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The Gender Ideology of “Wise Mother and Good Wife” and Korean Immigrant Women’s
Adjustment in the United States

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Abstract

The notion of “wise mother and good wife (WMGW)” (*Hyonmo Yangcho*) is the traditional idealized image of Korean womanhood as one who serves her country and others through her roles as a mother and wife. This ideology may continue to have some significance in the lives of many first-generation Korean immigrant women, but its potential role in the adjustment challenges these women may face while acculturating to the immigrant context in the United States has received little attention. In this paper, we briefly review the historical background of the WMGW ideology and discussed the significance of focusing research attention on the role of this notion in contemporary first-generation Korean immigrant women in the United States. We focus on the intersecting influences of gender, ethnicity, and immigrants’ generation status, which may further marginalize some first-generation Korean immigrant mothers. We then outline possible unique challenges faced by some of these mothers due to the WMGW gender ideology, highlighting potential immigration-related difficulties including changes in their social support networks, parenting burden, mental health, and language issues. Finally, we provide suggestions for researchers and practitioners working with U.S. Korean immigrant women.

Keywords: gender ideology, first-generation Korean immigrant women in the United States, Korean culture

Introduction

The “wise mother and good wife” (*Hyonmo Yangcho*) is a traditional Korean gender ideology that urges women to contribute to the nation through their role as managers of their household and caregivers of their family (Choi, 2009). Gender ideology refers to individuals’ attitudes towards gender related social norms (Levant, 1996). In general, gender ideology measures endorsement and internalization of cultural belief systems about masculinity/femininity and male/female gender, rooted in the structural relationship between the two sexes (Pleck, 1995, p.19). Derived from Confucianism, the “wise mother and good wife” ideology has been reshaped over time but continues to persist both in modern Korean society and among first-generation Korean immigrant women in the United States (Choi, Miller, & Wilbur, 2009; Park & Bernstein, 2008).

It is important to note that not all Korean or Korean immigrant women in the United States are influenced by Confucian values, seek to fulfill the expectations of the “wise mother and good wife” ideology, or experience challenges associated with this ideology. As with all cultural values, norms or expectations, variations exist in terms of how they are internalized and or practiced by any specific individual within that culture (i.e., a socially constructed or transmitted cluster of practices, ideas, values, norms, goals, artifacts, and physical environment; Cohen, 2009; Fiske, 2002) or society (Morris, Hong, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). However, some previous studies have briefly outlined various challenges faced by Korean immigrants related to this gender ideology including mental health issues (e.g., Min, 2006).

Despite the higher prevalence of mental health issues in Korean immigrant women, little attention has been paid to first-generation Korean American women specifically, who may face unique challenges due to the expectations of being a “wise mother and good wife” while

adjusting to the gender expectations of the mainstream American society, where greater gender equality is advocated by the women's movement in the United States (Goss, 2013) compared to Korean society.

An intersectionality perspective suggests that individuals' social identities¹ that stem from membership to multiple groups combine to shape their experiences and outcomes (Cole, 2009; Ghavami, Katsiaficas, & Rogers, 2016; Shields, 2008). Intersectionality is a term used to describe the connection and intersecting effects of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and any other additional social constructs that further marginalize individuals, thus resulting in inequalities, hierarchies, and negative health outcomes (Crenshaw, 1991; Seng, Lopez, Sperlich, Hamama, & Meldrum, 2012). In addition, the concept of intersectionality is an analytic approach that allows researchers to understand the complex ways in which the interplay of multiple social categories create different or unique experience of marginalization (Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008). An examination of Korean immigrant women's lives in the United States from an intersectionality perspective is imperative as their experiences at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and immigrants' generation status can help us understand factors that can affect their adjustment (Veenstra & Patterson, 2016), which is the general positive adaptation of immigrants, including both their behavioral and psychological adaptation to the host culture (Berry, 1997).

In this paper, we focus on individuals who identify with the female gender, who are ethnically Korean, and of first-generation immigrant status. Several key terms need to be first defined. We define gender as a social construct regarding culture-bound conventions, roles, and behaviors for men and women (Krieger, 2003). Ethnicity refers to subgroups within a larger context, such as a nation, that claim a common ancestry and share one of more of the following

¹ Social identity refers to an individual's knowledge of one's membership in a certain social group and a sense of attachment to the group (Turner, 1975).

elements: culture, religion, language, kinship, and place of origin, including individuals of Korean ethnicity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, Vedder, 2001). Immigrants' generation status can be classified based on their or their parents' countries of birth (Duncan & Trejo, 2017). Specifically, first-generation immigrants refer to foreign-born individuals who have moved from one's native country to another host country (Bradby, Humphris, Newall, & Philimore, 2015) whereas second-generation immigrants include individuals born in the host country and have at least one foreign-born parent (Duncan & Trejo, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2010; Zhou, 1997). First-generation immigrants were found to hold gender attitudes that reflect more strongly the country of origin's gender attitudes than second-generation immigrants (Pessin & Arpino, 2018), which may influence some aspects of their adaptation to the United States.

Psychological conceptions of intersectionality suggest that individuals who experience multiple marginalized social identities (e.g., Bowleg, 2008; Hurtado, 2003; Syed, 2010) create unique experiences that cannot be shared by those holding only one of those identities (Juan, Syed, & Azmitia, 2016). For instance, women of color have experiences with race/ethnicity and gender that cannot be completely shared with White women (Juan et al., 2016). In a similar vein, holding multiple social identities such as being a woman, being a person of color, and being a first-generation immigrant may create unique challenges or intersectional experience for Korean immigrant women.

Thus, the overall aim of this paper was to highlight possible unique challenges that Korean immigrant women in the United States face due to the gender ideology of "wise mother and good wife" using an intersectionality perspective. An extensive search of literature databases (PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar) and inspection of the reference lists of relevant articles was conducted. The search was restricted to articles from book chapters and

peer-reviewed journals. No date restrictions were used. First, we described the Korean gender ideology of “wise mother and good wife” within a socio-historical context. Second, we discussed the importance of focusing research attention on first-generation Korean women in the United States and described the unique challenges that these women may face due to this gendered cultural notion. Finally, we provided suggestions that can help guide practitioners working with Korean American women.

As mentioned above, our discussion focuses on first-generation Korean immigrant mothers in particular. It should be noted that while not all women and girls become wives and mothers, this larger gender-based cultural expectation may still be relevant in shaping at least some of the expectations that others may have of them.

“Wise Mother and Good Wife”: A Brief History

The ideology of “wise mother and good wife” (WMGW) derives from the gender role expectations outlined by Confucianism, a system of philosophical and ethical teachings with profound influence on the cultures of Eastern Asia, including Chinese, Korean, and Japanese cultures (Levi, 2013). This ideology assigns women to the domestic arena and men to the public domain (Choi, 2015). In simple historical terms, women were confined to the home without educational or career opportunities and expected to follow “womanly virtues” of compliance and wisdom. In contrast, men dominated in economic privilege and political leadership (Choi, 2009). Under the influence of Confucianism, women’s lives have been characterized by inequality in the relationship between men and women (Son, 2006), such that women were expected to obey the father in childhood, the husband during marriage, and the son in old age (Kim, 1976). Some of these women’s lives have been restricted by this unequal relationship associated with Confucianism to some extent, which contribute to the risk of depression and low

levels of well-being among some Korean women (Chun et al., 2006). This traditional gender role and ideology was retained and practiced relatively unchanged in Korea until the Korean Empire ended in 1910 (Moon, 2002). Since then, various sociocultural events, including Japanese colonialism, the influx of Western religion and modernity, Korea's nationalist movement, and socio-economic changes through industry, have reshaped this ideology to its current form in contemporary Korean culture (Choi, 2009).

In modern Korean society, as industrial capitalism began to grow and higher education was seen as an important enabler of upward social mobility (Moon, 2002), the WMGW ideology was transformed to describe mothers who are equipped with knowledge that contributes to effective child rearing (e.g., knowing what kind of exercise is good for their children, what kind of toys are suitable for their tastes, and what pedagogical methods would maximize their ability to learn), while providing emotional and material support so that children can focus on studying, promote good hygiene and nutrition in the family (e.g., having knowledge of the prevention of diseases and hygienic ways of preserving food), and create happy and harmonious family environment (Choi, 2009; Moon, 2002). Moreover, although contemporary Korean wives and their parents-in-laws do not usually live together in the same household (Moon, 2002), the WMGW ideology in conjunction with the patriarchal ideologies dictates that Korean women carry out their filial duties and take active roles in managing relationships between their own nuclear family and in-laws through ritualized visits, gift-giving, and labor exchange (Kim, 1996).

The WMGW ideology evolved into a medium for empowering women through their possession of knowledge about child health, nutrition, child-rearing practices and general household management (McLelland & Mackie, 2014). However, the WMGW ideology appears to continue to influence the gender role norms in modern Korea, such that women are still

expected to take full responsibility for child rearing and education and household chores, and fulfil their filial duties, even if they participate in the workplace. Therefore, the WMGW ideology possesses some oppressive qualities for women that originate from traditional Confucian-based gender roles.

Although East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and Korea, have evolved similar gender roles rooted in the Confucian ideal of the “virtuous wife and good mother” (Pimental, 2006), the different political, social, and economic development over the past century in each of these countries have given rise to different gender role attitudes and values (Tsuya, Bumpass, & Choe, 2000; Yang, 2016). Gender role attitudes are generally defined as beliefs regarding the appropriate roles for men and women in the private (housework) and public (education, labor market, and politics) areas (Constantin & Voicu, 2015; Lee et al., 2010). The traditionalist gender-role attitude considers that women are different from men and inferior (Jelen, 1988).

In fact, the gender gap (i.e., differences in participation, opportunity, and attainment between women and men in health, education, economics, and politics, which can result in, for example, differences between women and men in life expectancy, basic and higher levels of education, and/or salary; Harris, 2017) in Korea, is the highest, followed by Japan and China (World Economic Forum, 2016). The greater gender inequality whereby unequal rights and opportunities between women and men to achieve their potential development and capabilities due to systematic disadvantages in health, educational opportunities, and/or economic status (United Nations Development Programme, 2019) that Korean women experience may be partially due to the WMGW gender ideology along with socioeconomic influences. Korean women, particularly mothers, may be more pressured to accept this gender ideology than other

East Asian groups. However, the potential effects of WMGW on the gender gap and/or Korean women's psychological adjustment have not been considered or empirically examined.

“Wise Mother and Good Wife” among Korean Immigrant Communities in the United States

First-generation Korean Americans have been identified as one of the most understudied groups despite being one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the Asian American population (Jang, Kim, Hansen & Chiriboga, 2007) perhaps because Korean immigrants are perceived to be considered a successful immigrant group in the United States. (Zhou & Lee, 2017). However, some first-generation Korean immigrant mothers in particular may experience unique challenges due to the cultural obligation² to be a wise mother and good wife. Compared to other Asian immigrants in the United States, Korean immigrants in the United States have been found to maintain stronger ethnic attachment and adherence to their cultural traditions in order to satisfy their primary group needs and preserve their collective identity (Huh & Kim, 1990; Min, 1995). Thus, more attention on Korean immigrant mothers' psychological adjustment in the United States is needed.

The WMGW ideology may play a significant role in first-generation Korean immigrant mothers' psychological adjustment and life in the United States because immigrant societies are fundamentally embedded with the mindset of achieving the American dream through financial success and making a better living for their children and for themselves (Hong & Hong, 1996; Park 1998). Many Korean immigrants have the American dream of owning a home in suburbs with highly rated schools and raising children who attend competitive universities and have a

² Cultural obligation refers to the extent to which an individual of a certain cultural group feels a sense of duty to adhere to culturally-defined expectations. Specifically, family obligation refers to the extent to which family members feel a sense of duty to assist and consider family members and their needs before their needs and desires (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006)

well-respected and paid job (Kang, Okazaki, Abelman, Kim-Prieto, & Lan, 2010). In fact, consistent with the current notion of WMGW in modern Korean society, Korean immigrant mothers are actively engaged in their children's education, taking care of household responsibilities, while employed in the United States (Kim & Kim, 2017). The primary reasons for Korean women's migration to the U.S include following a husband's or a father's decision and seeking better educational opportunity for children's education (Kim & Min, 1992; Yoon, Lee, Koo, & Yoo, 2010). Thus, Korean women are more likely to begin their immigration experience with expectations to support their husband's pursuits and their children's success rather than seeking their own opportunities. Consistent with this idea, the rate of Korean immigrant women's workforce participation (52%) is lower than those of Korean immigrant men (70%) in the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2017). Korean immigrant women participate in workforce less than Korean immigrant men perhaps because Korean immigrant women have to deal with the interface of their multiple identities³ of being a woman, being Korean, and being an immigrant, which marginalize Korean immigrant women within occupational settings.

However, the processes involved in first-generation immigrant mothers' different roles and experiences are complex. One qualitative study on first-generation immigrant women found that their emotions to and interpretations of post-migration labor force participation were associated with their definition of motherhood and whether they perceived their work as contributing to or distracting them from fulfilling their definition of the ideal mother (Park, 2008). In this study, the majority of first-generation Korean immigrant women coming from middle-class pre-immigration backgrounds identified "mother" as the most important personal

³ Given that an individual is simultaneously a member of multiple social groups including race, gender, social class, religion, and sexual orientation, multiple identities refer to the dynamic construction of one's identity that is influenced by changing contexts and multiple salient dimensions (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Freeman, 2003)

identity⁴ label, as women's roles as mothers are highly valued and sanctified in Korean culture (Lee & Keith, 1999; Park, 2008). Therefore, unless mothers have a professional career, their employment is often considered as not beneficial for children's upbringing (Park & Liao, 2000). Thus, many middle-class first-generation Korean immigrant women whose husbands earn enough income to sustain the family choose not to work but dedicate themselves to child-rearing as round-the-clock caretaker and education supervisor (Park, 2008). In contrast, for those first-generation immigrant women with middle-class pre-immigration backgrounds who considered "mother" as the most important identity label but were forced to leave their children for work due to financial difficulties reported more negative emotions toward work and viewed work as a sign of economic downward mobility and a demotion in status relative to their pre-migration status as middle class (Park, 2008).

However, as work becomes a taken-for-granted reality and they perceive that their work is essential not only for the family's survival but also for the better future of children, many of these women tended to develop more positive and accepting perspectives on their employment and they were more likely to view their devotion to work as compensating, rather than competing, with their motherly devotions (Park, 2008). Thus, first-generation Korean immigrant women's post-migration experiences and their related psychological adjustment may vary according to their perspectives on motherhood and working women.

Even when first-generation Korean immigrant women are employed, they have been found to generally not challenge the traditional patriarchal inequity in terms of the division of responsibilities in the home (Choi, Kushner, Mill, & Lai, 2014; Lim 1997; Shin, 2011).

Although Korean immigrant women may seek to make and maintain gains in gender status

⁴ Personal identity refers to an individual's ways of defining oneself as a unique person (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994)

brought by immigration to the United States, Korean immigrant men in the United States tend to maintain a rigid form of the patriarchal ideology and authority brought from traditional Korean society (Kim, 2006; Kim & Kim, 2017). Patriarchy refers to a systematic social structure and custom that men are deemed to be superior, and thus have authority and dominate women (Jin, 2001), and in traditional Korean society, men were considered to be the primary breadwinners and decision makers who had authority over family members, whereas women were expected to obey and serve their husbands and maintain their husbands' lineage by bearing and caring for children (Min, 2001). Compared to the patriarchy that exists in American culture, Korean patriarchy, indelibly shaped by Korea's long-standing subjugation by outside powers, is more public, rigid, and overt in the name of Confucian collective "social harmony" and "duty" (Kim, 2006), which may further enforce the gender ideology of WMGW and make it more difficult for Korean immigrant wives to challenge the gender inequality in Korean immigrant society in the United States.

One possible reason for maintaining the patriarchal tradition and not challenging gender inequality at home is that although Korean immigrants are embedded within the larger United States culture, their immediate social context is often predominantly a Korean immigrant community, within which patriarchal beliefs and customs are kept and reinforced by the larger ethnic community that comprise various institutions and social networks that are established and maintained by group members who share common cultural heritage⁵, values⁶, beliefs, and customs; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The Korean church also promotes Korean individuals' sense of

⁵ Beyond physical objects or places, cultural heritage includes various practices and intangible aspects such as language and values that has been passed on from generation to generation. It is constantly changing as it re-evaluated, interpreted, and managed by a new generation in daily lives (Tengberg, Fredholm, Eliasson, Knez, Saltzman, & Wetterberg, 2012)

⁶ Values refer to the preferences, principles and virtues that are endorsed by individuals or groups (Chan, Satterfield, & Goldstein, 2012)

belonging, loyalty, involvement to their ethnic group (i.e., ethnic affiliations; Chae & Foley, 2010) and their cultural identity, that is, their self-perception as a member of the Korean cultural and ethnic group due to a shared cultural heritage; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006; Yoon et al., 2010).

The WMGW ideology and traditional Korean Confucian patriarchy ideology are often maintained through religious practices in churches or Buddhist temples within the Korean immigrant community in the United States, which is attended by over 70 percent of Korean Americans (Jo, Maxwell, Yang, & Bastani, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2017; Min & Kim, 2002). Although Americanized Christianity pervaded local Korean community churches, much of the Confucian aspects of Korean culture (e.g., valuing of education, family honor, and subordination of women to men) was incorporated into church practices as a way to maintain Korean identity and enhance a sense of ethnic affiliation (Kim & Kim, 2017; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Therefore, when patriarchal traditions and gender inequality do not change at home, Korean immigrant women are faced with the double burden of meeting traditional cultural expectations at home as well as those of the mainstream society at work (Yoon et al., 2010).

The role of the gender ideology of WMGW within Korean immigrant communities in the United States is particularly important to understand as immigrant women face various challenges while transitioning from their heritage culture to a Western one. Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological changes that take place due to contact between two or more cultural groups and their individuals, which may entail changes in one's behavioral repertoire (i.e., the range of behaviors and activities including the way of speaking, eating, and dressing; Berry, 2005), values, attitudes, identity, and/or maintenance of one's culture of origin (Berry, 2005, 2009). Research has shown that Korean immigrant women experience more difficulties

with the acculturation process than their male counterparts (Kim & Chen, 2011; Lee, Moon, & Knight, 2005; Yang, 2007), and face particular hardships with regard to getting a job as well as maintaining their roles as a mother, a wife, and an employee, while adjusting to their new lives (McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Pak, 2006). In addition, first-generation Korean immigrant women, in particular, have been found to be at greater risk for mental health issues than Korean immigrant men or women of other ethnic groups (Choi, 2009; Ding et al., 2011; Huang, Wong, Ronzio, & Yu, 2007; Kuo, 1984; Shin, 1993).

One possible contributor to the higher prevalence of Korean American women's mental health issues has been proposed to be their cultural obligation to be a WMGW (Choi, 2009; Lim, Yi, & Zebrack, 2008). Moreover, immigrants' generation status could be an additional marginalizing characteristic that impacts their mental health (Close et al., 2016). Therefore, not all, but many Korean immigrant women may encounter greater degrees of disadvantage as they experience demands and restrictions from their multiple social identities (gender, ethnicity, and immigrant generation status) simultaneously. Thus, special research attention paid to Korean American women is needed with regard to the unique challenges that they encounter due to various cultural expectations and the intersectional effects of gender, ethnicity, and immigrants' generation status.

Potential Challenges of Being a “Wise Mother and Good Wife”

Regardless of ethnicity and culture, wives generally perform more household tasks than their husbands in heterosexual homes (Kim & Hurh, 1988; U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). For Korean immigrant women, they are expected to continue their primary responsibility for meeting the needs of their family members, performing household chores, and fulfilling the duties of daughters-in-law due to the WMGW ideology.

Therefore, the valuing of this ideology may lead first-generation Korean immigrant women to face challenges and issues as they endeavor to fulfill multiple responsibilities related to the family, while adjusting to the immigrant context in the United States. Moreover, Korean immigrant women need to constantly deal with the interface of their multiple identities of being a woman with less power in patriarchal system, being Korean with specific cultural expectations of being a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, and being an immigrant with its associated acculturative stresses, caused by the process of adapting to and/or navigating a new culture and society (Berry, 2006).

Thus, the intersecting effects of gender, ethnicity, and immigrants' generation status may further marginalize Korean immigrant mothers, resulting in additional adversities and negative life experiences (Rosemberg & Hsin-Chun Tsai, 2014). This next section describes challenges faced by first-generation Korean immigrant women in the United States, in the areas of social support, parenting burden, and mental health issues as related to the Korean cultural notion of WMGW. It should be noted that although these issues are discussed in separate sections, they interact and overlap in complex, dynamic, and reciprocal ways. Moreover, we do not propose that the WMGW ideology affects all Korean immigrant mothers in the same way. For instance, some Korean immigrant women may not be negatively affected by the gender ideology of WMGW. Instead, in this paper, we call for researchers and practitioners' attention to the possible effects of the WMGW gender ideology on first-generation Korean immigrant women's psychological adjustment in the United States.

Social Support

Emotional support from their spouse may be less available to Korean immigrant mothers because Korean immigrant men tend to have long work days partly due to the cultural influences

of Confucianism regarding the primary role of fathers as breadwinners and providers and due to being an immigrant (Kim & Chung, 2011). As emotional support from their husband may be less available, Korean immigrant women usually seek emotional support from kin members rather than professionals (Kim, Kreps, & Shin, 2015). One qualitative study found that first-generation Korean Americans' primary source of health-related help and advice came from their relatives (Kim et al., 2015), reflecting the concept of Korean familism that views kin as the only group on which one can unconditionally rely and trust (Lee & Bauer, 2013). Furthermore, emotional support received from kin, rather than non-kin, was found to be associated with higher levels of psychological well-being among Korean immigrant mothers in the United States (Seo et al., 2018). However, Korean immigrant women may not receive enough emotional support because their cultural expectations of needing to be a WMGW pressures them to “save face (*chaemyun*)” for themselves and their family by hiding their problems (Cho, Lee, & Jezewski, 2005) as many fear that revealing such problems to others will make them look like a bad wife and mother (Cho et al., 2005). Indeed, Korean immigrant women rarely seek professional help (Park & Bernstein, 2008). Even when professional emotional support is available and affordable, their lower levels of English language proficiency and the lack of ethnic and linguistic matching of providers and services can be barriers to seeking emotional support from professionals (Wu, Kviz, & Miller, 2009).

Although recent studies have found mixed effects of ethnic and/or linguistic matching between clients and therapists on treatment outcomes (e.g., Cabral & Smith, 2011), ethnic minority clients including Korean immigrant women may prefer ethnically and linguistically matched professionals so that they can more effectively and comfortably articulate their feelings and issues. Moreover, these women may view professionals who share commonalities in culture

and values as more credible sources of help than those who do not share any cultural similarities (Meyer, Zane, & Cho, 2011; Ye et al. 2012). Therefore, the absence of ethnic and/or linguistic matching of clients and providers may still be perceived as barriers to access health services among some first-generation Korean immigrant women.

Additionally, the size of Korean immigrant mothers' social networks may be more limited than those of Korean immigrant men due to the gendered ideology placed upon Korean immigrant women to be self-restrained (Wu et al., 2009). Moreover, English language barriers may limit their social networks because communication difficulties are closely related to social relationships (Yoon et al., 2010). Therefore, Korean immigrant women tend to experience difficulties with social integration into the mainstream society (Yoon et al., 2010). Thus, the gender role obligation from the WMGW ideology may create additional hardships for Korean immigrant women in the United States at different levels of their social networks.

Parenting Burden

The parenting burden is another challenge related to the WMGW adage faced by Korean immigrant mothers. Under this adage, a woman's life achievement is generally determined by their children's educational success (Min, 2001). To maximize their children's success in the American cultural context, Korean immigrant mothers need to negotiate heritage Korean and American parenting beliefs, goals, and practices, which can be contradictory and thus lead to parenting stress (Cheah, Leung, & Zhou, 2013). Cheah et al. (2016) found that Korean immigrant mothers reported higher levels of parenting daily hassles due to their parenting role than Chinese immigrant mothers.

In addition, the level of parenting daily hassles that Korean immigrant mothers experienced was found to be negatively correlated with their marital relationship quality (Cheah

et al., 2016). The WMGW ideology likely also contributes to this high level of parenting daily hassles and the negative association between parenting daily hassles and marital quality in several ways. First, Korean immigrant mothers are expected to be perfect wives and mothers (Kim, 1998; Min & Song, 1998), which could add additional stress. Second, their parenting burden is doubled when there is little role sharing with their husbands in both childrearing and household management responsibilities (Park, 1997).

Third, although the importance of learning as a pathway to excellence in Confucian philosophy is one reason why Korean immigrant parents strongly emphasize their children's educational achievement (e.g., acceptance into prestigious schools, career in certain elite professions; Lee, 2004), it also has a symbolic meaning of high status in immigrant Asian societies. Korean immigrant women believe that their children's academic achievement can lead to high-paying professional careers, which can also help them find suitable spouses (Kim, Im, Nahm, & Hong, 2012). Thus, when their children fail to achieve an expected level of academic success, Korean immigrant women tend to feel that their husbands, parents, and parents-in-laws will blame them for failing their children, and their families.

Mental Health Issues

First-generation Korean immigrant women report high levels of mental health issues, such as depression and lower psychological well-being (Choi, Miller, & Wilbur, 2009). Many have difficulties with shaping their own identity outside of being a WMGW and lose a sense of volitional functioning because of their cultural obligations to their husband and children (Park & Bernstein, 2008). Difficulties with cultivating their own identity and a lack of personal agency can be partially explained by their immigrant history. Korean immigrants experience downward mobility in the United States despite their mostly college-educated, middle class, and

professional origins (Noland, 2003). To compensate for this downward mobility, Korean immigrants gravitate towards small businesses as an avenue of upward economic mobility (Park, 1997; Yoon et al., 2010) and have the highest self-employment rate among all minority or immigrant groups (Noland, 2003). Thus, because many Korean women migrate to support their husbands, they are required to help their family business as a duty to the family rather than as a personal choice or accomplishment (Lim, 1997; Yoon et al., 2010).

This assistance conforms to the patriarchal system, and the gender ideology even calls for the sacrifice of personal identity, when such sacrifice is necessary for the collective interests of the family (Kim & Hurh, 1988). A lack of personal agency has been found to contribute to depressive symptoms (Cartwright, Gibson, & Read, 2016). Although some theorists have proposed that autonomy and self-determinism are less relevant to well-being in interdependent cultures (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Oishi & Diener, 2001), a greater sense of volitional functioning was found to be associated with fewer depressive symptoms in Koreans (Soenens, Park, Vansteenkiste, & Mouratidis, 2012). Moreover, when Korean and United States participants were asked to think of satisfying experiences in the past week or month of their lives, involvement in events when they felt strongly autonomous were identified, and autonomy-related events uniquely predicted well-being across both samples (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001).

Korean women are also discouraged from outwardly expressing their emotions because the WMGW adage urges them to be self-sacrificing, soft-spoken, and submissive (Kim, 1998). These women's emotional needs are rarely supported because expressing personal emotional needs is believed to disrupt family harmony (Kim, 1998). Moreover, explicit expressions of one's inner feelings bears stigma and shame as Koreans also put strong emphasis on saving face

informed by the Confucian value of reciprocity to maintain personal dignity, honor, and self-respect in their interpersonal relationships (Lee, Martin-Jearld, Robinson, & Price, 2016).

This discouragement of emotional expression could lead to chronic distress and has been proposed to cause the onset of *Hwa-Byung* (fire illness), an indigenous psychiatric illness commonly found in Korean women (Lee et al., 2016; Lin et al., 1992). The symptoms that are associated with *Hwa-Byung* include physical (e.g., chest pains, heart palpitation, fatigue, indigestion, and dull headache), emotional (e.g., anger, anxiety, and depression), and behavioral/social factors (e.g., crying, tearfulness, and divorce from spouse; Pang, 1990). Korean immigrant women who reported *Hwa-Byung* were found to have more symptoms of depression than those who did not report it (Kim & Rew, 1994). Researchers and practitioners are increasingly recognizing the prevalence of this issue, and *Hwa-Byung* was recently identified as a culture-bound syndrome in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM-5; Lee, Wachholtz, & Choi, 2014).

Language Issues

Limited English proficiency in Korean immigrant women may compound the challenges discussed above. More than 50% of Korean immigrants have limited English proficiency (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), and the majority report prefer to speak Korean both at home and work (Jeon, 2008). This generally lower levels of English proficiency may be related to their limited social support network, and experiences of economic hardships, and familial conflict, which can compound and exacerbate daily stress of Korean immigrant women (Lee, Martin-Jearld, Robinson, & Price, 2016). For instance, a recent study showed that English proficiency was negatively related to Korean immigrant wives' homemaker status, with better English-language proficiency being associated with a lower likelihood of being homemakers (Omori, 2016).

Moreover, Korean immigrant women may experience intergenerational conflicts with their children due to language and cultural gaps (Lee et al., 2016). Limited language proficiency can also be significant barriers to building relationships with the larger mainstream community and seeking professional help (Kim & Yoon, 2012). As these various challenges and language-related problems accumulate, Korean immigrant women may become more vulnerable to psychological distress, such as *Hwa-Byung*, depression and social anxiety (Lee et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Researchers and Practitioners

Researchers and practitioners should not assume that all Korean immigrant women in the U.S. experience the WMGW ideology. However, we argue that researchers and service providers should be aware of this ideology as it may be relevant for some first-generation Korean immigrant women; for some of these women, the WMGW ideology may play a role in their mental health and adjustment to the United States. Such cultural awareness will likely help providers improve their ability to provide culturally-competent healthcare for these women.

For researchers. Although past studies have established the existence of the WMGW gender ideology among Korean immigrant women in the U.S. (e.g., Park & Bernstein, 2008), no research has directly assessed its impact on Korean immigrant communities in the U.S. Even in Korea, there are no measures developed to capture this notion. Therefore, an important initial step for researchers is to conduct qualitative studies using in-depth interviews or focus groups (Carlson & Lynch, 2013; Hughes & DuMont, 2002) among Korean immigrant women and their spouses to understand their shared cultural knowledge, experiences, and gender-related unique perceptions of WMGW.

During these focus groups and interviews, researchers should identify the societal role expectations of a woman/wife/mother, perceived characteristics of a good/bad wife/mother,

feelings when women practice their expected roles, and how they cope with their specific situation. Moreover, researchers should consider the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and immigrants' generation status with respect to Korean immigrant women's psychological adjustment. Such qualitative studies using an intersectionality approach (Shields, 2008) will help researchers better understand the thoughts and feelings of the Korean immigrant women and what being a WMGW means to them (Sutton & Austin, 2015). For instance, participants can be asked to discuss how their "Korean" identity and being an immigrant may relate to their gender identity, and when these identities might be in harmony or conflict, and then discuss stressors or strengths related to these identities (Narvaez, Meyer, Kertzner, Ouellette, & Gordon, 2009). Researchers can also examine the various themes derived from these interviews and focus groups and their associations with Korean immigrant mothers' psychological adjustment.

For practitioners. In addition to recognizing the specific cultural challenges that are important to specific individuals, practitioners should also be mindful of the following cultural patterns that may be relevant for Korean immigrant women and their families (Park & Bernstein, 2008). Korean immigrant women may be vulnerable to psychological distress due to the challenges associated with the gender ideology of WMGW (e.g., Lee et al., 2016) but not seek mental health services because of concerns of being viewed as a failure and bringing shame to the family (Cho et al., 2005; Kramer, Kwong, Lee, & Chung, 2002) or due to the cultural stigmas attached to revealing private information and expressing emotions to unfamiliar persons (Lee, 2007). Moreover, Korean immigrant women tend to hold negative attitudes regarding medications for mental disorders (e.g., antidepressants) and less likely to be aware of the signs or prevalence of depressive symptoms (Kim & Im, 2015). The negative attitudes and misattribution may lead to delay or absence of seeking treatment (Shin, 2002).

Therefore, Korean immigrant women tend to underutilize mental health clinics and neglect the important role of preventive care (Park, Cho, Park, Bernstein, & Shin, 2013; Seo, Bae, & Dickerson, 2016). Even if Korean immigrant women seek professional help, they tend to focus on physical symptoms and receive primary healthcare services rather than mental health services because they do not have to disclose their emotional and mental difficulties, and thus feel less stigmatized (Lee, Wachholtz, & Choi, 2014). Therefore, when nurses and other health practitioners encounter Korean immigrant women in these medical settings, they can optimize these opportunities and pay attention also to their psychological status. If necessary, nurses and other health care professionals can provide potential resources, including information and interventions that can provide basic coping strategies and promote healthy lifestyle changes (Lee et al., 2014). Furthermore, if warranted, various treatment methods should be considered when working with Korean immigrant women. For example, as *Hwa-Byung* includes physical, emotional and behavioral/social symptoms, nurses and practitioners can utilize cognitive behavioral therapy, meditation, and social skills development training (Lee et al., 2014).

To provide culturally sensitive mental health services to Korean immigrant women, practitioners can benefit from possessing knowledge about indigenous cultural values such as *jeong* (emotional bonding from kinship/interpersonal trust), *noon-chi* (ability to evaluate people or social situations quickly through implicit cues), and *haan* (suppressed feeling of sorrow or anger; Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006). Such cultural knowledge can be used in clinical settings to foster emotional bonding in therapeutic relationships, provide greater awareness of clients' nonverbal cues, and help in the acknowledgement of the presence of suppressed anger in clients (Kim et al., 2006). Culturally sensitive services can contribute to the perceptions of

normativeness surrounding seeking mental health care and increase positive effects on treatment and intervention outcomes (Sue, Zane, Hall, & Berger, 2009).

In addition, knowledge about their clients' culture can help improve the cultural competence of healthcare professionals (Cai, 2016). Thus, having some understanding and awareness of WMGW ideology and the various ways that it may be relevant for some Korean immigrant women can help nurses and practitioners provide more culturally sensitive and responsive services to clients who may face challenges or barriers to care stemming from the WMGW ideology. Similarly, healthcare professionals who work with immigrant and ethnic minority women in other countries can also enhance their cultural competency in healthcare by having awareness of their clients' culture and considering what might be cultural, gender, and immigrant-related intersectionality issues that may be relevant for their clients.

Second, at the group level, practitioners should consider family-focused programs that are specifically suitable for Korean immigrant women. For example, due to the traditional patriarchal norm of Korean culture, some women may not be able to attend intervention programs or comply with the therapist's recommendations without their husband's permission (Kim et al., 2006; Lee, 2007; Park, 2007). Such challenges can be mitigated through teaching family members communication skills (e.g., guiding family members to communicate their expectations more effectively) and empathy building skills (e.g., teaching family members to be more sensitive to others' psychological, emotional, and physical needs; Lee et al., 2014). Subsequently, creating a family-based intervention or prevention program may likely foster cohesive family relationship to support Korean immigrant women's psychological health (Lee et al., 2016). However, for those who may feel uncomfortable to openly verbalize and express their

problems with family members, nurses and other health practitioners should be attentive to each member's non-verbal signs of discomfort (Lee et al., 2014).

Third, practitioners should be aware of Korean immigrant women's unwillingness to seek support from others due to the fear of losing face or disturbing group harmony (Taylor et al., 2004). Therefore, practitioners should help Korean immigrant women to expand their social networks and introduce them to support groups or programs that are culturally-sensitive (e.g., Korean physician-guided intervention program; Cho et al, 2005; Park & Bernstein, 2008). In addition, the importance of community-based outreach for immigrant families has been highlighted by researchers, practitioners, and community members (Lee, Hanner, Cho, Han, & Kim, 2008; Park et al., 2013). Community education can raise Korean immigrants' awareness of mental health symptoms and treatment and may improve mental health care utilization among Korean immigrant women (Park et al., 2013).

At the community level, this may be best achieved through promoting collaboration with churches as over 70 percent of Korean Americans attend church on a regular basis (Min & Kim, 2002; Jo et al., 2010). As many Korean immigrants attend Korean church on regular basis and receive emotional and social support, church leaders are more likely to serve as the first point of contact of Korean immigrant women with mental health issues (Lee et al., 2008). Thus, practitioners can work closely with Korean church leaders to raise awareness and knowledge about mental health needs and resources by holding educational workshops and gatherings (Lee et al., 2008; Park et al., 2013). Additionally, churches can serve as an active community center for Korean immigrants where individuals exchange information about children's education, business opportunities, and available social support (Park, Jang, Nam, Grey, & Whittemore, 2017). The utilization of the church will also allow practitioners to easily implement family-

based programs as Korean immigrants tend to attend church as a family unit. Moreover, as Korean immigrant women often use online community websites to make health-related decisions (Seo, Bae, & Dickerson, 2016), nurses and practitioners can work on ensuring that reliable and easily accessible using language- and cultural-appropriate health information is available through these women's informal social networks and via the internet (Seo et al., 2016).

Conclusions

The main objective of this article was to discuss unique challenges faced by Korean immigrant women in the U.S. The contemporary notion of WMGW, which requires women to have extensive and systematic knowledge on childrearing and homemaking, is still promoted in Korean immigrant communities to enhance their ethnic affiliations and maintain cultural identities (Choi, 2009; Lee et al., 2016; Moon, 2002; Yoon et al., 2010). Strong ethnic affiliations and cultural identities are often found to be predictive of well-being of immigrants (Chae & Foley, 2010). However, the high expectations and pressures to adhere to this gender ideology within the home and from their ethnic immigrant community may also pose additional challenges to Korean immigrant women's psychological adjustment in the United States as they are exposed to new cultural norms and expectations and immigration-related difficulties. Therefore, acknowledging the interplay of multiple identities of being a woman, Korean, and an immigrant is essential for understanding the complexity processes that may impact Korean immigrant women's psychological adjustment.

As a caveat, this paper does not imply that all Korean immigrant women are burdened or negatively affected by this ideology. An interesting and noteworthy aspect of the concept of WMGW is that although Korean immigrant women may face the difficulties highlighted above, many still choose to endure the challenges associated with it. One reason may be because they

wish to preserve the traditional Korean values in the home while living in an immigrant society. Moreover, immigrants may be more traditional than those in their country of origin (Kosmitzki, 1996; Takaki, 1998).

In addition, the contemporary form of WMGW has benefitted from modern education and served as a platform to empower some Korean women (Choi, 2009; Hong, 2008). As motherhood is often extolled as a glorious fulfillment for women (Choi, 2009), some Korean women may also devote themselves to being WMGW and see their double roles in a positive light. Therefore, instead of emphasizing the negative aspects of the gender ideology, this paper suggests that the gender ideology of WMGW continues to impact contemporary first-generation Korean immigrant women in the United States and deserve serious consideration in future research and clinical work with this population.

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