

Positioning of Korean Immigrant Mothers of Children with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the ways in which Korean immigrant mothers take up roles to position themselves while they engage in their children's education across a wide range of settings—academic, social, and linguistic. Data sources included interviews with four Korean mothers, home and community observations, and field notes. Positioning theory is a research approach that provides a useful analytic means for understanding positioning of Korean immigrant mothers as being parents of children with disabilities attending American schools. The results demonstrate that Korean immigrant mothers seek to learn how to be supportive mothers of children with disabilities by negotiating and facilitating contextual affordances and limitations between home, school, and community in order to obtain valuable potential resources for their children's linguistic repertoires and social skill development and their future success.

KEYWORDS: Korean immigrant, mother, positioning, theory, disability, U.S. school.

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For children with disabilities, the quality of parenting is a critical factor for the children's academic success and independent living. It is reported that mothers who take care of their children with disabilities often find it difficult to cope with stress and feelings of being overwhelmed because of their parental roles and responsibilities (Dabrowska & Pisula, 2010; Johnson, 2000). In particular, mothers from different cultural and social backgrounds may have different attitudes about their children's education. Immigrant parents' perceptions of children's school

performance vary depending on cultural traditions and values (Ogbu, 1987; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, Garnier, 2001; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). The family history of immigrants and their home cultures affect how immigrant parents engage in the education of their children (López, 2001). Immigrant parents draw upon repertoires of life experiences and cultural capital to actively engage in their children's education while positioning themselves in different ways as helper, questioner, learner, listener, and advocate (Carreón, Drake, Barton, 2005). In this paper, we explore how immigrant mothers from Korea take up their roles to position themselves while they engage in their children's education across a wide range of settings—academic, social, and linguistic.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Immigrant Parents' Experiences

Cultural factors are operative in social structures that influence immigrant parents' aspirations and expectations of their children's school performance. For example, Latino immigrant parents have been shown to hope for their children's academic success (Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010), but their expectations for their children's performance become less stable when they experience discrimination and inequality in schools (Goldenberg et al., 2001). Interestingly, Goldenberg et al. (2001) found that Latino immigrant parents considered educational attainments as opportunities to secure personal development and satisfaction (e.g., feeling sure of oneself) and future happiness of their child's life (e.g., making more money and getting a good job) based on their cultural expectations.

Similarly, Asian immigrant parents draw on their distinctive cultural and ethnic backgrounds for their parenting practices and attitudes toward their children's academic ability and school success. Cultural variations such as cultural characteristics and social class background influence Asian immigrant parents' socialization and parental perceptions, attitudes, and values regarding their children's education and school (Chao, 1996; Li, 2006, 2010; Zhang, Ollila, & Harvey, 1998). Based on their cultural expectations, Asian parents negotiate the concept of schooling for their children's academic success while experiencing different cultural and educational ideologies from parents raised in the United States.

Trainor (2010) affirmed that cultural background plays an important role in shaping parents' perceptions of their children's education and learning and that parents' cultural backgrounds, including personal experiences and history of school performance, influence the way they advocate for their children's education. Moreover, immigrant parents understand and make sense of special education based on their own cultural and school experiences (e.g., getting an education, specific skills, self-esteem, self-actualization, employment, and social relations). Due to their different ways of dealing with children with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents are often treated as unprofessional or passive regarding the education of their children with disabilities (Geenen, Powers, Lopez-

Vasquez, & Bersani, 2003; Jung, 2011; Kim & Morningstar, 2005). Jung (2011) found that some CLD parents struggle to participate in their children's special education determination due to a lack of information regarding the concept of special education programs and services.

Given that there has been an increase of CLD students of immigrant parents, who receive special education services in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), it is imperative to update the analysis of CLD immigrant parents' experiences of school engagement and their position in their children's lives. In order to effectively address the needs and abilities of students with disabilities from CLD backgrounds, there should be a clear understanding of how parents' cultural values and identities affect their perception of disabilities, their collaboration with their children's teachers, and overall parental involvement in special education. In this study, the needs to investigate Asian subcultures, particularly Korean, is highlighted.

Korean Immigrant Mothers of Children with Disabilities

Participation of Korean immigrant parents in school activities is limited due to several difficulties, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and feelings of discrimination (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Park, Turnbull, & Park, 2001; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Park et al. (2001) and Kim and Trainor (2017) found that Korean parents of children with disabilities identify their limited English proficiency as a critical barrier in creating partnerships with professionals to acquire knowledge about special education and services for their children. Specifically, Korean immigrant mothers feel stressed and hopeless when teachers or professionals disregard their concerns and do not seem to care about their suggestions for improving their children's educational success (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Cho, Singer, & Brenner, 2000). They also have trouble understanding terminology, jargon, abbreviations, and overly technical language that special education teachers use at legally required annual meetings (i.e., Individualized Education Program [IEP] meetings) (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006; Lo, 2008; Klingner & Harry, 2006). Moreover, Koreans' traditionally negative concepts about disabilities often impede parents' active participation in school and community activities and in their children's development (Cho et al., 2000).

Korean immigrant mothers and their children with disabilities live with a stigmatized identity that leads to their marginalization in the society. The culturally constructed negativity about disabilities often contributes to their feeling of shame and loneliness (Kwon, 2000). Furthermore, the Korean immigrant mothers may also encounter stereotypes or other demeaning comments about disability, deeply embedded in their expatriate communities (Gilson & Depoy, 2000; Kang-Yi, Grinker, & Mandell, 2013). This marginalized group of women has not received sufficient scholarly attention in spite of the growing research about immigrant women's concept of gender as a social system in the United States (Dion & Dion, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Kim, 2006; Wittebrood & Robertson, 1991) and

immigrant women's experiences, including entry status, family work, and participation in society and the labor force (Simon & Brettell, 1986).

Nevertheless, Korean immigrant parents, particularly mothers, of children with disabilities express strong advocacy for their children's school success. Korean immigrant parents have "concrete and comprehensive visions" for their children's social integration with peers and neighbors (Kim, Lee, & Morningstar, 2007, p. 256). They have high expectations for their children's future living. They take advantage of social networks and resources within the Korean community while participating in Korean-managed group homes, recreation, and community services. It is notable that Korean immigrant parents who build self-confidence in their parenting of their children with disabilities actively engage in their children's education to develop their children's quality of life.

This study aims to gain a better understanding of Korean immigrant mothers' thoughts and beliefs regarding their roles as mothers with respect to their children's education. Specifically, we explored how the mothers took up positions while engaging in the diverse extracurricular activities of their children with disabilities. We examined the mothers' positionalities regarding their involvement for their children's education, when dealing with their listeners (the authors as researchers) and other important people, including their children with or without disabilities, husbands, and classroom teachers. As there has been scarcity in recent research examining the experiences of the rapidly increasing immigrant population with disabilities, this study can serve as a catalyst for multiple dialogues among immigrant parents, teachers, practitioners, and policymakers about the affordances and constraints of creating parental training programs and parent-teacher organizations that reflect the multiplicity of voices in relation to the values and beliefs of both immigrant families of children with disabilities and their communities.

Positioning Theory

The theoretical framework that forms the basis of the study draws on positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999) to explore the positions that Korean immigrant mothers take in their children's education inside and outside schools. According to Harré and Van Langenhove (1999), positioning refers to a dynamic form of social role. Immigrant mothers in conversations take on different kinds of parental roles with respect to the development of children with disabilities in the United States. These roles include those of speaker, listener, advocate, or opponent of the issue being discussed.

Positioning theory frames positioning as a dynamic activity rather than a static role and provides greater insight into how Korean immigrant mothers in social contexts can both position themselves and be positioned by others. Harré and Moghaddam (2003) assert that a position includes rights, duties, and obligations of an individual within social settings. Their positions can shift within

diverse social and cultural contexts when they look back and reconstruct previous immigrant experiences (McVee, 2011). Davies and Harré (1990) explain:

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (p. 46).

Positions can be identified in the context of a tri-polar relationship between position, speech acts, and storyline (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). Speech acts refer to "doing things" in the social world (Austin, 1955) that mutually settle positions and create storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990). Moghaddam and Harré (2010) noted that positioning theory is an approach to examining "how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others" (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010, p. 2). McVee (2011) noted that speech acts include "both the words we say or write and any other meaningful communicative act" (McVee, 2011, p. 6).

Storyline refers to a typical narrative form and personal stories (Allen & Wiles, 2013) and the dynamic episodes that are overlapped, changed, or transformed through speech acts and positions. For example, while interacting with classroom teachers, specialists, and therapists, one focal Korean mother of a child with disability considered her roles and identified herself as a mother, parent, and caregiver. She is actively involved in her children's PTA (Parent Teacher Association) and volunteers frequently to help her child's learning. We noticed that she positioned herself by using the pronoun "I" through her speech acts in which she engaged with her child's teachers and special education program specialist. For instance, some Korean immigrant mother expressed, "I like your Buddy program" and "I've seen Ryan's development." When asked to talk about her daily activities, she focused on her child saying, "He played by himself and showed me how to play." However, she struggled with self-positioning within two competing storylines related to "caregiver" and "bystander" (see Table 1). Self-positioning herself as a good mother while expecting to be a caregiver to her child may not be applied to a "bystander" storyline while experiencing immigrant status, financial struggles, participation in society, and the labor forces (Simon & Brettell, 1986). She detached herself from some of her existing beliefs and values of being mother of a child with disability.

For the purpose of exploring Korea immigrant parents' positioning, we first looked at four Korean mothers' self-positioning of themselves along their different storylines, which also positioned them as particular types of mothers of children with disabilities. Drawing on speech acts, which allowed us to identify the positions that Korean immigrant mothers took up in their storylines, we explored how the parents make sense of their roles within diverse social and cultural contexts while they engage in their children's education. We also explored how the mothers took up or resisted their roles—in other words, how they positioned themselves—while constructing social and cultural realms of interpretation in which particular parental roles were recognized in their involvement in their children's education. Specifically, this paper was guided by the following research questions: (a) How

do Korean immigrant mothers take up roles to position themselves while they engage in their children's education? and (b) What are their thoughts and beliefs regarding their roles as mothers with respect to their children's education?

In sum, positioning theory provides a unique lens from which the positions of the Korean immigrant mothers are explored in various contexts. Ultimately, this theory reveals how Korean mothers sharpen, extend, and negotiate their positions for parental involvement in their children's school success in diverse educational, linguistic, and cultural settings, as well as how their discourse and positions instantiate themselves and others in relation to their educational involvement with children.

Methods

Recruitment and Setting

As the current study was the part of a large mixed method study of social skill intervention for the mothers of children with autism (Kim & Trainor, 2017) and an interview study of the parents and community members' perception on the behavioral intervention (Kim, 2017), this paper expands the qualitative study and reports only on findings from the study. Korean immigrant parents who provided consents for children's participation in the intervention study participated in this qualitative case study with obtained consents. The researchers used criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) and considered as study participants only mothers who identified themselves as Korean and immigrant. Their English proficiency and the duration of residence in the US were not factors for selection. The second author, Sunyoung contacted several Korean communities in the Midwest, such as Korean churches and non-profit organizations for Koreans with disabilities. She also distributed a flyer through the communities. One mother of a child of autism contacted the second author as the results of the initial recruitment process. The mother made recommendations of potential participants and this snowball approach identified additional three Korean immigrant mothers for this research. A total of four Korean mothers agreed to participate in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the mothers and from observational notes. This study was originated from a social skill intervention study for the children with disabilities (Kim, 2017) and a following qualitative study to examine parent's perspective of the intervention and their children's development (Kim & Trainor, 2017). The second author implemented a social skill intervention for the children with autism and interviewed the mothers to examine the acceptance and satisfaction of the intervention and outcomes, three

different times over four months in either the mother's home or in a location of her choosing in the community (e.g., coffee shop or restaurant). The following interview questions we asked were related to the schooling, interaction with teachers, social skills, and the intervention including: "Can you tell me about your interaction with special education?"; "Can you describe your child's social life across people?"; "What type of feedback do teachers provide regarding your child's classroom interactions?"; and "What do you think about your child's social behaviors before and after the intervention?"

We also did observations and wrote field notes to record how the mothers and their children with autism interacted with other family and community members (a) at the Korean church where the intervention for the children occurred, (b) participants' homes, and (c) other communities for interviews. The observations occurred before, during, and after the interviews and children's intervention sessions; the duration of the observation was about two hours. The duration of the interviews with parents was about one hour each. While recording insights along with questions created in the fieldwork, we also wrote analytic memos independently to record ongoing data analysis as cumulative. Besides the interviews with the mothers, we regularly met their children with disabilities to offer a social skill intervention for a peer-relationship development 2-3 times a week based on children's schedules.

To analyze the data, we open-coded the mothers' interviews independently using constant comparison and codes that emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to examine the mothers' storylines about themselves and others that they created through speech acts. First, we coded the data from each mother separately while rereading all the observation notes. We separately coded the data and met to compare and contrast their findings until a consensus on the findings and themes was reached. We then constructed summaries of the four mothers' storylines together prior to identifying the positions that they took up while we visited and revisited the data set between our analytic categories and their positions seen across individual cases. We then separately wrote more detailed memos to identify the emerging themes on parents' positioning that they took up or that were being taken up while they engaged in their children's education across a wide range of settings—academic, social, and linguistic—such as home, church, institutions, and schools. Then, we coded the transcribed data of the mother interviews separately and assigned a list of specific examples and quotations related to the positions that the mothers took on and the ways in which they positioned themselves. We then collaborated to consolidate the categories into axial codes. Data were coded and analyzed within each individual mother's data and across all four mothers' data using a priori and evolving grounded codes, paying attention to the four mothers' dialogic communicative discourse to examine how they took up or resisted their positions in their figured world for parental involvement in their children's school success. Some examples of the axial codes include "researcher," "bystander," "organizer," and so on. Table 1 indicates the mothers' discursive positioning of themselves along the storylines that each Korean mother constructed and enacted individually and interactionally

(Langenhove & Harré, 1999; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003). Table 1 provides a sample of the position codes and examples of storylines.

Table 1
A Sample of Position Codes and Storylines

Position Codes	Examples of Storylines
Caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “David is the same at home, he doesn’t change at home. But, there is one big change. He said, ‘mommy, look!’ speaking to me and showed me how to kick a ball. It is a huge development.” • “Though nobody asks him to play, David did by himself and showed me how to play. He liked it a lot.” • “He now is willing to go to friends anywhere.”
Organizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Last week, I participated in an IEP meeting. Teachers, staff, assistant teachers, even main teachers said, ‘he has changed so much!’” They said David doesn’t have challenging behaviors he used to show.” • “I want to remind you that it might be better to organize it visually. Tell me whatever you need assistance.”
Bystander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Frankly speaking I joined this interview for your research.” • “Me? Well...the person who studies this field is better than me. It is nonsense if I tell something to you that I don’t know.” • “Social interaction? No change at church and at school because I have been told that he hardly interacts with others from teachers. There is nothing I can do for it.” • “I have no idea on his relationship with friends because I didn’t see.”
Observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I like your Buddy program because the way David takes an approach to treat people was different from the one he did in the past.” • “I personally felt that David became more childish because some people care about him at church and at school. He became overindulged at home.” • “Yeah, that is what I’ve definitely seen.” • “I’ve seen Ryan’s development.”
Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So, I educated him to keep what he said.” • “I have David keep trying to do.” • “I want Korean people to learn this special education a lot as soon as possible.” • “I am doing all my best to teach her. But no one cares my efforts and time I spent for her.” • “I am really trying to teach her.” • “I published children’s book. I have a really good idea to do.”

Immigrant Experience and Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are only that kind of family in this very small Korean church.” • “Here is America. Life is not easy. There are a lot of parts we cannot understand. Some treat in American style because here is America.” • “I was raised in Korean culture, but Lucy goes to American school, American culture.” • “There is something I cannot do because I am alien here. I have a language limitation.” • “As a cultural wise, they're very um... courtesy? I don't know. They're pretty culturally um.... conservative.” • “They are all from different color but Korea is like one nation. I really don't want to raise my kids in Korea. There is so much competition there.” • “And my daughter, Lucy still remembers you know a lot of things in Korea.”
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Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, we triangulated data by gathering data from multiple and different families and experiences/histories. Also, by using multiple data sources (i.e., interview, observation, and field notes), we were able to triangulate data. Additionally, we did a member checking to ensure that our understandings of previous interviews were correct. A consistent engagement and persistent observation in the field for four months also supported the credibility of the data collection (Creswell, 2012). We interviewed Korean immigrant mothers in Korean and translated the interview transcripts into English. To ensure the accuracy of data translations, we asked a Korean researcher who had experience with qualitative study in the area of Korean-American families for individuals with autism to review the translation.

Researcher Reflexivity

We, as the authors and qualitative researchers, have experience working with Korean-American families of children with disabilities and bilingualism in American public school and community settings. The first researcher's English experience consists of teaching at an after-school community center and Korean language school. Along with the first researcher's experience, the second researcher's work at a nursery school introduced us to a particular research area including home-school relationships, ethnic community practices, and Korean immigrant families. These work and life experiences affected the Korean immigrant mothers' interests in the study and their role as parents over the course of the interview. The socioeconomic status and other factors among the families varied, but the parents were uniformly enthusiastic about their children's education and

successful development. During the interviews, the mothers told us that they appreciated the interviews because they felt a bond of relationship with fellow Koreans:

Ms. Park: You gave more than your care and teaching. We are given a lot of something about culture. I like your advice related to my kids' difficulties and parenting.

Researcher: Do you feel better because we can have a conversation, sharing the same culture in Korean?

Ms. Park: Yes. That's correct. Here we are in America. It is not easy. There are many things that I cannot understand. So I cannot open my mind to share my thoughts to others. You know we have a different cultural perspective from other therapists and school staff and teachers. They do things in an American style because they are American. But, it is so hard because I am a [Korean] mother at home. That's the toughest part to me.

These experiences and relationships with the mothers influenced our perception of how seriously Korean-American parents consider their children's social development and lives. Additionally, as Korean researchers and data collectors and interpreters of this study, our inside perspective might unintentionally, or sometimes intentionally, reflect our own experience as Koreans as well as educators. Hence, we put value on minority female voices and their right to participation and contribution, as well as the role of the immigrant mothers' human experience as a source of knowledge and learning. During the data collection and analysis procedure, thus, we were consistently mindful of the assumptions and biases that we potentially brought to this paper and explicitly reflected on these issues in written memos.

Cases

All Korean immigrant mothers and their families live in a suburban area of the Midwest. Each family has one or more children with a disability or disabilities, and their children range in age from 5 to 11. The mothers' years of residence in the United States, along with their socioeconomic status, vary. Table 2 summarizes the demographic information of the participants. Participants' names are pseudonyms.

Ms. Mina Choi is married to a Korean man, Mr. Dong-Hee Min and moved to the United States for her husband to pursue a doctorate degree about 13 years ago. Currently, he works as a post-doctoral researcher at a university in the Midwest. Ms. Choi is a stay-at-home mother with three children: Lucas, Lucy, and Kristin. Lucy is a nine-year-old girl who was born in the United States with autism and other health issues. Lucy's younger sister, Kristin, is a four-year-old with Down syndrome. While Ms. Choi communicates with her husband mostly in Korean, she speaks only English to her children at home to educate them more consistently with mono-language in English in order to help them succeed in the United States.

Table 2
Participants' Demographic Information

Mother's Name	Years in USA	Socio-economic Status	Profession	Child			
				Name	Age	Gender	Disability
Ms. Choi	More than 10 years	Middle class	Full-time homemaker	Kristin	4	Female	Down Syndrome
				Lucy	9	Female	Autism
Ms. Hong	More than 10 years	Middle class	Full-time homemaker	Ryan	8	Male	Autism
				Scott	11	Male	Autism
Ms. Park	Between 5 and 10 years	Low-income class	Full-time homemaker	Ian	6	Male	Autism
Ms. Han	More than 10 years	Middle class	Realtor	David	10	Male	Autism

Ms. Eu-Jin Hong and her husband immigrated to the United States about 12 years ago to pursue graduate degrees. Soon after their immigration, Ms. Hong's first son, Scott, was diagnosed with autism, and she decided to leave her master's program to stay home as a housekeeper and full-time mother in order to care for and educate Scott. Her second son, Ryan, who is eight years old, was also later diagnosed with autism. The family had a hard time financially while Ms. Hong's husband was a full-time graduate student. The family barely made a living, even with the aid of Ryan's grandparents who lived in Korea. Ms. Hong's husband finished his doctoral degree about three years ago at a university in the Southeast; upon completion, he was employed in the Midwest area of the United States. The parents communicate in Korean at home; the children mostly speak and understand English and understand basic Korean.

Ms. Su-Na Park has three children. Her son, Ian, is six year old and has autism. He has two sisters who are nine and four years old respectively. The family moved to the United States when the older sister was two years old. Ms. Park's husband is a pastor at a Korean-American church, and she is a stay-at-home mom. Ms. Park's husband moved to the United States to attend university. After he received his master's degree, he started to work as a pastor. The parents mainly speak Korean at home. Ian's older sister can speak both Korean and English, but Ian and his younger sister prefer to communicate in Korean. Ms. Park does not speak or comprehend English fluently.

Ms. June Han moved to the United States about 15 years ago to study photography. Her husband had moved here more than 15 years ago for work. They married 10 years ago in the United States, and Ms. Han's husband works as a

janitorial manager at hotels. Ms. Han recently started a career as a realtor. Her first son, David, is a 10-year-old American-born Korean child with autism. Although both parents can fluently speak both Korean and English, the father usually speaks Korean when he communicates with David, and Ms. Han speaks only English for their children's language skills. David is a verbal communicator using short sentences in English.

Findings

Data analysis uncovered three compelling themes: (a) acting out in home-school collaborations, (b) hardships of parenting children with disabilities, and (c) emerging reflexive positioning for gender equality. We explore each of these themes in the sections that follow, providing interview excerpts from the four mothers.

Acting Out in Home-School Collaboration

Korean immigrant mothers actively engaged in their children's school activities and programs and communicated with teachers at school. They tended to respect the teachers' recommendations and guidance, and the school's educational plan, although they felt it was hard to understand many school documents. For example, they had trouble in understanding letters written to them and the annual Individual Education Plan (IEP). The data demonstrated that the mothers' positioning as organizers and researchers became concrete over time when they engaged in their children's social interactions and development to help fulfill their educational expectations for their children's better life. The positioning of the four mothers, which was created between their home and school roles, as well as their execution of social capital and agency, affected their understanding of their children's social interactions. For example, Ms. Han was concerned about David's life with autism and his social behavior issues. Her involvement in school through IEP meetings to discuss David with teachers and staff led her to position herself as an organizer who kept track of David's schoolwork and important schedules. Ms. Han actively engaged in David's school to look into the growth and development in classrooms stating, "I participated in IEP meetings. Staff, assistant teachers, and main teachers told me that David has changed a lot." Ms. Choi described herself as an organizer and explained, "I want to remind you that it might be better to organize it [what you want to teach] visually to interact with Lucy. Tell me whatever you [the researcher] need my assistance with." The immigrant mothers took up their positions as organizers for their children's social activities in and out of school.

Each of the mothers took on the role of "researcher" for their children's social interaction and language development in different educational settings. Most of the immigrant mothers highly valued both adopting professional attitudes about

researching the educational information and actively engaging not only at home and school but also in community-based activities for their children's social language development. The mothers made an effort to interact with community services and special social and language programs to find extracurricular resources, instead of being satisfied with the role of stay-at-home mothers. For instance, Ms. Han stated, "I like the Buddy program at the church because the way David approaches treating people is different from the one he showed in the past." Since Ms. Han felt that David became overindulged at home, she searched for better programs or community activities instead of only relying on her home education. Most of the mothers wanted their children to develop social skills as their peers did outside of school. Therefore, the mothers often brought their children to community organizations and recreation facilities, such as movie theaters, gymnasiums, and language schools, to promote social interaction among children with and without disabilities. One of the mothers said, "I know it is extra work to bring my kid to this movie theater in the early morning. It is really tough to wash, dress, and feed my kid early in the morning. But, I think my kid must know what a movie theater is and what to do in there. That's why I keep trying."

In general, the mothers were aware of how their children developed their social, interpersonal, and language skills in and out of the home, and sensitively monitored this development. For instance, Ms. Hong explained, "I've observed how Ryan has progressively developed." Ms. Choi stated, "That's exactly what I've definitely seen from my kid." Likewise, the mothers highlighted not only interaction with their children's school and teachers, but also their own investigations and professional development as researchers to support their children's social development among people who had diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, one of the mothers explained, "I have my kid enjoy outside activities that help my kid move up, swing, and dance with other kids, apart from academic programs such as reading and writing. I treat these activities as chances for my kids to get therapy."

Hardships of Parenting Children with Disabilities

The Korean mothers often expressed that their role as a mother seemed burdensome. As the interview continued, they tended to refuse this parental role by taking on the position of bystander instead. Since the immigrant mothers who came from low socio-economic status and low educational levels realized how hard it was for immigrant families to live in the United States, they negotiated their positions while feeling tremendous pressure about parental involvement in the American educational system. Ms. Park felt pressed to join the social development program for her child at her church, asking, "Do I have to do this?" and stated, "That does not have any special meaning to us. They are just meaningless." Ms. Han also described her position as a bystander, just watching David's school life. She noted, "I might be considered to be an irresponsible person, but I didn't expect too much in terms of how well my kid learned from the school. This is a just my

routine.” In fact, she felt guilty about not teaching David how to play with others and not helping with his homework at home.

It is worth noting here that the mothers acknowledged placing a high value on school education as a means of teaching their child. The mothers did not blame teachers for their children’s learning and social development. They were quite aware of how hard it was to take care of children with disabilities. Ms. Hong said, “I do not express my dissatisfaction with the way in which the teachers treat my kid. I have not ever complained. I will not say anything to the teacher even though she made a mistake to my kid. It is because I know it is so hard to take care of my kid. I would let her do whatever she does because she will take care of my kid.”

Over time, while the mothers kept their passion for educating their children at home and were willing to take on the role of researcher for their children’s social interaction and language development, they showed a contradictory stance about their roles as researcher-mothers due to a sense of having failed to appropriately educate their children. Ms. Choi showed anxiety and maternal depression associated with caring for her child with a disability. She said:

Yes, I studied a lot how to care and educate children with disabilities by myself. But, now I don’t. I am so tired. I decided to see my kid as she is. I don’t seek how to improve her linguistic and social skills anymore. I face up to reality as it is. I tried hard for her but it seems that my teaching doesn’t help. I am exhausted and I am worn out enough not to try anything more. I want to live my life and I want to be happy. I have been stressed out so far. I think I missed a chance to teach my kid since the first year of her life. But, it is related to my husband’s job here. We couldn’t do anything at all. There is nothing I can do for my kid except just playing around. I cannot do anything for her because I don’t have enough money.

The data demonstrated that church-based programs provided easy access for the Korean mothers to participate in their children’s development of social and language skills. In the local church, they took diverse educational opportunities to participate in family and community enrichment activities for their children’s school success. For example, Ms. Choi focused more on the church-based extracurricular activities that did not take place at either home or school. In the community observation, we found that most of the mothers aimed to provide their children with many opportunities for involvement in church- and community-based programs. The Korean mothers took diverse educational opportunities to participate in family and community enrichment activities that their church provided for their children’s school success.

Korean immigrant parents’ efforts to promote educational opportunities for their children, and their expectations for their success in doing so, are often limited because of immigrant circumstances such as language difference, economic status, and the children’s dispositions. The data demonstrated that the immigrant mothers sought to share their feelings of stress, failure, and fatigue with others who had children with disabilities, and they felt comfortable sharing Korean homogeneous culture, history, and language. Korean heritage and language

played a role in how they expressed their ideas, values, and understanding of themselves as mothers, helpers, guides, and caregivers to their children with disabilities. Ms. Choi stated, "We are the only family of our kind in this very small Korean church." Ms. Park emphasized her immigrant status when asked about Tim's social interaction with other Asian American and Caucasian American children and explained, "Here is America. It is not easy. There are a lot of parts we cannot understand. Some treat us in American style because here is America." During interviews, the mothers felt comfortable with the researchers because they could converse in their native language, Korean. Ms. Park felt a fear of English-only contexts when she engaged in a meeting with school staff and teachers both in person and by phone. She said, "There is nothing I can do for my kid because of my poor English skill. There is no time to learn English."

Emerging Reflexive Positioning for Gender Equality

While the Korean immigrant mothers position themselves in the role of advocates and professional researchers beyond simply caregivers and guides, they began to identify themselves with their husband as partners for their children's education. This new emerging identity as equal partners with men was in tension with the mothers' traditional positioning as women and wives. Data analysis uncovered the fact that many Korean immigrant mothers shared cultural homogeneity and a sense of belonging to ethnic affiliations or religious spaces, such as Protestant or Catholic churches or Buddhist temples, through which they stayed connected to each other. The blended Christianity at Korean churches provided resources for the mothers who devoted their whole life to their family members. In addition, the participation of the Korean immigrant women in Korean churches or other affiliations also allowed them to be exposed to egalitarian gender roles. For example, at the church, they negotiated the concept of modern motherhood against the Confucian patriarchal system, although native languages and cultural practices were invoked in new religious spaces with others who shared religious and cultural backgrounds. Ms. Hong critiqued, "You know Korean men just have a meal that women make after the service at Korean church. Korean women make lunch and clean up tables from early Sunday morning. We have a lot of work that we do at church compared to men. I hoped my husband would play with the kids. But he never does, ever." In addition, while adapting to the dominant Caucasian society of the United States, the women learned the more egalitarian gender role attitudes prevalent in American society. While engaging in their children's school activities and extracurricular programs, the mothers interacted with other American mothers and teachers.

However, the persistence of the husbands' traditional patriarchal ideology in their relationships to the Korean immigrant women resulted in serious marital conflicts and tensions in families. Although the women worked outside the home, with most working half- or full-time and having an economic role and social status, most of the Korean immigrant fathers had not modified a rigid form of patriarchal

ideology and authority brought from Korean society (Rubin, 1983). Dion and Dion (2001) found that immigrant women do not always experience the same or comparable benefits compared to immigrant men, since immigrant women have to take care of household responsibilities, childcare, and employment, which often results in psychological distress and depression. The traditional attitudes or perceptions of gender roles originate from the Confucian patriarchal system and Korean cultural concept of *hyonmo yangch'o*, which means *wise mother-good wife*. Kim (2006) reported that immigrant Korean women seek to maintain gains in gender status brought by immigration while they encounter Korean patriarchy and "male privilege" (Kim, 2006, p. 523) in the United States.

Religious practices compelled the Korean immigrant mothers to acknowledge their position as "female" parents. Although Americanized Christianity pervaded the Korean local community churches, much of Korean culture with Confucianism was incorporated in the church practices. The reality of these mothers was reflective of the history of the Korean immigration to the United States. Namely, since the first group of Korean immigrants immigrated to the United States in 1903, the majority of contemporary Korean immigrants have been identified as Christians (Chong, 1998; Min, 1992). The Korean immigrant church of the United States has preserved Korean ethnicity by developing their social networks and engaging Korean Confucian cultural traditions (Min, 1992). Confucianism places a high value on education, family honor, discipline, respect for older persons, and subordination of women to men. Although the structural factors and ethnic social structures reshape and reinforce Confucianism to support community forces and social capital in the United States (Zhou & Kim, 2006), Confucian cultural elements are embedded into the Korean Christian community (Baker 1997; Park & Cho, 1995; Kim, 1996). Such a traditional influence of Confucianism is what the Korean immigrant mothers was resistant and tried to position themselves against so that they could claim a partnership with their husbands in serving better their children with disabilities.

Discussion

This paper described how Korean immigrant parents took up various positions as they engaged in social and cultural activities in and out of school, for the social development of their children with disabilities. Through our multiple case study, we found that the mothers took on the position of researcher-mothers. They took various roles in the education of their children with disabilities and brought diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to the development of different attitudes and strategies for their children's education and independent life. First, they wanted to teach their children with disabilities as their classroom teachers recommended and guided at school. For the betterment of their children's lives, the mothers were willing to facilitate and promote communication with teachers by engaging in diverse school programs and conferences. Their positions as researching mothers could be seen in community-based activities, such as

bringing their children to the local Korean church that provided specialized programs for children with disabilities. For example, Ms. Han searched for better programs and community activities for her child's language learning in the local church. Korean churches played a key role in developing affiliations and networks through which Korean mothers gained information about resources related to special education, curriculum, and school and build social capital. Parents' cultural and social capital allowed for immigrant parents to align home practices with school practices and effectively participate in special education (Compton-Lilly, 2007, Leiter & Krauss, 2004; Trainor, 2010). The community involvement of immigrant parents (e.g., churches, language schools, and supplementary education programs) not only helped them navigate American schools for educational success (Zhou, Adefuin, Chung, & Roach, 2000; Zhou & Kim, 2006), but also improved perceptions of parent participation without feeling marginalized and segregated (Trainor, 2010).

We learned from Ms. Choi's positioning how parents of children with disabilities struggled with anxiety and maternal depression related to parenting these children. They experienced a number of difficulties, including linguistic barriers, stereotyping, and contentious gender role dynamic. While they struggled with cultural differences between home and school, they felt stressed and sometimes hopeless, which prevented them from actively participating in school activities. Traditional gender divisions of labor at home led to marital conflict and marital instability, although the Korean immigrant women made significant contributions to the family economy and their children's education. The mothers, compared to the Korean fathers, took on the greater share of responsibility for raising their children by far. It is particularly important to understand that the Korean immigrant female's concept of being a mother and a wife stems from the traditional Korean gender role of *hyonmo yangch'o* (wise mother–good wife). They expressed the hardship of parenting while living in the United States as an immigrant female with many roles, which sometimes led them to take positions as bystanders. While they put a high value on their children's learning and social development, they also realized how difficult it was to raise children with disabilities by themselves at home. The Korean mothers' efforts to promote their children's educational opportunities and expectations were often limited because of immigrant circumstances, such as language difference, economic status, and the children's dispositions.

In general, the Korean mothers in the study appeared to experience feelings of guilt, self-blame, depression, frustration, stress, and helplessness, particularly in relation to their children's education. At the same time, they were motivated to pursue egalitarian gender roles in their families for their children's sake although it was not always attainable. In addition, it was affirmed that Korean parents, particularly these mothers, expressed a deep respect for school administrators and teachers by following the professional decisions they made (Kim & Greene, 2003; Park, 1999). While they tried to be engaged in opportunities to improve their children's development, they also felt the sense of powerlessness. It becomes clear that the mothers' needs should be understood by teachers and school personnel with deep cultural sensitivity. In addition, timely support needs to be

provided for Korean mothers to effectively participate in and to develop strong bonds with schools (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006; Jones & Gansle, 2010; Lo, 2008). It might be helpful to build individual rapport with Korean immigrant mothers by providing social networks, family empowerment, resources, and information (Leiter & Krauss, 2004), while providing frequent, honest, and accessible ways to maintain supportive communication (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004).

Limitation and Implication

There is a limitation to this study. Although interview data with mothers and community observations were valuable for us to gain an in-depth understanding of the immigrant mothers' positionality with respect to homes, communities and schools, school observations and other sources of data might better support both our understanding of the mothers' experiences and involvement with their children's school.

Despite the limitation, this study is of significant interest to special education teachers and other educators because of the implications for how educators may help immigrant mothers who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and develop complex identities as immigrant mothers in ways that are in dialogue with others in their lives—children with disabilities, school teachers, specialists, therapists, and doctors. This study sheds light on how to guide parental participation in special education and how to work with parents of children with disabilities as vital team members (McCloskey, 2010). The analysis of interviews with the Korean immigrant mothers, along with home and community observations, demonstrates how the mothers employ culturally and linguistically diverse capital and knowledge in order to raise their children with disabilities and develop their children's social skills in positive ways outside of school. The mothers, however, reported concerns about language barriers, cultural differences between home and school, and feeling overwhelmed or intimidated by discrimination and miscommunication between home and school. Special education teachers need to engage in person-to-person interactions with parents of children with disabilities to make their participation count. Given that consistent and close communication between home and school is tremendously important for a child's success in school, teachers need to build trust and partnership by drawing on a variety of interactions. To help Korean immigrant mothers free themselves from tremendous pressure about parental involvement in the special education system, teachers need simply to devote a brief amount of time to asking immigrant mothers about their child's needs and their concerns (Edwards, 2016).

The analysis of interviews with the mothers also revealed that they sought to learn how to support the linguistic and social development of their children with disabilities by drawing on diverse roles and positions. However, the mothers struggled with limited sources regarding parenting and ways to make decisions about their children's special education programs. The mothers wanted to be

trained as professionals/experts and educators for children with disabilities, but they did not know where to get the information. This study serves as more evidence that immigrant mothers could engage in professional parenting groups that focus on the parenting and educational aspects for their children with disabilities. In addition, community-based organizations and programs play a key role in providing excellent resources for parents of children with a variety of disabilities or special needs, such as school services, therapy, local policies, funding sources, transportation, medical facilitation, and much more. Teachers can help parents of children with disabilities look beyond the child's disability to his or her abilities and help parents make their own lives better by actively engaging, rather than remaining a bystander.

Future researchers might expand to encompass other immigrant parents, not only Korean parents of children with disabilities attending in U.S. public schools. In addition, future researchers need to investigate several unanswered, but important, issues such as (a) how the role of a researching mother might evolve from being advocate, helper, organizer, and planner to being teacher, educator, and facilitator in the home, community, and school for educational decision-making and educational opportunities for children with disabilities; and (b) how educators can create structures and spaces for parent-driven interactions and collaborative communication with parents of children with disabilities.

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