

The Effect of the Rise in Tensions between North Korea and South Korea
American Children Living on American Military Installations in South Korea

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved April 2012 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2012

ABSTRACT

American families have been coming to South Korea accompanying active duty service members or Embassy employees since before the Korean War. While their numbers were originally smaller, they continue to increase as South Korean assignments undergo "tour normalization", a transition from a location intended for service members to come alone for one year to a location where service members come accompanied by their family and stay for longer periods of times. The U.S. maintains a large presence in South Korea as a deterrence against possible threats from North Korea. Despite establishment of an armistice at the conclusion of the Korean War, a constant state of potential threat was created. This paper will examine what affect the recent rise in tension between North Korea and South Korea has on the American children living in South Korea with their active duty service member parent(s).

DEDICATION

To Patrick, Michael, Victor, and Anthony, I am in constant awe of the grace you have shown with every adventure your father and I have dragged you along on. From all over Texas to Mississippi to Korea and Alabama, we have watched you all grow and become the most amazing little boys. I hope you will one day be able to look back at your time in Korea with fond memories and understand the importance of the role our family played during our three years there. And to Anthony, our “Korean” baby, may you always consider Korea a bit like home.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to the following individuals who without their help, this degree may never have happened.

Dr. Eric Margolis, you stuck by my every step of the way. Your guidance and support was constant, your patience, unwavering. Words cannot express how truly grateful I am. I could have never made it this far without you. Dr. Mary Romero and Dr. Nicholas Appleton, thank you both for all of your assistance. Your time and commitment is truly appreciated.

To my parents, Johnny and Maria Saucedo, and my amazing siblings, Martha and Johnny, your constant love and encouragement have been a constant in my life.

Thank you for always believing in me, no matter what.

And finally, to my husband David, you have literally been with me from the start.

Thank you for being there for me and for believing.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

American children can find themselves living overseas for a variety of reasons ranging from their parent's employment, missionary work, corporate work or simply a desire by their parents to relocate. While none of these situations are without similarities, perhaps the most unique are those children who come to live in an area where aggression not only remains a possibility, but their parents play an active role in the deterrence of that aggression. These are the children of active duty service members. These are my children.

My children were born into the military community and have known nothing else. Traveling from duty location to duty location is their norm. And while each move comes with its unique challenges, our relocation to the Republic of Korea (ROK) or South Korea, as it is more commonly known, has been the most challenging. Nothing can prepare you for having to explain the new realities of life in South Korea to your children. Some of our new realities included military exercises with sirens, barbed wire, service members in battle gear and gas masks and ammunition fire, (albeit blanks). Our coat closet was stuffed with evacuation bags and gas masks for the family that included an infant gas mask that more closely resembled something you would put your dry cleaning in. Nothing can prepare you for what happens when there is a rise in tensions between North Korea and South Korea. Nothing can prepare you for life on the ROK.

During the time we lived in South Korea, life did not stop. While exploring the wonders of South Korea, and managing the realities of the mission the unexpected realities of life continued. While in South Korea we had a child diagnosed as educationally delayed; we had another child have to undergo surgery in a Korean hospital; we had two children get bullied in preschool; I gave birth to our fourth child; the South Korean submarine the Cheonan was sunk and the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong was shelled in response to periodic military exercises along disputed waters that border North and South Korea (Bandow, 1996; McDonald, 2010).

It was not until we were back in the United States and one of our children literally ran out of our home when a fire alarm went off after I burned toast, that I began to wonder what impact life in South Korea truly had. It has been nearly a year since we left South Korea and that same child still has an impulse to run out of the home at the buzzing sound of an alarm clock going off. And while some of the specifics in my life may be unique to my family, my story is not completely dissimilar from other families living in South Korea. This commonality is what first drove me to investigating not only children of active duty service members, but the unique situation they find themselves in when living in South Korea.

Within the category of children of active duty service members there has been research on the impact of a parent that is serving away from the child in a deployed situation, the impact of a parent who has returned from deployment, and children who have lived overseas with their service member parent and children of service members in general (Military Family Resource Center, 1984). But

while most families living overseas with their active duty service member sponsors move as a permanent change of duty station (PCS) to locations ranging from England, Italy, Spain, and Japan, there are others who are sent with their active duty sponsors on accompanied assignments to remote locations; “remote assignments”, or short tour duty assignments, are given that designation because of the quality of life conditions, their location and the nature of the mission and include locations such as Turkey and South Korea (Department of Defense, 2011; Department of Defense, 2009).

Perhaps the most unique remote assignments are those to South Korea. In 1953 the Korean War concluded by means of an armistice (Bandow, 1996). While there is always a certain level of threat of aggression at any military installation this threat has proved true in South Korea and is visible in recent acts of aggression towards South Korea by North Korea (Bandow, 1996; McDonald, 2010). Because the Korean War ended in an armistice as opposed to a peace treaty, the peninsula remains at a level of heightened alert (Bandow, 1996).

Despite existing tensions between North Korea and South Korea, there are currently more American military families relocating to South Korea than ever before (McMichael, W. & Holmes, E, 2008). As the number of families allowed to come to South Korea continues to grow, research such as my thesis is crucial in determining levels of concern of short or long term impacts from living in South Korea. My research examines the effects that the recent rise in tensions between North Korea and South Korea has had on children living on American military

instillations in South Korea and the role the existence of a “third culture” unique to military children has had.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my exploration of literature relating to children and war, military aggression, or unrest there is a tremendous amount of research that has been done. However, most importantly, it should be noted that when examining the effects that the possibility of war or military aggression, or war itself, has on children, there is a difference in the experiences of “hundreds, thousands and millions of war-affected children” living in their native countries where conflict took place, and the experiences of children living in a foreign country within a military instillation of their native country where there is a threat of aggression, but no actual fighting (Machel, 2001, p. 6). The research on the former category ranges from children living within violence to children participating in the violence as child soldiers. This is in stark contrast to the experiences American children of service members have with war. “Young people in conflict zones around the world actively survive, resist, and participate in conflicts” while American children may only experience war as it impacts their active duty service member parent who deploys overseas to a war zone (Dupuy & Peters, 2010, p. 3). This is not to devalue the impact war can have on American children, but merely to clarify the manner in which war can impact their lives.

The majority of research conducted on the experiences of American children of service members and war is two-fold: first literature explores the impact of having a parent serve in support of a war during a deployment (Hall, 2008; Petty, 2009); while the second literature ranges from the impact of a parent

returning from a deployment including problems related to the separation and traumas the parent may have from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), to those who come back injured (Hall, 2008; Hoge, 2010). When a parent deploys, a child is not always prepared to handle the uncertainty that comes with deployment; in addition, depending on their age, the impact can vary greatly (Hall, 2008). When a parent returns from deployment children can experience a wide variety of emotions from an inability to trust, to a need for attention, to a general sense of moodiness, but issues can be far more complex for those with parents returning with mental or physical injuries (Hall, 2008).

Another interaction children have with war is historical in nature. The origins of many military installations overseas were rooted in war, although many are now considered to be desired locations to bring the family to enjoy another culture. It is in these circumstances that the concept of a third culture emerges. While discussing her life as a self-proclaimed “military brat”¹, Mary Wertsch wrote of the “invisible, unorganized tribe...an undiscovered nation” that she belonged to. She reminisced on living life, wondering “who would have thought we were in the process of creating a brand new culture in America” (Wertsch, 1991, p. xvii-xviii). The idea of a culture all its own, unique to military children, is either hinted at or overtly discussed in much of the literature (Gonzalez, 1970; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Truscott, 1989; Wertsch, 1991).

The phrase “third culture kids” refers to any child that has spent part of their childhood in a country or culture not of their parents: including children of

¹ The phrase “military brat” is a self-definition, not a pejorative; it is used within the military community to refer to the children of active duty service members (Wertsch, 1991).

Foreign Service workers, missionaries, corporate employees, and military members; the phrase was coined by Dr. Ruth Useem and Dr. John Useem in the 1950's (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The child has cultural influences from both their parents as well as the host nation they reside in; the combinations of these components in conjunction with their personal life experiences, which for children of active duty service members includes high mobility, help to create the third culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The most unique aspect of the third culture is less the commonality between individuals within the culture, and more how experiences specific to their particular circumstances come together to create the "third" culture.

Living overseas was not generally an option for families until after World War II (WW II) (Alvah, 2007). In *Brats: Children of the American Military Speak Out*, Mary R. Truscott (1991) chronicled the recollections of children of service members. In those who described their experiences overseas, several discussed memories of living in a post-WW II Europe with a certain level of disconnection from the realities of the danger that once took place there and to a certain extent still existed. One child recalled exploring the French countryside and finding "parts of jeeps and tanks and stuff ... we'd find bullets and some were live ... we did that a bunch of times ... it was wild" (Truscott, 1989, p. 51). Another child recalled riding his bike with friends into the German countryside with a sense of security despite the fact that the Russians were nearby (Truscott, 1989). Yet another described always having bomb shelter alerts, air raid drills, and participating in evacuation procedures while still maintaining a sense of well-

being as a child (Truscott, 1989). These memories express a unique perspective on children and war; they are in glaring disparity to the memories of their German counterparts who may have participated in Hitler's Youth or the Jewish children who had been victims of the Holocaust. And, as time continues to pass, the perspective on the area and of war are distanced even more. One child of a service member recalls his father's desire to return to Germany where he had once served as a military policeman during WW II some eighteen years earlier; "as a kid, I didn't really relate to it" (Truscott, 1989, p. 46).

But not all children carry memories of war or aggression; some memories related more to the language and cultural challenges that come with living life overseas, in addition to memories of the relocation process in general. On the topic of relocation, a sense of alienation can occur; one child recalled hearing stories from other children who had relocated overseas, of being pushed around, not being spoken to, and feeling isolated (Truscott, 1989). It should be noted that families' reaction to relocation can be greatly impacted by the tone set by the active duty parent (Gonzalez, 1970). But regardless of tone, it is easily seen why the active duty lifestyle is so often referred to as nomadic (Wertsch, 1991). And while nomadic may sound less than ideal for a child; mobility can come with its own rewards.

The Useems' discussed a variety of advantages to being a military child including their ability to adapt and blend in, be less prejudiced, recognize the importance of now, and appreciate authority (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Military children sometimes use frequent moves as an opportunity to develop

resiliency and adaptability (Wertsch, 1991). In interviewing the children of service members about what influence the lifestyle had there was an overwhelming response of becoming more adaptable (Truscott, 1989). One woman used the analogy of sink or swim; “military brats are swimmers” (Truscott, 1989, p. 229). Truscott (1989) went on to explain that military brats have moved around the country and the world, constantly changing schools, severing ties with friends while trying to remain stoic during the process, relying on their ability to adapt and to change. The author noted that while there is no typical military brat, the “sum total of a military brat background is greater than its parts: more than just a description of moves, it is a common cultural background. Raised in the uniquely insular and transient military environment, military brats are continually aware of and affected by the military culture that surrounded them” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 256).

In sum, although there is a plethora of research on children and war (Machel, 2001; Dupuy & Peters, 2010; Military Family Resource Center, 1984; Marten, 2002; Sherrow, 2000), and the various ways war can impact American military children (Hall, 2008; Military Family Resource Center, 1984; Ellis, 2008), the unique circumstances of Korea have created a situation all its own. Polluck and Van Reken refer to the journey when discussing the advantages of conducting research (2009). Looking at the creation and existence of third culture kids it is perhaps one of the most pertinent parts of my analysis; when examining military children in Korea it is essential to examine the particulars of their experiences -- their journey in Korea.

This brief review of the literature leads to my research question: How does the rise in tension between North Korea and South Korea affect this unique group of children?

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

As the numbers of American families being relocated to Korea with their active duty service member spouse continues to rise, this unique population of children cannot be ignored. Exploration into the impact is necessary not only for the purpose of determining if resources may be needed to assist that population in coping, but also adding to the growing body of knowledge that discusses children and war.

To better understand what is occurring with American children of active duty service members as tensions between North Korea and South Korea were rising, I employed interpretative and descriptive qualitative methods. I conducted interviews to understand specific circumstances and scenarios engulfing the children of American military families living in South Korea. Participants included parents, school officials, family members, youth services and children who had reached 18 years of age.

Eighteen interviews were conducted with participants ranging from eighteen to some in their sixties. Interviews were in an unstructured and conversational format allowing participants to lead the direction of the interview. A constant examination and comparison of the data was conducted as it was collected; the data continually led the research process itself. In this approach I was following the main processes of grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss, but without the intent to formulate a formal sociological theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). From data, generalizations

were made that further pushed the study in new directions in an effort to understand the behavior. Through the use of descriptive research, I explored the situation and circumstances surrounding American military children living in South Korea.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

As the participants began to share their experiences of children and families living in South Korea one overarching theme was continuously brought up. This overarching theme is the role of the parents and dynamics within the family on the impact on the American children. The various comments and observations were summed up by one participant who explained, “Children live what their parents live... the family background, the support and even a person’s personality” influences how life in Korea affects them. As the coding process progressed, I developed groups grounded in the participant responses and created emic codes, that is codes emerging from the community as opposed to technical codes drawn from the literature. Regardless of whether the participants were parents, professionals that work with children and their families, or both -- their descriptions and observations were invaluable in identifying the following emergent groups: “Happily-Oblivious”, “Dazed-and-Confused”, “Sensational”, “So-What”, “Calm-in-the-Storm”, “Grounded”, and “Good-Little-Soldier.”

The “Happily-Oblivious” group tended to be younger in age. This group includes primarily preschoolers between approximately 3 and 5 years of age. Participants described this group as having a happy disposition and generally oblivious to any rise in tension caused by threats from North Korea. One participant who worked with children said that the children in this age range had an attitude of “just living life ... not worried.” They were described as displaying behavior typical of any child of that age. But participants, parents and

professionals alike, did note that some parents shielded children from existing stressors including any potential risk they may be in. These observations by participants held for those children who attended daycare in addition to those who stayed at home with a parent or nanny.

So while the children are displaying a sense of happiness, participants do acknowledge the role of shielding as a possible reason for a lack of typical signs of stress. This was in addition to the young age of the children. It should also be noted that while a child is not displaying signs of stress it does not mean they are not experiencing it. The lack of signs of stress could indicate that they are playing the role of the “Good-Little-Soldier” a group that will be discussed later.

Another factor brought up by one participant that worked with children and families in family services was the fact that most preschoolers are very proud of their active duty parent(s). She noted that while they did not always understand the specific job they held, they understood the basic concept that they were doing something to help protect others. This pride in their parent(s) is often the only thought given to their parent’s role in the mission. And as real world events unfold, staff of family and youth service locations stand ready to aid families trying to keep adverse impacts to a minimum. Even during situations where the mission of being in Korea is obvious -- such as at Noncombatant Evacuation Operation exercises that families are expected to participate in -- staff makes the process as smooth as possible.

The second group is referred to as “Dazed-and-Confused”. It consists of children between approximately 3 and 8 years of age. Participants described this

group as having knowledge that there was something going on or wrong, but did not indicate specific knowledge about actual events occurring at that time.

According to participants, their reaction to real world events ranged from emotional distress to a general feeling of uncertainty. A participant who is a counselor in family services noted that the drawings of older children in the “Dazed-and-Confused” group included imagery of “bad North Koreans being killed” but again, nothing more specific.

Participants noted that the children often appeared confused by the circumstances surrounding real world events involving North Korea and the subsequent changes it caused in their daily lives. One participant who worked in family services notes that if a parent required longer child care for their children due to real world events, it created confusion for the children. These descriptions stand in contrast to the reactions, or lack of, from the “Happily-Oblivious” group. Unlike those children who appear unaffected by the rise in tension between North Korea and South Korea, those considered “Dazed-and-Confused” were just that -- dazed and confused.

Participants also speculated that some children may have limited access to current events and may only receive information by listening to the conversations of others. One participant working closely with children noted that whether it was tensions between North Korea and South Korea or natural disasters, details were always vague or incorrect. Often the only way they knew what was happening with this group was when a change in the demeanor of the child was noticed and

staff questioned the child; at that point staff realized the child was confused and often ill-informed on the nature of events.

The third group is coded as “Sensational” and its members ranged in age from approximately 7 to 11 years of age. They are most notable for their sensational interpretation of real world events. While rumors within the group stemmed from real world situations, their interpretations deviated drastically. Thus, in February 2010 during a South Korean military exercise North Korea fired upon and sunk the South Korean submarine Cheonan (Lendon, 2010, n.p.). After hearing about the sinking of the Cheonan, participants working with children in this group observed that the children were convinced that “North Korea was invading South Korea.” Moreover members of this group frequently expressed their lack of understanding of how two groups of people who speak the same language, and who are both considered Koreans, would want to kill one another. Adult participants also discussed the group’s desire to “just nuke the North” and “get on with it.” They wanted to “just start the war already. To them it is an inevitability.” One participant who is an American but was raised in South Korea recalled being “totally freaked” when there were threats from North Korea. She recalled peers who were “totally into war and battle” and talked about it frequently. It made it all very “drastic and now.”

Participants who work in youth services noted that children at this age are eligible to utilize facilities where youth congregate for fun and educational activities. This fact was noted because many children who go to these facilities for free play spend time talking about what may be going on therefore opening the

door for sensational talk. Participants who are staff or are familiar with staff at such facilities all concurred that staff continuously makes efforts to quell sensational rumors, and explain what is going on in a calm manner. One participant, a counselor in family services, also notes that this age is a transition age. This group is described as not being little kids anymore, yet still not allowed to wander on their own. Like most pre-teens this group wants to be seen as older and can sometimes “talk big” playing into sensationalism and drama.

An additional factor that participants drew attention to was the role of the media. Participants explained that for those children there was greater access to local television which similarly sensationalized events and made them more prevalent in the news. Also, the tempo of military instillations in South Korea should not be ignored. One participant commented on the nature of the mission, “assignments to Korea are fast paced, everything is heightened.” Another participant spoke of the tempo being in a constant state of motion, a constant run with an occasional sprint but with little down time.

A final factor that participants noted about “Sensational” children was that it was not only sensational about details pertaining to North and South Korea. The sensationalism of real world events extended to many events. One participant working with children within this group, and who was also responsible for assisting in the preparation of possible influx of evacuees from Japan after the Tsunami of March 2011, recalls overhearing children talk about how certain evacuation centers were already at capacity and wondered if those evacuees would attend school in Korea for the time being. Even after reassuring them that

this was not the case, the participant said they proceed to explain that they had reliable sources and were convinced of it.

The fourth group is coded as the “So-What” group because of their lackadaisical attitude toward real world events involving the sometimes tense situation between North Korea and South Korea. This group includes a broad range of children from approximately 10 - 15 years of age. Participants overwhelmingly commented on this group’s lack of concern over the political/military situation. One participant expressed that children who were less exposed to local media and were not as concerned with circumstances revolving around North Korea and South Korea. A participant assisting with children in family services explained that they are at a self-focused age. Put another way by a parent, they were “more concerned about what was going on in their lives than with the world around them.” The group approaching puberty appears to have opted to ignore the situation, or at minimum give it a passing thought, before moving on to their own lives, in stark contrast to those in the “sensational” group.

Other participants, both parents and professionals working with children were more focused on the fact that military children growing up overseas develop a heightened sense of security. They feel safe. Participants noted that when living overseas tight bonds are developed where everyone looks out for one another. They saw many children express a sentiment of “So-What” more because they are feeling safe than a lack of thinking on the matter.

The final observations on this group as described by participants who worked in family services and education services was that they could be playing

the role of the “Good-Little-Soldier.” While this group will be discussed later, it should be noted here that children putting forth a “brave face” is an important theme that threads through each group discussed previously. Participants who noted this attitude/ behavior expressed concern that greater information exchange with the child was needed to more accurately assess the situation.

The fifth group, “Calm-in-the-Storm” consists primarily of teens. This is a unique group because it is a melding of the behaviors of the “Sensational” and “So-What” groups. They are able to maintain that lackadaisical attitude in the midst of sensational thoughts. One participant recalls some children’s unique ability, in the midst of peers sharing sensational stories and rumors, to maintain a disconnected attitude. They remain unconcerned. Participants could not clearly identify if this was a result of not knowing what to do with rumors and not having the knowledge to navigate them, just not responding, or if it had more to do with a conscience effort to be calm.

The sixth group referred to as “Grounded” included children ranging from approximately 11 – 17 years of age. They are described by participants as having a “good head on their shoulders” and being “calm about it all.” Participants note that parental influence was the primary influencing factor; “being a part of family conversations over dinner about current events” are every day. Families that kept an open line of communication with their children experienced greater calm; “when parents remain calm the kids did too.”

Another participant likened military children to chameleons who “adapt to their surroundings”, and noted that with the aid of family discussions parents are

able to keep some sensationalized news at bay. Military children also learn to take life as it comes with a sense of “life is an adventure.” Also, children who are older remain more grounded by the simple virtue of their age; as they grew older their parents explained more, leading to a better sense of what was really going on. Parents attributed the increase in understanding to a feeling of safety.

Some participants also noted that studying Asia in school helped keep perspective. Parents, educators and one time students noted how children matured when they are given the knowledge to put real world events into a frame of reference. In this instance participants agree that concrete information for children who are older and better equipped to deal with such knowledge greatly assisted in their ability to cope and remain level-headed.

Participants who were closely involved with working with families living on the military installation added that when living overseas the community often grows more connected. As discussed previously, the closeness of the community often led to a heightened sense of security. Many told me that families feel “more secure and children felt safer.” Adding to the heightened feeling of security was the fact that organizations servicing family members “made it a point to minimally impact children and youth services during times of heightened alert.” One participant with youth services said, “We are aware of sensitive times and that they call for more sensitivity.” Again, the factors brought up by participants in conjunction with comments by parents and educators attesting to the knowledge held by these children, speak volumes on their ability to remain calm while maintaining an understanding of real world events.

The final group that was emerged from coding responses of participants discussing American children living on American military installations in South Korea was the “Good-Little-Soldier.” This group above all others is the most elusive; it is also the group with the greatest range in age and background. This group plays the role of a “Good-Little-Soldier” by always saying everything is fine despite what they may actually be feeling. Actual feelings of this group as described by participants may range from general feelings of confusion and emotional distress to feelings of fear, anger and resentment. Because these children do not disclose their true feelings it is unclear what they really may be thinking or feeling. This group was identified by participants who work with children or their families.

One participant who is an educator discussed how “part of being a military kid is doing as you are told.” They are frequently told to “make the best of the situation.” One family service staff member pointed out that while children are a reflection of their parents, military children are a reflection of their parents as well as the military itself. While overseas, “our children become little ambassador’s to our host nation,” noted one participant.

Two participants who have worked as counselors both noted that children are under a tremendous amount of pressure to be the “Good-Little-Soldier”, to put on a brave face and soldier on. This was also mentioned by educators and family and youth service staff. The phrase military brat is often thrown around but the children of active duty service members are a unique group that in combination of their home, school and social environment and pressures placed on them by the

very nature of being the child of a service member has an impact that is not yet completely known in this situation.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Based on the data there are three primary factors that have the greatest impact on how the children react to the increase in tension between North Korea and South Korea. Factors include: their age, the role their parents play, and their interactions with staff at school or family and youth services. When exploring these three factors, it is important to first discuss stress in children. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder notes (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009) that even infants can be affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) though primarily as a result of abuse or neglect as opposed to the type of circumstances American children living on military installations in South Korea experience. None the less, children of all ages are subject to the impact of stress (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009; Hall, 2008). It is in this capacity that we explore the role of stress in children.

Stress, in and of itself, it is not all bad. In *Counseling Military Families*, Hall (2008) makes the analogy that without a certain amount of stress a tree's roots may never find the need to grow deep; some stress allows children the opportunity to learn valuable coping skills. These coping skills include self-control, social skills and independence (Bowlby, 1953). But for stressful opportunities to be productive, the child's primary attachment, the person who spends the most time with the child and is most closely bonded, must respond and help the child regulate their emotions (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009). If the primary attachment is able to provide an "attuned response, the child develops a 'felt

security' and adapts this internal working model to build self-organization and physiological regulation skills" (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009, n.p.). Children use their primary attachment as a social reference to help guide their response to events (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009); without this guidance they may have difficulty self-comforting and develop a lack of self-control. But before I go further into the specifics of the role parents play I would first like to explore the impact of age.

Moving from youngest to oldest, the children coded "Happily-Oblivious" and "Dazed-and-Confused" are the youngest of the children discussed during the interview process. Because of their age they are limited in exposure to real world events. These children are not necessarily old enough to read and therefore access newspapers; they more likely to be exposed to fairy tale books and cartoons than news reports. These types of limitation of exposure to sometimes harsh realities can be furthered with parental efforts. Participants who were parents of young children recalled keeping the television off and maintaining as normal a schedule as possible. While they avoided "real world" seriousness as much as possible, some things could not be avoided such as the sirens and battle gear that they see their active duty parent wearing during military exercises. In these cases they made light of anything that could not be avoided. Participants shared stories of children trying on their parents "Darth Vader" gas masks or their helmets but never discussed the role those items played in their lives. But more importantly than any actions masking things, is how they dealt with the unspoken emotions.

The role of the primary attachment is crucial in learning how to deal with stress (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009). The parents who described their children as “Happily-Oblivious” were also participants who made light of things, described military exercise related commotion to “just practicing” and military gear as “just another uniform.” They reassured their children that everything is fine and that they are safe, but most importantly they believed it. When discussing their own feelings about the threat, these participants felt safe in their environment. Participants who worked with children and families echoed these sentiments when describing the children. They noted that the calmer the parent is, the more they explain things in a manner that is appropriate for the age of their respective child, the greater the chance those children will be well-adjusted. In *Counseling Military Families*, Hall (2008) discussed how a caring family that is able to keep stress low can promote healthy psychological development in the children.

In contrast, participants who worked with parents who were more concerned about real-world events and less informed about the nature of the mission and state of things were more likely to have children who were dazed and confused. This can occur even in the most innocent of conversations. One participant recalled a group of mothers discussing their annoyance with the volume of the loud speakers, their proximity to family housing, and a variety of other inconveniences that can come with military exercises. The participant noticed that while they were discussing their annoyance and frustrations with each other, they never visibly touched on the subject to their children who were similarly within earshot. While it is impossible to say whether they discussed

these matters in the privacy of their own home or if their children even paid any attention to their conversations, it is safe to say that these situations should at least be acknowledged for their potential impact.

While there is no guarantee that parents will shield their child or more importantly aid them in learning how to cope with the emotions that come with being in South Korea, fulfilling these tasks remains a goal of staff members within family and youth services. There was a resounding show of support by all participants who worked with the children to maintain as much of a sense of normality as possible. And when children displayed a reaction to these realities or stresses family service professionals were there to provide services as needed; they recognized the importance of the needs of the children. But one participant did note that a great deal of their effectiveness relies on the family. As mentioned before the primary attachment carries the most influence in learning to cope (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009). He felt it was crucial for families as well as staff to work together as a team to have the greatest impact on the children.

As children get older and enter elementary school their world often gets bigger. They are exposed to more thoughts and perspectives from teachers, peers, and the world around them. This is the case of the children coded “Sensational” and this is where they begin to deviate from “Happily-Oblivious” and “Dazed-and-Confused”. Participants recalled some of the most outrageous stories from this particular group. The most vivid recollection came from one staff member who had worked with military children all over the world in a variety of capacities. She noted that this group was now old enough to play together

without having someone constantly watch them, but when they get together the theories that they share with one another are always sensational. In her experience this was normal for this age group. She noted they are old enough to understand the basics of what is going on but not necessarily kept in the loop enough to know what is really going on. This point comes back to the role of the primary attachment. As mentioned previously the ability for the child to cope with stress relies on the ability of the parent to guide them (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009). Regardless of the time the children spend outside the home, it is possible to quell some of the sensationalism with the help of their parents and with the maturity of age.

As children continue to grow there begins to be a variety of directions the children can go in terms of how the rise in tension between North Korea and South Korea is handled. One particular group, while initially appearing selfish may in fact be self-preserving. The “So-What” group and their lackadaisical attitude may actually work as an advantage. Participants noted that they appeared unconcerned with tensions between North Korea and South Korea. Their focus on themselves and their own lives left little to no room for worrying about North Korea and South Korea. Several parents laughed when asked about their child’s concerns; their concerns were described as focusing on their social circle. Staff members who worked with children also noted that these were the ones they worried least about because they simply never showed signs of concern or stress and remained more focused on their own lives. But as self-preserving as this appears, it is also possible that the children are acting-out the role of the “Good-

Little-Soldier”. Congruent with my findings, in *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*, Mary Wertsch (1991) discussed the militarization of childhood and the masks they wear to portray a façade much like the idea of the “Good-Little-Soldier”.

Another avenue children take in response to tension is the one that merges the sensational theories of the “Sensational” group and the lackadaisical attitude of the “So-What” group into one that is referred to as the “Calm-in-the-Storm”. Their unique ability to remain calm amongst the rumors of North Korea invading, American soldiers fighting along South Koreans against the North and escalation of fire fights along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is commendable. Even with this dramatized list of rumors, this group can remain immersed in drama, but still be calm.

This group’s members could almost fall into the “Grounded” group if not for their lack of knowledge. And it is in this knowledge that those within the “Grounded” group are able to remain calm. They lack the sensationalism that can come from misinformation and are generally older which only adds to the sense of having their feet firmly planted on the ground. Participants who spent time discussing current events and the situation between North Korea and South Korea with their families were better able to achieve a positive influence in how the child dealt with stress and tension between the two countries (Barnett & Hamblen, 2009). Both parents and staff that worked with families and children all made efforts to keep the children grounded, but most important, those children listened

and responded. This is in contrast to the children in the “Sensational” and even those in the “Calm-in-the-Storm” group.

Aside from the key factors of age, parental effect and affect and the influence of staff members that work with families and children, there are other factors that should also be acknowledged for their potential impact on how a child may react to the increase in tension between North Korea and South Korea. These factors include the child’s prior life experience, knowledge of their parent’s role as an active duty service member, and experiences with deployment. Their experience with life overseas is similarly a factor to consider.

Participants noted that overseas, the communities can be more closely connected and feel like extended family, impacting how people are affected by the tensions between the North and South. Children may also be accustomed to their parent wearing a variety of uniforms. And specific to Korea, the frequency of military exercises made them common practice which aid in dulling the shock for some. While there are countless factors that play into how a child will respond to rising tensions, it is obvious that while many are related to the role of the people in their lives, their life experiences are among the most impactful. This is most obvious in the exploration of the “Good-Little-Soldier”.

The group that is the most intriguing is the “Good-Little-Soldier”. In the military, family members are perceived as a direct extension of their active duty sponsor (Wertsch, 1991; Alvah, 2007). Because of this, children are told from an early age to behave, to not act out, to present a particular image to those around them (Wertsch, 1991). This sparks the question: Were the children of active duty

service members, who appeared to be well-adjusted, actually well-adjusted or is it possible that they were actually playing a role? Is it also possible that those who did not appear well-adjusted may actually be struggling with not only the original stressors, but also the pressures to be the “Good-Little-Soldier”?

Wertsch discussed the militarization of childhood, “the coaching that directs military children to assume their proper roles in the theatrical company of the Fortress” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 3). This goes beyond an average parent’s desire for their child to be good; this is about learning a life long role of being the “Good-Little-Soldier”. But not all children internalize this message in the same exact way, which is likely why there are so many different coded groups describing how different children have been affected by the rise in tensions between North Korea and South Korea.

Despite the varying reactions, their life experiences clearly brand these children as military brats, in a unique American sub-culture. When exploring the concept of third culture kids there are some key factors that describe this particular group. When combined, they relegate children to a culture separate from others; individually they can set other groups apart as well. These factors include secrecy, stoicism, and denial (Wertsch, 1991). Secrecy refers to the secrecy that is common place in military communities; there are things that parents are not always at liberty to discuss and this creates a veil of secrecy within the family (Wertsch, 1991).

Stoicism is of particular interest when looking at American children living on military installations in South Korea. It not only refers to the active duty

service member being stoic about their service and even injuries, but includes their children as well. This is the embodiment of the “Good-Little-Soldier”. Wertsch (1991) quoted children talking about keeping emotions in, remaining strong during frequent relocations, and suppressing other emotions related to unhappiness or discomfort. One of the subsequent consequences was detachment between family members and feelings of isolation. Both of these consequences work in direct contrast to the role counselors would like to see family members assume.

The third factor, denial, slightly resembles stoicism in that it involves presenting a particular image (Wertsch, 1991). The goal of denial is to block out that which would be not right; in this case it involves being in denial about certain facts (Wertsch, 1991). Again, relating back to aggression from North Korea, the possibility of the North attacking is a prime example of what to deny. This type of denial would allow family members to remain stoic and maintain the mask.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

As the number of families allowed to come to South Korea continues to grow, research into the experiences of families living there on military installations becomes even more important. In looking beyond the specifics of South Korea, research into learning how best to minimize negative impacts that may result from stresses related to a parent's active duty service can be utilized to aid a broad range of children and families.

The role of a child's age, parental influences, and the influence of staff members that work with children and families is evident, but what is not completely known is the impact on the specific sub-culture of third culture kids. The experiences of these children, their journey, is perhaps one of the most pertinent parts of the process, and when examining military children in Korea it is essential to examine the particulars of their experiences, their journey in Korea. So whether you call them the children of active duty service members, or military brats, this particular group has grown to experience life with a perspective all their own. No particular person, or family, lives isolated from the outside world in a bubble and this group is no different. And the best way to aid them is by conducting further research in how to best aid these children in learning to cope, and for those well-adjusted, the best way to maintain a healthy perspective on life.

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