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PARACHUTE KIDS FROM KOREA:
MOTIVATION, INSTITUTIONAL FORCES, AND ADAPTIVE EXPERIENCES OF
K-12 EARLY STUDY ABROAD MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of parachute kids, who are generally East Asian k-12 school age minors living overseas and attending school without the accompaniment of their parents. The study particularly focuses on expanding the understandings on *why* and *how* young adolescents from Korea arrive in the U.S. alone for educational purposes. A qualitative approach was taken in this study, particularly using the tools of face-to-face interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Ten Korean college students and graduates living in the U.S. were recruited to provide a retrospective view of their experiences as parachute kids. Findings show that students' motivation for coming are generated by push and pull factors stemming from the social, political, and economic dynamics of Korea, and perceptions about the American dream. Participants' experiences indicate the existence of an institutional infrastructure aiding the migration process of parachute kids. Students experienced highest stress in adjusting to host families and lower stress in adapting to schools and academics. Lastly, students' self-motivation for coming abroad is found to influence their satisfaction and view of success in their early study abroad experience. This research suggests policy implications and future research directions for ensuring safe and healthy adjustment for parachute kids arriving to the U.S.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Children in the process of migration are generally portrayed as dependents of their adult migrants, often regarded as “burdens” complicating adults’ movement decisions (Orellana, 2001). Researchers have found, however, that children can also become the primary initiators or actors of a family’s migration (Orellana, 2001; Tsong & Liu, 2009; Zhou, 1998). Such a pattern falls for the case of a group known as “parachute kids,” who are minors traveling and settling abroad alone without the accompaniment of their parents. These minors generally come from several Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea (hereafter Korea) to live in the host country and attend school (Li, 2005; Tsong & Liu, 2009; Zhou, 1998). This category of student migrants is separate from the commonly known international students, or adult students in higher education studying overseas. Parachute kids have been documented to arrive at various ages, ranging from 8 to 18. Multiple types of living arrangements are made for the kids as they live in the host country, including but not limited to living with a relative, a related adult or parents’ friends, or an unrelated caregiver (Chiang-Hom, 2004).

Parachute kids began receiving media coverage and attention in the early 1990s as they became a growing presence in California (Hamilton, 1993a; Zhou, 1998). As a Los Angeles Times article titled, “A House, Cash--and No Parents” indicates, the phenomenon was portrayed as a sensational, exceptional experience of wealthy Asian kids living in sub-urban households by themselves with minimal adult supervision (Hamilton, 1993a; Lee, 2006). In fact, parachute kids living alone have been subjects of crime such as kidnapping and robbery, raising serious attention and policy interventions in areas where the phenomenon is prevalent, such as Southern California (Chao, 1997; Hamilton, 1993b; Lee, 1999). Scholarly work on the phenomenon finds that cases

of wealthy families pouring money onto their unsupervised, spoiled children are not a universal scenario for parachute kids (Zhou, 1998).

Researchers consistently find that educational purposes are the primary reasons for sending a young adolescent overseas by him or herself (Cho, 1996; New man & New man, 2009; Orellana, 2001; Zhou, 1998). Drawing from the high values placed on education in part by the strongly engrained Confucian values in Asia (Cho, 2007; Sorensen, 1994), it makes sense that the migration of young kids for educational purposes mainly stem from countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Korea. Individual reports and estimates in the U.S. have found Taiwan to be on the leading front of sending the largest group of parachute kids followed by Hong Kong and Korea (Hwang & Watanabe, 1990). The exact number of these students in the U.S. is difficult to obtain due to lack of official records and restrictions on access to personal identification information of student visas. According to a report generated from Korea, an estimated 16,446 elementary and secondary school students had left Korea's public education system to study abroad in 2004 alone (Korean Educational Development Institute [KEDI], 2005). The rising number of international minors living alone has drawn research interests and most of the academic discourse on the topic center on psychological impairments and social dynamics of parachute kids living alone and acculturating on their own (Byun 2010; Chung, 1994; Kuo & Roysircar, 2005; Lee, 2006; Popadiuk, 2010).

Although the term "parachute kids" applies to unaccompanied minors of all nationalities who arrive to a host country to attend school, it is important to note that differences appear by nationality and ethnicity. Regardless of the realistic assumption that certain values of education and cultural factors overlap among East Asian countries, each nation's political, economic, and social climate influence the motivation, practices, and demographic population of those who come abroad (Kang & Abelmann, 2011). For this reason, this study focuses on the experiences of parachute kids from Korea, one of the top participating nations in the migration of k-12 school

age children. As the following literature review and findings reveal, the early study abroad phenomenon in Korea is quite unique to the extent of its popularization and institutionalization in society.

The primary aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons and measures by which parachute kids migrate, and their experiences thereafter. Data were collected from the retrospective stories of ten adults living in the U.S. who had initially arrived as parachute kids. The following research questions guided this study:

Q1. How and why do young adolescents from Korea engage in long term overseas study on their own?

Q2. What major difficulties do parachute kids face as they study abroad in the U.S.?

This study is organized into 8 chapters. Chapters 1 to 3 include the introduction, literature review, and the research design and methodology of the study, in respective order. Chapters 4 to 7 lay out the major findings of the study. Chapter 4 presents the motivations that drove the participants and their families to engage in the early study abroad experience. Chapter 5 discusses the findings on the institutionalized context of the Korean parachute students, describing the functions of institutions and industries that enabled the participants' study abroad experience. Students' experiences upon arrival, including their psychological and emotional sentiments, are explored in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 addresses the ideal qualities for succeeding in one's early study abroad experience as identified by the student participants. Chapter 8 concludes the study with a discussion of the findings and provides future policy suggestions and research directions.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Defining Parachute Kids in the Literature

A number of terms have been used in the literature to describe the presence of minors living abroad by themselves and attending school. The term “parachute kids” has been most widely used in domestic media as well as in scholarship (Popadiuk, 2009; Tsong & Liu, 2009; Zhou, 1998). The term illustrates a portrayal of kids being launched and “dropped off” by their parents in a foreign culture and left to acculturate on their own (Popadiuk, 2009). Concerns with the underlying negative connotations associated with such a description have led literature published in Canada to refer to these kids as “unaccompanied sojourners” or “adolescent international students” (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Popadiuk, 2009). Scholarship in Korea has named the phenomenon as “early study abroad” (ESA), a term driven from the translation of the Korean word, *jogi yuhak*. ESA provides an accurate depiction of individuals engaging in a study abroad experience early in their developmental age (Ly, 2008). Kang and Abelman (2011) have also used “pre-college study abroad” (PSA) to term the phenomenon. PSA is useful in a way that it distinguishes between the general understandings of a study abroad, which is commonly known to be pertinent among college students, with the case particularly applying to elementary and secondary school students who have yet entered higher education. I use the terms “early study abroad” (hereafter ESA) and “parachute kids” interchangeably in this paper.

Literature categorizes the parachute phenomenon as one of the features of the transnational family phenomenon, which is becoming more prevalent in the globalizing society (Kang, 2012; Orellana, 2001; Zhou, 1998). Transnational families occur when one or more

members of a family live across nation borders while maintaining their familial ties and relationships (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). The categorization especially seems fitting for parachute kids who stay abroad due to overseas business establishments of families and the parents' trans-migratory life style. Researchers have documented cases of parachute kids living in wealthy sub-urban areas where children live alone often with a sibling and a caretaker while the parents visit the household during their business trips (Zhou, 1998). These cases are known to result from the parents' involvement in overseas business programs or from families' efforts to secure U.S. citizenship in the midst of political instability happening in the home country (Kang & Abelmann, 2011; Zhou, 1998). Parachute kids are generally part of the transnational middle- to upper-middle class Asian families, since there are considerable financial costs associated with private school tuition and homestay payments (Zhou, 1998). In this context, ESA phenomenon is discussed as a means for wealthy parents to purchase an alternative route to the stringent and competitive education system in the homeland (Lee & Larson 2000; Zhou 1998).

Parachute kids in the literature are generally clumped together with other transnational family structures such as the "astronaut families," and "wild geese families" (Kang, 2012; Tsong & Liu, 2009). Unlike the parachute kids who come abroad alone, in "astronaut families" children are accompanied by their mothers who establish residence in the host country while the head of the household, or the father, remains in the home country to financially support the rest of his family members living abroad (Li, 2005). "Wild geese families" is also a term describing such families, more pervasively used for Korean households whereas the previous term is generally used for Chinese families (Choi, 2006; Kang, 2012). This marital separation between "geese fathers" and "geese mothers" has raised concerns and discourse over the psychological inconveniences of the spouses and their potential negative effects on child rearing (Kim & Yang, 2012). Such family structures are opposite of the traditional model of migrant workers in which the male head of the household travels abroad and send remittances for the remaining family in

the homeland (Li, 2005). In modern transnational family arrangements such as the astronaut and wild-geese families, research finds that enabling a supposedly better education and living environment for the children is a primary reason driving the family's transnational split (Kang, 2012; Waters, 2001). Children of transnationally split households have been termed as "satellite kids" in the academic discourse (Tsang et al., 2003; Waters, 2003). While satellite kids and parachute kids arrive in a host country for a similar goal and purpose – to attend school – their experiences are obviously different, since one settles into a new culture under adjacent parental care while another does so with minimal adult supervision.

Psychological and Emotional Experiences of Parachute Kids

A small but growing body of research has been generated to understand the ESA phenomenon and in particular the experiences of the participating kids. Literature on the topic encompasses an international stage, indicating that the phenomenon is widely spread across the globe. ESA students have been found and mostly researched in majority English-speaking countries such as the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Ho & Bedford, 2008; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Lee, 2006; Zhou, 1998). Recently, however, increasing attention has been paid to the growing body of ESA students in non-Western destination countries such as China and Singapore where the movement is mostly attributable to Korean parachute kids (Kang 2012; Park & Bae, 2009).

The stress of immigration and separation from parents inevitably lead to concerns over the psychological well-beings of parachute kids, and much scholarly attention has been given to the developmental and emotional needs of the lone children (Yeoh et al., 2005). In general, parachute kids display high levels of stress associated with acculturation (Chung, 1994; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). A comparative study of American-born Chinese, accompanied immigrant

Taiwanese, and unaccompanied ESA Taiwanese adolescents found that the last group of parachute kids were reported to have higher levels of worry, concentration anxiety, and depression than their counterparts (Chung, 1994). Another comparative study of the same types of groups living in Canada found that parachute kids experienced the lowest acculturation levels along with having the highest acculturation stress levels (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004). Studies using qualitative approaches report common feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and alienation experienced by ESA students (Tsong & Liu, 2009; Zhou, 1998). Struggles with identity formation have also been documented since these adolescents come abroad at a time period critical to their identity development (Byun, 2010; Lee 2006). Relative to accompanied minors, parachute kids struggle with feeling marginal in both their home countries and host countries, and are often observed to display less of their original ethnicity in the host country as they stay physically disconnected from family members (Lee, 2006; Orellana et al., 2001).

Contrary to the negative psychological and emotional costs identified in the research, scholars have noted students' positive outlook on their overall ESA experience. Zhou explains that since parachute kids are separated from their parents for the specific purpose of education, their experiences of separate living is largely different from separate living in the homeland (Zhou, 1998). For example, a structural equation model analysis of data from 201 early study abroad students in Toronto, Canada shows that education-related acculturation – students' familiarity with the Canadian educational system, learning environment, and English proficiency – is negatively correlated to acculturative stress (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). This means educational preparation prior to coming abroad and proper adjustment to the education system reduces the stress levels of ESA students. Zhou also discusses that while separate living in the U.S., such as single parent households and foster living, are associated with negative social factors (Astone & McLanahan, 1991), high socio-economic living status and parental resources of parachute kids reduce the potential risk of family separation. Transnational families intend to maintain their

long-distance relationships by using various communication methods to stay in touch, thus decreasing the negative effects of parents' physical absence on children (Madianou & Miller, 2011). A phenomenological study finds that students expressed their lone journeys as “worthwhile” or “rewarding” experiences despite the difficulties (Hsieh, 2008).

The *Jogi-yuhak* Students of Korea

While media coverage on parachute kids commonly describes them as students of Asian origin, researchers have investigated the phenomenon for separate countries, examining the influence of each national context (Chung, 1994; Hsieh, 2008; Lee, 2006; Kang & Abelmann, 2011; Zhou, 1998). For the purpose of this paper, only literature on Korean parachute kids is discussed. As mentioned in the introduction, Korea is one of the top sending nations of ESA students, having established a strong presence in destination countries abroad. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education report, a total of 2,193 Asian elementary and secondary international were enrolled in Canada during 1999 to 2000. The report shows that Korea ranked first in the amount of sending students, followed by Taiwan (CBIE, 2002). In the U.S., the number of parachute kids coming from Korea was estimated to be slightly less than that of Taiwan and Hong Kong (Hamilton 1993a). Recent studies discuss the rise of the presence of Korean ESA students in Asian countries such as Singapore and China, where the opportunities for both Mandarin and English language acquisition and the booming Chinese economy have made such destination countries appealing to Korean families (Kang, 2013).

Unlike the literature of the Hong Kong and Taiwanese parachute kids, whose migratory patterns are found to be part of the transnational living arrangements among the super-elites of the nation, Korea's parachute phenomenon has been popularized across a larger spectrum of social classes (Kang & Abelmann, 2011). The number of ESA students has been reported to have

continuously increased since the 1990s, topping more than 30,000 elementary and secondary level students leaving for overseas education in 2006 alone (Jo et al., 2007).

The Korean word *jogi yuhak* translates into the term early study abroad, which is defined by the Korean government as the practice of studying abroad among elementary and secondary students who have not graduated from high school (Kim, 2005). Data collected by the Korean Educational Development Institute shows that the proportion of ESA students in Korea has experienced a steady increase, going from .04 percent in 1997 to .13 percent in 2003. Between 2003 and 2004, the number of elementary and secondary students going abroad increased by 6.68 percent and approximately 34 students per day left their school for overseas education. In fact, studying abroad before college is illegal for kids who have not graduated from middle school in Korea (Kim, 2005). However, the majority of Korea citizens reported to have very limited awareness of the legal restrictions and in 2004, 6,276 elementary students left the public education system to study abroad (KEDI, 2005). The United States continues to be the most popular destination for the early study abroad students leaving the country (Kang & Abelmann, 2011).

The large number of Korean children's educational exodus has generated considerable public discourse on the social, political, and historical contexts that push students out of the nation's education system (Cho 2007; Kang, 2012; Kang & Abelmann, 2011). Academically rigorous and competitive school environments and exam-oriented school structures in the home country comprise a share of the negative push factors that motivate students and their families to seek alternative routes abroad (Cho, 1996; Lee & Larson, 2000). The phenomenon is also found to be driven by the influence of political and economic changes of the 1990s. The economic downturn of the 1997 International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis and the nation's following recovery promoted globalization, demanding citizens to become integrated into the globalizing world system (Kang, 2012; Kang & Abelmann, 2011). Many Koreans embraced the idea of

globalization, and considered English proficiency to be a crucial aspect of becoming “global elites” (Ablemann et al., 2009; Park, 2009). The pursuit of becoming global led families to send their young children abroad, in hopes that they would acquire powerful cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), including Western lifestyles and English mastery, which will in turn secure a successful adult status in Korea (Waters, 2008). Leading into the new millennium, the 2000s mark the popularization era of ESA in Korea (Kang & Abelmann, 2011). Kang and Abelmann’s recent article suggests a “domestication” of Korean ESA, proposing that the ESA phenomenon – referred to as pre-college study abroad (PSA) in the article – is an “extension of the highly stratified and competitive domestic South Korean education market” (p. 90). Literature on early study abroad students in Korea documents the phenomenon to be one that many people espouse, and it is projected to continue to rise in the future (Jo et al., 2007; Kang & Abelmann, 2011).

In addition to the social and political factors, the liberalization of the education market for private after-school education and alternative education has given rise to private education businesses for domestic English learning as well as overseas studying (Kang & Abelmann, 2011). Hence, an institutional infrastructure has developed. An investigation of Korean international student mobility in Auckland, New Zealand documents the role of education agents, businesses, and interpersonal connections in immigrant communities that facilitate the movement between Korea and New Zealand (Collins, 2008). Collins (2008) refers to these institutions as “bridges to learning” (p.404) since they establish a convenient pathway for international students to come to New Zealand. References to such institutional infrastructure, a unique feature of the Korean ESA context, was discovered in this research as well. While Collins (2008) describes the functions of the educational agents, or “bridges to learning,” located in New Zealand, this research goes further by exploring the experiences of the students who use these institutions for their duration in the U.S. as parachute kids.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Although a growing body of research is being produced on the topic of parachute kids worldwide, few have concentrated on the experiences of Korean parachute kids in the U.S. The dearth of available data on parachute kids living in the U.S. and the design of the research questions led to using qualitative tools in this study. The two research questions that guide the study are:

Q1. How and why do young adolescents from Korea engage in long term overseas study on their own?

Q2. What major difficulties do parachute kids face as they study abroad in the U.S.?

The first question, which asks *how* and *why*, attempts to seek information about the thought processes regarding the motivation and rationale that led parachute kids and their families to engage in the unique transnational migration. The second question aims to gather information on the students' subjective feelings and perspectives on their daily experiences in the host country. Qualitative research methods enable discovering a wealth of detailed information (Patton, 1990), which are the type of data I require to answer the two research questions and explore the Korean parachute phenomenon in-depth.

In this chapter on methodology, I reflect on my own researcher reflexivity to explain the interconnection between myself and this study. The rationale for selecting Korean parachute kids as a focus of the study is elaborated based on my reflection. Next, I present the eligibility criteria I used for recruiting the participants and the details of the selection procedure and sites. Then, I describe the methods I used to collect data and the process of analyzing the information. Lastly, limitations of using such methodology and data are considered.

Researcher's Reflexivity

Reflexivity entails the researcher's awareness of his or her intertwined relationship with the study and multiple influences the researcher can bring to the research process and design (Gilgun, 2010). Including reflexivity in a study involves reflecting on the interconnection between the researcher him/herself and the study (Maxwell, 2005). Providing reflexivity enables the researcher and the consumer of the research to become aware of the researcher's influences on the study and thus can be useful in avoiding possible research bias. In this section I will elaborate on my personal experience as a parachute kid living in the U.S. and how that drove my interest in conducting research on parachute kids from Korea.

My childhood experiences place me in an odd pair of shoes for looking at the parachute phenomenon and equipped me to consider it from multiple perspectives. I was born and raised in a small city in the eastern U.S. until I was seven years old, during which time my two younger sisters were born. My parents returned to Korea intending to permanently reside in their mother country with three U.S. citizen daughters. My sisters and I attended school, made friends, and learned Korean while mostly losing all our English. In the summer of my first year in middle school, our family migrated to the deep south of the U.S. for a year-long temporary visit for my father's work. When the time came for our family to return to Korea, it was decided that I would remain alone in the U.S. under the care of a close family friend who still lived in the town where we resided as small children. Hence I flew to the east coast on my own, and the rest of my family returned to Korea. Two years later, the older of my younger sisters came to be with me; two years after that, our youngest joined us. All the while my parents lived in Korea but my mom made occasional travels to visit us.

I was technically a second generation immigrant – a U.S. born child with foreign born parents – but also a parachute kid. Carrying the title of a parachute kid led to numerous

encounters with other parachute kids. The friends I met were more legitimate parachute kids by definition: born and raised in South Korea, little to no social networks existing in the U.S., carrying their F-2 visas and I-20s, and only eligible for private school attendance. Throughout my adolescent years, my host family hosted me and my sisters and also a rotating group of other parachute kids.

I certainly recall feeling uncomfortable speaking of my quite unique living situation to my American friends in high school. I saw many of my parachute kid friends struggle with adjusting to their new lives and they often wished to return to their lives in Korea. Meanwhile, we still managed to be a happy family all together, and the struggles and hardships seemed nothing more than normal to us. Education appeared to be an important motivation for coming abroad for my friends and my family, and being surrounded by all the energy for more, better education eventually led me to pursue a degree in education policy studies in college.

I only began doubting the risks of ESA and its effects on me and my sisters when I came to college and moved out of my host family. Stepping out of those shoes gave me something of a third party perspective on the phenomenon, and presented new ideas and inquiries. Moreover, taking courses related to human development, psychology, and sociology in college raised numerous questions about my experience that once seemed so normal and even positive to me and those around me.

Collectively drawing upon these experiences and questions, I became curious in the reasons and motivations for sending a young adolescent overseas alone. The curiosity drove me to conduct scholarly research on the topic. I have learned through the literature review that my wonderings are in fact significant to the discourse of parachute kids and how they navigate their experience. As a Korean and parachute-experienced individual, I also contribute to the study with my fluency in both Korean and English and translation/interpretation skills. My background has

assisted the research process by enabling access and communication with participants in their most comfortable first language.

In this study, researcher's reflexivity was carried out before and during the research process in a deliberate manner. Two identity memos were written prior to designing the study – one in the perspective of an ESA student, another in the perspective of a researcher conducting a study on ESA students. Also, thoughtful discussions occurred throughout the weekly research meetings with my thesis advisor in order to minimize the disadvantages of research bias while maximizing the benefits of my experience in the study.

Data Selection

This study was designed to draw data from two groups involved in ESA: the participating students and their parents. Hearing the voices from both perspectives was especially important in answering the first research question, which inquires *how* and *why* parachute kids and their families engage in the early study abroad experience of a young adolescent. I first recruited the student participants and then asked them to talk to their parents about having them participate in the study. When recruiting students, I used the following criteria to identify Korean parachute kids who would be appropriate for this research purpose:

- Student was born and raised in Korea, and lived with their biological parent(s) prior to moving abroad
- Student did not spend a substantial period of his or her childhood living outside of Korea with his or her family
- Student traveled abroad from Korea for educational purposes during elementary or secondary education period
- Student was not accompanied by a parent when the child initially left Korea and arrived in the host country
- Current age of the student is between 18 and 25

The recruitment site for students occurred on the campus of a large state university. I initially established rapport with several members of a well-established Korean religious organization situated on campus. I provided an oral brief of the research purpose and asked for eligible participants who would be willing to volunteer for the study. Participant recruitment also relied on social networks outside the religious organization and by asking other Korean students to refer eligible individuals. A snowball sampling technique was used throughout the recruitment process as recruited students were asked to refer eligible participants.

When an eligible student was identified and contacted, he or she was asked whether either of their parents would be willing to participate in the study. The final recruitment decision was made only when a student had contacted at least one of his or her parents and had confirmed the parent's willingness to participate in the study. All student participants who had been initially recruited were able to confirm their parents' participation. At the time of contact, the majority of the parents were living in Korea. Two mothers who participated in this study were residing with their children in the U.S. at the time of contact, but both of them had moved in with their children several years after the participating student had arrived in the U.S. alone for ESA.

The recruitment process successfully gathered a total of 10 student-parent pairs, or 20 individual participants for the study, including 5 female and 5 male students and one parent for each student participant. All student participants except for one female participant were full-time students at the state university. For basic demographic information on the participants, refer to Appendix A.

Although all 10 parents of the participating students had initially approved their participation in the study, acquiring responses from all parents posed greater difficulties than I had anticipated. By the time the data collection process ceased, only 7 out of 10 parents of participating students had responded (refer to Appendix A).

Methods

As described earlier, this research was conducted as a generic qualitative study. One-on-one personal interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used as primary data gathering tools. In order to gather a wealth of detailed information, one-on-one interviewing was the most preferable choice of tools for data gathering. For the students, it was possible for me to conduct face-to-face interviews with each of them. For the parents, however, the geographic separation and limited contact with them restricted me from conducting interviews. Therefore, an open-ended questionnaire was designed and used to gather data from the parents. After selecting the data gathering tools for the study, I submitted an online application for approval by the Pennsylvania State University Office for Research Protections (ORP) through the Institutional Review Board's eSubmission process. Immediately upon receiving the ORP approval letter (Appendix D), student participants were recruited and interview schedules were arranged.

I developed and used a semi-structured interview protocol as a guide in face-to-face interviews. The protocol contained three broad questions with subsequent cues and follow-up questions. The initial interview protocol was tested in two pilot studies. The pilot studies were helpful for practicing my interviewing skills and receiving feedback. Several modifications were made to the interview protocol following the pilot studies. The process of developing interview questions and writing out the protocol was done in both English and Korean since the primary purpose of the document was to use it as a guide for myself, who is fluent in both languages. Appendix B shows the protocol I used for the interviews with additional translations and clarifications for the reader. All interviews with students lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. Interviewees were asked to speak in the language they preferred, and all 10 of them used Korean as the primary language in their interview while also mixing in some English. Interview participants were compensated with a five dollar Starbucks gift card as a means of appreciation.

All 10 interviews were voice recorded under each interviewee's permission. Interviews were later transcribed verbatim using Express Scribe and Fast Fox, which are transcribing software downloadable through the internet. I translated the respondent's answers in the transcripts into English. Also, I assigned each interviewee a pseudonym in the transcripts. The translated transcripts were uploaded and stored on old.saturateapp.com, which is a password-protected online tool for qualitative data analysis for coding. The online tool enabled highlighting parts of a transcript and coding them, and also provided features to organize and categorize codes. I coded inductively as I went through each transcript and highlighted significant phrases from the student responses and coded them.

The open-ended questionnaire for parents was developed as a structured survey containing several open-ended questions. The questions were designed in English initially with helpful advice from the thesis advisor. I then translated the document and asked a professor in Korea for a grammatical editing. The final questionnaire was pilot tested by asking both of my parents to each fill out the questionnaire. After receiving feedback from my parents and consulting with my advisor, I added a checkbox asking for consent on a future phone interview at the end of the questionnaire. Refer to Appendix C for the final version of the questionnaire I sent out to the parents. Prior to sending out the questionnaire via email, I included a letter explaining the background of the study and instructions for how and where to send their completed survey. I also attached the ORP approval letter with the questionnaire for further credentials. I first sent the parent questionnaire package to the participating students' email, which was obtained at the end of each interview. The student then forwarded parent questionnaire package via email to his or her parents and the parents sent the completed questionnaires to the email address provided in the instruction. As indicated in the data selection section, gathering parents' responses was significantly delayed and only 7 out of 10 parents provided their responses by the end of the data collection period. In regards to the checkbox asking for a future phone interview, 6 out of the 7

parent respondents agreed to participate in a phone interview. However, the attempt to conduct phone interviews was limited by time constraints exacerbated by response delays. For analyzing the parents' survey responses, I used the same method of inductive coding I used for the student transcripts. I printed out the completed surveys as hardcopies and data were coded by hand. I then manually added the codes to the online database on old.saturateapp.com by typing in the phrases. Two new codes emerged from the parent surveys, and the rest repeated the existing codes extracted from student interview transcripts.

A final list of 65 codes was obtained at the end of all data coding. Next, I developed 6 large categories based on overarching themes I came across during the translation and coding process. The initial 6 categories included: reasons/motivation for coming, adjustment to host family, relationship with parents, study abroad agency, coping with loneliness, and intention to stay permanently. I started out by moving around each of the 65 codes and placing them under each category, which is an available feature of old.saturateapp.com. New categories emerged and some categories were merged together as I studied the codes and clustered them by topic. For example, codes such as "host family divorce," "good relationship with host siblings," and "trouble with host mother" were grouped together under "adjustment to host family." The categories, or cluster of codes, were then grouped under a relevant heading and organized for flow. These groups of codes are represented in each subtitle of the chapters discussing the findings.

Limitations

The data sample and methodology used in this study has several limitations. Conducting a qualitative study limits the generalization of findings, since it only allows an understanding of a phenomenon based on the experiences of a small number of people. This study draws on the

experiences of 10 Korean ESA students alone, and although it provides useful insight into the parachute phenomenon, the findings do not capture the overall experience of Korean parachute kids living in the U.S.

Furthermore, participant recruitment occurred among a very homogeneous population due to time and travel constraints. Recruitment and snowball sampling took place on a university setting, and therefore all recruited participants are university graduates or attendees; this sample concentrates only on the successful population of ESA students who make their way to higher education. ESA experiences are extremely diverse, including those who complete an academically successful high school career and enter well-respected higher education institutions and those who fail to do so. This study only includes students in the former group. The experiences of ESA students who do not make their way through the American higher education system may diverge from the findings presented in this study.

Last but not the least the parent questionnaire, which was developed to capture the perspectives of the parents, did not provide especially rich data. Only 7 out of 10 agreed parents completed the survey and the responses were usually given in brief sentences or lists of words. The initial research design had planned on a future phone interview with the parents which could have enhanced the quality of the data; however, the delay in receiving parents' responses created time constraints and phone interviews could not be conducted. As a result, only a couple of recurring themes were detected and coded from the parent questionnaires. Careful planning and time management of the research agenda may improve involvement of parent participants.

Chapter 4

The Motivation to Come Early

The transnational migration of unaccompanied adolescents for long-term education can pose great risks and challenges for both the child and the family, since the child is perceived to be at a vulnerable age period in the life course. When asked what motivated them to come early as minors, study participants indicated similar reasons in which benefits were seen to outweigh the potential risks of coming abroad. It is useful to note that many of the participants were motivated to engage in ESA as a consequence of another's ESA experience. Following another's migration, also known as chain migration, was prevalent in the ESA experience of the participants; eight out of the ten participants had been involved in some form of chain migration whether as initiators or as followers. Besides chain migration, interview participants' causes and motivation for engaging in ESA were largely based on push-pull factors affecting their choices to migrate. The push factors were summarized into a critique of the competitive environment in Korea, while pull factors included elements associated with increased opportunities.

Push of the Competition

Often referred as "examination hell," the competitive exam-oriented structure of Korean k-12 education yields potential negative psychological and emotional effects on adolescents (Lee & Larson, 2000). Participants of the study resonated on the extreme degree of competition in the Korean educational environment and were generally critical of it. Students shared their complaints about experiencing severe stress resulting from the school environment. Eunbi, who left Korea after her first year in middle school, revisits her stressful experience upon entering middle school and recalls wanting to avoid it. She shares, "I was in 1st grade in middle school and

I had taken the midterm exams and I was fully aware of how much of a hell way is left ahead – if I were to be in Korea. I liked the idea of getting out of that.”

For students like Gabby, the competition was not only about getting stressed but also a narrowing of one’s potential talents and gifts. Gabby comes from Gangnam, which is a wealthy province well-known for its high quality education accompanied by rigorous academics and competition. Gabby shares her concerns regarding the Korean education system that emphasizes too much rote memorization and high-stakes exams, and indicates she is someone who is not suitable for such a system. She says:

There are some people who are fit to just study, but people can be good at different things... Some people study well, some are good athletes. But I wasn’t like a studying person. Just. I was not a right fit to that education system.

Students like Gabby who struggled to fit into the Korean education system searched for alternative systems that may be a better fit for them. For example, Gabby and Jung-woo attended alternative private schools in Korea after misadjusting to public schools, but later made the decision to go overseas when they found alternative Korean schools to be unsatisfactory. Jung-woo shares that he was disappointed by the education curriculum in the alternative school, because he found it to be little different from the existing public system and continued to struggle with the academic load and stress due to competition.

Several participants expanded their critique on Korea’s education system to the overall social structure of the country. While Helen mentions that education in Korea is difficult and academically rigorous, she expands her comparisons to the overall cultural and social differences between Korea and the US. She shares, “Korea is so competitive. You have to put someone down in order for you to rise. Here it’s not always like that. I just really like American society a lot.” Students attributed the competitive school environment to the competitive structure and culture of the overall society, which most of them found to be unfavorable. Both Jung-woo and Gabby

commented on the strict hierarchy of job stratification and socioeconomic status in the Korean society, and expressed their fear that they may not be able to fit into the upper tier levels of being a “doctor, lawyer, [or] a judge.” Jung-woo had aspired to become a sound technician in Korea, but after finding out in high school that the training course to become a sound technician is not a well-acknowledged path in Korea, he chose to come abroad and study media communications in the United States. Such students were disapproving of the overall social structure and competitive job market of Korea and were concerned that their future adult status may be at stake if they were to remain in the competitive environment.

Motivation for ESA resulting from students’ maladjustment in the Korean education system and their unfavorable outlook on the Korean society did not always hold true across all participants. For example, Jisu and Won-ho were highly academically capable students who were “already doing well” in their current school systems at the time of their migration. For these students, poor school performance and the fear of not having a chance for successful adult status were not the major components driving their movement. Jisu and Won-ho’s cases suggest the presence of other important factors that motivated students to do an early study abroad besides the push of the competition experienced in the home country.

Pull of the Opportunities

Participants associated a great degree of increased opportunities with ESA. Increased opportunities included academic achievement, future job prospects, and gaining global communication skills. A student’s positive outlook on such opportunities especially grew stronger if the student was struggling in the Korean education system. For these students, having the chance to attend a university abroad was seen as an alternative pathway to adult success. For example, Joyce shares:

I was in the middle of my studies and it was a difficult period for me, difficult in everything. My grades didn't look good and so there's a little, a little bit of trying to escape... [I thought] rather than studying really hard in Korea and going to a good university, you could study hard and go to an even better university in America, honestly. A good university in Korea is a good university in Korea but if you come out to America you could go to world ranking universities.

Students like Joyce express that attaining a degree from a university in the U.S. holds greater rewards than any other university they could academically fit in to attend in Korea. As Newman & Newman (2009) report, moving to the U.S. earlier in one's life and being enrolled in its k-12 system makes the process of attending a U.S. higher education institution easier. Therefore, participants who saw little room for future success in their k-12 career in Korea made the decision to migrate for educational purposes earlier on.

Interestingly, participants' aspiration for greater opportunities abroad was intertwined with a general belief in the American Dream. They repeatedly visited the notion of the American Dream when explaining the process of making the decision to come abroad. For example, in her interview, Helen said, "[b]ecause it's a bigger land. It's bigger and if you just go to America, you will prosper. I had that big sort of dream about America." Joyce also shares, "It felt like if I went there, then there would be an answer, and there's the American dream thing." Eunbi describes her feelings as "it wasn't a typical American dream but something similar... I thought it might be a better life to study in the U.S. than in Korea." The American Dream was especially apparent among students who had initially arrived in other countries for ESA and then later migrated to the U.S. Du-han, Samuel, Helen, and Yung had initially migrated to other English speaking nations such as the Philippines and New Zealand and eventually made their way to the U.S. a year or two later. Yung had been to Australia for a short-term early study abroad during summer vacation in elementary school, but when he reached middle school and wanted to go for a long-term study

abroad, Yung insisted on coming to the U.S. When asked why he insisted on coming to the U.S. and not perhaps Australia, he answered, “it [U.S.] has a better reputation, and I wanted to go for the best.” As these examples show, the American Dream, the notion of achieving success in the greater land of opportunities in the U.S., was strongly embraced by many of the participants.

Participants also indicated much more expansive reasons, such as wanting to gain a global experience and a global perspective, as their motivational factors. Several of the interview transcripts contained the code referring to “seeing the wide world.” In the words of Gabby:

My parents wanted me to see the... like wide world. A bigger world. Like widening my perspectives about the world... knowing that in the world there are this and that kind of people. Like that, it means to break the boundaries of my narrow thought and learn that there are many other different things in the world.

Gaining a global perspective and encountering a new culture was a common motivational factor among the parents as well. The majority of the parents indicated *globalization* as their purpose for sending their child abroad. For example, Samuel’s father wrote “for him to experience a global world,” Jung-woo’s mother wrote “hoping for his increased participation in the globalized world.” Parents indicated becoming educated, or becoming academically trained, in Western, more developed regions of the world as their purpose for sending their kids. Both Joyce and Jisu’s mothers specified better academics in the field of “math, science” and “energy” in the U.S. as their reasons.

Other aspects of gaining a global perspective and experience included getting exposure to greater diversity. Coming from a particularly homogeneous country, students mentioned being able to make friends from various nations and ethnic groups was an important aspect of their motivation to come abroad. Samuel shares that he was inspired to engage in ESA after he saw photos of his friend, who had left for the U.S., taken with his American peers. He says, “It seemed very global and I sort of envied it, and I thought maybe I want to try going abroad too.”

As Samuel's story shows, participants cherished the opportunity ESA offered to meet and interact with a variety of peoples and to enlarge their spectrum of thought.

Becoming educated as a global citizen also included becoming fluent in English, which is an invaluable skill in the job market of non-English speaking nations such as Korea. Participants recognized that learning English is generally easier at a younger age and believed that attending at least a part of the k-12 schooling in an English speaking nation will increase their capability in the English language. The wish to gain linguistic skills was reflected in the parent responses as well. Won-ho shares that his primary motivation to come was to improve his English skills which he had a difficult time learning in Korea. He had been preparing to enter a specialized high school in Korea but his "English wouldn't improve easily." Jisu also reflects on her past experience and shares, "If I had stayed in Korea, I wouldn't have been able to speak English this well. Also I am able to now communicate with a variety of people around the world." Foreign language acquisition is often believed to be faster and more effective when living in the country where the language is spoken, and thus students and parents were motivated to send their kids abroad especially at younger ages.

Another pull factor that made the ESA experience more attractive was its privileged aspect. The participants' stories of how they came to decide on the unique migration experience revealed that the phenomenon is portrayed as a privilege by the general public in Korea. The idea of living in a more developed country and the promising air of the American dream present a convincing case for an optimistic ESA experience. Moreover, the financial cost of engaging in the parachute experience, including paying for private school tuition and monthly host family fees, has limited the option to the higher rungs of the social ladder in Korea. Such matters combined, the interviewees reflected a sense that doing an early study abroad is a privilege for a young adolescent living in Korea. For example, Samuel described the parachute experience this way: "[Being able to do a study abroad is in a sense a privilege... it requires a lot of money and not

everyone can do it for sure.” Taking from Samuel’s words, multiple significant resources that are required of the early study abroad experience have leads the phenomenon to be regarded as a privilege by the general population in Korea. Hence, the privileged aspect of the experience attracted participants and their parents to engage in the risk of sending a young adolescent alone despite the costs of doing so.

Weighing the Cost-Benefit

Although the privileged aspect of ESA market the experience as a desirable one, decision making adults nonetheless recognized that the ESA experience is not a one-size-fits-all. Students’ recollection of close-by adult’s reaction and input to their decision indicate that parents and related adults were carefully considered the possible outcomes and consequences of the ESA experience.

For example, Eunbi, who came abroad at age 12 with her sister, who is 4 years older, shares that teachers and relatives were both concerned over the sister because of her older age, but were also very optimistic about her since her age was “the perfect timing to go.” Jisu and Won-ho were discouraged by teachers from going abroad because they were already high achievers in their schools. When Won-ho told his teachers he was leaving for America, his teacher reacted in a disapproving manner. He recalls:

[My] homeroom teacher I remember asked [my parents], “Why are you sending the kid abroad?” She was like, if he just does things the way he’s doing right now he’ll be set for a good college here and all will be well but why are you sending him off to ruin his life.

Decision makers also carefully considered distance, safety issues, and financial constraints in their cost-benefit analysis for the child. For example, Helen shares that her parents

were unenthusiastic about moving her from the Philippines to the U.S., because they were concerned with the increased travel distance and time that would disable them from promptly responding, and perhaps traveling to be with Helen, in case of an emergency. Du-han shares that his relatives were critical of his decision to go abroad because they had always expected him to be “the man of the house” since the death of his father many years ago, and were concerned that his absence would put his mother and sister in a vulnerable situation. As students’ recollections show, the motivation for engaging in ESA were often reevaluated and carefully measured based on each child’s individual circumstance.

For Whom the Parachute Launches: Motivated Actors

Students’ recollection of their motivation for coming reveals that not all members involved in the decision making process were equally persuaded by the push and pull factors listed above. Findings show that individuals involved in the decision making – the student, parents, and close network of adults such as teachers and relatives – were often motivated differently. In some cases, parents were more motivated to send their kids, and they actively took steps to send their kids abroad. In other families, the student him/herself desired to go abroad and made the initiation.

Parent-Driven Cases

For the case of Joyce, Jisu, Jung-woo, and Won-ho, parents made the initial suggestion for them to go abroad while the student did not have any intentions or motivation to do so. These parents were highly supportive of their child’s migration, some even beyond the student’s own intentions. Joyce explains that before her parents first suggested the idea of her going abroad, she

“didn’t have any thought at all of doing a study abroad... I had never even thought of it or even imagined that I would be doing a study abroad.” In parent-driven ESA, parents often made homestay arrangements or acquired detailed information through networks prior to asking for the child’s input. For example, Jisu says her father had planned her ESA for quite a long time on his own, arranging a host family for her through his business networks. Her father had studied away from home during his secondary schooling and was motivated to send his daughter abroad for more opportunities to advance herself. Jisu was conflicted when her father opened up the suggestion and expresses she felt “numb.”

As Joyce and Jisu’s stories show, student input was not equally contributed into the decision making when parents were more motivated than students to participate in ESA. According to the responses collected from the parent questionnaires, parents who were highly supportive of their child’s early study abroad indicated having had trust in the child’s ability to look after and to take care of him or herself. Nevertheless, some of these parents admit that they did not have substantial information prior to sending the child and was not able to properly support them throughout their ESA experience.

Student-Driven Cases

While some parents were highly supportive of their kids’ migration abroad, others were adamantly against sending their kids away. Students with such parents had fought their way through their parents’ disapproval in order to come to the U.S. for ESA. For example, Helen, who came to Boston at age 16, resisted going to school for the first two weeks of the semester, insisting that she must go to the U.S. She explains that she was motivated to enter college in the U.S. after having a self-realization about the importance of university credentials when she went to high school. She personally contacted her father’s past colleague who was living in Boston and

persistently asked him and his family to take her in so that she could attend high school there. Her parents finally gave in after a long quarrel and she earned her ticket to the U.S. Helen shares that even after the decision was made for her to go, her relatives were concerned about her safety and financial burden for her parents and continuously persuaded her to not go. Nevertheless, she resisted such discontentment and made her way overseas.

Yung is another student who displayed strong self-motivation in his ESA experience. When Yung was 14, he arrived at a decision on his own to do a study abroad, but was met with disapproval when he asked his parents. In order to communicate his strong determination to leave Korea, Yung intentionally scored a 0 on his midterm exams. He explains “If you select an answer that you’re for sure is not correct, then you could get a 0. It’s hard to get that score.” The act convinced his parents, and they promised to financially support him in the U.S. After getting their approval, Yung contacted an study abroad agency to arrange a school and a host family for himself. He had also taught himself English for a year, prior to his parents’ approval, in order to prepare for a successful ESA experience.

Another student driven case is Samuel, who initiated his ESA process by putting together a report outlining the cost and benefits – including financial components – of doing an ESA to present to his father. Samuel’s parents were not as adamantly against sending him abroad, but nevertheless the initiative was carried out by the students himself. Self-motivation in ESA is revisited in Chapter 7, where the qualities for succeeding in one’s ESA experience as defined by students is discussed. Self-motivation is found to be an important element in feeling satisfied and successful with one’s ESA experience.

Intention to Stay Permanently

Among the interviewees, only two females mentioned that their goal from the beginning was to stay in the U.S. permanently, while four participants expressed clear goals to return to Korea and the other four remained unclear. Helen is one of the students who wished to permanently live in the US from the beginning. She and Gabby had strong desires to live in the U.S. from the beginning and are still determined that they “will get a job in America and live here.”

Keeping in mind that the data sample was skewed to include parachute kids who have already entered higher education, the interviewees’ overall major goal for doing an early study abroad was to earn at least a bachelor’s degree in an American university. This goal was also reflected among the parent responses who foresaw their children attending a university in the U.S. which is believed to have stronger academics especially in the field of math and science. Nevertheless, the interviewees’ expectations for attending an American university ranged widely. Some participants arrived to the U.S. aspiring to attend an Ivy League college and were disappointed to come to a large state university, while others had the same state university at the top of their wish list for college.

Jisu, the oldest of the participants, who graduated from pharmacy school last year and is now doing her residency to become a clinical pharmacist, explains that most of the parachute kids come without the intention to stay permanently but end up wanting to stay by the time they graduate from college. Jisu herself experienced this change of mind as well. In her words:

So these kids they come and they’re goal is to go to college. But then, after staying here for so long, many want to stay longer and get their first jobs in the U.S. It’s good for experience and stuff. But really having an international students’ status, getting a job in the U.S. is really hard. Because the reality now is that it’s hard for even Americans to

get a job. So, that's why most just return to Korea. But do they get a good job in Korea? Not really. There are too many students who studied abroad these days.

Jisu voices that the returns of doing a study abroad – especially an early study abroad – may be decreasing in the Korean society due to a saturation of such type of human capital. While her thoughtful dialogue provides insights into other aspects of the early study abroad phenomenon, her words show that parachute kids' intention to permanently reside in the U.S. may shift. In this study, however, majority of the students who chose to do an early study abroad had the intention to return to Korea after earning their educational degrees in the U.S. Parents' responses also do not shed light on the possibility of permanently migrating to the U.S. through their child's ESA.

Chapter 5

Institutional Forces

Existing literature on parachute kids largely note that when families become motivated to send their children abroad, they use their personal social networks to execute the migration process (Lee, 2006; Zhou, 1998). However, besides the individual and family level effort to cultivate the experience, participants in this study reveal the role of institutional forces that accommodated their migration to the U.S. for ESA. This finding is similar to Collins' observation of the institutional infrastructure established among the Korean immigrant community in Auckland, New Zealand which he calls "bridges to learning" (Collins, 2008). Collins describes that these "bridges to learning" act as informal gateways accelerating the migration process of Koreans, especially students, into Auckland. In my findings, the institutional forces described by the students included structurally organized institutions as well as small private entrepreneurship that specifically aided the process of coming abroad and attending a foreign school system overseas. Majority of the research participants had used these institutions as their primary means of settling into the U.S. as young adolescents coming alone.

Study Abroad Agencies and Exchange Programs

Participants described study abroad agencies as highly organized institutions that essentially facilitate the details of ESA for a customer, or the student. Seven out of the ten interviewees had used the help of a study abroad agency during their ESA experience. Based on participants' observations, study abroad agencies have a predominant presence in the metropolitan area near Seoul, Korea. Joyce says she and her parents drove two hours to Gangnam,

a metropolitan province, in search for a study abroad agency. She explains, “If you go to Gangnam there are plenty of study abroad agencies.” Yung contacted an agency in his hometown, Busan, the second largest city in Korea next to Seoul. Students who visited the agencies were given a pre-test for an examination of their English ability and then consulted with a representative. The agencies provided students with a list of required documents necessary for the travel and a list of available schools and their information to choose from. As Jung-woo explains:

They give a list of schools in several different regions. It lists in which region there are what kind of schools, how many kids are in the school, and what’s the advantage and disadvantage of the school and whether there’s a lot of Korean kids in the school and all... yeah so I can choose.

Once a student selects a school of his or her choice, a host family was searched and provided for the student. Students explained that host families were determined and assigned by the agency while taking into consideration some of the preferences students were asked to list. However, students’ preferences were usually not reflected when they were assigned a host; Jung-woo believed it was more of a random process. Students received information about their host families a week or two prior to their departure, and were encouraged to contact them. In some cases, students were assisted with obtaining their F-1 student visas and other necessary documents for their travel. When the time came for students to apply for college, study abroad agencies offered help with college applications. Joyce had a representative from the agency help her with editing her application essays and making payments. Additional fees were required for help with college applications, and a couple of students opted out from receiving the extra help. Students reflected that they communicated substantially with the agency representative during their ESA duration, often more frequently than with their parents.

Two of participants had used the same study abroad agency, the Nacel International exchange program. The website of the exchange program markets itself as a language travel

industry organization with established partnerships around the world. Other students used agencies which only work with Korean adolescents and their families.

Another institutional force driving the Korean ESA phenomenon are exchange programs, which offer a limited time frame for a student to travel overseas and attend the public education system while staying with a host family for no cost. Unlike the study abroad agencies which require substantial financial compensation for their work, exchange programs are offered for free and usually have a selective component. Gabby had initially arrived to the U.S. through an exchange program and later switched into a study abroad agency when the one year contract with the program expired. She explains that exchange program students are issued a different visa, the J-1, and are allowed to attend public schools while general F-1 visa study abroad students are only allowed to attend private schools under U.S. immigration law. Gabby says that there are a lot of cases like hers, where a student initially arrives through an exchange program for a temporary stay but later switches to an F-1 visa to finish schooling in the U.S.

So a lot of kids go as exchange students but then they mostly don't return to Korea.

Because as I said before the 1 year gap is too big to make up. There are so many more reasons why you can't return. Really. You can't catch up. So when kids come as exchange students, most of them remain as international study-abroad.

As Gabby explains above, the fast-paced curriculum in Korea and its high stakes tests become obstacles for returning for many students who have spent half a semester to a year abroad. Therefore rather than providing students a short term overseas experience, exchange programs are often used as a pathway for students to settle in the U.S. for long-term education purposes.

It would be understandable to find that students who did not have any prior connections in the host country chose to come through study abroad agencies that help with locating a school and a host family for stay. In fact, students such as Yung, Du-han, Gabby, and Joyce stated that they had no social network in the U.S. prior to coming and thus chose to get help from a study

abroad agency. However, Samuel, Jung-woo, and Eunbi had close family members such as uncles had aunts living in the destination country of their choice and yet still chose to come through a study abroad agency. The students' choice to use study abroad agencies and programs as their primary means of migration over their well-established networks reflect the strong institutionalized context of ESA. Despite the dubious and questionable reliability of the agencies whose unsavory elements will be reflected in the next chapter, students and families exhibited a certain degree of trust in the agencies. The widespread use of study abroad agencies is evident and generalizable beyond the ten participants of the study; participants recalled encountering and becoming friends with numerous other parachute kids who arrived through the same study abroad agency they had used.

Established Host Families

While study abroad agencies and exchange programs are structured for-profit industries contributing to the institutional infrastructure of Korean ESA, another institutional form took the shape of a personal, private entrepreneurship. Such private entrepreneurs were individuals or families residing in the destination country who aided the ESA experience of a child in the same manner as the study abroad agencies. These individuals provided information about the schools and living environment in their community to the family in Korea and hosted a rotating group of parachute kids in their houses. Jisu and Won-ho were participants who lived in such household arrangements during the ESA experience. Jisu and Won-ho's parents were able to contact host families in the U.S. who had previously had experience hosting parachute kids. In these host families, the host mother communicated between the family in Korea and the school in the local community to help the child come overseas and obtain the necessary documents. Jisu's family came in contact with such a family through her father's business partnership and Won-ho did so

through church affiliates. Jisu and Won-ho both share that the in-and-out flow of parachute kids in their host families was frequent. Jisu describes the experience in the following quote:

So I was there for a year and then later another kid came. And then it continued and a lot of kids came in and out. The host families' kids remained the same throughout but then they took in a whole lot of other kids and they came and left. I can't remember exactly how many, but anyways it was just a lot of kids who came and left for sure... all students from Korea.

As Jisu recalls, her host family was a private household unrelated to any organized institution; the process was self-organized by the host mother who performed private transactions and entrepreneurship with the study abroad students, their families, and the local private schools which the students attended. Won-ho had several experiences living in such established host families. In one family, Won-ho lived with a roommate who was another parachute kid hosted by the family. Whenever Won-ho moved into a new host family or left one, he recalls there was always a preceding or succeeding chain of other parachute kids in the household. The flow of the number of study abroad kids in and out of the households as described by Jisu and Won-ho portray the presence of parachute-kid-host-families with entrepreneurial bent. The individual level enterprises comprise a part of the institutional features working behind the Korean ESA phenomenon.

Institutionalization's Influence on Motivation

When a certain pattern of migration becomes institutionalized, the motivation for moving tends to become more independent of its original causes (Massey et al., 1993). I find that indeed the establishment of an institutional infrastructure aiding the flow of ESA in Korea has influenced

some families to engage in the experience as part of a larger social trend, not necessarily driven by strong motivation for academics and opportunities. For example, Joyce shares:

First of all... I didn't have any thought at all of doing a study abroad. I had never even thought of it or ever imagined that I would be doing a study abroad ... I heard from mom and dad later is that everyone else around us at the time were sending their kids abroad so they thought they had to send me too. So then they asked me, would you like to go on a study abroad?

When I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by the phrase "everyone else at the time were sending their kids," she answered:

People around, people around my dad like his friends and everyone were sending their kids abroad. Because everyone around him were doing it, dad thought maybe I should send my daughter too something like that.

Joyce's example shows how the institutional forces of ESA promote and encourage the migration of individuals who may not have strong motivations to take the risk. The institutionalization of ESA may be a component driving the popularization of the ESA phenomenon taking place in Korea (Kang & Abelman, 2010).

Chapter 6

Experience upon Arrival

Parents' and students' motivation for coming, as elaborated on Chapter 4, were concentrated on student academics and opportunities for a better future adult status. During the interview, however, when participants were asked to describe their experiences after arrival, their responses were heavily focused on illustrating their living environments and struggles within, instead of elaborating on their academic experiences. Participants indicate that such struggles in the living environment are the unintended consequences of the ESA experience. Even for students like Yung, who said he had expected there to be hardship upon arrival had been prepared to face them, he reflects on his early arrival period and describes it as "so difficult... in terms of difficulty it far exceeded my expectations."

(Mal)Adjustment to the Host Family

When revisiting their experience with host families, participants recognized that the adjustment process could vary by each person based on personality differences. For example, Gabby shared that she faced a lot of trouble getting along with her host family in a rural town of Utah. However, Gabby's roommate, who was a German exchange student, got along just fine with the house environment and the hosts. Gabby, who had come from a highly urbanized area of South Korea, says "our personalities seriously didn't match at all, that house and the girl... the [host] mom only liked knitting and it was far out from civilization... the only stuff they did was like cooking, knitting, everything that I hate." Gabby eventually left the host family five months later while her German friend stayed the full year during her exchange program. Yung also shares

an example of his roommate who was a Korean parachute kid living together in the same host. In contrast to Gabby's experience, Yung adjusted very well into the family, a single parent household while his roommate struggled through the relationship and had frequent conflicts with the host mom and host brother. As these two examples show, it is important to note that students' account of their host families are sole reflections of the student, and therefore may be biased based by his or her personal taste, preferences, and characteristics.

Most host families provided a decent living condition for the students. Students were usually given a private room, often a private bathroom, and provided with food and care. However, in some cases, students experienced poor living conditions and unpleasant treatment in their host families. For example, Joyce initially arrived in Minnesota on her first year and was placed to live with a family of six kids, mom, dad, and additional two study abroad students – a total of 11 in a single two story house. She says she was given the top bed of a three-level bunk bed to sleep in. When asked how her experience was living with the host family, she gave a simple remark: "it was the worst." She complains having to have shared a single bathroom with everyone living in the family, and not being able to sit up straight on her bed. She immediately requested a change of placement to her agency representative, and was able to move to a different host family two months later. In Eunbi's experience, she was misinformed by the agency representative with a promise of her own room; when she arrived in Seattle, she was asked to share rooms with the host sister with no adjustment to her payment amount. Helen, who went to Boston, shares she felt very frustrated when her host parents kept asking her to babysit the family's two young kids throughout the day and over the weekends when they were out.

Besides encountering bad living conditions, such as crowdedness and bad hygiene, some students were put into families who were already going through internal conflicts, such as a divorce or a family illness. For example, Yung initially arrived to Boston to live with a family where the couple was going through a divorce at the time. He expresses he was not fed well and

endured high stress. He notified his agency representative and his parents and was able to move to a different household a month later. In Gabby's experience with her third host family, the single mom and her only daughter were struggling in their relationship which also negatively affected Gabby's interaction with them.

Unsatisfactory living conditions combined with the students' emotional and psychological stress often led to disputes between the student and the host family. Students reported having the most trouble with host moms; other cases included conflicts with host siblings or other study abroad students living in the house. These tensions often escalated into heated arguments and emotional breakouts. Gabby, Eunbi, and Samuel were those who disclosed sensitive information about their conflicts in detail while a couple of other students hinted on the problems and expressed remorse.

Regardless of the good or bad living condition students were put into, all participants expressed feeling difficult, weary, and stressed while adjusting to their new lives with the host family. Jisu, who arrived in Pennsylvania to live with a Korean immigrant host whom her father had networked through his business partnership, shares her feelings:

In my house [in Korea] I don't really have to care about anything, and I can do things I want to do the way I wish to do them. I'm not a sensitive person at all. Yet, since it wasn't my house, since they're not my parents, I had to become sensitive to certain things. I had to be careful... so of course it was never like home, even though they [host family] were very nice to me.

Other students shared feeling alone, left out, and unwelcomed in their host families. Such feelings became more vivid during holiday seasons and family reunions. As Jisu pointed out, participants expressed that living away from their own family and trying to fit into a new, strange one was one of the major difficulties of their ESA experience.

Frequent Movement

Maladjustment to a host family usually ended with the student moving out of the household, which created a series of unstable movements for young adolescents. Among the 10 students who participated in the study, all but one had moved host families at least once during their ESA. Jisu, who made her way to the U.S. through the personal connection of her father's business partnership, says she managed to stay in one household during her four years of high school since keeping a good relationship with her host family was crucial for her stay in the U.S. as well as for her father's business. Nonetheless, she shares that she had once seriously discussed with her parents about moving to another area during high school. Also, Jisu lived in an established host family which hosted a rotating group of parachute kids from Korea, and she shares that countless students moved in and out for temporary periods (see *Established Host Families* in Chapter 5).

Examples of the other nine participants who frequently moved around include Gabby, who changed host families six times during her the four years of high school education, Won-ho, who lived in five different host families, and Eunbi, who lived in three different ones – during high school only. Eunbi reflects on her experience narrates her feelings during each move:

I remember how I felt when I first left [Korea]. When I went to Arizona... More than fear I was like, 'yay I'm going to a different place!' That was it... when I moved from Arizona to Seattle I was a little afraid... Now when I moved from Seattle to New York, at this point I was like 'oh I'll probably keep doing this from now on. During my early study abroad, unless I go to a university for four years, I'll just be moving around like this the whole time.' I pretty much resigned myself to it. I cleared my mind.

Although the frequent movement can be emotionally draining for kids as Eunbi describes, the change was often better since it provided an opportunity for them to search and try a different

host family who could be a better fit for them. Students like Gabby, Yung, Duhan, and Samuel were able to find a host family they enjoyed being with and “felt like family,” once they moved out from the family they were struggling in.

Reasons for moving were not always due to trouble or conflict with the host family, although such accounts were most frequently cited. When Jung-woo contacted his agency representative, it was because he was getting along too well with the family members. Jung-woo’s initial host had three young kids, ages six, seven, and nine at the time. He says, “they were cute really cute. If I sit in my room to start studying, they’d open the door and come sit on my lap... and beg me to play Nintendo with them. It was fun but since I was becoming a senior, I thought I shouldn’t do this anymore.” Jung-woo enjoyed being with his host family, but wanted to gain more personal time to focus on his academics. He later moved in to live with an elderly couple who were living alone.

Students changed host families more frequently than changing schools; for example, Gabby, who had six different host families, only moved her school twice when she moved from Utah to Minnesota at the end of her exchange program. When students changed schools, it was due to change of location or in search for stronger academics.

School and Academic Adjustment

Unlike the experience with the host families, students described their school life and academics in a much more positive light. Although students expressed difficulty learning English – as Samuel says, “English is still difficult” –, most adjusted well into the school life and met helpful teachers and staff who accommodated their needs. The frustration of language incompetency bothered them when they couldn’t fluently communicate with peers and teachers, and some often resorted to hanging out with only other Korean parachute kids in the school.

Meanwhile, students tried to integrate into their schools by joining music or sports programs to increase their interaction with friends and the school, which were quite successful. All participants of the study had attended and graduated from small scale religious private schools in various geographic locations, including suburban neighborhoods, rural towns, and urban cities. Gabby was the only exception of having experience in a public school since she initially arrived through a J-1 visa supported by an exchange program.

Students described their academic experiences in the American schools to be “way easier compared to Korean high schools,” as put into words by Joyce. Helen shares that she was more stressed about studying for the SAT exams and the TOFEL rather than her school grades. She explains that her “school grades was not a problem. I got good grades. But SAT, SAT 2, they were a mess.” In fact Jisu, Joyce, and Eunbi intentionally moved to a different school for more challenging academics and advanced curriculums. Eunbi comments on her past school in Seattle and criticizes its low educational quality. Joyce moved to a neighboring private school that offered AP courses which she calls were “a little more tough” compared to her previous school. Jisu described a similar experience to that of Joyce. Overall, students portrayed a positive and easy-going outlook on their academic experience during high school and took substantially less time elaborating on the topic during the interview. The difficulties associated with ESA were heavily inclined to their experience with host families and less on academics. Won-ho appropriately sums up the pattern by saying,

Because when you're in Korea, you have family. So when you're in Korea, academics is at the top of your list. Because everything else your parents take care of. But the moment you come abroad on your one, the student alone has to take care of everything – not only academics but everything. So there are people who help you and take care of you but honestly unless they're your parents, it's different so naturally the way you think really expands beyond just focusing on academics... when you're in Korea,

they're your parents and everything was taken for granted and you're used to that. But for the first time now you're away from your parents and exposed to the world on your own. Well, things change and they all look different when you do that [ESA].

Won-ho's quote provides a nice transition into the next category of findings.

Relationship Dynamics with Parents

During their ESA experience, participants experienced changes not only in the destination country but also back in their homes. Literature on parachute kids note that students sometimes face challenges in maintaining an intact relationship with their parents (Tsong & Liu, 2009; Zhou, 1998), and similar findings were discovered in this study. Additionally, my findings surfaced gender differences in how males and females had contrasting views about their relationship with parents as influenced by ESA which will be elaborated later in this section.

Students express growing distant from and lacking communication with their parents over the course of their ESA. Students recount that they frequently communicated with their parents in the first few weeks of their departure, but the number of calls and emails decreased as their duration away from home prolonged. Intentional frequent communication was enforced in the case of Jisu, whose mother called her every day by phone and later through Skype in order to keep in touch with her daughter. In most cases, however, students report calling their parents once or twice a week, or even per month. Helen, who stayed with a Korean host family, says she and her parents were discouraged from calling each other by the host so that she could focus on her studies. Helen also shares, "my parents didn't call me often because they didn't want [the host] to think they didn't trust him. So they just didn't call." Helen called her parents approximately once every three months during her two years of living in the U.S. for ESA.

The separation by distance during their adolescence years made it harder for parents to be involved in the everyday lives of their teenage children, and the majority of the parents indicated in the questionnaire that not having their child close by and not being able to meet the emotional needs of their child as parents were negative aspects of ESA. Two parents expressed their guilt feelings about their decisions and recommended that it is better for an adolescent to live together with the parents than to be apart. The downfall of the physical separation between the parents and their adolescent children is portrayed in Eunbi's testimony below:

[S]ince we were apart for such a long time honestly the only way to communicate was through talking on the phone. But they couldn't see what I was struggling through, and it was the time period when my thoughts and everything was developing, development was still going on, but then mom and dad couldn't watch that from nearby, so as a result we really don't know much about each other... I mean my parents gave birth to me but they are still two different individuals. I feel like I need to learn more about them. Just because I'm their daughter by birth doesn't mean I know everything about them automatically. And we didn't have that time. So to tell you the truth I still don't know anything much about my mom and dad. So we collide on a lot of things and stuff. I mean I understand it with my head that we had this gap, but sometimes I get disappointed at how much my parents really don't know about me.

Embedded in Eunbi's response is remorse on the lack of communication between the child and the parent, which was a constant theme among all participants' experiences. Even Jisu's mom, who dutifully talked to her daughter for at least 20 to 30 minutes a day every day, wrote in her response that "communication is difficult since [the child is] entrusted to become educated by someone else."

Apart from the physical separation that made staying in touch difficult, students themselves chose to conceal information from their parents in many cases. Du-han, who fell into

delinquent behaviors with his friends during the first year of his ESA in the Philippines, frankly responded, “to be honest I liked spending time like that... [so] I didn’t tell my parents... I called them once a month.” Gabby and Joyce say they intentionally chose to not disclose all information about their personal struggles to their parents because they were afraid doing so would worry them even more. Gabby shares, “already she [mom] worries so much about me and then imagine I tell her I’m going through all these troubles, then just how much more would she worry. I didn’t tell much to mom.” Joyce reflects back to her actions and chastises herself for staying in touch too closely with her mom. She says:

I called her every day. Every day I would call and cry. And mom got really sad too. I was young back then and I wasn’t able to think about my mom’s feelings. I wasn’t able to think that if I acted this way my mom would be really disheartened.

Interestingly, the findings reveal that participants, who expressed feeling distant, lonely, and regretful about their consequential parental relationship due to ESA were mostly female. All female participants contemplated on loss of the relationship with their parents, while male participants did not comment much on the topic or rather casted an enthusiastic light on the relationship dynamic. For example, Yung replied that he became closer with his parents by explaining that “we [my parents and I] stopped fighting often, since we only see each other like once every year.” Samuel, who had initially expressed feeling lonely in the absence of his parents, later commented that he overall “became a better son,” and that the relationship improved. Du-han and Jung-woo both answered being away from family was not a struggle for them. When Won-ho was asked the same question about his relationship with parents, he hesitated for a moment and started his sentence with, “Since I’m a son...” Won-ho’s words pose the possibility that stereotypes about gender roles may have affected the male participants’ feelings and attitudes regarding their separation with their parents.

While living apart from each other may have drifted the family's relationship, students and parents indicated having a growing appreciation for each other over the years of staying apart. The students especially the students displayed a sense of gratitude and indebtedness to their parents. Helen expresses:

I am able to understand my parents more now.... I used to take everything for granted. Never gave a thought about how this money was being made or how hard my parents were working to provide all of these for me. Maybe I became more mature so I was able to understand my parents' perspectives a little better – how much they were pouring out their support and love to send me to the states at so much cost and risk. So I came to understand those parts, and even though my parents gave me only a little amount of allowances, I never resented but was always thankful.

The indebted feeling and appreciation for their parents' sacrifices became a guilt feeling sometimes, and students often felt burdened to pay off the investment their parents were putting in for them. Joyce questions her ability to reach her parents' expectations when she says:

[M]om and dad took out their future savings and poured it all to me... compared to the money they put in, I feel like I haven't done much and I didn't work hard enough. I kind of feel like they wasted their money. When I graduate from college, I should get a good job and pay them off at least some. But I wonder if I'd be able to do that.

Other students concurred with Joyce's feelings and related the feeling to having high aspirations to become successful in the future so that they could pay back their parents. However, it is important to note that, the majority of the participants in this study indicated the financial burden to be a critical struggle in their family during their ESA experience. If data were to be collected from parachute kids of significantly wealthy families, as those who appear in Zhou's (1998) work of wealthy Chinese parachute kids living in Southern California, the kinds of burden

and feelings of indebtedness shared among the participants in this study may be portrayed differently.

Coping with Loneliness

Although this study is not focused on the psychological consequences of early study abroad adolescents, students' loneliness was a constant theme across all participants when describing their ESA experience. Feeling lonely emerged in all aspects of the participants' experiences, including host family experiences, being in school, learning English, and living away from parents and family. For example, Samuel shares below:

I never knew I could be so lonely, and at the time I couldn't speak English well and I'm not an outgoing person so it was hard... I was really lonely. I was just plain lonely. And it wasn't like because I didn't have any friends or because there wasn't anyone to take care of me. It was just the fact that I wasn't in my country, I wasn't with my family all this and that plus handling interpersonal relationships and all that together so... not being able to say what I wanted to say... all together combined I was just lonely and that was most difficult"

Samuel's illustration describes the magnitude of the recurrent theme – loneliness – that appeared in the interviews of all 10 early study abroad students. When asked which aspect of their study abroad experience was most difficult, students' responses generally fell into two categories: host family struggles and loneliness. The two categories were interconnected, since host family struggles paralleled with feeling lonely and helpless.

An advantage of interviewing current adults who participated in ESA as adolescents is that they are able to provide a reflection of their own experience from an adult's point of view. Jisu, who is the oldest of the sample, revisits her childhood loneliness and says, "I had to be left

alone in a totally new environment as a young one, which was very traumatic overall but I didn't realize it was like that at the time." The traumatic experiences often left severe emotional damages to kids like Won-ho. Won-ho shares:

at one point, I closed my heart. So I stopped making close relationships. So the time I had left I started spending a lot of time on my own. I started playing [computer] games instead. I only played games like crazy.

Eunbi shares during her ESA experience, even the feeling of becoming a responsible independent adult felt lonely and unenthusiastic. She explains that when she had completed a task such as official paper works and payments by herself in the U.S., "Instead of feeling proud, I thought, 'I have to do this by myself from now on. I'm alone. I'm away from my parents.' The moment this realization comes, there's that lonely feeling that unfolds."

My lack of expertise in the field of adolescence psychology limits further interpretation of the participants' shared experience of loneliness their ESA experience; however, it is evident from the analysis and above examples that coping with loneliness was a major struggle for them. As participants have shared, the lonely feeling largely stemmed from separation from immediate family members and migration away from one's country of origin.

Chapter 7

Qualities for Succeeding and Satisfaction of the Experience

Keeping in mind that all samples in this study were successful examples of parachute kids transitioning into American higher education, participants idealized on several qualities and characteristics that contribute to a successful ESA experience. While some interviewees mentioned financial assets and networks to have an important role in determining a successful ESA, these “ideal qualities” largely pertained to the student’s level of self-motivation and mental preparation. Self-motivation included having personally driven high goals, strong will, and vision. Mental preparation was described in close connection to self-motivation, for students believed that self-motivated students would have greater mental ability to fight through the difficulties they face upon arrival and remain persistent throughout the experience.

Arriving at the decision to engage in ESA takes place while the participating student is yet an adolescent, and it is difficult to judge whether a child in that age can have a strong input in making such a drastic decision. Such feelings were reflected by participants like Joyce, who admits that she was “too young back then” to know any better. However, other participants in this study are clear examples of student level motivation to ESA. Helen and Yung are the two parachute kids who resisted parents’ initial disapproval and successfully persuaded them to support their ESA. More details of Helen and Yung’s stories have been shared in Chapter 4. In fact, while Helen and Yung also idealized certain qualities that lead to a successful ESA, they identified themselves as possessing some of these characteristics. Interestingly, when students were looking back on their ESA experiences during the interview, those who had identified themselves as possessing these characteristics, such as Helen and Yung, displayed greater

satisfaction on their ESA experience while students who admitted lacking these qualities were more regretful of their overall experiences.

Ideal Qualities

Students stressed the importance of having a strong mental ability as they described their past struggles of being a parachute kid. The participants in this study experienced high levels of stress from living with, and navigating through, multiple host families on top of struggling with the stress of acculturating to a foreign culture with limited language proficiency and extreme loneliness at a vulnerable developmental period of their life cycle. Based on these recollections, participants shared that having a resilient character is a crucial determinant of success in ESA which is often underappreciated by families when they consider sending their kids abroad. Gabby shares her concerns for other parachute kids who naively come to the U.S. just as she had done in the past: “I feel like a lot of kids just think ‘yay I’m going on a study abroad. I get to live abroad’ like that and just come. But then, uh, it’s really something much more difficult than what you think.” Gabby expresses that she never anticipated living through such instability – Gabby changed host families six times during her four years of high school in the U.S. Du-han echoes that perspective and emphasizes that a student must be prepared to face the psychological and social changes resulting from physical separation from family. He explains that during ESA:

You’re going through so much difficulty and yet there’re not many people around you to actually help you... But that’s the reality.... So if you’re going to do a study abroad, you really need to examine your mental state first.

Exactly what comprises a right kind of “mental state” for ESA was expressed in different ways by the participants. Students mentioned having high goals, such as targeting a prestigious university, and having self-control to effectively manage time and money in the absence of parental supervision. Being self-motivated with a strong vision and will to come abroad was

repeatedly reflected in the participants' responses. Below Yung explains the importance of having self-motivation in one's ESA experience:

You have to come with your own motivation.... Because if you come out of your own will, then that's happiness and you feel accomplished when you achieve things here and the world just looks different. You're gonna try to not lose the fight against yourself and you realize you're thankful to even be fighting through that struggle. But I've seen a lot of cases where kids come because their parents suggest this and then they misuse their freedoms... [I]f you don't have a strong motivation, even if you have success it's not a success. You could get good grades and become successful because you're smart but it's more like a failure.

In the above quote, Yung not only describes the alleviating affects of self-motivation on a student's ESA experience, but also suggests its influence on an individual's satisfactory outlook on his or her ESA outcomes.

Personal Satisfaction of the Experience

The last two sentences of Yung's quote provide an interesting perspective on the definition of ESA success. While researchers have looked into students' prior grades as predictors of ESA achievement (Kwon & Lee, 2007), Yung suggests that the degree of self-motivation may have an effect on parachute kids' personal satisfaction of their ESA experiences. This study finds convincing support for Yung's observation. Participants who portrayed higher levels of self-motivation expressed more positive feelings about their experiences. For example, Helen, who had resisted going to school for two weeks until her parents finally gave in to send her to the U.S., describes ESA as a "must have" experience that teaches worthwhile life lessons earlier in one's life. In her own words:

I think it's valuable... in a way you're getting the opportunity to reflect on yourself much earlier than any other high school students who just stay with family and don't go. And you get to know a little more about yourself and more about the world. It's a gift you get to have. And I think those lessons can be a big advantage to people as they live.

While all students admitted to struggling with difficulties and hardships, self-motivated students expressed that ESA is a difficult yet worthwhile experience. The language was switched, however, for the students who arrived with less self-motivation. These students usually had greater parental influence in the decision to come abroad, and they displayed more conflicted feelings about their overall outcome despite their current academic and social success in the U.S. Such students expressed that ESA is a privileging opportunity yet introduces too much unintended consequences. Jisu, who was an academically successful student prior to her ESA, who graduated as a doctor of pharmacy with honors and is currently a clinical pharmacist in training, nevertheless began the interview by explaining that there are definite "gains" and "costs" to ESA. The gains, as she describes, include opportunities for professional development and building a global pool of networks since ESA enables easy transition into American higher education along with English language acquisition. The "costs" include emotional and psychological stress from not living with family, loss of intimacy with parents and siblings, as well as financial expenditures. As she progressed through the interview, however, Jisu arrived at a decision that the costs were greater than the benefits. She explains that the cost associated with emotions and relationships with family "also affect the human character. But then that [human character] can also affect your professional life in the long run. So I think it can be said there are more things you lose." At the time of the interview, Jisu's 18 year old younger brother had also migrated to the U.S. for ESA, following his sister's example. However, this time Jisu's mother

followed to stay with him, so that she could provide more parental supervision and care for her adolescent son.

In my findings, Yung's implication on the self-motivation piece appears to have an important role in parachute kids' psychological well-being and satisfaction of their experience. This study did not attempt to examine motivation as a focal element, but this study's findings suggest researchers might explore the concept in more detail as it pertains to ESA students.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Discussion

Scholarly attention to the parachute kid phenomenon has been rising in recent years in both the host country and the home country, and this has contributed to the knowledge of a select group of adolescents living through quite a unique experience (Byun, 2010; Cho, 2007; Kang, 2012; Kang & Abelman, 2011; Lee, 2006; Tsong & Zhou, 2009). This study expands on the understandings regarding *why* and *how* these adolescents and families come abroad by examining their motivation, pathways, institutional arrangements, and experiences onward. My research parallels the literature (Lee, 2006; Tsong & Zhou, 2009; Zhou, 1998), with findings that various push-pull factors were at work when participants and their families arrived at the decision to engage in ESA (Zhou, 1998). As Kang and Abelman discuss in the article (2011), these factors seem to have stemmed from various social, political, and economic forces in Korea. Students mainly referred to the competitive and homogeneous nature of the education system and the lack of job opportunities in contemporary Korean society as what motivated them to leave. Also, parents and students deeply embraced the idea of globalization, which was a political agenda of the Korean government after the economic fall of the late 1990s (Kang, 2012; Kang & Abelman, 2011). The pursuit of becoming global citizens tied in with the notion of the American Dream was reflected in the students' motivation for coming. An interesting aspect regarding motivation in this study is the role of the different motivated actors in the decision making process. In some cases, parents were more motivated to send their child abroad and initiated the process. In other cases, the child was more motivated and took the steps to persuade their parents. Future research is encouraged to study the role of different actors and student input in the decision making process of ESA.

Besides confirming the push-pull factors influencing the decision to engage in ESA, findings also reveal the existence of an institutional infrastructure established in the ESA phenomenon in Korea. These institutional forces, which were study abroad agencies, exchange programs, and established homestays, are similar to the institutional infrastructure found among the Korean immigrant community in Auckland, New Zealand (Collins, 2008). In both Collins' study and this research, for-profit industries and private entrepreneurs were accommodating the movement of Korean migrants, particularly parachute kids in this study, by providing information and assistance useful in their migration process. Findings suggest that the Korean ESA phenomenon is continuing its practices through the assistance of organized agencies and firms that facilitate the movement. I relate this aspect of the Korean ESA phenomenon to the institutional theory of migration, which Massey et al. uses to explain the perpetuation of international migration (Massey et al., 1993). According to Massey, once a flow of international migration has begun, "private institutions and voluntary organizations" as well as "entrepreneurs and institutions" arise to accommodate the needs of the large number of people who seek to migrate to the capital-rich host countries. Such institutions and organizations are described as "dedicated to promoting international movement for profit" (Massey et al., 1993, p.450). While previous discussion of push-pull factors associated with the motivation to engage in ESA explores individual and family level forces driving the phenomenon, my findings support the claim that institutional infrastructure is also propelling the ongoing ESA phenomenon in Korea.

Findings show that students who came through study abroad agencies were prone to experience conflicts in their host families and multiple transitions in living spaces. Student responses show that these programs operate partially in the U.S. in conjunction with Korea; it may be necessary for U.S. policymakers to perform evaluative work on such agencies and host families to ensure adolescents' safety and well-being during their stay in the U.S. According to the summary of the institutional theory of migration defined by Massey and his colleagues, the

institutional forces accommodating the flow of migration are often established as “underground market[s]” (Massey et al., 1993, p. 450). With limited information on study abroad agencies acquired through this research, it is not appropriate to propose that such agencies operate as a black market system. Findings reveal a mix of both positive and negative experiences for students who used the help of these agencies. Therefore, further exploration and evaluation of the programs in both Korea and the U.S. are necessary.

Stress from living away from family and adjusting to host families combined with acculturative stress were shared difficulties experienced by all participants during their ESA experience. Participants specified feeling lonely and coping with intense loneliness to have been a major difficulty throughout their experience as parachute kids. Students’ reflections on their relationship dynamics with parents reveals an interesting paradox; while some students, largely females, felt they were drifting away and losing intimacy from their parents, other students, largely males, felt their relationship had strengthened due to decreased conflicts and increased appreciation for each other. The majority of the participants had occasional contacts with their parents, such as talking to them over the phone once a week or every two weeks or even once a month, and a few had regularly stayed in touch with their parents on a daily basis.

While participants’ recollection of their psychological and emotional struggles during the ESA experience could be quite alarming, participants’ experiences in the U.S. school system were unanimously positive and optimistic. This is reasonable considering that parachute kids come abroad primarily for education purposes and are more prepared to adjust well to schools, while living arrangements and other emotional difficulties associated with it are hardly expected. Also, it should be noted that due to their F-1 visa status, all participants in the sample attended private schools, which were small-scale and mostly religious. Coleman and his colleague’s work on private and catholic schools (1982), indicates the characteristics of religious private schools may have provided a better environment for ESA students to adjust compared to attending large public

schools. Moreover, the influx of international students into such small private schools would provide additional financial resources, thus incentivizing teachers and administrators to provide proper assistance to these students.

An additional finding discussed in this study is the role of self-motivation and its connection to students' satisfaction of the ESA experience. Drawing from a small number of participants, this study finds that students who were highly self-motivated to come abroad prior to their ESA came away with a greater feeling of success and satisfaction from their experience overseas. Future studies stemming from this observation should concentrate on exploring the relationship between ESA students' self-motivation and factors such as student outcome, emotional health, and their perception of the experience.

The participants in this study experienced ESA in rural, urban, and suburban cities of the U.S., which suggests that the parachute kid phenomenon in the U.S. is quite widespread across the country. To ensure safe and healthy adjustment of this population, policymakers should pay attention to the institutional infrastructures located in the U.S. Policies for home-stay eligibility requirements and evaluation of such agency operations may be necessary in the future as these pathways continue to act as major mechanisms bringing unaccompanied adolescents to the U.S. Creating programs in schools to address the special needs of parachute kids based on their unique circumstances may improve the transition process and reduce the stress associated with it. Researchers in Canada have begun developing such strategies to accommodate the large number of parachute kids attending schools in urban cities of Canada (Popadiuk, 2010). Finally, while this study focuses only on Korean ESA students, research on ESA students from other participating nations should continue to develop and to enrich the discourse on parachute kids living in the U.S.

Appendix A

Student Participant Background Information and Contacted Parent List

No.	Sex	Pseudonym	Place of birth	Initial destination of arrival for ESA	Age when left Korea	Participated parent
1	F	Jisu	South Korea	State College, PA, United States	15	Mother
2	F	Helen	South Korea	Boston, MA, United States	16	n/a
3	F	Joyce	South Korea	Saint Paul, MN, United States	16	Mother
4	F	Eunbi	South Korea	Mesa, AZ, United States	12	Mother
5	F	Gabby	South Korea	Salt Lake City, UT, United States	15	Father
6	M	Won-ho	South Korea	Willow Grove, PA, United States	14	Mother
7	M	Yung	South Korea	Boston, MA, United States	15	n/a
8	M	Du-han	South Korea	Baguio, Philippines	14	n/a
9	M	Samuel	South Korea	Auckland, New Zealand	15	Father
10	M	Jung-woo	South Korea	Reading, PA, United States	16	Mother

Appendix B

Interview Questions with Student Participants

Introduction 인터뷰에 참여해주어서 너무 고마워요. 인터뷰의 목적은 주로 아시아에서 많이 일어나는 대학시절 전 조기유학생들에 대해 더 알아보고자 하는 것이에요. 중고시절에 혼자 유학을 하게 된 사람으로서 당신의 경험담이 많은 도움을 줄 것입니다. *Thank you so much for participating in the interview. This study aims to understand the phenomenon of pre-collegiate study abroad that takes place in East Asian countries. As a student who has a pre-collegiate study abroad experience, your experience will be a really big help for me.*

1. 미국에 어떻게 오게 되었는지, 유학을 하게 된 process 를 story-telling 하듯 이야기
Tell me about the process of how you came to the US to study abroad.
 - a. 언제, 어디, 호스트 *when, where, host family*
 - b. 지인 *Social network*
 - c. 학교 생활 *School life*
 - d. 유학 계획/미래계획 *initial future plans*
 - e. 부모님의 반응 *Parents/relatives' reactions*

2. 유학을 하는 과정에 있어서의 느낌을 얘기해주세요.
Tell me about the experience of studying abroad as a child.
 - a. 떠날 당시 느낌, 와서의 느낌, 기대와 현실의 차이
Initial feelings – feelings after arriving – initial expectations and your reality
 - b. 지금 돌아볼 때의 느낌 *Your feelings now*
 - c. 다른 사람에게도 추천하겠나? 왜? *Would you recommend it to anyone else?*

3. 부모님과 떨어져 지낸것에 대한 이야기
What was it like to be not living with your parents?
 - a. 소통 방법 *How did you stay in touch?*
 - b. 자녀와의 관계에 어떤 영향을? *How has the experience affected your relationship with them?*

그외에 말해주고 싶은것? *Anything else?*

Appendix C

<조기유학생 부모 질문지>

Early Study Abroad Students' Parent Questionnaire

작성일: __월 __일 20__년

자녀의 성명:

부 ()/ 모 ()

1. 아이를 유학 보내는 기회에 대해 어떻게 알게 되셨는지 설명해주세요.
2. 아이를 유학보낼 지역을 어떻게 결정하게 되셨나요? 조기유학을 보낸 과정에서 활용한 정보들은 무엇들이었나요?
3. 아이를 유학 보내기에 앞서 미리 준비한 부분은 어떤 것들이었습니까?
4. 아이를 유학 보내게 된 목적이나 취지는 무엇이었나요?
5. 아이를 보내기 전의 기대와 보내고 난 후의 실제적 현실이 기대하신 것과 같았습니까? 아니면 달랐나요? 설명 부탁드립니다.
6. 아이의 유학에 있어서 가장 고려하고 염려했던 부분들은 무엇이었나요? 유학을 보내고 또 지속하는 부분에 있어서의 한계점들은 무엇이었나요?
7. 아이가 해외에 가 있는 동안에 어떻게 서로간의 소통을 유지할 계획이셨나요?
8. 본인 또는 가까운 가족/친척 중 학생시절에 가족을 떠나 먼 거리에서 유학을 한 사례가 있나요? 어떤 사례들이었나요?
9. 아이의 조기유학이 아이에게 어떤 영향을 미쳤다고 생각하십니까?

10. 어려서 떠난 아이의 유학생활(유학생활)이 본인(부모)과 아이의 관계에 어떤 영향을 끼쳤습니까? 가족 전체에 미친 영향을 무엇이라고 보십니까?

* 위의 질문들 외에 아이의 조기유학 경험에 대하여 말씀하시고 싶은 것들을 적어주세요.

가능하시다면 10 분 정도의 간단한 전화 인터뷰에 응해주실 수 있나요?

네() 또는 아니오()

응해주실 경우에 전화 연락처: _____

전화 통화가 가능한 가장 편한 시간을 적어주세요: (주중/한국시간) _____

(주말/한국시간) _____

<조기유학생 부모 질문지> English Translation***Early Study Abroad Students' Parent Questionnaire***

Date: ____/____/20____

Name of your child:_____

Father() / Mother()

1. Please explain how you became aware about the possibility of sending your child to study abroad for pre-college education?
2. How did you come to decide where to send your child? Please describe the resources you used to help you make your decision
3. What, if any, preparations did you make prior to sending your child abroad?
4. What were some of the main goals you wished to achieve by sending your child abroad?
5. How did your expectations prior to sending your child and the experience after sending your child change, or remain the same?
6. What were some of your greatest concerns when sending your child abroad? What were some of the potential limitations in sending your child abroad and keeping them abroad?
7. When your child went abroad, what were your plans to continue to be in touch with them?
8. Have you or any of your immediate family members traveled far away from home for pre-college education? For example, did you or any of your siblings move nearer to a larger city by themselves to go to primary or secondary school?
9. How has the parachute migration experience shaped your child?

10. How has the parachute migration experience shaped your relationship with the child? What effects has the experience had on your family?

* Is there anything else you would like to share about your child's early study abroad experience that weren't addressed in the questions above? Please feel free to elaborate on them.

Would you be willing to participate in a 10 minute phone interview with us regarding your child's early study abroad experience? Yes () No ()

If Yes, please provide your daytime phone number: _____

If Yes, which time frame would you prefer us calling you?

Weekdays/KST: _____

Weekends/KST: _____

Appendix D

IRB Letter of Approval

PENNSSTATE



Vice President for Research
Office for Research Protections

The Pennsylvania State University
The 330 Building, Suite 205
University Park, PA 16802

Phone : (814) 865-1775
Fax: (814) 863-8699
Email : orprotections@psu.edu
Web : www.research.psu.edu/om

Date: December 14, 2013

From: The Office for Research Protections - FW A#: FW A00001534
Jodi L. Mathieu, Research Compliance Specialist

To: Jennifer Lee

Re: Determination of Exemption

IRB Protocol ID: 44296

Follow-up Date: December 13, 2018

Title of Protocol: Parachute Kids from Korea: Institutionalized Context of k-12 Early Study Abroad Migration

The Office for Research Protections (ORP) has received and reviewed the above referenced eSubmission application. It has been determined that your research is exempt from IRB initial and ongoing review, as currently described in the application. You may begin your research. The category within the federal regulations under which your research is exempt is:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Given that the IRB is not involved in the initial and ongoing review of this research, it is the investigator's responsibility to review [IRB Policy III "Exempt Review Process and Determination"](#) which outlines:

- What it means to be exempt and how determinations are made
- What changes to the research protocol are and are not required to be reported to the ORP
- Ongoing actions post-exemption determination including addressing problems and complaints, reporting closed research to the ORP and research audits
- What occurs at the time of follow-up

Please do not hesitate to contact the Office for Research Protections (ORP) if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your continued efforts in protecting human participants in research.

This correspondence should be maintained with your research records.

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ACADEMIC VITA

JENNIFER LEE

3302 Plaza Drive, State College, PA 16801
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EDUCATION

Integrated Undergraduate Graduate Studies	2012 to present
MA The Pennsylvania State University <i>Education Theory and Policy</i> , Advisor: Mindy Kornhaber <i>Comparative and International Education Dual Degree</i> , Advisor: David Baker	2012 to present
BA The Pennsylvania State University Schreyer Honors College <i>Education and Public Policy</i> major, <i>Sociology</i> minor Cumulative GPA: 3.96	2009 to present

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Immigrant children education in emergent immigrant countries, diversity and multicultural education, education effect on society, demography, and childhood studies

ACADEMIC RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

American Education Research Association (AERA) Undergraduate Student Education Research Training Workshop , Philadelphia, PA <i>Selected applicant</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Participated in the training workshop led by senior scholars involving an overview of education research design across disciplines, research methods, and research input in policy making.	April 2014
Comparative and International Education Society Conference , Toronto, ON, Canada <i>First author presenter and participant</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Presented as first third author of the proposal titled “(De)constructing images of childhood during conflict” in collaboration with Renata Horvatek, PhD candidate at the Pennsylvania State University.	March 2014
Dr. David Baker Research Team Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA <i>Participating student and progress sheet note taker</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Observing member and progress sheet note taker of the weekly research team meeting with Dr. David Baker and senior graduate level researchers on various working papers.	2012 to Present
Global Penn State Conference , Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA <i>Student presenter and participant</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Presented on the proposal titled “Building a Penn State/Brazil Connection” as part of the Short Term Embedded Programs session.Collaborated with Professor Jason Whitney.	September 2013

Comparative and International Education Society Conference, New Orleans, LA

March 2013

Third author presenter and participant

- Presented as a third author of the proposal titled “Does Contest Mobility Inflate Aspirations as 'Fantasy'? The Differentiated Process of Stratification by Institutional Context.”
- Collaborated with Haram Jeon and Hyowon Park, PhD candidates at the Pennsylvania State University

JOB EXPERIENCE

Teach For America – Chicago, Illinois

June to July 2014

Early Childhood Education Teacher

- Accepted to the 2014 Teach For America Corp
- Teach preschool aged children 3-5 years old at a community based organization in Chicago
- Develop vision and lesson plans for classrooms
- Participate in research-based professional development workshops

Institute of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

June 2013 to May 2014

Graduate Work Study Student, Supervisor: Thomas Houck

- Performed phone interviews with graduated students of adult education programs.
- Designed, distributed, and analyzed surveys for adult education teachers.
- Assembled presentation materials and handbooks for training workshops and conferences.

Sisa English Academy, Pohang, South Korea

June 2013

English Teacher

- Designed class activities for 9 classes a week.
- Taught each 40 minutes classes which were arranged according to grade levels, ranging from third graders to ninth graders.

[SOC 422] World Population Diversity, Pennsylvania State University

August 2012 to May 2013

Teaching Assistant, Supervisor: Dr. Vanitha Dayananda

- Assisted course materials and PowerPoint lecture presentations
- Took responsibility for grading student work and provided communication to a body of 20 students. Organized and led review sessions. Finalized grades.

Handong International School, Pohang, South Korea

May to June 2012

Assistant to the Assistant Principal, Supervisor: Timothy Northe

- Summarized the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation process document for the administration staff
- Communicated with the staff within the school and in other schools to execute the annual joint music festival for international schools in the southern province of South Korea
- Created an excel spreadsheet mapping students' responses to the Spirit Week survey

Hangdong Global University, Pohang, South Korea

May to June 2011

Summer Teaching Assistant, Supervisor: Lynn Kuitems Henk

- Assisted an American ESL professor with her Beginning Level English class, English Composition and Grammar class, and a graduate level course in Linguistics and Translation
- Organized class materials, graded student work, and tutored individual students

OTHER EXPERIENCE

- EDUC 497C Special Topics in Education**, Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil May 2013
Participating Student, Supervisor: Professor Jason Whitney
- Participated as a representative student in the Penn State College of Education partnership establishment trip with IESB (Instituto de Educação Superior de Brasília).
- World Remnant Conference**, Japan and South Korea August 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012
Team Leader
- Led an international group of 10 to 13 members ranging from ages 12 to 20 throughout a 3 day long conference, which included over 10,000 attendees.
 - Led forums and group participation in each activity, reported to group leader in-charge, and communicated announcements. Responsible for the safety and wellbeing of all members.
 - Attended the Leader's Training Retreat.
- Musical The Covenant Journey: Tour in the East Coast** November 2010
Stage Crew Translator (Korean/English)
- Interpreted between Korean and English for the stage crew at Gerald W. Lynch Theater in John Jay College, New York, NY, Merriam Theatre in Philadelphia, PA, and John F. Kennedy Center in Washington D.C.

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Dean's List Academic Achievement** Fall 2014, Spring 2013, Fall 2012, Spring 2012, Fall 2011,
Spring 2011, Fall 2010, Spring 2010, Fall 2009
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society** 2012 to 2013
 At The Pennsylvania State University
- Scholarships and Grants**
- | | |
|---|--------------|
| Karl & Joanne Erdman Trustee Scholarship | 2010 to 2014 |
| Tsui Honors Scholarship | 2010 to 2013 |
| Academic Excellence Scholarship | 2009 to 2013 |
| Penn State Academic Grant | 2010 to 2012 |
| Academic Competitiveness Grant | 2010 |
| Rotary Club of State College Scholarship | 2009 |
| Society of Distinguished Alumni Trustee Scholarship | 2009 |

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND AFFILIATIONS

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| Comparative and International Education Society | 2013 to present |
| International Education Student Association
<i>Pennsylvania State University</i> | 2012 to present |
| Education Policy Studies Student Association
<i>Pennsylvania State University</i> | 2012 to present |

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Saturday Afterschool Center, Kikye, South Korea

May to July 2011, 2012, 2013

Volunteer

- Assisted in providing meals and afterschool care for underprivileged kids in grades 1 through 7 living in rural area of Kikye, South Korea.
- Monitored and assisted science classes and recorded teacher meeting minutes

Immanuel Pennsylvania Church, State College, PA*Sunday School Volunteer Teacher*

2011 to present

- Lead worship praise and small groups for children ages 5-11 who generally come from single mother households residing in the local women's homeless shelter

Main Translator (Korean to English)

2007 to 2010

- Provided service as on-site translator and interpreter for events and publications.

LANGUAGES

English: Native/Second Language

Korean: Native/Second Language

Spanish: Intermediate listening and reading, novice speaking and writing