Saving Chi: Exploring Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants' Parental School Involvement

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Dedication

To my son, Jayden and my wife, Hye-Young
Abstract

The goals of this study were (a) to explore Korean immigrant parents’ perceptions of school involvement and school support and (b) to investigate key factors that affect Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. A qualitative research design based on grounded theory was employed. The final grounded theory of “Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants’ Parental School Involvement” was developed from interview data with eight Korean immigrant parents. The most important core theme was saving the child’s chi (“기 살리기,” Gi Saligi in Korean). The four other secondary themes were (a) personal factors; (b) interpersonal factors; (c) situational factors; and (d) environmental factors.

The personal factors were derived from self-determination motivations, parenting styles, the parent’s gender, English proficiency, and acculturation. The situational factors included parents’ time pressure and expected and unexpected changes in family life. The interpersonal factors included parents’ relationships with school teachers, other parents, and people they met through online communities such as MissyUSA. Finally, the environmental factors were identified from school and Korean community support. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed along with limitations and conclusions.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

This study was designed to explore key factors affecting Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement in the context of U.S. elementary (including kindergarten) education systems. Conventional wisdom states that when parents are involved in their children’s education, the children perform better. Substantial research supports this notion highlighting that parental school involvement plays a critical role in children’s social development as well as academic achievement (see Fan & Chen, 2001; Hayes, 2012; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeunes, 2007). In addition, research consistently demonstrates that parental school involvement is mutually beneficial to both parents and schools (Epstein, 1991; Lareau, 2000; Marcon, 1999; Miedel & Reynolds, 2000) by sharing responsibility for decision making about the children’s education, health, and well-being.

With these notions in mind, as a graduate student in the Family, Youth, and Community (FYC) Program and first-generation immigrant father, I have identified some important questions since my son started kindergarten in the U.S. I came to the U.S. with my spouse from South Korea more than a decade ago, but I did not attend K-12 in the U.S. Just as any immigrant parent, I often feel frustrated when I need to engage in my son’s school-related activities. My son’s new kindergarten life has been overwhelming and challenging for my entire family unlike his daycare and preschool experiences, in that his elementary school has a relatively larger class size, less ethnically diverse
environment, and a seemingly task/outcome-oriented culture. I also often encounter culturally biased or ambiguous terms in school announcements regarding school events, class activities, decision-making meetings, such as Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings and regular conferences with the teacher. The Internet has been my main source of information for parenting in the U.S. since I knew I would become a father; however, I feel that I rely too much on Internet resources without multicultural perspectives although I can get most parts of what I want to know from parenting-related websites.

Over the past year, I have strived to determine what will happen during school events to which parents are invited or what exactly a particular school-related term/policy means. For example, I recently learned that the word “tardiness” is defined and operationalized differently in my son’s school compared to this concept used in Korea. Even this word seems to have a different cultural connotation. In Korea, tardiness is a time-focused and objective measure recorded once a day rather than a teacher’s ongoing observation and evaluation criterion throughout the day. While tardiness is a serious student misbehavior reflecting irresponsible parenting in Korea, it appears to be a frequent occurrence here in the U.S. I also wondered why kindergarteners are being sent to “take a break” room on several occasions and at different times and why candy is easily reachable at school events and sometimes used as incentives in educational settings. My questions are endless.

Such personal experiences and unresolved issues as a parent explain my motivation for this research. Therefore, I was “the primary intended audience” (Patton, 2001) in this study because I started this inquiry to better understand and address my own
personal questions. I have also found that other Korean immigrant parents I know share very similar thoughts and concerns regarding their school involvement. Along with my own questions, this common dilemma observed in the Korean immigrant community has deepened my research interest in immigrant parents’ school involvement. Thus, the secondary intended audience of this study includes Korean immigrant parents and the associated schools and communities where they live.

My initial research interest during my doctoral study in the FYC Program was searching for key factors that might affect parenting practices. While delving into this area, I realized that most prior research has been conducted within general parent contexts. As a novice researcher in the field, I can understand the value of developing theories and testing variables in a broader context (i.e., increased generalizability/applicability). As a Korean immigrant parent, however, it has been difficult at times to relate generalized research findings to my personal experiences. For example, I wonder if my parenting style is actually authoritative, which is deemed optimal in European-American parenting (see Baumrind, 1973; Gray & Steinberg, 1999) as I consider myself so. I also wonder if my parenting style has effectively worked as much as I wish.

Specifically, the research gaps I identified in the parenting literature can be summarized in three ways. First, there has been little research on Koreans in parenting studies, although the Korean immigrant population represents one of the fastest growing Asian-American minorities in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010) of all fifty Asian immigrant groupings. Second, most studies regarding parental involvement
have been conducted using Euro-American contexts and few studies have investigated the pertinent issues that minority parents experience (Kim, 2002; Kim, 2010). Lastly, although there are a few studies on Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement, these studies have been inadequately explored, compared to other ethnic minority groups such as Hispanic immigrant parents (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Sohn & Wang, 2006), without fully considering significant cultural variations across different ethnic minority groups.

Several relevant studies claim that immigrant parents tend to struggle with their children’s schooling due to language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination, and that they need more specific, systematic support (Sohn & Wang, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009). Through one of my previous research projects focusing on parents’ technology use for their parenting conducted with a sample of general U.S. parents, I have become more confident that Korean immigrant parents have distinctive characteristics that can be differentiated from the general U.S. parent population. One example is that the majority of the Korean population in the U.S. may prefer technology mediated communication (e.g., emails, phone/Internet texting, website resources) rather than face-to-face communication when they have to use English due to language and cultural barriers (Kim & Yoon, 2012). It is probable that this notion could be adequately applied to Korean immigrant parents when they begin their involvement in their children’s school life. This preference is particularly apparent when they interact with teachers, school personnel, and other parents.

All of the above-mentioned issues made me think further about “culturally
relevant pedagogy/education (CRP)” developed by Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995) and a possible school support system specifically designed for immigrant parents so that they may benefit from school involvement. In general, culturally relevant pedagogy/education is described as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382). This perspective is consistent with the philosophical contention that “schools should show fairness to diverse visions of the good life and not merely replace them with neutered and safe substitutes” (Glanzer, 2008, p. 526) or that “no student should have to sacrifice cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and social networks in order to obtain an education” (Dingus, 2003, p. 99). The ultimate goal of CRP is to create an atmosphere where schools acknowledge and honor the diverse viewpoints and prevent teachers from promoting homogeneous cultural perspectives as standard norms and values to their students (Dingus, 2009).

Extending CRP to immigrant parents who typically undergo cultural dissonance and acculturation (King & Goodwin, 2002) means that schools need to acknowledge parents’ diversity and incorporate their pluralistic backgrounds and experiences into the school culture and climate. To facilitate “culturally responsive parental involvement” (King & Goodwin, 2002), schools should encourage teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and predispositions to effectively communicate and work with parents from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social class backgrounds. Culturally responsive schools would honor parents’ diverse cultural and ethnic experiences, contributions and identities (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). They would understand the experiences and
perspectives that immigrant parents bring to educational settings and would be responsive to the cultures of different ethnic groups (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

As I look back on my past research experience during my doctoral study, I realize that I have mainly conducted positivist research in general parenting contexts but have always admired and been influenced by a postmodern approach with its emphasis on multiple truths (Packwood & Sikes, 1996). In this study, I attempt to use my ethnic cultural identity as a valuable research instrument. Along with my self-discovery, I intend to move beyond existing perspectives on parental involvement and give a voice to multicultural perspectives that have been neglected and suppressed in prior research. As a Korean immigrant researcher and parent, I believe that I am in an ideal position to explore Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement than other researchers from different ethnic backgrounds.

**Context of the Study**

In general, studies have shown that parents positively influence their children’s academic and social development at school and parental involvement has been identified as a key factor influencing successful student achievement. Hill and Taylor (2004) claimed that students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to: attend school regularly, earn higher grades and test scores, have better social skills, adapt well to school, graduate, and go on to college education. Prior research also reports that when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). Regarding an effort to increase
parent involvement in their children’s schooling, Feuerstein (2000) claimed that the more school teachers try to contact parents, the more likely parents are to volunteer and attend school meetings.

As the immigrant population in the United States rapidly increases (Pew Research, 2015), so does the need for schools to support immigrant students and their families. Since Asians were recently projected to surpass in 35 years Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants to the United States (Pew Research, 2015), researchers’ interest in Asian-American families has also increased in recent years. Among Asian immigrants, the Korean-origin population is the fifth-largest Asian group, with a population of 1.7 million people and 70-80% of this population is foreign-born (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010), which is similar to other Asian groups. Although some researchers have investigated parenting issues in the context of established immigrant groups, particularly Chinese-Americans (i.e., Chao, 1994; 2000) and Hispanic Americans (i.e., Torres-Villa, 1995), few parenting-related studies have focused on Korean-Americans except for a few valuable studies (e.g., Sohn & Wang, 2006; Yang, & McMullen, 2003). Despite the fact that Koreans represent one of the fastest growing Asian-American minorities in the United States, there has been little focus on this unique group of Asian immigrants, particularly related to parental involvement. Not only have most parental involvement studies been conducted with respect to European-American students (Kim, 2002), but the studies that have focused on ethnic minorities have concentrated more on Hispanic immigrant parents (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Sohn & Wang, 2006) leaving a gap in relevant studies regarding Korean immigrant parents.
Studies on immigrant parents’ school involvement have shown that most immigrant parents tend to struggle with their children’s schooling due to language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination with ineffective attempts to support those immigrant parents (Sohn & Wang, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009; Koh, Shin, & Reeves, 2015). Korean immigrant parents may also face these barriers, but they also face a unique set of challenges when they attempt to participate in their children’s schooling. Because the large proportion of Korean population in the U.S. are relatively new to the immigration experience, the parents and their children need to quickly adapt to the new environment in the United States; they also tend to maintain or expect Korean cultural norms and traditions for their children’s schooling (Sohn & Wang, 2006). In addition, Korean-origin students in the U.S. have been frequently labeled as a “model minority” student group especially in their academic achievement, which is definitely a stereotype. Considering the limited research on Korean parents and their support for children’s schooling, it is likely that this image might have led researchers not to perceive an imminent need to support this population (Blair & Qian, 1998).

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau of 2010 (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Hasan, 2012), more than half of Korean-Americans (52.3%) do not believe that they speak English very well. Because this result is based on Korean-Americans aged five or older, if we only consider Korean immigrant parents with school-age children, it is safe to assume that the majority of them would not be confident about their English speaking skills. Because of their limited English proficiency, it may be difficult for Korean immigrant parents to engage in effective communication and
collaboration with teachers and school systems. This is an especially unique challenge because the majority of Korean immigrant parents in the U.S. are highly educated (Oh, 2010) with more than half of Korean foreign-born adults holding a bachelor’s degree or higher (Hoeffel et. al., 2012). This characteristic makes this group unique from other immigrant groups who may have lower education levels.

Another unique characteristic of Korean immigrants is that they are distinctively dedicated to their children’s education (Park & Sarkar, 2007). The so-called Korean “education fever” (Seth, 2002) has historic roots. In the early years of the Confucian Choson dynasty (1392 to 1910), those who passed a national civil-service exam, termed “Gwageo” could gain entry to the privileged Yangban class, a scholarly aristocracy (“The Other Arms Race,” 2013). The Confucian value of self-actualization was to join this elite group. This tradition has been further preserved in modern times. The modern Korean government has offered national exams for those applying for high ranking government and bureaucratic/administrative jobs (Oh, 2010). This Confucian tradition has resulted in many problems within the current Korean educational system including (a) a strong focus on entrance examinations, which has tended to reduce education and teaching to test preparation and overheated competition to enter prestige schools; (b) the enormous financial burden placed on families for costly private tutoring; (c) the inflexibility created by an emphasis on uniformity of standards; and (d) the misuse of education by successive governments for political purposes (Seth, 2002).

In the half century after 1945, South Korea went from a nation where a majority of the population had no formal education to one with some of the world’s highest rates
of literacy, high school graduates, and university students. In 1995, the government officially declared the nation as an “edutopia,” convincing people that they could succeed by their own efforts but only through the entry of higher education (Seth, 2002). In response, the higher education sector boomed. The proportion of high school graduates going on to universities rose from 40 percent in the early 1990s to almost 84 percent in 2008 (“The Other Arms Race,” 2013). Not surprisingly, most Korean parents are willing to sacrifice themselves for their children’s education (Oh, 2010; Shim, Kim, & Martin, 2008; Park & Sarkar, 2007), which is often their first priority when deciding their immigration.

Despite their passion for education, Korean immigrant parents often have severe barriers including language and culture when they want to be involved in their children’s schooling (Sohn & Wang, 2006). In other words, although they understand the importance of parental involvement and want to be actively involved in their children’s schools, it is probable that they have difficulty taking action because of their unique situations such as the acculturation process, language barriers, and school accessibility (Kim, 2002). However, few studies have clarified what these language and cultural barriers are, exactly how these barriers relate to perceptions of Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement and school support, and what factors influence their school involvement.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Korean immigrant parents may have distinctive personal and cultural factors that are related to their school involvement such as motivation, parenting styles, and the
acculturation process. These factors can be explored through multiple theoretical perspectives that have originated from a wide array of disciplines including psychology, sociology, education, immigration studies, and family studies. However, relatively little research has comprehensively explored the multifaceted nature of immigrant parents’ school involvement.

**Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) may provide a useful basis for this study in that parents are motivated to act toward desired parenting needs and outcomes. Considering their unwavering commitment to their children’s education, Korean immigrant parents are highly motivated to help their children have the best possible education. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), people have as their ultimate needs to feel autonomous, competent, and related in order to develop and function optimally. It seems that Korean immigrant parents are quite self-determined in that they have a strong goal not for themselves but for their children and their optimal function for themselves is accomplished within a “microsystem” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) such as a family or Korean churches other than other larger systems due to language and cultural barriers and lack of social capital (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Because parenting consists of various goal-oriented activities as well as unconditioned behaviors, specifically parents’ school involvement would be well understood by this motivation theory. The motivation theory may be helpful to better understand the reasons Korean immigrant parents initiate involvement in their children’s schools.
**Parenting Style**

Parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) have been actively studied as an influential factor related to parental school involvement. One study suggests that the positive impact of authoritative parenting on academic achievement may be mediated to a significant degree by parental involvement in children’s schooling, at least among European-American adolescents (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Therefore, exploring Korean immigrant parents’ parenting styles and the relationship with parental school involvement would contribute to this body of parenting research. One important consideration on parenting styles is the issue of whether an effective parenting style varies across different ethnic backgrounds. Although the “authoritative parenting style” has been considered the optimal parenting style among Baumrind (1967) and Maccoby and Martin’s (1983) four parenting styles by many European-American parents, studies on parenting styles in ethnic groups have demonstrated that an authoritarian parenting style may be a better fit for ethnic minority parents (Chao, 2000). Thus, it is important to explore parents’ unique cultures and their acculturation aspects for a study on specific ethnic groups because different cultural backgrounds may lead parents to develop different parenting styles.

**Acculturation**

In line with the notion of parenting styles, another distinctive factor related to

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1 There has been criticism regarding the usefulness of existing acculturation theories. For example, building on the anti-oppressive and social justice perspective, Ngo (2008) criticizes that existing acculturation theories overlook the social construction of inequitable socioeconomic realities facing immigrants and increase a risk of pathologizing a marginalized population, highlighting the need to develop an alternative theory of acculturation.
immigrant parents’ school involvement would be an acculturation aspect including the level of acculturation and/or acculturation process. Acculturation is the process of learning that occurs when individuals are continuously exposed to a new culture (Berry, 1997). Immigrant parents’ school involvement could be related to acculturation including its process and current level. For example, when either assimilation (i.e., using only English instead of their native language to better adapt to the new U.S. society) or separation (i.e., maintaining only their original culture and rejecting becoming part of the new society) (Berry, 1997) occurs often, there could be considerable variation in immigrant parents’ school involvement (Ying & Han, 2008).

Korean-Americans are known to experience greater difficulties in becoming bicultural (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000) compared to some other ethnic groups. Regardless of the radical economic and social changes they have experienced, Korean families still tend to maintain their Confucian characteristics from the past, which affects their parenting style (Park & Cho, 1995). Korean-Americans also tend to adhere to the significant parts of the Korean culture and social networks and do not replace or modify their behavior according to American culture norms (Hurh & Kim, 1984). One study argues that Korean-American parents who scored high on integration would maintain and better understand both Korean and American culture, making it more likely that they would show more warmth and use more authoritative discipline techniques with their children in the U.S. compared to other acculturation domains (Kim, Cain, & McCubbin, 2006). Thus, it is worthwhile to further explore the relationship between Korean immigrants’ parenting styles and their acculturation aspect and the role of these two
interrelated factors in their school involvement.

**Gender**

The final consideration in this study is gender differences in parental school involvement. Korean fathers are known for spending very long hours at work and taking on fewer responsibilities at home. Their main role in the family is still considered “breadwinners.” According to a recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report (How’s Life?, 2015), South Korean fathers spend only six minutes daily with their children for book reading, homework help, playing, and responding to their physical needs (cf. 72 minutes in Australia, 76 minutes in the US). Korean fathers along with other East Asian fathers reportedly maintain features of “authoritarian parenting style” (Chao & Tseng, 2002), which has not been considered ideal according to Western standards. Thus, it is uncommon for Korean fathers to be involved in their children’s school activities. Although there has been a growing interest in the role and responsibilities of fathers in parenting in Korea (Lamb, 2000; Lamb 2007; Goldberg, Tan, & Thorsen, 2009), it is still unclear what hinders Korean fathers from being involved in their children’s schools. In this regard, this study attempts to address this research gap by exploring gender differences in Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement.

**Problem Statement**

In this study, I focus on exploring Korean immigrant parents’ perceptions of school involvement and school support that promote/hinder their parental involvement. I also attempt to identify key factors that may influence Korean immigrant parents’ school
involvement using a qualitative research design. As stated above, few studies have investigated the specific experiences and perceptions of Korean immigrant parents as they attempt to engage in interacting with the school. In addition, little research has explored personal and cultural factors such as the unique parenting style and acculturation that could influence their school involvement and perceived school support.

Specifically, this study examines (a) how Korean immigrant parents perceive their school involvement and U.S. school support; and (b) what factors influence Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. To accomplish the goals of this study, a qualitative research design based on grounded theory was employed.

**Research Questions**

This study focuses on the following specific research questions:

1. How do Korean immigrant parents perceive their involvement in their children’s schooling?
2. How do Korean immigrant parents perceive school support for their school involvement?
3. What influences Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement?

**Significance of the Study**

This qualitative study is important and needed for several reasons. First, considering that research on parenting has been predominantly conducted with respect to the European populations, this study will contribute to closing the gap in the parenting literature. Efforts of this nature will advance both theory and practice in multicultural parenting and teacher education.
Second, this study will deepen our understanding of Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement and its influence on children at school. The findings in this study can be used to generate beneficial ideas for “culturally relevant, inclusive school support” (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that will help teachers cultivate their cultural competence and teaching skills in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting.

Lastly, the qualitative findings of this study may inspire future researchers to conduct positivistic research including the development a multi-item scale measuring and dimensionalizing the psychometric properties of immigrant parental school involvement. The interpretive data generated in this study can serve as a conceptual basis of measurement items. Thus, further investigation of the relationship between immigrant parents’ school involvement and children’s academic achievement and psychological well-being at school can be facilitated in the future.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a review of the scholarly literature regarding Korean immigrant parents’ perceptions of school involvement and school support. Classic grounded theorists including Glaser and Strauss (1967) have advocated delaying the literature review until completing the qualitative analysis to prevent the researcher from seeing data through the lens of earlier ideas and concepts. They believed that delaying the literature review can simply help the researcher articulate his or her own ideas. While Glaser (1992) still maintains this position, grounded theorists have gradually recognized that “a lack of familiarity with relevant literatures is unlikely and untenable” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 306). In this study, although I had already reviewed some relevant literature before the data analysis, I later reviewed a considerable amount of literature and added my summary of it as I analyzed the data. This review added later includes the following subheadings: (a) Korean Immigrant Parents, (b) Parental School Involvement, (c) School Support, (d) Self-Determination Theory, (e) Parenting Style, (f) Acculturation, and (g) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP).

Korean Immigrant Parents

While Korean immigration to the United States started in 1903 when 7,000 Koreans were recruited for labor on sugar plantations in Hawaii, the number of Korean immigrants increased dramatically after the 1965 Immigration Act (Zong & Batalova, 2014). Between the years of 1969 and 1973, Korean immigrants increased from 0.7% to 3.8% of the entire immigrant population of the United States. These later Korean
immigrants were relatively young, well-educated, and affluent Koreans who came to America with hopes for a better education and career (Hurh & Kim, 1984). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the total number of Korean-Americans is about 1.7 million, which comprises about 0.6 percent of the United States population. The Korean-American community is the fifth largest Asian-American subgroup, after the Chinese-American, Filipino-American, Indian-American, and Vietnamese-American communities. The number of Korean immigrants who were born in Korea and later immigrated to the United States was approximately 1.1 million individuals as of 2013 representing close to 3 percent of the 41.3 million foreign-born population (Zong & Batalova, 2014).

According to the 1990 Census Report, 55 percent of Korean-Americans aged 25 years or over had some college education and 80 percent had at least completed high school, which is higher than those of their American counterparts, which were 45 percent and 75 percent, respectively. One recent report (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) also showed that more than half of Korean foreign-born adults have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Despite their higher levels of education, Korean immigrants have had difficulty finding jobs equivalent to their educational and professional experience mainly due to language barriers. Many of them have decided to operate small businesses and are self-employed, where a high level of English proficiency was not required (Kim, 1988).

In general, Korean immigrant parents come to the United States primarily for economic stability and educational concerns for their children (Jo, 1999). Their main purpose of earning is to secure funding for educating their children and they subsequently
expect more economic returns through a better education in the United States (Wrigley, 1989). Successful Korean immigrant parents are often described by their economic success and the prestige of sending their children to colleges with high reputations (Kim, 1993) as a reward of the parents’ hard work in America, which is viewed as a land of opportunity.

Despite these similarities, there are significant class differences in the Korean-American community. Although most Korean immigrants believe that their hard work and high quality of K-12 education will lead to socioeconomic mobility, some Korean immigrants work hard but still cannot make a living (Lee, 2004; Lew, 2006). Working class Korean-Americans who are marginalized by the term “model minority” often feel “inadequate, ashamed, and ostracized from the co-ethnic community” (Lee, 2004, p. 314). The dropout rate of Korean children from working class families is high due to little supervision by the parents who work extremely long hours outside of the home (Lew 2004; 2006). In addition, the poverty level of Korean immigrants (15%) is higher than the average for Asian (11%), Japanese (8.4%) and Chinese (12.5%) immigrants according to 2007–2011 American Community Survey (Macartney, Bishaw & Fontenot, 2013).

Another characteristic of Korean parents is that they have traditionally emphasized interdependence rather than independence as observed generally in Asian parenting. The emphasis on interdependence has significant implications for what is responded to, emphasized, and sanctioned in the socialization process and for the character of social relations (Greenfield, 1994). Koreans are generally more collectivistic (i.e., interdependently oriented) and less individualistic than European-Americans in
relation to their families (Rhee, Uleman, & Lee, 1996). Along with this difference, Korean-American families who literally live in two cultures face the challenge of dealing with both American and Korean cultures (Kim & Choi, 1994), and hence the acculturation process for Korean-Americans may be more complicated than for European-Americans (Kim, Cain, & McCubbin, 2006).

In sum, Korean immigrant parents, one of the fastest growing minority groups in the U.S., place a high value on their children’s education and understand the importance of parental involvement in their children’s schooling. However, many of them seem to struggle with taking action because of cultural and language barriers, yet few studies have addressed this issue.

With these unique characteristics in mind, this research topic is very relevant to me as a Korean immigrant researcher. My past research studies regarding parents’ technology use has revealed that the majority of Korean immigrant parents in the U.S. seem to prefer technology-mediated communication rather than face-to-face communication. In this study, considerable evidence shows that they actively use technology to communicate with teachers and other parents and also to gather/confirm information for their parenting as the best way to overcome their language and cultural barriers.

**Parental School Involvement**

Research consistently demonstrates that parental involvement in their children’s schools is significantly and mutually beneficial to the parents and students as well as to their teachers (Epstein, 1991; Lareau, 2000). The concept of “parental involvement” has
been increasingly studied in educational research over the past decades as one of the key factors influencing successful student outcomes. (e.g., Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). Parental involvement is a broad idea that is often defined by operational terms such as home-based and school-based activities of parents in relation to their children’s learning (Coots, 1998; Epstein, 1995; Grolick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Maccoby & Martin 1983; Moles, 1993). In this study, parental school involvement is conceptualized as the participation of parents in every aspect of children’s school lives, including academic and social aspects.

There are many different ways for parents to be involved in their children’s education (Muller, 1998). Parents may become involved differently depending on the resources available to them (Baker & Stevenson, 1986). Parents can improve their understanding of the school’s curriculum, programs, and activities and enjoy expanded opportunities to work closely with teachers (Swap, 1993). Parents are also satisfied with the ways that schools encourage them to participate, and this participation makes their children feel cared for in the school climate (Epstein, 1995; 2001). Regarding parental involvement around schools, Moles (1993) views that parents may take positions as paid aides or volunteers; serve at PTA/PTO meetings or on governing councils; attend sporting events, concerts, or other student performances; learn about parenting and teaching from teachers; or exchange information with teachers about their children.

Children from different ethnic groups may need different kinds of involvement from parents. However, most of the research regarding parental involvement has been
conducted with respect to European-American students; few research studies have investigated the issue with respect to minority students (Kim & Rohner, 2002). As a result, at least as compared to European-American students, parental involvement in the school environment of minority student groups has been insufficiently explored.

Asian immigrant parents may face communication barriers due to cultural differences, language limitations, and a general lack of knowledge about the American public school system (Huang, 1993; Lee, 1995). Based on the strong tradition of Confucianism, teachers are highly respected by both students and parents in most East Asian countries. Thus, East Asian parents are inclined to delegate the education of their children entirely to the teacher and also perceive that giving ideas or suggestions to teachers is disrespectful (Lee, 1988). Consequently, Asian immigrant parents (specifically East Asian immigrant parents) often do not regard themselves as equal partners with teachers in their children’s education, and once they have immigrated to the United States, they also may not have enough skills or information to work effectively with their children’s teachers (Sohn & Wang, 2006). As an attempt to learn more about this cultural variation, I explored Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement in this qualitative study using in-depth interviews.

**School Support**

Schools and teachers play an important role in determining parental school involvement. Research persistently suggests that parents typically become more involved in their child’s schooling if teachers and schools provide opportunities and an inviting school climate (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Dauber & Epstein, 1993). However, schools
often fail to involve or engage immigrant parents in an effective partnership even though they can be a valuable resource for cultivating multicultural education (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Using a sample of schools serving English language learners (ELL), Cohen and his colleagues (2005) found significant differences in parental outreach and support between schools serving high-ELL populations (i.e., immigrant families) and schools serving low-ELL populations. Specifically, high-ELL schools are more likely than low-ELL schools to provide interpreters, translated documents, parent outreach activities, and other services (e.g., transportation or child care) to support parental involvement. Elizalde-Utnick (2010) emphasized that all immigrant students regardless of preexisting conditions need the support of culturally sensitive educators due to their characteristics and challenges such as acculturation, racism/discrimination, second language acquisition, and school accessibility. She claimed that school professionals should provide assistance to immigrant families in a culturally competent manner, which can be obtained by improving self-awareness about immigrant parents’ own cultural heritage, knowledge of other cultures, and practical skills. She also added that supporting immigrant families should include home-school collaboration, linking families with school-based/community services and providing specific instructional support to meet immigrant students’ learning needs (Elizalde-Utnick, 2010).

Although there are differences between schools in the amount of parent support services provided, little research has examined how such services are related to parents’ actual participation in their children’s education or how such services are related to
student outcomes (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Thus, there are many unanswered questions about the effectiveness of family outreach services in enhancing the educational and personal success of immigrant students. Moreover, it is difficult to find relevant studies regarding school support for immigrant parents. In particular, school support for Korean immigrant parents has been rarely explored.

According to Sohn and Wang’s (2006) study, all Korean immigrant mothers interviewed for their study reported that they did not feel they received sufficient support from the school and their children’s teachers; in particular, they complained about the lack of opportunities to communicate with teachers. The Korean immigrant mothers also felt that the conferences held once or twice a year did not provide ample opportunities to establish a connection with the teachers. Sohn and Wang (2006) claimed that Korean mothers who are not fluent in English need a less time-pressured environment to feel comfortable talking with teachers or alternative ways of communication through the Internet and email.

As reported in the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA, 2010], children who are English language learners (ELLs) currently comprise more than 10% of all students in U.S. public schools and are the fastest growing segment of the school-aged population. ELLs often experience difficulty in English-only classrooms, and may benefit from various language support programs (Meyer, Madden, & McGrath, 2004). Therefore, enhanced school support systems and strategies should be developed and implemented for immigrant families.

As reported in Niehaus and Adelson’s (2014) study, higher levels of school support
predicted more parental involvement, more parental involvement predicted fewer social-emotional concerns for ELL children, and fewer social-emotional problems were linked to higher achievement scores. This finding is particularly compelling and even further supports the need to explore the relationship between Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement and school support as well as its influence on children’s well-being at school.

**Self-Determination Theory**

In addition to school support, parents’ motivations may play an important role in determining parental school involvement. In general, humans are motivated to act toward desired needs and outcomes. Most motivation theories seem to agree that individuals initiate and persist at behaviors to the extent that they believe the behaviors will lead to their desired goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Because parenting consists of various goal-oriented activities as well as unconditioned behaviors, specifically parents’ school involvement would be well understood by those motivation theories.

Self-determination theory originated from Deci’s (1971) earlier work on intrinsic motivation and was further developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). This theory has been one of the most influential approaches in motivational psychology. Self-determination theory focuses on “the degree to which people endorse their actions at the highest level of reflection and engage in the actions with a full sense of choice” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). Ryan and Deci (2000) identified intrinsic motivation and internalization as two major processes underlying personality and social development. As a person seeks to engage in interesting activities (i.e., intrinsic motivation), at the same time s/he also
attempts to integrate a sense of self with less interesting but important values and behaviors of the social environment (i.e., internalization).

Deci and Ryan (1985) classified three types of motivation (i.e., amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation) relative to the extent to which the motivation is self-determined or internalized within the learner. Amotivation, as the least determined end, is manifested when individuals find neither competence nor value in doing actions (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), which seems to relate to parents with a neglectful/uninvolved parenting style. Extrinsic motivation is demonstrated when the purpose of an action is for instrumental outcomes. One example of extrinsic motivation would be when parents plan events for their children or participate in school volunteer work mainly to show others that they are good parents. Lastly, intrinsic motivation, which is the most self-determined motivation, means doing something for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself without any obvious external rewards. The concept of intrinsic motivation was later divided into knowledge, accomplishment, and stimulation (Vallerand, Blais, Briere, & Pelletier, 1989). Parental involvement appears to be related to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, but intrinsic motivation components are likely to make parents feel a sense of accomplishment and this feeling likely leads to future positive parenting acts.

According to self-determination theory, people have an ultimate need to feel autonomous, competent, and related—and in order to develop and function optimally, satisfaction of these basic psychological needs is critical for their self-determined motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy is a sense of willingness to freely engage in
an activity. When individuals fully internalize into the self the value of external regulatory factors, such as parent’s choices, they can feel autonomous and intrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Competence is also related to a sense of accomplishment. In self-determination theory, optimal challenge and positive performance feedback support individuals’ perceived competence and, in turn, facilitate intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, it is assumed that parents’ competence in school related engagement activities would be enhanced by sharing positive and supportive feedback with other parents probably through social networking systems. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), another factor, relatedness, is being connected with others, belonging, caring for and being cared for, as well as being part of a community and the need for relatedness means feeling connected and being close with significant others. Research regarding intrinsic motivation has found that infants and children who were more secure and attached in their relationships showed higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

In sum, people who experience perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness would facilitate more self-determined motivation as they are likely to decide to return to the activities that satisfy their psychological needs, which leads to development and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Consequently, parental involvement derived from parents’ innate and psychological needs would contribute to the positive school-parent-child relationship. Because parenting research based on self-determination theory has been scarce, especially in relation to parental involvement, finding a relationship between parents’ motivation and parental school involvement will be
worthwhile.

**Parenting Style**

The concept of parenting styles has been developed in the process of defining and organizing dimensional components of parenting to understand the nature of parental influences (Fletcher, Walls, Cook, Madison & Bridges, 2008). In general, supportive parenting styles can be conceptualized based on parental warmth (versus rejection) and parental provision of structure (versus chaos) while parenting (Skinner, Johnson & Snyder, 2005). Supportive parents are expected to show high parental warmth, care for the child’s development, maintain clear and consistent expectations, and control/limit settings that are advantageous to the child.

Parents are thought to create their own style based on various intrinsic and extrinsic factors which may evolve over time as children develop their own personalities. Based on two dimensions, support and control, four different parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting) have been identified (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and also extensively studied in parenting-related studies over the past two decades. The two dimensions are sometimes understood as consisting of either supportive or controlling parenting behaviors (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005).

Authoritative parenting is defined by high parental support and moderate behavioral control. Research has shown that authoritative parenting is consistently associated with positive child adjustment outcomes. Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) found that children of authoritative parents are more socially and cognitively
competent than other children. Authoritarian parenting is characterized as high in parental control and low support. Authoritarian parenting is generally associated with negative outcomes in child adjustment in studies conducted in Western countries, (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) although it appears to be less negative for Asian children than for European-American children (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). Permissive parenting is categorized as high in support but low in control. Research suggests that adolescents of permissive parents are at higher risk of drug and alcohol use as well as problem behaviors (Baumrind, 1991). This is largely due to the fact that permissive parents are “indulgent” parents rejecting the whole notion of keeping their children under control. Although they are emotionally supportive and responsive to their children’s needs and wishes, they are not demanding. They do not assign their children many responsibilities. Rather, they allow their children to regulate themselves. Thus, permissive parents do not present themselves as authority figures or role models advocating socially acceptable behavior standards (Baumrind, 1991). This explains why permissive parenting can damage children. Finally, neglecting parenting has low support and low control. Adolescents of neglecting parents have the worst outcomes in delinquency, substance use, and academic competence (Steinberg et al., 1994).

Darling and Steinberg (1993) defined parenting styles in terms of the emotional climate provided by parents and parenting practices as behaviors in which parents engage with the purpose of obtaining specific goals. They suggest that parental involvement in schooling and parental monitoring are examples of parenting practices followed by parenting styles. Darling and Steinberg (1993) also theorized that parenting style could
moderate the associations between parenting practice and child well-being.

Substantial evidence suggests that the authoritative style of parenting (Baumrind, 1968, 1991) is often associated with optimal academic, social, and psychological development of European-American children (i.e., Baumrind, 1973; Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Steinberg and his colleagues (1994) suggested that the positive impact of authoritative parenting on academic achievement may be mediated to a significant degree by parental involvement in children’s schooling, at least among European-American adolescents.

Researchers, however, have continued questioning whether the authoritative parenting style is necessarily associated with such outcomes for other ethnic minorities such as African-Americans (Baumrind, 1972; Smetana, 2000), Chinese-Americans (Chao, 1994), or Hispanic-Americans (Torres-Villa, 1995). Several studies on ethnic-based parenting styles have illustrated that parenting styles among Asian-Americans are different from parenting styles of European-Americans and characteristics of parenting styles may hold different meanings between these two populations (Chao, 1994; Chao, 2000; Kelley & Tseng, 1992). For example, according to Chao (1994), harsh “strictness” and restrictive “control” are often perceived by European-American parents as indicators of parental hostility and aggression, whereas the same concepts are viewed by Asian-American parents as demonstrations of parental concern and caring. Chao (1994; 2000) also claimed that although an “authoritative parenting style” has been considered the optimal parenting style by many European-American parents, an authoritarian parenting style may be a better fit for ethnic minority parents. Kim (2005) suggested that because
there are definite cultural differences in family systems and values between the United States and Korea, parenting styles that vary based on different family systems and values are also different. Unlike the United States where an individualistic culture is predominant, many countries in Asia such as Korea, China, and Japan are characterized as collectivistic cultures (Kim & Choi, 1994). With this in mind, exploring Korean immigrant parents’ parenting styles and the relationship with parental school involvement would contribute to this body of parenting research.

**Acculturation**

Immigrants experience psychological and physiological changes when they continuously face new and unique circumstances. Adapting to a new culture could be challenging regardless of the ethnic background. Berry (2005) defines acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 698).

In general, unidimensional models and bidimensional models of acculturation are two major frameworks in the acculturation literature (Lee et al., 2003), but the unidimensional model, which is a linear model, is not considered realistic (thus assuming that immigrants are functioning at some point in-between being un-acculturated and being fully-acculturated). According to Berry’s (1980, 1997) bidimensional models, individuals and groups in plural societies tend to utilize one of the following four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization.

Assimilation occurs when immigrants relinquish their original cultural identities as they acquire new cultural identities from the new society (Berry, 1980, 1997) (e.g., use
only English other than their own language to better adapt). In contrast, integration occurs when immigrants retain their original culture while they also accept new aspects from the dominant society (Berry, 1980, 1997). Separation is another acculturation strategy that involves the process of maintaining only the original cultural identity and rejecting becoming part of the new society (Berry, 1980, 1997). Finally, marginalization is defined when individuals lose contact with their original cultural identities while also rejecting the new cultural context (Berry, 1980; 1997).

Korean-Americans may experience greater difficulties in becoming bicultural compared to some other ethnic groups (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000). According to Park and Cho (1995), in spite of the sweeping economic and social changes in Korea, Korean families still maintain their Confucian characteristics from the past, which affects their parenting styles. Unlike the typical type of acculturation such as modifying immigrants’ behavioral patterns to improve their living situation in the new environment, Hurh and Kim (1984) claimed that Korean-Americans tend to adhere to the significant parts of the Korean culture and social networks and do not replace or modify these aspects based on American culture. According to their study, the majority of Korean-Americans, regardless of length of residence in the U.S., indicated that (a) family duty should be a given priority; (b) children should be taught the Korean language; (c) the Korean ethnic church is preferable over the American church; (d) subscription to Korean newspapers is desirable; and (e) keeping close relationships with Korean friends and neighbors is vital.

One study argues that Korean-American parents who scored high on integration would maintain and better understand both Korean and American culture, which would
likely show more warmth and use more authoritative discipline techniques with children in the U.S. compared to other acculturation domains (Kim et al., 2006). Thus, it is worthwhile to better understand the relationship between Korean immigrants’ parenting styles and their acculturation and school involvement.

As discussed above, research consistently suggests that students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to do better in school, and parental school involvement is better promoted by appropriate school support. Rose-Krasnor (1997) explained that consistent with much of the research literature, social competence is defined as effectiveness in social interactions. She introduced four general approaches to the operational definition of social competence: social skills, sociometric status (i.e., overall peer acceptance conceptualized as the experience of being liked or disliked by peers), relationships, and functional outcomes. Other related studies have applied these four concepts differently (i.e., social competence at school includes academic achievement). As key outcomes of Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement and school support, I explored parents’ perceptions and expectations of their children’s academic achievement and social competence at school through their school involvement in the future.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)**

While acculturation is a parent-specific factor, the overall school culture can also make a substantial difference in parental school involvement. Over the past decades, diversity has been as a critical component in U.S. education systems with students from an increasingly multicultural population (Oran, 2009). Responding to this trend, Gay
(2006) stressed the need to ensure multicultural education. He stated that:

U.S. society is becoming increasingly diverse, and that diversity is reflected in its classrooms. Creating a respectful, productive classroom environment is always a challenge; this challenge is even greater when students and teachers come from different cultural backgrounds, or when students differ in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation, ableness, and academic aptitude. Unless teachers have the knowledge, skills, and disposition to effectively guide diverse groups of children, they are likely to face classes characterized by disrespect and alienation, name-calling and bullying, disorder and chaos (pp. 365-366).

Thus, to achieve true multicultural education, Gay (2003) highlights the role of teachers and strongly asserts that teachers must be multicultural themselves before they can effectively and authentically teach students to be multicultural. Culturally responsive teachers are those who have a crucial understanding of the underlying pedagogical principles of multicultural education to be able to execute culturally responsive strategies and practical lessons in their classrooms. They “validate, facilitate, liberate, and empower ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (Gay, 2000, pp. 43-44).

In line with multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) originally developed by Ladson-Billings (1994) is described as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382). CRP
builds on the three premises of multicultural education: (a) Cultural diversity is a valuable resource, (b) Multicultural education preserves and extends the resource of culture diversity rather than merely tolerating it or making it “melt away,” and (c) A commitment to cultural pluralism should permeate all aspects of teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith, 2008, p. xv).

CRP is more than requiring students to read the latest biography of Martin Luther King Jr. It can be viewed as an educational philosophy built on basic American values such as freedom, justice, opportunity, and equality (Hayes & Juarez, 2012). CRP can also be conceptualized as a set of strategies aimed to address the diverse challenges experienced by rapidly changing U.S. demographics. To immigrant families, it is America’s valuable “moral” attempt to shift the balance of power and privilege within the education system. CRP-oriented schools show fairness to diverse visions of the good life and not merely replace them with neutered and safe substitutes (Glanzer, 2008). In CRP-oriented schools, no student needs to sacrifice cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and social networks to obtain an education (Dingus, 2003). Thus, the ultimate goal of CRP is to create an atmosphere where schools acknowledge and honor diverse viewpoints and prevent teachers from promoting dominant cultural perspectives as standard norms and beliefs to their students (Oran, 2009).

To extend CRP to immigrant parents who may undergo cultural dissonance and acculturation (King & Goodwin, 2002), schools need to acknowledge parents’ diversity and incorporate their pluralistic backgrounds and experiences into the school culture and climate. In “culturally responsive parental involvement” (King & Goodwin, 2002),
schools should encourage teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and predispositions to effectively communicate and work with parents from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social class backgrounds.

CRP is most successful when implemented as a schoolwide approach with reconstruction of not only the curriculum, but also organizational and institutional policy. Culturally responsive schools honor parents’ diverse cultural and ethnic experiences, contributions, and identities (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). They understand the experiences and perspectives parents bring to educational settings, being responsive to the cultures of different ethnic groups (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). They also work to create a sense of community. By doing so, they develop an environment for optimal parental involvement for the diverse parent population. When schools create an environment which is based on diversity and inclusivity where each parent is valued, the result might be that immigrant parents become more motivated and engage more.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

Readers may have different views about some of the terms used in this study. To eliminate ambiguity and clarify the research scope, the following key terms were identified and defined:

- *Korean Immigrant Parents*: Parents, who were born in South Korea and later immigrated to the United States. There were approximately 1.1 million South Korean immigrants in the U.S. as of 2013 (Department of Homeland Security, 2014). In this study, two Korean immigrant populations are defined as Korean immigrant parents: families with two Korean-born parents, and married couples composed of a Korean-
born and a foreign-born (other than Korean) spouse.

- **Parental School Involvement**: Parental school involvement is conceptualized as the participation of parents in every aspect of children’s school lives, including academic and social aspects. The specific activities include taking positions as aides or volunteers, attending parental meetings and school events, or exchanging information with teachers.

- **School Support for Immigrant Families** – This includes various school efforts that meet the needs of immigrant students and their parents as they deal with challenges such as the acculturation process, racism, discrimination, language barrier, and school accessibility (see Elizalde-Utnick, 2010) so that students in immigrant families can do well in school.

- **Parenting styles** can be conceptualized based on parental warmth (versus rejection) and parental provision of structure (versus chaos) while parenting (Skinner, Johnson \& Snyder, 2005). Supportive parents are expected to show high parental warmth caring to the child’s development, maintain clear and consistent expectations, and control/limit settings that are advantageous to the child.

- **Acculturation** is defined as the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups (Berry, 2005). Four acculturation strategies are relevant to this study: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997).
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the perceptions of Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement and school support and also explored key factors that influence Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. In so doing, this study utilized a qualitative research approach guided by grounded theory in analyzing the collected data.

Overview of Qualitative Research

The purpose of qualitative research is to understand and explain participants’ meaning of their inner world. Qualitative methods provide rich descriptions of phenomena that cannot be captured through quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Corbin and Strauss (2014) define qualitative research as “a form of research in which the researcher or a designated co-researcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and data they provide” (p. 4). Various qualitative approaches have been used to describe and explain subjective experiences of individuals and groups. Corbin and Strauss (2014) explained that researchers choose qualitative methods (a) to explore the inner experiences of participants, (b) to explore how meanings are formed and transformed, (c) to explore areas not yet thoroughly researched, (d) to discover relevant variables that later can be tested through quantitative forms of research, and (e) to take a holistic and comprehensive approach to the study of phenomena (pp. 4-5).

Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative methods do not attempt to generalize results to a larger population but attempt to reach a deeper level of understanding of the
experiences being explored with participants. Qualitative research approaches attempt to study human experiences and interactions in their natural environments and assess how participants understand and experience a particular phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, the researcher as the primary instrument of analysis interprets and conveys the meaning of textual data (Merriam, 2009). Data generated in qualitative research often originate from multiple sources but most commonly come from direct interviews with participants and field observations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

While researchers have attempted to classify qualitative research methods into a variety of typologies, Creswell’s (2013) five categories of qualitative research approaches appear to reflect representative qualitative approaches that have been widely used and discussed. These five categories include (a) Narrative Research, (b) Phenomenological Research, (c) Grounded Theory, (d) Ethnography, and (e) Case Study. Table 1 summarizes the differences between the five qualitative methods, according to Creswell. Narrative researchers gather data by collecting individuals’ stories and report their experiences by “chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Phenomenological research examines human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved. These experiences are called lived experiences (Donalek, 2004). Grounded theory, the theory chosen for this study, involves data collection and analysis for the purpose of theory development. As a final outcome, a theory is developed that is grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). Ethnography involves the collection and analysis of data about a culture’s characteristics. According to Leininger (1985), ethnography can be defined as “the
systematic process of observing, detailing, describing, documenting, and analyzing the lifeways or particular patterns of a culture (or subculture) in order to grasp the lifeways or patterns of the people in their familiar environment” (p. 35). Case studies are in-depth examinations of people or groups of people. Data may be collected in case studies through various means such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, or written accounts by participants (Jacelon & O’Dell, 2005).

Table 1. Five Qualitative Research Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Data Collection Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Research</td>
<td>To describe the meaning of an individual’s life experiences</td>
<td>Collect one or two individuals’ stories through multiple types of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological Research</td>
<td>To search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning</td>
<td>Conduct interviews but no clearly defined research procedures to avoid limiting the creativity of the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>To develop a theory that is grounded in the data</td>
<td>Conduct interviews but data collection and analysis occur simultaneously; a constant comparative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>To describe a culture’s characteristics</td>
<td>Collect data through direct observations and interactions with participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>To describe the in-depth experience of people or groups of people</td>
<td>Collect data from questionnaires, interviews, observations, or written accounts by participants</td>
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Rationale for the Chosen Methodology: Grounded Theory

Conducting qualitative research is essential to generate a better understanding of Korean immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions about their school involvement. Grounded theory was chosen for this study because it is compatible with the research questions guiding this investigation and stands out among other qualitative approaches because of its systematic research methods. More specifically, the grounded theory method uses both an inductive and a deductive approach to theory development.

According to Field and Morse (1985), “constructs and concepts are grounded in the data and hypotheses are tested as they arise from the research” (p. 23). I argue that given the multifaceted nature of the research topic encompassing a wide range of issues (e.g., diversity, parenting, school support, and a specific ethnic culture), theory generation is more critical than theory testing for the development of knowledge about immigrant parents’ school involvement.

The grounded theory approach was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later separately developed by Glaser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). Grounded theory is a research method that employs inductive, iterative, and participatory techniques because it seeks to formulate and integrate an emergent theory grounded in the data provided by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Glaser’s (1992) approach is a more open-ended, data-driven method that lacks a specific means of conducting grounded theory and it also requires researchers to suspend preexisting knowledge of the literature and personal experiences in the research method (Glaser, 1992). As stated in the literature review, I question the usefulness of this approach in that as a Ph.D. graduate student, I
have been exposed to the related literature to a large extent. Thus, “a lack of familiarity with relevant literatures is unlikely and untenable” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 306).

Strauss and Corbin (1998), on the other hand, offered a systematic approach with clearly outlined procedures and stages for building a theory at the substantive level, which is different from Glaser’s (1992) approach. Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasized that participants’ own understanding of their social environment plays the foundational role in any qualitative research and that it is important for researchers to be creative and to tailor the approach to their own research settings and interests. They stressed that the pursuit of rigor and objectivity, essential though these are, must not turn into a mechanistic adherence to a pre-set methodological formula. Their systematic data coding procedures involve different forms of conceptual ordering, termed “open coding,” “axial coding,” and “selective coding.” While open coding refers to the process of generating initial concepts from data, axial coding focuses on to the development and linking of concepts into conceptual families, and selective coding on formalizing these relationships into theoretical frameworks (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Constructivist grounded theory, based on social constructionism, which is essentially an anti-realism, relativist stance (Hammersley, 1992), was later developed by Charmaz (2006; 2014). It assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but are constructed by a researcher as a result of the researcher’s interactions with the field and the participants. Thus, Charmaz (2014) sees researchers as co-producers of the data by enriching the data with a description of the situation, interaction with participants, and the impact of the interview including the participant’s perception of his or her experience
during the interview. Charmaz’s (2014) approach is a good fit for this study in that the proposed research inquiries (a) came from my epistemological view of knowledge as something acquired through my subjective experiences and personal/academic knowledge as an immigrant parent; and (b) evolved through the co-production between my experiences and knowledge and my interactions with the participants.

With these factors in mind, I employed constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to answer my first and second research questions (How do Korean immigrant parents perceive their involvement in child’s schooling? and How do Korean immigrant parents perceive school support for their school involvement?), and then I followed the systematic procedures and conceptualization of Strauss and Corbin (1998) to explore key factors that influence parental school involvement (What influences Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement?)

**Sampling and Recruitment**

A total of eight (six mothers and two fathers) Korean immigrant parents whose children had attended kindergarten through elementary school (5th grade) participated in this study. I intentionally recruited Korean immigrant parents with K-5 grade students because parental school involvement generally begins when children start kindergarten and reportedly decreases as their children advance into higher grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). For example, a report by the U.S. Department Education (2003) shows that for children at age nine (4th Grade), about 75 percent of American parents report high or moderate involvement in school related activities, but when children reach age 14, the rate of parental involvement has dropped to 55 percent. The rate continues to drop
throughout high school. This notion is also confirmed in prior research regarding parental involvement. Although there are positive relations between parental involvement and school-related outcomes, parental involvement tends to decline in adolescence (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Milgram & Toubiana, 1999; Muller, 1998).

All participants were recruited in a Midwestern metropolitan area in which I (the researcher) resided. First, I contacted two Korean immigrant mothers, Seo and Jung\(^2\) whom I had known before but had not yet built any personal relationship. I interviewed Seo and Jung, respectively, and used the collected data to refine and evaluate the semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix D). Next, I contacted a Korean language school operated by a religious institution in the metropolitan area to recruit participants, but this attempt was not successful. I asked Seo and Jung to recommend potential participants within their social networks who might be interested in participating in this study. In other words, a snowball sampling method (Biernacki, & Waldorf, 1981) was used relying on referrals from the seed participants (i.e., Seo and Jung). The resulting sample, while not meant to be representative of Korean immigrant parents, nevertheless included a decent sample from a hard-to-reach population (Shaghaghi, Bhopal, & Sheikh, 2011), characterized by the lack of a serviceable sampling frame (i.e., Korean immigrant parents in the U.S.). Also, I used the recommendations made by Seo and Jung who had already established a trusted relationship with me (the researcher). This was effective in creating a comfortable interview setting for the second set of participants when they shared their personal experiences with me.

\(^2\) Pseudonyms were used.
Gender Consideration in Sampling

Regarding gender, recruiting Korean immigrant fathers was not easy, which is similar to what has been reported in other parenting studies (e.g., Sohn & Wang, 2006; Yang & McMullen, 2003). In fact, a large portion of parenting research has focused on mothering and only recently has there been a growing interest among researchers in the role and responsibilities of fathers as parents (Lamb, 2000; Pleck 2007; Goldberg, Tan, & Thorsen, 2009). Therefore, there are still gaps in understanding fathers as parents although there has been increased attention to fathering and fatherhood in recent years. One example is that although researchers recognize the need to examine fathering (versus mothering) across a wide range of settings (e.g., Parke, 2000), further research is still needed to describe existing variations in fathering across culturally, ethnically, and geographically diverse samples of fathers.

Participant Characteristics

A total of eight Korean immigrant parents composed of six mothers and two fathers participated in this study. Through snowball sampling, two female participants recommended their own spouses (cf. it took more than two months to recruit these two fathers). Thus, two married couples were included in the sample. As shown in Table 2, the age of the participants ranged from late 30s to mid-40s. They had lived in the United States for 16 years, on average. Seven participants had been working on a full-time basis. They all considered themselves middle class. All of them were college graduates. Five of them had received graduate degrees including two participants with doctoral degrees. Regarding English proficiency, self-reported responses were used: one participant self-
reported as below average and the rest of the participants self-reported as either average or above average on a 5-point rating scale. Only one participant’s spouse is a 2nd generation Korean-American and the remaining participants and all of their spouses were born in South Korea and came to the US from South Korea for the purpose of studying, marriage, or family immigration. One participant was a single parent. The number of children ranged from one to three. The participants perceived the academic achievement of their children at school as being either average or above average. Detailed information regarding the demographic characteristics of participants is reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of the U.S. residency</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education/college degree</th>
<th>English Proficiency (1-lowest, 5-highest)</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Children’s Academic Achievement (Perceived)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seo</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>3 (Kindergartner, 4th &amp; 6th graders)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>4 (Kindergartner)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hee</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>4 (5th grader)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joo</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>3 (2nd &amp; 5th graders)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>2 (4th &amp; 9th graders)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyung</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>4 (5th &amp; 8th graders)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chul</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>3 (Kindergartner)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kook</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>4 (Kindergartner, 4th &amp; 6th graders)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>above average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary Data Collection

All individual interviews were conducted between December 2015 and April 2016. I conducted the interviews in Korean given that it was the primary language that both the participants and I used. I used a digital voice recorder to generate audio data from each interview. Next, I transcribed the audio data recorded in Korean and then translated the text data into English for data analysis.

In-depth, individual interviews were used as the primary means of data collection—a recommendation in qualitative research (Patton, 2001; Ritchie, 2003). This face-to-face interview method is believed to be more conducive for establishing rapport (Hill & Lambert, 2004). It also fosters an interpersonal context in which personal experiences and meanings can be discussed in detail (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003).

Prior to conducting each interview, I asked the participant to fill out a demographic questionnaire I developed on the Internet. In-person interviews lasted 65 minutes, on average, and ranged from 55 minutes to 83 minutes. Each participant and I determined a particular interview location (e.g., library, coffee shop, the participant’s home, a quiet restaurant) and the meeting time was arranged by agreement at the participant’s convenience. Most interviews were conducted during the day but two meetings were scheduled at night. All interviews were recorded with permission using a digital voice recorder. Memo-taking (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) was consistently used before, during, and after the interviews. Each participant received a $25 gift card after the in-person interview.
Follow-Up Data Collection Using Theoretical Sampling

The follow-up data collection procedure was designed using theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Charmaz, 2014), which is a purposive sampling, to further explore ideas obtained through initial data coding. Theoretical sampling is a process that unfolds out of the simultaneous practice of data collection, data analysis, and theory development in the grounded theory approach. It is a strategy of data collection in which the researcher actively seeks to address underdeveloped themes in the data by asking questions meant to provide further insight into those areas (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin, 2007). Charmaz (2014) explains that theoretical sampling is used to “seek pertinent data to develop an emerging theory (p.193).” Therefore, theoretical sampling elaborates the themes that consist of the theory developed and continue until no new properties are developed (Charmaz, 2014).

After the in-person interviews were completed, the participants had follow-up interviews via phone calls, emailing, and/or texting. Telephone interviews have been used in qualitative research and regarded as a “versatile” data collection tool (Carr & Worth, 2001, p. 521). Telephones allow participants to feel relaxed and to disclose sensitive/intimate information (Novick, 2008). In this study, one of the key questions explored through telephone interviews focused on the issue of how the mother participants perceived the father’s involvement. During the phone interview, I strived to encourage the participants to talk as much as possible, probing any vague and general answers by saying such things as “That’s interesting ... could you explain a little more about your husband’s lack of involvement in your child’s schooling?” or “Let’s see, you
said you did not necessarily seek your husband’s help…. just what do you mean by that?”

This type of rejoinder enticed the participants to expand upon their thoughts, without biasing them as to what I thought of the information provided thus far (Burke & Miller, 2001). As prior research suggests (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), this follow-up procedure generated rich, vivid, and detailed data. The phone calls that took place for the follow-up procedure lasted 15-25 minutes and all were recorded with permission.

E-mailing is useful when considering its use as a qualitative research tool (Selwyn & Robson, 1998). Participants are not constrained to instant communication but can respond to e-mails when they feel comfortable. In short, the primary advantage of emailing as a research tool is its “friendliness” to the participant (Selwyn & Robson, 1998). Given the ubiquitous use of mobile phones, text messaging is also regarded as an effective communication medium not only in the social realm but in qualitative research as well. The advantages of texting via mobile phone as a qualitative data collection method include (a) it is cheap; (b) it can be sent from anywhere and at any time; and (c) it is less intrusive and less of a time commitment (Kew, 2010).

Emailing and texting were used for follow-up data collection mostly to confirm whether I understood correctly what they had said. For example, when one parent said, “My child is doing just average” regarding her child’s academic achievement during the face-to-face interview, I was not sure whether this was a true statement. It is mainly because she also mentioned that one of her daughter’s friends once asked how her daughter was smart and did very well academically at school because she also mentioned that one of her daughters’ friends once asked how smart her daughter was and did well at
school. Through texting (Question: “Your child is doing just average at school, right?”), I found out that the child was actually a high academic achiever enrolled in a program for gifted children (Response: “Actually, she has been doing pretty well. She was selected as a gifted kid.”). From this text message, I was able to conclude that the participant had shown Koreans’ typical virtue of modesty during the initial face-to-face interview. This information helped me read and interpret the transcribed data correctly.

**Interview Protocol**

To answer the research questions, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed and was later revised after conducting interviews with the two initial participants, Seo and Jung. Major interview questions included: (1) Tell me about your school involvement experience for your children and what do you think about them? (2) How did you start your school involvement? (3) Which school involvement activities have worked well for you and how? If you feel some activities have not worked well for you, tell me how and why you feel that way? What made you feel unsatisfied? (4) Have you received support from teachers and schools when you are involved in your children’s schooling? Which types of support were effective and ineffective? (4) What would you suggest for school administrators and teachers to support you as a parent and to better promote your school involvement?

While I was conducting the follow-up interviews for the purpose of theoretical sampling, some more detailed questions were given to the participants such as primary reasons and motivations for school involvement, perceptions about several factors that influence their school involvement such as frequency and time, parenting styles, and
acculturation levels.

**Data Analysis Strategy**

Data were analyzed according to the procedures and principles of grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained that data collection and analysis are an interrelated process and the process of data collection and analysis is also iterative with informal thematic data analysis beginning after the first interview. Thus, the following analysis is used to direct the next interview and analysis. This grounded theory analysis utilizes this constant comparative method to guide a sequence of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I also applied the perspective of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). I conducted theoretical multiple analyses of data drawn from the experiences of the research participants and constructed the analysis based on my interactions and observations of them. I coded the data using qualitative labels and wrote analytic notes or memos. I made comparisons of the data and interpreted the similar topics as analytic themes. I also conducted a theoretical sampling procedure when codes and ideas were derived from the initial open coding which then led to follow-up questions. I then sorted and integrated the memos in an iterative, non-linear, constant comparative manner. Emerging themes became more theoretical and refined as the process moved through different levels of coding and eventually abstractions were built from the data (Charmaz, 2014). The specific coding procedures and examples are described in the following section.
**Data Analysis and Coding**

In grounded theory, the constant comparative method is used in data collection and coding concurrently. This method allows researchers to recognize the various properties and dimensions inherent in each theme, taking into account the full diversity of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used this constant comparative method to compare new data with the data that had already been coded into themes.

Readers should keep in mind that while the three coding procedures are described in a sequential manner in the following section, the actual coding procedure conducted was an iterative, non-linear, constant comparative procedure as suggested by the standard ground theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Open Coding**

Data analysis began with open coding, which is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While reading the transcribed data thoroughly, I strived to identify meaningful pieces of text data and each identified concept was coded as a descriptive label (hereafter referred to as an “open code”). During the process of open coding, I found interesting “open codes” that I wanted to further explore through theoretical sampling. By the end of initial open coding, a large number of “open codes” were identified. Examples are shown in Table 3.
## Table 3. Examples of Initial Open Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Code</th>
<th>Sample Narrative Data Coded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling relieved from the heavy responsibility of parental involvement</td>
<td>“I am so happy that (my child) is the last one of the three that I need to pay close attention to her schooling.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Finding the best school in the best school district as Korean immigrant parents’ mantra</td>
<td>“You know how much passion Korean parents have for their children’s education….We also have been pursuing similar paths like other Korean people do...We’ve spent lots of time and effort on finding our first home in the U.S. and our first priority then was totally given to finding one of the best schools in the best school district.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children’s expressed excitement/positive reactions to their parental involvement</td>
<td>“My kids really like me to visit their schools.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children’s explicit request for parental involvement</td>
<td>“I have tried to visit my kid’s school as much as she wants although I can’t go every time she wants. She has always liked me to come to her school since her kindergarten. She asks me to sign up for a classroom volunteer and just to join her during lunch time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Meeting children’s implicit expectations</td>
<td>“My children seem so proud of me when I just show up at their school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accidental involvement</td>
<td>“I first started volunteer work…as an assistant math teacher…weekly for one semester. Although the math assistant was not what I first wanted to do…I didn’t know how to do it, I just said yes anyway when my son’s teacher asked me to do that.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Axial Coding**

I conducted axial coding to inspect each “open code” to identify how it could be linked to other open codes. This process enabled me to explore what relationships and
patterns that exist in the data (Hawker & Kerr, 2007; Payne, 2007). Each pattern/relationship identified was coded as a descriptive label (hereafter referred to as an “axial code”). During this process, I began to relate the open codes to conditions, contexts, action/interaction strategies, and consequences that might help me develop a final theoretical model (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Major themes derived from the iterative coding process include (a) Saving the child's chi (기 살리기—Gi Saligi) as the ultimate goal of parental school involvement; (b) responsive parentings style as a facilitating factor for parental school involvement, especially for mothers; and (c) varied levels of involvement according to the teacher’s attitude (attentiveness, caring, patience) and quality (multicultural competence). The final axial codes are exemplified in Table 4.

**Selective Coding**

Selective coding was the process of “selecting” a set of core themes, systematically relating it to the themes generated from the data and validating those relationships. The developing theory was integrated and refined during this process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each identified core theme was coded as a descriptive label (hereafter referred to as a “selective code”). During this process, all the final axial codes were organized around the selective codes. One central selective code explaining Korean immigrants’ parental involvement emerged and was labeled as “saving chi (기 살리기—Gi Saligi).” Four additional selective codes were generated as key factors affecting Korean immigrants’ parental involvement: (a) personal factors; (b) interpersonal factors; (c) situational factors; and (d) environmental factors. Table 4 presents an example of the linkage among these iteratively purified open codes, axial codes and selective codes.
Table 4. Examples of Interactively Purified Open Codes, Axial Codes and Selective Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Open Code Iteratively Purified</th>
<th>Axial Code</th>
<th>Selective Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about the child’s different physical appearance, language barrier, social ineptitude, cultural incompetence, etc.</td>
<td>Fear of killing chi</td>
<td>Saving Chi (기살리다) as the Ultimate Goal of Parental School Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Satisfaction and self-fulfillment felt after participation; psychological well-being leading to parental school involvement</td>
<td>Self-determination: Intrinsic &amp; extrinsic motivations for the child’s education and school involvement</td>
<td>Personal Factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Memo-Writing**

Charmaz (2014) advised researchers using a grounded theory by stating that memo writing “creates an interactive space for conversing with yourself about your data, codes, ideas, and hunches” (p. 162). Keeping in mind her advice, I wrote questions and new ideas generated in the process of data analysis and compiled them for the purpose of theory construction. Thus, memo-writing was an essential intermediate step between the data collection and the data analysis because memo writing helped me analyze the collected data in relation to my research questions. Table 5 shows a few examples of my memos taken during the data collection and analysis.
Concerned about “killing the child’s chi”

All participants commonly express that they do not want to kill their children’s chi at school or in the classroom. What is behind this “not killing chi (기죽이다)” mentality? I can understand what they mean by that… but need to explore more about their feelings to see why they are concerned about their children’s chi and whether this is related to their motivation for school involvement? Does this come from their own experiences? Have the participants felt/experienced these feelings in the U.S. being discouraged, depressed, and not confident in their lives… from what… how often? Do they reflect and project their own personal experiences in the U.S. onto their children?

Recognize obvious obstacles but say “I will accept them. That is just the way it is.”

Literally, all Korean parents have made mistakes or misunderstood about school events, activities… so embarrassing, regretful (sometimes funny) memories… they think it happened just because they didn’t seek further information (their fault)… They say “But we (Korean parents) don’t want/request anything more from school. Instead, we just learn from our own mistakes at least for the first 1-2 school years. This is just our fate as immigrant parents; we just embrace and deal with…” Can these obstacles be removed without school support? What is my study for?

Positionality

My personal, academic, and professional background needs to be addressed here to better explain my methodological approach, research design, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. After completing my undergraduate study in Pedagogy and master’s degree in Counseling in Korea, I worked as a counselor at a Korean government counseling institute for five years. While working with parents, teenagers, and school
teachers, I participated in hundreds of individual/group counseling sessions and conducted a variety of counseling-related studies. After acquiring this work experience in Korea, I came to the U.S. to further my academic and professional growth. While navigating various fields through my Ph.D. coursework and research, I was able to narrow down my specialty in the area of Family Studies/Parent Education.

On a personal note, I did not have much knowledge and information about the U.S. K-12 education system and did not have many opportunities to learn about it before my son started kindergarten in the U.S. As a Korean immigrant father who has studied “Parenting,” raising a child is always exciting but challenging. Before my son started his official school life, I had been a confident and involved parent. I thought that I had played my role as a father fairly well, actively supporting my son’s healthy growth and development both physically and psychologically. Once my child started kindergarten, however, I began experiencing cultural challenges that seemed beyond my understanding and knowledge. Another important revelation was that other (mainly Korean) immigrant parents also had experienced a great deal of frustration and anxiety when it comes to parental school involvement. Such anecdotal evidence deepened my interest in “Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement” as a collective, cultural phenomenon that deserved in-depth research.

From a researcher’s standpoint, I have been involved in several parenting-related research projects conducted in more typical U.S. population contexts while pursuing my Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. However, a common limitation identified from these projects was that some of the research findings might not be applicable to particular
ethnic minority groups such as Korean immigrants. Moreover, I learned not only how little research has been conducted involving Korean immigrant parents, but also how most parental involvement studies have been conducted in European-American contexts. In an attempt to address this research void, I designed a qualitative study using my ethnic cultural identity as a valuable research instrument. My ultimate goal as a researcher is to enrich multicultural perspectives that have been rather neglected in prior parenting research.

Regarding my choice of methodology, although I have a strong quantitative research background based on positivist/scientific methods, I concluded that qualitative research would be a better methodological approach given a lack of culture-specific insights in the literature regarding Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. In this study, I intended to generate a grounded theory reflecting deeper and more valuable insights from the voices of Korean immigrants. To achieve this goal, I, a Korean immigrant parent, am arguably in a better position than other researchers with different ethnic backgrounds in that I use Korean as my first language, have sufficient knowledge and experiences about Korean people including social/cultural aspects of Korean society and the Korean school system.

I also believe that my past work experience as a male counselor has influenced my data collection to some extent. Overall, it was difficult to recruit participants despite the use of monetary incentives and confidentiality agreements. In general, most Koreans do not open up about themselves during the first several interactions with someone who has not yet built a close relationship with them and they tend to feel uncomfortable or
even offended if they are asked to disclose their personal stories. This cultural tendency becomes even more salient when a woman interacts with a married, older, and/or male stranger. In a qualitative research setting, this means that female participants might behave politely to maintain social manners but would not share their personal feelings and thoughts with an interviewer like me, who falls under all of the three “avoidance” categories (male, older, married). Especially my gender as a father and male researcher in parenting studies, in a field that is dominated by female researchers, might have led to discomfort in both male and female participants considering Korean traditional gender roles. At the same time, I believe that my past counseling training and active listening skills likely helped to create positive rapport with each participant in a relatively short time frame, enabling me to hear their true and inner voices.

Therefore, my unique background and cultural identity as a former professional counselor and Korean immigrant father is a major strength as a researcher in this study that enabled me to successfully carry out and complete this journey.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

As stated throughout this dissertation, to carefully explore the experiences of Korean immigrant parents regarding their school involvement in the United States, I employed a qualitative study design based on a grounded theory approach. The main goal of this study was to investigate key factors that influence Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. In this chapter, I first present my grounded theory of “Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants’ Parental School Involvement” developed from the participants’ perceptions, experiences, and thoughts and explain how the theory is grounded in the data. Next, I provide my additional findings about Korean immigrant parents’ perceptions and notable phenomena regarding their school involvement and school support. Finally, I elaborate my theory development journey based on a series of different data coding procedures.

Overview of Grounded Theory

This chapter starts with an overview explaining five key factors affecting Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement. Figure 1 visually illustrates the grounded theory of “Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants’ Parental School Involvement” developed from the interview data. The most important core theme that emerged from the data was saving the child’s chi (“기 살리기”), positioned in the center of the model in Figure 1. The four other themes were conceptualized as (a) personal factors; (b) interpersonal factors; (c) situational factors; and (d) environmental factors. The personal factors were derived from self-determination motivations, parenting styles, the parent’s
gender, English proficiency, and acculturation. The interpersonal factors entail parents’ relationships with school teachers, other parents, and people met through MissyUSA. The situational factors involve parents’ time pressure and expected and unexpected changes in family life. Finally, the environmental factors were identified from school and Korean community support.

Figure 1. Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants’ Parental School Involvement

In the following sections, each of the five big themes are described in detail. In discussing the final grounded theory, direct quotations are included to assist in illustrating the findings. Each participant was given a pseudonym and quotes are coded under this
name. The results are discussed using particular terms to indicate the frequency of similar responses. The phrases “many,” and “most” are used to discuss concepts expressed by at least five of the eight participants. The words “some,” and “several,” show that three to four of the participants supported the concept. “A few” was used to indicate concepts expressed by one or two participants.

**Saving Chi**

All of the parents in this study agreed that their school involvement was highly related to their children’s social competence. They believed that by actively engaging in their children’s schooling, they were able to prevent their children from being intimidated, trivialized, alienated, or marginalized at school. In other words, the purpose of their school involvement was to save their children’s gi (Korean root) or chi (Chinese root): it seems that chi is a more accepted term in the U.S., (“기 살리기” *Gi Saligi*) even though I could not locate the definition of chi in several American English dictionaries. This concept represents Korean immigrants’ unique thinking regarding parental school involvement.

According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online (2016), chi is defined as “the most important energy that a person has.” 기죽다 (Killing chi, antonym: 기살다-saving chi) is an old Korean idiom/phrase that most Korean adults still use. A widely used Korean-English dictionary in Korea (네이버 - Naver Online Dictionary, 2016) defines 기죽다 (killing chi) as “being discouraged.” As a Korean native speaker, I understand that 기죽다 could be translated in various ways: feeling inferior, losing confidence, feeling
daunted, looking depressed, bummed out, looking down on. When someone is in a state of “기죽다,” his/her significant others (e.g., family, friends) usually encourage, cheer him/her up, and try to make him/her feel better.

From the perspective of classical Adlerian psychology (Adler, 1929), “saving chi” may resonate with a parent’s inferiority complex. For example, to some parents, the outside world their children face is nothing but an arena of competition and accomplishment. As a result, how much their children can accomplish has become an important value to them. These over-anxious parents believe that children who accomplish more feel proud and superior, whereas those failing to do so feel inferior. In Korea’s modern society, the inferiority complex born of competition (Lee, 1999) has caused many parents to actively express their “saving chi” efforts instead of following the traditional belief that “forbearance is a virtue.” One extreme and distorted form of their “saving chi” efforts may be chonji, the deeply rooted practice of parents offering under-the-table payoffs to teachers or administrators (Glionna & Park, 2009). Chonji could be a simple box of cookies or an innocent gift given to a hardworking teacher from an appreciative parent especially in the US. In the highly competitive school system, however, some parents offer a plain envelope stuffed with cash to teachers to help their children get ahead, seeking any classroom possible advantage for them (Glionna & Park, 2009).

From a sociological angle, Koreans’ “saving chi” mentality is strongly linked to the current dominant “middle class” values that were formed to a large extent by the process of modernization in Korea. This process began at the end of the 19th century
when Western cultural influences penetrated Korean society (e.g., the expansion of scientific knowledge, acceptance of the democratic system, industrialization, and urbanization) (Lee, 1999). These “modern, middle class” values in Korea are viewed as important and involve efforts by each individual for liberty, equality, reasonableness, and material wealth (Lee, 1999). Accordingly, the feeling of “killing chi” in modern Korean society is associated with the lack of such values. In this regard, social incompetence and poverty are generally the sources of “killing chi” in Korea.

According to the data I collected and analyzed, however, Korean immigrant parents’ saving chi efforts cannot be fully explained by the inferiority complex or the modern middle class values discussed above. All eight participants used the exact same expression to explain why they wanted to be involved in their children’s schooling; they did not want their children to be “기죽다 (Gijookda),” which means that the parents did not want their children to be discouraged at school mostly because they were different physically and culturally. With regard to saving the children’s chi through school involvement, Joo provided a vivid description:

Actually, I was hesitant to be a volunteer for my son’s school but he is my first child and he really wanted me to come to his school. I thought that my son’s chi would be saved (“기가 살다”) if I became a parent volunteer for his school. When that actually happened, my son was really excited……I had never seen him that excited. What I have been a little concerned about him is…his different physical appearance, he is a colored race…From my point of view, my son’s chi may be killed (기죽다) at school because he is physically different from other
kids. And he is somewhat shy. He doesn’t talk much and show his feelings, but when I was in his classroom, he showed a big smile and laughed a lot looking at me. I knew he really liked me to be there and I think that my school visit saved his chi (“기살다”).

Despite much progress during the past few decades, racism and prejudice may be still an ugly reality in U.S. educational settings. Although the participants understood that racism would be less obvious and virulent at school than in the past, they thought that its effects could still greatly harm their children. Their concern was that subtle, insidious forms of racism could be even more harmful to their children (e.g., being ignored, ridiculed or treated differently) than more blatant forms. Seo confirmed that the notion of saving (vs. killing) chi is related to Korean immigrant parents’ fear of subtle racism, ethnic discrimination, or social exclusion at school:

My son’s classroom and school is not ethnically diverse...very few kids are minorities and the majority of them are white. So, what I was most concerned about was how well my son would do at such an (intimidating) white dominant environment. You know...actually, we (the parents) also feel uncomfortable when we meet a lot of white people and have to talk with them speaking in English...I assumed that my son would feel the same. Also his English was not perfect as he started his first school year...I was worried that he might feel embarrassed if his friends made fun of him because of his English and strange accent. In fact, I am still nervous about that.

One interesting notion observed in Seo’s story was that she seemed to project
onto her son her own uncomfortable feelings from meeting and talking to white people speaking in English, assuming that he would feel the same as she would. This “psychological projection” (see Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998) onto their children was also observed in Hee’s story:

When my daughter started her school 5 years ago, there was less than one percent of ethnic minority kids...maybe they were Asian. The school staff I met for the first time were not nice...I would say their attitude was like being cold, hasty...too much formal. So I frowned too, of course feeling uncomfortable. Now I am better… I wouldn’t have any unpleasant experiences like that in communicating with other (white) people...Anyway, I got more involved in school activities since that unpleasant experience because I was worried that my daughter would experience the same at school as I did. Also, I had not taught my daughter any English before starting school (so she would) not lose her mother language as other Korean moms had recommended. Sure enough, when I was in her classroom in the first school week, only my daughter didn’t raise her hand when her teacher asked questions to kids...Later she said she had not been able to understand the teacher’s questions at all. From my classroom observations, I knew other kids’ answers were almost irrelevant and not always correct, so I encouraged my daughter to raise her hand anyway and to answer whatever the teacher asked and I remember...she did so later.

The word “psychological projection,” used in this study is different from the one originated from Freud’s perspective, defined as a defense mechanism against a person’s
own unpleasant feelings and thoughts by denying their existence while attributing them to others. In this study, it simply indicates the existence of a false-consensus effect whereby humans have a broad tendency to believe that others are similar to themselves, and thus “project” their personal feelings and thoughts onto others (see Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998).

Saving chi becomes a problem-solving strategy when a Korean immigrant parent encounters a challenging situation. It functions as a parental intervention strategy to resolve a problematic situation at school. For example, Seo made it her mission to save her son’s chi when her first son had an inevitable school transfer and showed social/cultural ineptitude at the new school:

(Question: What made you participate in his school life more actively? Why were you so involved?) First of all, I hoped my involvement would be helpful for my son. For me, it was not about improving his academic grades, but I was willing to do more if it would help him better adapt to his new surroundings. (Question: How helpful was it?) I think I wanted to do more because that was what my son really wanted and needed at that time. He wanted me to come to his new school and I knew how much he liked it when I was there. Yes, it was not about math or reading scores. The most important thing to me was that my son would think “Oh, my mom is here just for me.” I don’t know whether American moms do like me...maybe not all do that...but my involvement efforts at his new school definitely made him feel much more comfortable. He didn’t say it directly but I just knew it.
In sum, the participants’ parental school involvement was largely explained by the concept of “saving chi.” Their saving chi efforts were triggered by their inner fear of subtle racism, ethnic discrimination, or social exclusion at school. Saving chi was not related to improving their children’s academic performance. Rather, it was related to their children’s social, psychological well-being. The participants projected their own “killing chi” experiences onto their children and wanted to prevent them from feeling what they had gone through. By showing up at school, as a teacher assistant, they believed that they could ensure their children’s social inclusion. “Saving chi” functioned as their problem-solving strategy when their children encountered problematic situations at school.

**Personal Factors**

The “personal” theme involves those factors that vary from one individual to another. These factors represent individual characteristics such as self-determination, parenting styles, gender of the parent, English proficiency, and acculturation.

**Self-Determination**

It was noteworthy to explore how the participants became involved in their children’s schooling and what motivated them to proceed with their school involvement despite the numerous barriers and obstacles identified in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2011). Several participants expressed that they enjoyed their school involvement activity itself and felt a sense of accomplishment by contributing to the school and helping the teacher (intrinsic). However, most participants expected that their involvement would bring substantial benefits to their children (extrinsic). Two extrinsic motivations for their school involvement were (a) helping the child get more
attention and care from the teacher, and (b) helping the child build good relationships with peers. Min stated that:

I just go to school and help the teacher because my son loves it. That’s the most important thing to me. Maybe if I volunteered as a teacher assistant, his teacher would pay a little more attention to my son, or might say bye in a nicer, friendlier tone waving her hands to my son. This is just my thought but she might call my son’s name once more in class. But I think that my involvement does not have a big connection with my son’s academic performance. The fact that my son likes my involvement is more important to me.

Min’s self-determination is a less obvious form of saving chi. Behind her involvement efforts, she wanted the teacher to pay more attention to her son, which would save his chi at school. In other words, “saving chi” was manifested through self-determination. Intrinsic rewards could not be realized without saving chi (i.e., I just go to school and help the teacher because my son loves it. That’s the most important thing to me.). Extrinsic rewards were just the operationalization of “saving chi.” (e.g., Maybe if I volunteered as a teacher assistant, his teacher would pay a little more attention to my son, or might say bye in a nicer, friendlier tone waving her hands to my son. This is just my thought but she might call my son’s name once more in class.) The underlying, fundamental motive behind these extrinsic motivations was “saving chi.” “Saving chi” was a necessary condition for self-determination. Korean immigrant parents in this study were motivated intrinsically and extrinsically when their mission for “saving chi” was ensured through parental school involvement.
Interestingly, most parents in this study did not clearly indicate that their school involvement directly influenced their children’s academic performance. Only one of the eight participants perceived that her school involvement would ultimately influence her children’s academic achievement, because parental involvement would help her (the parent) get better information about what and how her children were doing and learning at school.

The possible reasons the participants did not clearly relate their involvement to their children’s academic achievement could be because (a) their children’s social, emotional well-being at school was their primary interest and concern, (b) they had not seen any substantial proof through grades or test scores yet, and (c) they were just being modest. Koreans typically demonstrate the virtue of modesty during interpersonal interactions. One parent said, “My child is doing just average” but later it turned out that the child was actually a high academic achiever enrolled in a program for gifted children.

**English Proficiency and Acculturation**

Many participants discussed the ways in which language barriers and cultural differences had hindered their interactions with the teacher and other children during their school involvement activities. Without exception, most parents in this study recalled a variety of moments when they felt nervous, hesitant, ashamed, embarrassed, regretful, and awkward when they started getting involved in their children’s schooling--mainly due to language barriers and cultural differences. Their unpleasant miscommunication experiences and cultural misunderstandings were commonly documented across different genders, English proficiency levels, age, education levels, and acculturation levels
(partially indicated by the duration of U.S. residency). Seo recalled:

When I met my second son’s (first grade) teacher for the very first time, I just signed up to be a classroom assistant who was supposed to help his teacher in a reading class. I regretted right after his teacher had given me a list of words that I had to use for that class. My thoughts were “My English is not good...Why did I sign up for this? I shouldn’t have done this…I should have chosen other volunteer work that no English is needed!” On that day, I had one group with six students in my reading table...It was very difficult for me to explain to my group the meaning of each word...maybe 15 words...I had a really hard time...In fact, I felt even more embarrassed because the teacher was standing by my table for a long time.

Seo’s story implies that “saving chi” could be more important than all other key factors identified in this study. She went to her son’s school to be a classroom volunteer despite her lack of confidence with her English. She voluntarily exposed herself to a potentially threatening environment that might kill her own chi. She put herself in danger of “being ashamed,” and the consequences might have been traumatic for her. Like Seo, other participants’ stories were also delivered through a sense of shame, the emotion associated with the humiliating revelation of personal failure (Nathanson, 1987). Joo recalled:

When my first son started school, I didn’t know much about schools in the U.S. and American culture and customs in general. When he started kindergarten, I told my son many times that he had to call his teacher literally “Teacher” not her
name. You know we do that in Korea. But, after I saw other teachers just call her by the first name, I thought it would be okay to use a teacher’s first name in American culture ...so I called her like “Jane” pretending to sound very natural. The teacher told me in a stern voice that she wanted me to call her “Mrs. ….” I said “sorry” many times and felt so embarrassed.

In Joo’s story, I could sense the teacher’s attitude was atypically condescending. Joo’s shame was closely related to the ethical values or moral standards of Confucian culture in Korea. Confucianism propounds three cardinal values: joyous learning, filial piety, and loyalty to the king (Chung, 2014). These three virtues have been used as criteria in evaluating human behavior for centuries. Accordingly, the most shameful behavior in Confucian culture has been the violation of these three mores (Lee, 1999). Under the influence of Confucianism, Koreans tend to view teachers as authority figures rather than equal partners. To illustrate how much (philosophically) powerful teachers can be to Koreans, I would like to introduce one notable Confucian ideology, termed “the trinity of king, teacher, and father,” meaning each of them must be equally respected and loved. This tradition persists even in modern Korean society and all teachers, parents, and society are aware of it; it is frequently quoted in public speeches, talks, and writing (Chung, 2014). Thus, in the teacher-parent dyadic, the teacher is a stronger party as exemplified by an old Korean saying “One does not dare to step on a teacher’s shadow.” The parent is the weaker one. Joo was the weaker one based on her Korean cultural values. Unfortunately, she received traumatic discipline from the teacher exhorting her with irrevocable guilt and shame. Joo’s shame was intensified because of her violation of
the Confucian virtue (i.e., showing disrespect to a teacher).

The participants felt shame when they painfully experienced a discrepancy between the actual self (culturally and socially incompetent) and the ideal self (culturally and socially competent). To some extent, I could sense their desire “to hide,” or “to cover up” their own actual mistakes. What they were exposed to was something deeply personal, some particularly sensitive, and vulnerable aspect of the actual self. Kyung recalled:

When my first kid started kindergarten, I really didn’t have any information...and experiences about American schools. I volunteered as a “secret reader,” after having heard from the teacher that all I would have to do is to just read a book in the classroom for the kids and she said I could choose any book on my own. One Korean mother I had known suggested that American kindergarteners would prefer a very basic book with minimum text in it. So, I chose an easy-to-read book written for kindergarteners. What happened was…my reading ended weirdly -- too fast...The book was too short and too basic...almost nothing I needed to read. I realized that the book was for kindergarteners practicing reading skills at the beginner level, not for parents...Oh my...I was so ashamed.

The participants explicitly said “I felt ashamed” implying that “I do not want to talk about it and I do not want to reveal this side of myself.” Their shame was associated with the hidden parts of themselves, buried deeply enough to avoid scrutiny by others and even by themselves. Their shame essentially implied painful embarrassment and a sense of devastation/mortification. Hee described:
When my daughter was in kindergarten, I made a lot of mistakes. Now I can laugh at those but each time I felt so ashamed. For example, I was informed that my daughter’s class would have a costume day and I thought, “Costume? Maybe a special dress?” I chose a fancy pink dress with a lot of lace and ribbons, looking cute but also formal. My daughter got so angry later at me saying, “I was the only one who dressed like that! So weird!” I never imagined that kids would wear monster costumes that they usually would do for Halloween. Another one is...her teacher emailed that her classroom would celebrate the 100th school day and my daughter would need to bring something special to school to celebrate this. I should have asked her teacher what to bring but I regret that I didn’t. “Special, special...thing to celebrate the 100th day…” I asked my daughter if she knew what she could bring but she said no. So, I decided to prepare a special thing for all of the students. On a big drawing paper, I wrote “Congrats, the 100th School Day!” in Korean (경축 백번째 학교수업!) and decorated the space around the letters with as many colors as I could. My daughter told me that other kids brought 100 pieces of something like beans, candy, cookies, etc. and she asked me why I didn’t know that like all other moms knew.

Hee told her story in a casual manner but her shame was still lingering there because she recalled her deeply buried memory of her daughter’s realization/accusation: “My mom is different from other moms; my mom is not right.” She failed to hide her vulnerable side. Up to this point, all she had to do was to keep her daughter from feeling different at school. That was her “saving chi” mission. Ironically, through her one trivial
mistake (not correctly understanding the teacher’s assignment request), she made her daughter realize that she was different from other moms. Moreover, her competence as a parent was questioned by her daughter. To every young child, regardless of ethnicity, his/her parents may be superheroes; they are brave, resourceful, and always right. When Hee made a laughable mistake, her daughter’s fantasy of having a superhero mom was shattered. Hee’s relationship with her daughter was changed. She had to move on to a more “mature” mother-daughter relationship, somewhat forcefully. She had to seal the simple, innocent stage of her motherhood. It happened accidentally. She and her daughter were not prepared for this transition. Therefore, this was no longer a funny memory. This was too painful to even recall. Her emotion was almost “humiliated fury” (Stierlin, 1974) that was not extinguished. It remained latent in her sub-consciousness, buried below the level of her waking mentality.

While language barriers and cultural difference were obvious barriers hindering the participants’ parental school involvement, these influences were also strengthened or weakened by other factors. Even when participants were fluent in English, cultural barriers to parental involvement often remained. For example, depending on their level of acculturation (i.e., the extent to which a parent adopts the norms of American culture over Korean culture), the participants’ perceptions of school involvement were somewhat different. For example, the higher the acculturation level they showed, the more comfortable and confident they felt regarding their school involvement, despite their low English proficiency. Also, according to the teacher’s attitude and quality (multicultural competence), these barriers were effectively managed. Finally, the data suggested that, to
save their children’s chi at school, Korean immigrant parents were willing to tolerate the language and cultural difficulties they were confronted with during school involvement. This confirmed my earlier observation that saving chi is so powerful that it can override all other factors. In sum, these findings led me to realize a need to holistically view the dynamics among all of the related factors and define “saving chi’ as the connection among all the pieces of the puzzle.

**Parenting Styles and Gender**

Baumrind’s (1973) four distinct aspects of parenting styles developed in a Western culture did not fully explain the inconsistent patterns in the data. According to Baumrind’s (1973) parenting styles, the most widely accepted and most studied parenting styles in a Western culture, a traditional Korean parenting style can be mostly categorized as “authoritarian” which represents high parental demandingness and low parental responsiveness (Chao & Tseng, 2002). However, most participants, especially the Korean mothers, described themselves quite the opposite, with the perception of low demandingness and high responsiveness. Seo mentioned:

> In my son’s school, there are lots of Chinese students and their parents are really passionate about their children’s education. They are all involved in their children’s education, plan all the schedules at school and other extra activities very tightly...I think that they push their children too much and it is amazing that all the kids seem to follow and accomplish the tasks given to them. What we (Koreans) are doing is nothing compared to Chinese parents. But I think that there are many opportunities in the U.S. other than studying hard. I might think
differently if I were in Korea, but I don’t want to push my children too hard for better academic performance scores. I don’t want my children to be a continuously running horse to achieve something others desire. I try not to demand much from my children although they would think differently...haha. I am also a Korean mother, you know. Anyway, I want my kids to be a little relaxed and to search for what they want to do.

Seo’s story was interesting in that she compared her low demandingness to Chinese mothers, often stereotyped as “tiger mothers” (Chua, 2011), and implied that her children might perceive her parenting style differently than her own perception (she implied that perhaps her children would think she was more like a “tiger mom”). The data suggests that parenting styles and gender are also related to parental school involvement.

One pattern identified from the data was that highly responsive mothers tended to be actively involved in their children’s schooling. On the other hand, the two fathers appeared to show unresponsive parenting styles. Interestingly, Chul (father) had been intentionally unresponsive believing that this way of parenting would be more helpful in his daughter’s education and schooling. He even expressed that his active involvement would not be helpful ultimately. He said that his daughter did not want him to show up at school and to be engaged. He believed that his spouse would do a much better job with school-related involvement activities.

I don’t think that my involvement in my daughter’s schooling is helpful. Maybe it’s because I have not had any school involvement so far...My daughter also wouldn’t expect it. She seems to distinguish my role from her mom’s. She doesn’t
want me to show up at school and has no expectation at all… I don’t see any problem with it. My wife still wants me to go to regular conferences and meet the teacher together, at least, but I just tell her that I don’t have to because she knows way better than me about my daughter’s schooling so she surely does a much better job with it. My daughter would think that way, too.

Chul’s comment was interesting in that it pointed out the mother’s typical role in relation to the father’s involvement. Some female participants exhibited negative perceptions toward the father’s involvement because of their concerns about their husband’s incompetence and inexperience as a caregiver and the inconvenience to change his standards for housework and childcare. In this regard, the father’s involvement was partly determined by the mothers’ explicit and implicit permission, support, or encouragement. Joo expected that parenting should be a joint venture, and exemplified that her husband was more responsive and involved at home, although overall he was less involved than her at school. This was possible because she permitted/encouraged her husband to participate.

My husband doesn’t care much about what is going on at my son’s school but he just takes care of his study at home. He doesn’t want to go to school activities and doesn’t know about it but he seems to be only interested in the kid’s final grades. On school days, he reviews my son’s homework. He does it often…He tries to keep this routine at least, though not every night. It’s like he helps him solve math problems or checks if he had all the correct answers on a school workbook.

Recently, he also helped with some tasks that needed computer work. Of course,
he has to do it. We need to raise our kids together here in the U.S.

In sum, consistent with prior research, among the participants, the mothers were more involved in their children’s schooling than the fathers. While responsive (vs. unresponsive) parenting effectively facilitated the mothers’ parental school involvement, unresponsive (vs. responsive) parenting effectively facilitated the fathers’ lack of parental school involvement. Depending on the mothers’ support and encouragement, the fathers became more involved with their children at home.

**Interpersonal Factors**

The “interpersonal” theme involves the person-to-person factors that support Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. Teachers are a primary supporting resource, along with other parents who met through face-to-face interactions or Korean immigrant parents who met through online communities.

**School Teacher**

Most parents mentioned that their social interactions with the school teachers and other parents they met either in their residential areas or through online communities played an important role in their school involvement. In particular, they were well aware of the importance of support they could receive from their child’s home room teacher. Hee stated that she had been reluctant to actively seek the teacher’s support:

I know that other (white) moms often ask teachers things that they don’t know well. But in my case, I just tried to figure out everything on my own. Well... (Are there) any other better ways for immigrant parents like us? (Question: What if you asked your teacher in advance?) Well...it just takes 1 or 2 years to get used to
school schedules because most school events are the same annually….and I could have asked my daughter’s kindergarten teacher because I was so comfortable with her, but I don’t think I could have asked my daughter’s 1st grade teacher…She was not nice at times…just formal, and not listening well…I didn’t ask her for help because of my self-esteem…I felt like she ignored me. Anyway, almost every decision I made on my own turned out to be wrong…I learned I should have asked the teacher no matter what. I learned in a hard way from my own mistakes and I can do a better job now but I have only one child.

Hee did not actively seek the teacher’s support or establish an effective teacher-parent partnership despite her exceptional involvement with her daughter’s schooling. Several reasons might account for her hesitation and tendency to be cautious in seeking the teacher’s support. One reason might be that the teachers were not sufficiently trained in working with immigrant parents. Another reason could be the teachers’ negative attitudes toward cooperation with immigrant parents. It was interesting to note that many of the participants who were actively involved in their children’s schooling, expressed reservations and hesitations about seeking direct help from the teachers. Hee even expressed tension and criticism about one of the teachers she had experienced. To her, asking the teacher a simple question was a self-esteem issue. The teacher’s attitude was so mean that it offended her self-esteem. Contrary to Hee’s story, Seo exemplified how a good teacher could make a huge difference.

Every teacher is so different…in terms of multicultural perspective, knowledge…and attitude. The first teacher who taught my 2nd son in his previous
school seemed to have almost nothing in terms of those positive qualities. I think I was not comfortable with her. But the next teacher (since my son had been transferred to a new school) was totally different. I told her that we had lived in Korea for 2 years before coming back here so my son might have a difficult time to adjust to the new school. The teacher said that she herself had lived in another country as a minority and really understood well my son’s situation so I didn’t have to worry about it. She said to my son sitting next to me that she also had been a very shy girl but now she was not anymore. I felt so relieved and I truly thanked her for saying it very nicely. I think that my son got encouraged by her warm words and my son really liked her. I think that’s why I could get more involved in school activities without any major difficulty. I think that each teacher’s attitude, educational approach, and experiences are so important for parents as well as children.

As previous studies have suggested regarding the importance of an adequate relationship and communication between the teacher and parent (e.g., Dauber & Epstein 1993, Epstein, 1987, 2001), the participants agreed that their school involvement was likely influenced by the teacher’s personality, multicultural perspective/knowledge, and communication methods (i.e., frequency, communication tools). In other words, the participants felt more comfortable when their teachers were friendlier, more patient while communicating, more multiculturally refined, and more willing to communicate. These teacher qualities encouraged the participants’ active, continuous involvement. Seo mentioned another positive experience with her daughter’s teacher:
I have tried to visit my daughter’s school as much as she wants although I can’t go every time she wants. She has always asked me to come to her school since kindergarten (now she is in the 1st grade). She asks me to come as a classroom volunteer and just to join her during lunch time. When I am in her classroom, she always gets excited and raises her hand very often to talk in class. Last time, I felt like she did so too much…She is not that kind of kid as far as I know…I thought probably her excessive enthusiasm might have annoyed the teacher, so I was concerned. But her teacher once said to me that she liked when my kid was more active in class discussion when I was there. So I don’t need to worry about it anymore. Her teacher is so nice. She made me feel much more comfortable to visit school.

Seo also stated that her school involvement helped her son feel comfortable with his teacher when her 2nd grade son started his new school after a school transfer. Her son, born in the U.S., had lived in South Korea for about two years and started his schooling in the U.S. after coming back. She decided where to transfer to considering that a smaller class size would help her son better adjust to a U.S. school setting.

My son said his teacher didn’t pay attention to him as much as she did to others in his classroom. Well, I just thought that my son needed more time to get used to his teacher. My son is somewhat shy…He was shyer than I thought at school. But, because he said this about his teacher several times, not once, I got confused…I didn’t know what to do about that. I thought I should let his teacher know what my son had said a few times, but I didn’t feel comfortable talking about that with
his teacher through a face-to-face meeting. I also thought about sending an email but still it was hard to mention it to his teacher that directly. Instead, I just signed up for a classroom project assistant…Maybe it was about some art work, kind of origami, cutting, pasting, I think. Actually, it was good to be there and also fun to see how my son was doing in class. Of course, my son liked it, me being there to help the teacher. His teacher also smiled at me and said that she thanked me for the help. After class, when I walked in the hallway with my son that afternoon, we happened to meet his teacher. That time, she said a little loudly like “Bye, (saying my son’s name loudly), “Have a nice evening with mom!”’ and my son replied, “Thank you, you too” in his small and low voice. On our way home, he said he really liked that his teacher had called him by his name loudly. As far as I remember, my son didn’t say anything more about his teacher’s attitude that had bothered him previously.

In addition to their active parental involvement, the participants also expressed reservations and tension when seeking the teacher’s support and mentioned the challenges they had faced. Some participants tended to avoid asking questions and attempted to figure out everything on their own. Others tended to communicate mostly with kind teachers with whom they felt comfortable. Although they acknowledged the benefits they could get from the teacher’s support, the participants held back and were somewhat reserved, expressing ambivalence about seeking the teacher’s support. To obtain high levels of meaningful parent-teacher relationships and to expand the possibilities of Korean immigrants’ parental involvement, it seems that teachers should
make the parents feel more comfortable and encourage them to ask questions.

**Other Parents**

Regarding their relationship with other parents, all of the female participants in this study unanimously pointed out that they might have considerably reduced their mistakes while participating in school activities if they had been given more information from other experienced, knowledgeable parents. Because the participants were residing in less ethnically-diverse locations (i.e., white dominant suburb areas), other parents in their children’s schools tended to be white. They implicitly expressed that it was difficult for them to initiate and maintain a comfortable enough relationship with white parents to share school information or concerns. No participant in this study reported being able to develop close relationships with other Korean parents at school and obtain more school information and share their concerns with them because they could not meet other Korean parents at their children’s school.

Although most participants were well aware that developing interpersonal relationships with other (white) parents would be beneficial for their children’s schooling and themselves, they just simply could not do it or make it happen largely because of their language barriers. To them, English was a work/business language. To have fun with friends, they had to use Korean. It was a challenge for them to make friends using English in a social gathering despite their rich vocabularies and advanced reading/writing skills in most cases. They often seemed extremely conscious of their pronunciation and grammar. They were obsessed with speaking grammatically perfect sentences in perfect standard American English pronunciation, which was nearly impossible as foreign-born
immigrants. Their expectations of their own English proficiency could not be reachable because their bar was too high. They hated themselves when they happened to use grammatically incorrect, broken English. They had many self-defeating thoughts about their own English skills. From their past experiences, they learned that their jokes to break the ice in social gatherings sounded totally awkward and culturally inappropriate. Thus, they stopped trying and simply concluded that other (white) parents were hard to approach and make friends with.

Most participants often seemed socially isolated, feeling lonely in a huge house with the typical five bedrooms and a three-car garage. They typically felt homesick during harsh winter weather. While being extremely busy as soccer moms, inner emptiness and sadness became their second nature. Achieving the American dream of getting a good education, working at a good job, and earning a good living did not seem to make up for these lonely feelings. They spent a significant amount of time talking with family and friends in Korea through phone calls, texting, social media, watching Korean TV dramas and shows, or reading and responding to others’ postings in Korean-American online communities. On Sundays, many of them dress up to go to a Korean church to meet other Korean people. In the summer, they usually plan to go back to Korea with their kids and stayed there for about a month. They seemed still wandering souls between Korea and America. Through my own life experiences in the US over the past 16 years with my family, this phenomenon has been a typical lifestyle of most participants representing middle-class Korean immigrants living in a less diverse Midwestern state.
While religious institutions exclusively serving the Korean community were perceived as good places to develop intimate relationships with other Korean parents, most female participants in this study mentioned “missyusa.com,” a Korean web portal in the U.S., as an important information source for their parenting. Their main information need was often fulfilled through MissyUSA, including information about their children’s K-12 education in the U.S. According to a web resource (http://rankw.org, April, 2016), missyusa.com was launched 15 years ago, and currently attracts about 20,000 Korean mother users who live in the U.S. on a daily basis. Mothers can become members only through a rigorous verification process. The information shared on this website is anecdotal in nature, so it is uncertain if the quality of the information the participants had read was reliable and helpful but most mothers in this study said that it was helpful in various ways. Hee stated:

Yes, I know some Korean mothers whom I can talk to and sometimes exchange information with each other. But, have you heard about MissyUSA? (Answer: Yes). I still use it but when my child started school, I really used the website a lot. Whenever I had questions about US schools and extra activities like sports, I just asked my questions to the website. Then, some Korean mothers who had experienced the same issues or worked in the field answered the questions quite quickly. I know there are more than thousands of Korean mothers living in the U.S. It’s not only about U.S. schools but almost everything like parenting, medical information, or nice Korean restaurants in the U.S., cooking, home
decoration, etc. Of the several answers or information pieces, I just chose what I thought would be the best and that was so helpful. I think that I got helpful information and advice most of the times there.

The female participants were technology savvy parents actively searching for tips and information about child-rearing and education on the Internet. Rather than reading a book or simply asking their own mothers for advice, they preferred visiting online communities such as MissyUSA. They tended to feel more confident and relieved knowing that they were not alone when they participated in MissyUSA. They felt that no matter what they were going through, someone else had probably traveled the same road and had survived it. MissyUSA served as their coping mechanism to relieve the frustration and anxiety they experienced on a daily basis as immigrant parents, and to fulfill their belonging needs (Maslow, 1968). This could be described as a virtual coffee shop where they could escape from their lonely reality.

**Situational Factors**

The participants basically agreed that more frequent school involvement would be more beneficial for their children’s schooling. However, some parents in this study believed that physically showing up at school more often was not crucial, especially when their schedules became too tight (e.g., starting a full time job, changing work shifts). In such cases, they elaborated that they tended to focus more on tasks that they could do at home (e.g. review of work, homework, and email communication with school teachers) hoping that this could make up for their lack of physical presence at school. As a result, they perceived that their attempts and efforts toward more home-based
involvement also worked effectively. This could be explained through “time and energy” factors from parental motivations of involvement in Green and her colleagues’ study (2007).

Although the focus in this study was Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement, the activities and involvement opportunities provided outside of school seem to be inseparable from their school involvement activities. In many cases, the participants explained their school activities in relation to other activities that they did outside of the physical school boundaries to help their children do well in school. The parental involvement activities outside of school they reported included assisting with homework/school projects and participating in social activities (e.g., planning play dates, attending birthday parties, and having social gatherings with other parents). I found that both aspects of parental involvement were quite complementary in that the parents in this study tended to make up for missed involvement opportunities at school through their extra care at home or in other external settings.

Interestingly, for these parents, negative situational factors did not necessarily affect parental involvement negatively. When challenging circumstances arose, the Korean immigrant parents seemed to develop coping mechanisms using other involvement opportunities outside of school. They were persistent, resilient problem solvers. They accepted situations that were beyond their control and found ways to help their children even if the problematic situation still existed. When they consciously or unconsciously developed coping strategies, they built resilience as parents. This may explain why Koreans are often called a model minority group in the U.S. as an example
implying that other minority groups should follow. Korean-Americans have often been stereotyped as a shining example of “hard working, patient, bright, and educationally triumphant” parents (Le, 2016). However, it is unclear whether being able to cope with situational challenges makes them feel better about themselves. Ironically, these parents’ coping mechanisms were built on their guilt of not being available to the child or on somewhat unrealistically high standards of being a good parent.

Parental school involvement also seems to be influenced by the children’s development stage, and according to their grade levels in school (Anderson & Minke, 2007). All of the parents in this study speculated that as their children advanced into higher grade levels, the need for their involvement in school would diminished. Specifically, they mentioned two reasons for this reduced need for involvement. First, the Korean parents perceived that their children would not need or want them to come to school any more as they moved to a higher grade (mostly after the 5th grade and the lowest grade mentioned was the 2nd grade). Secondly, the participants also acknowledged that school teachers would not need or ask for parents’ help as students advanced to a higher grades because high grade students can better work independently. Seo mentioned:

Yes, I clearly see the difference in my school involvement depending on each of my (three) children. My kids really liked me to visit their schools and to do things like volunteer work during their early school years but later they didn’t want it anymore. (Question: About when? How different?) I think when they became around 4th graders, they didn’t ask me to come and often they said I didn’t have to. My youngest (in kindergarten) still wants me to come to school very often, for
lunch time, or any school or classroom events...So I am sorry for her because I can’t do it anymore since I have started this current full time job. So I am trying to find what I can do more for her away from school but at home or anywhere.

In sum, temporary, uncontrollable factors (time pressures, expected and unexpected changes in family life, the child’s grade level) also affected the participants’ school involvement. Especially highly involved parents developed their own coping mechanisms when they became less involved due to expected or unexpected changes in their lives (e.g., getting a full time job). When they felt they were less involved in the child’s school because of inevitable circumstances, they were more likely to invest in activities at home. In other words, negative situational factors did not necessarily affect parental involvement negatively. When challenging circumstances arose, the Korean immigrant parents developed coping mechanisms using other involvement opportunities outside of school.

**Environmental Factors**

In addition to interpersonal support from teachers or other parents, environmental support from the Korean community (co-ethnic religious institutions and community organizations) as well as school (multicultural culture and climate) factors were identified as facilitating conditions for the participants’ school involvement.

**School Support**

Most parents in this study showed a very similar perception of school support related to their school involvement. Their first reactions to the question, “How do you see (perceive) your child’s school support for your involvement?” were “Well, I don’t know,
is there anything more school can do?” or “How do we expect the school to pay special attention to us? We are just a small group of people.” They perceived that there was not much that schools could do to help their school involvement or for immigrant parents as a whole. Seo stated:

I once seriously thought about going to a PTO meeting when my kid was in the first grade. But then I thought I would be just sitting there and listening to other mothers without saying anything. After I realized that I couldn’t be actively involved in the meeting, I might just have decided not to go. I know that PTO is important...influencing lots of important school decisions but it’s really hard to go there and voice my opinions. Other Korean mothers say the same thing, I think. One of my friends living near Los Angeles told me that they use both Korean and English in their PTO meetings...maybe about half of the parents are Koreans there, so I think that’s possible. We (Koreans) are a very small number here...We can’t even dream about it. In fact, when I heard that PTO at my youngest child’s school would have several meetings to discuss and make decisions about the revision of school boundaries, I wanted to be there because my youngest daughter possibly would need a school transfer based on the decision, but I just couldn’t make it.

The participants expressed that they had no opportunities to contribute to important decision making through PTO meetings; in fact, they had no communication with PTO leaders at all. In turn, this indicated that PTOs tended to make few efforts to develop a relationship with immigrant parents who might be too intimidated or hard-
pressed to initiate contact themselves. For those participants who could not speak English fluently, the language barrier posed another formidable obstacle. Seo stressed that it would require a critical mass to have multicultural school support for Korean immigrant parents:

(Question: Have you heard that some schools in this area have multicultural events like Chinese night? Have you seen or experienced something like that?)

No, I haven't. I think that the number of Korean students is too small for schools to have that kind of cultural event even if all Asian students are considered. I just remember that my second son had a school event that students made some paper figures representing their own images. My son then made it using a Korean traditional clothing materials...maybe the image of Taekwondo with the Korean national flag on it...Yes...but that’s it. My friend living in New Jersey once said that her son’s school had an international day event and parents from diverse ethnic groups prepared their traditional food. Sharing the various food with the other children could help them learn a lot from other cultures. But in this Midwestern state, it would be hard to have that kind of event.

Limited access to multicultural resources and opportunities made Korean immigrant parents feel even more pessimistic about school support. The participants’ children attended white dominant schools in the suburbs in a less ethnically diverse Midwestern state compared to the national average. Jung also attributed a lack of multicultural school support to the small number of Korean families in the area:
In this Midwestern state, because only a few students have Korean heritage, I don’t know if we can expect or ask something more from the schools. I heard from someone I know in California that when they have a PTO meeting, the school provides a Korean translator so many Korean parents can attend and understand all the process of the meeting without any difficulty. But schools here actually would not consider that kind of care or service due to the very small number of Korean students and parents. I understand that. But if schools held some cultural events like 설날 (Sulnal: New Year’s day in Lunar Calendar) and displayed some traditional stuff, kids would be interested in other cultures and learn from it. My kids then would have more pride in Korean culture.

The participants expressed that good support systems for Korean immigrant parents had a few characteristics in common: (a) they tended to be inclusive, not exclusive; and (b) they could empower Korean immigrant parents to be actively involved in the processes of their children’s learning, rather than passively receptive.

Korean Community Support

Although most participants were involved in religious institutions available in their local Korean community, it did not necessarily contribute to facilitating communication and cooperation among Korean immigrant parents. The participants admitted that in their residential areas, there were few Korean community organizations serving the needs of recent immigrants and first-generation Korean-American parents who might be particularly vulnerable because of their limited English language proficiency and social isolation from mainstream American society.
Additional Key Findings

Overall, the participants described a variety of experiences related to their school involvement that they often felt were challenging, embarrassing, or self-fulfilling. Regarding their school involvement, they described what types of support from schools and/or other resources would be helpful from their own experiences. In this section, several key additional findings are incorporated into the theory development and discussed in detail.

Satisfaction with U.S. Schools

All of the eight Korean immigrant parents who participated in this study had positive opinions about the U.S. schools and K-12 system based on their experiences of their children’s schooling. They agreed that their children would be less stressed while attending schools in the U.S. They expressed directly and indirectly that Korean schools were too competitive and demanding, only focusing on children’s academic achievement. They also commented that this competitive educational culture was widespread in Korea especially in the metropolitan areas such as Seoul and the neighboring cities.

In Korea, private education is a national obsession. The college-entrance exam is regarded as a gateway to life success. To send their children to one of the top three universities (often called “SKY” schools of Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University), parents spend a large portion of their incomes on their children’s private education largely composed of cram schools (called hagwon) (Oh, 2010). The competition is often brutal. According to estimates by the Samsung Economic Research Institute in Seoul, approximately 70 percent of Korean household expenditures, goes
toward private education, to obtain an educational competitive advantage over other families (Sharma, 2013). *Hagwon* education starts at or before elementary school. It is not uncommon for children to be enrolled in multiple *hagwons* specializing in various subject areas (e.g., math, English, music) after school. In general, Korean children living in big cities cannot have a relaxing time with friends or family because of their heavy workload from school, homework, and multiple *hagwons*. Being well aware of this harsh reality in Korea, the majority of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the less stressful school environment in the U.S. as well as their decision to live in the U.S. Seo stated that:

> We had lived in (South) Korea for two years when my husband worked for a Korean branch of his company here in the U.S. My children seemed to enjoy living in Korea especially when they had good times with their cousins and other family members. But you know how Korean children live. My kids’ school in Korea really emphasized improving (academic) scores and almost every kid had to study at multiple *hagwons* after school to achieve higher grades in school. Schools here (in the U.S.) are totally different from Korean schools. Kids are happy here because they can play with their friends and spend some time with their families.

Most participants also had a positive view about U.S. schools and their educational goals. They perceived U.S. schools as highly effective social environments committed to teaching students not only academic skills but also social skills. They perceived that children in early school years could successfully learn socially acceptable
behavior/manners and build friendships with others at school. With this view, they believed that their children could enjoy their school life more in the U.S. than in Korea without huge pressure on academic performance.

*Ambivalence toward U.S Academic Standard*

In addition to acknowledging the benefits of raising their children in the U.S., the participants held back and were somewhat reserved, expressing ambivalence about the relatively low U.S. academic standards. Looking at the positive aspects of the U.S. K-12 system on the one hand, and still feeling anxious about their children’s low academic skills compared to the Korean standard on the other hand, the participants showed mixed feelings and provided contradictory statements about their perceptions about U.S. schools. A few participants felt that their children would need to put more time and effort into improving their academic ability as they moved from primary to secondary education to be better prepared for higher education. In particular, the participants who were uncertain about whether or not their family would go back to Korea in the future had a similar concern about their children’s adaptation to the Korean educational system. Even though they did not necessarily agree that academic performance would be the most important achievement in their children’s education, they stated that it would be difficult to be free from the prevalent *hagwon* education expectations in Korea. They seemed anxious about the fact that their children’s current academic performance could not keep up with the Korean standards. Kyung stated:

*It seems that schools here (in the U.S.) try to teach children how to behave better and interact with friends more than Korean schools do. In fact, sometimes I feel*
that U.S. schools don’t focus much on teaching content and knowledge compared to Korean schools so I am a little concerned about what will happen if my children go to Korean schools in case we need to go back to Korea later. They will be academically behind compared to other Korean kids, I am sure. Anyway, I see that my children don’t have any big pressure on their academic achievement right now. It’s so good for them for the time being here.

As detected in Kyung’s story, the participants were torn between Korean and American values. Their “incongruity between speech and behavior” toward the Korean (versus U.S.) educational system seemed to resemble a common conflict such as despising material goods or money and yet pursuing them with zeal. This paradox was also observed in explaining why the participants were obsessed with finding the best school district but at the same time saying that they only cared about their children’s true happiness and well-being.

“Best School, Best School District” Mentality

In Korea, parents have a deep conviction that their children should attain the best education regardless of their financial ability to support their education. The kind of school a child attends is the yardstick of his/her ability (Lee, 1999). The school decides the future of the graduates; attending a first-class school is something to be proud of and the opposite is shameful resonating the inferiority complex (Adler, 1929). Such a trend has come to produce “first-class disease” in South Korea (Lee, 1999).

The participants were not entirely free from this typical Korean “first-class disease.” They frequently expressed “the best school in the best school district” mentality
in all important family decision making. This is in line with Korean parents’ well-known passion (or obsession sometimes) to provide the best education for their children. Hee stated that:

We moved here from another state before my daughter started her 1st grade and now she is a 5th grader. You know how much passion Korean parents have for their children’s education. Just like other typical Korean parents, I think we also have been pursuing similar paths as they do. For example, we spent a lot of time and effort to find our first home in the U.S. and our first priority then was totally given to finding one of the best schools in the best school district. For my daughter, we didn’t need any big, nice house but we wanted a stable neighborhood that had a good school in a high performing school district.

For the participants, their children’s education was a family project. However, they were followers rather than leading “helicopter moms” or “tiger moms” (Chua, 2011), still struggling to figure out what would be the best for their children. They were not entirely free from the Korean system with its emphasis on children’s academic achievement although their priority was their children’s social and psychological well-being at school.

School Involvement in the US

Regarding cultural differences in parental school involvement, the participants of this study tended to believe that U.S. schools are proactive in encouraging parents to get involved in school/classroom activities. They perceived that parent involvement is the default expectation for parents in the U.S. Jung stated:
I have seen lots of parents here in the U.S. getting involved in school activities. I think this is the culture here that parents are involved in school activities. Schools also seem to just expect parents to do that. Not only do mothers get involved in school activities but fathers do too.

Several participants expressed that teachers would benefit practically from parents’ involvement especially in classroom management when students were in the lower grades. They also implied that parental involvement would be beneficial for cultivating and maintaining a positive relationship with their children. Seo mentioned:

Of course, my kids really like me to visit their schools. In fact, I think that kindergarten or 1st grade teachers often need parent volunteers especially when they have arts/crafts class and sometimes for math, additional help is needed. It’s not easy to get involved in all of those school activities, but my kids seem so proud of me when I show up at school. Korean schools don’t do it, do they? There are many things that parents can get involved in school activities here. I think that Korean schools would hire someone professional to do those activities or just don’t do those activities because of a lack of funding.

The participants also thought that the role of fathers in parental school involvement is significantly different between the two cultures (Korean vs. American). In Korea today, like prior generations, mothers remain mainly responsible for their children’s education while fathers work outside as breadwinners even when the mothers also hold a full time job outside the home. Korean immigrant fathers may still maintain this traditional gender role. Hee stated:
My husband doesn’t show any interest at all in our kid’s schooling. He doesn’t know when school tests are scheduled, what school events are scheduled and when. He even thinks that homework is unnecessary because schoolwork should be done at school not at home. He is clearly different from other fathers I see here. I know his style but he isn’t helpful at all in my school involvement and parenting.

Kook (father) said that while his U.S. co-workers did not personally talk much about their children’s schooling, most of them seemed to be involved in various school events unlike typical Korean fathers. Several participants explained that the culture of Korean companies typically is not family friendly. They believed that except for a few workplaces in the public sector, most Korean companies do not maintain 40 hours a week work schedules. Therefore, parents (especially fathers) have very limited time with their children and do not physically get involved in their children’s schooling. Seo stated:

Here, many fathers also do that. Well, my husband complains about it sometimes when he has to participate in some activities and conferences, haha...no other choices for him but he just does it. I think he might have done almost everything except a field trip volunteer…that needs a background check so that’s bothersome for him. It’s hard to imagine that Korean fathers do as much as U.S. fathers do here, right? Korean fathers usually don’t have dinner with their family. They leave work too late. I know most Korean companies demand too much from their employees.
Overall, the participants had positive perceptions about U.S. schools and they were generally satisfied with their children’s schooling. In particular, their general satisfaction with U.S. schools and systems were related to their perceptions of school involvement and school support. However, I sensed that their positive perceptions of U.S. schools might have been influenced by other factors such as where they lived since their residential areas were considered “good school districts” in suburbs with mostly socially and economically middle class families.

The type of school involvement that the participants experienced included (a) being a volunteer in a classroom (e.g., teaching aide), in the cafeteria (e.g., lunch aide), for a field trip (e.g., chaperone), at school events (e.g., helper at a school carnival); (b) attending classroom/school meetings and events (e.g., teacher conferences, open house, parent orientations); (c) communicating with the teacher and school through daily notes, phone calls, or emails/newsletters. Seo shared her first involvement experience as a full-time mom:

I first started my volunteer work when my 2\textsuperscript{nd} son was in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade as an assistant math teacher in his classroom almost weekly for one semester. I think there were more than 20 students in his class. Although the math assistant was not what I first wanted to do, I just said yes anyway when my son’s teacher asked me if I was interested. It was often difficult to explain to my group of students some math concepts because there were many unfamiliar math terms that are different from what I learned in Korea. But I think my volunteer work was helpful for the
class and my son also was so happy about that. The teacher really appreciated it and even gave me a gift card after that.

One surprising finding was that no parent except one in this study had attended either a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) or Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, although they acknowledged the importance of participation in these decision-making meetings. Only one mother in this study had attended a PTO meeting and she described her unpleasant and even intimidating experience. Most participants expressed that they would feel uncomfortable and nervous about interacting with other attendees who were likely to be native English speakers. Without actually experiencing it directly, the participants often internalized those feelings delivered from a few other Korean parents who had attended and shared what it was like. Otherwise, they might have believed what they wanted to believe. They might have been searching for a possible excuse for not attending a PTO meeting. For the mission of saving their children’s chi, they became highly involved parents despite their language and cultural barriers. When parental involvement was less relevant to saving their children’s chi such as PTO meetings, they suddenly looked at the school from a distance. Their rigor was diminished. Their language barriers suddenly became powerful factors.

After contemplating their responses, my follow-up question was “What if there were an important agenda item at a PTO meeting that parents had to collectively make a decision about or needed to provide feedback and that could directly affect your children’s education/schooling?” A few parents showed regret recalling such incidents stating that they now felt quite regretful because they had missed an opportunity to
vocalize their needs more proactively at PTO/PTA to support their children. One mother expressed that she would definitely attend the PTO meeting whenever her schedule permitted.

**Theory Development**

Based on the data analysis, this study attempted to develop a grounded theory that could describe key factors affecting Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement and the relationships among the factors. In this section, I describe my theory development process grounded in the data. First, I provide a summary of my interpretations derived from the initial open codes. Next, I provide an interpretive discussion regarding the linkage among the iteratively purified open codes, axial codes, and selective codes. As the sequence of this section suggests, my theory has evolved from concrete stories to abstract patterns.

*Insight Grounded Initial Open Codes*

Table 6 summarizes the initial open codes and their related sample statements that contributed to the development of the final grounded theory. Overall, school involvement is a psychological burden for Korean immigrant parents. They feel relieved when they are free from the heavy responsibility of parental involvement.

They have a “best school in the best school district” mentality reflecting Koreans’ well-known obsession/addiction to education (Oh, 2010; Seth, 2002). While educating a child is literally a family project for Korean immigrants, they are different from “tiger mothers” who practice traditional, strict child-rearing solely focusing on academic achievement (Chua, 2011). Their actual motivations to engage in school activities come
from the intrinsic rewards they receive as well as the extrinsic rewards they expect. They want to support and please their children by meeting or exceeding their children’s expectations regarding parental school involvement. They also feel a sense of accomplishment when they think they can make a practical contribution to the school and when they are appreciated and valued by the teacher.

They are largely ambivalent about the idea that academic achievement reflects successful parenting. They are torn between Korean and American ideals of being a good parent. These ideals are interpreted as an oxymoron. While searching for the best school for their children (Korean), they criticize Korean educational culture and appreciate what they can have in the U.S. (American). Although they say they are intrinsically motivated, they still think that school involvement is a burden. What is behind this paradox? The answer to this question might come from their “immigrant” status. Their “incongruity between speech and behavior” stems from the conflict/tension between the values of Korean and American societies. Cultural duality affects every aspect of Korean immigrants’ parenting. When they need to make a decision about their children, the duality creates inner tensions and conflicts. Whenever those tensions or conflicts occur, they feel cultural ambiguity (Young, 2012). This cultural ambiguity is sometimes related to ambiguity about what is best for their children. They physically live in America. Yet, emotionally, they still identify with Korean values. Between the two cultures, they are faced with the question of which value system they should adopt. In the face of biculturalism (Young, 2012), they are struggling to figure out who they are and who they want to be. This duality may create an identity crisis.
School involvement is basically a mother’s job for Korean immigrant parents. Despite their language and cultural barriers, mothers actively engage in their children’s schooling to support their children. They are insecure to some extent when they have to interact with their child’s teachers. They perceive the teacher as an absolute authority rather than an equal partner, reflecting the Confucian influence. They are happy when they receive complements/encouragement from the teacher just like their child.

Table 6. Extended Examples of Initial Open Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Code</th>
<th>Sample Narrative Data Coded</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling relieved from the heavy responsibility of parental involvement</td>
<td>“I am so happy that (my child) is the last one of the three that I need to pay close attention to her schooling.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the best school in the best school district</td>
<td>“You know how much passion Korean parents have for their children’s education….We also have been pursuing similar paths like other Korean people do...We spent lots of time and effort on finding our first home in the U.S. and our first priority then was totally given to finding one of the best schools in the best school district.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s expressed excitement/positive reactions to their parental involvement</td>
<td>“My kids really like me to visit their schools.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s explicit request for parental involvement</td>
<td>“I have tried to visit my kid’s school as much as she wants although I can’t go every time she wants. She has always liked me to come to her school since her kindergarten. She asks me to sign up for a classroom volunteer and just to join her during lunch time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting children’s implicit expectations</td>
<td>“My children seem so proud of me when I just show up at their school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental involvement due to the teacher’s request</td>
<td>“I first started volunteer work…as an assistant math teacher…weekly for one semester. Although the math assistant was not what I first wanted to do…I didn’t know how to do it, I just said yes anyway when my son’s teacher asked me to do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the school</td>
<td>“I think my volunteer work was helpful for the class and my son also was so happy with that. The teacher really appreciated it and even gave me a gift card after that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive transformation in the child’s behavior</td>
<td>“When I am in my daughter’s classroom, she always gets excited and raises up her hand very often to talk in class…She was not that kind of a kid as far as I knew.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing difficulty due to language differences</td>
<td>“I often had difficulty explaining math concepts to the students because there were many unfamiliar math terms that were different from what I learned in Korean.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering the teacher’s practical needs for parental involvement</td>
<td>“I think that kindergarten or 1st grade teachers need parent volunteers when they have arts/crafts class and sometimes math when additional help would be needed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling relieved from the teacher’s compliments and encouragement</td>
<td>“Her teacher once said to me that she liked my child to get more active in class discussion when I was there so I know I don’t need to worry about her behavior at school. Her teacher is so nice. She made me feel much more comfortable in visiting the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences in school activities and resources</td>
<td>“There are many things that parents can get involved in school activities. I think that Korean schools would hire someone to do those activities or just don’t do those because of a lack of funding.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No or limited father involvement</td>
<td>“Here, many fathers also actively engage in school activities. Well, my spouse sometimes complains that I am not like American fathers….My wife takes care of everything and just does it on her own (gets involved in the child’s schooling). It’s hard to imagine that Korean fathers could do as much as...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Default expectations embedded in American culture</td>
<td>“I have seen lots of parents here in U.S. getting involved in school activities. I think this is the culture here that parents are involved in school activities. Schools also seem to just expect parents to do that.”</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambivalent feeling about seemingly low academic standards but less pressure in the U.S.</td>
<td>“I feel that U.S. schools don’t focus much on teaching content and knowledge compared to Korean schools so…in case we need to go back to Korea, my children as they perform in U.S. schools will be academically behind compared to other Korean kids…Anyway, I see that my children don’t have any big pressure for their academic achievement. It’s so good for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different curriculum and educational focus</td>
<td>“It seems that schools here (in the U.S.) try to teach children how to behave better and interact with friends more than Korean schools do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different educational focus between Korea and the U.S. and expressed satisfaction with the U.S. schools</td>
<td>“…but, you know how Korean students live. My kids’ school in Korea really stresses improving (academic) grades and almost every kid goes to many extra activities to improve their grades after school. Schools here (in the U.S.) are totally different than Korean schools. Kids (in Korea) are too busy to play with their friends as well as with their family.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concern about the child’s complaints about the teacher and struggle to find the right way to communicate with the teacher</td>
<td>“My son said his teacher didn’t seem to pay attention to him as much as she did to others in his classroom. Well, I just thought that my son needed more time to get used to his teacher and friends. My son is somewhat shy…He was shyer at school than I had thought. But because he said it several times, not once, I got confused…I didn’t know what to do about that. I thought I should let his teacher know what my son said about her a few times, but I didn’t feel comfortable to talk about that with his teacher face to face…I also thought about sending an email but still it was hard to mention it to his teacher that directly.”</td>
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</table>
Helping the child get more attention and care from the teacher

| Helping the child get more attention and care from the teacher | “Actually it was good to be there and also fun to see how my son was doing in class. Of course, my son liked it. His teacher also smiled at me and said that she thanked me for the help. When I walked in the school hallway with my son that afternoon, we happened to meet his teacher. That time, she said a little loudly “Bye, (using my child’s Korean name), Have a nice evening with mom!” and my son replied, “Thank you, you too” with his small and low voice. On our way home, he said he really liked his teacher to call him by his name loudly.” |

**Insights Grounded in Axial Codes**

Axial coding was used to inspect each “open code” to identify how it could be linked to other open codes. This process enabled me to discover what relationships and patterns existed in the data (Hawker & Kerr, 2007; Payne, 2007). The Korean immigrant parents had moderately or intensely traumatic experiences because of their different physical experience (implying racism and ethnic discrimination), language barriers, social exclusion, or cultural differences throughout their immigration life in the U.S. They experienced unpleasant or traumatic incidents that killed their *chi*. They feared that their children would experience what they had gone through at school. Korean immigrant parents projected their negative experiences onto their children. They assigned their traumatic thoughts and feelings that they have repressed to their children. They felt that their children would do, think, and feel the same way as they did. Thus, they wanted to protect their children from any potential threat of killing their *chi* at school.

To do so, they had to boost their children’s self-esteem, confidence, and social competence. They often felt that they should prevent their children from having self-
defeating thoughts and feelings about themselves. They felt a bit guilty that their children had to live as a minority because the parents were the ones that had made the decision to move to the United States. They wanted their children to be strong in this harsh world. Thus, they, as protectors, had to clearly declare to their children, the teacher, and other children at school that they cared. One way to achieve this was to show up at school as a teacher assistant, volunteer, or helper. This “saving chi” was the Korean immigrant parents’ mission when it came to school involvement. This is, perhaps, what is behind Korean immigrants’ parental involvement.

Despite their language and cultural barriers, Korean immigrant parents still chose to volunteer at school to save their children’s chi. They exposed themselves to potentially threatening environments that might kill their own chi again by choosing to be a parent volunteer at school. This was a sacred choice only the parents could make. They believed that they could tolerate a potentially threatening situation that might kill their own chi if this could save their children’s chi. To save their children’s chi, they put their own self-esteem at stake. Therefore, sacrifice has become the norm in Korean parenting. They sacrificed their own chi (psychological well-being, self-esteem) to save their children’s chi. They gladly made this sacred trade-off although the end result could be another trauma they had to endure for a long time consciously and unconsciously. Although these highly assimilated parents tended to seek and engage in school involvement opportunities, acculturation and English proficiency became less powerful factor under the mission of saving their child’s chi.

“Saving chi” was also manifested through self-determination. Intrinsic rewards
(i.e., enjoying the involvement activity itself) cannot be realized without saving chi. Extrinsic rewards such as “helping the child get more attention and care from the teacher” and “helping the child build friendships with peers at school” were just the operationalization of “saving chi.” The underlying, fundamental motive behind these extrinsic motivations was “saving chi.” “Saving chi” is a necessary condition for self-determination. It seems that Korean immigrant parents are motivated intrinsically and extrinsically when their mission for “saving chi” is ensured in parental school involvement.

Korean immigrants’ parenting styles are not homogenous. Patterns identified from the data are inconsistent and perplexing. Thus, one should be cautious in applying established theories of parenting styles to Korean immigrant parents. One insight derived from the data is that effective parenting styles for parental school involvement differed according to the parent’s gender among these Korean immigrants. Among these Korean immigrants, the mothers were more involved in their children’s schooling than the fathers. Among Korean the immigrant mothers, responsive (vs. unresponsive) parenting effectively facilitated parental school involvement. The responsive mothers’ involvement efforts were expected and appreciated by their spouses and children. However, unresponsive fathers (doing nothing at school) may still help. This may be because they can help at home instead or their children do not expect much from them. While responsiveness in parenting appears to be important, demandingness associated with academic achievement is less important in explaining Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement.
Temporary, uncontrollable factors (time pressure, expected and unexpected change in family life) also seemed to affect Korean immigrant parent’s school involvement. The Korean immigrant parents’ interpersonal resources supported their school involvement. Teachers were the primary source of information and a major reference group, followed by other parents they could physically interact with and other parents they met through online communities. The Korean immigrant parents did not expect much from the school. Their minimum expectation about school support was largely abstract (multicultural culture and climate), rather than specific (school policies or aid). As a larger environmental influence, the Korean community (co-ethnic religious institutions and community organizations) has the potential to facilitate school involvement. Table 7 illustrates axial codes and selective codes identified based on representing open codes.

Table 7. Axial Codes and Selective Code Based on the Final Representing Open Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes</th>
<th>Selective Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Concerns about the child’s different physical appearance, language barrier, social exclusion, and cultural differences</td>
<td>Fear of Killing Chi</td>
<td>기살리다 (Saving Chi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents’ past negative experience (killing chi-기죽다) in the U.S.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 기살리다 (Saving Chi) as a necessary condition for self-determination</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- Frustration and anxiety experienced in the first school involvement experience
- School involvement to resolve the child’s issues at school
- Satisfaction and self-fulfillment felt after school participation
- New insights about the child and positive feedback from the child, thus reinforcing continuous involvement
- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for the child’s education and psychological well-being leading to parental school involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- Self-Determination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| - Responsiveness/Unresponsiveness |
| - Demandingness/Under demandingness/permissiveness |
| - The more responsive mothers were to their children, the more actively they were involved in their children’s schooling. |
| - Fathers’ unresponsive parenting style actually helped |

| - No or limited father involvement |
| - This was basically the mom’s job |
| - Fathers were too busy, not available |
- Having difficulty, not confident due to language barrier
- Attending PTA/PTO was not what they could do or even tried to do
- Feeling embarrassed in making mistakes
- Parent’s coping mechanisms in language-related issues (e.g., search for more secondary information)

- Cultural differences regarding parental involvement
- Unfamiliar U.S. school curriculum and systems
- Half Korean, half American; did not know what to do
- Korean parents’ obsession with the best education
- Acculturation may have been a determining factor in the father’s involvement.
- Korean parents tended to adhere to Korean tradition and heritage but depending on their acculturation levels, parents engaged in children’s schooling differently.

- Teacher’s request for parental involvement
- Feeling relieved based on the teacher’s compliments and encouragement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Proficiency</th>
<th>Acculturation</th>
<th>Interpersonal Factors</th>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>School Teacher</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpersonal Factors</strong></th>
</tr>
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</table>
- Teacher’s multicultural competence
- Frequent communication with the teacher made the parent feel comfortable
- Teacher’s patience during direct contact
- Teacher’s attitude (attentiveness, caring, patience) and quality (multicultural competence) could make a huge difference in promoting parental school involvement.

- Cultural differences experienced in interacting with other parents
- Uncomfortable interactions with U.S. (mostly Caucasian) parents
- Limited social contacts with Korean parents due to the limited number of Korean people in the community
- Other experienced, knowledgeable Korean mothers met though churches or other formal/informal Korean social groups as a reference group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Parents</th>
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<tr>
<td>MissyUSA, an online community designed exclusively for Korean-American mothers as a reference group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive use of MissyUSA for not only children’s education but all other aspects of U.S. life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Frequent, continuous school involvement was beneficial.
- Employment status from part-time to full time job changes were an obstacle
- Feeling guilty and trying to make up for missed involvement opportunities (coping mechanisms emerged)

- Younger children wanted/needed the most parental school involvement
- Feeling relieved from the heavy responsibility of parental involvement as children advanced through school
- Older children did not ask, want parental school involvement any more.

- Satisfaction with the U.S. school system in general
- Parents often made mistakes and had embarrassing moments due to a lack of information, cultural/language barriers
- Believed this was her fate as a minority immigrant parent.
- Korean community organizations (religious institutions, formal and informal social groups)

- Time Pressure
- Expected and Unexpected Changes in Family Life

- Child’s Grade

- School Support
- Korean Community Support

**Situational Factors**

**Environmental Factors**
- Did not expect more school support just for Korean immigrants.
- If schools did more for immigrant parents, that would be very helpful for the parents and children.
- Korean community can provide necessary information for first-time parents.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined (a) how Korean immigrant parents perceive their school involvement and school support; and (b) what factors influence Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement. To accomplish the goals of this study, a qualitative research design based on grounded theory was employed. In this chapter, the theoretical and practical implications of the findings are presented. Then the limitations of the study are addressed. Finally, my personal reflections are provided as the conclusion of this study.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study can be summarized in three ways. First, the final outcome of this study was the grounded theory of “Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants’ Parental School Involvement.” The final grounded theory took the form of a diagram illustrating conceptually dense relationships among the themes derived from the data (see Figure 1). To clarify, the theory developed in this study was a substantive theory “suited to its supposed uses” (i.e., explaining Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Thus, it is distinguished from a higher level general theory established from deductive approaches (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Accordingly, it has the potential to be extended “to a more elaborative substantive theory or to formal theories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 282). Although the theory developed in this study is provisional in nature and grounded in a particular substantive area (i.e., Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement), it has important implications for the development of a general theory through the accumulation of
multiple studies or through a comparison with the studies of other researchers (Cho & Lee, 2014).

In particular, the qualitative findings of this study may inspire future researchers to conduct positivistic research including the development a multi-item scale measuring and dimensionalizing the psychometric properties of immigrant parental school involvement. The interpretive data generated in this study can serve as a conceptual basis of measurement items. Thus, further investigation on the relationship between immigrant parents’ school involvement and children’s academic achievement and psychological well-being in school might be facilitated in the future.

Second, the benefits offered by the grounded theory approach for this study include the method’s capacity to interpret complex phenomena (Charmaz, 2014), its accommodation of social issues (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and its appropriateness for socially constructed experiences (Charmaz, 2014; Goulding, 1998). Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement, the focal topic explored in this study, was complex and multifaceted. A full conceptual understanding of it required the grappling of many interweaved and overlapping issues and themes. Also, the grounded theory approach furnished an important value because existing literature has failed to support the theoretical evolution of the investigated phenomenon (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Research on parenting has been predominantly conducted with respect to European-American populations. In particular, most studies regarding parental involvement have been conducted using European-American contexts and few studies have investigated pertinent
issues that minority parents experience (Kim, 2002; Smith, 2010). In this regard, this study can contribute to closing the gap in the parenting literature.

The findings of this study showed that the participants had distinctive personal and cultural factors related to their school involvement. These factors were identified and interpreted through multiple theoretical perspectives that originated from a wide array of disciplines including psychology, sociology, education, immigration studies, cultural studies, and family studies. Given that there has been relatively little comprehensive research exploring the multifaceted nature of immigrant parents’ school involvement, this study can be used to advance theoretical and conceptual frameworks in multicultural parenting and teacher education.

Finally, in this study, I attempted to use my ethnic cultural identity as a valuable research instrument. To achieve this, I paid attention to the importance of the fit between the selected research method and myself (the researcher) (Walsham, 2006). By choosing a method I like, admire, and engage with (i.e., grounded theory) among the various available interpretive approaches, I was able to adopt an ontological and epistemological paradigm highlighting the notion that knowledge is not static, but is always emerging and transforming, and is interpreted by both the researcher and the participant. Specifically, I incorporated constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) into the data collection and analysis. Thus, the resulting theory depended on my views and my “shared experiences and relationships” with the participants (Charmaz, 2014, p. 239); it did not and could not exist outside of them. Therefore, its groundedness was not the result of a somehow removed researcher, but instead, it resulted from my commitment to analyze what I had
actually observed and experienced with the participants throughout the data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 1990).

In the following sections, the theoretical implications of the substantive, grounded theory that the participants and I co-produced are discussed in detail to provide beneficial insights for future research. First, the core theme Saving Chi (‘기 살리기’) is delineated, followed by a discussion of the multifaceted nature of the research problem explored in this study. Next, two unique characteristics of Korean immigrant parents, labeled as “coping mechanisms” and “fate and experience curve” are presented. Finally, Korean immigrants’ parenting styles are discussed.

**Saving Chi “기 살리기”**

The final grounded theory of “Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrant Parental School Involvement” was developed from the interview data with eight Korean immigrant parents. The most important core theme was “기 살리기 (saving the child’s chi).” Interestingly, this “기 살리기” theme is related to Korean immigrant parents’ own life experiences in the U.S. The word, “기죽다 (Gijookda),” the antonym of “기 살리다 (Gi salida),” appears to reflect their moderately or intensely traumatic, self-defeating memories that had been formed throughout their immigration life. The participants described that they occasionally felt nervous, regretful, discouraged, not confident, depressed, and dispirited when they encountered difficult situations mainly due to their language barriers, cultural incompetence, social ineptitude, and even physical appearance (implying racism and ethnic discrimination) in U.S. culture.
It is possible for Korean parents to project their own psychological uneasiness accumulated throughout their immigration life onto their children. It seems that those projections and concerns explain their motivations for parental school involvement to a large extent. In spite of the barriers and obstacles that Korean immigrant parents deal with, they strive to be actively involved in their children’s schooling. They throw themselves in another difficult situation to help their children avoid going through the same trauma they have undergone. Their underlying thought might be that “I don’t care what I will be exposed to at school. If I can protect my kid at school, I will gladly put myself in danger of feeling insecure/vulnerable again. I can tolerate anything for my kid if s/he feels confident and empowered at school.” This may be an extreme interpretation but as a Korean immigrant father, this resonates with how I feel about my son. My parent generations behaved this way to protect their children’s social well-being. Indeed, they sacrificed themselves for their children, not only providing financial resources but also sacrificed their own chi (psychological well-being and self-esteem). The findings of this study suggest that this uniquely Korean parenting mentality still remains, even among highly educated, modern, Korean immigrant parents in the U.S. as the data suggest. It may have been already embedded in Korean immigrants’ genes as a collective emotion (Von Scheve & Ismer, 2013).

Multifaceted Grounded Theory Approach

The grounded theory method used in this study generated thick descriptions about Korean immigrant parents, which helped me disentangle conceptual relevance between different factors. While deciphering the participants’ positive perceptions about U.S.
schools, I first noticed that parental school involvement might differ by situational factors such as the child’s development stage/age/grade. This means that the participants’ school involvement could be a reflection of their temporary (vs. permanent) situations derived from what the parents can hardly control with their own free will. Regardless of their self-determination, they may not be able to commit themselves to parental school involvement under certain circumstances. Thus, solely focusing on individual motivations does not fully capture what is truly going on among Korean immigrant parents, justifying the need to develop a multifaceted grounded theory (as opposed to a single grounded theory). I use the word “multifaceted” here to mean that while various factors grounded in and identified from the data are incorporated into my final theory on their own, they cooperatively support each other to explain the same phenomenon (i.e., Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement).

Different influences of language and cultural barriers were also observed depending on the presence/absence of saving chi in school involvement contexts. When parents were driven by saving chi, language and cultural barriers became less relevant. No matter what barriers they faced, they became highly involved and proactive parents to save chi. When their school involvement was not directly related to the mission of saving chi (e.g., PTO meetings, developing relationships with other (white) parents, seeking school support), the parents suddenly started looking at things from a distance. They became less involved parents because of language and cultural barriers.

Another the multifaceted nature of the grounded theory developed in this study is that self-determination theory explaining almost every aspect of human motivations has a
secondary factor in capturing Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement. To Korean immigrant parents, saving chi was a necessary condition for their self-determination of school involvement. In other words, they were motivated intrinsically and extrinsically when their mission for saving chi was ensured through parental school involvement. Such intrinsic rewards as “enjoying the involvement activity itself” cannot be realized without saving chi. Extrinsic rewards such as “helping the child get more attention and care from the teacher” and “helping the child build friendships with peers at school” are just the operationalization of saving chi. The underlying, fundamental motive behind these extrinsic motivations is saving chi.

**Coping Mechanisms**

Although the focus in this study was Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement, the activities and involvement opportunities provided outside of school seem to be inseparable from their school involvement activities. In many cases, the participants explained their school activities in relation to other activities that they did outside of the physical school boundaries to help their children do well in school. The parental involvement activities outside school they reported included assisting with homework/school projects and participating in social activities (e.g., planning play dates, attending birthday parties, and having social gatherings with other parents). I found that both aspects of parental involvement were quite complementary in that the parents in this study tended to make up for missed involvement opportunities at school through their extra care at home or in other external settings. The participants also developed their own coping mechanisms when they became less involved due to expected or unexpected
changes in their life (e.g., getting a full time job). When they felt they were less involved in the child’s school because of inevitable circumstances, they were more likely to invest in the activities at home. In other words, negative situational factors did not necessarily affect parental involvement negatively. When challenging circumstances arose, Korean immigrant parents developed coping mechanisms using other involvement opportunities outside school. They were persistent, resilient problem solvers. They accepted situations that were beyond their control and found ways to help their children even if the problematic situation still existed. When they consciously or unconsciously developed coping strategies, they built resilience as parents. This may explain why they are called a model minority group in the U.S. whose example other minority groups should follow. Korean-Americans have often been stereotyped as a shining example of “hard working, patient, bright, and educationally triumphant” parents (Le, 2016). However, it is unclear whether being able to cope with situational challenges makes them feel better about themselves. Ironically, their coping mechanisms were built on their guilt from not being available to the child or were based on somewhat unrealistically high standards of being a good parent.

The participants wished they could have communicated better in English. However, under the mission of saving chi, most of them did not think that English proficiency would be a significant barrier to their school involvement because they believed that those obstacles could be managed by searching for information or indirect experiences obtained from other Korean immigrant parents. Again, Korean immigrant parents’ coping strategies were detected from the data. This is inconsistent with Kim’s
(2002) suggestion that parents’ higher level of English proficiency will contribute to higher levels of parental involvement. My data suggest that English proficiency will be an obstacle when parents cannot develop an appropriate coping strategy.

**Fate and Learning/Experience Curve**

Without exception, all of the participants recalled several moments when they had felt nervous, hesitant, ashamed, embarrassed, regretful, and awkward when they had to get involved in their children’s schooling. Their unpleasant experiences were commonly shared in all the interviews regardless of the participant’s English ability, education level, and acculturation. However, they did not attribute their mistakes and confusion during their school involvement to a lack of school support. They tended to view that this is just the way it is. They tended to accept their current life, living as a minority ethnic group in the U.S. and enduring the associated difficulties of American life including parental school involvement issues. They perceived that there would be a “learning/experience curve effect” meaning that time would resolve any pertinent issue through learning or experiencing new things. Most parents in this study agreed that it would take one or two school years for them to be better informed about school activities because most school activities and events were repetitive. Interestingly enough, most of them seemed to just accept this reality as their fate – something they, as immigrant parents, had to deal with; that is, they attributed such shameful mistakes to their ultimate life choice to live in another country and they never brought up this issue as an external attribution that might need more attention and efforts for improvement. Therefore, the parents who were highly motivated and determined to help with their children’s education were willing to conform
to the U.S. school system and policies without confronting and demanding change to better meet their needs.

**Parenting Styles**

According to Baumrind’s (1973) parenting styles, the most widely accepted and most studied theory in Western cultures, a traditional Korean parenting style would be dominantly categorized as the “authoritarian” style that represents high parental demandingness and low parental responsiveness (Chao & Tseng, 2002). However, Baumrind’s (1973) four distinct aspects of parenting styles developed in a Western culture have a limitation to fully explain the patterns that emerged from the data. Overall, the participants’ parenting styles were too obscure and multilayered although their parenting styles largely resembled the “Authoritative” style, representing high parental responsiveness and demandingness. Their parenting styles seemed to be much more complicated and subdivided than the theoretical definition based on Baumrind’s (1966, 1971, & 1991) Parenting Typology and Maccoby and Martin’s (1983) expansion. For example, each parent appeared to show all aspects of the four contrasting characteristics (responsiveness, unresponsiveness, demandingness and under demandingness) in their parenting practices to meet their children’s needs in a specific situation. Further research is needed to conceptualize culture-specific parenting styles.

**Practical Implications**

This study contributes to a body of knowledge on the multicultural competencies K-12 schools and teachers need by providing a picture of immigrant parents’ school involvement in the context of Korean immigrants. The findings from this research can
provide beneficial insights for schools as they develop culturally responsive strategies and programs to help immigrant parents engage in school activities. The findings of this study could serve as a conceptual basis for developing organizational and instructional support to promote more successful school involvement of Korean immigrant parents.

Common barriers to Korean immigrant parents’ participation in PTO/PTA meetings include a lack of inclusivity. To address this issue, culturally responsive PTO leaders and organizers are needed. Following Golan and Petersen’s (2002) recommendations, the characteristics of culturally responsive PTO leaders and organizers could be described as (a) extending personal invitations to immigrant parents to attend, (b) having warm and individualized communication with immigrant parents, (c) showing respect for immigrant parents’ feelings and concerns, (d) paying attention to immigrant parents’ personal situations (e.g., remembering specific information about the immigrant parents’ children or own educational experiences), (e) learning immigrant parents’ names, (f) showing appreciation for immigrant parents’ contributions and participation, (g) greeting immigrant parents as they come and leave the meeting, and (h) inviting open communication by the PTO leader/organizer giving some personal information about him or herself and providing immigrant parents with a way to contact him or her outside of the school.

Such strong personal outreach, warm and nonjudgmental communication, and the ability to convey respect for Korean immigrant parents’ feelings and concerns would be essential to encourage Korean immigrant parents’ involvement in PTO/PTA and other school activities (Garcia, 1990). In addition, several participants provided some useful
ideas that PTO/PTA could try to cultivate an inclusive culture among parents. For example, they exemplified cultural events and activities where students and families can gather to enjoy entertainment, traditional costumes, and cuisine from different countries.

This study supports the notion that schools should be transformed into culturally responsive institutions by providing immigrant parents with detailed information about school programs, policies, staff, and parent involvement opportunities in a culturally inclusive manner. Korean immigrant parents may be too nervous to get involved in school activities or communicate with their children’s teachers or principals because they do not understand the American school system and do not know what the school expects from them. Under an inclusive school environment, the parents can comfortably seek help from school and district resources (e.g., programs and personnel) and ask teachers and counselors questions about their children’s social development and psychological well-being (saving chi) and about suggestions for ways to support their children at home.

Culturally responsive schools may offer outreach programs for Korean immigrant parents, held in Korean. They can also guide teachers through multicultural competency training programs to increase their understanding of Korean culture and their skills at developing partnerships with Korean immigrant parents. They may foster good relationships with Korean immigrant parents through social activities and events (e.g., Culture Experience Night) to bring families and school staff together, helping Korean immigrant parents and children feel valued in a culturally rich and inclusive school environment. When applied to teacher education, cultural competence is a key to supporting Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement. According to Diller and
Moule (2005), cultural competence entails developing a teacher’s personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities. Obviously, teachers’ multicultural awareness is critical to avoid discrimination, consciously or unconsciously, against parents because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Such discrimination can be as subtle as a patronizing or condescending attitude toward immigrant parents. Teachers should carefully examine their own attitudes and behaviors to be sure that they are not imposing any undue hardship on immigrant parents. Most importantly, they should believe sincerely and completely that all parents can engage in and contribute to their children’s schooling.

Cultural competence also involves a teacher’s understanding of certain bodies of cultural knowledge and mastering a set of skills (Diller & Moule, 2005). Although cultural competence does not occur as a result of a single day of training, reading a book, or taking a course, research suggests that there are specific cultural competence skill areas that can be learned, practiced, and institutionalized (Diller & Moule, 2005). One important area involves recognizing differences between people and acknowledging that these differences are a valued asset (i.e., valuing diversity). Culturally competent teachers accept and respect students’ different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values (Diller & Moule, 2005). Another critical area entails being culturally self-aware. Culturally competent teachers understand that their own cultures (i.e., all of their experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests) shape their sense of who they are, where they fit into their family, school, community, and society, and how they interact with students who come from a culture or cultures other than their own (Diller & Moule, 2005). Finally, culturally
competent teachers understand that students benefit from a learning environment that increases the connection between home and school culture and involves families and the broader community in students’ education (National Education Association, 2008). Focusing on learning within the context of culture, they develop and implement culturally-responsive curriculum and teaching strategies (Gay, 2000).

The Korean community as well as schools should also become more awareness of the need for parental school involvement. In Korea, parental school involvement is not commonly sought in school systems, and significant differences between Korea and the United States exist. Korean community organizations should raise parents’ awareness of their rights to be involved in their children’s education, the potential problems that may arise if they are not involved, and the potential benefits if they become involved. For example, community support programs may include (a) holding parenting workshops and seminars to empower fathers to become involved in their children’s schooling; and (b) developing a parent resource website in both Korean and English that educates and disseminates reliable information sources about the U.S. education system to promote Korean immigrants’ parental school involvement.

**Limitations**

This study is significant as it provides insights into how Korean immigrants’ perceive parental school involvement in primary education contexts, and the factors that influence their school involvement. However, several limitations should be considered when examining the findings from this study. First, failure to include working class, low-income Korean immigrants presents a potential limitation of this study. Working class,
Korean immigrant fathers typically have extremely limited opportunities and their incomes are not sufficient to provide for their families (Kim, 2010). Thus, the mothers must work outside of the home for their families’ survival (Kim, 2010). Their children may attend resource-poor, low-performing neighborhood public schools where many working-class Korean-American children experience racism and structural barriers in a more explicit manner (Lew, 2006). Future research could explore how Korean immigrants’ social class variability impacts their parental school involvement and children’s schooling outcomes.

Another limitation is that the sample included only two fathers. Therefore, the findings are largely based on mothers’ experiences and perceptions. In addition, all of the participants had a relatively long U.S. residency (more than 10 years). Thus, the transferability of findings from this research to those Korean immigrants in other states may also be impacted by the fact that the study was conducted in a less diverse Midwestern state.

Conclusions

As I finish this interpretive journey, I realize that my choice of grounded theory as a research method provided some advantages. First, grounded theory allowed me to enter the field that I never had the chance to explore before to discover a phenomenon of great importance to Korean immigrants, including myself. At first, I had been floundering around for some time, unable to conceive an appropriate research method which might have led to the execution of more conventional, positivist research. Grounded theory provided me with the opportunity to formulate my “true” and “personally relevant”
Second, I felt grounded theory was a robust tool making sense out of the raw qualitative data. The progression of the coding procedures were logical and effective. I began with only a few ideas regarding Korean immigrant parents and their school involvement, but as the research gained much clearer “direction, focus and momentum,” I was able to “commence a gradual sensitization with extant literature” (Suddaby, 2006, p.634). However, the literature did not directly inform and guide this study. It was just a reality check for comparative purposes to speculate whether prior research on parental school involvement could work well in the context of Korean immigrant parents.

Third, I benefited from the guiding structure provided by grounded theory. I experienced a certain level of comfort and confidence throughout the analytical journey using its iterative methods of coding and constant comparison because of its systematic and thorough construction. I also found that theoretical sampling actually worked well with the participants as Charmaz (2014) suggested. In addition to the initial face-to-face interviews, follow-up phone calls, emails, and text messages provided rich, vivid, thick, and interesting descriptions contributing to my final theory.

Finally, compared to all other methodological options I had considered in designing this research, I felt that grounded theory offered far more substantial findings. Most methods I had initially considered were designed to test a high level general theory, and only a few options actually offered an opportunity to build a new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Believing in the existence of multiple truths, I started my journey toward building a substantive theory that could explain Korean immigrant parents and their
school involvement phenomenon. I hope I have meaningfully reached the final destination.
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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

1510E70041 - PI Ham - IRB - Exempt Study Notification

TO: vop008@umn.edu, tamv002@umn.edu

The IRB, Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS, STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS, OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1510E70041
Principal Investigator: Young-Hoon Ham

Title(s):
Exploring Key Factors Affecting Korean Immigrants' Parental School Involvement: A Qualitative Study

This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota IRPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter. This secure electronic notification between password protected authorizations has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-6664.

You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at http://eresearch.umn.edu to view further details on your study.

The IRB wishes you success with this research.

We value your feedback. We have created a short survey that will only take a couple of minutes to complete. The questions are basic, but your responses will provide us with insight regarding what we do well and areas that may need improvement. Thanks in advance for completing the survey. http://tinyurl.com/example-survey
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (English)

Parents’ School Involvement and School Support

You are invited to be in a research study about Korean immigrant parents’ school involvement in child schooling and school support to promote parental involvement. You were selected in this study as a possible participant because you are a Korean immigrant parent with a school aged child. We ask that you read this information and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by Young-Hoon Ham, a PhD student in the University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to generate a better understanding of how Korean immigrant parents are involved in their child schooling and how they perceive current school support to promote their school involvement. The result of the study will be helpful for school teachers, school administrators, and researchers to further discuss about ways to better meet Korean immigrant parents’ needs for school involvement. This study will also contribute to generating “culturally relevant” school support for Korean immigrant parents and also other ethnic immigrant populations ultimately.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you are asked to do the following procedures.

You will be first asked to complete a brief background information form and then participate in one interview that will last about 90 minutes and possibly short follow-up communications to make sure if your shared experiences are well understood. The interview questions will include your experiences about school involvement in your child schooling and your perceptions about school support that helps your school involvement. It is necessary that interviews are audio-recorded to ensure that we accurately document your responses. If you agree to participate in the study, you are consenting to have your responses in the
interview audio-recorded. You may tell me as much or as little as you want to share, and you may stop the interview or recording at any time.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:**

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify an individual or family by changing participants' names from the beginning to the end of the study. Research records will be stored securely and only the researchers will have access to the records. Your data will remain confidential unless written permission is obtained from you to do so.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may say no to participation or you may change your mind and decide to stop participating at any time with no negative consequences. You may also choose not to answer any question you do not want to answer. Withdrawing from the study or not answering questions would not prevent you from receiving compensation for participation in the study.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The risks and discomfort associated with participation in this study are no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. However, if you do experience discomfort, you may choose to not answer a question, take a break from answering questions, or you may stop participating in the study at any time.

You may experience benefits from participating in this study. You may experience some relief in sharing about your experiences and perceptions regarding your child’s schooling that may include unanswered questions and wishes you have. Your feedback will be helpful for schools to better meet your needs.

For your time and effort in this study, you will receive a $25 gift card.

**Contact Information for Questions or Concerns:**
The researcher conducting this study is Young-Hoon Ham. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please directly contact Young-Hoon Ham at 651-000-0000, email hamxx037@umn.edu or Dr. Mark Vagle, Advisor to the principal investigator, at 612-000-0000, email vagl0006@umn.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects’ Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.
연구 참가에 대한 정보

안녕하세요. 저는 미네소타 주립대 교육과정학과 (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)에서 박사과정 논문을 준비하고 있는 합영훈입니다. 제가 진행하고 있는 연구에 학부모님을 초대하고자 이 글을 드립니다. 본 연구의 주제는 미국에 살고 계신 한국 부모님들께서 자녀분들의 학교생활에 대한 직접 참여는 어떠했는지, 그리고 부모님들의 학교참여를 돕기 위한 학교의 역할에 대해 부모님들의 소중한 경험과 의견을 듣고자 합니다. 이 글이 부디 본 연구에 대한 학부모님의 이해를 도와서 참여를 결정하시는데 도움이 되었으면 합니다.

본 연구의 목적은 미국으로 이민오신 한국부모님의 학교참여에 대한 이해를 높이고, 이를 토대로 학교가 부모님들의 학교참여를 위해 어떤 역할과 노력을 더 할 수 있는지 알아보는데 있습니다. 본 연구자는 학부모님처럼 미국에 살고 있는 학부모로서 이 연구 문제에 관심을 갖고 있었고, 저와 제 가족뿐만 아니라 미국의 한국커뮤니티에 미력한 도움이 되었던 마음으로 이번 연구를 시작하게 되었습니다. 본 연구 결과는 이민오신 한국 부모님들의 학교 참여에 대한 기대와 요구를 학교 교사, 학교 행정 담당자 그리고 교육 관련 연구자들이 더욱 잘 이해하도록 도와서 이에 부응하기 위한 방법들을 모색하는데 도움이 될 것으로 기대합니다.

연구에 참여하시게 되면, 우선 학부모님의 기본 정보에 대해 간단한 양식에 기입해 주시게 되고, 60-90분간 진행되는 1회의 인터뷰를 하시게 됩니다. 그리고 나중에 자료를 정리하는 과정에서 필요하다고 생각되는 경우, 1회 혹은 최대 2회에 걸쳐 편하신 방법 (이메일이나 전화 등)을 이용해 추가로 해주시고 싶은 말씀이 있는지 혹은 제가 말씀해주신 부분을 잘 이해했는지 확인하는 연락을 드릴 수 있을 것 같습니다.

인터넷는 나중의 정확한 이해와 해석을 위해 오디오로 녹음될 예정입니다. 무엇보다도 학부모님께서 나눠주신 소중한 경험과 생각에 포함될 수 있는 개인 정보는 연구 윤리규정이 정하는 대로 최대한 보호하고자 노력하겠습니다. 연구 자료는 본 연구자만 볼 수 있도록 관리할 것이며, 연구가 모두 끝나게 되면 모든 자료들은 파기될 것입니다. 연구 논문에는 개인 정보가 노출되지 않도록 이름, 지명 등이 모두 다른 이름으로 쓰여질 것입니다. 이와 관련하여 본 연구는
기관감사위원회 (The institutional Review Board)의 심의를 거쳐 본 연구를 하가 받았습니다 (Exemption Category 2, Study #: 1510E79041).

전적으로 학부모님의 연구 참여는 자발적으로 선택하실 수 있습니다. 본 연구에 참여하시는 데는 어떤 어려움이나 위험의 뒷받침 요소는 없을 것입니다만, 연구 시작 전이나 혹은 후에는 학부모님의 사정에 따라 참여를 언제든지 중단하실 수 있습니다. 간단한 설문 조사나 인터뷰 중에 언제든지 불편을 느끼시거나 원하지 않는 질문이 있으시면 대답하지 않으셔도 됩니다. 필요하시면 대답하시는 데 중분한 시간을 가지셔도 되며, 또한 연구 참여를 중도에 중단하실 수 있습니다.

본 연구에 참여하시는 자녀분들의 학교 생활과 관련하여 그 동안 학부모님께서 학교 참여를 경험하셨거나, 계획하셨거나, 혹은 관련된 고민이 있겠셨다면 그간의 여러 생각들과 경험을 나누시면서 마음의 위안도 되시고 함께 혼이 되었으면 합니다. 학부모님의 따뜻한 관심과 시간, 노력에 대해서 많이 작지만 25 불에 해당하는 선물카드를 드리도록 하겠습니다.

참여하시는 데 있어서 질문이나 염려되시는 부분이 있으시면 언제든지 다음의 연락처로 연락 주시기 바랍니다. 제 휴대전화 번호는 651-000-0000이고, 이메일은 hamxx037@umn.edu 입니다.

감사합니다. 학부모님의 참여를 기대하겠습니다. 안녕히 계세요.

함영훈 드림
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

학부모님 사전 설문 조사

본 연구에 관심을 가져 주셔서 다시 한번 감사드립니다. 아래의 질문은 연구 참여와 결과에 대한 참고 자료로만 쓰일 것이며, 학부모님의 사전 동의없이는 직접적인 내용을 결과에 반영하지 않을 것입니다. 궁금한 점이 있으시면 hamxx037@umn.edu 이나 651-xxx-xxxx으로 문의해 주십시오.

* Required

아래의 체크박스에 선택해 주십시오. *
- 어머니 (Mother)
- 아버지 (Father)

미국에 오신 년도 (Year when you came to the US) *

미국에 생활하신 핫수 (Years of your US living, 미국에 오신 이후 1 년 이상 다른 곳에서 생활 하신 경우만 기입해 주십시오)

미국으로 이민오시게 된 계기나 동기 (Immigration motivation/purpose)

한국으로 귀국할 계획을 가지고 계십니까? (Plan to return to Korea?)
- 네 (Yes)
- 아니요 (No)
- 아직 잘 모르겠습니다. (Don’t know)

현재 나이가 어떻게 되십니까? * (Age)
- 30대 이하 (below 30s)
- 30대 초반 (early 30s)
- 30대 중반 (mid 30s)
- 30대 후반 (late 30s)
- 40대 초반
- 40대 중반
- 40대 후반
- 50대 이상
현재 혹은 최근까지의 직업 (occupation) *

최종 학력 (Education level) *

현재의 사회/경제적 상황 혹은 위치 (Socio-economic status) *
- 상 (high)
- 중 (mid)
- 하 (low)

학부모님이 생각하시는 영어 사용 능력 (English ability: 전반적인 말하기, 들기, 쓰기, 읽기) *

기초 단계 (beginner)  1  2  3  4  5  숙련 단계 (advanced)

종교 (Religion)

총 가족의 수 (Numbers of family) *

자녀(들)의 학년 (school years of child(ren): 둘 이상의 자녀가 있으시면 차례로 학년과 성별을 기입해 주세요) *
예) 1 학년 딸, 3 학년 아들

최근 자녀(들)의 학업성적 (academic achievement: 유치원/Kindergarten 부터 5학년/6학년까지) *
자녀 1
- 최상위 (excellence)
- 우수함 (good)
- 평균 이상 (above average)
- 평균 (average)
- 평균 이하 (below average)

자녀 2
- 최상위 (excellence)
- 우수함 (good)
- 평균 이상 (above average)
 최근 자녀(들)의 학업성적 (academic achievement: 유치원/Kindergarten 부터 5학년/6학년까지) *

자녀 3
- 최상위 (excellence)
- 우수함 (good)
- 평균 이상 (above average)
- 평균 (average)
- 평균 이하 (below average)

자녀 4
- 최상위 (excellence)
- 우수함 (good)
- 평균 이상 (above average)
- 평균 (average)
- 평균 이하 (below average)

마지막으로 학부모님 성함의 이니셜을 아래에 기입해 주십시오. 감사합니다.
APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1) Tell me about your school involvement experience for your children and what do you think about them?

2) How did you start your school involvement?

3) Which school involvement activities have worked well for you and how? If you feel some activities have not worked well for you, tell me how and why you feel that way? What made you feel unsatisfied?

4) Have you received support from teachers and schools when you are involved in your children’s schooling? Which types of support were effective and ineffective?

5) What would you suggest for school administrators and teachers to support you as a parent and to better promote your school involvement?