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Psychological experiences of Korean missionary "kids" (MKs): A qualitative inquiry

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Psychological Experiences of Korean Missionary "Kids" (MKs): A Qualitative Inquiry

Abstract

The present study is a qualitative investigation of the psychological experiences of children of Korean missionaries, through the eyes of Korean missionary kids (MKs) and missionary workers. A semi-structured interview was conducted with eleven MKs and MK workers, and data were analyzed using the Consensual Qualitative Research method (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005). Several domains emerged: challenges associated with the MK experience, resiliency of MKs, intrapersonal and interpersonal coping skills, mental health concerns, religion and spirituality, a complex cultural identity, preparation for college transition, and hopes for MKs and their missionary parents. Categories corresponding to the domains are highlighted. The present study addresses a need for more attention paid to the non-American MK experience, and it presents some implications for the church and higher educational institutions.

Keywords: Missionary kids; Korean missionaries.

Psychological Experiences of Korean Missionary "Kids" (MKs): A Qualitative Inquiry

Adult children of cross-cultural Christian missionaries (missionary kids[1] or "MKs") have rich and unique cross-cultural experiences that warrant empirical attention. While the research literature on MKs is sparse compared to similar populations—for instance, the international student literature is relatively more developed—it has yielded some important findings nonetheless. Some common psychological themes examined in the MK literature include the effectiveness of re-entry programs (Davis, Suarez, Crawford, & Rehfuss, 2013), identity development (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009), and adjustment of repatriated MKs (Klemens & Bikos, 2009). Continued efforts to build the MK literature hold much promise.

Despite the emergence of MK studies in research literature, much of the existing literature focuses on the experiences of *American* MKs (e.g., Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Consequently, at best, the unique experiences of non-American MKs are lumped together with the American MK experience, and at worst, ignored altogether. Elsewhere in psychology, Arnett (2009) noted that the overreliance on American samples in making inferences regarding humanity means that there is a "neglected 95%" (p. 602) in this world, and we find this critique fitting for the MK literature. It is critical to address this glaring disparity by highlighting the psychological experiences of non-American MKs. The urgency is even more heightened when considering the anecdotal trend that many international MKs choose to pursue higher education in the United States. Therefore, a better understanding of how U.S. institutions can effectively support non-American MKs would be beneficial. Against this backdrop, we set out to articulate the experiences of an important subpopulation of MKs who have both shared

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[1] [1] Although the participants in our study were not minors, because the term MK is often used in the literature and also by those in missionary communities to refer to the offspring of cross-cultural missionary parents, we will refer to these individuals as MKs in the present article.

and unique experiences from North American MKs: offspring of South Korean Christian missionaries.

Korean Missionaries and Their Children

Over the last several decades, the number of Korean Christian missionaries around the world has dramatically increased. For instance, the number exploded from 93 to 14,905 between the years 1979 to 2006 (Moon, 2008). In 2010, Korea ranked sixth among countries in number of missionaries sent around the world (Center for the Global Study of Christianity, 2013). If one considers Korea's population size in relation to countries ahead of it on this list of number of missionaries (e.g., U.S.), Korean missionaries' strong representation in global missions is that much more impressive.

With such radical growth comes critical needs that impact both the missionary experience and the MK experience. For example, Moon (2008) found that one of the most pressing needs among Korean missionaries (endorsed by around 10 % of mission executives) is the education of MKs.

Despite this need for a better understanding of Korean MKs, there remains a dearth of empirical studies on this topic. Certainly, Korean MKs have shared experiences with other MKs (Choi, 2004), but they also have culture-specific experiences that deserve empirical attention. Kwon (2006) argued for an existence of a distinctively Korean MK experience, based on the observation that Korean MKs' experience in international schools in the mission field (or in most cases, American schools) is distinct compared to American MKs' experience in such a setting. In other words, the international (or often, American) primary and secondary education experience for the American MK is one of coming home, whereas it is one of yet another acculturative

experience for the Korean MK. Therefore, it makes sense to highlight these unique experiences of Korean MKs.

A Psycho-Cultural-Spiritual Framework

As a result, the question arises: Which aspects of Korean MKs' experiences should an empirical, qualitative study like ours attempt to capture? We believe that an incorporation of psychological, cultural, and spiritual elements provides a useful framework for understanding and inquiring about the Korean MK experience. Also, such an effort might lead to the development and implementation of comprehensive programs to better the lives of Korean MKs. Below, we briefly summarize the rationale for the formulation of our questions to focus on psychological, sociocultural, and spiritual elements. Whenever possible, we draw from the MK literature to present our arguments; but given the relative dearth of MK literature, we also draw from multicultural, cross-cultural, and mainstream psychological literature. Finally, although we are aware that the MK experience includes several stages (e.g., pre-departure, repatriation), in our study, we do not limit the MK experience to a specific timeframe.

Psychological perspectives. Psychological perspectives are important in describing and understanding the Korean MK experience. For instance, mental health is an important psychological dimension to consider. Klemens and Bikos (2009) found that repatriated MKs in the U.S. had lower levels of psychological well-being compared to their non-MK counterparts. What remain unclear, however, are the levels and the nature of psychological distress experienced by non-Western MKs. It is critical to broaden the understanding of the intersection of culture and mental health in the MK literature, including culture's influence on the understanding, experience, and treatment of emotional and behavioral difficulties. Our study

addresses this need by identifying mental health issues that might be especially salient within the

Korean MK context.

      Sociocultural perspectives. Sociocultural perspectives focused on complex cultural

identities are pertinent for the MK experience. Hoersting and Jenkins (2011) found that a lack of

cultural home (i.e., cultural homelessness) was correlated with lowered self-esteem in a sample

of Third Culture Kids[2] (TCKs; 29.10 % of participants were individuals from missionary

organizations). In addition, 22.30% of the TCK participants reported elevated levels on all

subscales of a measure assessing cultural homelessness, suggesting that a lack of cultural identity

is a salient concern. Similarly, Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) in a qualitative study of TCK

women (several MK participants included) found themes of identity (e.g., an identity of being

different). Taken together, these studies suggest that the managing of multiple identities is at the

core of the MK experience. Therefore, we expected to see themes related to cultural identities in

our study.

      The MK literature is also interested in cultural adaptation and related processes. Davis et

al. (2013) found that a re-entry program for MKs in the U.S. significantly lowered

psychopathology symptoms and increased well-being. Bikos et al. (2009) found that (re)

adjustment to the culture of origin was a major experience for MKs. But regarding the Korean

MK experience, there is an inadequate understanding of the added layer of adaptation: as noted

earlier, Korean MKs' cultural adaptation to an international or American educational setting in

the mission field is an experience that is distinct from the American MKs' educational

experience (Kwon, 2006). Furthermore, Korean MKs' cultural adaptation should be discussed

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[2] Third culture kids (TCKs) are those who have lived "at least part of their childhood in countries and cultures other than their own" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 3). Therefore, all MKs are TCKs, but not all TCKs are MKs – for instance, children of overseas military personnel can also be described as TCKs.

considering the MKs′ decision to pursue higher education in their country of origin (Korea) versus in the U.S. as international students (Kwon, 2006)—the latter situation presenting yet another acculturative experience, and not one of repatriation. Our study fills the gap regarding the unique cultural adaptation experiences of Korean MKs.

Spiritual perspectives. Given the Christian context that MKs are raised in, it is reasonable that spirituality has an integral role in their lives. We were especially interested in how MKs utilize *religious coping* (i.e., working through troubles through a connection to the divine; Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011).

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that spirituality is a vital component of the MK experience. Choi (2004) argued that spirituality should be a central theme when professionals provide counseling support for MKs, such as MKs' spiritual identity exploration and MKs' finding comfort in their parents' faith-driven work. Likewise, Bikos et al. (2014), in a study of MKs repatriated to the U.S. and their vocational development, reported several themes relating to spirituality, such as MKs' awareness of the presence of God and their coping through seeking God's direction. Collectively, these arguments point to the importance of spiritual perspectives for understanding the MK experience, But to date, no studies have empirically examined the role of religiosity or spirituality in shaping the experiences and the needs of Korean MKs. Given this gap, we were intentional in including questions about the role of spirituality and religion. We were especially intrigued by the possibility of spiritual themes intertwined with Korean cultural elements.

Research Questions

In sum, we conducted a qualitative investigation of the experiences and needs of Korean MKs. We interviewed adult Korean MKs (i.e., adults who grew up in the mission field as

children of missionaries) and professionals working closely with Korean MKs (e.g., pastors specializing in MK ministry); the latter group was included to increase diversity of perspectives regarding Korean MKs and to help inform intervention programs. We expected to find themes relating to several different aspects of the MK experience, but primarily of mental health, culture, and religiosity. We also anticipated that our findings will include both shared elements with the general MK experience and culture-specific elements.

Method

Participant Characteristics

Participants were MKs ($n = 8$)[3] and MK workers (e.g., pastors specializing in MK ministry; $n = 3$), for a total of 11 participants. All participants were of Korean descent; 9 reported Korean citizenship and 2 reported "other" citizenships (1 U.S., citizenship, 1 unspecified). There were 9 females and 2 males. The average age was 31.00 ($SD = 9.02$) for all participants, and 27.50 ($SD = 5.48$) for the MKs. For the MKs, the average years lived in the mission field was 11.25 years ($SD = 5.01$). The countries that they had lived in were Indonesia ($n = 2$), Philippines ($n = 2$), China, Kenya, South Africa, and Turkey. Most of the MKs reported having attended a U. S. institution ($n = 4$) or planning to attend one ($n = 1$); three did not report their college education status.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through social media (e.g., Facebook) and referrals by the first author's personal contacts. Potential participants were contacted through a Facebook message or email explaining the study goals and an invitation to participate. Participants were interviewed in South Korea. All interviews were conducted by the first or second author at a quiet location (e.g.,

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[3] This includes participants who identified as MKs but now working as MK workers.

a coffee shop) and lasted 30-60 minutes. During the interview, participants first read and signed the consent form and filled out a demographic questionnaire. Next, the interview questions formulated for the present study were asked (see Appendix). Participants were interviewed in the language of their choice (English, Korean, or a mix of both). All interviews were audio-recorded, and these audio files were transcribed verbatim by a bilingual research assistant. Participants received a 20,000 Korean Won (roughly U.S. $20) gift card to a coffee shop for their participation.

Research Team

The first author (Author A) is trained as a counseling psychologist and is a faculty member at a small liberal arts university in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S., with interests in international student mental health. Also, Author A is an adult MK who grew up in the Philippines, and he sojourned to the U.S. for college education. Therefore, although his experiences have the potential to enrich this study, they also could potentially serve as biases. Author A was aware of this risk, shared it openly with the research team, and was receptive to feedback about his biases throughout the research process.

The second author (Author B) is trained as a marriage and family therapist and is a faculty member at the same institution as Author A. Author B came to the U.S. as an international student, and since then, has worked with immigrant families in in research and clinical settings. Thus, she makes unique contributions to the study by bringing her personal experience of adjusting to the U.S. and clinical work with multicultural families. However, Author B acknowledges that her experiences may serve as biases and discussed these with the research team to be more aware of how they might affect the data analysis.

The third author (Author C) is a counselor educator in a school counseling program at the same institution as Authors A and B. Author C also came to the U.S. as an international student. Author C's work has focused on P-12 students' resiliency, supporting underserved students and their families in the school system, and multicultural school counseling. Having abundant experience with immigrant students, Author C was aware that her knowledge in cultural identity and understanding children's life transition challenges might serve as biases in data analysis.

Data Analytic Procedure

The Consensual Qualitative Research method (CQR; Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005) was used for data analysis. A key feature of CQR is the consensus that occurs between the research team members in analyzing data. The research team consisted of three scholars listed above (4th author served as the auditor; 5th author joined the team after data analyses). The analysis of data involved multiple phases summarized below. At all phases, the team was intentional in monitoring and discussing our own biases in data interpretation.

Phase 1: Domains. First, the research team identified the broad themes (i.e., domains) within the cases. Specifically, for each transcript corresponding to each participant responses, the research team members (a) read it individually, (b) identified the possible domains and corresponding chunks of data, and (c) met as a team (approximately every other week) to discuss and arrive on a consensus regarding the domains. Steps a-c were repeated for all transcripts.

Phase 2: Core ideas. After Phase 1, the research team identified the ideas (i.e., core ideas) within the domains. Specifically, for each transcript, the research team members (a) re-read it individually, (b) identified possible core ideas, and (c) met as a team to discuss and arrive on a consensus regarding the core ideas. Steps a-c were repeated for all transcripts.

Phase 3: Cross-analysis. After Phase 2, the research team conducted the cross-analysis, which involved grouping similar core ideas together within each domain (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The research team first created categories within the domains and then placed the core ideas into the categories. As with the other phases, the research team was intentional about arriving at consensus regarding the categories through regular in-person meetings.

Auditor's role. The auditor is an essential part of CQR to ensure data quality (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The fourth author served as the auditor. After the identification of domains and core ideas, the auditor provided feedback on the research team's work. After the cross-analysis, the auditor once again gave feedback on the categories.

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Results

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Several domains emerged: challenges associated with the MK experience, resiliency of MKs, intrapersonal and interpersonal coping skills, mental health concerns, religion and spirituality, a complex cultural identity, preparation for college transition, and hopes for MKs and their missionary parents. Because of the number of categories (see Table 1), for each domain, we present the top two categories (i.e., most number of respondents). For those domains with ties for the second most endorsed category, we chose to discuss one of them based on our judgement of which one was most relevant for considering how to improve Korean MK lives.

Domain 1: Challenges Associated with the MK Experience

Certain spiritual deficits. With general frequency, participants described spiritual challenges associated with the Korean MK experience. Some participants focused on deficits such as MKs being "spiritually lukewarm." Others noted MKs' surprising deficits in knowledge of the Bible and "church culture." Related, one MK worker described a lack of missional conviction among MKs:

They (MKs) live in the mission field, but they do not know about missionary work. This is because the mission field is only a home to them; there is no other meaning to being in the mission field to Korean MKs.

Others reported that MKs lack a meaningful church experience while growing up in the mission field due to their parents' busyness and lack of involvement. One MK stated:

I've seen some MKs who get [spiritually] weaker as they grow older. Maybe because… they feel that they don't get enough attention from parents, or maybe they don't feel loved, even from God, because they've been taken away from the environment that they were supposed to grow in.

One participant argued that Korean MKs tendency to not become missionary themselves is also a reflection of spiritual deficit.

Difficulty adjusting to new contexts. With typical frequency, participants described the difficulties of adjusting to new contexts, which is a frequent experience for Korean MKs. Strikingly, participants described difficulties that are shared with other MKs such as Western MKs (e.g., repatriation to home country), but also experiences that are distinct from the Western MK experience, such as the stressors stemming from academic sojourn to the U.S., and the repatriation to Korean culture.

For example, an MK participant reported that the learning curve to adjust to the U.S. during their academic sojourn was much steeper than they initially thought. One MK participant noted that some of the qualities that are valued in U.S. campuses are things that were not as emphasized while they were growing up, contributing to the difficulties of cultural adjustment to the U.S.:

…if you're trying to go to a college in the States, like teamwork and leadership, that's two

of the qualities that are really emphasized, but for a lot of the different cultures that they

[MKs] come from, it's… not emphasized.

On the other hand, participants also expressed difficulties associated with the Korean

MKs' decision to repatriate to Korea for college and post-college life, for those who choose to do

so. Participants referred to Korean cultural values such as the emphasis on hierarchical

relationships as potential stressors for Korean MKs. For example, one participant discussed

"unspoken rules" about not questioning superiors even when something contradicts the MKs'

ethical standards. As a result of these cultural differences, as one MK worker noted:

MKs end up not adjusting well to the Korean culture, experience difficulty

communicating with others, and end up either trusting others too easily or not trusting

others at all, placing lots of distance between themselves and others.

Another participant spoke of MKs who intentionally try to fit into the Korean college

culture, but to a point where they lose their MK identity in the process.

Domain 2: Resiliency of MKs

Adaptability and flexibility. With typical frequency, participants described cultural

adaptability and flexibility as a clear strength of Korean MKs. Participants noted that Korean

MKs possess the ability to quickly adjust to a different person, situation, place, or culture. As a

reason for adaptability, a participant noted that it was a "survival skill" for Korean MKs.

I think that it [adaptability and flexibility] comes very naturally or they have been trained

to become naturals at it because a lot of MKs don't choose to adapt but they just have

to… it's like a mode of survival. And so I think that you can generally say that most MKs

are very adaptable to different social settings or cultural settings…

A broadened worldview due to cultural experiences. With typical frequency, participants reported that a broadened worldview was a strength of Korean MKs. Participants spoke of accepting individuals from different cultures as one evidence of a broadened perspective. A participant noted that gaining a global perspective is an integral part of the Korean MK experience. Finally, a participant also described cultural awareness and sensitivity as a manifestation of a broadened worldview rooted in faith: "I think, to be able to receive the grace that God's given me to be who I am. And then also to… extend [it] to others who are different."

Domain 3: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Coping Skills

Fellow MKs as a source of support. With typical frequency, participants reported that Korean MKs cope by turning to their support networks. Participants reported that Korean MKs derive support from fellow MKs, including fellow Korean MKs. A participant also identified family (e.g., parents) as an important source of support. Interestingly, when participants discussed their sense of solidarity with fellow MKs about the "hurts" that they have experienced, one participant discussed "MK camps" (i.e., intensive retreats for MKs hosted by Korean churches) that allow MKs to gather as a community:

> I feel like when MKs get together… they relate through their hurts or through their horrible experiences and that's why they feel so close, because it's like a vulnerable spot that they don't even have to verbally [discuss].

Skilled at putting the best culture forward. With typical frequency, participants described switching between two or more cultures as a common way of coping. A participant noted that MKs are well-versed in "putting one culture forward" to best accommodate a situation. Another participant noted that "blending in" to a novel situation is a particular skill of

Korean MKs. Finally, a participant articulated that Korean MKs tend to hide themselves by "wearing a mask." An MK worker stated:

> Because MKs tend to have two, three, or more cultures, MKs tend to put forward the culture that is most advantageous to them. For example, in Korea, they might say "this is how things are abroad or in the United Sates," but in other situations, they might say, "I am Korean" to avoid difficult social situations.

Domain 4: Mental Health Concerns

Depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts. With typical frequency, participants described depressive symptoms as mental health concerns of Korean MKs. Participants generally agreed that suicidal thoughts are a common depressive symptom. "Suicides and suicide attempts among MKs are increasingly visible," reported one participant, and described a recent suicide by a Korean MK who had suffered financial and relational difficulties. Participants also described social difficulties and identity confusion as contributing to depressive symptoms.

Anxiety and trauma symptoms triggered by mission field experiences. With variant frequency, participants described anxiety and trauma-provoking experiences of Korean MKs. For example, a participant noted that for missionaries (i.e., parents) who are persecuted or in danger of being persecuted for their faith-related work in the mission field, Korean MKs' fear that their parents could be arrested could lead to constant worrying and eventually anxiety symptoms. As one participant put it, "The fear was real...and the impact was significant."

Domain 5: Religion and Spirituality

Spiritual strengths based on MK experiences. With typical frequency, participants observed that MKs possess certain spiritual strengths due to their MK experiences. A participant spoke of spiritual training under missionary parents that sets a strong foundation for MKs, so that

they can have "a discerning spirit when it comes to making moral decisions." Another participant noted that Korean MKs are deeply aware of God's presence and provision that take place in both international and local settings. Another participant described Korean MKs' contributions to their local church, such as their respect for and submission to church authority figures, ability to serve in church roles with their talents (e.g., playing many musical instruments), and ability to network both inside and outside of the church.

Importance of spiritual care. With variant frequency, participants identified the importance of spiritual care for the well-being of MKs. Participants spoke to the salience of it but also the ways to provide it. One participant noted that it is important to return to the basics of faith. The same participant also described MK peers as providing spiritual healing and older MKs as mentors. Another participant spoke of the importance of structured gatherings for MKs, such as "MK camps" but also programming for Korean MKs currently in college.

Domain 6: A Complex Cultural Identity

Confusion due to multiple cultural identities. With variant frequency, participants discussed uncertainty among MKs about their cultural backgrounds. In particular, participants described a complex layer of identities that included a mission field identity, a Korean identity, and an American identity. At the same time, as one participant noted, these identities were not fully realized. An MK participant stated, "I struggle with just being in only-Korean context, or even just being in only-American context; I speak with an American accent, so people could easily think 'Oh, she's culturally American,' but I'm not."

Social expectation or pressure to develop a Korean identity. With variant frequency, participants also described some external (e.g., familial) pressure to develop and maintain a Korean identity. A participant stated that Korean missionary parents want their MK children to

be "more in touch with [their] Korean groups and discover more of [their] Korean-ness." A participant noted that this type of pressure is self-defeating because it is difficult to maintain a Korean identity if one is not surrounded by Koreans. Another participant described their own belief and that it is within God's plans that they maintain their Korean identity.

Domain 7: Preparation for College Transition

 Need for more training in independent living. With typical frequency, participants reported that preparing MKs to function on their own is critical for successful academic sojourn to the U.S. For example, participants shared that "very basic and practical information" such as finding housing and using money might be helpful. Another participant reflected that it would be beneficial for Korean MKs to have information regarding safety concerns while living in the U.S. Finally, one participant noted that Korean MKs need assistance in finding churches to attend during their sojourn in the U.S.

 Need for practical information about college. With variant frequency, participants observed the need for practical information related to U.S. colleges for both MKs and their missionary parents ("I wish colleges continued to provide that kind of information and to communicate with parents regarding different ways to go to colleges."). Types of information identified by participants were regarding the geographic areas that the colleges are located in, financial aid, and so on. A participant emphasized the significance of financial assistance for Korean MKs, noting that it is more critical than the quality of the school itself. One participant noted that the need for these practical pieces of information about U.S. colleges is even more heightened when considering the fact that Korean missionary parents often lack information about U.S. colleges.

Domain 8: Hopes for MKs and their Missionary Parents

For MKs to develop a mature faith. With typical frequency, participants expressed a desire to see Korean MKs' faith develop and mature. Participants emphasized the importance of Korean MKs internalizing a definition of success that is not based on external goals but instead on a Christian worldview (e.g., a "Biblical worldview," glorifying God in all endeavors, assurance of God's provision). One MK participant said it well:

> They [MKs] just need to come to awareness that God is their God and God designed their life to be special and, I think for a lot of MKs, they need to see their faith as separate from their parents' faith…But they [MKs] need to understand that it's their own God, it's their God.

Developing a community made up of both other MKs and non-MKs. With typical frequency, participants spoke of wishes related to communities. They hoped to see Korean MKs be part of the MK community, allowing them to find support through shared experiences. At the same time, a participant articulated that it is important for MKs to develop relationships with individuals outside of the MK circle, and that there is a cost to Korean MKs restricting their community to other MKs. One participant spoke of the critical roles of college and church communities in providing a sense of belongingness to Korean MKs:

> …MKs think that only MKs go through this when maybe people—some, you know, some kid next door, like whose parents are in business have moved around just like MKs and they have like similar experiences, but MKs don't like to hear about those things. MKs just wanna hear about themselves… And I think that exclusivity is very common in American colleges, at least from what I have seen. Not only from my school but also other schools and I hear from my other friends. I think that MKs definitely do need that small group like 'oh, you were here, I was here, like we share that.' And then…the next

step would be to understand that everybody has a past, everybody has gone through something—not just MKs.

Discussion

The present study was a qualitative inquiry into the psychological experiences of Korean MKs, through the eyes of both MKs and MK workers. The data yielded several domains: challenges associated with the MK experience, resiliency of MKs, intrapersonal and interpersonal coping skills, mental health concerns, religion and spirituality, a complex cultural identity, preparation for college transition, and hopes for MKs and their missionary parents. Moreover, the categories that emerged within the domains reflected an interesting blend of both shared experiences with non-Korean MKs and culture-specific experiences unique to the Korean MK context. More broadly, these unique and shared experiences of Korean MKs reinforce the importance of righting the imbalance in the MK literature, one that currently favors the experiences of Western or American MKs. Our study is a significant step in that direction.

Our findings suggest that Korean MKs have distinct experiences based on their Korean identity. For instance, one theme that emerged was the complexity involving the dynamic interaction between not only the culture of origin identity and the mission field identity (a shared stressor for MKs), but also the unique struggle of having to balance a third identity—namely, an American or Western identity stemming from being educated in an American or international school system while living in the mission field. Furthermore, for the Korean MK pursuing higher education in the U.S.—a natural course of action for many, given their primary and secondary education experience—entering the U.S. is yet another acculturation experience that is fundamentally different from the repatriation experiences of American MKs often highlighted in the literature (e.g., Klemens & Bikos, 2009). During their academic sojourn in the U.S., Korean

MKs might experience some shared MK stressors in a more amplified way (e.g., cultural identity confusion) or unique stressors that they might be more susceptible to (e.g., racial discrimination). It is also important to note that *some* Korean MK experiences are shared with international students, such as their acculturation experiences.

At the same time, we also uncovered experiences that are similar to those already identified in the literature, such as identity-related considerations (Bikos et al., 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). These commonalities suggest that there may be generalizable MK experiences regardless of the specific MK group.

Implications

Although numerous implications can emerge from our findings, we decided to focus on two especially critical entry points for reaching Korean MKs: how U.S. colleges can apply our findings to better host Korean MKs on their campuses, and how churches can provide effective pastoral care to Korean MKs.

Implications for U.S. colleges. Our study suggests some key ways for U.S. colleges to better host (and to the degree possible, help prepare for collegiate experience) Korean MKs. First, our findings indicate that Korean MKs share in the stressors and coping methods of other MKs (e.g., American MKs), and therefore they may benefit from generalized MK programs that are popular on U.S. college campuses (e.g., Mu Kappa International). On the other hand, our findings also suggest that relying solely on generic programming to reach out to Korean MKs on U.S. campuses might result in missing the unique experiences of Korean MKs. Furthermore, to group Korean MKs together with international students might help to capture some of their shared experiences, but it also poses the risk of glossing over the MK-specific experiences of Korean MKs that international students to the U.S. do not share. Given these complexities, it

would be wise for college campuses to develop both programing within "mainstream" MK programs and international students programs to speak to the rich experiences of non-American MKs, such as Korean MKs. Also, training of staff members to take these complexities into account in a thoughtful and respectful manner might also be beneficial.

Second, it might be helpful for colleges to be more proactive in reaching out to international MKs and their missionary parents with concrete information regarding not only their school, but also practical information for living in the U.S. We suspect that it is easy to gloss over these basics for those working with Korean MKs, especially if the Korean MK might look "American" on paper (e.g., educated at an American secondary school); but the present findings indicate that such information might be pivotal in the decision process to come to the U.S. for college and also for a successful academic sojourn in the U.S. Finally, colleges should be intentional about communicating information regarding scholarships and financial aid programs that can help international MKs to attend U.S. colleges.

Implications for MK workers. Our study also leads to some implications for the spiritual care of Korean MKs. It is important to note that MKs do not choose to become MKs. Due to the parents' sense of calling, the MK title is *given,* often from a very young age. Because Korean culture values respect for parents' decisions, there is limited space for MKs to voice their own thoughts. When this culture is combined with spiritual calling from God, the pressure to submit to the MK identity is further heightened. Such pressure may silence MKs and lead to a loss of personal authenticity and a disconnection with their true self. This can further develop into a loss of identity, culture, community, and even one's spiritual beliefs.

There needs to be safe spaces where MKs can fully explore and express their authentic selves. Some MKs may feel authentically connected with the spirituality that they have

experienced growing up, as indicated in our study. However, MKs may have questions which they could not ask freely growing up, particularly about spiritual life and Christian traditions. There may be unexpressed emotions of frustration, loneliness, sadness or anger that needs to be acknowledged and honored. It is important for MKs to have opportunities to explore their identity outside of their MK identity. Christian communities can provide such safe spaces for MKs, though the context of Christian community is not a requirement. At times, gifted counselors who are spiritually and culturally aware beyond Christianity may be particularly beneficial for MKs, allowing them to experience acceptance outside a familiar context.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, our study has limitations that future studies should address. First, in an effort to obtain a breadth of responses, we included non-MK participants (i.e., MK workers). Future studies should include a more homogenous sample to delve deeper into shared experiences and perceptions of MKs. Second, because our study was the first to examine the psychological experiences of Korean MKs, our inquiry was necessarily broad. Future researchers should build upon our findings and focus on a specific theme (e.g., spiritual coping) or a time-period (e.g., academic sojourn to the U.S.). Third, we utilized the qualitative method to allow for rich descriptive data, but due to this design, causal or correlational inferences cannot be drawn. Future studies should replicate or extend our findings using quantitative methods. Fourth, our study included more female than male participants. Future studies should include more males to provide a balanced perspective. Alternatively, it might also be helpful to conduct within-gender studies to examine the experiences of Korean MKs' that might be specific to a gender. Fifth, in an effort to capture the MK experience of sojourning to the U.S. as college students, our study's generalizability is limited to the U.S. context in this aspect. Future studies should highlight the

diversity within the Korean MK experience in regards to where they choose to sojourn for higher

education, for example.

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Table 1. *Domains, Categories, and Frequencies (N =11).*

Domain/Category	Frequency
Domain 1: Challenges associated with the MK experience	
Certain spiritual deficits	General (11)
Difficulty adjusting to new contexts	Typical (7)
Struggle in making social connections	Typical (7)
Language difficulties that limit MKs' adjustment to new contexts	Typical (5)
Misunderstandings or negative reactions from non-MKs	Typical (5)
Intrapersonal difficulties (e.g., lack of self-awareness)	Variant (4)
Emotional and social difficulties (e.g., not opening up to others) due to their mobility	Variant (4)
Challenges associated with having missionary parents (e.g., lengthy separation from parents)	Variant (4)
Financial difficulties as children of missionaries	Variant (3)
Practical challenges when MKs move to new contexts (e.g., military duty for Korean males)	Variant (3)
Domain 2: Resiliency of MKs	
Adaptability and flexibility	Typical (8)
A broadened worldview due to cultural experiences	Typical (6)
Language skills as a cultural bridge	Variant (4)
Benefits of international travel experiences for MKs	Variant (2)
Domain 3: Intrapersonal and interpersonal coping skills	
Fellow MKs as a source of support	Typical (5)
Skilled at putting the best culture forward	Typical (5)
Intrapersonal resources for coping	Typical (5)
Domain 4: Mental health concerns	
Depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts	Typical (6)
Anxiety and trauma symptoms triggered by mission field experiences	Variant (2)
Psychological and social adjustment issues	Variant (2)
Emotion regulation difficulties	Variant (2)
Domain 5: Religion and Spirituality	
Spiritual strengths based on MK experiences	Typical (5)
Importance of spiritual care	Variant (4)
Walking away from the church community	Variant (3)
A secure spiritual identity as a compensation for insecure cultural identity	Variant (2)

Spiritual blessings associated with MK status	Variant (2)
Domain 6: A complex cultural identity	
Confusion due to multiple cultural identities	Variant (3)
Struggles to connect fully to one culture	Variant (2)
Social expectation or pressure to develop a Korean identity	Variant (2)
Critical role of language in the MK cultural identity formation	Variant (2)
Domain 7: Preparation for college transition	
Need for more training in independent living	Typical (5)
Need for practical information about college	Variant (2)
Need for more information about the U.S. cultural context	Variant (2)
Helpfulness of connecting with older students who can mentor MKs	Variant (2)
Domain 8: Hopes for MKs and their missionary parents	
For MKs to develop a mature faith	Typical (6)
For MKs to develop a community made up of both other MKs and non-MKs	Typical (5)
For MKs to embrace the MK experience as a blessing	Variant (4)
For MKs to receive adequate preparation for life after the mission field	Variant (4)
For missionary parents to better understand their MK children	Variant (3)

Note. General = 10-11 cases; Typical = 5-9 cases; Variant = 2-4 cases (see Hill et al., 2005).

Appendix: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- *Which psychological coping skills are MKs lacking? Strong in?*
- *What are some mental health concerns that you have observed among MKs?*
- *What are some social/cultural deficits of MKs? Strengths?*
- *What kinds of things might be important to include in a training on international MK sociocultural adjustment?*
- *What are some ways in which MKs are spiritually strong? Lacking?*
- *How can spirituality/religiosity be incorporated into MK pre-sojourn training/workshops?*
- *What predicts success for international MKs? Failure? How do you define success and failure?*