

From Sleepless in Seattle to “I Seoul U”: How Korean Gay Men Narrative,
Negotiate and Reproduce Discourses of Race, Culture, Religion and Sexual
(In)Visibility

Patrick S. Thomsen

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Reading Committee:

Clark Sorensen, Chair

Ji-Hyun Ahn

Christian Novetzke

Nathalie Williams

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Jackson School of International Studies

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Patrick S. Thomsen

University of Washington

Abstract

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Patrick S. Thomsen

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Professor Clark Sorensen

Director, Center for Korea Studies; Professor of International Studies – Jackson School of International Studies

In both Seattle and Seoul, Korean gay men have often been constructed as marginal, whose perpetual invisibility to the public sphere has been attributed to intensely-heterosexist cultural configurations complicated by Christianity. This dissertation project deploys a 3-paper/chapter format to investigate how Korean gay men are navigating this marginal space through qualitative research methods. Over the course of 2-years in (1 year) Seattle and (1 year) Seoul, I completed an ethnographic study that included interviews with Korean gay men about how they navigated questions of sexual visibility in the form of the coming-out narrative as an affective discourse. I found that Korean gay men have their coming-out story affected by a complex milieu of factors that were also affected by the transnational context in which their conceptions of the self was also formed.

In the first analytical chapter, I story how Korean gay men in Seattle navigate the complex nature of a Korean American community that is constructed around the primacy of the Korean American Christian Church. From this phase of fieldwork, I identified how Korean gay men construct what has been coined here as: Situated Embedded Narratives (SENs). Where along with select family members, they construct a heteronormative narrative to allow them to present as heterosexual to extended family and the Korean American community at large. In doing so they are able to live as “out” gay men in the American work place and among non-Koreans without upsetting the normative constructs of the Korean American community. I argue that this is an adaptive strategy that is culturally-sensitive, which suggests Korean gay men do come-out, but due to their relative intersectional-status, do so in a way that reflects the complex intersections of racialized/ethnic others with a gay sexual identity. This also brings into question the appropriateness of coming-out models that have been valorized in the West, premised on a public performance of sexual identity being an important proxy for a healthy gay identity.

In the second analytical paper/chapter, based on the narratives of informants in Seoul, I investigate how Korean gay men are affected by the discursive power of Western constructs around gay sexual liberation and a cosmopolitan gay identity. In Seoul, informants’ narratives demonstrate how notions of a coming-out and gay futurity was directly impacted by Western normative constructs around a gay identity through a variety of transnational flows including television programs, music, Western celebrities and direct travel to Western countries. As a result, Korean gay men are now imagining a type of gay futurity that has also adapted to the pressures of a globalizing Korean society. Where they take-up the project of self-cultivation as a way to negotiate a new type of relationality and postionality within their families and wider South Korean society. I also argue that in order to do so, it required informants to construct

narratives that placed Korean society as “lesser” than the West in relation to gay sexual identities. Their narratives also suggest the idea that a Korean family may be a site of negotiated futurity as opposed as just rigidly heterosexist. Opening up new sites of possible futurity in South Korea for gay men.

The third analytical paper/chapter brings together the narratives of Seattle and Seoul informants to demonstrate how they are coopted subjects in formations of racialized modernity that orbits around whiteness as its referential. In this chapter, I show how informants are both subjected to racialization and coopted agents of racialization due to the unique Korean configuration of racial hierarchies that derives from Korea’s own history and contemporary context. I also argue that due to the power-configuration that posits Korean views of gay identity as inferior to the West, a racialized connection, or inverted convergence functions to re-inscribe Western hegemony. Thus, both coinciding with, and re-inscribing Korean racial hierarchies that mirror processes in the West. This places non-White ethnic groups below Whites in the gay communities in both the US and Korea.

This dissertation also makes a unique epistemological contribution to the Korean Studies literature through my positionality as a Samoan-New Zealander. Data generation for this dissertation used *talanoa* dialogue, an interpretivist, culturally-sensitive research method from the Pacific that connects to Western-ways of knowing through its constructionist nature. As such, this dissertation contributes to knowledge in both substantive and methodological ways that opens up new frames in which we can understand Korean gay men’s visibility.

This dissertation is dedicated to all the men in my study. This work is only possible because you shared and trusted me with your stories so generously. I am forever indebted to you all.

And to Mariah Carey, whose catalogue saved me from myself on many-a-lonely night in Seattle and Seoul.

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Terminologies and Abbreviations

All terminologies are deployed contextually throughout the dissertation, this list is designed to clarify how I conceptualized and use each term throughout the dissertation.

API – *Asian Pacific Islander*

AA – *Asian American*

LGBT – *Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender*

LGBTQIA+ – *Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual plus*

GLB - *Gay Lesbian Bisexual*

Homosexuality – *Used to mark the practice of same-sex attraction leading to same-sex sexual relations.*

Gay – *Used to denote a claimed sexual identity that is built around a homosexual preference*

Queer – *A sexual or gender identity that is not heterosexual or cisgender. This term includes non-binary, transgender folk, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Intersex and Asexual individuals.*

Cis- Cisgender – *Used here to denote an individual whose appearance matches their self-identified gender. Note that a gay male is cis-gendered if he is coded in society as a male and not queer.*

Korea/Korean – *Used to denote South Korea and South Koreans unless specified otherwise*

KACC – *Korean American Christian Church*

Korean Gay Man/Men – *This dissertation uses this term to describe all informants, other labels like Korean-American or Native Korean are not used to distinguish between informants as these terminologies and their construction as identification categories are not dealt with in this dissertation in meaningful ways.*

Potato Queen – *A colloquial term used in the gay community to label someone who has a preference for sexual liaisons and dating only White men.*

Rice Queen – *A colloquial term used in the gay community to label someone (usually a White gay man) who has a preference for sexual liaisons and dating only Asian men.*

MTF – *Male-to-Female transgender subject, born into a male body but who's gender is female. Commonly used to describe a transgender person who has transitioned from male-to-female.*

FTM – *Female-to-Male transgender subject, born into a female body but whose gender is male. Commonly used to describe a transgender person who has transitioned from female-to-male.*

TERF – *Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist. A TERF denies that transgender men or women are “real” men or women by focusing on a narrow biological definition of gender.*

SLHRK – *Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights Korea*

WSCAPAA – *Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American*

*** When not using Korean, or quoting other authors, I use the Revised Romanization Version of Korean transliteration which was adopted officially by the South Korean government in 2000. This differs from the McCune-Reishauer system, which is more common in academic publications outside Korea. I choose to use the Revised Romanization system as it better reflects the way my informants and I speak and pronounce Korean. It also reflects more accurately the way Korean is spoken and Romanized in South Korea today (See Huh, 2017 for a review).*

Introduction Chapter - Where are all the Korean Gay Men?

In South Korea¹, it is not uncommon to encounter the statement that “there are no gays in Korea” from many Koreans themselves (Mogashoa, 2011). This somewhat perplexing statement of apparent sexual exceptionalism (Puar 2007), poses many questions of interest. Could there be something inherently different about Korean society that makes it impossible for a Korean man to be “gay”? In addition, in contrast to many other countries in Asia, South Korea, has never officially outlawed homosexuality (See Laurent, 2005). However, if Koreans have indeed erased or “orientalized from within” homosexual or gay subjectivities (Seo D, 2001), how then, does one become “illegal” if one does not exist in the first place? Indeed, no social phenomenon is created out of a vacuum: societies by their activities determine the beliefs, and motives of their individual members (Hayes, 1911, p.375). In South Korea, then, it appears social processes have simply struck gay men from existence. This, I was to learn, is rather a particular feature of Korean society’s view and relationship toward homosexuality (Seo D, 2001).

To be certain, I am not the first to question the absence of Korean gay men (see: Seo D, 2001; Bong Y, 2008; King, 2008; Kim Y and Hahn S, 2006; Youn, 1996; Um N. et al, 2016; Lim and Johnson, 2001; Cho and Chu, 2015; Kim J and Hong S; 2007 and others). Those who have, all posit that despite homosexuality not being “illegal” in South Korea, gay men still face immense obstacles to their social and legal recognition. And perhaps as a result of this historical erasure, the emergence of a Korean queer studies episteme has struggled as well. As Henry (2018) explains: if sexual and gender minorities in Korea today struggle to survive and ensure their well-being in

¹ I use the terms Korea, ROK, South Korea interchangeably. All refer to a South Korean context unless otherwise specified.

political, social, and cultural systems that tend to silence, displace, and erase them from national life, intellectuals who write about queer populations in the academy face similar barriers (p7).

For the brave who have dared to ask the question before me, their answers to why Korean gay men have been erased have tended to have been structural. Korean gay men are stuck in a cultural bind that oppresses any deviant sexual identity that does not further the development and continuity of the Korean nation (Bong Y, 2008; Seo D, 2001; Han W, 2018). Korean society is both too Confucian and too Christian at the same time for the recognition of sexual minority identities, let alone their integration into its national identity (Cho, M. 2011; Chase, 2012; Cho, J., 2009). But that is not all. The arrival of Christianity endowed with a political power that is historically-derived (Konig, 2000; Camhi-Rayer et al, 2012; Clark, 1986), provides a second constraint to the acceptance of a gay identity in South Korea (Chase, 2012). However, as many of these studies also point out, the trouble with any structural or cultural-centric explanation is the slippery nature of deploying culture as a single explanatory narrative. Culture has many facets, it lives, and its elements - or aspects are constantly converging, and articulating into new, moving and shifting formations (Helmi, 2011). This leads me to believe that the deployment of the term culture as an explanatory framework, can be problematic in the sense that to understand its effects and the phenomenon it produces, more context is needed. Thus, deserves closer inspection in the South Korean case.

Therefore, the goal of my study was to understand the lack of visibility for Korean gay men in both locations through the way my informants narrated their own experiences. To do so, I chose to use a qualitative, ethnographic approach. Conventional ethnography refers to the tradition of cultural description and analysis that displays understanding by interpreting meanings (Thomas, 1993: p4). It involves the researcher participating overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an

extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts [...] to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: p3). In gathering data to formulate the arguments in this dissertation, I spent a full year in both Seoul and Seattle documenting narratives through both formal in-depth interviews (10 in Seattle, 20 in Seoul), and informal interviews. I also collected field notes at various queer festivals including activist and homophobic paraphernalia, spent time as a participant-observer in queer community groups, bars, social gatherings, and immersed myself within the social networks of my informants.

In adopting a “researcher as primary research tool” approach to data generation, a reflexive critique is needed, and I take seriously the post-structural critique that argues we should challenge the idea of value-free knowledge in accepting that a researcher’s personal and political position mediates his/her research questions, interpretations, analyses and writing (Choi J, 2006: p437). As such, my positionality as a gay Samoan New Zealander became a central part of data generation and analysis. As a foreigner, I can be seen as an outsider, but by the same token, I was offered access to informants, premised on a shared gay identity that represents a moment of insider inclusivity. However, as a non-White foreigner, this shifted my positionality in other scenarios, where I subverted the Korean construct of a Westerner by not being a White gay male. This allowed me to carry forth my own assumptions, experiences and ways of knowing as a Person of Color (PoC) into the research process. More specifically, as a Samoan, having lived in South Korea for 7 years prior to my dissertation project being implemented. This reflexive critique brought me to the incorporation of the Samoan concept of the *va* and a shared Pacific practice of *talanoa* dialogue (Vaioliti, 2006). *Talanoa* focuses on the interaction between the researcher and the informant as co-constructed and framed by a space in-between (*va*) that is imbued with respect

and acknowledgement of both party's positionalities in the interaction (see chapter 1 for more details). In this way, I claim that my methodology is also constructionist and relativistic in its ontological and epistemological approach to knowledge production (Blaikie, 2007). This is how I draw connections between post-structural approaches to ethnography and Pacific ways of knowing.

My choice of a transnational setting to locate this study is informed by scholars such as Dennis Altman (1997), Inderpal Grewal (2005), Jasbin Puar (2007) who have all ruminated over the development of a universalizing cosmopolitan gay narrative that many gay men around the world have in some way either grounded their sense of gay identity within or attempted to find sites of resistance to. Puar (2007, 2013, 2016) in particular, refers to this being part of the articulation of homonationalism which is an "assemblage" of de- and re-territorialising forces, affects, energies, and movements. Following from this, my study also attempts in a Korean context, to "understand the particular factors, conditions, and ideologies that shape sexual identities and practices, and how these permeate social institutions" (Manalansan 2006, p. 229). In an age where globalizing and transnational formations continue to generate an imagined global gay identity, a central question becomes: how do we balance the impact of universalizing rhetoric and styles with the continuing existences of cultural and social traditions? (Altman, 1997, p420). Transnationalism as it continues to emerge, ensures that particular factors are no longer bounded by geography. Non-Western identities are often not assimilated but emerge as alternative sexual identities, and migration highlights this difference between the local and the global (Sullivan & Jackson 1999, quoted in Smith, 2012).

The critical power frame is evident in discussions that surround transnational queer subjectivities, therefore a range of theories around power relations are deployed here. In particular, I draw on biopower/biopolitics (Foucault, 1978), to illustrate the productive nature of gay

liberation and freedom as a discourse in the narratives of informants. Foucault articulated biopower to describe how power is not only ‘repressive’ but also productive and operates in a network of practices on our very own bodies regulating them through self-disciplinary practices. For Foucault (1980), power is a force that reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses [...] and everyday lives (p.39). My reference to Foucault in this dissertation is to highlight how scripts of a gay cosmopolitan identity carry with it a productive modality. One that forces gay men of diverse cultural backgrounds to interact with it as a discursive construct imbued with a transformative power.

I also draw on homonationalism (Puar, 2007), which is an analytical lens that helps us to apprehend the manifold ways in which the question of how a state treats its homosexuals became a barometer of state legitimacy (Puar, 2016). More importantly, how and why certain queer bodies become excluded when other homosexuals are included as part of the state project of legitimizing forms of sexuality (Puar 2013). Although, Puar’s critique focuses on the weaponization of homonationalism by states and corporations, I draw on homonationalism throughout the dissertation to position the power configuration, intra-queer identities, mediated by race and class, often made invisible by the discursive power of gay liberation. This is important, as Woori Han (2018) posits through their articulation of queer developmental citizenship, LGBT individuals in South Korea often draw on a discourse of “catching up” with the West as a strategy to push for state reform.

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017) approach is introduced in the latter section of the dissertation. This theoretical approach critiques the ways in which different groups of people become racialized to serve the interests of those with the most power in society. As ethnic minorities in the United States my informants were subjected to racialization in different

forms, whilst in South Korea, the process of racialization is linked to ethno-nationalism and forms the context in which the term foreigner is constructed. Informants experienced and reproduced forms of racialization in different contexts, all the while being imbricated through global discourses of gay identity they navigated in different ways.

As such, the opening analytical chapter of this dissertation draws from an off-shoot of CRT leaning heavily on the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality was a term coined by Black feminists who argued that a single power lens is not enough to understand the complexity of when two or more forms of marginalization intersect. For example, a focus on race alone can subsume the role that sexism plays in the life of a Black woman, and vice-versa, where a single focus on gendered differentials cannot adequately address the racialized experience of a Black woman. An intersectionality critique does not presume that one marginalized identity formation should be seen as more important than the other. Rather, it highlights how when they intersect, the outcome for an intersectional subject creates a different form of exclusion that requires more nuanced analysis. I draw on intersectionality in the first chapter to story how my informants in Seattle occupy an intersectional space of a racialized and sexualized other that generates different adaptive responses.

Probing the narratives of Korean gay men in both Seattle and Seoul allowed me to present a set of empirical and relationally-interpretive arguments in this dissertation. In-line with past studies, this dissertation will argue that informants in both Seattle and Seoul do have their subjectivity and sense of identity constructed by Korean cultural, religious and familial norms. However, the way it affected how they constructed their own sense of a gay identity was mediated by numerous social and structural factors such as class, educational background, and of most interest here, contact with Western culture and ideas around sexuality and gender identity. This

impacted how they navigated decisions around becoming more (or less) visible in their sexual identity. This matters because it has the ability to shed light on queer, specifically gay identity formation in contemporary South Korea. It also allows us to further nuance our own understanding in the “West” of the coming out process for gay men who are non-White in particular. The dearth of literature in this area is finally being addressed by a range of scholars across many disciplines, which this dissertation also aims to provide a valuable contribution to. (For examples of this see: Harris et al, 2017; Szymanski et al, 2008; Chacko 2016; Pongyingpis, 2012; Chiang, 2015 and others).

The central arguments made in this dissertation are two-fold. The first is that Korean gay men do come-out, but they come-out in a uniquely Korean way. They negotiate their coming out within their familial setting, a setting that is impregnated with specific cultural, historical and familial lenses that are specific to the Korean-context. The second argument, connected to the first, is that our unwillingness to accept this as a valid form of “coming-out” relates to the racialized nature of sexual exceptionalism that undergirds the spread of a cosmopolitan gay identity. A type of discourse that posits itself as a type of liberation from the barbarous superstition in which non-Western societies continue to lag behind in. As a result, I also argue that Korean gay men find themselves in an in-between, where some navigate a type of double consciousness that forces them to denounce the discursively constructed backwardness of Korea, to move toward a modern, Western type futurity. The power of this futurity is derived from the allure of homonormativity and the liberating human rights frame. This discourse of futurity defines discursively the cosmopolitan gay subject, but also silences racialized and coloniality critiques, often re-inscribing Western scripts of superiority.

Primarily due to the located nature of queer studies scholarship in the United States, Korean gay men are usually studied in geographically-bounded locations. Studies on Korean gay men in the United States firstly conflate the narratives of Korean gay men with a wider taxonomic category: Asian American. Or even more loosely categorize them as Asian Pacific Islander (API) (See: Chan, 1992; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Cochran et al, 2007; Chung & Szymanski, 2007; Choi K. et al, 1998; Tsunokai et al, 2014; Narui, 2011; Leong, 2014, Harris et al, 2018; Ocampo and Soodjina, 2016). This practice, I will also argue, is problematic in the sense that it functions as a type of erasure through conflation.

I also posit that this practice doubles as a methodological concern. This taxonomical conflation, I purport, can elide important differences between Korean gay men and other Asian and Pacific Islander gay men placed under these umbrella terms (see Harris et al, 2017; Chen and Tryon 2012). Moreover, all these studies tangentially tie Asian American or Asian Pacific Islander gay men to their “sexually conservative” ethnic homelands through the referencing of oppressive conservative cultural norms that come from across the Pacific Ocean. Yet, as Harris et al (2017) point out, this only has the effect of locating stigma and discrimination as a solely Asian Pacific Islander experience. Identifying a need for more nuanced discussions around the power structures that underpin the motivations of sexual minority groups seeking reform in non-Western contexts.

The Korean context that is talked about in this dissertation is also transnational by virtue of Koreans being one of the most mobile populations in the world. According to the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2017) the number of Koreans living abroad now numbers over seven million. With the South Korean government sponsored *Hallyu* movement, also known as the Korean wave, one simply cannot avoid Korean cultural products as well. In 2014, *Gangnam Style* broke the record for the most watched video in YouTube history, leading many to jokingly

proclaim that it broke the internet (Galvin, 2014). As will be clear in this dissertation, globalizing digital media and communications plays a significant role for informants in Seoul to be able to make contact with Western sexual norms and identity constructs. Perhaps even more crucially, it provided digital transnational flows of information, ideas, strategies and media that became central to informants' own construction of their personhood.

These transnational connections speak to the historical context of a Korean nation that has been displaced, reformed and reconstituted in differing nation-state formations across centuries (See Sō C and Sohn J, 2007; Lee N, 2008). McCarthy (2009), in conversation with Spivak postulates that discourse that refers to transnational subjects like the subaltern in settler-colonies often reference an imaginary homeland. Yet, they too (postcolonial subjects) are steeped in the same quotidian experience as the rest of us. The “us” meaning the dominant culture and those socialized within them. McCarthy speaks to the complex connections between diaspora populations and how they narrate their own marginality in adopted homes. Where they inevitably draw on the same logic that produced their self-narrated marginalization.

Setting the Scene – Sleepless in Seattle?

Around 61,000 Koreans enjoy a large presence in Seattle and Washington State as a whole (WSCAPAA, 2018). They are a “model minority,” high-achieving, generally well-educated, and in a middle-to-high income bracket in comparison to non-East Asian minority ethnic groups (Harris et al, 2017 Phua, 2007). Yet, what perplexes still, is that Korean gay men are less-visible than other gay men from different ethnic backgrounds, something informants to this study derided as a type of internalized homophobia in their interviews. This idea itself runs contrary to studies like what was presented by Strayhorn (2014) who found that Korean gay men do migrate to places like the United States in order to enjoy a more “open” life.

The lack of visibility or sexual visibility displayed by Korean gay men in the US has been explained as a product of Korean Americans being part of an intensely heterosexist Asian American demographic, due in large part to cultural norms that highlight patriarchal familial norms of continuing the family line (Chen & Tyron, 2012; Harris et al, 2017). This explanation is also in-line with what scholarship in South Korea has identified (Seo D, 2001; Bong Y, 2008; Um N. et al, 2016; Lim and Johnson, 2001; Cho and Chu, 2015). An explanation that highlights the power of Confucian-derived cultural and familial norms to restrict the recognition of gay identities in South Korea. But if this is the case, a new question arises, where have they all gone? Do they just remain silent and hidden? Moreover, having been conflated under an Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander label, what specificities exist in the Korean American community for gay men? Ultimately, of interest here: how are Korean American gay men navigating their own marginality? A question that the first substantive chapter deals with in much detail.

Informant narratives in Seattle showed that when deciding to “come-out,” their decisions were also complicated by experiences of exclusion from wider US society. As alluded to previously, in constructing this chapter, I draw on the work of Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989) who articulated the term intersectionality to critique the racial blind spots in the feminist movement. I argue that an intersectionality lens is more useful here than queer theory alone, as intersectionality holds that when multiple forms of marginalization converge, they generate different challenges that a single queer-focused, or race-focused lens alone cannot account for. Thus, due to their positioning in an intersectional space, I theorize that informants in Seattle engaged in a process of what I term the construction of “situated embedded narratives (SEN).” Where they chose to reveal their sexual orientation to a certain member of their family and together with these select family members, informants deployed a heteronormative narrative specifically targeting the Korean

American community. This was done in order to minimize familial friction and community dislocation. A SEN also allowed for informants to live both as “out” gay men in American society, where many of them were out to workmates, friends and colleagues, but stayed closeted to the wider Korean American community.

A central concern for many informants was the ability to allow their families to stay attached to the Korean American community. For Koreans in the United States, ethnic community, dominated by a Christian church formed the bedrock of social relations and helped in both providing social and even economically important networks (Light, 1984; Kim J, 2014). However, their sexual identity is deviant to their cultural and religious backgrounds, and at the same time as Koreans, they can be considered part of what Puar (2007) terms, the “disqualified racial and sexual other” from the national imaginary. As such, their reliance on Korean community structures cannot be severed easily. Doing so, I theorize, would require a “break through the veil” (Du Bois, 2007), by assimilating into American society. This is something some informants had chosen to do, but in doing so, had caused themselves emotional distress and for some even threatened their physical well-being.

In this first analytical chapter, I also theorize that the deployment of SENs must be understood as not only a culturally adaptive practice, but a necessary condition for informants to negotiate the minefield of being a sexual and racial other. The existence of this practice forces us to also reconsider our understanding of what is seen as a “true” coming out process, and whether full disclosure is really a good proxy for the total realization of the sexual self for Korean gay men.

I Seoul U – Negotiated Futurities?

The connected nature of the Korean American community to Seoul and Korea as a whole was something that was evident in the narratives of Seattle informants. Hence, this dissertation organically found itself entangled with Seoul in a network of trans-Pacific connections including people-to-people contact. In fact, it was through my time in Seoul that I found myself, a Samoan New Zealander, transplanted to Seattle, in following the same transnational migratory patterns of a Korean ex-partner who had introduced me to this community (my positionality as a researcher will be explained in more detail in chapter 1). However, in selecting Seoul as the second analytical chapter's located place of enquiry, there were other theoretical logics, identified in prior studies, which made analytical sense.

According to Dongjin Seo (2001), Korean society has had a tendency to erase Korean gay men and queer subjectivities. Many informants believed that this was still a major stumbling block for the recognition of a gay identity in South Korea. "Koreans simply do not want to accept that gay people exist! They say that there are no gay Koreans," one informant I spoke to at the Seoul Queer Culture Festival 2017, exclaimed. A response given when I queried the presence of signs that simply read: "we're here, we exist," (written in Korean). Moreover, as Korean queer activists continue to actively push for greater social and legal recognition in contemporary Korean society, a peculiar quirk still remains as part of their activism. Korean activists in general are "not out." Leading to one of the informants, a self-proclaimed activist in Seoul, intimating to me that: it's a type of "faceless activism."

To be sure, gay men in South Korea most certainly do exist. On any given weekend, and some weekdays, Seoul's two gay-friendly districts Itaewon and Jongro find themselves well-patronized by Korean gay men seeking out gay socialization. In addition, the queer and gay activist movement in particular is perhaps at its most visible in history. In the past decade there have been

many high-profile attempts to have legislative reforms protecting gay and queer identities in-turn fail (Hill, 2017). Including a high-profile test of South Korea's marriage laws by a well-known gay Korean film director, Kim Jho Gwang-soo, who attempted to legally marry his long-term partner (Chung J, 2013). A situation that one of my informants labelled as a "sugar daddy type of arrangement."

LGBT rights became a publicized subject of discussion for the first time ever during the 2017 Presidential Election Debate. Over the past two years, the issue of sexual assault and the targeting of gay soldiers in the military also emerged in public discussions (Ock H, 2017). Despite there being little movement legislatively in South Korea, my informants were overall positive on the issue of social reform. It appears that discursively, South Korea has moved past the point of denying that gay people exist in their country. So, what has facilitated these changes? And can we expect to see more gay men come-out and claim an open identity as one of my informants put it: South Korea moves toward a "postmodern" future?

Establishing whether wider structural changes have taken place in a society is not an exact science. Cho, S and Abelman (2011), for example, highlighted a rather under-examined part of South Korean gay life. Where some married men (to women) engaged in weekend relations with other men, even constructing their own version of a gay life that included gay partners their wives/partners knew or suspected existed. Cho, S and Abelman termed this "the rise of the bats." This practice resembles what some would recognize as the "gay on the weekend" trope or what King and Hunter (2004) investigated as "on the down low" in the lives of straight Black men who slept with other men. For South Korea, the situation is certainly more complex than gay men just operating on the "down low" in living out sexual desires. The rise of the bats should be seen as a product of distinctly Korean social and historical processes. As Cho's findings sit in-line very

much with work completed by Dongjin Seo (2001), Youngshik Bong (2008) and Insook Lee (2016).

When I interviewed activists as part of my sample, they relayed to me a longing for this practice of being “gay on the weekend” to end. Additionally, many informants who said they did not consider themselves activists, criticized this practice as contributing to internalized homophobia in the South Korean gay community. This, they labelled as one of the major factors that holds back progress for Korean gay men being able to gain recognition in South Korea. The type of criticism that posits a reluctance to come-out contributing to internalized homophobia, bringing psychological harm to gay men, falls in-line with a Western, and essentialist viewpoint on the effects of developing an alternative gay identity (Horowitz and Newcomb, 2001). Some of my informants simply referred to it as cowardice.

However, I have reservations about this interpretation that are undergirded by two points. The first is that this critique supposes that a gay sexual identity in a Korean context is a fully formed subjectivity that we in the West can recognize, and that men with homosexual desires should be seeking to attain this in order to ensure a synthesis of identities (Cass, 1979). However, Cass herself recognized that a homosexual identity as we see it in the West can only be sure of occurring in societies where homosexuality is acknowledged (Cass, 1984). South Korea has only acknowledged the presence of a gay identity in their country recently. This is why Dongjin Seo (2001) was highly skeptical of a Western-type sexual politics strategy being effective, without a group consciousness around a gay or queer subjectivity firmly emerging in Korea.

The second reason for my skepticism, relates to the first, in that this critique takes a single lens to the operation of power. One that seems to be repressive in claiming that these men are still oppressed from being able to reach this imagined fully-formed Korean gay subjectivity. However,

if we expand our conceptualization of power to incorporate a Foucaultian definition, power must also be seen for all its generative elements. This means recognizing its productive (biopower/biopolitics) nature, not just its repressive, qualities (Foucault, 1978). In this way, understanding that gay men are still men and have access to Korean patriarchal normative structures, means that other possibilities of inclusion can emerge that reflect this access to patriarchal power. One that differs starkly with the positionality of Korean women for example. Hence, the supposition that an alternative way of being gay, could well and truly exist when this expanded, productive understanding of power is brought back into the analysis.

The second analytical paper makes the argument then, that Korean gay men are being constituted as gay subjects by their own deployment of Western discursive formations that have flowed into Korea through media forms like music, television programs and people-to-people contact. In doing so, the chapter traces how activists and non-activists utilize the productive element of the discursive relationship between the West and South Korea to their advantage. For activists the utility was both ideological in garnering international support for local reform and material in inducing financial contributions for local activities. For non-activists its constitutive value was ideological in helping to shape positive views of the self, as well as create imagined possibilities of social and familial transformation. In doing so, they pursued a cultivation of self-reliance that they deployed as an adaptive strategy to renegotiate their positionality within their families as they either came-out, in forms we recognize in the West, or made plans to do so.

According to my informants, for Koreans, the space to become an “individual” finds itself emerging in-line with shifts in South Korean society. Shifts that have arisen as part of class inequality and the rise of neoliberal subjectivities within South Korea’s notable era of compressed modernization (Campbell, 2016). An era that has also instigated structural changes to the South

Korean family (Chang, 2010). My informants' narratives intimated the importance of self-cultivation as an adaptive strategy. Something I also draw parallels with to Abelman et al's (2013) articulation of the term "self-management" *chagi kwalli*, as a guiding discourse in how South Korea's rising generation now present their narratives of self-responsibility to succeed within the new global reality. In addition, for informants, the family was a central site of identity formation.

To be sure, one argument this dissertation does not make is that a gay sexual identity based around Western sexual politics has no place in South Korea. It can even be said that Western sexual identity politics is something that many South Korean gay men want (see Ock H, 2017). And the second substantive paper will also trace how this presents itself in the narratives of informants. What is not so clear is the deeper role that Western norms and transnational queer identities play in the South Korean context on the ground. Woori Han (2018), one of the few to have examined this in detail, postulates that one outcome has been the appearance of a type of queer developmental citizenship, where LGBTQIA+ Koreans seek to cultivate the self and others to "catch up" with and align with Euro-American citizenship narratives. In doing so, a reflexive critique of the power-differentials between Korean ways of knowing and Western ascendancy can often be lost.

In-line with this, probing informant narratives deeper has demonstrated to me that Korean informants had internalized a type of "Othering" that places Korean culture and society as not only backward, but lesser than the "West." Here I follow in Dongjin Seo's (2001) footsteps in drawing on Edward Said's (1978) conceptualization of Orientalism. As a discursive construct, Orientalism allows the West to mirror itself by positing that the Orient, represented by an imagined "East" is its denigrated and feminized opposite. I argue that informants accessed an Orientalist frame in Western benchmarking that constructed Korean culture and society as the lesser. Western benchmarking has productive appeal, as it was a successful strategy in South Korea in aiding the

state to push structural reform. Clear evidence of this is seen in the developmental miracle orchestrated by Park Chung Hee during the time of the military dictatorship. A process Byung-Doo Choi (2012) titles: developmental liberalism.

However, the use of this benchmarking frame was particularly complicated due to its malleability in allowing opponents to queer liberation within South Korea to deploy the same logic. This was demonstrated by informants when they also explained how opponents to gay rights in Korea, including an increasingly militant Christian bloc, also drew on this type of “Othering” (i.e. gay is a Western disease) in their efforts to contain the recognition of sexual minorities. Using Western benchmarking represents then, an inevitable clash of politics, where opposing groups frame their arguments using the same logic: “gay” is a Western concept. But rather than it be touted as a progressive construct, these oppositions deride it as neocolonial and diseased, often drawing a faulty yet powerful construct that connected homosexuality to HIV/AIDS in South Korea.² In employing an Orientalism lens, I further argue that both camps are ultimately using logic that has emerged from colonial times. For informants, especially those that were activists, Western benchmarking became a two-edged sword. On one side was a desired progressive society that the West modelled in its discourses and media productions, on the other, it provided fertile ground for the forces of Korean ethno-nationalism to be repurposed by the opposition to expel homosexuality as a threat to the nation altogether.

Moreover, it is this situation that drew me to the work of Lyotard (1988), where I also construct the argument that Korean gay men face a *differend* between cultural norms that dictate gay as Western, versus a utilitarian value found in queer developmental citizenship and ideals that

² See appendices B, C, D for examples of specific signs used by Christian fundamentalists that linked homosexuality to AIDS and the cost it has on the Korean nation-state.

informants advanced as “modernizing” overall. Speaking specifically to genres of discourse, Lyotard argues that a *differend* is a situation in which two or more parties to a dispute speak different languages or discourse, the *differend* will be settled in a manner that will injure the other party. In other words, due to differences in understanding, the outcome can only be judged in one linguistic and discursive form. Thus, an equitable outcome can never be achieved in this situation. The matter must be settled in favor of the party that wields the most power. Informants also believed that a rising younger generation of Korean gay men, raised in a more “Westernized” and a globally connected Korea, will transform, reshape, and reconstitute Korean identity by claiming and incorporating a cosmopolitan gay identity into their own individual subjectivity. If this does come to pass, I maintain that they are at their core *still* Western normative constructs. Essentially, these gay men are forming a type of hybrid gay identity, which I metaphorically posit, entails the putting of a *Hanbok* over a Western body. Thus, settling the matter in the favor of Western normative constructs around sexuality and gender. A side-effect of establishing the rights of gay and queer subjectivities in Korean legislative and normative frameworks in this vein then, is a re-inscription of Western hegemony. Minus a reflective critique of this power configuration, the possibilities of generating something uniquely Korean may also be lost.

The role of religion in the form of Christianity is also presented in the second chapter where I argue through informant narratives, that the geo-historical-genealogical roots of what was once a modernizing force in South Korea (“Christianity”), has now become the most oppressive force against gay futurities in South Korea. Informants storied their Korean families as flexible despite homosexuality still being an emerging identity in the Korean consciousness. They felt their families were capable of incorporating a gay son into its kinship relations. Christianity, however, was storied as dated, inflexible, illogical and oppressive. This emergent separation between

Christianity and conservative familial and cultural configurations in informant narratives is an important distinction, as it suggests that their roles and effect on gay Koreans have begun to diverge. In that informants now saw conservative normative structures as ripe for reform, while in contrast, Christianity was storied as an existential threat to the possibilities available to Korean families that may wish to incorporate a gay son into its frameworks. Informants' critique of Christianity related to the ability of Christian conservatives to monopolize public discourses that incited homophobia in the public sphere. In other words, informants felt Korean society's progress on sexuality, diversity and inclusion was being held hostage by its own genealogical history. A history where Christianity's unique positionality gave it a disproportionate share of power in affecting discourses around sexuality in South Korea, even in 2018.

Transnational Racialized Modernity and Interest Convergence

In the third analytical chapter, I draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and homonationalism as an assemblage to outline how Seoul and Seattle informants are subject to and coopted agents of racialization that centers whiteness as its referential. I specifically use the concept of interest convergence, borrowed from CRT (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017) in theorizing how the valorization of white as a constructed category as referential point in Seoul's gay community is also connected to the West through the convergence between Korea's own obsession with whiteness as a desirable aesthetic and racialization in our own "Western" countries.

Thus, I infer a further convergence with gay racism found in Western countries like the US (Bérubé, 2001; Teunis, 2007). In CRT, interest convergence is often deployed to explain how only when White elites find their interests coincide with the desires of racialized groups will a desire to

reform racially discriminative structures begin to emerge. However, I repurpose this concept of interest convergence in deploying it in combination with Puar's assemblage theory to explain how a transnational convergence between the interests of White elite Americans and Korean constructs of the foreigner produces a preference for whiteness, works in tandem with White-centrism in the West that reinscribes White supremacy across the Pacific Ocean. Thus, recreating disqualified racialized gay others in South Korea, whilst simultaneously disqualifying Korean gay men in the United States in other moments and contexts.

This third analytical chapter also draws on the work of Jasbin Puar (2007) whose articulation of homonationalism as an analytic aim to interrogate what processes led to the development of global practices that allow for the homosexual question to be a proxy of state morality and progress. In this process, Puar argues that there are some gays and queer identities who are partially constituted by the state whilst others are left out based on race, color, religion and other subject formations. These multiple configurations led her to the articulation and characterization of the concept of assemblages versus identity, which aims to take the subject out of the analysis due to the lack of futurity that queer "identities" may not be privy to (Puar 2013). I use assemblage theory to help foreground the deployment of CRT, focused specifically on interest convergence to explain how the process of racialization in South Korea among queer subjects creates multiple moments of inclusion and exclusion for gay foreigners. A multifaceted process that emerges in-line with Korea's ascension into the global community of nations.

In the West, White gay men are often centered as the symbol of the gay community (Bérubé, 2001). A type of privilege that also creates a hierarchy of desire that places White gay men at the apex giving them the ability to racialize gay PoC (Teunis, 2007). Informants in both locations revealed that they experienced both racial stereotyping from within the gay community and from

White gay men (who are now quite common in Seoul as well as Seattle). Moreover, informants in Seoul also reproduced similar hierarchies among themselves in choosing to date Koreans first, with White men being seen as acceptable to many above other non-Koreans. This phenomenon is important to note as it also something that has been well-documented to exist within the US gay community, noted through the Asian American gay and masculinities literature (Han C, 2008a; Han C, 2008b; Eguchi, 2010; Fung, 1996; Phua, 2007). But also, it coincides with the phenomenon of colorism in South Korea, where White skin color is the most desired skin aesthetic (Glenn, 2008).

In Seoul, informants generally encountered relatively well-educated, middle class White gay men. In particular, these men that informants encountered tended to be English teachers. According to Korean immigration law, to secure an E-2 visa - the visa required to be able to teach English in Korea - a foreigner is required to have a degree from a 4-year university, and citizenship from one of the “big seven” native English-speaking countries. The US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, South Africa or New Zealand (NZ) (Korea Immigration Service, 2018). Providing one can pass a local police clearance that demonstrates that they are free of any criminal convictions in their home country, an E-2 visa is relatively easy to obtain. Up until recently, it was a requirement for foreign English teachers to pass an annual HIV test to prove they also have a clean bill of health, a requirement of all foreigners living in South Korea (Cheng, 2004). This requirement was removed in July 2017. The South Korean government were instructed in May 2015 by the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to remove it from visa requirements. A ruling backed by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea in September 2016 (Kerry, 2017). Cheng S (2004) argues that the construction of the foreign other, functioned as a way to manage the disease (HIV) in public discourses, attributing it to the social

ills associated with globalization, and the incursion of the foreign “other”. Also, informants, often added that there was still a misconception in Korea that HIV and AIDS is a “gay disease.” Anti-gay protestors at many queer festivals I attended often used the productive modality of this discourse in their signage and posters that claimed an acceptance of homosexuals or queers in Korean society was akin to shepherding in HIV and AIDS as threats to the stability of the state and harmful toward the development of Korean children.

Unofficially, there is a look that Korean English private academies favor: White (Strother, 2007). Racism seems to be a major issue in South Korea for foreigners living there. The Korea Observer (Hyams, 2015) reported a Seoul Institute survey (2015), where 94.5% of foreigners said they had experienced racism. The issue of race and racism in South Korea is only now becoming an area of academic interest, where it is often linked to the issue of Korean ethno-nationalism (Kim C S, 2011), applied to the way the South Korean state deploys its multiculturalism discourse (Lim T, 2010; Kyung-Koo, 2007; Ha S, 2012; Kim N, 2012; Watson, 2012; Ahn J H, 2013). In terms of this study, what informant narratives betrayed was the existence of another phenomenon related to racial hierarchies, how the privileging of English as a modicum of social capital in South Korea (Sorensen, 1994; Park J, 2011; Park and Abelmann, 2004), seems to have also facilitated the greater presence of White gay men in Seoul.

I further connect this phenomenon - the uneven racial/ethnic distribution of foreign gay men in Seoul - to CRT by drawing on the racialized nature of education inequality in the United States (Harper et al, 2009; Fine and Ruglis, 2009; Feagin, 2010) and other Western countries by simply arguing that there are just numerically, far more White college graduates than PoC. As a result, I postulate that informants were encountering more White gay men due to the numerical advantage that they have as a group in being able to qualify for an E2 visa. The connection to

South Korea then is a result of South Koreans, through the pursuit of English language education as social capital, finding itself entangled in the self-referential eye/I that Chow argues is the crux of US practices of targeting the world (Puar, 2007). Incho Lee (2011) also connects this to the Global Korea policy or *Segyhewa* policy, which has helped to create a hierarchy in South Korea of foreigners that is racially-inflected. Koreans, they posit, assign status to their foreigner community by the level of economic development of their home nations. As such a divide has emerged between a professional, mostly White middle-class workers who inhabit urban centers like Seoul, versus a ‘lower’ class of women from Southeast Asia as rural brides and low-skilled migrants from Central, South and Southeast Asia as manual laborers.

The implications for CRT are significant, as CRT scholars are an epistemological community engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). As part of my fieldwork I also interviewed and observed gay men from diverse ethnic backgrounds who were living in South Korea regarding their experiences within the Seoul gay community. These men were vocal about racism in South Korea, with White gay men the most vociferous in sharing their experiences to me, a Brown researcher. For these men, this manifested in critical comments of the racist behavior of Korean men who refused to talk to them or wrote things like “no foreigners” on their gay dating profiles. This was part of their overall feelings of displacement related to living as a foreign subject in Korea. Yet, very few acknowledged their relative privilege in relation to South Korean societal norms around what one informant termed, “whiteness being rightness,” in South Korea. This practice, a lack of interrogation of racial hierarchies within societies, is something critical race theorists identify as a hallmark of White privilege (Powell J, 1999).

Korean informants assured me that this was something they believed to be a mere reflection of South Korean societal norms and not specific to the Korean gay community itself. However, informants revealed that a “race-deficit” can be overcome by gay PoC who possessed the ideal hyper masculine body type that speaks to the power of hypermasculinity in gay communities (Phua, 2007). This also mirrors research conducted in the US (Longres, 1996). For instance, when some informants encountered Black men in South Korea, they often betrayed a racial stereotyping that deemed these Black men as objects of desire because they embody idealized masculine traits valorized among gay communities globally. Scripts of potato queens (Asian gay men who have a preference for dating White men), rice queens (White men with a preference for dating Asian men), ran rife among the gay community in Seoul as well as other racialized stereotypes that othered gay PoC. One common stereotype posited that Black men, African American in most cases, represented a type of hypermasculinity that included having large penises and muscular bodies that is desirable to gay men (Ward, 2005). Puar’s articulation of assemblages tells us that different conditions and moments allows for different moments of inclusion and exclusion to occur for racialized gay subjects. Thus, this chapter also helps to reveal the moments in which some informants became racialized in one context, and coopted into racializer in others, yet at every moment orbiting around whiteness as its referential.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is primarily a 3-paper dissertation that has been structured to reflect my own diverse academic training. As a student of international studies, Pacific studies and Korean queer studies, I was brought to this field through personal experiences rather than any particular

fascination or desire to join any academic discipline. I arrived at my doctoral program having detoured via political science, international relations and Pacific studies. Even completing an interdisciplinary social science program as a minor during my undergraduate years. Thus, I am unsure how any single dissertation format would be able to honor all of my academic “homes.” To navigate this, I have chosen to take a decidedly interdisciplinary approach.

I share no particular dissatisfaction with disciplinary divides. Interdisciplinary studies may have emerged partly as a reaction against the fragmentation and professionalization of knowledge produced by disciplinary proliferation (Augsburg and Henry, 2009), but I see them as necessary in being able to produce diverse forms of knowledge production in the social world. I only hope that my use of these concepts, which crosses disciplinary borders opens a deeper realm of theorization when trying to understand the social puzzle that is in front of me in this dissertation.

Despite this being a 3-paper dissertation format, I present here a work of hybridity. This dissertation is assembled empirically. Meaning, the 2 years of my fieldwork are presented through three analytical chapters that will contain a short abstract/summary, introduction to the empirical puzzle, a situated literature review, theoretical framework or additions as needed, methodology specifics, an analysis and discussion, rounded out by a conclusion. After the third analytical chapter, a conclusion chapter that draws the papers together as one body of work is presented.

Before the analytical chapters are presented, some general reflections are also offered in the form of background or foregrounding chapters. This is done in order to fill methodological and theoretical gaps that can sometimes appear in a 3-paper dissertation format. To do this, I present a situated methodology chapter of sorts, that deals with my positionality and concerns inherent to constructionism, *talanoa* dialogue, a poststructural ethnographic approach and how I was able to resolve them in my fieldwork. I will also present a chapter that will outline my understanding of

coming-out and the shortcomings of linear models that we often use to undergird our understanding of sexual visibility. This chapter will also discuss in some length, Korean configurations of the family and how they relate to my informant narratives. I felt this a necessary exercise as the role of Korean familism in the ways my informants constructed their narratives became apparent very early on in my fieldwork. Following these two background chapters, the three analytical chapters will present my informants and I's contribution to knowledge and the literature.

As evidenced by this lengthy introduction, my interdisciplinary approach to this dissertation, draws from a large and diverse range of theories across many social science disciplines and I also deal with each one individually as the dissertation develops. This work has much to say about debates in many disciplines, but I wish to also make clear that this work belongs to the fields of international studies, Korean queer studies and makes a decided effort to advance the sphere of Pacific studies. My ultimate goal was to also produce a body of work that reflects, global, contemporary times. Where transnational linkages and subjectivities now muddle the range of theoretical approaches available to us in understanding sexual identity visibility.

Chapter 1 - Methodology: Connecting the *Va*, and *Talanoa* with Constructionism and Poststructural Insights

The fact that Korean men with same-sex desires do not appear to exist as “fully out” gays is a reflection of the construction of gay subjectivity in the West. Western discourses have valorized the full coming-out narrative as a symbol of not only self-acceptance, but a rallying cry for a specific type of sexual politics that demands public recognition of “gay” as a distinct identity having embodied rights such as same-sex marriage and non-discrimination (Rimmerman and Wilcox, 2007). These rights and this approach to gay subjectivity aligns well in Western contexts but does not translate so well in non-Western contexts (Wang et al., 2009; Coleman and Chou, 2013; Yip, 2004), in which people see themselves as subjects positioned in a complexity of different relationships (Tamagawa, 2018³; Cass, 1984).

Constructionists posit that the social world, as people understand it, is a construct of the complex operations of the human mind. In that we as individuals construct meanings for objects through a process of inter-subjective meaning giving (Blaikie, 2007). Moreover, that reality is constructed and reconstructed both individually from the sum of experience and in relationship and conversation with others (Birks and Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006; Gergen, 2001, 2009 quoted in Ward et al, 2015). Floridi, quoted in Allo (2017), summarizes the epistemological insight from constructionists as follows: Knowledge is not about getting the message from the world; [but] first and foremost about negotiating the right kind of communication with it (Floridi 2011a, 284).

But if social relations are discursively constructed, they are also constructed within relations of power. Foucault (1980) argues that in any society there are manifold relations of

³ Tamagawa’s study on the coming out narratives of Japanese queer subjects concluded that the Japanese cultural context created multi-faceted narratives complicated by how Japanese familial relationships are constructed. Making a clean alignment with Western coming out narratives impossible.

power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body. And these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. Here, Foucault talks specifically of the way power relations are embedded within social relations and the discursive forms we use to produce knowledge. He further suggests that we should also abandon the tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where power relations are suspended, and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands, and its interests. That the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge (Foucault, 1979).

Subjects frequently do not have full agency to choose their responses to situations (Sundin et al., 2008). Not only that, but there is a power relationship between the researcher and his/her subjects (Mason, 2002). This relates to the privileged position of the researcher as the knower of knowledge in presenting the final text of the research. If situated subjects are enmeshed in relationships, praxes and power structures that form us and our contexts of encounter (Grant, 2016), this positionality can also be used as a tool for deconstruction (Choi 2006). In particular, the “real” is taken as an effect of the discourse (Britzman, 2000 quoted in Choi, 2006). The poststructural approach to agency is particularly useful to the research questions I ask here focused on ethnic and sexual minorities. Especially as their positionality in society are governed by hegemonic mainstream discourses. Poststructuralists locate subjectivity within social and cultural context, founded upon the specific nature between the speaker and the listener. They also emphasize that the history of each individual influences that person’s participation and reproduction of discourses, which can only be accorded meaning within a relational context (Roy-Chowdury, 2010).

I posit that due to social constructionism’s emphasis on the relationally-derived nature of knowledge and understanding, that a critical lens that situates positionality between the researcher

and subject must be undertaken. This reflexive approach was important to my research specifically, as a Samoan New Zealander, the particularities of my positionality in relation to my informants was important in that it engendered particular assumptions about the research and my legitimacy as a researcher for informants. As a racialized body, my position in the Korean racial hierarchy colored the approach many of my informants took in choosing to focus on this aspect of my identity. Namely, I began to get a sense that informants felt like issues relating to race and racialization was something that they should focus on in our dialogue due to my racially-coded appearance. Despite my initial focus being on the coming-out narrative, the effects of Western discourses and sexual exceptionalism, our discussions inevitably turned into a racially-inflected dialogue. To this end, my positionality affected the type of data I was generating in the field and ultimately affected the outcome of the final text. Where I dedicate an entire chapter to the issue of racialization in a Korean transnational setting.

Positionality of the Researcher

A postcolonial critique helps one understand that asymmetric power relations are generative spaces of their own. Edward Said (1978) in discussing the role of power and positionality in facilitating Orientalism, draws on Foucault to write that: one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient, politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (p11). For Said, “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature (p12).” Rather, it was a constructed imaginary constituted through the power and positionality of Western discourses. As a result, he also argues that ideas, cultures, and histories

cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied (Said, 1978, p13).

In reference to discourses specifically and what she terms “elite theory” Gayatri Spivak (1990) argues that there is no neutral communication, which is a central tenet of Habermasian articulation of the public sphere. She suggests that: “the desire for neutrality and dialogue, even as it should not be repressed, must always mark its own failure (p.72).” A self-confessed poststructuralist, Spivak further posits that “the idea of neutral dialogue is an idea which denies history, denies structure, denies the positioning of subjects (p.72)”. She supposes that for post-colonial subjects, then, the issue of knowledge production should also involve: “using what one has (p.69)”. In other words, despite the post-colonial subject being immersed within a Western academic tradition that is marked out by history and asymmetric power relations, even indigenous theory “cannot ignore the reality of nineteenth-century history (p.69).”

My positionality as a postcolonial transnational subject has facilitated my research and allowed me to subvert Western elite theory and Orientalist discourses. As a Samoan New Zealander my understanding of gender and sexual identities differ from what can be described as typically Western. Although I was raised in a settler colony and was acclimated into the Western tradition of academic knowledge production, my suspicion of its colonizing tendencies has a long tradition of its own (Smith, 1999). Samoan is my first language, I grew up in a very Samoan household, in the sense that Samoan cultural norms formed my interpretation of the social world early on. This, I argue, is what gives me a unique positionality in relation to the subject matter being investigated by this dissertation.

For Samoans, the idea of a gender binary is a blurry space. A contested part of Samoan normative structures around gender and sexuality posits that a third gender exists, where *fa'afafine*

are normatively placed in a separate taxonomic category to those of men and women (Vasey and Barlett, 2010). The term *fa'afafine* in the Samoan language means: in the way of a woman. For Samoans, this does not align cleanly with Western conceptions of sexual and gender identity. Yet, despite this, the Western academy have often labeled *fa'afafine* as transvestites (see Mageo, 1992). My own experience tells me that this is not an accurate representation. Schmidt (2010) posits that *fa'afafine* should also be understood as being able to traverse the social roles of both men and women. A situation that is often celebrated in Samoan cultural normative frameworks. Thus, *fa'afafine* are neither transgender nor transsexual in the Samoan understanding of gender and sexual identity. My referencing of this framework is not to engage in this debate directly, rather, it is to demonstrate where my biases toward investigating non-Western forms of sexual identity is derived from.

I was raised in New Zealand, Samoa's former colonial master. The ability for my family to be able to migrate from Samoa was a direct consequence of the era of post-New Zealand rule of the western Samoan archipelago that began in 1962. Where a treaty of friendship now exists between both my homelands, there was once a political sovereignty asymmetry, where Samoa was subjected first to German rulers (1899-1914) then to New Zealand ones (1914-1962). The crimes that the New Zealand administration committed against the Samoan people during the period of colonial rule is part of my historical genealogical frame. During this time, the disastrous mismanagement of the influenza epidemic led to Samoa losing nearly 20% of its entire population in 1918. Proportionally, the worst casualties incurred by any nation in the world during the epidemic was put down to colonial indifference on the part of the NZ administration. This was then followed by the NZ police publicly murdering and exiling some of Samoa's high chiefs and leaders to violently quell an independence movement based out of my home village, in an incident

famously known in Samoa as Black Saturday (Field, 1991, 2006). In 2002, the then New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark apologized to the Samoan nation for the atrocities committed against us during our subjection to New Zealand rule (McMullin et al, 2009). Thus, if one were to suspect a postcolonial streak in this analysis, they would not be mistaken. The fact that a power lens is incorporated into the theoretical and analytical frameworks deployed here is also a direct consequence of my own positionality in this regard. For my inward skepticism toward pure and a-political Western discourses around liberation, even for gay identities, has a genealogy with a colonial history of its own.

As a post-colonial subject, myself, a Samoan raised in New Zealand as part of the diaspora, my marginality is enhanced further by my migration to South Korea. Thus, my very existence is a *translated existence of Samoan culture*, where my very body is translated from another place (McMullin et al, 2009). This is my positionality that also produces different types of asymmetries in power, positionality vis-a-viz my research participants, which shifts in relation to their own. In following Spivak's advice, this dissertation makes use of "what I have", in carrying my positionality into my research paradigm. Familiar with and socialized into Western epistemological communities, I have also been socialized into Pacific and Samoan social customs, which I used to inform my methodology. Therefore, this is the specific bias I carry into my research and the reflections presented here should also be understood as an *interpretive construct colored by this position*.

In South Korea, as a Brown gay researcher, I am imbricated within South Korean society in complex ways. For one thing, although I appeared "out" to all my informants, my friends and some of my coworkers, officially, I do not openly claim a gay subjectivity in public in Korea. For much the same reasons as many of my informants, in that it matters very little in being able to

function within South Korean society as a worker considering that I have a cisgender appearance. As YG one of my Seattle informants who was not “out” in public put it, “my gay life in Korea is great.” In Seoul, I have a gay community and group of friends whom I interact with regularly, attend drag shows with, drink fruity cocktails with at lounge bars, occasionally I also perform at events making use of my experience in the music industry before I joined the world of academia.

When read in relation to the fact that as a racialized subject in South Korea, where the first identity marker I am coded with is prominently on display through my skin, I am often forced to center experiences of racialization in my day-to-day life. My homosexuality is not an area that tends to come up in day-to-day conversation, which is not to say that it does not matter, just that as an intersectional minority, it is not the *only* thing that matters. A process that is similar to how my sexuality has been imbricated within Samoan social structures. My elevated status is derived from my family connections, an educational background that far exceeds my class background, my knowledge of the culture and language, as well as my embeddedness within the community. This has mostly ameliorated any discussions around my sexual deviancy. However, in NZ, I am publicly presented as a gay male as it is a point of identity that has been politicized in that location and am constantly reminded that I matter as a gay subject. As a gay PoC in NZ I am also called upon to also model a type of gay futurity that is important for younger gay subjects of color. The complexities of this aside, this demonstrates how my hybrid ethnic and national identity affected my positionality, and intuition as a researcher in ways that are unique to me. Subsequently affecting the way in which I theorize and the frameworks I draw on to interpret the meaning of data that was being generated in the field.

In terms of racialization specifically, Koreans often assume a type of hierarchy associated with skin color that relates to the Korean construct of the foreigner. Incho Lee (2011) posits that

Koreans valorize Whiteness for its proximity to economic prosperity in the global economy. Soon-Won Kang (2010) also connects Korean forms of racism to the colonial period and its construct of foreigners relating to ethno-nationalism. Moreover, it is postulated that due to the South Korean state's instrumentalization of foreigners as part of its *Segyhewa* or Global Korea policy (Watson, 2012), a divide exists between foreigners in South Korea. One where a professional "whiter" class of foreigners from wealthy Western countries are separated from "brownier" migrants from poorer nations of the Global South, deployed as brides for rural Korean men and manual laborers utilized to work jobs that are considered part of the 3Ds (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) (Seol D, 2012).

As a Samoan New Zealander, in this context, I translate in South Korea as an anomaly. I am both brown and from one of the wealthy countries in South Korea's construct of the foreigner. Meaning I was able to cross-cut the racial hierarchy that a Brown body is normally subjected to and utilized the malleability of my ambiguous positionality in a variety of ways. Some informants believed I looked like a Southeast Asian or to be of African descent. Meaning that they coded me as part of the lower group of foreigners in the South Korean hierarchy of race. As a Brown body in South Korea I have been subjected to racialization on many fronts. Many PoC in South Korea who are part of the professional working class are often discriminated against in favor of White applicants when they compete for jobs in South Korea's teaching industry as an example (Strother, 2007). Informants themselves recognized this in their interviews, often criticizing the racism that is inherent in South Korea's construct of the foreigner. I experienced this personally when I applied for a job in South Korea in 2011, being told by a potential employer that although my credentials were fantastic, that the parents of their institution wanted a White teacher.

However, in returning to Seoul in 2017, my racialized positionality was also mediated by the fact that I returned to Korea as a doctoral candidate from an American university. As such, I

was also coded in a different way that related to educational background. My informants storied how South Koreans hold study in the United States and abroad in Western countries in high regard, as it carries with it a high level of social capital in South Korea (Shin H, 2014). Something my informants often said made me an “elite” to South Korean perceptions. This narrative was something that I was familiar with and recognized when I first moved to South Korea. As a Samoan, my mother made the decision to migrate to New Zealand specifically for my education for similar reasons, with the goal to help develop a higher socio-economic positioning for our family. This was another way in which my background and experiences prefaced and nuanced my positionality in relation to my informants.

Moreover, at other moments in the research process I believed my racialized positionality was an additional advantage. I was able to access PoC informants who volunteered to talk to me with relatively little barriers when it came to talk about their experiences in the gay community. Conversely, White gay men also found it easy to talk to me as they drew on the connection we shared through my American educational background and experience of living in Seattle. When divulging details of experiencing racial discrimination, they often saw my PoC status as a point of potential connection, assuming that I must have experienced racism as a PoC in South Korea. Thus, my racialized status in South Korea was something that I was aware of and navigated within shifting contexts that I posit was mostly advantageous in gaining access and generating more nuanced data from a wide variety of informants.

The *Va* and *Talanoa* Dialogue

My Samoan background gives me unique opportunities to negotiate communication with Korean informants. Specifically, in Samoan social customs, there exists what we call the *va* or space where social interactions take place between people. Wendt (1996) explains that the *va* is the space in-between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities together. Samoa's traditions and protocols explain the nature of a Samoan being as a relational being. There is myself and yourself, through myself, you are given primacy in light of our collective identity (Tamasese et al, 1997). In other words, for Samoans there is no me, without you, for the self cannot be defined outside of family lineage, village ties, church connections and genealogical lineage. To foster these connections, a space of mutual respect must be created between all within society. Simanu (2006) explains how the *va* is the most important way to understand Samoan social interactions between people. It underpins all our interactions and continues even as Samoans move abroad.

The concept of the *va* deals with holistic forms of identity formation predicated on co-belonging and relationship building (Refiti, 2008). The connotations for qualitative research in particular of such an understanding of social interactions are clear. Epistemologically, *va* is encoded with respect, service and hospitality (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 20009 quoted in Simati, 2011). In reflecting on my own positionality as a researcher, it was impossible for me not to be foregrounded by the *va*. When interviewing participants, I took the active position that considered informants not as mere data points, but relational subjects in which I, the researcher self, was also constituted. Thus, creating space for mutual respect to emerge was something I was always concerned with.

The relational aspects of the *va*, and its role in identity formation, then, I connect to a Korean worldview that also suggests that a Korean identity or articulation of the self is formed relationally rather than individually. In particular, the Korean language demonstrates this symmetry, where the lexico-grammatical structure of Korean is formally dependent upon social and interpersonal factors such as symmetrical/asymmetrical relationships, kinship, gender, age, profession/vocation/trade as well as socioeconomic status (Kim and Strauss, 2018). As an example, Lee H (2018) in the field of linguistics, states that in presenting one's self in conversation and social settings, Koreans select terminologies in their language that refer to the self and other in accordance with the expected honorific norms of Korean society. Where nearly two-thirds of pronouns for the self in Korean is self-denigrating (p.64). Lee presents the example of a Korean king who referred to himself using the Korean word *Kwain*, which literally means 'an insufficient person'. In Samoan language, the deference accorded to others is considered an important part of respecting the *va*. For my own research, this innate understanding of relationality provided me with a second sense in being able to understand the difference between a relationally-formed identity and one that encourages the development of the self from an individualistic perspective.

A second concept is that of *talanoa* dialogue. A method of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue. In *talanoa*, one builds empathy with informants by sharing stories. A Pacific research methodology rooted in oratory tradition, *talanoa* overcomes methods that disempower informants by legitimizing researchers' exchanging personal stories that explicitly express feelings with informants. Vaioleti (2016) defines it as a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking whether formal or informal. It allows people to engage in social conversation, which may lead to critical discussions or knowledge creation that allows rich contextual and inter-related

information to surface as co-constructed. It requires researchers to partake deeply in the research experience rather than stand back and analyze.

Talanoa finds synthesis with phenomenological research approaches which focuses on understanding the meaning that events have for participants (Patton, 1991 quoted in Vaioleti, 2016). Although this may appear to be similar to narrative research, *Talanoa* is different in that participants will provide a challenge or legitimation to shared information. Because *Talanoa* is flexible, it provides opportunities to probe, challenge, clarify and re-align. It should create and disseminate robust, valid and up-to-the minute knowledge because the shared outcome of what *talanoa* has integrated and synthesized will be contextual, not likely to have been already written or subjected to academic sanitization (Vaioleti, 2016). In line with what Bryman (2016) states, in *talanoa*, the researcher is necessarily implicated in the data that is being generated. The relational nature of poststructural constructions, which I also draw a sense of my own hybridity, is how I resolve a *talanoa* frame with that of Western forms of knowledge production.

As a Samoan New Zealander, the ideals that shape how I approached my interviews and social interactions in general cannot be meaningfully disentangled from that of the *va* specifically. Thus, I deployed *talanoa* dialogue as an interview method and reflective lens designed to necessarily empower informants through my own validation of their narratives co-constructed in the *va* established between us. By approaching interviews from a *talanoa* perspective I am accepting that the interview space is a place where informants and I would be co-constructing their narratives through the art of the interview.

Taking this approach means that data is never really compromised, however, in order to find some sort of internal validity and reliability, a systematic analysis was still needed, thus a semi-structured set of questions were prepared beforehand, and informants were then able to

reconstruct their narratives with the researcher in a space of comfortability and empathy. This was a focus of the interview technique deployed, where making sure that informants not only felt in control of the interview but of the entire process themselves, became a central concern of mine. This is demonstrated in the field notes I took of an interview I conducted in Seoul following our *talanoa*.

Researcher diary: *when the informant arrived, we spoke at length about their day. I asked them where they had come from immediately prior, and the informant let me know they had come from home and had just woken up. It was after midday when we met, so it appeared to me that they may have had a long night. When I asked them about this, they told me that they had been up late working on some things for their job that related to activism. It was here where I knew I would be able to ask the informant about their views on activism and Western sexual politics in particular. We spoke for about 30mins before the actual interview took place. In the time we shared hilarious stories about working in Korea, how Koreans behaved in public settings as we were in a coffee shop. When it seemed like the informant and I had built some sort of rapport, I let the informant know that I wanted them to be in control of the interview. That, despite having some questions I wanted to ask, they ultimately were helping me understand their story better. I told them that I wanted them to feel comfortable to challenge my interpretation of what they were telling me as well, to ensure there's some sort of agreement. During the interview this happened a few times, especially when it came to defining Western-style sexual politics and gay human rights. The informant clarified misunderstandings for me and I found them sharing more and more details of their own experiences in more depth. I think this strategy of approaching interviews like a talanoa session is helpful in building trust with informants. I really should embrace my uniqueness in*

positionality, this informant was fascinated about my experiences in Korea as a foreigner, or as a “different” type of foreigner in our discussions. I was the first Samoan they had ever come across in Korea before.

At the beginning of my interviews, all informants were given all the possible information about the study, including the University of Washington’s Internal Review Board approved research protocol, the aims, the procedures, as well as the social phenomenon it sought to investigate. Informants in formal interview settings were given the option to not only opt-out at any time during the interview, they were also required to give their permission at the end of the interview for the interview data they had shared in the *va*, to be used by the researcher. Additionally, they were also informed that even after they had participated, that they were able to strike things off the record or withdraw their interview as data altogether. The option to take things off the record was taken up post-interview but none chose to withdraw from the study.

My approach here demonstrated that I respected the informants for not only their willingness to share their narratives with me, but also that I as a researcher had a responsibility to take care of their stories as *mea sina*, or treasures that should not be misrepresented. This is not to say that all these qualities are not embedded in Western data gathering qualitative methodologies, this is to clarify the importance that my positionality as a Samoan presented in guiding me to focus on these aspects and principles of qualitative research methods.

My ability to empathize with research participants also extended beyond my Samoan orientation and approach to interview situations. As a gay male, I was able to build a natural rapport with many of my informants. My self-identified cisgender gay male appearance, where a *talanoa* methodological framework requires me to share my positionality with informants, meant that they

were privy to my own personal narrative before the interview began. Often, I would allow informants to know that I myself was once in two long-term relationships with Korean gay men and that for reasons that came down to personality and cultural clashes, neither relationships lasted. This jumping off point allowed the informants to also build empathy with me. As a *talanoa* framework emphasizes that the researcher and informant form a bond during an interaction (Vaiotei, 2016). When discussing issues of race, it was evident that my positionality helped make informants feel more comfortable to make comments on racialized discourses that they may have not been comfortable sharing with a gay White researcher. Here are a few examples from my field notes in Seattle and Seoul:

“You know what White gays are like. Come on now, you’ve seen how racist they can be, that’s why I know you can understand what I mean by this” - Seattle informant

“White guys have BO (body odor). I have a good sample size honey. I lived in Australia and I fucked a truckload of White people. In my sampling that stereotype is true. And yeah, Black guys in general, I think they do have big dicks. Comparatively. I know because I sucked them, and I know it. I think the dick size, the genitalia. Asian guys in general do have smaller dicks.” - Seoul informant

“What is that thing again, you know, the hashtag Seattle’s so White, hashtag Seattle’s so gay White?” - Seattle informant

“Korean gays are racist, they prefer White guys, I think it’s possible you’ve experienced that, but I’m not sure if you’ve seen it. They don’t want to date anyone who is from Southeast Asia and they don’t really like Brown guys much unless they’re Latino.” - Seoul informant

The comfort that informants felt in sharing stories like these derives from my complex positionality. As alluded to previously, as a foreigner, I am considered well-educated for my racially-coded appearance and am in a rather middle-class field. Moreover, as a child from a low-income family, I subverted the class frame associated with the middle-class position of my profession, having been raised by a single mother. My experiences in this area helped me to connect with informants who came from a similar familial background as mine. Yet, despite all this, I am still a Westerner in that I carry a NZ passport and have received a Western education. Thus, one informant pointed out that this ambiguity in my positionality made it easier to talk to me than it would have been someone of a different ethnicity or more simple line of positionality.

“Yeah, I thought about how you’re a Westerner, but also from a different ethnic background. Like you’re not White, so I did feel more comfortable talking to you than someone else who usually does these types of research projects.” - Informant in Seoul

What should be noted also, is that my positionality as a gay male who often engaged in the same social practices as informants in using gay dating applications and frequented the same bars, festivals and shows is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration. Sharing my own experiences with a wide range of informants in both formal and informal settings brought a certain degree of comfort for informants that evidenced itself in their willingness to share extremely

candid stories of their sex and dating lives. Nearly all informants openly volunteered details with me about the first time they felt attracted to another guy, often vivid and intimate details of what their first experience of masturbation and sex, as well as a number of traumatizing experiences that have been mostly redacted to respect informants' right to keep these narratives as their own. My retelling of that part of their story is not something I have a right to, and neither do I have a particular desire to.

Transnational Subjectivity and Insider Bias

Despite not being Korean, issues of insider bias were still considered in my methodology due to my unique positionality. Of central importance being the fact that I cannot be seen as a full insider nor as a full Western outsider because I am a gay Samoan New Zealander. If the Western academy has been implicated in producing research by theorists like Edward Said (1978), which reproduces orientalist frames in work that deals with Asia and the Other, my positionality presents a different challenge. My marginality itself, I relate to the same processes of a racialized Western-hegemony reproduced over my people in settler-colonies that follows what Said articulates in *Orientalism* (1978) and Smith (1999) specifies in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. The same can be said about the marginality of my sexual identity.

Thus, my ability to see beyond the limits of Western epistemologies is already clear and helpful in ameliorating Western biases to research. Moreover, my gay subjectivity itself was useful in building rapport with informants. This was particularly evident with informants in Seattle who were often transnational gay subjects themselves. The challenge for me then was overcoming a different type of insider bias, one that emerges from my relationship to the narrative of the text produced here. As explained in my introduction, this work is transnational in nature, therefore

there is a real risk of projection. Where my own experiences as a transnational subject are projected into the research process. But further to this, I share what is called an intersectional identity (Crenshaw, 1989) in that I am both a racial and sexual minority. A quality I shared with my informants in Seattle. This is where my insider status is derived. Not in sharing the same sources of marginalization, rather that we both shared a type of hybrid identity that presented a different set of phenomena that I investigate in this dissertation. To account for this, I use a poststructural approach in situating across the dissertation my positionality in relation to the text and to informants. Using what Choi (2006) terms deconstructive reflections. Doing so allows the data presented here to be scrutinized for their discursive value. Or to engage what Choi advises researchers to do: reflect on our vested interest and privilege, whilst opening up the terms (coming out) we investigate that are “steeped in dominant discourses to re-usage (p.450).” Thus, I position myself as a biased researcher, who despite critiquing Western-centrism in understanding of gay subjectivity, will inevitably be applying my own Samoan-derived framework in its place. Recognizing this helps to situate better the context, the logic and the methods I used to develop my arguments. Recognizing this is not a statement of concession either, rather, it offers a new way of epistemologically approaching the research puzzles investigated here.

This is where I also argue that my hybridity as a transnational gay subject can be useful. Here I draw on Delgado Bernal’s (1998) idea of cultural intuition referenced by Choi J (2006) and apply it to a transnational setting. Bernal does not argue that only people from a specific community should be allowed to research their own community, but that insider knowledge provides additional benefits, as insiders are in a position to understand cultural cues and have a “cultural intuition” (Choi, 2006 p.438). Although I am not Korean, I shared a similar identity with informants that relate to the challenges of navigating positionality in a cultural or societal

framework, where we both negotiate our positionality in our relative societies from a place of marginality. Moreover, of having to exist in contemporary times as *translated bodies* within diaspora communities as the othered sexuality. My intuition is a transnational one and is also mediated by my own experiences of living in South Korea for nearly a decade. Drawing on work by Black feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (1990) who sees their marginality as a foundational space for their scholarship, I believe that these common points of marginality allowed me to unearth and generate data that is unique to this gay PoC transnational insider status to an intersectional identity formation.

Informant Selection and Sample Bias

In terms of informant profiles, the analytical chapters will convey in some more detail the specificities of their relative characteristics around age, class, education background, family background, religion as well as a host of other demographic statistics. Each chapter will also contain an outline of the specific recruitment strategy and the type of sample it then garnered. What bears mentioning now is the fact that my positionality also attracted a specific-type respondent overall. Hence, attempts at external validity that are based on generalizability should be treated cautiously and within context.

An example of this being the primary language that was used to conduct my fieldwork in general. Although my level of Korean allowed me to build rapport with informants and even allowed me to conduct an entire interview almost exclusively in Korean, the reality is, the majority of the information that was gathered for this dissertation was done so in English as the primary

medium of communication. Visual materials which were all printed in Korean have been incorporated into the ethnographic technique and dissertation research methodology, but it would be a disingenuous claim to say that these formed large data sources.

There are two issues that arise from this. The first being translation, for informants, speaking in their second language may have led to possible misunderstandings of what they were wanting to express. Filep (2009) reminds us that the task of translation is not just about changing words, we must understand language as an important part of conceptualization, incorporating values and beliefs. In other words, it is not only the language but also the culture that has to be translated or interpreted (Filep, 2009 p.60). One such strategy that can be employed is the use of interpreters. I offered all informants the use of an interpreter before the interviews, only one informant chose to use one. However, they only asked the interpreter to translate questions they did not understand, and their responses were all recorded in Korean, which I translated later. Moreover, my proficiency in Korean allowed me to understand any terminologies that informants used that were not in English. In terms of my cultural understanding, having lived in South Korea for many years, and studying South Korea's historical genealogy helped me to develop a form of triangulation to verify my interpretations. Additionally, my *talanoa* approach to interviews also helped me to overcome this. I sought synthesis in my understandings and interpretations by seeking clarification with informants throughout the interview process. In some cases, I would ask the same question twice but in different forms to verify that informants understood the concepts I was attempting to test in normative terms.

Here is an example from one of my informal interviews where an informant and I were discussing social class. My original question related to "how would you classify your family's social class, i.e. were you rich or wealthy, middle income, low income?" To which the informant

replied middle-to-lower. Through the course of the interview I found that the informant had spent time studying overseas from elementary right up to their high school years. This intimated to me that the informant may have understood the original question in a different frame to the one I intended. So, I asked a follow up question to gain greater context:

Researcher: *Wait, so you studied overseas from elementary right up to high school. Wasn't it expensive for your family?*

Informant: *I guess it was a lot of money for my parents. But you know how Korean parents are, even if you don't have a lot of money, you still find a way to get your children to study overseas.*

Researcher: *So, does that mean from your experience that low-income people in Korea can afford to do the same thing?*

Informant: *I suppose we were probably more rich than middle income in that case. Because it's definitely not something everyone can afford.*

Later, the informant confirmed to me that their understanding of class was not necessarily tied to income alone. Moreover, that his family had a history of poverty in earlier generations. Therefore, despite their relative “new wealth” they still considered themselves middle-to-lower class. This nuance I understood from within South Korea’s story of compressed modernity. Where South Korea went from one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the world’s wealthiest in the span of one generation. Thus, I was able to overcome a lot of the issues relating to the use of English as a tool of communication through my knowledge of the Korean language and Korea’s specific historical genealogy that I had foregrounded my research with. In this dissertation, when I refer to social class, my understanding of it is derived by informants themselves. I deploy it as a

discursive tool self-defined by informants that incorporates how they viewed their own social position. In this case, class background is not narrowly defined as income background alone. Class in this case also means social position, educational background and income, all determined by informants themselves, co-constructed with me through our *talanoa*.

The second issue with using English in data collection methods is the effect it had on my sample, which is a biased one. In the sense that men who were most likely to volunteer participation in this study were more likely to be the most exposed to Western culture already. Additionally, I feared that men who were most likely to respond were likely to have already “come-out,” as my call for participants asked specifically for men who had identified as gay. A term I have already taken great lengths to explain does not have a tidy translation into non-Western normative constructs. In this way, the sample can be said to be self-selecting, or more quantitatively-wired social researchers would argue: selected on the dependent variable (King et al., 1994). Selection on the dependent variable as a critique of my methodology is perhaps incompatible with a relativist, constructionist and poststructural epistemology (Blaikie, 2007). However, for the sake of methodological integrity, I still wish to address this concern.

Selection on the dependent variable simply means that in situations where the social phenomenon, commonly known as x, occur (in my case, where Korean gay men have “come-out”), one cannot truly know the cause of x, by selecting a sample of where only x occurs. Thus, to infer any sense of validity, one must also observe situations where x did not occur. A situation that is usually overcome in social research using a randomized sample (see King et al, 1994).

However, King et al (1994) state that random selection or a randomized sample may be even worse than other ways of selecting a sample in particular situations as it can end up introducing even more bias. Specifically, random selection is not generally appropriate in small-n

research (p. 126). In my study, I chose to formally-interview a relatively small sample (30). However, even in small n studies, King et al (1994), emphasize that “selection should allow for the possibility of at least some variation on the dependent variable” (p.129). I ameliorated issues of “selecting on the dependent variable,” by probing for demographic difference in informant narratives. This allowed me to incorporate interacting variables such as age, education, family background, time spent overseas etc. and created variation on the dependent variable throughout my analysis in this way.

Initially, I was also concerned that any men who agreed to participate in my study by default “came-out” as gay to the researcher. Thus, how would I be able to draw comparisons between those who had and had not made the decision to come-out? Situationally, my sample deals with this issue by including men who had engaged in varying degrees of sexual orientation disclosure. Some had indeed gone the full-disclosure route and were completely “out”. However, most of my informants were not “out” in their own definition of the term. I encountered men who would be more likely to be classified at stage 3 or 4 on the homosexual identity formation model advanced by Vivianne Cass (1979). This helped to verify the appropriateness of my approach, as what was clear is that the term coming-out, specifically, was being negotiated by informants in their specific contexts and may mean something different in the Korean context. Thus, my research strategy, I argue, was able to overcome the issue of selection on the dependent variable.

To return to the question of ontology and epistemology, an argument this dissertation inevitably makes, asks us to deconstruct our understanding of coming-out models. It also questions the stability of such terms and their definitions in interrogating the relative positionality of informants and power configurations that form their understanding of being gay and coming-out as we move across cultural divides. As the discussion unfolds, the universal definition of coming-

out is put under severe stress when viewed from diverse cultural and ultimately transnational contexts. King et al. (1994) highlight that sampling strategies should always be selected appropriately in relation to the social phenomenon being studied. Therefore, despite my own academic training allowing me to engage in a more quantitatively arranged research project, that methodological approach simply is incompatible to the aims of the study.

A further concern is that the use of English in South Korea is connected to a type of social capital, as English ability is often an important requirement for career advancement in South Korea's ultra-competitive labor market (Sorensen, 1994; Park J, 2011; Park and Abelmann, 2004). Again, this was not an issue I was oblivious to. The ability to perfect one's English in South Korea it can be argued, is tied to class (from an income perspective). Those with enough money to pay for private English lessons, naturally, are those with the most amount of income. I dealt with this in two ways. As alluded to earlier, my sample was careful to contextualize each participant's social and economic background. My sample finds surprising levels of diversity in terms of income background. As will be reported in the chapters, there were men in Seoul from a wide range of class backgrounds, ranging from men who classified themselves from "very poor," to the "rich."

One informant who was perhaps from the poorest economic background in fact ended up presenting with the most fluent English. He explained to me that in his experience, even though his mother was very poor (child of a single parent home), she still found the money to get him to a private English academy. It was his belief that this was common practice. Moreover, other informants explained how they self-studied English, and that in school, after-school programs that taught English for free meant that learning the language was accessible (albeit not equal) for all Koreans, irrespective of class background. What one can distill from this is that specific narratives are important to provide much needed context. English ability as a marker of class in South Korea,

may not necessarily be a clean proxy after all. This is a worthy area of further social research enquiry.

Moreover, in further support of my methodology, my referencing of constructionist and poststructural approaches to social research lead me to the following conclusion. When trying to examine how an anomalous phenomenon is working, it requires a situated understanding of what the conditions and mechanisms are present in the context that creates the outcome of the dependent variable in the first place.

As the phenomenon I am investigating is one that has not been investigated in this way before, I argue that an abductive approach is more appropriate. Abductive reasoning focuses on data which contradicts or does not fit with existing theories. ‘Surprising evidence’ is derived from comparing data to existing research and theories, which becomes the starting point of theory construction (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, p.168). Moreover, this type of qualitative approach can generate rich data that is more likely to provide insights into the theoretical points at stake. Abductive reasoning aims to “discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tactical, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, intentions and rules, which provide the orientations for their actions” (Blaikie 2007, p.90). This approach falls in-line with constructionist and post-structural approaches to knowledge production that focuses on the relationally-specific as opposed to the structurally-affected individual. Thus, this study merely contributes one piece of a bigger puzzle.

Additionally, what should not be ignored is that informants often wanted to use English themselves despite my offer for them to use Korean if they felt more comfortable. Perhaps it could be argued that informants were engaging in their own act of agential expression in proving their own neoliberal credentials. English is after all treated as a type of social capital. Unfortunately,

this is not the focus of the analysis here. What this infers then, is that there exists a separate set of contextual meanings that are specific to a Korean experience across many of the areas that I touch upon. In many ways, this study raises more questions about other social phenomenon in South Korea that are affecting the subjectivity of Korean gay men that can be pursued in further social research using other types of research methods appropriate to those questions.

Notes on Sexual Visibility

There exist multiple ways individuals can be seen to be expressing their sexual identity. Choices around clothing, language and aesthetic are among the most well-understood (see Gauntlett, 2008 for a review). However, as Butler (1990) puts it, the problem is how the self is constituted. For this “I” that you read is in part a consequence of the grammar that governs the availability of persons in language. I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this “I” possible. But the process of claiming the “I” requires there for recognition of the individual that they are what this label is. Therefore, the exercise of interpretation here does not extend to imposing definitions for informants, rather, I take the terminologies that informants used themselves as their preferred categories as the given truth by which I begin my analysis from.

This is a hallmark of *talanoa* approaches to research methodology, which allows narratives to flow freely and be presented and uncorrupted by the sanitizing brush of the Western researcher’s empiricist tendencies (Vaioliti, 2016). Thus, if an informant declared themselves as a gay male, or if they declared themselves to be “out” despite not fully disclosing their sexual identity to family members, I still interpreted this to be the way they understood a coming-out process and used this as the starting point for my own process of theory generation. Whether or not this matched our

own theoretical models was not of concern, as I posit that this has the potential to open new ways to modify existing theories or generate new ways in which we can understand social phenomena that are occurring. As such, informant narratives are presented in a *talanoa* narrative first, that displays their narratives in their own words and are situated through my own recollection of our interactions. This is done before an interpretivist lens is added to the discussion sections that reviews informant narratives through the theoretical analytics outlined at the beginning of each chapter before a conclusion section is presented.

The next background chapter will deal with my concerns relating to coming-out narratives and the often-linear model that they represent. In particular, the difficulties that it can present when we apply a linear coming-out narrative to non-Western cultures. I posit that this is central to understanding the way I position my ethnography and the theoretical approaches I deploy in the following analytical chapters. This will flow into a discussion on Korean familism, which came to be a major theme in the way informants navigated their decisions over sexual visibility. The following background chapter will provide much needed context before I present my situated ethnography through the 3 analytical chapters.

Chapter – 2 Theoretical Orientation and Background: The Trouble with Coming-out and Korean Familism

Linear Coming-out Models - The Cass Model of Homosexual Identity Formation

There exists a range of models that seek to explain how a person develops a homosexual identity in the West, with the most influential models quoted across academia given to us by the discipline of psychology. The most prominent of these models is known as the Cass model of homosexual identity formation (1979). The development of homosexual identity has been described as occurring in six relevantly arbitrary stages. It is important to note that Cass specifies that at any stage of identity formation, an individual may choose to foreclose on the entire process itself. Basically, what many would recognize as going back into the closet. What follows is a paraphrased version of this model based off Cass's own writing.

Stage one on the Cass Model is known as identity confusion, where individuals begin to feel a sense of confusion around whether they perceived themselves as homosexual. According to Cass, the individual either rejects this possibility entirely foreclosing any future developments or moves into stage 2.

At this stage, having accepted the possibility that they may have a homosexual identity, individuals proceed into a process of *identity comparison*. Here, they experience feelings of alienation as the difference between their homosexual self and non-homosexuals becomes clearer. Stage 2 leads to multiple possible paths, which requires different cognitive and behavioral strategies to arrive at either the point of saying "I am probably homosexual" or a position of completely denying such a possibility. In the case of identity foreclosure not occurring, the individual may contemplate contacting homosexuals as a means of lessening the alienation felt at this stage of their development.

Once an individual demonstrates what Cass labels “increasing commitment to a homosexual self-image,” the individual will seek out the company of homosexuals in order to fulfill social, sexual and emotional needs. Stage 3 of the Cass model is known as *identity tolerance*. What sets this stage apart from other stages on the model, is that at this stage of development the individual applies a certain selectiveness about contact with other homosexuals that are ‘necessary’ as opposed to desirable. In other words, they have tolerated their sexual identity but not accepted it as desirable.

Cass postulates that two paths of development are taken, one by those who perceive a homosexual self-identity as desirable and by those who do not. This outcome often depends on the quality of contact with other homosexuals, whether individuals perceive these to be positive or negative. At this stage of the model, Cass argues, disclosure to heterosexuals is extremely limited with an “emphasis placed on the maintenance of two separate images: a public or presenting one (heterosexual) and a private one (homosexual) exhibited only in the company of homosexuals.” The presentation of a heterosexual image calls upon the individual to play out a heterosexual or “straight” role.

In stage 4, *identity acceptance*, increased contact with the homosexual subculture encourages a more positive view of homosexuality that accompanies the development of a network of homosexual friends. In this stage individuals tend to develop a philosophy of trying to fit into society, while also retaining a homosexual lifestyle. This is where an individual adopts a “passing” strategy to avoid being presented with negative reactions of others toward one’s homosexuality. Selective disclosure takes place, and individuals take developmental paths that depend on the degree to which individuals accept the idea of homosexuals as a negatively valued group and the

individual can maintain strategies that avoid confrontation with antagonistic others. If identity foreclosure does not occur an individual moves onto the next stage.

Identity pride, stage 5 in the Cass model is characterized by feelings of pride toward one's homosexual identity and fierce loyalty to homosexuals as a group who are seen as important and creditable, while heterosexuals have become discredited and devalued. Anger about society's stigmatization of homosexuals leads to disclosure and purposeful confrontation with non-homosexuals. Here the path of identity development becomes dichotomized. Attempts to resolve this dissonance leads individuals onto the final stage.

Stage 6 of the Cass model is titled *identity synthesis*. At this stage positive contact with non-homosexuals helps to create an awareness of the rigidity and inaccuracy of dividing the world into good homosexuals and bad heterosexuals. Anger and pride associated with the previous stage are retained but in less emotional terms. A homosexual identity is no longer seen as overwhelmingly the identity by which an individual can be characterized. Individuals come to see themselves as people having many sides to their character, only one part of which is related to homosexuality. A lifestyle is developed in which the homosexual identity is no longer hidden, so that disclosure becomes a non-issue. Own views of self and views believed to be held by others are therefore synthesized into one integrated identity that unites both private and public aspects of self. This gives rise to feelings of peace and stability, and with this development identity formation is complete. The Cass model is mapped conceptually in the diagram below:

Table 1 - The Cass Homosexual Identity Model

Table 1. Cass Homosexual Identity Formation Model		
Stage	Identity Position	Typical Behavior
1. Confusion	Questioning a heterosexual identity	Creates confusion, possibility of foreclosing and not proceeding any further in homosexual identity development.
2. Comparison	Begins comparing with a heterosexual identity	Asks maybe I'm homosexual? Possibility of engaging in homosexual behavior. questions whether homosexuality is desirable.
3. Tolerance	Tolerance of a homosexual self-image	Seeks out company of homosexuals selectively. Is homosexual self-identity desirable? Disclosure extremely limited, divided public heterosexual persona, homosexual private persona.
4. Acceptance	Accepts homosexual self-identity	Develops positive view of homosexuality. Maintains passing public persona selective disclosure to heterosexuals.
5. Pride	Pride toward homosexual identity	Fierce loyalty to homosexuals as a group, open disclosure and purposeful confrontation with heterosexism
6. Synthesis	Homosexual identity synthesized	A homosexual identity is no longer seen as overwhelmingly the identity by which an individual can be characterized. Disclosure a non-issue.

Source: Cass (1979)

Another model was presented by Troiden (1989). This model includes four stages that reshapes Cass's ideas into *sensitization*, *identity confusion*, *identity assumption* and finally *commitment*. Stage 1 is where a person becomes 'sensitive' of being different for his/her peers in terms of sexual behaviors. In stage 2 they are met with confusion as an increasing awareness of same-sex feelings incongruent with his or her previously assumed heterosexual orientation. Stage 3 is characterized by identity tolerance and acceptance, experimentation with same-sex experience, and getting involved with the gay and lesbian community. The final stage is where a person sustains a positive homosexual identity and often engages in a committed same-sex love relationship.

The Linearity of the Cass Model

These developmental type models like the Cass and Troiden model (see also, Coleman, 1982; Minton and McDonald, 1984) view a healthy homosexual identity requiring an integration of a homosexual identity into a broader sense of a personal identity. Anything short of this integration is judged to be an incomplete or less than optimal outcome (Horowitz and Newcomb, 2001). This is largely due to these development approaches being premised on a psychosocial development model developed by Erikson (1968). This model presumes a person progresses in a set of steps and an order that eventually allows them to integrate their sexual identity into their conception of the self (Chung and Katayama, 1998. p22). The issue with approaching identity formation in this way, according to Narui (2007), is that it takes an essentialist point of view in assuming that identity formation occurs in a specific, linear fashion (p. 1213).

Floyd and Stein (2002) argue that both the stage theory and data on the timing of milestone events presents an oversimplification among gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Indeed, the choice of focusing on one group of sexual minorities, specifically, gay men, helps to avoid part of this oversimplification by virtue of contextual specificity. However, even with a grouping such as “gay,” the diversity that exists between individual narratives must also be recognized. Many scholars have pointed out that there is a wide range of variation between individuals that cut-across age, and the occurrence of stages or “milestone” events that undergird the stage modeling and their subsequent processes (Bell and Weinberg, 1978; Herdt, 1989). Because the coming-out process and implications for personal adjustment varies due to individual circumstances, there is a need to research and examine the diversity of coming-out experiences (Floyd and Stein 2002).

The linearity of coming-out models is also problematic from a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionists offer that sexual identity is fluid and can change according to

individual and social interaction (Hart, 1984; Hart and Richardson, 1984, quoted in Horowitz and Newcomb, 2001). For Horowitz and Newcomb (2001), the concepts of homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual are self-constructs that influence one's relationship with self and with others. Thus, the maintenance of the sexual orientation construct is influenced by the individual's experience with the world, the way in which the meaning of life experiences affects the individual's self-constructs, and the relationship of sexual identity to other constructs the individual holds for him or herself. Because everyone has different life experiences, meanings, and self-constructs, the experience of sexuality and sexual orientation can be different for each person (p. 12).

They also posit that a social constructionist viewpoint is more empowering for individuals over an essentialist view of sexual orientation that is inherent to these developmental models. As a social constructionist posit allows individuals a more active role in the development of a healthy sexual identity, whilst a stages developmental model promotes a logic in which individuals merely discover fixed points of sexual identity. An intensive study of how informants arrived at a homosexual identity is not the focus of this study. I mostly controlled for sexual fluidity by allowing informants to choose their own sexual identity label. However, as the concept of coming-out is so embedded in the Western image of a healthy formation of a homosexual identity, the interest here is whether the foundation of these models is as sound in the West as they appear when they come under empirical evaluation.

According to Levine (1997) some validation has been provided for the developmental model in homosexual identity formation (Horowitz and Newcomb, 2001). In contrast, it is noted that Coleman (1982), Minton and McDonald (1984) and Troiden (1989) have "no empirical validation whatsoever" (McCain and Fassinger, 1996, quoted in Horowitz and Newcomb, p.5). Schurr (2015) did attempt to test empirically, the validity of the Cass model. His findings showed

that in a contemporary sample, the distribution of individuals across the Cass stages of development showed that the majority were in fact placed in the later stages of the model. This stands in contrast to what would be expected across age and development pathways proposed by the Cass model and subsequent derivatives presented by other scholars. His sample was affected in part by a recruitment strategy that would most likely have attracted individuals already at the latter stage of homosexual identity development. Many participants were located through LGB list servs, thus it was plausible that many of his participants would have passed through the lower stages of the Cass model before participating. However, this speaks to the difficulty of testing empirically such a linear model that is based on a lifetime developmental process. Cass recognizes these difficulties, which is why she adopts a cross-sectional research program (Cass, 1984).

The Western-Centrism of Linear Coming-out Models

The deficiencies of these models relate not only to their linearity, they are also embedded within a Western worldview that does not encapsulate diverse modes of identity formation process such as those present in non-Western cultures. Cass (1984) recognized this deficiency herself in conceding that a homosexual identity can only emerge in those societies in which a homosexual categorization is acknowledged. Rather tellingly, in the field of psychology, studies on homosexuality in the US have used primarily White samples (Szymanski and Sung, 2010). For Koreans in particular, their identity formation processes are sometimes even left out of Asian American samples (see Chen and Tyron, 2012).

The stages model becomes further problematic in that it makes coming-out universal or a “normal” stage of identity development yet fails to recognize the diversity of gay men embedded

in different cultures and social relations. Speaking about gay men in Taiwan, Wang et al. (2009) presents the example of the Taiwanese Tongzhi Hotline Association that reminds its audience that “hiding in the closet can also be a good way of being gay” (p. 287).

A study by Bhugra (1997) on the coming-out process among South Asian Gay men in the United Kingdom looked at the specificity of outcomes on gay individuals who were embedded within non-White communities. Bhugra’s study also attempted to test the stage model of homosexual identity development. Bhugra concluded that: “although the notions and stages of coming-out among Asian gay men are fairly similar to those experienced by Western gay men, their ethnic identity plays an important role. External influences and pressures are culturally different and need to be studied in greater depth (p555).”

Bhugra further suggests that: “an attempt should also be made to understand the ‘fit’ of sexual orientation in the components of self-identity and self-esteem. Future research should also describe the range of solutions Asian gay males employ including compartmentalization to fend off pressures from family and community in order to cope with being gay. Although these strategies are employed by White gay men, here the concepts of cultural identity are vital in dealing with one's own sexual orientation (p.556).”

Chacko (2016) in phenomenologically examining the coming-out experiences among second-generation South Asian American gay men found that participants in their study were subject to being in an in-between position in several regards. They are People of Color (PoC) who are also subject to the model minority myth, which can make invisible their experience of racism. “They are bicultural participants and members of South Asian culture and dominant American culture (p. 151),” and Chacko reported that informants shared how their ethnic/racial identity and sexual orientation affected them in different social settings. They were thus forced to navigate

multiple marginalized identities that could cause internal conflict for them. In terms of coming-out, some informants spoke of “caution around coming-out due to the possibility of highlighting generational and cultural difference regarding sexuality.” (p 142).

In addition, as Pongyingpis et al, (2012) terms it in their study of the relationships between traditional male roles, internalized homophobia, and Asian ethnic identification/pride for Gay Asian American Identified Males, coming-out or “self-disclosure” for Asian American gay men can be termed both a privilege and burden (Takagi, 1996, quoted in Pongyingpis et al, 2012: p. 54). This dual function relates to the way race as a category is constructed in the public imaginary and coded by dubious essentialized features that mark out groups of people publicly (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). In other words, due to the power of essentialized scripts of racial identity, it tends to lead to entire communities being painted with a single racialized brush that presents difficulties for all members of that racialized group in navigating racism. It is a privilege to come-out in the sense that to do so would presume that an individual identification marker (gay) in this context, takes precedence over the collective need to combat racial discrimination. The burden being the inverted responsibility of dismantling racist scripts of essentialization. Therefore, an individual’s gay identity can often appear as invisible when compared to their ethnic identity. However, this invisibility is often interpreted as a type of silence in a negative light by non- Asian Americans. Once again quoting Takagi (1996), Pongyingpis et al explains, this is due to a lack of cultural understanding from non-Asian Americans (p.55). Thus, gay Asian Americans may remain silent about their sexual identity to maintain the harmony within the family and community. Doing so, can be understood to be a culturally adaptive behavior.

Moreover, a recent study by Chiang (2015) on the differences between Asian and Caucasian men in coming-out processes also challenged the idea that coming-out is a necessary

component or milestone for healthy gay identity development in Asian American gay men. Chiang argues that for men who were “living in the closet” it may not be associated with psychological distress. A conclusion being that the patterns of psychological impact related to coming-out appeared to be highly culturally-specific. Their study did also support the conclusion that Asian gay men who strongly adhered to “Asian values” were most likely to conceal their sexual orientation. Two points arise from this work, first that one can question the necessity of a coming-out process to gay identity formation, and second that one must define the exact role culture plays in shaping sexual identity and how it might work to inhibit sexual visibility.

Critiquing Coming-out from a Korean and Asian American Perspective

For some Korean gay men remaining closeted does not seem to be stunting their overall sense of identity development and conceptions of selfhood. Cho S and Abelmann (2011), clearly demonstrated how some Korean gay men live full and complete lives by incorporating a gay identity into a heterosexual and married one. This corresponds with Hart’s critique of the essentialist viewpoint of sexual identity labels that sees individuals as inherently heterosexual or homosexual regardless of social or cultural context. Hart (1984) suggested, in fact, that “certain individuals are able to have both homosexual and heterosexual relationships without the conflicts that may be associated with an ‘essentialist’ view of sex-roles and sexual orientation” (pp. 44-45). As in other East Asian countries like China and Japan, Koreans valorize family not merely as an important social institution. Some have argued that this is a universal value, even among gay men in the West (Altman, 1997). This may be true; however, I argue here that for Koreans in particular, the disintegration of the state over the past century and a half, forced a shift in burden for social

welfare directly onto the South Korean family (Chang, 2010). Therefore, complicating this situation further.

Thus, Cho S and Abelmann's (2011) assertion that Korean gay men, even those that had married, possessed a "homing instinct" (p.176) makes contextual sense. They explain that the married gay men in their study had an instinct to always protect the family. For all intents and purposes these men found ways to rationalize and resolve a homosexual identity with that of a heterosexual one. This certainly makes sense in a Korean context when one considers that traditionally, in Korea, a strong norm of homosociality exists, where gender role differentiation prohibited persons of different sexes to socialize with each other in public and private (Lee I, 2016). Boys and girls outside familial and kinship relationships begin to be separated from each other when they reach the age of six. Insook Lee (2016) argues that this provides fertile ground for intimate male bonding to take place where the emotional and sexual boundaries of a same-sex relationship is often blurred and can easily crossover into sexual intimacy.

This ambiguity, Lee also posits allows for ambivalent attitudes toward homosexual intimacy. Thus, when this Korean norm of homosociality is also read in relation to the obvious privilege that males can access in Korea's gender hierarchy, it complicates the idea of a gay subjectivity in South Korea. Homosociality as a social norm can still be seen today in South Korea, as David Oh (2018) demonstrated, evidence of it can even be found in the way South Korean television talk shows arrange discourses of multiculturalism in reference to foreign others. Their example focuses on how foreigners are coopted into critiquing the fact that Korean men tend to socialize together and build homosocial relationships that sometimes blur into what is viewed in the West as possible expressions of a desire for homosexual sexual intimacy.

Another example of this norm came in a part of my own fieldwork where I was brought into an organization of gay men who would play sport together every weekend by my ex-boyfriend. This sports club (which remains general in description to protect the identity of its members) consisted of only men, some of whom were married to women. When speaking to members of the club as to why we were an all-men sports club, it was the normative construct of homosociality in Korean society that they referenced as an explanation. “Men and women do not usually play together that is why we are an all-male club.” After every weekend meeting, we would go for dinner and drink beer and soju together in very public places. In these moments of alcohol-fueled socialization, often we would play games that required direct and intimate touching. It was clear that the norm of homosociality in South Korea protected all of us from being under-suspicion in public. No patrons of any establishments saw anything that we did as being out of the ordinary. In this way, members of our sports club were able to socialize with other gay men on the weekend, whilst being integrated into Korea’s heteronormative institutions during weekdays. For married gay men in the club, it helped them to fulfill their role as husband and father, whilst having homosexual relationships simultaneously. In fact, many of the members of our club were “couples”. In the sense that they were their weekend partners. My ex-boyfriend and I were at one point one of those couples as well.

As such, I posit that a coming-out process in the Korean context should *not* only be examined for its affective psychological quality on a Korean man’s gay identity formation process. But having a contextual understanding of how Korean men have identity formations processes affected by a specific context asks us to also consider more seriously how a coming-out process relates to the Korean situation, especially for their families. For men in my study, this matters far more than just simply being able to focus on changing social attitudes or avoiding uncomfortable

situations in family gatherings. At this juncture a threat to familial harmony is also in essence a threat to many Korean gay men's notions of selfhood. For the two cannot be meaningfully disentangled.

This apparent gap of focus on ethnic and cultural diversity in traditional coming-out models has led to other theorists looking to areas such as minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) to analyze the difficulties that the coming-out processes has on gay Asian American men (Chen and Tyron, 2012). Meyer's model emphasizes the resilience of minority groups in facing prejudice and discrimination. It argues that positive coping skills and social support may be positive moderators, in that they help to protect and mediate the negative effects of minority related stress (Grossman and Liang, 2003; Meyer 2003; Szymanski, 2009; Wei et al, 2009; Cassidy et al, 2004; Harrell, 2000). Although none of these studies deal directly with coming-out, they all share the same idea that carrying a dual minority identity creates a set of doubly impactful discriminatory events that men with these identity constructs must inevitably face.

As Wilson and Yoshikawa (2004) claim, Asian American gay men face the unique situation of managing stressors arising from both their ethnicity/race and their sexual orientation. A key stressor according to this literature is that heterosexism and homophobia has a higher prevalence in Asian cultures. A coming-out process, then, within an Asian American family of any type becomes more difficult. Thus, they (gay men) are more likely not to come-out, and can appear almost invisible (Chung and Katayama, 1998).

This recognition of an added layer of complexity is a welcome addition to the literature, however, the depiction of Asian American families as being intensely heterosexist and homophobic does tread toward essentialism. Harris et al (2017) in their study of Asian Pacific Islander LGBT people, challenge notions that Asian Pacific Islanders do not "come-out" due to

racial and ethnic specific beliefs about family and religion. They posit that the reality for many LGBT Asian Pacific Islanders is that they are out to family, friends and people in their neighborhood. LGBT Asian Pacific Islanders find varying degrees of support within their families, friends and religious communities. And in many instances receive maintain and create support from other Asian Pacific Islander people. In fact, over 90% of Asian Pacific Islanders they surveyed were “out” to their friends and family. What this suggests then is that cultural norms can surely be identified as existing but are not necessarily monolithic in the way they are practiced. Highlighting again the need for more contextual nuance in analyzing different coming-out narratives.

Often, an issue that is highlighted as being a central barrier for East Asian men are traditional norms around filial piety (loyalty and duty to respect and serve one’s parents), especially with regard to men being expected to produce an heir. According to the *Book of Filial Piety* (in China) there is no crime greater for a son than to not produce an heir (Wang et al 2009). The privileging of filial piety as a discursive construct in East Asian cultures also includes South Korea. Wang et al (2009) argues, though, that filial piety is constantly negotiated, especially in the coming-out process. This was demonstrated by many men in my study who were indeed aware of their obligations under the principle of filial piety, yet they did not necessarily see it is a barrier to their coming-out. Rather, thoughts on coming-out were complicated by it, as they attempted to navigate a contemporary South Korean context that is shifting quickly as their nation races relentlessly toward modernization.

The Importance of Korean Familism

As literature in gay and lesbian studies has highlighted the role of intensely heterosexist social norms in limiting coming-out narratives for Asian American men, I find it a necessary exercise to provide a brief review of the concepts that affect family and familism in South Korea. Moreover, how they have been shaped over time and what implications this may have as gay Korean men seek to reshape its structure. The role of the family in the ROK has been lauded as both the backbone of its economic miracle, forming the basis of social and business relations, but its enduring quality also makes it one of the most robust and resilient social institutions in Korean society (Chang, 2010; Chung, 2015; Park, 2015; Kendall, 2002; Chung 1969). Indeed, in the ROK family culture is composed of inherent principles that determine how family members are organized and form relationships as family's systems, rules and values. These inherent principles are based on the patrilineal family system (Hah, 2012).

Confucianism and the Korean Family

The Confucian tradition which centers on patrilineal succession, preserving rigid relationships between father and son, historically, has proven to be most successful in maintaining strict social order. In modern incarnations, the Family Register Law was established in 1960 to prescribe regulations on one's legal domicile and the head of family and family members. The Family Register Law was essentially a patriarchal family law. Under this law a patriarch as head of the family was recorded first, and, following this, lineal ascendants of the head of the family, a spouse of the head of family, lineal descendants of the head of family and their spouses were recorded in order (Yang, 2013). Derived from a Confucian tradition that was established in the

second half of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), the strict adherence to Confucian norms is what is often assigned as a key factor that ameliorates any ideas of Korean homosexual males in South Korea claiming greater sexual visibility (Bong Y, 2008; Seo D, 2001).

However, depending on one's view of history, it can be said that this is rather a recent phenomenon. Prior to the second half of the Joseon era, in reference to the time of the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), the typical Korean family unit did not privilege males across its entire spectrum. This was evidenced by the fact that husbands during this time in fact moved in with their wives' post-marriage. The move toward a neo-Confucianist tradition in familial structure served a political purpose in which elites, the Yangban (aristocratic class) and the King, drew political strength and stabilized their power by emphasizing this patrilineal familial structure (Kim C, 2010).

Changsop Kim (2010) argues that Confucianism was the domain of the elite and allowed the Yangban the opportunity to gain moral legitimacy to their class domination. The practice of it was materially and culturally too burdensome for ordinary citizens so it morally justified the Yangban's class domination. Confucian familism become universalized in the mid-19th century as the traditional class system dissolved and represented the aspiration of previously lower classes to assimilate the exclusive class culture of their one-time rulers. After colonial devastation and war, Confucianism was utilized in promoting social integration and stability based on the Confucian family. As the state and local communities were in disarray due to repeated political and military conflicts, private families were entrusted with full responsibility for protecting and controlling individuals. Hence, the re-entrenching of the importance of the family was unavoidable.

What this means for the visibility of Korean gay men, is that as individuals, the family - a site of identity formation and subjectivity - is a site that has not only been contested across many moments of history, but it is also a site of social and economic security. With weakened state

institutions, there was nowhere an individual could turn besides seeking the support of kinship ties. These strong ties were necessary in keeping poverty at bay, and for men in general, a site where they found great privilege through their gender identity. This is an important nuance that is often not paid enough attention to. Korean homosexual men are *still* men and if they adhere to familial norms that follow Confucian ideas, they can still access privilege within this system. A privilege that affords social security and continued elevated status within a family structure that follows some Confucian modus operandi. The accessing of patriarchal norms that delivered privilege to Korean gay men was identified by Cho J (2009) in his study that investigated the phenomenon of contract marriages between gay men and lesbian women. Where the lesbian women in their study were often forced to “perform” the role of a subservient wife, while their gay-husbands comfortably performed and accessed the privilege of a Korean male household-head in their marriage of convenience. This was most notable when it came to navigating familial expectations and performing specific gendered roles in the household. Despite these women entering into marriages of convenience to protect their lesbian identity and subvert gendered subservience in Korean cultural norms, they often had to focus on projecting an image of domestic competency in the presence of their gay-husband’s mothers and other family members. Something I interpreted as an inevitable re-inscription of the configuration of male patrilineal privilege and patriarchy in the Korean gay and lesbian community.

This is vital for my analysis, as it sensitized me toward my informants’ responses when they spoke of their family as an important space in which they constructed their individual identity and formulated their understanding of the self. A feature they shared with Korean society at large (Park I and Cho L, 1995). But more than this, this feature intimated to me that they believed that their familial structures were more elastic than prior literature leads us to believe. This relational

formation is crucial in understanding how the norms of the family affects the choices of the individual. It may act in a constraining way, but if that site of relational identity formation is a contested site, it means that the norms that an individual is exposed to are not necessarily set in Confucian stone. Especially when the Korean family bestows privilege to a male identity. This inevitably clouds the way in which Korean gay men were constructing notions of their own self-hood.

The Evolving Pluralistic Nature of Korean Familism

In this section I draw from Chang K's (2010) understanding of the South Korean family as containing pluralistic types of kinship relationships. Although South Koreans are well known for their family-centeredness in personal and social life, their notions and attitudes about family are diverse. Until recently, the main approach to the psychological and ethical dimensions of family change in South Korea has accepted the modernization theory thesis that most of the problems in family life and relationships emanate from the tensions between modernity and tradition (Kim C, 2010). In South Korea, the coexistence of traditional, modern, and even post-modern constructs results in serious tension and conflict among different generations who have been exposed to diverse cultures in varying degrees (Chang K, 2010; Chong K, 2008; Park C. et al, 2003). In the next section I use Chang K's (2010) articulation of the different types of familial forms that co-exist in South Korean families today as a lens throughout the dissertation. According to Chang, these forms can be classified as: Confucian familism (which was explained in the previous section), instrumental familism, affectionate familism, and individualistic familism.

Korean Instrumental Familism

The first family structure that I wish to add to the foregrounding of this dissertation is what Chang K (2010) coins as the rise of instrumental familism. Chang defines instrumental familism in a Korean context as: “South Koreans mobilizing their family resources and kin networks for their social advancement, material achievement, and even political success. A good family is one that can meet such social, economic, or political needs of its members (p18)” Chang grounds this formation in historical forces emanating from the dissolution of the traditional order, successive colonial rule, and the Korean War, which destroyed stable state governance. South Koreans then, not only turned to their families for support. they also turned to their families for social achievement.

This articulation of instrumental familism finds similarities with Bourdieu’s concept of social capital. Bourdieu (1992) defines social capital as: the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (p.119). In other words, social capital, which includes material and non-material elements accumulate along networks that can be used to advance the position of individuals. For Bourdieu, this articulation was meant to demonstrate how networks among the upper social classes can create loops through communities that keep social capital within its network. In other words, highlighting the structural elements that undergird and allow the perpetuation of social inequality (Gauntlett, 2010). Chang K’s (2010) articulation of instrumental familism aligns with this by supposing that due to historical forces, South Koreans turned to their families to build valuable networks where social and eventually, material benefits could accrue to.

To support this assertion, Chang K (2010) uses the example of Korea's educated labor force. Chang argues that the formation of a well-educated and skilled labor force in South Korea has been greatly influenced by the high levels of private education investment from Korean families. Moreover, most widespread small-scale commercial and industrial operations are family-funded/or family-staffed ventures. *Chaebol*, Korea's largest and most powerful business organization is also family-controlled. South Koreans have mobilized their family resources and kin networks for their social advancement and material achievement (even political success) (Lee Y, 2002). In other words, South Koreans can be said to have developed and managed their industrial system in a family-reliant manner (Lee J. et al, 2010).

Instrumental familism then, poses an even more intensive influence over the decisions of males. If Confucian familism, or aspects of it, leads to elevated social status for males, instrumental familism provides real economic benefits in following familial norms. Combining the two makes a very complex decision-making process even harder for Korean gay men. The genealogical lens applied through Confucian familism helps to shape an individual's collective memory, that binds, and the reliance on family for social and economic advancements brings the individual even closer to familial norms (Kang H and Larson, 2014). It begs the question then of whether someone's desire to claim an othered sexual identity would preclude them from these networks and what psychological, material and physical harm this presents. If coming-out models are meant to allow for greater psychological synthesis of identities, can a "coming-out" in a Western sense of the term, do more harm than good in a Korean context?

But perhaps of even more interest is the idea of how affected an individual is by these norms and whether in effect, choose to internalize them as part of their individual subjectivity due to utilitarian calculation. Cho S and Abelman's (2011) study certainly posits that this may be the

case for married gay men who built gay communities and relationships that are restricted to the weekend. By finding such strong social and economic advancement within the confines of the family, it would appear that preserving the integrity of the family is motivated by more than just a social support network.

Moreover, instrumental familism is important in that it provides an economic opportunity for social and economic advancement. This clearly would affect people of different social and economic backgrounds by differing degrees. An individual in which their family is not able to provide a high level of social and economic advancement support, it could be hypothesized would be less likely to internalize familial norms over strict moral and social behavior embodied in Confucian familism. In reverse, those who are more likely to benefit from instrumental familism would then be more likely to want to preserve the status quo. These are important nuances for any study that looks to the development of an independent assertive sexual identity among South Korean gay men.

Korean Affectionate and Individual Familism

Chang K's (2010) second familial lens is what they term affectionate familism. This, Chang argues, arose in the West, during the emergence of large-scale industrialization that led to the reformulation of the family unit as a site for the emotional protection of the people (Zaretsky 1986). In South Korea, affectionate familism arose in line with a speedy expansion of the middle class, due to rapid industrialization. The rise of this form of familism is something important in that new types of familial relationships came to be emphasized. As most of the highly-educated women remained home after marriage, they became exposed to western familism through the dissemination of mass media (Chang K, 1997).

Affectionate familism emphasizes the bond between parents and children, this repositioning in familial roles characterized here as a post-Korean war phenomenon is not to say that there was no affection in Korean families prior to this time. But the rise of affectionate familism in this time caused many inter-generational conflicts to emerge (Chang K, 2010). Here it also bears mentioning that in a Confucian patrilineal society like Korea, what Chang has defined as affectionate familism, is complicated by the idea of uterine families. Marjorie Wolf (1972) defines uterine families as having: no ideology, no formal structure, and no public existence. [...] It is built out of sentiments and loyalties, but it is no less real. (p37). In other words, because women and men within Confucian families have gendered roles, women and men interact with their children differently. Mothers form uterine families through developing loyalties and networks with other wives, which also cultivates a much more sentimental relationship with her children, especially a male child. This is because as Wolf states: “the descent lines of men are born and nourished in the uterine families of women (p37).” An important point being that women literally *make* their own families by giving birth to one as she does not exist in her husband’s family line, nor her father’s either. As such, a more affectionate bond between mother and son can be assumed to develop in order to navigate the patriarchal nature and exclusion she may experience as part of the Confucian family. Whilst a more formal relationship may exist between father and son as he is charged with continuing his father’s line.

I find that the concept of uterine families aligns with Chang K’s (2010) articulation of affectionate familism. Chang attributes its rise in South Korea because of modernity. However, I interpret affectionate familism as an example of how contemporary times allow concepts of the uterine family to re-shape itself. For example, many of my informants formed close bonds with their mothers because of the time they spent with them as children, whom they considered to be

nurturers that took care of their emotional and physical needs, while their fathers worked and pursued economic stability for their families. Fathers were also storied as authoritarian and rigid, often citing their fathers desire for them to carry on the family line as type of affect that had consequences on their relationship. As a result, informants often coopted and looked to their mothers to help them form their situated embedded narratives (SENs) as well as negotiate new kinship relations before coming-out.

The important take away here is the idea that family, already a site of social and economic advancement, has also been overlaid in certain instances by a reformulating of traditional relationships that can often reinscribe old ones too. Thus, family in modern day Korea is still a very dynamic site of identity formation, for there to be an intrusion by minority sexual identities into the norms of the Korean family, there may just exist a space. But what the emergence of these three previous forms of familism show, is that external factors are often what create the extra spaces of contestation and moments of potential reform socially and politically.

A newly emerging form of familism which relates closely to this idea of contested spaces is what has been coined as individual familism, a nod by Chung K (2010) to the rise of postmodernity discourses. This form of familism tends to be a product of sweeping social changes that has taken the post-developed world, a club that South Korea has recently joined. Central to this has been the emergence and intense critiques advanced by women and their traditional role in the family unit. Moreover, the nurturing of individual consumerist needs of the young generation has also given rise to individualistic familism. Here, the desires of a younger generation that have been assaulted by commercial interests and consumerism often deviate from the traditional modes of Confucian familism. This creates friction and tensions that present itself as intergenerational conflict. Abelmann et al. (2013) argued that this has led to the development of *chagi kwalli* or a

self-cultivation frame. Where informants to their study betrayed the formation of a new individual neoliberal-driven cosmopolitan subjectivity discourse present among the rising generation of Korean youth. This was also something that was present in the narratives of my informants, which will be covered in more detail in chapter 4.

The spaces of reformulation of the types of families that can be imagined due to the rise of individual familism seems rather voluminous from this angle of familism. It is not inconceivable that a same-sex couple could one day be successful in pushing successful political reforms through in Korea that would seek to recognize non-traditional families, considering all the complex social and demographic pressures that South Korea face today. However, multiple familism lenses and its various iterations in South Korea mean that inevitably outside influences will play some role. Whether direct intervention by norm transition and Western benchmarking may provide this spark needs to be interrogated further. As Korea's own economic rapid industrialization, in the form of the fused state (Cumings, 1998) was created by Park Chung Hee in aggressively pursuing a catch-up strategy with the West.

Human rights are fundamentally different from economic benchmarking. Granting liberal rights for sexual minorities offer very little in terms of social and economic advancement at this point for many in South Korea's political elite. For individuals, being estranged from a Confucian familial structure that operates both at an instrumental and affectionate level provides very little individual utility. And as spaces in which identities are constructed, there is also the matter of having to disentangle familial norms internalized as a process of socialization. These norms very much still function on a hierarchical familial structure. The only realistic paths to reform then is for these norms to change internally, from the inside out, or from within the family, out to wider society. The other option is for the family in its current form to disintegrate altogether as the

pressures of postmodernity, a rapid demographic transition and sustained level of peace and security could conceivably lead to. However, the robustness of the Korean family in its political, social, and economic utility makes me skeptical of this scenario occurring.

Christianity and Korea

Prior literature has also identified the power of Christianity in restricting the visibility and integration of gay subjectivities in Korean and Korean American communities (as part of the Asian American demographic). Like every society, Christianity in Korea is not practiced in monolithic terms. Something that my informants recognized, with Anton (introduced in chapter 4) differentiating between the way Catholics in Korea and Presbyterians have varying degrees of tolerance to homosexuality. However, in general, when dealing with Korean gay and queer subjectivities, Christianity was storied by informants as being overall oppressive toward non-heterosexual constructs of gender and sexual diversity in South Korea. Although what informants meant by the term Christianity was often left aside, they often constructed it as an all-encompassing label and symbol of opposition to gay futurity in South Korea. As such, the use of the term throughout the dissertation is deployed as a type of discourse that my informants were navigating, storying and reproducing.

Historically, South Korea's Christian community has risen to become one of the most significant sites of civil society organizational development. According to Clark (1986), the brand of Christianity that informs the views of Korea's Christian organizations often adheres to stricter Christian norms than in other countries (Clark, 1986). Although Anton said that from his point of view, Catholics tended to be more indifferent to Korea's queer community, there is very little

tolerance toward LGBTIQ+ people from Christian churches overall in South Korea. Most of my informants referred to a monolithic Christian church, which I understood as a product of the disproportionate level of publicity given to extremist Christian groups anytime queer groups in Korea attempt to claim space in the Korean public sphere⁴.

It has been theorized that Korean anti-queer Christian groups' zealotry in pushing against calls for greater acceptance of sexual minorities derives from their desire to regain political saliency, which post-democratic transition has begun to wane (Cho, 2011). And this influence over Korea politically is considerable, something none of my informants were unaware of. According to Clark (1986) and Baker (2016), unlike in other locations where Christianity became associated with colonizing forces, Christianity in Korea became associated with a new kind of nationalism during the time of the Japanese occupation. Not only that, but prior to the Korean Peninsula coming under Japanese control, Christianity was adopted as a revolutionary edict, providing educational institutes, creating key infrastructure for people that were traditionally excluded by the Yangban, and even found its most fertile ground in Pyongyang, an area whose people were seen as uncouth and backward by their countrymen further south in Seoul. This was even referenced by some informants in my study.

This formidable historical genealogy inevitably impacts familism in Korea. The reformulation of the Korean family into instrumental, affectionate, individualistic family structures is important as at each point, a source of modernist, reforming ideology became that of Christianity. Clark (1986) and Baker (2016), both recount how Christian churches were active in criticizing the Japanese, then again in criticizing Park Chung Hee's oppressive regime.

⁴ See appendix B, C, D for examples of some of the discursive constructs used by fundamentalist groups in Korea. For more details, also see Woori Han (2018), who stories the huge number of Christian fundamentalist groups that hold anti-queer rallies in Seoul during the time of the Seoul Queer Culture Festival.

The Christian Church has also been central in developing Korean networks overseas. The Presbyterian Church in particular, rooted in Korean familial networks is a common feature of Korean migrant communities overseas (Hurh W and Kim K, 1990; Chong K, 1998). And in many instances, became the center of migrant communities in the US (Min P, 1992; Shrake, 2009). Transnational networks involving Koreans based overseas were important in transmitting norms from outside Korea, especially during the time of democratization. However, the reverse historical process of mass Korean migration to the US is often ignored. More than one of the informants in this study pointed out that he had observed the Korean American community being far more “backward” than modern day Koreans. They believed this to be because Korean American families had migrated to the US making use of church networks during a time where South Korean society was still deeply affected by Confucian familism.

The reach of Christianity in Korea is massively important for queer communities. Especially, as Chase (2011) outlines, often Christian churches see their identity as Christians locked in a zero-sum game with the desires of sexual minorities. The aggressive lobbying of anti-queer Christians is a major stumbling block in the realization of their liberal rights becoming recognized by the state. Christian normative constructs have embedded itself within some familial structures as well. Many of my informants storied their narratives in reference to their time growing up in a Korean American Christian Church (KACC) in Seattle as one example. Normatively speaking, the KACC also shaped the values that they were raised with. In South Korea, the power of the anti-queer Christian bloc, enhanced by its ability to dictate social discussions and attitudes toward homosexuality, is still very much a challenge that gay men must navigate in considering matters of visibility. An issue that informants to my study storied as the biggest stumbling block to their recognition in South Korea.

Escaping the Frame of Western Culture?

So, what is the problem with coming-out that I posited at the beginning of this chapter? Simply, my position is that our understanding of it is embedded within Western cultural understandings of homosexuality identity formation processes as evidenced by the Cass model and others. A staged approach in the context of this work is too linear a model to be useful here. The assumption that two identity frames *must* be synthesized, a private and public one, gives little concern to how these private and public identities are themselves constructed and shaped in diverse and specific cultural and national contexts. In particular, understanding the particularities of Korean familism can help to nuance our understanding of the ethnography that is about to be presented.

For the purposes of this study then, I leave the question of what constitutes a coming-out narrative an open one. I take the position that there exists no one “right” way to develop and practice a homosexual identity. By reviewing in-depth the socio-cultural and historical frames in which the Korean gay male emerges, one must question the linear coming-out focus that is accepted as “normal” for many. While attempts to model a universal homosexual identity may be useful in psychology and counselling praxis, such a one-size-fits-all approach offers us little help in understanding a Korean gay man’s subjectivity or decisions made around sexual identity visibility. As such, I take the position that the constructionist approach advocated for by Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) provides better tools for addressing cultural differences in this context.

Despite my critique of essentialist approaches to coming-out I do not aim to discredit the incredibly important work that has been done in this field. Psychologists have nuanced their understanding of multiple minority stressors in order to provide better support for those who carry

multiple forms of social marginalization (see Chen and Tyron, 2012 for a review). What will become clearer further on in this dissertation, also, is that a coming-out process of full-disclosure relating to sexual identity for my informants was what many wanted. However, their contact with these ideas nestled within a linear coming-out frame, often came in the form of transnational flows of information, media, people and even financial support for certain organizations. Therefore, I postulate that these flows need to be interrogated for their generative aspect through a power lens to help reveal more depth to our understanding of the coming-out process and why linear models are now beginning to also appear in South Korea.

This dissertation will now turn to the analytical chapters to present the data that was generated, collected and bounded through 2 years of fieldwork in Seoul and Seattle. Each analytical chapter will take its theoretical cues from many different perspectives, but ultimately will lead into a final discussion that brings the many strands of this dissertation together. Korean gay men navigate discourses around their marginality that are affected by family, culture, religion racialization and coming-out, which I argue will allow us to see how complicated this space is and requires us to adopt a more contextual lens, when looking for how Korean gay men present themselves in contemporary times.

Analytical Chapters

As this work is designed as a 3-paper form dissertation, the following chapters are structured as individual papers. They are also informed by the foregrounding chapters that have structured the front end of this dissertation. All three use slightly different theoretical approaches but are also connected by the concepts and framing offered prior to this section. A conclusion is also presented to link the three papers together using its own theoretical approach. The papers have been renamed as chapters to reflect the hybrid approach taken in this dissertation.

Chapter 3: Sleepless in Seattle? Constructing Situated Embedded Narratives to Navigate the Complexities of Culture, Family, Community and forces of Exclusion.

Chapter Summary/Abstract

This first analytical chapter explores how Korean gay men in Seattle narrate their marginality regarding their sexual visibility. Here I demonstrate how informants constructed what I have termed “situated embedded narratives” in navigating the intersections of family, culture and community. This is a process where together with select family members, informants deployed a heteronormative narrative to minimize familial friction and dislocation from the Korean American community. Korean American Christian Churches (KACC) formed a central site of community for US-born informants and became part of their identity formation process. Informants who chose not to use this strategy in fully disclosing their sexual identity found themselves estranged from the Korean American community. As such, it created immense difficulties for those informants that related to family, ethnic identity and personal welfare. Despite limitations as a qualitative study, findings suggest important differences in the Korean gay narrative often made invisible by scholarship conducted under umbrella terms like Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander. It also raises questions around epistemological and ontological ways of understanding the coming-out process based on linear frameworks like the Cass model.

Introduction

“Korean gays [in America] have to stop being cowards and come-out of the closet. They need to stop living a lie and claim openly that they’re gay.” - Simeon.

In lambasting the reluctance of Korean gay men to claim greater visibility around their sexual identity, Simeon touched on an often-neglected question in Asian American and queer studies literature: simply, where are all the Korean gay men? Korean gay men appear to be invisible to communities both in Korea and in the United States (US). Scholars have not only opined their reluctance to claim greater visibility in Korea (Bong Y, 2008), but have also theorized the complete erasure of their identity from the Korean public consciousness (Seo D, 2001). In Seattle and Washington State, a significant Korean population of around 65,000 exists (WSCAPAA, 2010). Although estimates on rates of homosexuality within a population are difficult to ascertain for a variety of reasons⁵, if Bruce Voeller’s (1990) rather optimistic figure of 10% of a population are homosexual is used, we would get a rough estimate of about 3,250 Korean gay men⁶. A more conservative estimate of 8.6% by Sell et al. (1995)⁷ would make about 2,795 Korean gay men in

⁵ Some argue that homosexuality is a social construction, and therefore, variant over time and across different societies (Pruitt, 2002) Therefore it becomes difficult for some to believe that an accurate figure or estimate can be given for a population of homosexual men in many parts of the world.

⁶ Voeller’s figures are questionable based on statistical methods used to glean this data. Moreover, this sample was taken from White American men so the applicability to Korean homosexual men is suspect as it assumes then that homosexuality and definitions of it are universal, there is a wealth of research that contradicts this assumption.

⁷ Sell, Randall L., James A. Wells, and David Wypij. "The prevalence of homosexual behaviour and attraction in the United States, the United Kingdom and France: Results of national population-based samples." *Archives of sexual behaviour* 24.3 (1995): 235-248. - this study looked at behaviour, desire and self-identification estimates. Their figures are dependent on one’s definition of homosexuality, therefore is not necessarily as valid an indicator for the purposes of this dissertation.

Seattle and Washington State, with this number possibly being higher considering the age of these statistics. Yet, as many of my informants pointed out, Korean gay men are not visible in public social groups in Seattle either. This is perplexing as Seattle is one of the most gay-friendly cities in the US and considering although research into the behaviors of Korean gay men in America is still fledgling, some scholars have reached the conclusion that Korean gay men are motivated to move to the US in search of greater sexual freedom (Longres, 1996; Strayhorn, 2014).

The popular explanation given is that Korean gay men, as part of the Asian American and Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities, are being rendered invisible by a community that is religiously conservative and intensely heterosexist (Chen & Tyron, 2012; Harris et al, 2017). However, this explanation does not account for *how* conservative norms function and operate to limit visibility beyond a mere clash of cultural values lens, nor can it account for the particularities and diversity even among Korean experiences themselves. This chapter begins to address one part of this gap in the literature by interrogating the lived experiences of 10 Korean gay men resident in Seattle. Informants to this study demonstrated that a far more complex process was taking place particular to a Korean lived experience. In line with feminist traditions, I argue here that these experiences and narratives must be treated as situated knowledges and placed in wider socio-historical forces that are at play (Haraway, 2003).

My arguments are constructed using data collected through ethnographic methodologies that included semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation informed by *talanoa* methodological approaches in reflectivist positionality. A hermeneutical, interpretivist approach is taken to build themes told in a *talanoa* narrative framed by a theoretical framework that borrows from intersectionality scholarship.

I argue that Korean gay men in Seattle represented by informants in this study, are affected by the Korean American Christian Church (KACC) and Confucian norms in more complex ways than mere oppressive discursive constructs that “other” a gay identity. I argue that due to the Korean American community being intertwined with the Christian Church, Koreans born and raised in the US often find their sense of ethnic identity mutually constructed by a Christian one. Korean American Identity for my informants in many cases was not able to be disentangled from the KACC in meaningful ways. Instead, one-way informants navigated these complexities was using what I have coined the construction and deployment of “situated embedded narratives (SENS).” Whereby they revealed their sexual identity to a family member(s) and together, built a story that projects a heteronormative image of the self. This narrative was deployed contextually, that helped to keep their gay identity hidden from others within their familial and community networks. These narratives allow family members to avoid friction in wider familial, social and community circles and permitted informants to live gay lives openly with partners in US society. Without the deployment of such narratives, a full coming-out narrative is unavoidable. Something that often leads to complete estrangement for informants that can have detrimental impacts for them that require them to re-evaluate their connectedness to their Korean identity.

In this dissertation, the term Korean gay men as opposed to Korean American gay men, is used as a collective marker. This is important as Seattle informants in my study were born both in South Korea and in the US, some had lived longer in South Korea than in the US, others vice versa and others had not been to Korea at all. There were also two biracial participants. Some considered themselves to be Korean American, while others considered themselves to be just a Korean living in America. Thus, the complexity of a Korean identity itself, the connectedness some respondents felt to a Korean homeland versus an American one and vice versa, shows exactly why an even

more general categorization such as Asian American or API is analytically unhelpful for my analysis.

Literature Review

In interrogating the lived experiences of Korean gay men in the United States, most of the literature has grouped their stories under the umbrella term Asian American or API gay men (Chan C, 1992; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Cochran et al, 2007; Chung & Szymanski, 2007; Tsunokai et al, 2014; Narui, 2011; Leong, 2014, Harris et al, 2017). The common theme identified in this literature is the existence of stock stories in dominant discourses that depict gay Asian American men in essentialized ways, often as a denigrated, ostracized group dominated by the hegemonic influence of the White masculine gay (Han C, 2008a, 2008b; Eguchi, 2010). It also underscores the continuation of an emasculated Asian American gay male in mainstream discourses as feminine, with small penises (Fung, 1996) and ripe for White consumption (Han C, 2007). Asian American gay men suffer from the perpetual pressures of the model minority myth, where the paramount challenge for these men in exercising their sense of self is boxed by the image of the model Asian (Phua, 2007).

In nuancing these stories somewhat, Ocampo & Soodjina (2016) found that gay Asian American men also used the intersection of race and sexuality strategically, deploying education as a conscious strategy to mitigate homophobia and the racialized climate of their schools. Gay Asian American men have also been found to delay the process of being more visible in their sexuality by using ethnic stereotypes and conformity to the model minority myth, as a way of buffering themselves against being doubly oppressed as an intersectional minority (Kumashiro, 1999). This literature on gay Asian American and API men further identified bias toward studies

on HIV risk, mental health outcomes and sexual practices in research problematization (Wilson & Yoshikawa, 2004; Boehmer, 2002; Cochran et al., 2007; Nemoto et al., 2003; Choi K. et al., 1998). As a result, some argue that this has left a greater need for research that moves beyond a ‘deficit’ model, in focusing on the resilience of the Asian American gay community instead (Akerland & Cheung 2000; Masten, 1994).

In dealing with coming-out experiences specifically, the literature highlights overwhelmingly how Asian American gay males have their coming-out journey complicated by a deeply conservative immigrant Asian American community (Chan S, 1992). This has been attributed to a combination of religiosity and cultural norms that highlight the importance of carrying on the family name in displaying patriarchal normative constructs in social and familial structures. This is what creates intensely heterosexist and homophobic attitudes in Asian cultures (Chen & Tyron, 2012; Harris et al, 2017). Cultural expectations are thought to discourage individualism, which is seen as key to the linear coming-out process advanced by Cass (1979), Coleman (1982) and Troiden (1989) to name a few (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Green, 1994; Nemoto et al, 2003; Han & Festinger, 2001).

Chung & Szymanski (2007) state that the personal realization of an Asian American gay sexual identity conflicts with Asian cultural values and this tension is exacerbated by a lack of support and resources for Asian gay men. In the Korean studies literature, these social norms are often attributed to the power of Confucian familial norms, where Korea enjoys some of the most Confucian norms of all (Chung E, 2015; Chang K, 2010; Hwang S & Lim J, 2015). However, in the US context, this conservatism and group identity was also a product of the immigrant

community narrative where social support and networks are nestled primarily in the family and building of ethnic communities (Kim I, 2014).

A notable omission in the scholarship on gender, queer as well as gay and lesbian studies in the US, is a lack of intersectionally-informed analyses based on a Korean gay identity. A common explanation for this is the difficulty in locating subjects for potential research participants (see Narui, 2011; Phua 2007). Yet, analytical concerns persist when using these umbrella categorizations. Chen and Tyron (2012), as an example, found in their study of Asian American gay men that those who reported higher levels of stress related to their Asian identity also tended to report higher levels of stress associated with their homosexuality, suggesting a correlative and possible causative relationship. However, their sample did not include Korean respondents. Harris et al (2017), as another example, attempted to push back against essentialized images of a religiously conservative API identity by highlighting the religious diversity that exists among API communities, represented by various Christian denominations, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. However, the format of their book glosses over the complexities of how this religious diversity pairs with an ethnic identity, thus limiting the analysis to description. And their use of general population statistics to point out that only 39% of APIs in the US claim that religion was important to them versus the general population of 58% is undermined by the fact that the same body of data they draw from shows that 61% of Koreans identify as Protestant alone, and 65% of Filipino Americans as Catholics. Suggesting that in terms of interrogating factors that affect identity, much more refined analytical categories are needed.

Despite attempts at mapping Korean American masculinities being published under the Asian American and API label before, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, there exists no

studies that have focused on the coming-out narratives of Korean gay men in America specifically. The closest being Strayhorn (2014), who found in his qualitative study of four Korean gay men at a college in the Midwest, that Korean gay men were motivated to move to the US to live a more open life. This was something denied to them by South Korean societal norms around homosexuality that ‘orientalizes (gay men) from within’ (Seo D, 2001). Strayhorn’s study suffered from a small sample size alluding to the pre-acknowledged methodological constraints identified by other scholars. However, their study concluded that these Korean gay men were pigeonholed by the model minority myth that limited and colored the type of interactions they had on campus, subjecting them to microaggressions and discrimination.

In South Korea, more studies have begun to reproduce the type of work popular in the Western academy. Recent research published on the negative mental health impacts of coming-out including suicide ideation using large N samples (Cho and Sohn, 2016), concluded that gay men demonstrated higher levels of suicide ideation than the general population. With the highest level found among men who were forced to come-out. Other recent studies have focused on general societal attitudes toward homosexuality, with Um N et al., (2016) positive on the prospects of South Korean society making progress on accepting homosexuality. In 2017, the Korean gay men’s human rights group, *Chingusai*, celebrated 20 years of existence and published the South Korean LGBTI Community Social Needs Assessment (2014) with a purposive sample of 3208. They found coming-out rates within their sample to be extremely low, 21% of respondents came out to mothers and only 7% to their fathers, with rates much lower among respondents who were under the age of 18. Interviews, which were also part of their study, revealed a complex milieu of social and familial factors that affected informant choices around visibility vis-a-vis their family. This falls in line with conclusions reached by previous studies conducted into the South Korean

gay community which paints a picture of a Korean gay identity, othered both culturally (Bong Y, 2008; Seo D, 2001) and more recently, religiously, by a fervent Christian minority (Cho M, 2011). It is important to note that in South Korea, roughly 29% of South Koreans identify as Christians. Yet, in the United States, over 70% of Korean Americans identify as Christian, the largest share being Presbyterian. Additionally, although less than 30% of Koreans are Christian, more than 8 in 10 South Koreans have a positive view of Pope Francis; outnumbering considerably the 66% of Americans who held the same view (Pew Research Center, 2014). This intimates just how big an influence Christianity is on the lives of Koreans and Korean Americans. Christianity's powerful influence stretches back to its interwoven nature in South Korea's historical genealogy, where it was once viewed as a liberating and modernizing force on the Korean Peninsula (Clark, 1986, Konig, 2000; Park A and Yoo D, 2014).

The Korean American community like other immigrant communities have a strong historical connection to the Christian Church (Min P, 1992; Shrake E, 2009). The KACC was central to developing Korean communities all around the US (Hurh W & Kim K, 1990, Chong K, 1998). Forming sites where Korean American culture was kept alive through Korean language services/sermons and shared worship (Ebaugh, 2003). Moreover, building community networks that proved vital in providing social and even economic support for new Korean immigrants to America (Light, 1984; Kim J, 2014). Thus, the findings of Harris et al's (2017) study that depicted a collective Asian Pacific Islander experience as one that is not necessarily as "religious" as mainstream America is not able to account for Korean context. I purport that this requires us to reformulate two questions asked in the literature with a Korean specific twist: The first, what is it about the specific Korean experience and living in America that makes it so difficult for Korean

gay men to come-out? And how does this differ from traditional coming-out models as well as the gay Asian American/API narrative that has been told many times in the existing literature?

Theoretical Framework - Intersectionality

Intersectionality with genealogical roots in Black Feminist literature, was coined by Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989) and begins with the premise that focusing on single markers leads to a false classification of people that simply does not reflect lived realities (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011). It is a theoretical and methodological tool that analyzes how historically, specific kinds of power differentials and or/constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations (Lykke, 2010). Intersectionality is about power differentials. It focuses on when an individual suffers from multiple exclusions based on multiple sociocultural categorizations they fall into, their specific experiences of marginalization can become lost to wider society at an intersection where these exclusions meet.

Crenshaw used what has become famously known as the intersecting roads metaphor. In articulating the dimensions of intersectionality, she showed how Women of Color become misrepresented by political initiatives that are built on conventional politics, founded around resistance to only one power differential. More specifically though, in her ground-breaking article: *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (1989), her aim was to show how Black women's lived experiences of discrimination and violence were made invisible by intersecting marginalizing forces. First, the assumption that White women, as the dominant voices in feminist

movements spoke for all women, thus allowing racism within the feminist movement to go unchecked. Second, Black women were additionally erased by Black men, whose voices centered in the civil rights movement and the battle for racial equality, also silenced the Black woman's need for justice around domestic violence and gender inequality within the Black community. Her work as a legal scholar and activist illuminated the existence of a vast chasm of difference between the experiences of Black women, White women and Black men, due to the narrow application of laws inadvertently focused on reforming a single power differential (ie sexism alone, or racism alone) (See Crenshaw, 1989).

Lykke (2010) quotes Crenshaw in stating that to conduct an effective intersectional analysis we need to structurally analyze how power differentials around gender (sexuality), race, and ethnicity are entangled with each other. This is what she defines as structural intersectionality. For my analysis, I deploy intersectionality structurally in theoretical terms to examine how it shapes the environment in which informants are required to form their decision-making processes. However, as a theory, Carbado (2013) outlines, intersectionality often suffers accusations of being static, centered on positivism and "double jeopardy" in the sense that the more marginalized identity frames a person claims, the more disadvantaged someone may say they are in society. The problem with such rigidity in understanding intersectionality is that it encourages what some term as the "Oppression Olympics", where minorities compete against each other for fringe level resources and attention (Hancock, 2007).

This characterization of intersectionality is misguided. Intersectionality does not privilege any particular subject (Carbado 2013) and intersectionality is as concerned with formative processes especially around knowledge production as it is about reforming social structures (Cho

et al, 2013). Intersectionality helps us understand that different typologies and reflexive interpretations of subjectivities are formed in the margins and are in a struggle with dominant forces for center ground, including the theory itself. For what lies at the heart of intersectionality's critique—complexity, identity, and power—still works to privilege certain interlocutors and logics, while rendering others invisible (Hancock, 2016). Intersectionality does not make the case for identities to be classified as countable nouns, as this would presume that identities are fixed entities bounded by clear demarcations. When in reality, intersectionality reflects a commitment neither to subjects nor to identities per se, but to marking and mapping the production of both (Carbado, 2013). Thus is connected to intersectionality's wider intellectual project that aims to reshape the ontological relationships between categories of difference. In other words, so-called categories of difference cannot meaningfully exist apart from each other because they mutually construct each other (Hancock, 2016).

Thus, my deployment of intersectionality in this chapter is not merely an attempt to map out hierarchies on fixed identities, rather, beyond just a structural analysis, I also aim to examine what circumstances the interlocking nature of identity formation processes have created, in which informants have then been forced to navigate around their sexual identity visibility. To contextualize my theoretical position, the fact that informants are gay, Korean and living in Seattle as the racialized other, brings forth interlocking identity formation processes that interact with each other to generate a *different* space of exclusion.

Study Design and Methodology

Recruitment and Procedure

As mentioned previously, this study's research and recruitment methods were reviewed thoroughly and approved by the internal review board at the University of Washington in order to minimize risk to research participants. Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy. A purposive sampling strategy is non-randomized, where participants in a study are selected based on specific characteristics that are deemed most likely to reveal information that can shed light on the social phenomenon under investigation (see Tongco, 2007 for an overview of specific sampling strategies). A call for participants was put out to LGBTIQ+ organizations in the Seattle and wider Washington State area that asked specifically for Korean gay men who wished to be interviewed for a study on their experiences of living as a gay Korean in America. Respondents were given multiple ways to contact the researcher including encrypted email addresses and phone numbers to ensure that they could keep participation in the study confidential. From there, a snowball sampling method was thought best to be employed, as often, this strategy is useful in reaching hard to access populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Kendall et al., 2008). The fact that the population under study was seen to be hard to access was evidenced by prior literature that posited Korean Americans as part of a heterosexist Asian American community, thus, reluctance to participate in a study of this nature could be assumed.

18 men responded including those who were recruited through snowball sampling. In the end 10 informants agreed to participate formally in the study through a combination of interviews that were digitally recorded and through the researcher's own participant observations over the course of 12 months. These observations included regular social interactions with informants in a

variety of informal settings. To preserve confidentiality, the interviews were conducted using pseudonyms (deployed here) that I then transcribed. The participants were given consent forms that required signatures before, and after the interviews (no real names were required to be used). Their interview and consent forms for formal interviews were given matching numbers as its identifier. The form included the procedure of the interviews, use of data, collection and methods, research aims and goals, their rights as participants to end the interview at any stage and they were made aware of their ability to cancel participation in the study later without prejudice. It also offered contact information of relevant LGBTIQ+ support organizations through the consent forms in case the formal interview may have had triggering effects. All participants in the study did so voluntarily and received no financial compensation. Following interviews, follow up questions in the form of conversations and interactions were used to clarify any areas of misunderstandings.

Table 2: Seattle Informant Profiles

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*Pseudonym	Age	**Born	Years in Korea	Religion	Education	**Ethnic Identification	***Marital Status	Disclosure - Family	Disclosure - Community
Azariah	30-34	US	2	Christian	Postgraduate	Korean-American	Engaged	Immediate - Closeted to extended	Full to US community, disconnected from KA, closeted in Korea
Barnabas	50-54	Seoul	15	Christian	Postgraduate	Korean-American	Married	Immediate - Closeted to extended	Full to US community, disconnected from KA, closeted in Korea
Cain	25-29	WA	1	Christian	Bachelors	Korean-American	Single	Immediate - Closeted to extended	Full to US community, disconnected from KA, closeted in Korea
Ezra	20-24	US	0	Christian	Bachelors	Mixed Asian American	In a relationship	Full disclosure	Full disclosure
YG	30-34	Seoul	30	None	Doctorate	Korean	Single	None	Korea - Friends only, US - American colleagues only, KA community, none
Jacob	30-34	Korea	29	None	Bachelors	Korean	Married	None	Korea - Friends only, US - American colleagues only, KA community, none
Reuben	24-29	US	3	Christian	Postgraduate	Bi-racial Korean American	Married	Immediate - Closeted to extended	Full to US community, disconnected from KA, closeted in Korea
Samson	35-39	Korea	30	None	Postgraduate	Korean	Married	None	Korea - select friends only, Full to US community, not connected to KA community
Ezekiel	20-24	Seoul	18	Christian	Bachelors	Korean	Single	None	None
Simeon	20-24	WA	0	Christian	Bachelors	Korean-American	Single	Full disclosure	Full disclosure disconnected from KA community

*Pseudonym assigned randomly by researcher, **Self-identified by informants, *** At time of study (Korea means outside Seoul, US means outside of WA state) KA = Korean American

Data Generation

Data was generated from interviews and supplemented with ethnographic observations. Drawing from prior literature, the interviews were semi-structured around 6 focus areas, *demographics/personal history, religious background, cultural affect, coming-out narrative, human rights/gay rights activism, and dating/sex experiences/preferences*. All interviews lasted between 50-90 minutes in length and follow up questions asked after the interviews when required. I coded the interview transcripts and field notes openly (Strauss, 1987) using qualitative software program Nvivo to create categories out of the data. After the interviews were coded, the responses

to questions was used to identify patterns and categorized. Later, I drew connections between these categories, a process also known as “axial coding.” One of the purposes of coding in this way is to quantify different categories of a variable (Ritchie et al, 1994). However, in moving away from an empiricist approach, which implies that knowledge is merely “discovered” through grounded theory (Clarke et al. 2015), these interviews used a *talanoa* dialogue framework and an interpretivist lens to situate narratives, which was explained in chapter 1.

Positionality, Representativeness and Interpretation of Data

As explained in chapter 1, as a Samoan researcher I chose to use *talanoa* dialogue as my interview framework. *Talanoa* is a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations. It is a conversation, carried out face-to-face and a multi-layered critical discussion that is culturally situated in a space where researchers holistically intermingle emotions, knowing and experiences with research participants (Vaioleti, 2016). *Talanoa* removes the distance between researcher and participant and provides research participants with a human face they can relate to. I deployed *talanoa* as an approach in trying not to set informants from a distance, as inanimate objects to be studied. Rather, I chose to embrace our connectedness through the shared experience in this study.

Talanoa, takes an interpretivist epistemological position which explores, describes, and analyzes the meaning of individual lived experiences (Marshall and Rossman 2006). Moreover, this type of qualitative approach can generate rich data that is more likely to provide insights into the theoretical points at stake in the analysis. *Talanoa* connects with Western-ways of knowing as it aims to “discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tactical, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, intentions and rules, which provide the orientations for their

actions” (Blaikie, 2007, p.90). Moreover, my use of *talanoa* dialogue is connected to a poststructural, situated, constructionist methodological approach to knowledge production that is deployed here. Thus, after coding of the interviews and mapping of categories using axial coding, the narratives of informants have been presented here in the form of a situated *talanoa*. This too, is part of the methodology of the dissertation. This means that rather than presenting them alone under thematic headings, they have also been woven into a story of their own that reflect what was co-constructed by the researcher and informants.

Informant narratives presented here are constituted by and modify existing discourses around sexual identity visibility, Korean culture, family, society, religion, Western hegemony, sexual exceptionalism, racism, and a range of other discursive formations. Yet, theirs represents a marginal way of knowing the world that is often subsumed by dominant discourses. Hence, the privileging of their narratives here can be seen as providing a type of situated validity or contextualized truth. Throughout the *talanoa* or narrative discussion, interpretations offered are both compared with and grounded in, socio-historico structurations, discursive formations and other theoretical frameworks that have been extensively outlined in foregrounded chapters and this chapter’s *talanoa*.

The *Talanoa* (Narrative Discussion)

The Role of the Korean American Christian Church (KACC)

In this first part of the *talanoa*, I story through the narratives of informants in Seattle, the central role the KACC played in their lives. For informants, this often came in the form of Church

communities they were active participants in. The KACC became a site of support for them and their families, as well as helped to shape the way they viewed the world. As such, the KACC became a part of their Korean identity formation processes where Christian symbols and norms became integrated into their lives.

Barnabas - The Transplant from New York

Behind one of Seattle's busiest suburban thoroughfares, a modern two-part building sits among greenery, flanked by large parking lots to the front and to the back. The need for all these parking spaces becomes apparent once the interview with one of my informants begins.

"My mum's a Deacon at that church. It's the largest Korean church in Seattle with a congregation of more than 1500. She's been singing in the choir for years."

Barnabas, my first informant, had moved to the US with his mother back in 1980. He subsequently moved to Seattle in 1990 with his then partner, who is now his husband. They lived in a high-income neighborhood near downtown Seattle with their three children, two adopted, one conceived through surrogacy.

"I met Mike at a sleazy bar in Manhattan. At the time, my life revolved around family, God and Jesus. When I met him, he was a Presbyterian boy from small town Spokane. That night we talked for about 2 hours, in this sleazy bar, and we talked about God. It was a Wednesday night and I was 24, really energetic [and] we talked about having a family. You know with other guys I met it was always, meet, sex, adios, but this other guy it was different."

Barnabas's connection with his husband had been initiated through their shared experience through religious ties, something that was shared by all my informants that had grown up in

America. A sense of connection manifested not only on a personal level for the informants, but for their entire families as well. For Barnabas, the connections he made at the Church ran deeper than just his meeting with his future husband, his whole life had revolved around the Church. When he made the incredibly difficult decision for him to commit to a life with Mike and move to Seattle from New York to start a family, it was the Church where he and his husband sought community.

“When we first moved to this neighborhood, we lived two blocks away from this Presbyterian Church. So, we decided to go one Sunday, and we sat at the back. I was holding both our babies and there was a tiny old Caucasian woman. She turned around and asked me how old my babies were. I told her that my youngest was barely 3 weeks old at that point. And she turned around again. So, the whole congregation seemed OK, but I wasn’t really buying into it at this point. After the service, Mike said to me: ‘let’s go back next week, I don’t care what they say, I like building community.’ So, I said: ‘sure, we’ll come back.’ The next week when I came back, the woman had made our baby a quilt with her name on it. She said she had made a quilt for the past 35 years for every newborn baby in that congregation. She was single, never married, never had children and had been attending the church ever since it was established in 1965. So it was really touching and we have been going ever since.”

The sense of community in the Church that Barnabas and Mike felt was not uncommon among my informants. For Barnabas, after moving to a new city and starting a new family in Seattle, it was the Church where he felt the sense of community that he and his husband were able to ground themselves in. The complexity in Barnabas and Mike’s story pertains to the fact that the Church itself was an important source of social support, yet, prior literature has shown that it is a source of exclusion for Asian American gay men.

The Pacific Northwest Native: Cain

“I believe that my parents were connected to a church from since they first got to America and I was baptized in that Church.”

This is what Cain, another informant, relayed to me when I asked him about the role of religions in his life. In our *talanoa*, he spoke candidly of the times he spent with his family in their Korean Church in Kent, Washington. For him, it was:

“a place where we could be with people who look like me. We would eat Korean food, although my group sessions were in English.”

When I prodded him about whether this was about protecting his ethnic identity he replied:

“Yeah, I feel like there’s another big thing about Christian churches in Seattle, where there’s a loss of identity; where it can be really white and mainstream.”

Here he touched on the struggles of growing up as a child of migrant parents. Specifically, he identified the issue of coming up against a mainstream that centered around whiteness and the Church. However, when I asked Cain about his family’s adherence to Korean specific norms, this is what he had to offer about ancestor worship in particular:

“We never did ancestor worship, it’s something I had to reclaim for myself recently. I put pictures of my grandmothers in my room, my family completely adopted Christian rituals, it wasn’t a picture of my grandparents hanging in our living room, it was a picture of Jesus, white Jesus nonetheless.”

Cain's responses to the questions of ancestor worship was important in that Korean Protestants generally do not do ancestor worship. Rather, they practice what is called *ch'uma*, or commemorative celebrations for departed family members (Lee J. 1988). Cain supposed that reclaiming it for himself was an expression of his Korean identity. Moreover, what was clear was that he was contesting a Christian norm had taken over one that would be seen as traditionally Confucian and by-default, Korean. But what his response also shows is that the Church itself, is the referential in which he was forced to navigate his Korean ethnic construct against.

Out of State: Azariah, Reuben and Ezra

Azariah, had been living in Seattle for 8 years prior to our interview. He would later meet his fiancé Johnny in Seattle, go to Law School in Seattle and find stable employment practicing law there too. Azaraiah, who was born outside WA, helped provide important insights into one of the largest Korean American communities in the United States (Los Angeles).

"I grew up in a Presbyterian Church, our family went every Sunday and we ate lunch like every Sunday at the Church."

His responses added another dimension as he, as well as Cain, were the only informants who grew up in the US to inform me that they had attended Korean school on the weekends,

"But I mostly went for the free donuts."

Unlike Cain, Azaraiah outlined to me how Confucian norms were very much kept alive in their household by his mother who would even drive out to his College which was 40 miles away

from his hometown with *songpyeon* (rice cakes) just to celebrate *Seollal* and *Chuseok*⁸ with him. This suggests that within Korean American families the role of Christianity and its ability to dictate familial practices varies. Whilst Cain's family shunned ancestor worship and all ancestor rites associated with *Seollal* and *Chuseok*, Azariah's family seemed to be synthesizing both. Again, the emphasis I place here in Azariah's responses relate to the role of the KACC as site of identity formation. Not only did he attend Korean school through the KACC, he also got a free donut in the process.

My next two informants, Reuben and Ezra, both born out of state, were also immersed in the Church growing up. For Reuben, a child from a mixed marriage, where his father was of White-American stock and his mother Korean, it was his maternal grandmother who maintained a strong connection to the Korean church in his hometown.

"She only started attending Church when she got to America, funnily enough."

Reuben would tell me in a follow-up conversation:

"I guess it was where she was able to feel connection and build her own sense of community."

Reuben would also touch on similar issues that Cain and Azariah did in relation to their own personal faith. What Reuben's insights provided was a link between the KACC and his maternal grandmother's integration into American society after migrating to the US. This was

⁸ *Seollal* is also known as Lunar New Year in Korea, *Chuseok* is also known as the Thanksgiving Harvest, commonly referred to as Korean Thanksgiving. On both occasions, Koreans usually visit their hometowns to pay respect to their ancestors. The specific ancestor worship ceremony, a Confucian practice, is known as *Chesa*.

something that was identified in the prior literature, reviewed earlier, that showed how Korean migrants often found community and support networks within the KACC.

Ezra, another informant to my study, provided an interesting counterpoint to Reuben's, yet, his narrative came to underscore the same theme of belonging and connectedness that Reuben's grandmother appeared to be tapping into relating to the KACC. In stark difference to Reuben, Ezra felt very little connection to his Korean heritage

"I don't really claim my Korean side, the only thing Korean about me are my features."

Ezra's connection to Korea came through his Korean father who was adopted from an orphanage in Korea, and the complexity in his story was illustrated by the fact that despite his father not being able to speak Korean, he made them all attend Korean church.

"It was surprising; my dad doesn't speak any Korean. I don't speak any Korean either. And I've only ever been to the airport on my way to the Philippines"

Yet, Ezra felt it was where his father and he both felt some connection to being Korean. Therefore, I interpreted this as: for informants' and their family members the Church is also an important site of identity preservation or place of reconnection in Ezra's father's case. For Ezra in particular, when we spoke after his interview many times, he often felt his outsider status as a mixed Korean Filipino, and at least in the moment where he attended Korean Church, he felt some sort of connection back to his Korean heritage. The complicated nature of his father's story has been mostly redacted here at Ezra's request. However, what it also stories, is the intense complexities for Korean adoptees who were taken from Korea at a young age and face the reality

of also being a racial other in the United States.⁹ A situation where they are stripped of cultural reference points that can help to define their ethnically-coded experience within a Korean identity. A process which led to Ezra's father gravitating toward the KACC. Eleana Kim's (2010) book *Adopted Territory*, stories how Korean adoptees challenge dominant discourses of nation, citizenship, identity, race and family by asserting themselves in South Korea civil society in the media and state institutions. One way that Eleana Kim argues this is also facilitated, is through Korean American Church networks that are tied to churches in South Korea.

Moreover, the importance of the KACC in helping shape the identity of informants is also revealed by Azariah in this excerpt:

"I've always identified as a Christian, from more of a spiritual sense. [...] To love other people as much as humanly possible, and for that love to be unconditional. So, I get something to aspire to be. [...] But beyond that I don't agree with the treatment of people who don't follow exactly the teachings of the Church. I don't agree with like, teachings of judgment."

He later confirmed that he was referring to the Church's stance on homosexuality. For Azariah, although the Church was the site in where he derived his moral compass, it was also the site where his confusion came from. The Church was what made it hard for him to be able to resolve his homosexuality with that of his religious upbringing. Yet, this struggle is not just related to sexuality. Ezra's responses added depth to this complexity when he spoke candidly of how he felt that the Church provided solace for his family because of their socio-economic class.

⁹ A large literature exists on the experiences of exclusion and the adaptive strategies for Korean adoptees as returnees to Korea and their experiences in the US. See Eleana Kim's (2010) *Adopted Territory* for a comprehensive overview of how Korean adult adoptees negotiate and create notions of kinship and cultural transnational citizenship.

“I feel like because my family were poor, it gave them something to look forward to. My Mom prayed every night.”

This point is significant as the Church’s role in providing significant social and psychological support for migrant communities in low-socioeconomic areas is well-documented already (Hirschmann, 2004). More importantly however, the impact on how it affected informants’ identity formation processes – interacting with their Korean heritage – is already clear. For one thing, the importance of the KACC in providing support for the Korean immigrant population is well-documented. But as a site of identity formation, it is also one that permeates into the familial structures of my informants. Thus, I argue that the informants’ Korean identity could not be separated meaningfully from their Christian ones. As they were mutually constructed by the structural positioning of a Korean community supported by a Christian Church.

The Complicated Coming-out Process

Azariah: The first day she (his mother) got to Seattle I decided to tell her so that we would have the week, in my head it sounded like a great idea [laughter]. That we’d have the whole week to talk it out and then it ended up being an incredibly awkward week. [...] We agreed not to tell my Dad, so she went back home and I guess she was so physically and emotionally and visibly depressed, my dad asked about it and he found out like the day she arrived. He booked a flight for the following weekend. [...] He came with a stack of papers that he printed and there was this incredible article about how, like: ‘the problems of choosing to be gay.’ It was put out by some organization that is along the lines of something like the ‘Center for Keeping Families Wholesome’ or something”.

In this excerpt, Azariah stories the way the Church impacted the way his parents reacted to his disclosure of his sexual identity. Namely, it caused panic and strategizing on both their parts in trying to figure out the best way to deal with Azariah not complying with Church teachings. The impact of the Church was further strengthened later in the interview at Thanksgiving when Azariah returned home for the holidays after he had come-out to his mother:

“I went home and found my Mom had circled all these passages in the bible with post-it notes, I think it was to try and give her strength.”

Azariah also detailed how his father reacted:

“Finding out that I didn’t necessarily fit what his probable expectations were, for my future and having kids. He probably had so many questions, but he didn’t really have a mechanism to ask those questions.”

In both these responses Azaraiah revealed a similar phenomenon to what Ezra had highlighted although Ezra’s response was housed within a class frame. for Azariah’s parents, the Church provided comfort in coming to terms with the fact that their son would no longer meet the religious norms and expectations that had been set by their own upbringings. When Azaraiah talked of his father not having a mechanism “to ask those questions,” he is also making a statement about the lack of reference points in his father’s life. This makes intuitive sense from a Korean familism lens and historical perspective where a Korean gay subjectivity cannot be seen to have a historical subject formation reference point.

His father’s reaction, which he had also explained as being a product of a desire for him to have children and carry on the family name is very much in-line with Confucian norms that center patriarchal continuity of familial lines. A feature that Azaraiah would relay was also a prominent

value in the way he understood Christianity. The interwoven nature of Confucian and Christian forces was also something demonstrated by Cain in his responses. Cain described how the interactional nature of Christianity and Confucian norms in his household affected his coming-out process.

Cain: I came out to my parents in 2014. This was after college, back at home, fed up with the idea of them not knowing who I was. It was really disastrous. I felt like what hurt them more, was the fact that I stopped going to Church. That was more painful to my mom and dad. These factors coming together. You know the bible talks about not being gay. Yeah, it was definitely a hodge-podge of judgments placed on me at the same time. They thought I went to college in California and came back this heathen, a raging homosexual who lost his way.

Researcher: Do you think for your family; it was also to do with the expectations of a son in the Korean culture?

Cain: Oh, yeah, the term filial piety. That was a big thing I was struggling with. Especially with being American, and that not being a prominent value; at least I don't see it as a prominent value. So, it's like: "well you guys brought me to America, I'm just trying to be an individual, how this culture teaches me to be."

Researcher: How do you feel about that, do you feel like that you should be allowed to integrate more with American culture/norms, versus holding onto Korean culture and its norms?

Cain: That's the gold question, I feel like American culture is problematic in a lot of ways. In terms of rejection of family, 18, you move out. I find a value in family ties, that's your original support network. It's also helped form my identity. That's a really important question, especially now coz I ask myself: What is my duty to my family, my community, my Korean identity. But also, what is

my duty to my queer family, to my queer brothers and sisters? How can we reconcile the two?

Yeah so those are the big questions, I don't have an answer for you.

The Importance of Family

Cain's responses demonstrated the importance of family in how he narrated his sense of selfhood. Overall, the embeddedness of family and church is already well-telegraphed in informant responses, but the feelings of duty to family was something that also stood out as a major theme in informant responses. Take this excerpt from Barnabas's narrative of how he made the choice to inform his mother of his decision to move away to Seattle.

"I had a monetary motivation to help feed the family in a way. I wanted to make things happen in America, make money, buy a penthouse, get a key for my mom. In the meantime, find someone to love. Maybe I might. I dated women before. I wanted to please my family, the relationship between my sister me and my mom was so strong, we were inseparable. So, I wrote a 10-page letter to my mom. She's a 4th generation Presbyterian and we were so committed to church. I said to her in the letter that I wanted to take a chance to find my life somewhere besides New York. I folded it in parts and left \$1000 cash in her bedroom. Snuck it under her door and I left at 4 in the morning, on my birthday."

Barnabas's feelings of responsibility for his family when situated within Korean familism mentioned in the previous chapter makes contextual sense. His deep connection to his mother and sister was later explained within the context of the different roles his mother and father played in his life. His father immigrated to America ahead of him and his mother and as a result he developed a strong bond with his mother throughout his life. Throughout his interview explained how his

mother had a strong reliance on him for both emotional and material support. A quality of their relationship that show the traces of a uterine structure that helped to facilitate an affectionate aspect of their relationship. His choice of words also demonstrated an element of an immigrant narrative of struggle. Where he casts his family's story in the US as one of financial struggle in trying to "make it" in America. The power of Korean familial normative constructs was also evident in how he subsequently narrated this incident himself:

"You know for Asian, Korean families, unless there's a death, or some other pivotal moment it's really hard to break that relationship. You know how Korean moms treat their sons, basically spoon feed them from birth. I think she cried for 3 months."

In this way, it can be said that for Barnabas, the reluctance to come-out to his mother was not necessarily a fear of rejection alone, which a heterosexist explanation would dictate as the main oppressive factor. Rather, his fears were also related to the possibility that he may not be able to fulfill his role as a son within the family. The fact that he felt so strongly about providing for his mother and helping his family make it financially in America was also a product of his family's history. His mother had come from a wealthy family with Yangban or aristocratic roots. However, after the land reforms following the Korean War, which upturned Korea's social class order, she was forced to marry a poor man and they migrated to the United States with very little material possessions.

"My mother's family practically owned most of (name of town redacted for confidentiality). But after the Korean War, my (maternal) grandfather's land was mostly taken away. So, my father, he was a poor man, and with my mum being the last of them to be married, my dad went to ask my grandfather to marry my mom. My grandfather said: 'You, come here – pointing to my mom – just

go. ' And that was it! [laughter] He was really brave to do that, thinking about it now. She was the daughter of a higher up, but everything had changed. "

For Cain, the KACC was where his family developed a major part of their ethnic identity. Cain intimated to me his gratitude for having this network in place when they were growing up. He explained that it was within the family unit where he was able to develop and appreciate a greater sense of their Korean ethnic heritage despite being born in America.

"Yeah they (family) really helped to foster the aspect of my Korean identity that I still hold today. I'm really grateful for that. I've heard experiences of other Korean Americans where their parents shunned, completely rejected their Korean identity. Like refusing to teach them the language, and 'you should learn English.' My parents were good at straddling that line between American and Korean culture. We always ate Korean food, my mom was and still is an amazing Korean cook. Really keeps our culture alive through the food, fermenting things, sent me to Korean school when I was young. We went to the biggest Korean church in Seattle. "

Here Cain foreshadows the issues related to having to live in a space that exists between two cultures. An existence that brings forth its own complexities when juxtaposed further with a sexual identity that goes against heteronormative structures that are prominent in both host and home countries. The term "straddling", words that Cain chose to use, demonstrates their awareness of the duality of this intersectional experience. One that has family and church firmly placed in one camp as a migrant experience, whilst looking outward into an adopted homeland and trying to fit in there too. Thus, family as the site where these forces all came together, became an important site for Cain to protect.

The importance of family and how it functions as a support mechanism for informants is also demonstrated in Reuben's story of coming-out to his mother. His was a staggered coming-out where he told his sister first, followed by his father and finally his mother.

“My mom was the most emotionally affected by it. She cried when I came out to her, she was pretty upset, she was more worried about me, she felt sorry for me. [...] she was sad for the life that I would have, that it would be hard for me. Or she was sad for the fact that my life had been hard up to that point, harder than a straight person.”

This quote demonstrates interrelated connections between informants and family members and how they work in the other direction as well. Family members who are connected to informants are intersubjectively constructing their own sense of self with informants in many ways. Here, Reuben's mother was clearly distraught, but according to Reuben, it was not because she felt her son had violated the religious norms of her family's values system, rather, he interprets it as a mother's instinct to protect her son showing through in her emotional response. In referring back to the concept of uterine families, her instinct to protect her son was perhaps connected to her own marginality as a racial other in the US. Although, Wolf's (1972) study focused on the marginality of wives in patriarchal Confucian families in Taiwan, if you consider for migrant mothers that feelings of displacement and marginality often accompanies the immigration process, her reaction which intimates that she had built a strong affectionate bond with her son also makes sense in this context.

In addition, as a Korean mother, her desire to protect her son is part of her identity and sense of personhood. The opportunity to realize this has been denied to her by the existence of a

sexual identity in her son that is marginalized by society. This nuance could be interpreted as heterosexism, but clearly Reuben's mother's concern here is not that her son is in violation of heteronormativity, rather, that she has not been able to protect him as much as she has felt obliged to as part of who she is as a Korean mother. This again, can be read in the specific Korean familism context where social welfare has fallen directly on the family unit itself, which includes social, economic and emotional support.

Constructing Situated Embedded Narratives

The importance of family and specifically the embeddedness of informants' families within the KACC, is what I postulate facilitated the development of Situated Embedded Narratives (SENs). A SEN is an adaptive strategy that presents a heteronormative story to select members of the community/extended family. This is done to ensure that informants or their families are able to continue to remain part of social and wider-familial structures.

Take the example of Barnabas. Despite Barnabas and Mike having lived together for many years which included raising 3 children, 2 who were now teenagers, Barnabas revealed to me that his marriage with Mike was not common knowledge in the Korean American community.

"When my mother found out that Mike was more than just my roommate she broke down in tears. It was hard for me to tell her; you know what it's like [...]. So, she tells everyone in the Church that Mike's my roommate and together we support and adopt kids who are needy."

This narrative was something that Barnabas complied with in allowing his mother to have the opportunity to preserve her position within the KACC. I was to learn that this was important

considering as his mother ran a dry-cleaning business of her own. Barnabas explained that the KACC was also important sites for economic exchanges that help to establish Korean businesses through community patronage. Thus, the Church was an important site where these connections were made according to all of my Seattle informants, not just Barnabas. This aligns well with previously reviewed literature that emphasizes the role of the KACC in forming Korean American community structures (see literature review).

SENs were also negotiated and deployed in situations where it required interacting with extended family members. This often included having other members of the immediate family enact particular roles of deception. When Barnabas took his family to South Korea during the summer, his husband stayed behind, but his children and mother went with him.

“So everyone on my mother’s side has passed away except her eldest. All her cousin’s came (to see us. So, my eldest (adopted Chinese heritage) he’s a good looking kid, and everyone was like, ‘Oh he’s the Park, he instantly gets \$100. [...] They said to me, ‘oh your wife must be White.’ [...] I didn’t say anything but my mom said, yeah, she’s working at home. [...] The relatives said, ‘she’s a good wife.’ My kids didn’t know what was going on, although my redhead calls me mummy, the relatives didn’t really understand what she meant by that.”

In this interaction, I argue that Barnabas allowed his mother to deceive his extended family in order to protect her. He stayed silent and played along because he knew that this would affect how the extended family would view her. For him, at this stage of his life, if his extended family found out about his sexuality he would not be directly affected as he had setup his own family in Seattle with his husband. However, his mother, who was now a widow, is more embedded within the family and community network. She would most likely be affected the most. By remaining

silent as she built the narrative of heteronormativity, he was in many ways performing his duty as a Korean son, to also protect his mother. This was also something that Azariah experienced when he travelled with his fiancé to South Korea coincidentally during the same summer.

“Before we travelled, we sat down and talked about how we would be introduced and who would we be introduced to. It was decided that we would just be introduced as Chingu (friends). [...] When I came out there was an understanding that I would not be coming-out to anyone in my extended family. Over the years, my mom’s side all know now, but my dad’s side, still nobody knows.”

It turns out that for Azariah it was his maternal grandmother who was key in taking leadership on his mother’s side for allowing that side of the family to accept his gay identity. The reason why his father’s side was kept in the dark was to ensure peaceful relations was maintained between his father and the rest of his relatives.

“They’re extremely judgmental people, my father feels a lot of pressure from them.”

Later in our conversation, he explained in more detail how this occurred. His father was the only son of four siblings. Azaraiah explained how loyal his father was to his family despite them being in his words: “cold, minimalist and conservative Korean”. When Azaraiah had been forced out by his mother’s disclosure to his father, Azaraiah’s father was devastated but never thought about disowning him. Azaraiah explained that when his father had the “talk” with him after his “accidental” coming-out, his father had said to him: “the most important thing is family.” What this intimated to me was that although existing explanations posit that Korean families are intensely conservative and religious, which reads as heterosexist and homophobic, the strength of the bonds forged in the Korean family can also manifest protective responses. In that despite

disappointment occurring – which Azaraiah also storied as part of his father’s reaction – the Korean family can adapt. Thus, his family’s decision to deploy a SEN when he went to South Korea with his partner, I also read as being an attempt to protect the family.

For Azaraiah this had positive effects for him. He said that the gradual way that his relationship was introduced into the familial structure allowed for people in his extended family to slowly make the connection themselves. But by using a SEN, it allowed he and his partner to expose themselves to the family as non-threatening, and allowed his extended family time to get used to seeing them together. And although he is yet to come-out officially, he believes most people “kind of knew” or put two and two together.

“On my mom's side, he still got introduced with the words chingu (friend) but I think everyone knew what that meant. I don't think anyone was comfortable saying like namja chingu (boyfriend). Coz I think that is maybe too much. But everyone seemed fine meeting him. [...] It was amazing when the two of us actually stayed at my grandmas. My mom's mom's place for a couple of nights. My grandma doesn't speak a ton of English. She spoke what little she knew to him and then she told me: 'you look very 환해 (‘shiny’) and I've never seen you this bright and happy.’ Yeah and I think that went really amazingly well. The rest of my mom's extended family, I think everybody's OK. It was like meeting any other friends. There was nothing special about it. Nothing particularly different than meeting another friend but I think everyone knew and didn't act weird about it which I think is amazing.

Azaraiah’s experience is important as it demonstrated how a SEN can help to smooth possible tensions within a familial setting if deployed with a contextual sensitivity. If he had been more assertive in pushing a gay identity that a linear model like the Cass model supposes (free disclosure to everyone), it may have caused far more tension, which could have impacted his

parents in negative ways. This suggests that for Korean gay men, the coming-out process may require more nuanced adaptive strategies to navigate cultural, religious and familial structures.

For Reuben, a SEN was also setup in protecting his Korean grandmother whom connected him the most with his Korean side. When he came out to his mother as quoted earlier, her reaction was very emotional. But later he assured me that she was at peace with it now. When we talked about his grandmother who he called a “3rd parent” he said he would never tell her. A decision that his parents also agreed to.

“She was typical in the sense for a lot of Korean immigrants they need a community to get help from, and the church is that for the Korean American community.”

Thus, Reuben’s decision not to tell her protected her from having to be dislocated from this community in any way. Once again, demonstrating that for Korean gay men, the context of coming-out can be far more complicated than merely synthesizing a homosexual self with other parts of their personhood. Namely, it requires more careful consideration of familial context and the impact it has on all members of the family.

Rejecting a Narrative of Convenience and Choosing Estrangement from Community and Family

For Simeon his choice to come-out to everyone meant that he no longer wanted to be associated with the Korean American community in any way.

“Saying that it’s the church is an excuse, you have to be braver and accept who you are as a gay. I don’t really associate myself with Koreans anymore. I am proud to be gay and I have a lot so say about that.”

Simeon's conversations with me were characterized with a great deal of angst he felt toward the Korean gay community in Seattle for not embracing their sexuality more openly. Tellingly, however, he revealed that he had engaged in full-disclosure and subsequently was not able to build any sense of gay Korean community. He also intimated some kind of loss of community that informants who had deployed SENs, had not. He later confirmed that his relationship with his parents was also very strained as a result of his choice to opt for full disclosure.

“My parents and I don't really talk about my sexual identity at all. They're not happy with me being openly gay, but I know they love me. They have to just deal with it. It took me a long time to come-out to them. But I didn't want to live my life as if I were lying to them, you know what I mean? So I did it and all hell broke loose. Now it's just something that's not spoken about.”

When I spoke to Simeon about his social circle it appeared that he did not socialize with many gay Korean men either. His gay social circle was ethnically diverse but tended to have Korean gay men absent. He maintained though that this was not by deliberate choice, rather a product of their lack of visibility. He had also dated a lot of Asian and White men, but had not dated any other Koreans.

“It's not like I avoid Korean gay guys, it's just that they're just not likely to be out I find. And seeing I'm openly gay, a lot of Korean gays are too scared that they'll be found out if they hang out with other gay guys. So, seeing most people know that I'm gay, Korean guys who know I'm gay and open about it probably just avoid it. But like I said, they need to be proud to be gay. Otherwise we're just going nowhere.”

Simeon's narrative offers an interesting counterpoint to some of the other informants in the study as he was born in America and spent virtually no time in Korea. For he openly claimed his

Korean American identity clearly demarcating a difference between “they” as Korean gays, versus him as a Korean American gay. What he meant by this distinction was never really explored in the interviews. This additional excerpt from our subsequent conversation may provide further insights.

“I never spent any time in Korea so I don’t know what that’s like, I’m American in the way that I was born and raised here, so all I know is American life. But I was brought up in a Korean household by Korean parents who I don’t really understand sometimes when it comes to their ways of thinking about my life. Like Koreans themselves are kinda too conservative for me to understand in many ways and I don’t really like to hang out with too many of them in general.”

Cain, the other informant who was born in the Washington state area also shared similar sentiments with Simeon regarding the differences that existed between their parents’ expectations and what their own desires were regarding living out their own sense of personhood. Cain chose the full-disclosure route. It was a decision that led to him being kicked out of home as he refused to abide by his family’s desire for him to keep his queer subjectivity invisible in familial spaces. Since then however, he had moved back home to live under strict regulations.

“I stayed at people’s houses, even stayed at a park, but once they cooled down I got the message they still cared for me, but they couldn’t accept that identification of me, that queer identity. I once put a rainbow flag and that didn’t go down well, so that’s the rules we’re playing with now.”

Despite both being born in Washington State a difference exists between Cain and Simeon’s narratives. For one, Cain had spent time in Korea as a teacher and told me that it had been a great learning experience that helped reconnect him with his Korean side again. What differentiated Cain and Simeon further was their age and relative position in terms of education. Cain, was nearly 6 years older than Simeon. Cain had finished his undergraduate work and was

well on the way to postgraduate studies. This included forays into queer theory, activism and Asian American identities. In contrast, Simeon was yet to finish his bachelor's degree in a science field. For Cain, his narrative differed markedly from Simeon's in that he expressed a type of conflict that he was still trying to come to terms with relating to the reconciling of differences between American and Korean norms as well as trying to make sense of his queer subjectivity simultaneously. This excerpt was taken from Cain's interview and quoted earlier in the chapter:

"I feel like American culture is problematic in a lot of ways. In terms of rejection of family, 18, you move out, I find a value in family ties, that's your original support network, it's also helped form my identity, that's a really important question, especially now coz I ask myself: What is my duty to my family, my community, my Korean identity? But also, what is my duty to my queer family, to my queer brothers and sisters? How can we reconcile the two?"

While Simeon seemed to have a much firmer idea of what a gay identity should be even within a Korean context, Cain was more unsure. For Simeon, full-disclosure was the only way a gay identity should be practiced and the Korean identity needed to catch up. For Cain, there were too many complexities overlaid in the same calculation, relating to the space where the two identities met. Thus, Cain felt stuck in-between, whilst I argue, Simeon had chosen to assimilate into a Western construct of gay identity.

Structures/Discourses of Exclusion and Forms of Resistance

For informants not born in the US, the intensely Christian character of the Korean community in Seattle was particularly off-putting. Not a single informant who was raised predominantly in Korea

demonstrated a desire to take an active role in the local Seattle Korean community. When I spoke to Samson about why he had no Korean gay friends in Seattle he replied:

“I don’t want to have any Korean friends here, they’re too Christian for me, and more conservative than Koreans in Korea. I’m actually worried about them finding out and talking about me (redacted for confidentiality) is the only Korean friend I have”

The fact that Samson only had one Korean friend in Seattle despite being a new migrant to a city that has a large Korean population was an important aspect of his responses. As a child of a migrant family myself, I knew how important it was for my family when my mother moved to find social-support from her ethnic community. Moreover, a feature that the prior literature speaks of is that the Korean American community was often an important source of social support and networks for new migrants. The fact he chose to reject this is a situation that should not be overlooked. For the reason he chose to reject the possibility of using the extensive Korean network in Seattle was its conservative and religious nature. Samson explained his reservations in meeting with other Koreans in this way:

“Recently, I met two people (Koreans) one was a married woman, the other was a married guy. They were saying how they were scared about their kids growing up in the US because of a lot of drug problems and of how there are a lot of gay teachers. They specifically focused on that, they obviously didn’t know I was gay, but that’s what they were worried about [informant shook head]’.

The deeply heterosexist and Christian-infused nature of the Korean American community is well documented in the Korean American as part of the Asian American gay and lesbian literature. However, its effects on Korean gay men recently migrated to the US has been relatively understudied. For my informants who had recently migrated to Seattle from South Korea, their

narratives showed a type of marginality that excluded them from the Korean American Community in the US. However, rather than have this function as a type of exclusion that made them feel disconnected and develop mental distress, they relayed a sense of relief to be able to disconnect from these conservative structures as a whole. This often came in the form of the ability to live a more open-life in the workplace as an example. In this excerpt, Samson explains how he came out to his boss in Seattle and how he felt a new sense of freedom in being able to do so.

“I told my boss when I got a job, because my spouse wasn’t working, so we needed health insurance, so I told my boss. He said: ‘thank you for saying that, but you didn’t have to tell me, here it doesn’t really matter, this will be the best place for you guys.’ Even his kids went to school where there are gay parents (and his kid was a high school kid at the time). So, ‘if you guys want to have a family, you can adopt or have a surrogate child.’ It was big for me, because in Korea I was working in the oil industry and it’s really masculine that industry and if they found out about me I would have to quit my job.”

In this excerpt what Samson shows is that within the US, there exists two worlds for Korean gay men, a Korean one and an American one. For Korean gay men who migrate to the US in search for a more open life like Longres (2014) concluded, I argue, it does not necessarily mean having to be completely “out.” By this, I mean that for people like Samson, one does not need to come-out to extended family or be “visibly gay” in the Korean American Community. In this way, the need to synthesize one’s sense of homosexual identity with other parts of the self, i.e. the “Korean self” in the way that the Cass model postulates is questioned.

This idea was mirrored by YG. Another informant who had just migrated to Seattle when we met. YG was out to his workmates and even marched in Seattle Pride as part of his workplace’s

participation in the annual event. YG was a lively character, whom by sheer coincidence moved into an apartment 4 doors down from mine. He jokingly referred to himself as a racist who only dated Koreans. He had, according to him, cultivated a sense of pride in his gay identity, which did not seem to be impacting his sense of his Korean heritage. I would later run into him again at Seoul Pride in 2017 while he was visiting family over the summer.

He openly declared himself as the most “out” among his Korean gay friends in Seattle (none of which he succeeded in convincing to participate in the study). What was interesting about YG is that he was an active participant in gay clubs and activist movements in Korea, yet was not open with his sexuality to anyone besides fellow “sisters”. A terminology I was to learn later in Seoul, has two contemporary common uses. The first was an inclusive naming deployment that helped to denote a shared sexual identity, the second was used among some gay Korean activists, which can be likened to “comrade” in certain contexts¹⁰. YG would often refer to me as his “sis” in our conversations. For YG, living in Seattle presented two Americas. The first was one where gay people were free to live open lives that he felt impressed by. The second was a Korean American US that was more intensely conservative and exclusionary which led to him, much like Samson, distancing himself from them.

Researcher: *What were your views of American society in terms of acceptance of homosexuality versus that of Korea, and what’s your experience been like since you got here?*

¹⁰ In Taiwan the term *Tongzhi* or comrade is often used among queer activists as a marker of shared identity (see Wang et al., (2009)), in many ways, this was deployed in a similar yet more jestful way among Korean gay men I came across in the activist arena. In Korea, the common usage of the term *onni* or *unni* is between a younger woman who refers to an older woman in her social and familial circle as *unni* as a sign of social and genealogical kinship. Whilst men use the term *hyung* or “older brother” to express the same relationality. The term *unni* has been said to have once been used among men as well.

YG: *I was surprised to see that many homosexuals and gays in general, actually even other queer identities are open here and open themselves up to society. I even see rainbow flags in their homes. In fitness centers I see signs where they invite sexual diversity, and people are so open with sexuality in general here. This is interesting.*

Researcher: *So, do you think that means you can be more open here with your sexual identity?*

YG: *That's a difficult situation actually. Even though American society is more open to it, the Korean community is very conservative. [...] Even though I haven't been here that long, I don't go to a Korean Church, which is the largest Korean community in Korea as I'm not Christian.*

For YG his migration to the US was for work purposes, he was highly-educated and was pursuing work in Seattle after completing his doctorate in South Korea. As for Samson, he had migrated to the US with his White-American husband and was employed in the Seattle area. Another informant, Jacob, who was also married to an American citizen had also moved to Seattle for work purposes. Although he was still looking for employment when I had met him, he later found work in Seattle when I had already moved onto Seoul for the second phase of fieldwork. For Jacob, he had no desire to make Korean friends in Seattle either, this time citing the insular nature of Koreans in the US.

“No I don't want to make more Korean friends because they make me uncomfortable. First of all, the community is very small and Korean people are usually very different from Westerners. They always want to be in a group, even if I want to do something on my own, I have to do it with them. I did that in Korea, and I don't want to do that in the US. You know, Koreans always hanging out together. Especially the Korean community in Seattle, they just hang out with each other and they don't hang out with people from different cultures.”

Jacob's disavowal of what he has described as a typology associated with Korean forms of socializing is interesting in that he rejects a group formation in favor of one that is more individual. In this way, he can be seen to be choosing to embrace a more Western, or individualistic discursive strand in his own behavior. As opposed to a more collective strand in the behavior of Korean Americans. His comments on the insularity of Koreans in Seattle certainly sit comfortably in conversation with other comments that YG and another informant who was born in Korea, Ezekiel was to relay. In contrast to Jacob, YG and Samson's disavowal, Ezekiel in fact mostly only spent time with Koreans. He had moved to Seattle for university and was near graduation when we met. This excerpt is from a follow-up conversation we had in Seoul after Ezekiel had moved back following his graduation. We had the opportunity to catch up over coffee at a café in Gangnam.

Ezekiel: *"I mostly hung out with Koreans, it was easy to hang out with them because you know we're all Korean. And I didn't know anyone that was there at the time."*

Researcher: *"Was it your experience that most Koreans in the Korean American community tend to socialize together and not really mix with people from other ethnic backgrounds?"*

Ezekiel: *"Yeah, my group of friends mostly just stuck with Koreans because it was easiest. We all spoke the same language, we all understood each other because we have the same culture. You know, American culture is different from Korean. So, we do mostly hang out with each other."*

Researcher: *Did that mean you also went to Church? As I know that the Korean American community in Seattle is quite Christian.*

Ezekiel: *I didn't go to Church with them but it's very Christian and very conservative there. But that's how Koreans are in America in general I think.*

The division between the Korean American world and an American one is a real divide that informants were discursively constructing. The image conjured for the Korean American world was one that is conservative and Christian, the American one was progressive and more likely to afford sexual freedoms. Informants also theorized why they believed that this was the case. YG explained it as a type of temporal-dependent social construct. Where the Korean American community had been built around structures that formed in a specific time and space:

“For many of them, they moved here in the 60s and 70s when Korea was really conservative. So, they’ve maintained their conservative ways, Korea has moved on.”

He clarified this position by indicating that he was referring to the way that gay life in Korea had moved on. In the sense that his gay life in Korea was much better than what it was like in the United States.

“The night life in Korea is much better than here [...] for me. I also prefer to date Korean guys so it’s not so great for me here.”

The idea that the Korean American community was stuck in a time-warp of sorts was also reiterated in follow-up conversations with nearly all informants. This included informants who were both born in the US and Korea. Jacob in particular made this observation in eerily similar terms to YG:

“I think so, because most of the Korean Americans I know, their parents moved here a long time ago when Korea was still really conservative. They have the same idea of their parents about Korean culture and life. So it’s like Korean society has changed a lot, but Korean Americans have not.”

This may appear a peculiar observation to make considering that none of the informants born in Korea had disclosed their sexual identity beyond their circle of gay friends in Korea. None of them had disclosed their sexual identity to anyone in their family either. But disclosure being a non-issue is only considered a necessary part of gay identity synthesis in developmental models advanced by social-psycho models like the Cass model. When read in reference to wider social changes that have been carefully traced by scholars like Campbell (2016) and Abelmann et al., (2013) in South Korea, it makes contextual sense. They posit that a new type of neoliberal self-cultivation discourse has emerged among Korea's rising generation that emphasizes creating a future on your own. Therefore, this temporal divide identified by informants makes contextual sense as well. As was covered in chapter 2 of this dissertation, South Korean family and civil society in particular has undergone many structural changes over the past 6 decades specifically. With the rapid advancements in technological links across the globe, this process promises even more transnational possibilities and divergences.

Examples of emerging divergences run abound in the narratives of my informants. Especially when we bring back a racialized lens to the circulating discourses that are affecting their constructs of their own reality. Perhaps most telling is when Cain narrates the difficulties he faced when he sought help from an American therapist while trying to navigate his coming-out process to his parents. Cain relayed in our interview how he was struggling with trying to negotiate the pressures of family and resolve his own understanding of his sexual identity by visiting a White therapist.

“I’ve been trying to see therapists lately, and it’s with this White lady at the moment and after I’ve been telling her about what I’m going through, her response was simple: why don’t you move out? I wanted to scream at her, lady I’m Korean, It’s not that easy!”

What Cain was referring to was the complexities that his identity formation processes were subject to. A process that all informants who were born in the US in my study had alluded to in their interviews. Their sense of identity as Koreans in the US were constructed mutually through the KACC, and familial values that were imbued with Confucian values that emphasized familial continuity that presented as heterosexist. However, more than just as an oppressive force, informants felt it as a formative part of their being. This is an important part of their identity that should not be merely written off as a structural affective construct. It was this complexity that meant that they had to navigate sexual visibility with more nuance than just “coming-out of the gay closet”. This is nowhere more evident than in this excerpt from Ezekial’s interview and why he continued to stay connected with his group of Korean American friends despite understanding how intensely heterosexist their views were toward gay people.

Ezekial: Lots of them go to church and churches are supposedly conservative. So one of my friends actually mentioned that once when we were at a café drinking coffee. There was a gay couple walking next to us. My friend said ‘I would never ever understand those guys.’ She was Christian and was very conservative. She said that all her friends think the same way. So, I was thinking: I would never be able to come-out to them.

Researcher: What attracted you to hanging out with these people? Was it because you felt connected to them as Korean?

Ezekial: Yep.

Researcher: *Even though, they would say these things in front of you, you still felt compelled to hang out with these friends?*

Ezekial: *I understand them. It's their right to not like us. I don't care about that. The reason why we became friends is that we had something that connects us. Being Korean.*

Researcher: *A lot of people I've spoken to have said that Koreans in America are more conservative than Koreans in Korea. This is interesting because America is supposed to be less conservative.*

Ezekial: *It's not just Seattle Koreans though. I think it's because lot of Koreans moved to America in 70s and 80s when Korea was super conservative, and their thoughts still remain. But Korea has changed but they didn't change."*

What Ezekial stories here is something I understood well. As a gay intersectional subject, being gay matters, but it is not the *only* thing that matters. This requires you to think specifically of what the best options may be to navigate the particularities of your ethnic community in relation to your gay subjectivity. The Cass model and linear models like it, argue that disclosure should become a non-issue once you have resolved your homosexual identity with other parts of the self. However, for intersectional minorities like Korean gay men in Seattle, what if those two parts of the self are fundamentally structured by different normative and temporal spaces?

In light of these complexities, I argue that for informants, especially those that were born in the US, they navigated these complexities by bringing family with them through Situated Embedded Narratives (SENs) that were designed to keep harmony for their family inside and outside the home. Ezekial's example shows the complexity of being an intersectional subject can

force one to stay closeted in order to access social support from an ethnic community despite its intensely heterosexist character. Especially as Ezekial had only moved to the US specifically for university studies. As a racialized other, trying to navigate a gay Seattle that other informants storied as racist, it makes sense to me that he sought to strengthen his Korean networks instead. As a Samoan in New Zealand I often have faced a similar decision. Whether I should join a heterosexist conservative Samoan community or gravitate toward a queer community that can often lack a racial reflexivity.

Thus for my informants, family and preserving the integrity of that unit was an incredibly important value to who they were as people. Informants disclosed that their family was part of their identity and many valued the keeping of community connections alive as an ethnic minority. When informants chose to engage in full-disclosure, one in which the Cass model argues leads to a synthesized gay-identity, the outcome was often disastrous for informants. It even forced some of them to reconsider their connections to their Korean ethnic identity in some cases like Simeon's story.

For most informants who were not born in the US, they chose to distance themselves from the Korean American community because of the exclusionary nature of the discourses that were formed around a gay identity. Moreover, I hypothesize that the fact that their families were not in the US meant that they were able to step into an American world where they could live as gay men, but continued to keep their sexual identity secret from their families in Korea. Thus, the Pacific Ocean became their ally in allowing them to deploy their own form of a SEN. It was something my ex-boyfriend and his Korean gay friends had done. They lived openly as gay men in Seattle outside the Korean American community, whilst the physical division from their families in South

Korea allowed them to keep their family safe. Safe in the sense that any tensions that would emerge if their sexual identity were to be revealed in South Korea would be avoided.

Concluding Discussion

Informants in my study demonstrated that Korean gay men are not a homogenous group in of themselves. They are affected by multiple discourses that circulate around familial and cultural normative structures, conservatism, migrant struggles, sexual identity, coming-out narratives and racialized social structures. Korean gay men born in the US are brought into a unique intersectional environment that shapes their identity in specific differentiated ways. Where religious and ethnic marginalizations are mapped against culture and an immigrant narrative that impacts them in various way. These forces are all grounded by socio-historical factors. This also determines the positionality of the Korean American community vis-a-viz mainstream US society, which impacts the way my informants must navigate their own sexuality further.

For Koreans, the family is more than just a site of comfort, it is the site of social welfare where over the past 150 years, the Korean state weakened by annexation, war, compressed modernity, shifted all responsibility of social welfare to the family unit (Chang K, 2010, Lee J. et al, 2010). Hence, the very survival of Koreans has been shifted to families themselves. This is the specific socio-historical factor that is compounded and intensifies an immigrant lens. Thus, when one includes how the Korean American community established itself along Confucian familial norms, and a Christian Church, the intensity of this affect and its model minority image on my informants takes on a new complexity. The complicated nature of this type of decision making

means that a linear coming-out process like that advocated by the Cass model is not adequate to account for the coming-out process of Korean gay men in the US.

To deploy an intersectional lens specifically, prior literature has focused a lot on the specificities of a gay identity being “Othered” by an oppressive conservative, Christian community. However, the reality for my informants is that religion as well as cultural norms melded as a social construct that mutually helped to form their identity. Therefore, it does not operate as a structural force alone and requires us to think beyond models that assumes that it dictates their choices. The reverse can also be said to be true. A heavy focus on returning a cultural or ethnicity-centered critique of Western centrism or neo-imperialism in Western discourses over gay identity formation, ignores the constitutive importance of a gay identity for informants. All of my informants felt it important to live gay lives married or in relationships in recreating mainstream style cohabitations. Although this may be because informants were living in the US, many of my informants were happily married or in long-term relationships. This suggests that Korean gay men are building adaptive strategies to navigate this complexity that is far more nuanced than existing explanations we currently have. One of these strategies was redefining the coming-out process through Situated Embedded Narratives (SENs) that are culturally and situationally sensitive. The takeaway point then, is that understanding visibility for Korean gay men is not as simple as juxtaposing the expectations of a linear process that should take one from inside to outside a closet.

An important point of difference though is between Korean gay men who were born in the US and those who had migrated recently to the US. The way in which these two groups of men narrated their marginality differed starkly from each other. The latter felt little affinity to the Korean American community, nor did they seem to recognize it as “Korean” in the sense that they

narrated Korean Americans as being stuck in a time warp of sorts. They believed Korean Americans had been carved out of a Korean context that was stuck in the 1960s and 70s. There was also convergence with the narratives of informants who were born in the US, who also posited that the conservatism in the Korean American community was a product of historical forces. This situation is important to recognize, as this indicates that informants discursively were constructing the Korean American community as a type of antithesis to a gay identity. Thus, the need to setup a SEN then, becomes even clearer.

An intersectionality lens posits that marginalized identities should not be read as additive, rather as interlocking and co-constitutive, meaning they are sites of convergence that produce new forms of marginalization. For the informants in Seattle, their marginalization clearly takes place from multiple points. Prior literature already extensively reviewed in this dissertation posits that they are marginalized as gay men by a heterosexist Korean American/Asian American society and by wider American society as racialized others. What this creates is an interlocking tension, which requires a specific adaptive strategy with contextual specificity. With the Cass model, the idea of homosexual identity synthesis requires full-disclosure for an individual to fully synthesize their homosexual self, with other parts of their self. The narratives of my informants suggest otherwise, and a narrative of situated embedder narrative mediating sexual visibility decisions appeared a more than valid way for informants in this context to navigate the complexities of this intersectional environment.

This chapter was framed with two questions at the outset: what is it about the specific Korean experience and living in America that makes it so difficult for Korean gay men to come-out? And how does this differ from traditional coming-out models as well as the gay Asian

American/API narrative that has been told many times in the existing literature? It appears that perhaps the answer to these interrelated questions, much like the project of intersectionality, rests in our reshaping of the predominant normative construct that shapes our understanding of the coming-out process. Informants, deployed Situated Embedded Narratives when necessary in order to preserve familial structures, but this often did not prevent them from living fully realized gay relationships, marriages and families in some cases. For all intents and purposes, my informants were happy, well-adjusted and lived full lives. Those in this study who did suffer from emotional distress were those who followed full coming-out narratives advanced by the Cass Model and rejected familial support. This distress, I argue, was also related to them having to reconsider their connection to their Korean ethnic identity by pursuing a linear coming-out narrative. This is confronting if your identity was formed in an intersectional environment where being an ethnic *and* a sexual minority *both* matter, equally and impact you simultaneously. Therefore, I posit that using Situated Embedded Narratives should also be seen as another valid form of coming-out, and that Korean gay men are not necessarily invisible, they do come-out and claim their sexual identity, but they do so in the intersections. This is due to the social, historical, cultural and temporal specificities of their intersectional narrative.

Perhaps one of the reasons that we struggle to recognize the validity of this form of coming-out lays in the sexual exceptionalism that is latent in the discourses that surround gay liberation movements that are sourced in the West (See Puar, 2007). The next chapter not only moves to Seoul to explore the issue of gay sexual visibility and coming-out narratives further, but also sets out to explore the ways Korean gay men are being constituted by and responding to these narratives of sexual liberation in a contemporary context.

Chapter 4 – “I Seoul U”: Cultivating Self-Reliance, Negotiated Familial Futurities and The Productive Modality of Western Gay Identity Formations

Chapter Summary/Abstract

This chapter explores how a cosmopolitan global gay identity rooted in the West, affects the ways gay Korean men navigate the complications of sexual visibility in contemporary South Korea. This chapter is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork including 20 in-depth interviews with gay Korean men in Seoul. It finds that informants had their sense of a gay identity development assisted, and in many ways transformed by Western discursive elements that circulated through media such as television shows, Western pop music and people-to-people contact. The queer-liberation movement among gay activists of the West was also helpful for activist work in Seoul, both ideologically and materially. This chapter also makes the argument that informants used the relative positioning of a progressive West, through discourses of liberation to help constitute a gay subjectivity that they are renegotiating within the Korean family. Thus, allowing them to open up new possibilities and positionalities of gay futurity. This negotiated relationality is premised on the cultivation of self-reliance, an adaptive strategy deployed in order to navigate a coming-out process in the Korean contemporary reality. The resulting discursive frame deployed is one where Korean backwardness and conservatism is in need of reform and intimated an emerging elasticity in the Korean familial structure in the eyes of Seoul informants. The main barrier now appears to be Christianity and its hegemonic hold over discourses of sexuality and deviancy in the Korean public sphere as well as its incursions into some Korean families.

Introduction

On a sweltering July day in 2017, with the words “I Seoul U” as its backdrop, the city of Seoul bore witness to its largest ever pride parade as part of the Seoul Queer Culture Festival (Ock H, 2017). As part of the approximately 85,000 who flocked to Seoul City Hall Square for the festival, the incredibly heavy police presence all-around the square suggested the contested nature of the site. The growing groundswell of support for queer rights was protested against vehemently by Christian fundamentalists, whose opposition juxtaposed itself jarringly against Korean queer activists who are now perhaps at their most publicly emboldened in living memory.

Woori Han (2018) estimates there were 30,000 protestors there that day. While Han W witnessed what was happening above ground, my friend and I were witnesses to what was happening below. We were blocked from leaving the surrounding Seoul City Hall subway station with many other festival attendees, by what seemed like hundreds of protestors. We scrambled around underground as protestors clogged the exits, the public bathrooms, the seats, and the walkways. Thousands of Korean police officers struggled to hold off the shouting mob of protestors who implored us to turn-away from sin or risk getting AIDS.¹¹

What this increasingly violent contestation of public spaces in Seoul illustrates is that what Bong Y (2008) referred to as the eternally deferred question of gay rights in Korean society, perhaps, may not be avoided by South Korean policy-makers much longer. Emboldened activism alone, however, does not a reformist agenda make, and much has been written about the reluctance

¹¹ The protests at the 2018 Seoul Queer Culture Festival turned violent. Christian fundamentalists clashed with activists while they staged sit-ins to block the parade path. As Queer Culture Festivals begin to proliferate all over Korea, more reports of Christian fundamentalists turning violent continue to come in. The inaugural Incheon Queer Culture Festival was delayed by many hours by protestors, and queer activists have accused Christian groups of promoting the physical abuse of festival goers to intimidate festival attendees. Some young attendees of the festival have claimed that they were beaten by protestors during the festival, with video of the attacks surfacing on Korean social media sites. See Gibson (2018) for an overview.

of the South Korean state to grant recognition to sexual minorities within South Korean society (Seo D, 2001).

When approaching the question of a gay male subjectivity in Korea, lines of enquiry in the social sciences have tended to probe two areas: historicizing its development as an identity marker or practice (homosexuality/gay) through the Korean historical record (mapping), and what the chances are for wider public recognition and acceptance/inclusion of a gay identity in South Korean society (social/legal reform). However, few studies on South Korea have focused specifically on the contemporary global context, and how this has affected the subjectivity of gay men living in South Korea, beyond a reformist/activist lens besides. This chapter begins to help to fill this gap by focusing on the narratives of a cross section of Korean gay men living in Seoul today. It employs a qualitative research approach informed by *talanoa* dialogue (a culturally specific and nuanced interpretivist research methodology from the Pacific) in theorizing how the rise of a cosmopolitan gay identity cast in a Western dye, creates new tensions and possibilities for Korean gay men.

In this chapter, I make the argument that Western ideas around gay identity and the struggle for minority recognition in Western countries, have become interpreted and deployed in South Korea by activists and informants themselves. A process that is transforming Korean ideas around a gay identity facilitated and enhanced by South Korea's opening up to the global community (Watson, 2010). Informants built connections to an imagined gay global community by accessing the spread of Western music, television programs, art, culture and ideas such as gay human rights. All of which had a profound way in how they came to understand their own marginality as gay subjects and what possibilities there may be for a gay futurity in South Korea.

Informants often storied a narrative similar to what Abelman et al., (2013) termed *chaggi kwalli*, or cultivation of self-reliance, being used as an adaptive strategy, which sought to create new forms of kinship within their own families as an integrated gay son. This nuance is important, as it suggests that the Korean family as a site of oppression for gay subjectivity due to Confucian constructs may actually be more elastic than what has been identified in the prior literature. Moreover, that a divergence in effect between Christianity and the “conservatism” of the Korean family may have begun to emerge.

As Korean queer studies is a nascent field, what follows is a brief review of the relevant literature to gay men and their status in South Korea. The chapter then outlines its theoretical additions – a framework that has been constructed using Altman’s (1997) *Global Gays/Gaze*, Foucault’s (1979, 1980, 1991) theories on power, Lyotard’s (1988) *differend* and other insights into identity construction to frame the discussion. Additional comments on methodology are added that leads into a thematic *talanoa* based on the field work. The chapter will conclude with a discussion and conclusion section. All of which attempts to address the guiding research question of: how has the rise of a cosmopolitan gay identity, and the resultant exposure informants experienced in relation to Western normative constructs and culture, impacted the way South Korean gay men are narrating their own gay subjectivity and visibility?

Chapter Caveats: The Illusion of a Universal Gay Identity

To be sure, as is the case throughout the dissertation, the idea that there is a universal gay identity is rejected here. However, I argue that a power analysis illuminates the discursive forces present in globalizing narratives that have been critiqued as erasive of diverse queer subjectivities in non-Western societies (See Manalansan, 2006; Puar, 2007; Grewal, 2005 for an overview). This

critique though, does not make these forces any less generative, hence, informing a shift in focus in this chapter, to home in on what discursive phenomena are being produced in a South Korean context by informants. Moreover, terminologies like queer, gay and homosexuality are constantly being shaped, contested and deployed in ways that are difficult to universally demarcate for a range of theoretical and contextual reasons. Thus, to clarify my position in this chapter, I offer a quick reminder that I differentiate between homosexuality as the practice of sex and intimacy between two men versus gay or homosexual identity, as a sexual identity self-claimed, performed and internalized as a marker or part of one's subjective identity.

As this chapter's research question focuses on Korean gay men specifically and how they are narrating their stories vis-a-viz multiple and circulating discourses, it leaves many critical areas in Korean queer studies out. For example, discussions of Korean masculinities, gender and the hierarchies within Korean queer subjectivities are not dealt with adequately here. Neither is there a focus on lesbian women or transgender Koreans. In particular, it should be noted that Korean lesbian women are imbricated within the South Korean gender hierarchy in a much more subservient position than their gay male counterpoints. This suggests then that this chapter would take on a different complexion if this was the case. For one thing, the position of a woman in the South Korean family is usually subservient to that of their husbands and brothers. Therefore, this chapter's arguments cannot extend beyond a Korean gay male framework. However, the implications of this study on these areas are still clearly evident. It suggests that a gay futurity for Korean gay men may be possible, however, whether a futurity exists at the expense of Korean lesbian women becomes a question that is suspended. This paper's findings represent merely one nodal point of analysis and can be assistance in future conversations. To engage in such a

discussion would require a much larger platform beyond what is given here. This chapter does aim to open up further conversations around these issues which I hope to take-up in further studies.

Literature Review

Literature that seeks to systematically analyze the position of gay men and a gay identity in Korea is still relatively sparse in the social sciences. Dongjin Seo's (2001) essay, *Mapping the Vicissitudes of Korean Homosexual Men* represented the first time a Korean scholar sought to systematically examine the lay of the land for a homosexual identity. Since then, a wide array of scholars have located and situated homosexual men within South Korean society at large. Despite its relative fledgling nature, this literature has undergone notable changes in-line with global discourses around the rights of sexual minorities. Seo D (2001) argued that the invisibility of Korean homosexual men was a product of their "othering from within," an othering that was produced through the ascendancy of Confucianism during the Joseon Dynasty (A.D. 1392-1910). Certainly, Kim Y and Hahn S (2006) support this thesis, pointing to the existence of the *Hwarang* during the time of the Silla dynasty (B.C. 57- A.D. 935), right through to the twilight of the Goryeo Dynasty (A.D. 935-1392). During the Goryeo dynasty, the names of the homosexual partners of King Kongmin (A.D. 1352-1347) were actually recorded. In Goryeo vernacular, homosexual practices were called *yongyang-chi-chong* the dragon and the sun. Implying the coming together of the two male symbols. Seo's analysis is important in that his citing of this modern day 'historical amnesia' of discourses around homosexuality in Korea implies a discursive erasure. When read contextually within Korea's social and historically grounded modernization, the dilemma becomes: how can one claim an identity that according to society does not exist? Seo, in many ways is pointing to the idea that a gay identity in Korean society has never really discursively existed, but

homosexuality clearly has. One only need look at the fact that in Korean, the terms 게이(gay) and 퀴어(queer) 호모 (homo) among many others, have been transliterated from English, and is part of everyday Korean queer vernacular. In fact, Itaewon's famous gay district is simply known as 호모힐, which is a direct transliteration of the name "homo hill."

Aside from Seo, other contemporary scholars have attempted to further map homosexuality, practice, a gay identity, and responses from mainstream Korean society today (Kim Y and Hahn S, 2006; Youn G. 1996; Bong Y, 2008; Cho & Chu, 2015, 2016; Yi & Philips, 2015; Um N. et al., 2016). In doing so, they trace the emergence of a public movement toward the wider recognition of sexual minority rights in South Korea to shortly after the successful emergence of democracy. Bong Y (2008) points out however, that the Female Taxi Drivers' Association from a group of lesbian taxi drivers, formed in the 1970s, predated the post-democracy sexual minority movement. Seo D (2001) on the other hand maintains that the discernible traces of a lesbian and gay subculture emerged in the mid-1980s. A further movement with reform designs, aiming to center sexual minorities as an oppressed social group began in Korea in the early 1990s. Citing the rise of various student organizations that formed out of Yonsei University in Seoul first, spreading to other parts of Seoul and Korea later.

Since then, the attempts to understand Korean gay subjectivity have centered on the question of how to integrate a gay Korean identity into Korean society and mapping attitudes toward homosexuals within wider Korean society. Lim H and Johnson (2001) found that in their study of attitudes among social work students at a Korean university toward homosexuality, that there was an overwhelmingly negative attitude. Their quantitative study showed that about 77% of their sample displayed homophobic positions. However, attitudes in Korea seem to be moving.

The Pew Research Center (2013) located South Korea as the country with the fastest growing rate of acceptance of homosexuality that it surveyed. Up from 12% in 2007 to 39%, with over 50% in the under 30 age group demographic responding positively to the need to accept homosexuality within Korean society.

Another recent study by Um N. et al., (2016) mirrors this. Focused on the effects that gay-themed ads were having on young Korean consumers, their results showed that exposure to a gay-themed advertisement (they defined as an advertisement that centered homosexual characters in its narrative) had no negative effect on brand image or sales of the product. Their conclusions do point to a possible change in attitudes. However, these conclusions are still divorced from a wider social and cultural context and focused on a narrow subset of social practice. This would need to be investigated further across differing social contexts. For example, a study by Cho B and Sohn A (2016), conducted at roughly the same time, found among Korean gay youth who had “come-out”, or revealed their sexual orientation, sexual minorities who identified as gay or transgendered were three times more likely to engage in suicidal ideation than heterosexual or bisexual respondents. This rate was highest among men who had done so involuntarily. Their study emphasized the weak idea of a gay identity in Korea, or collective consciousness that in turn provided no social support for Korean gay youth. This assertion is very much in-line with Seo’s (2001) observations who argued that there has not been a successful group or individual that has been able to unify the homosexual community in Korea under one umbrella or social movement.

In trying to find a deeper understanding of the subjectivity of homosexuality in Korea, other studies have tried to uncover the discursive elements of a subversive homosexual community in modern day Korea. Kim J and Hong S (2007) indicated a hermeneutical presence in analytical frames. Their study considered the ways in which filmmakers used places like the Seoul Queer

Films and Videos Festival to explore themes of repression for homosexuals. This, they argued, represented a form of discursive counterpublics designed to integrate a gay identity in the hegemonic discourse of Korean society. Kwon J. et al.'s, (2014) study on the spectacularization of the homosexual body by Korean women in Korean dramas and movies found that although cognitive of a homosexual body, these women merely instrumentalized homosexual characters in fulfilling their own utility as consumers of cultural products. There was little evidence of any of this engagement leading to these women becoming more likely to support political reform for queer Koreans.

This is significant when one reads Seo's process of homosexuality being "Othered" from within, in relation to wider cultural and social contexts around the Korean family. The Korean family has become a site of intense state intrusion in its deliberate attempts to regulate reproduction, assign specific gender duties, delineating social welfare as a familial responsibility (Chang K, 2010), meanwhile providing very little semblance of a social safety net (Hwang S and Lim J, 2015). I interpret the findings of the Kwon et al.'s (2014) study as evidence of the perpetual othering of a homosexual body. This is important considering that Korean identity formation is clearly developed in a relational context. Thus, a homosexual body can be instrumentalized as long as it is made devoid of a relational identity and is therefore kept outside from their own family and site of identity construction. Assigning agency to that identity would be problematic, hence homosexuality continues to stay outside the consciousness of Korean society.

Others have attempted to catalyze the move from mere mapping to strategizing ways in which a gay identity can be moved from the outside to the public consciousness of Korean society. Yi J and Phillips (2015), in lamenting unsuccessful attempts at pushing for reform through identity politics, advocate a brokering strategy instead. They encourage homosexual men to make use of

the cultural specificity of Korean identity formation processes. They argue that Korean homosexual men will find wider acceptance in Korean society by joining local organizations and befriending other marginalized groups.

Other scholars have chosen to examine the core of resistance to integration in Korean society being the potent residue of a Confucian familial tradition infused with the power of an ultra-conservative Christian fundamentalist sect that has managed to capitalize on its unique positioning in the Korean historical context (Cho M, 2011). According to Cho M (2011), Christian conservatives, saw their political influence wane at the successful ushering in of democracy in Korea at the end of the 1980s. He argues that Christian conservatives once found their power in the anti-communist discourse perpetuated by the authoritarian state. Once this disappeared, so did their opportunity for defining the ‘other’ and essentializing them as an enemy of the state. As a result, to avoid their power over lawmakers in Korea eroding any further, they now target sexual minorities as an object of social disease to re-establish their position in the Korean social and political hierarchy.

Adding to this discussion is the work of Chase (2012) who advocates the use of more traditional forms of media publications to encourage activism among homosexuals in Korea. Drawing on Bong Y (2008) and Seo D’s (2001) work, Chase outlines how gay males in Korea congregate and circulate emancipatory discourses online. Often, these are kept out of the public domain as a result. He however, doubts the effectiveness of this for same-sex sexuality in Korea and China. His research showed that traditional print media still had a much more significant penetration level than online distributed content. Two issues seem to arise from this study, first, the trend since 2012 toward online publication has only intensified, not waned, therefore his initial

assertion may not hold in today's context.¹² The second, it seems what's missing is a hermeneutic analysis of this tendency for Korean homosexual men to congregate online beyond the prism of social activism.

A common point of departure for Chase (2012), Bong Y (2008), Seo D (2001), Cho M (2011) and others, is to characterize agency of a gay male as being nestled within the successful legal and social realization of a homosexual or gay identity in the public sphere. A point of departure that leans heavily on literature that has been produced in the United States. Namely, studies that focus on the 'how to' activist portion of integration, as opposed to the, "why not" posit. The latter opens up a richer field of hermeneutical enquiry. This is best illustrated in perhaps the most well-known study into Korean gay men and lesbians by Cho J (2009) called "The Wedding Banquet Revisited: 'Contract Marriages' Between Gays and Lesbians.' Here, Cho J moves beyond the idea that homosexuals as hidden populations are assumed to only want to emancipate their sexual identity from the shadows, thus, looking to pursue a politics of normalization (Richardson, 2005). Cho J argues that these marriages of convenience allow gay men and lesbians in Korea to create the illusion of a heterosexual relationship. This in-turn safeguards their participation in familial and wider social groups.

This important work highlights the need for better more nuanced approaches to the study of the subjectivity of Korean gay men. In this work, Cho J revealed that although conceived of as a site of resistance to the patriarchal norms of Korean society, these contract marriages often reinscribed gender norms and recreated power inequity between men and women that it sought to

¹² During the Seoul Queer Culture Festival, Twitter and Facebook was used by many of my informants to show the state of protestors. Moreover, it was being used by one of my informants to circulate discourses around the violent and oppressive actions of Christian fundamentalists. As this is an emerging form of political communication, it requires closer examination in further studies.

skirt. Men often comfortably accessed the privilege of a male household head that Korean social structures afforded them. Women, however, were often uncomfortably forced into accepting the subservience to a patriarch in performing the duties of a dutiful Korean wife. What makes this data even more complex is the way in which Cho was able to illuminate how the line between the “real” and “pretend” became blurred. Where the terms of an “arrangement” in opposition to “general affection” become nearly indistinguishable in certain cases.

Extrapolating from this, when dealing with the subjectivity of Korean gay men and their likelihood to adopt more visible forms of expression in sexual identity, analyses that are culturally, socially, historically and temporally situated are needed. Moreover, with South Korea itself being subject to international norms embedded in global frameworks, this must be complimented by an examination of global forces. Here, two gaps are clearly identified. Firstly, are emancipatory discourses carried by cosmopolitan gay identity having a positive effect on the way Korean gay men understand their marginality? The frame of needing to be rescued by oppressive cultural and religious norms can lead to assumptions of Korean gay men being bereft of agency. However, this position requires further nuance as evidenced by Cho J (2009). Korean gay men are imbricated within a patriarchal Korean society *as* men first. A position that assigns them particular privileges that must be impacting their decisions around sexual visibility. Second, prior research points to a normative difference regarding sexuality and identity between the global and local. Casting this relationship as one of “helping our less free comrades” in the global community of gays, also ignores the type of power-configuration that facilitates the west-to-east directional flow of these discourses. In other words, a power lens needs to be brought back into the equation to highlight what other effects the exalted positionality the West enjoys over Korea, may also be having.

Woori Han's (2018) essay on queer developmental citizenship using Puar's (2007) homonationalism framework is one of the first to take up this task. Han's essay demonstrates how queer Koreans cultivate a "catching-up" to the West, type strategy in denouncing the slow movement of Korean society on queer rights. However, the same discursive strategy allows for Western embassies to reinscribe a type of sexual exceptionalism that was described by Puar (2007) as an articulation of homonationalism. Han argues that this creates new frictions and tensions for the Korean queer community that relates to notions of queer citizenship and nationalism in South Korea. Han states that as a result of the positionality of Western embassies, Korean queer activists are less critical of liberal politics and development hierarchies that exist between the West and non-Western countries. In other words, they are more likely to just accept the superior positioning of Western discourses. In this vein, this chapter turns to the narratives of informants to not only map ways in which global discourses affect subjectivity, identity formation and visibility for Korean gay men, but also interrogates what traces of these power differentials lay in informant narratives.

Theoretical Additions – Altman, Globalization, *The Differend* and Foucault Revisited

“In both North America and Europe, gay liberation grew out of the counterculture and other radical movements, particularly feminism. To some extent this is also true of the developing gay worlds of the south¹³, but more significant is the global explosion of communications... these

¹³ South Korea is not part of the global south any longer – however, in relation to its treatment of homosexuality, it is often grouped with countries that are not considered to be part of the West. Thus, this quotation from Altman uses dated language, although the point being emphasized here is the asymmetric power-relationship between countries of the West and non-Western countries. Altman's focus is on Asia. South Korea tends to view itself as a middle power, semi-periphery, or semi-core country (Lee S J, 2012). Thus, its positioning within the global community on

relationships are shaped by colonial structures, which are impossible to escape. Racism and colonial scripts of superiority, inferiority are replicated within structures of desire in ways which neither side is comfortable admitting.” - Dennis Altman

Many scholars have argued against the universality of a cosmopolitan gay identity in critiquing the colonial assumptions infused in the spread of these discourses. Petris Liu (2007) warns us that emerging gay subjectivities and epistemes of desire in Asia, should be seen as a product of the impact of democratization and globalization. Jackson et al., (2008) adds that the opposition toward homosexuality in Asia is more likely to be a product of the threat it poses to traditional familial structures, rather than homophobia. Although South Korea’s militant fundamentalist Christian bloc complicates the Korean situation further. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001) mention how some scholars have pointed out that the rhetoric of diversity and globality with respect to sexual identity, produce "monumentalist gay identities" and elides "radical sexual difference". In recognizing this, Altman’s quote summarizes the theoretical points that are at stake. The first relates to how gay liberation discourses - intrinsically tied to how gay identity becomes discernibly public and activist in nature - relates to the specificity of the local. The second speaks to the discursive spread of a cosmopolitan gay identity as being embedded within asymmetric power-relations between the global gay community and gay identity in non-Western societies which are racialized. I support the notion that an analysis must also contain an examination of the generative aspect of these power differentials. Specifically, what types of conditions these clearly racialized

different areas is mixed. Economically, South Korea is one of the strongest economies in the world. On issues to do with homosexuality, it is still considered to be far behind Western countries.

and colonized transcultural interactions infer, and what phenomenon they may also be producing or facilitating in local contexts.

To contextualize Altman's essay, his was an attempt to critically examine the emergence of a Western politicized homosexuality in Asia. A key assumption of this position is that discursive tools deployed by politicized groups import and reinterpret Western norms in local Asian contexts. The dilemma that needs to be resolved here being: how to balance the impact of universalizing rhetoric and styles with the continuing existence of cultural and social traditions? (Altman, 1997: 420). However, despite acknowledgement of this tricky dilemma, Altman never relinquishes the position that a globalizing discourse around gay identity is still a relationship of power whose uneven nature is best expressed as an attempt for gay men in Asia to want to be more "Western". His claim is that: "sexual identity politics grows out of modernity... the claiming of lesbian/gay identities in Asia or Latin America is as much about being Western as about sexuality, symbolized by the co-option of the word 'gay'". He does however critique the frailty of this modernity-centered explanation by quoting Michael Connors in the statement that "we should be careful to avoid the narcissistic transition narrative in diffusion whereby the trajectory of the Third World has already been traversed by the first (p432)." Thus, according to Grewal and Kaplan (2001), our task is also to examine both the specificities and the continuities within the globalization of sexual identities at the present juncture.

Here I return to the work of Lyotard (1988) and the articulation of the *differend* principle introduced earlier in the dissertation. Lyotard outlines how in a "case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, they cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments." In other words, when two parties are in conflict, that conflict cannot be resolved

equitably unless they share the same discursive norms and terminologies that inform their interpretation of events.

Although speaking directly to genres of discourse, Lyotard also argues that “applying a single rule of judgment in order to settle their *differend* as though it were merely a litigation would wrong one of them.” As this results from “the fact that the rules of a genre of discourse by which one judges are not those of the judged.” In other words, agreeing upon a way to interpret a situation when two different ways of understanding are in play, will inevitably be settled in favor of one and subsume the other. I add that the judgment will be in favor of the party who is able to exercise the most power in this interaction.

In relation to my study, what does become clear in the narratives of informants is that on the issue of gay liberation, there appears little resistance, which a *differend* would likely portend. However, I further postulate that the lack of resistance lays in the productive modality of the power configuration that functions more as a biopolitical frame that incites conformity as opposed to imposing it. The ability to define in this case can be seen as a type of knowledge power. As Foucault (quoted in Rouse, 1994) states, knowledge is linked to power; firstly, because it assumes the authority of the ‘truth’ and, secondly, because it has the power to make itself true. In this vein, I argue that the *differend* and its subsequent settlement can also be seen as a reflection of asymmetric power relationships that are in operation. Further, that Altman’s assertion that we should view the rise of gay subjectivities in Asia as a product of these men in Asia wanting to be like the West, is also illustrative of Western hegemony. A type of hegemony achieved through the dominant positionality that undergirds gay modernity discourses.

Moreover, I further reject a narrow focus on a single modality of oppressive formations of power, which would see the repression of gay identities in Korea as a product of oppressive forces

alone. Here, I return to power and its faces, as articulated by Foucault for theoretical clarification. One of Foucault's (1979, 1980) articulations of power relies on a deductive modality. Whereby, the threat of removing one's freedom, specifically, one's life, is a power once embodied by monarchs (sovereign power) and deployed to control individual choices through repression. I do accept that this form of power is undoubtedly in operation when we examine the ways in which Christian fundamentalists in Korea aim to make use of the state in legally and socially suppressing queer subjectivities. But this is not enough to explain the precarity that informants to this study found themselves in over the course of their everyday lives. Our focus needs to be also on how the *differend* principle applied to globalizing gay identities deploys a productive type of power in what Altman (1997) characterizes as the localization of Western symbols by gay communities in Asia. Foucault's further addition that power is dispersed throughout society, inherent in social relationships, embedded in a network of practices, institutions and technologies - operating on all the micro levels of everyday life (Plypla, 1998) clarifies this further. His term biopower/biopolitics, is more helpful, as it is an assertion that power is strongest when it is able to mask itself: "its success [power] is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Foucault, 1980: 86). This forces us to consider how this *differend* underpinned by power relations, produces normative modes around gay identity and homosexuality that are infused with Western terms that informants in South Korea are now navigating.

Biopower, according to Foucault (1979) is a 'technology of power,' which organizes human subjects as a population. To Foucault, the individual is both subjugated and constituted through power and an actor who disseminates it (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014). This wider description of power suggests that power is not only repressive but also productive (making things happen, building notions of pleasure and pain, and achieving outcomes) (Sharp et al., 2000). Thus,

my focus here is how this difference in discursive norms between South Korea's historical, social and political context around homosexuality and gay identity, vis-a-viz a universalizing global identity discourse built around self-realization and human rights, must also be interrogated around the productive effect of this *differend*. More specifically, exploring *how* informants were deploying these discourses to constitute themselves and their own sense of selfhood.

This is not to say that learning how to be gay in the South Korean context has no prior reference point. The absence of a Korean gay identity that is recognizable to Western constructs of a liberated gay identity, does not negate the specific ways in which homosexuality was expressed and practiced in South Korea. Prior to South Korea's integration into the global community, to practice homosexuality meant something different, it often meant sexual acts between two men were restricted to weekend liaisons, facilitated in a counterpublic type configuration which was expanded on by Cho J and Abelman (2011) in their study and what they termed the "rise of the bats." Moreover, Korean norms of homosociality often allowed for the practice of homosexuality to exist and be tolerated as long as it was never given a social identity outside the gender binary and heterosexual family (Lee I, 2016).

Thus, this chapter also aims to illuminate the hidden mechanisms and technologies of power that are operating to discipline the bodies and minds of my informants, who are also in-turn reproducing these discourses of marginality. There is also a corrective element to be found here. In that, highlighting this generative space allows us to understand how informant narratives also challenge dominant narratives of the Korean family being monolithic in its heterosexism through the diversity in ways they navigated this emerging transnational and cosmopolitan gay reality versus a Korean local realm. The settlement of this *differend* I argue, makes use of the productive modality of discourse in a generative space that is now functioning to reshape and transform the

meaning of a gay subjectivity in South Korea. This theoretical position, where a gay identity or subjectivity for South Korean men is not a fixed category, but negotiated; shifting in-line with contemporary, transnational conditions, presents a deeper nuance and more opportunities and possibilities for epistemological innovation.

Methodology Additions

As was the case in Seattle, the data generated for this chapter was gathered through 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork that included participant-observation and interviews in South Korea. The informants in this study were deemed as being at medium to high-risk in that the revealing of their identities could put them at risk of suffering real social and material harm. In South Korea, gay men have been known to be shunned not only by family members but also suffered real discrimination in the workplace that limits their advancement opportunities. Some of these narratives were even presented by informants in their interviews. Thus, as the researcher, I went to great lengths to ensure confidentiality for the participants. This included the use of pseudonyms, an ongoing consent process as well as giving the informants the option to use encrypted email and communication software that supplements what was outlined in chapter 1.

As has been covered extensively already in this dissertation, *Talanoa* methodology is an indigenous Pacific style of dialogue which premises the interaction between researcher and subject as a shared and generative space of intimate contact (Vaiotele, 2016). *Talanoa* takes the position that interactions between two people should be built around shared experiences, common understanding is arrived at through consensus, and the space is to be nurtured and respected at all times (See chapter 1 of this dissertation for more details). A common response from informants

was that this interview style made them feel a lot more comfortable with probing questions around family and cultural practices. As a Samoan researcher, parallels were often offered to informants that connected Samoan ways of understanding the world, and cultural normative structures that informed a Korean worldview. This was an example I deployed during the interview process.

“When we talk about family life in Korea, I guess I feel like I can relate a bit more than another Westerner in the sense I was raised Samoan. And Samoan is my first language. For us, our family and their well-being is part of our identity, and filial piety, although we don’t call it that is a central part of how we interact with our parents and other people older than us.”

Informants often responded to this aspect of my positionality positively as demonstrated by this response from one of the informant’s post-interview.

“I felt really comfortable with your interview style, I was interviewed by a woman last week about the drag culture in Korea, and it was really uncomfortable. She didn’t really know what questions to ask most of the time that were important; [this] interview was so much easier, we spoke for an hour and it flowed freely.” – Seoul informant.

As was the case in Seattle, the interviews were divided into six thematic phases, 1) demographics 2) culture and religion 3) coming-out narratives 4) exposure to Western culture 5) human rights discourses 6) dating and socializing. All formal interviews (20) lasted from between 45 minutes to 120 minutes in length. They were recorded digitally and transcribed into written form by the researcher. A tabulation of the interview participants’ demographic details, which

includes their place of birth, experience of living overseas (if any), social class (self-defined), religious background, degree of “outness,” marital status – in this case if they were in a romantic partnership of some definition – is included as appendix a to this dissertation.

The *Talanoa* (Narrative Discussion)

For Seoul informants, many relayed to me the nascent nature of a gay identity and community in Seoul. However, many were in agreement that this situation was on the cusp of change, an observation that I found difficult to disagree with. In my nearly two years away from Seoul, I had returned to a scene at least, that had become noticeably more public, vibrant, and noisy. Where barely anyone attended Pride when I first arrived in 2008, organizers I spoke with for this year’s festival (2018), estimated that there were over 120,000 who had attended. What appeared common to informant narratives was that central to helping facilitate these changes had been the role of Western discursive formations and constructs of gay identity, sexual politics and gay pop icons.

The Connections, Effects and Flows of Western Discourses, Cultural Productions and Ideas

“Maybe Korean society follows some sort of global standard. Actually, I think that Sex and the City helped us a lot. Because many girls thought after watching the show: “there are gay people” because they watched the show and after the popularity of Sex and the City, there are gay guys in society.” – Martin

The power of media to change people's perceptions around social formations and discourses is robustly debated in media studies literature (see Ball-Rokeach et al., 1976 for a review). Indeed, for many informants to my study, it was their belief that Western discourses that were circulated by media formats that intensified in the 1990s had a real effect on helping to shape both activist movements and their sense of an emerging gay self. When I met Martin, who was a well-known activist running Seoul's first ever shelter for queer youth, he intimated this idea to me strongly. The day our *talanoa* took place, he had just attended a church service at one of Seoul's few Christian congregations that welcomed sexual minorities. In fact, this church was headed by a White pastor from the United States. However, it was also a well-known and a long-established Church in Seoul's foreigner district. Renowned as a safe meeting place for queer Christians of all ethnic backgrounds to be able to network and share in Christian worship and fellowship. Martin had been raised Christian, more specifically Catholic, like I had. He was also from what he termed a low-income background. The parallels between our stories provided for a lively and lengthy *talanoa* where he shared a lot of intimate stories. One that included his own experience of praying dutifully to a Christian God to change him, and when God failed to respond, he finally concluded that there was nothing wrong about being gay.

For Martin, the role of Westerners and the specific constructed history of gay activism in Western societies as a discourse was useful in his line of work. He felt that it helped to also bring to light the struggles of Korea's own sexual minority community in inspiring others to action. It was also a type of political strategy. He said it helped to highlight the shortcomings of South Korea's government on the international stage. This strategy drew on a type of international modelling that has been examined closely in international relations theory about international law, state socialization and its ability to engender domestic policy changes within a community of

likeminded liberal nations (Slaughter, 1995; Cortell and Davis, 1996; Acharya, 2004; Goodman and Jinks, 2004; Guzman, 2008; Friedman, 2012; Ayoub, 2015).

“Inspiration is a big part, when I was in the UK, I visited some local gay support centers for youth. I realized, wow, this can exist even in small towns. In Korea we established our first center just 3 years ago in Seoul, the UK had one in Bournemouth, a small town over 10 years ago! For me it was it was like: this could be my inspiration. I went to the UN in Geneva to lobby the human rights committee and spoke to them about the Korean government and its bad behavior toward LGBT society in Korea [...]. So, it’s these things, connecting with other countries and share ideas.”

By deploying a discourse that posits the West as progressive in terms of the advancement of LGBT and queer rights, Martin intimates the utility of a type of benchmarking for Korean queer activists in particular. One that he sees has real political value in being able to mobilize political support and even resources. In fact, for his organization, the international connection was of great significance in being able to draw financial support from around the globe. The money that came from outside Korea was central to his organization being able to survive.

“This organization when it was established, we were funded from so many sources. We had some Korean donors, others are international, mostly US and UK donors. We made an account on global giving and then on there, most of the donors are from the UK and the US. Because the Korean American gay community helped us to financially set up originally – they held fundraising events and then sent us that money – and our biggest funding actually came from

Google. The key money¹⁴ (deposit) of our center, in grant form was from Google. We got another part from the “Beautiful Foundation” which is a benefactor for all minority groups in Korea who funded us for 3 years. Every month we get individual donor support as well.”

The fact that Google, a major transnational corporation, was a major financial backer of the teen shelter came as a surprise to me. This speaks to other conversations around what role transnational corporations will play in subverting nation-states’ ability to assert total sovereignty over the subjectivity of their citizens. Dennis Rondinelli (2008) for example, questions whether the expansion of transnational corporations provides a threat to democratic decision-making and national sovereignty. But, what is clear here then, is that as a discourse, the advanced progress of Western countries on LGBT rights is a formation that my informants themselves were deploying to their advantage.

The diversity of my informants’ backgrounds demonstrated that this was not just a phenomenon that was restricted to activists. Jonathan the next informant to be introduced in this study was an extroverted character. Born, raised and educated in Korea, he was pursuing university studies in the United States. When we met he was home for the summer and I was introduced to him by one of my fellow New Zealanders. She had met him one night out clubbing in Hongdae. She said that he was openly gay, and through the course of our interview, Jonathan would relay to me how he felt it easier to make friends with foreigners in general, especially gay foreigners. For

¹⁴ In South Korea, key money is a large deposit amount given to landlords that they in-turn invest usually in term-deposits that yields them large interest. In return, renters usually pay a smaller monthly amount of rent. In Seoul, key money usually starts around 5 million won, or equivalent to \$5,000 in local money. For a center or large office space the amount can be closer to 50 million won, or \$50,000 in local currency. Sometimes landlords will only require a key money deposit and no rent is paid for a fixed term. In that case, the key money can reach over 100 million won, or \$100,000 in local currency.

him, Western cities like New York, represented a type of aesthetic that he was attracted to. A style that he was drawn into by television shows like *Gossip Girl*, a show that followed in the tradition of *Sex and the City*.

“Gossip Girl was all about drama, and I felt so much guilty pleasure watching that show. And Sex and the City. I love New York, as it was set in New York City, my American dream comes from New York City. I just wanted to live surrounded by sky scrapers. They are fancy, elaborate, fashionable. Every region has their own style. New York has its own style, like a symbol of luxury.”

Jonathan’s fascination with New York through television programs, helped him to gain an appreciation of Western culture that he constructed discursively as more open, progressive and elaborate than Korea. The effect of this type of discursive formation can be seen in the responses that Sam, another Seoul informant gave in relation to what watching Western television programs, specifically, American shows, had had on him. Sam came from a Catholic family, were middle class, and explained to me that his father was a strict authoritarian. His desire was to move out of Korea and live abroad away from the restrictive confines of what a life in Korea would mean for him. He had just completed his military service when we completed his interview and I had known him for a few years before our interview took place.

Researcher: *Do you think seeing gay characters in Western shows being normalized was something that was helpful for you?*

Sam: *I think so. You know I never lived abroad. I was always curious about Western gay culture, how they live and get married I learned from these programs like Modern Family.*

Researcher: *What do you think you learned?*

Sam: *Gay dating and gay marriage. Because in Korea, most gay guys just want to hook up, they don't want a relationship. Because in Korea it is illegal to get married. I don't think they are considering relationships seriously. I am tired of this. So, Western movies make me want to move out of Korea.*

The desire for Sam to move to the West was in order to pursue a type of relationship formation that he sees possible outside of Korea. The ability to see this as a viable path for him came through the medium of the Western television program. Gomillion and Giulano's (2011) empirical study on the influence of media role models on GLB youth, showed that media platforms with GLB characters provided models and inspiration that create sources of pride, inspiration and comfort for GLB youth in their study set in Texas. Sam's responses seemed to mirror this finding and process. *Modern Family* that he referenced in particular, is a show that features a married gay couple that adopt a child and raise them within an extended family network that normalizes their existence in a type of Western familism that held great appeal to Sam.

Western forms of television programs as well as musical icons were a major factor in attracting informants to the liberating contours of Western discursive productions. For Soonchang, whom I befriended through a gay socializing app, his time in Australia as an elementary and middle school student had helped to introduce him to Western celebrities. These experiences became central to his development and understanding of a gay subjectivity, and further sensitized him to the diversity of queer identities.

“I watched Will and Grace, it was funny. I think it was the fact that it was all about gay characters that interested me. Will and Jack, I liked Will better, Jack was hilarious, but back then he was too flamboyant. I was young at the time so I thought about Jack’s character in that way.”

For Soonchang, the appeal of the show was mediated by a type of depiction of a gay masculinity as feminized. It appeared that at first, he rejected Jack’s character for being too flamboyant. The rejection of femininity has been identified by masculinities literature as common in the gay community. Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) analyzed Will and Grace using a queer theory critique to examine the liabilities of relying on the sitcom format to invite mainstream audiences to be able to engage with gay characters. In doing so they argued that the show reinforced heterosexism by equating gayness with a lack of masculinity. A trait that Soonchang seemed to take objection to. He however, learned to accept femininity as a trait that could be married with a gay masculinity when he went on to watch Ru Paul’s Drag Race, a show that has been largely credited for helping to create greater awareness around the diversity of queer identities (Edgar, 2011). Prior to this next excerpt, Soonchang had explained to me that he had dated primarily foreigners. White gay men in particular, who had exposed him to the show, and as a result, he was able to develop a view of queer subjectivity that was less “dragphobic.”

“I met a new guy in 2015 and he said you should watch it (Ru Paul’s Drag Race), we literally netflixed and chilled all the seasons and I just loved it. Crack up and funny. But also, I don’t know, when I was first dating my ex, I wasn’t transphobic, maybe a little dragphobic? I didn’t like the idea of gay people being portrayed feminine. That stereotype of how straight people think of gay people, when there are (actually) a lot of different types of gay people, you know what I mean?”

You can easily portray gay people like this. Even in Will and Grace, Jack was kind of like this. In movies they're always portrayed in fashion, flamboyant, I didn't kind of like that idea at all, that was my justification of why I didn't like drag queens back then. But I've opened up since then, I went to gay clubs a lot and I'm at peace with it. Finally, I accepted, it's really fine to be whoever you are, a drag or whatever, that's why I got hooked into it."

Soonchang's responses were important in that he was familiar with colloquial terms that have become popular in English speaking countries such as, "Netflix and chill" – which is a type of coded term which has been taken up by millennials to mean a number of things including unplanned sexual intimacy (Eble, 2017). However, he also demonstrated a process where his exposure to Western television shows helped him to not only gain an awareness of gay stereotypes as discourses, subsequent shows that he watched, also of US origin, helped him to critique the singularity of those discourses.

Soonchang's narrative is an exemplar of the power that Western media and cultural products has to be able to circulate discourses and ideas around queer subjectivities and their liberation. The liberation narrative can also be demonstrated by the conversation we had around the types of music he listened to. Soonchang was not the only informant to reference Lady Gaga as someone he enjoyed listening to specifically for the liberating narrative her music carried. For example, Lady Gaga's song "Born This Way" was labelled by nearly all informants to my study as a "Gay anthem"

"When I was younger, I listened to Amy Winehouse, Coldplay, Britney Spears and stuff, we're all gays. We all love Britney and of course Lady Gaga. Her music is big, Poker Face, Telephone, Born

This Way – *that was iconic. I liked it, I really liked the whole content of the song when I was 23 or 24, being born the way that you are. It was all about that thing.*”

Soonchang was not the only informant to have been inspired by Born This Way, in fact, Jeremy, who will feature later in this chapter said to me that the lyrics: *“Almost made me cry because it was about us, she was singing about us, making us free.”* Paul, another informant started singing it back to me during our interview, meanwhile Gene said that *“Born This Way really helped me to understand that it was OK to be who I was. You know it’s hard for me because I haven’t really told anyone.”* Jang S and Lee H (2014) examined how “Born This Way” as an example of popular music can influence political attitudes. They concluded that it helped to prime genetic explanations of homosexuality as “natural” subsequently affecting the way citizens’ evaluated gay rights issues. For my informants, the sense of pride they felt helped them to feel a greater sense of comfort in coming to terms with their sexuality.

The role of Western discursive constructs in constituting the gay subject in Korea should not be underestimated. Seo D (2001) and Bong Y (2008) instruct us that Korean society has never truly constituted a gay subjectivity that is recognizable in the West. When speaking to Martin about that idea he had this to offer.

“Yeah, maybe there are sexual orientation things like bromance, or the Hwarang¹⁵, in Korean culture, local villages with packs of guys that would just “play” with each other. But that’s not

¹⁵ As mentioned in the literature review, *Hwarang* were a group of military leaders that were chosen from sons of the noble elite during the time of the Silla Dynasty. It is widely accepted that non-platonic relationships between *Hwarang* came to be widespread.

“gay” that diverse identity is something you’ll see maybe in Southeast Asia or India, but not in Korea.”

For Bob, the role of Western musicians in particular was an important part of his journey toward coming to understand himself and his gay identity. As one of the older informants in the study, his narrative was important as his development of a gay identity came in a time before the advent of the internet. Thus, I interpreted the temporality attached to that experience as heightening the importance of pop music artists in circulating creative and ultimately liberating discourses around sexuality and sexual identity. During the 90s he told me, this was the primary way he learned about Western culture. Here, he emphasizes the role that Western musicians played in helping him narrate his own story.

“Back then I didn’t know about the gay situation among musicians. But the more I listened to music and the more I got to know about particular musicians, I realized that they were related to gay society. Mariah Carey, Janet Jackson and Madonna, they were huge fans of gay people so they are somehow related to gay people. Music is very influential. Even the music that people listen to in clubs were influenced by gay people. I am not a clubbing type person, I don’t really know the club music scene well, but music is very related to gay culture, which tells a lot of my stories.”

The appeal of Western ideas was not limited to just television programs and musical icons for my informants. It also extended to the process of coming-out itself. At a special event for the Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights in Korea (SLHRK) 20-year anniversary of its founding, I was introduced to my next key informant Chad. As is not uncommon when a foreigner arrives at an

event hosted by Koreans, the person with the best English is usually sent to accompany them and this task was unfortunately assigned to him. He sat dutifully at my table for the remainder of the event and later agreed to meet me for a formal interview as part of my study. He had recently returned to Korea after completing his graduate studies in the US. Chad had spent most of his life abroad in Vietnam before then. His narrative was important in that his exposure to the West was not indirect or mediated through a third party, rather, came from direct exposure to the West by going to university in America. It was there where Chad felt inspired to follow what he termed a particular “performative” coming-out narrative. For Chad, the performative aspect of coming-out, he felt – after much reflection on the disaster of his first coming-out to his parents – was in his own words: “a very White narrative.” He believed that there were specific differences between coming-out in non-White cultures that required more careful consideration. As such he regretted the way that he did so the first time.

“Anyway, the whole American media spoiled me. I literally staged a coming-out for my fraternity, this was a thing you did you see. I knew there was also a political element to it, I somehow needed to make a statement. It really is an American thing (performative coming-out), because as soon as it comes to a different country, the performative thing isn’t the only way to live. There are huge cons to coming-out in a performative way. But America sold it to me very well. It’s a very White narrative. [...] Here I was, a naïve 19-year-old who bought into that. I did it. I told my sister on a rainy July day. I know a guy who is around my sister’s age and was active in the gay students’ association. He came out to his mom and his mom was really supportive. He told me I should come-out to my parents like him and that is when I can start the conversation. Yes, I listened to a

friend from a single culture background. I would say now, think again when coming-out. You need more planning.”

Chad’s “first” coming-out narrative (he would relay to me later that he had to come-out again and again to his family), shows some of the risks associated with not having a culturally-sensitive understanding of what challenges can emerge when applying Western logic to non-Western contexts. Chad’s advice was to plan properly for a coming-out, and many of the informants of my study demonstrated that this was something that they were preparing themselves for in the future. The ability to re-negotiate their positions within the family as gay sons as well as the ability to cultivate a self-reliance in the case of complete familial disintegration and abandonment was something all informants held at the forefront of their minds.

Family, Self-reliance and The Coming-out Process

Aaron cut a tall slender figure when I first encountered him in Seoul before I left for Seattle back in 2015. At the time, he had just exited a long-term relationship with an American and was working with a local government organization. I had just exited my 2-year relationship with my ex-boyfriend and we befriended each other at a time when I was preparing to move to Seattle to begin my doctoral studies. We kept in touch while I was in Seattle and he was one of the first people I contacted when I arrived back in Seoul about possible participation in my study. For Aaron, he was the first Korean gay man I had met who had undergone a complete coming-out to

his parents. So, I was interested to find out how that process had unfolded and what possible insights he might be willing to share.

“I’ve come-out to everyone, but only my immediate family. That’s my dad, my mom and sister, but not my extended family, like my cousins etc. It was my dad that asked me not to tell them. I guess it was because of the humiliation or some kind of stress it might be for him from me going against the norm. [...] He did want to know why it took me so long to come-out, because I knew I was gay when I was 15, so it took me about 10 years to come-out. I said to him (father) when I came out that I had waited to tell them because I was not independent, I was not ready financially, and had to rely on my parents. They could have used their power to rule over me and they could try to change me. I was worried about that and I didn’t really know who I was either at the time. I decided that I needed time to define who I was and waited for the perfect timing before I came out.”

Aaron’s statement here touches on a number of factors that are signposted in prior literature. In particular, the issue of Korean social and familial norms influenced by Confucian notions of familial roles looms large in the background. Aaron’s father as an example, instructs him to keep his sexuality a secret to the extended family in what could be interpreted as an attempt to keep face (see Wong et al, 2005 for a review of this concept). Aaron’s decision to also wait till he was financially independent when read in-line with *chagi kwalli* or self-reliance (Abelmann et al., 2013) makes contextual sense. It should be noted that this emerging individual subjectivity (Campbell, 2016) has not been studied much before in the context of Korean gay men’s coming-out narratives.

In addition, in a follow-up conversation, Aaron also explained that his decision to finally come-out was driven in part by the fact that his parents had lost the ability to financially support him. This ended up being the major catalyst that allowed him to draw the conclusion that he held more power to renegotiate his own positionality in relation to other members of the family.

“I know that they can’t say anything about what I do now, it’s because they can’t support me. I had to quit my schooling in America because of them and now I rely on myself, so they feel regret for that.”

This sentiment of self-reliance was also an affect that Aaron was forced to grapple with after his family’s financial situation turned dramatically. We got to know each other a lot better throughout the year of my fieldwork and he explained how his family had once been wealthy when he was younger. However, due to some unfortunate business decisions by his father, in his own words, his family had fallen into what is considered a very low-income bracket in South Korea.

Self-reliance, or the ability to support one’s self financially as a major factor impacting a coming-out narrative was a common theme for many of my informants. This theme seemed to also cut across income divides. For Jonathan, who was from a middle-to-upper class family (self-identified) it was an issue that he was very concerned about. Jonathan had outlined to me how he had a great relationship with his family including a gentle father who had taught him to be good to others and a caring mother who he was extremely close with. But when it came to the issue of coming-out, he feared mostly what it would do to his parents as opposed to the effect it would have on him. In order to protect his parents, as well as himself, he thought the best thing he could do was prepare to be independent himself.

Researcher: *You haven't come-out to your parents yet, do you have a desire to?*

Jonathan: *Yes, I want to come-out to my sister first, but the only reason why I don't want to come-out is because they will worry about me. They will worry about my future life and still, they worry about my current life. They are always concerned about me. By the time I have full independence, have my own house, own job, then I am going to come-out to them.*

Researcher: *So your hesitation is due to your worry about how it would affect your parents?*

Jonathan: *Yes*

Researcher: *Do you think they would disown you?*

Jonathan: *I am preparing for that as well in a way, that's why I want to come-out to my family once I am independent. I'm such a bad son for saying this, but if they don't accept who I am, I will live my own life and they will live their own and we don't have to talk anymore [laughter].*

Despite Jonathan making mention of the fact that his cultivation of an independent self is to ensure his own survival of his future gay-self, the connection to his family is undeniable. In that his decision around coming-out is still constructed around maintaining their well-being in a way that seeks to protect them in any way he can. The fact that he denigrates himself for being a “bad son” for mentioning the possibility of living a separate life from his parents is significant. I argue that this marks out how he is constructing a more individualized form of subjectivity against the collectivist Korean world view that he was socialized into. The affectionate and instrumental residue of Korean familism is clearly evident in this statement, concepts extensively covered earlier in this dissertation.

Jonathan was not the only informant to demonstrate specific Korean-inflected constructs when describing their choices and thought processes around the coming-out narrative. The narratives of the informants that came-out suggest that Korean families actually produce multiple discourses of both inclusion and exclusion, which I also relate to Korean familism. Take for example Henry's story of coming-out. Henry is from a middle-to-upper class family and enjoys quite a high position in the Korean public service. He travels a lot for work and has plans to migrate abroad. When his family found out he was gay, rather than shun him, they tried to understand him and even participated in meetings for the parents of LGBT parents.

"It was 2 years ago. Back in 2015. At that time, I used to live alone in Seoul. My mother came to see me sometimes. And once I was not in my place and my mother came. She found some books that I got from the gay festival in Seoul. It was a book about homosexuality. So, she just took in the fact that I am gay. My father was somewhat calm because he knew I used to hang out with only girls and had a lot of gut feelings while I grew up. So later they had no choice but to accept it. They participated twice in the LGBT parents meeting. They try to figure out what is good for me. I wanted to immigrate to other countries. Before I came out, my parents didn't want me to go abroad. But now that they know I am gay, they are trying to understand. They try to respect my decision."

When Henry and I spoke after his interview, he relayed to me that his parents felt it was probably best that he did move abroad for his own sake. They feared for the difficult life he would have to endure living in South Korean society as a gay man. This response from his parents I relate to affectionate familism. Despite Henry breaking a heteronormative construct by coming-out as gay,

he is still a child of a Korean family that has been constructed as the central site of social welfare and social support. His parents have taken this responsibility seriously in recognizing the difficulties he would face living a life in South Korea. In doing so, they are accepting their role in keeping their family safe and intact. What was also central to Henry's narrative was the fact that he believed his family was a progressive family. He explained that they discussed politics with each other and perhaps of crucial importance, in his words "hated Christians." As I was to find with nearly all my informants the role of Christianity as an interacting variable would come to play a major part in the way familial dynamics played out, if and when, an informant chose to come-out.

Another informant who had come-out that had maintained a positive relationship with his family was Jeremy. I met Jeremy by chance at the same SLHRK event in Seoul where I had encountered Chad. Jeremy had been in a relationship with his boyfriend for 5 years prior and decided to come-out to his mother one day while watching television. On that fateful day, Hong Seok-chon, the first openly gay Korean celebrity had appeared on television. Upon seeing him, his mother blurted out that she thought he had a "disorder" or 문란 in Korean. Jeremy, enraged, decided that he would reveal his sexuality to her at 16 years old.

"She cried, she couldn't imagine that she had a gay son, me, and that she had to endure such a life, a difficult life. She wanted to know why I didn't tell her earlier. She began to tell the rest of my family and now everyone is OK with me being gay."

Although things were difficult for Jeremy's parents to accept at first, they came to accept his sexuality after a period of familial discussion, and constant renegotiating of expectations and roles

for him within the family. What is important about Jeremy's narrative is that he was from a low-income family. Crucially, his parents came to accept his gay identity once he was able to demonstrate his own independence. Jeremy had once wanted to become a Priest, having been raised Catholic. But after being told that he was a "sinner" by the church, he abandoned that dream to go into social work where he now advocates for the rights of the disabled and is a labor rights activist in general. He said he felt compelled to do so after experiencing much discrimination as a teenager having come-out so early. What Jeremy's narrative suggests is that familism as a lens is helpful in understanding how he and his family renegotiated his position within the family. Once he was able to prove his ability to support himself, the concerns from his parents about his sexuality began to wane.

However, particular forms of familism articulated itself in other less than comfortable ways through the coming-out process for other informants. For Vincent, his story of coming-out was one of forced trauma, a type of trauma that was only complicated and muddled by Korean familism. When I met him, Vincent was working for one of my friends at a bar in Seoul's foreigner district having completed his military service. Although the details were a little hazy it appeared that attempts had been made to make an example of him for being a type of whistleblower against sexual abuse in the Korean military.

"I was friendly with some of the superior officers and they used to make me lick the inside of their mouths [...]. One day they made us give feedback and most people write silly stuff like: 'I am doing good', 'I am satisfied', but I really wanted to change this one thing. But this was done really openly. Like you had to put up your hand. But this was stupid because people were gathered very close to each other. So, when I raised my hand the person next to me knew. One day, the sexual abusers –

the soldiers – went to jail, and they thought the gay soldiers like me were troublesome so they sent us to the mental hospital. They tried to make us have a problem and tried to kick us out. They required me to tell one of my parents in the process. So I talked to my sister. I said I liked guys, and she said “I knew it” she told me to come-out to my mom. [...] I told my mom and she was very shocked. She suggested that I was confused because I am very artistic and sensitive. My mum knows but she pretends she doesn’t know”

The complications of Vincent’s story brought together many discourses that circulate around gay men in South Korea. None in the least being the oppressive biopolitical frame that functions as a type of foucaultian governmentality (Foucault, 1991) in the Korean military. An agent of state power that works insidiously to control and regulate the bodies of gay men in South Korea. The biopolitical strategy of the Korean state is well-documented and was famously traced by Seungsook Moon’s (2005) exemplary book *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*. Moon argued that the South Korean state married militarized forms of citizenship in order to rapidly industrialize its economy during the authoritarian era. Thus creating a gendered form of citizenship that constituted women as docile subjects for the reproductive purposes of the Korean nation. Meanwhile, men were constituted as soldiers to protect the state, and industrious soldiers (labor) for the project of modernization.

Vincent’s narrative illuminated the still considerable biopolitical powers at the Korean state in contemporary times. This was evidenced by the way in which he was subject to dubious charges of mental illness, designed to set him up as a deviant body deserving of regulation, and as a result, a dishonorable discharge from the military. The fact that Vincent was required to tell one of his parents of his homosexuality was another example of this type of governmentality and the state

intrusion into the affairs of the South Korean family that exists today. Bringing a Korean familism lens back into the discussion also helps us to understand why his mother continues to pretend as if she does not know of his homosexuality up till this day. Later, Vincent would relay to me that he believed it was because she feared that it would destabilize familial harmony. This sits very much in-line with notions that I have outlined already that suggest that an instrumental familism lens (Chung K, 2010) is important and appropriate as it highlights the crucial task of maintaining the integrity of the familial structure as a site, to ensure accumulated social capital stays protected.

Paul, was another informant I knew before he came-out and I spoke with him after he had made the sudden decision to disclose his gay identity to his parents. For Paul, his decision to come-out to his parents had stemmed from his own broken relationship with a foreigner. Following what turned out to be a very messy break up, he felt the courage to tell his parents. Paul came from a very wealthy family and was the eldest of two sons. Having cultivated his own sense of financial independence from his family. The shock of possible familial estrangement did not faze him. When we first met, he was already working as a private tutor, spoke multiple languages, had many foreigner friends. He was now looking forward to one-day marrying his current partner and moving out of Korea.

“My parents stopped talking to me at first, but they didn’t kick me out of the house. I knew they wouldn’t do that to me. Even if they had, I was ready anyway. I saved up a lot of money already, and we’ve been talking about what my future plans are. I want to start my own businesses, write a book, do a lot of things. Even though they are disappointed that I won’t marry a woman, I’m still their son. They’ve got my brother anyway.”

Paul's narrative is important in that it adds depth and complexity to the narratives and information that other informants had already shared. He alluded to the fact that his relational position in the family as one of two sons helped ease his decision around the impact it would have on his parents. Prior literature had identified the issue of filial piety being a major concern for gay sons in Eastern societies like Korea. However, as Wang et al. (2009) suggests, filial piety should be seen as a negotiated process. Despite Paul obviously constructing a type of self-reliance that freed him financially of the burden of relying on his parents, he still did feel responsibility as a son to his parents. Having a younger brother shifted his relationality and the calculations he made about coming-out as gay. His statement that: "they've got my brother anyway," suggests that the responsibilities of the first son such as marrying and carrying-on the family line were eased somewhat. In later conversations, he intimated to me that his parent's welfare was important to him and despite there being a difference between the way he saw the world and the way they wanted him to live his life, their well-being and having them part of his life was of central importance to him.

For Anton, this was an issue that also loomed large when his sexual identity was discovered by his parents. When I met Anton, he was sitting at a table on his own at the end of a church service where I had met Martin earlier. I approached him after Martin asked if he would be interested in speaking to me about my study. Anton decided to meet me a week later in a café near his home in one of Seoul's wealthy neighborhoods. Our *talanoa* ended up lasting for over an hour as he relayed to me some of his own perspectives about gay life in Korea. He was the only child of a "Seoulite couple," spent years studying abroad and was rather savvy in some of the latest discourses circulating around the Western academy relating to queer theory and queer social movements in general. When speaking of his own coming-out story though, Anton explained that it was

particularly a distressing experience for him. Where his parents brought into sharp relief the importance of the divide between the family and an unprogressive Korean society constructed by Anton as an existential threat to any family that harbored a gay son.

“When I was 16, I was going through puberty and of course I started looking at pornographic materials while I was learning about sexual things. I watched gay porn on my personal computer at home and my parents discovered it when I was at home. [...] My parent’s reaction was very negative. My mother hated it, but my father, he said that there are many different types of people in this world. But our society is not progressive. Korea is not ready to accept these people. [...] Do not choose the hard way”

For Anton’s father, the issue was not one of whether he should accept or reject his son, it was whether his son would be able to survive in Korean society. For Anton, his parents – and for all informants in fact – family and its preservation were of utmost concern. Although the idea of staunch heterosexism within Korean society has been well-telegraphed, what this suggests then is that heterosexism may still exist within Korean society and the family, but it perhaps is as Wang et al. (2009) suggests, their roles as sons in the Korean family becomes a negotiated process once a coming-out takes place. Coleman and Chou (2013) when speaking of the term *Tongzhi* or comrade as a marker for queer identities in Chinese societies, reference the importance of familial kinship systems rather than sexuality as the taken basis of an individual’s identity. Jackson et al (2008) also argue that homosexuality as a constructed existential threat in East Asian societies is better understood through the lens of the challenge it presents to patriarchal normative structures of the family as opposed to a heterosexism one. The lens of Korean familism certainly bears similar

hallmarks, however, the emergence of individual familism complicates the Korean picture more as well as South Korea's uniqueness in East Asia in having a powerful Christian bloc.

Putting this aside momentarily, the process of negotiation with one's family is not that entirely different from what happens within Western families too once a gay son decides to come-out. Thus, the difference in the way Korean society has been constructed, i.e. intensely heterosexual and oppressive versus a Western progressive narrative suggests that discursive formations may need to be interrogated further for their temporal appropriateness. As agents of discursive deployment, what is clear is that informants themselves were producing and using a type of discourse that portrayed Korean society as backward. A factor that connects to the first theme outlined in this section that dealt with the flows of Western culture to Korea through various forms.

In following this line of reasoning, Anton's response and choice of words demonstrated the way in which "gay" was being discursively constructed by informants and other members of their family as an "other". Gay people were referred to as "these people" as if they sat outside the sphere of Korean society. In that the idea of gay, discursively constructed, by informants and those around them, was not only an "other," it was also a Western formation. An idea that sat in direct opposition to the hegemonic ideals that were present in South Korea's public sphere. Some informants themselves even intimated this in denouncing the way some gay people behaved at the Seoul Queer Culture Festival. For Dennis and John, two of the informants I had come to know through the clubbing scene in Seoul, the thought of attending an event like a Seoul Pride Parade was not something that appealed to them. John explained it as a type of gay-optic that was not something he felt made sense in Korea.

“The way they act in these parades, you know, things like dressing half-naked and do sexual kind of things, it’s not something Korean people like. It gives people the wrong idea of what gay is. So I don’t really think gay parades are useful in helping Korean society understand us.”

For Dennis, it related to the way in which the Korean gay movement as a politicized group had adopted tactics used in the West, something that he doubted would have much impact besides alienating Korean society at large.

“It may be something that’s effective in Western countries, but I don’t know about here in Korea, because Korean people are just conservative in general. So it’s not even about not being proud of who you are, it’s just not something Koreans recognize, so I don’t know if it’s a good idea in general.”

The potential of queer pride events to destabilize hegemonic discourses of heteronormative frames of gender and sexual identity structures is well-documented in queer studies and gay and lesbian studies literature (Duncan, 1996; Markwell and Waitt 2009; Grindstaff, 2014). Moreover, other studies have located gay shame, as a response to the discontents these events produce (see Halperin and Traub, 2009 for a review). Yet, the majority of these studies have been located and constructed using frameworks rooted in the West. None have taken up the sentiments iterated by Dennis and John centered from a Korean culturally-centered perspective beyond a lens that would label their sentiments as a product of internalized homophobia. This is unsatisfactory considering the ways in which Korean gay men are interpreting these practices locally. Something that a critical coloniality or post-colonial lens instructs us to deconstruct further.

Therefore, an important nuance that I found in the narratives of my informants who had come-out, is that their presence as a gay son in their families meant they were forced to renegotiate this position after coming-out. What is important to note though, is that this did not mean that they themselves represented a threat to their family. Rather, by coming-out, their relational identity within the family shifted. This shift meant for some of my informants, their families themselves narrated Korean social norms around sexuality as a threat to their gay son and then by extension, their family. Thus, the process of negotiation became focused on preserving the family against the conservatism of Korean society, rather than focusing only on how a gay son violates social norms.

Korean Backwardness, Western Benchmarking and the Winds of Change?

“Gay people have only just come-out to the surface recently. Everybody is very new to this concept and at the same time do not know how to react to this. And even for gay people, we don’t know how to explain and how to speak out. Which is very hard for us to request what we need and want. Gay society is quite young. We are too used to hiding in hidden places. We [are] still scared of coming-out to other people. It is hard to talk about our natural daily gay lives at our work. I think we need to develop and learn more.” – Aaron.

This excerpt from Aaron’s interview demonstrates the type of discursive construct that was common among informant narratives that configured a type of Korean gay community that needed to catch up with the West. For Aaron, Korean gay society was behind the West, which required gay men in Korea to gain courage from the path that had been trodden already by gay men in Western countries already.

This was a sentiment that Bob shared. Bob was an activist who worked with one of Korea's most well-known gay organizations¹⁶. He was in his 40s and one of the oldest informants to the study. I had been introduced to him by one of my Seattle informants who had worked with him in the past.

“There are not enough resources to be able to educate people in Korea around the gay concept. I learned a lot about gay concepts through the media, music and dramas. There was a magazine I remember called ‘buddy.’ I learned a lot about being gay through this magazine, I feel really sad because Korean society has a lack of resources to educate people about gay society.”

For Bob, he believed that Koreans had the wrong concept of gay sexual identity as a whole. Often, he explained, gay men have been discursively constructed as carriers of HIV and AIDS, diseases that have also been linked to the foreign other in mainstream discourses. Indeed, when I attended the multiple pride events now being held all over South Korea, Christian fundamentalists often held up signs that urged the Korean state to protect their children from HIV/AIDS, which homosexuality apparently helped to spread unabated.

Other informants also emphasized how this was a practice that impacted their own lives growing up in Korea. For Aaron, he talked about how he believed that this mindset began with the older generation and that an effort was also needed to educate the newer generation emerging about the specific differences between a gay identity and sexual health.

¹⁶ The name of the organization has been redacted for confidentiality.

“If we are waiting for the new generation, who will educate them? The older generation people do. They will just hand out to the younger generation their biased ideas. Just like my friends who thought HIV equals gay. I think we need to make an effort to educate both.”

As Woori Han (2018) explains, the cultivation of a queer developmental citizenship is an observable phenomenon in the discourses that circulate around queer festivals like the Seoul Queer Culture Festival. Han describes how informants in their study use a catching-up to the West type strategy to help mobilize support for the realization of gay rights in South Korea. Evidence of Han’s assertions are clearly present in my informants’ narratives here. For informants they storied this as a type of temporality. In positing that Korean society was basically living in a different time from the West when it came to gay rights. The division for them was generational. Similar to what my informants in Seattle had also storied. Despite the temporal difference, they believed that Korea was catching up slowly. Soonchang explained it to me as a type of gradual but eventual change that would bring Korea more in-line with what Martin called a global standard.

“I think it’s happening slowly, at a slow pace. Little-by-little in that way the Korean gay community is being affected I guess. This country will move forward on homosexuality. I see it everywhere. I’ve seen on YouTube, there are Korean gay tubers and transsexual YouTubers who host talk shows, using YouTube as a powerful platform these days. [...] If I have to compare gay guys in Korea in their 30s, 40s, 50s, there’s a huge disparity because we are more comfortable. Comparatively we’re more open, we’re not discreet and that’s proof of change.”

The referencing of platforms like YouTube, only made possible by the explosion of technological innovation must be seen as an important facilitating factor. When I spoke with Bob earlier, the only way he had been exposed to discourses around gay subjectivity and Western ideas was through music that came highly censored via the radio and magazines. Technological advancements present many more opportunities for transformation especially for younger gay Koreans. This was a sentiment that was echoed by Martin himself who was approaching his 40s and had witnessed the inception of the first activist movements in Korea from the 1990s.

“I see so many youths these days, and I can’t compare them with my experience. They are more visible, and I’m sure they will be more visible as more and more time goes by.”

As Martin and I spoke, a young person sat down at the table next to us. They subsequently took out a cosmetic pack and began applying makeup that included heavy eyeliner and blusher. This person who at first appeared as a cisgendered male when they walked in, began to take on a more and more androgynous appearance as the interview went on. By the end of the interview I realized that they may have actually been non-binary. But it was they who Martin was certainly referring to as he discreetly tried to draw my eye-line toward the table next to me using a slight nod and eyebrow raise.

Henry also storied the division between Korean social norms as backwardness that related to the temporal-specific Korean context. Namely, his explanation focused on generational temporalities and a type of conservative-residue that can be traced to this generational affect. According to him, those who were driving mainstream discourses that constituted Korean gay men

and resistance to their integration in Korea found their reference points in the era of the Park Chunghee dictatorship:

“Back in the 1970s era of dictatorship, they did not want diversity. They wanted to easily control people. Even that time, there were a lot of protests against the dictatorship. But those people are still conservative when it comes to LGBT issues. What they have in mind is an anti-dictatorship politics but the scope of their minds have not developed and expanded to other sectors. So it is very disappointing, the current President was a protestor back then, but his mentality still remains in that era.”

For Henry, his referencing of this temporality in the differences in people’s understanding of reform and protest not expanding and adapting to incorporate current contexts around diversifying forms of sexual identity set this relationship up as a type of generational dialectic. In doing so, he was inevitably couching the Korean perspective as one that paired Korean conservatives with that of a Korean backwardness on sexual diversity as a result of generational difference and temporality. But this temporality had found itself extended into contemporary times and was mediated by the continued privileging of a heteronormative frame among Korean masculinities.

“I have an impression of the difference between Westerners and Koreans. I came out to most of my foreign friends and female friends. Korean men are reluctant to accept LGBT rights. This is what I discovered. A few weeks ago, I came out to my French friend and he was very supportive because he has a few lesbian friends. I also think Korean women are more accepting than Korean men as this has to do with gender roles. As Confucianism is still pervasive in Korea it says men

should act in a “manly” way, which I relate to mandatory military service. Still, in Korea (the military) there is a ridiculous and outdated rule that says that those who commit anal sex will go to prison for 2 years. Sexual intercourse between a man and female is OK, but between a man and man is considered a crime. That is not acceptable in my opinion.”

In recounting the obvious injustices and uneven application of anti-sodomy laws in the military, Henry inevitably has to draw on a discursive frame that positions a Korean position as one that is outdated, oppressive and backward. In doing so, he juxtaposes on top of his own statement, the progressiveness of the West vis-a-viz the barbarism of the Korean state's biopolitical disciplining of the homosexual body. This in itself is a generative space, which can help to constitute the relative victimhood of marginalized sexual identities in South Korea and represents the productive modality of Western discourses on sexual politics that were deployed by informants in our interviews. It however, inevitably casts Korea in a light that has it steeped in backwardness and in need of reforming.

For Silas, another one of my informants from Seoul, the backwardness of Korean social norms around sexuality and non-heterosexual relationships can be evidenced through the way the Korean media censored stories that came from the West. Specifically, Silas purported that stories which reported on progress made in Western societies around LGBT rights were being discursively “Othered” by Korea's media. Having recently returned to Seoul from Shanghai, Silas was now a well-known drag artist ‘on the scene’ and had been featured in a few newspaper articles in both Korea and abroad. Silas became a key informant throughout the year, helping to introduce me to many people within Seoul's rapidly burgeoning drag scene. The frustrations that Silas felt were

related to how the Korean media presented or stayed silent on major events that affected the gay community abroad like the Pulse Night Club Shooting in Florida.

“I’m trying to stay away from the Korean media because they make me so angry. I saw how they reacted in Korea (when the Pulse Night Club Shooting happened) and they made it seem like an ordinary night club shooting. Not mentioning that it was a hate crime against the LGBT community. It wasn’t until there was some backlash from the community here that they finally reported it as a gay club that was targeted. Seeing behavior like that makes me realize that Korea is still very conservative.”

Again, the issue for Silas was the backwardness of the normative practices of the Korean media. Putting aside the issue of how the media is able to drive the production of mainstream discourses in general, the discursive practice of pitching Korea as backward was something that continued through the narratives of all my informants. Martin was able to add a bit more depth and nuance to the practice by referencing a historical frame in describing why he believed Western normative structures carried a productive element that related to benchmarking.

“In my own opinion, Korean people don’t think that Western culture is bad, they see it is OK, or better than our own Korean culture. They ‘other’ some things as ‘Western culture’ but they don’t think it’s bad. Inside them, Korean people don’t want to go back to Korean traditional culture. People don’t think that Western people are bad.”

For Martin, the relationship between Korea and the West is one of admiration and contrasts starkly with what a post-colonial critique would suppose. Where the liberating contours of Western normative constructs have been critiqued for its neo-colonial aspect, it appears for many of my informants, there is a suspicion that Western approaches to sexual identity integration are just better than Korea's backward and conservative reality. This is not to say that informants accepted Western superiority blindly, in-fact, they resisted other areas of Western influence, namely when it came to experiences of racism and micro-aggressions. Despite informants drawing on Western norms for its utility in storying their own gay identity development, as will be detailed in the next chapter, Westerners were still distanced in other contexts.

What cannot be denied here though is that the practice of benchmarking against the West as an idealized progressive other to reach for, follows a logic of teleological progression that theorists like Michael Connors (quoted by Altman (1997)) warned us against. Connors suggested that we should be careful to avoid the narcissistic transition narrative in diffusion whereby the trajectory of the Third World has already been traversed by the First. Yet, it was informants themselves who were reproducing this narrative. In many ways this has already been explained by informants through the social and material facets of the productive modality associated with this type of discourse. However, this practice had become a two-edged sword in some instances in Korea. This is because the rhetoric of drawing inspiration from Western formations inevitably constitutes a type of power-configuration that is open to a neocolonialism critique. This was recognized by anti-LGBT protestors in particular and deployed to their advantage when protesting moves to protect sexual minorities in South Korea from persecution. An area that will also be covered in the next section.

Discussion

The Differend

Lyotard's (1988) framing of the *differend*, which was referenced in the conceptual framework to this chapter purports that in a "case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, they cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments." In other words, when two parties are in conflict, that conflict cannot be resolved equitably unless they share the same discursive norms and terminologies that inform their interpretation of events. For the informants that I came across in my fieldwork there was a fundamental difference between a historical Korean way of understanding homosexuality, gay subjectivity, and the role of individuals in society and the family, versus that of the West. Evidence abounds in the narratives that have been presented already that my informants were placed in the middle of this space. Informants spoke of the problems with Korean frameworks around homosexuality being stuck in both a time warp and generational divide, whilst referencing the progressiveness of the West. In many ways, if we review the narratives of informants that have been presented, this *differend* as a generative space is necessary for informants to be able to constitute a new self. In other words, the *differend* a byproduct of transnational flows is important precisely because informants needed it to help setup this dialectic in order to constitute new notions of the gay self. Especially if we accept that there exists no clearly formed gay group consciousness in South Korea, like Bong Y (2008) and Seo D (2001) ascertain.

One of the effects of this is that it then brought their own sense of self into direct conflict with Korean normative constructs of sexuality and gender which have been documented as

privileging heteronormative structures. This can be seen by how the Korean self for informants was constituted by contextually-specific Korean discourses that include Confucian and Christian normative effects. Therefore, I argue that informants were in-turn constructing their sense of a gay-self between these two positions. I further add that in order to choose a linear coming-out path, an informant would in essence have to discursively construct a situation where they were seen to be rejecting Korean backwardness in favor of a modernizing cosmopolitan identity construct around sexuality. In other words, to justify the rejection of a Korean way of knowing homosexuality and a gay identity, they *needed* to demonize it.

Moreover, with the proliferating ways in which contemporary fields like queer studies produce diverse discourses around sexual identity and gender identity, due to Korea's connected nature with the West, these discourses are finding their way into Korean vernacular. When speaking to Martin and Chad, they both explained to me how terminologies that were coming from the West was also being used in contemporary Korea, but not always in a good way. The example Martin focused on was TERF, or Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist. This movement is well-known as being specifically exclusionary of transgender women within the project of feminism. He explained to me that in Korea there was a rising TERF movement and they were gathering on a website that was titled WOMAD calling themselves TERFs. For him the issue came down to misunderstanding and misappropriation of terminologies.

“For me the issue is the Korean queer community just use the phrases without really knowing its proper meaning, because it useful. But to me, they didn't study it. Or know the real meaning behind it. Some people say, I'm a queer feminist, but then I'm like, 'no you're not, you don't really understand it.' That part I think is dangerous because they misuse the terminology.”

The dangers associated with the malleability of Western queer constructs to be used by anti-queer groups in Korea are clearly displayed here in Martin's narrative. In this situation, the transformative possibility in this discourse is being used to instrumentalize the generative possibilities of this *differend* by two opposing groups: Korean queer liberation movements, and anti-queer/trans movements. The significance of this for gay men is that the discourses that surround them are immediately generative and opposing at the same time. Yet, both are drawing from the same transnational frame. As a result, corrective action needed to be taken in order for this frame to be deployed in a way that would be able to constitute and normalize a gay subject in the Korean public imagination. This is also another reason why informants constructed a Korean frame as being backward and steeped in conservatism. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Anton's explanation.

"I think it's a little too early to apply all those ideas to Korean society, because we don't even have a separatist movement, everyone's so narrow-minded. We don't even have recognition for a basic movement. I think Korean society is at the same stage as the 1960s in the US. The current Korean society is so conservative, it's like the 50s and 60s in Europe [...]. Some of the older Korean people confuse gays with transgender. When they travel to Thailand they see transgender performers, in their minds homosexuals and transgender people are not different. Some of the feminists think MTF (male-to-female) transgender women are trans boys not women. This is a common misunderstanding. Also, those who studied abroad about some of these discourses in the West, they understand it too shallow. They don't understand how it applies to all of society. Sometimes these 'liberal young men' say they can accept gays but can't accept radical feminist

politics. Another really bad thing is the misuse of the concept of gender construction. They cite Judith Butler but they misunderstand Butler's idea. I even saw some people say, well, gender and sexuality are social constructs, so it's not a static thing so you can change your sexuality and some of them even support conversion therapy using this idea."

Anton's explanation is important for two reasons. His narration of the situation in Korea as being behind the West is important in raising awareness on the work that needs to be done in changing social conditions for Korea's much maligned sexual and gender minorities. In particular, the fact that both progressives and detractors are drawing from the same theoretical and discursive frame to build their cases demonstrates the dangers of mistranslation and how these imported terminologies can be misused and abused according to Anton. However, in the process, Anton's explanation also illuminates how the *differend* is being settled in favor of Western constructs by many of my informants. The differences between a Korean and Western normative structure around sexuality in this case is not being questioned, rather, just being incorporated and deployed at will. Moreover, his depiction of there being a correct way to deploy these discourses that originate from the West also construct them as being hegemonic norms in Western societies as a singular discourse.

Biopower and Western Normative Frameworks

The power of Western normative constructs to form informant narratives is perhaps best encapsulated by the surprising frequency *Sex and The City* (SATC) was quoted by informants. Jane Arthurs (2003) argued that SATC's novelty was in its ability to migrate woman-centered and

sexual explicit discourse to television. Jane Gerhard (2006) adds that its popularity was due to its place at the juncture of post-feminism and queerness. Its queerness coming from its attempts to weaken the naturalized and binding normativity of sexual binaries. The sexual freedom that was put on display by the main characters represented a type of sexual subjectivity and practice that informants recognized as not only foreign to Korea but also a desired object of attainment. Here is another excerpt from Anton's interview:

"I thought it (SATC) stated some realities of dating life among professional people, even among gay friends. We compared ourselves to the main characters of that drama, "which is my character?" I rather think I'm kind of like Charlotte in our group. My other friend is like Carrie, another one is like Miranda, and even for us, Samantha is a sex symbol. Many of my friends claimed to be like Samantha [laughter]."

The fact that almost all informants quoted this show demonstrated some important points and processes that were on-going. The flow of Western discourses to South Korea during the mid-90s of sexual exceptionalism was not just of cultivating more freedom for gay or queer subjectivities, informants narrated it as part of a wider flow of Western normative constructs around sexual freedom as a whole. Informants often spoke about how in Korea to be sexual in public was just not "normalized" behavior. Suggesting that sexual freedom itself was a thread that helped to constitute a gay identity. In adopting a Foucaultian frame to the analysis of discourse in this situation, we can see the generative aspect of this narrative. For one thing, the productive facet of this discourse of Western sexual exceptionalism was producing models of activism and

strategies that could be adopted in South Korea for raising awareness for the plight of sexual minorities. Here Bob explains the generative effect it has in the Korean context from his experience.

“Developments in Western countries was definitely helpful because they provided a lot of strategies and ideas to work on gay rights. The organizations in Korea were weak because they did not have enough workers and activists. In order to utilize the sources from Western cultures, they tried to hire more people as permanent workers, we didn’t have an office like we do today. We have tried to increase our budget support and now we are using the resources from Western countries, we analyze them and figure out how to utilize it in Korean society.”

As an activist, Bob stories the usefulness of drawing from a global framework in Korea. His organization attempts to localize the practices that flow from outside sources that are positioned in the West. This type of strategizing operated in many ways. At the Seoul Queer Culture Festival, even the practice of naming using the term “culture” took on discursively productive reasons. In Western countries, it is not common to find a pride event using the term “culture” in its name. When I spoke with other activists, it was believed the term “culture,” or 문화, would resonate better with local Korean society, as “cultural festivals” or 문화축제 themselves were commonplace in Korea. By taking the inspiration for a pro-LGBT event from other pride celebrations rooted in the West, they could then use local practices to draw a type of congruency with normalized Korean practice.

As Martin also storied in his interview, much like many terms popular in the Korean queer vernacular, the term “queer” has no Korean equivalent, and has just been transliterated from

English, directly into Hangeul. I saw much evidence of this all over Korea's many queer festivals where terminologies like "gender non-binary" "gender neutral bathrooms" "I am queer" simply were written in phonetic Hangeul as opposed to translated into the Korean language. By positioning queer as a type of "culture" at a festival to be "experienced," I speculate that this practice performs a dual function. The first is obviously in raising awareness of the plight of queer Koreans, but also an unintended consequence is that it may also allow for "queer culture," however loosely defined, to be continually "Othered" in the imagination of heteronormative mainstream Koreans. Another area of possible further enquiry.

Another productive modality was also storied by Martin. This was a productive power that helped to garner more support in real financial terms for activists. It also helped to constitute the Korean gay as marginalized, oppressed and subjects of state tyranny. In doing so, they were able to use this relative positionality within the transnational gay assemblage as a position worthy of global condemnation. Henry, in his interview also believed in this productive modality, of Western discursive constructs to materialize change as demonstrated in this excerpt from his interview. In doing so, he adopts a decidedly utilitarian analytic in theorizing the behavior of Korea's older generation.

"Like I said, the older generation switch their beliefs in terms of their own benefit, right now, in this society, they don't find benefit for supporting gay society, but international organizations join and speak with us to help move our society. This will lead to conglomerates and big transnational corporations feeling pressure. They will participate in this social activity and then these companies will change their moves which will lead to an increase in the chances of the older generation changing their perspective."

Familism and Negotiating New Positionalities

What informant narratives intimated was that the issue of coming-out in Korea was often a negotiated process within the family. In fact, despite the pre-identified notions of heterosexism derived from Confucianist heteronormative-patriarchal structures existing, the idea of conservatism being a barrier to coming-out was not necessarily something that informants felt stopped them from disclosing their sexual identity to family members. Rather, these norms mediated their approach to the coming-out process. For example, the tendency of informants to prepare for a coming-out by cultivating self-reliance, I argue, demonstrates how the varying forms of familism affect informants' narratives and behavior. When informants spoke about the issue of self-reliance, there were generally two-lines of rationalization deployed. The first, was the idea of being able to provide for themselves, in the event that familial support would be taken away. The second was negotiating how best to fulfill their duty as a son in a Korean family under new terms.

The multiple forms of Korean familism lenses that were outlined earlier all present in the narratives of informants and can be seen to be mediating informant choices around sexual visibility. However, what seems to be the most predominant forms were instrumental familism and affectionate familism. Informants often narrated their relationship to their families from both an instrumental and affectionate lens. Martin's story helps to illuminate this process.

Researcher: *"So you've come-out to everyone but your mother, what are the reasons why wouldn't come-out to her?"*

Martin: *“I’m not sure she can handle it, I kind of fear for her, for me it’s OK, I’m old enough, but for her, I don’t know. I’d rather keep it in the ground.”*

Earlier in the interview, Martin had spoken extensively about how he felt so much affection for his mother’s story and responsibility for her as the only son as she had suffered through a terrible divorce.

Researcher: *“You think the harm will be on her? So, that’s why you hesitate?”*

Martin: *“Yeah, there’s this funny story actually. She found something, some documents about sexual orientation and she asked me, are you gay? So I said no, and said: Why do you ask me that question? She said she found the documents and she said she thinks it means I’m gay. And she acted like she knew it deep down inside but wanted me to deny it. So I went along with it and kept denying it for her sake. But I don’t think even she knows deep down inside that I am. Because she always asks me to buy her skincare and cosmetic products, and I always ask her, why do you ask me to do that? And she says, you know better than me. And yes, she still asks me, when are you going to get married? I don’t know why she still asks that. But after I turned 35, she stopped asking, even my relatives when they ask me, she stops them and tells them “leave him be”. She thinks I’m kind of broken, or I’m in a poor state, she pities me, she thinks I went the wrong way because I worked for an NGO. For her generation it’s a strange job. And I didn’t date a girl, she never saw a girlfriend. She thinks I had problems and feels pity for me, so she says: ‘leave my son alone.’ I feel bad, because I am so happy, but for her, she pities me.”*

For Martin, his decision to not come-out can be seen as a response to the instrumental function of the Korean family and the possible affects it brings forth. His desire to protect his mother can also be understood through the lens of affectionate familism mediated by the presence of a uterine family lens. As the only son of a family that was now fractured due to divorce, his decision to not to come-out was related to his mother's well-being not his own. For he believed that he lived a wonderful life in Korea and was free to live relatively openly as a gay man. Yet, he was not "out" beyond his close circle of friends. The bond he shared with his mother, he would share in his interviews related to his father's abandonment of their family. His mother built a special connection with him as a single mother, I postulate, to help her navigate the patriarchal nature of Korean society.

Thus, his mother's reaction, much like Vincent's mother, can also be understood through the lens of instrumental familism. In that she chose to deny her son's homosexuality in order to maintain family harmony and strengthen the family that she had built for herself. With only one son, an external social norm that "others" a gay or homosexual identity would represent an existential threat to her uterine family. Thus, in many ways, her bargaining with Martin around his sexual visibility, where she appeared to construct an internalized white lie should be seen as an adaptive strategy for his mother. A strategy designed to ensure the family stays intact. This was further evidenced by her desire to protect her son from the enquiries of curious extended family members who sought to understand Martin's perpetual bachelor status. A positioning that Martin himself was happy to play along with.

In speaking with Martin further, this did not provide him with any mental difficulties that a model like the Cass Model purports occurs when a gay man is not able to disclose his homosexual or gay identity to all others in their lives. The peculiarities of a gay activist in South Korea being

“not out,” referenced by Martin as a type of faceless activism, speaks to the power of the forces of familism and its contours in the South Korean context. For Martin had been an activist most of his adult life, yet, had never had his sexual orientation revealed outside of this context. What this suggests then, is that for Korean gay men, decisions around sexual visibility are not an individual decision or linear developmental process. In-line with Korean identity formation processes, sexual identity or its visibility is negotiated based on relationships that Korean gay men have with different groups of people within the family. Rather than understanding Korean familism and Confucian normative structures as being a structural block for coming-out in relation to Korean gay men’s narratives alone, it should also be viewed as a possible site of negotiation.

To be certain, for some informants, the expectations of the filial son did induce a type of response that disciplined their behavior to fall in-line with patriarchal masculinities. Sam’s narrative in particular draws attention to this outcome.

“I can’t imagine (if I come-out). First of all, my family doesn’t believe in homosexuality. My parents are from a different generation when homosexuality wasn’t common in Korea. They don’t even question whether I’m gay or not. Even if I act girly or like fashion. My dad would get really mad and first off, I’d get kicked out of my family. My Mom would maybe try to change me. Some Korean parents believe it can be cured. So, I better not come-out to my family, it will be better for both me and my parents, I can live a separate life, in my family, my sister is pressuring enough.”

Sam’s narrative is important in that his construction of a hypothetical coming-out bears the hallmarks of many of the pre-identified discourses in prior research around the marginality of Korean gay sexuality that is derived from a generational temporality. However, his statement that

“homosexuality wasn’t common in Korea” is important in our discussion. An argument presented in this chapter is that the constitution of a gay identity that we recognize for informants came from outside the Korean normative frame. If it was not so common in Sam’s parent’s generation, then what has driven its visibility in more contemporary times, if not through the referencing of Western frameworks?

Moreover, what he references is part of a thread that has been running through many informants’ narratives as well as in prior literature: the prevalence and perpetual existence of patriarchal masculine privilege and heteronormativity in the Korean family identified under the term Confucian familism. But for Sam, it can be argued, his narrative still is mediated by other familial lenses. His response to his family’s structure was to construct a type of individual familism for his future that allowed to keep his family structure secure (instrumental familism), which relates to his concerns for his sister and parents (affectionate familism). In this way, we can see that despite the rigidity that Confucian familism provides in some contexts, there are multiple responses that informants may choose. For Sam, his choice was to keep his sexual identity hidden.

The Role of Christianity

The role of Christianity in restricting gay men’s ability to find acceptance and legal recognition in South Korea is well-documented and has been reviewed earlier in this dissertation. For many informants in my study, the role of Christianity was referenced repeatedly in their narratives in different forms. For many, they had been exposed to churches growing up through their families. However, many of them came to reject the Church as they grew older, something that a lot of their parents did as well. An interesting phenomenon was that some were exposed to the church

randomly. As the Korean form of Christianity often involved active evangelical recruitment practices, some informants were actively recruited by the church at a young age. Here Vincent explains how he found himself at Church as a youngster.

“I don’t know why, but I think my house was near a church. When I was young, people stopped me while I attended school to have conversations with them and bring me to Church. I felt like they were selling God since they were offering snacks and toys. I tried to go to Church because they were working hard and I felt bad. It wasn’t such a hard thing to do seeing it was near my house. A lot of art teachers were from the church and they liked artistic students so they tried to bring those students to church. I was curious about the church because of that reason.”

But, the majority of my informants had in the end come to reject the church as being oppressive not just to Korean gay and queer subjectivities as a whole, but to the social progress of Korea as a society. Anton in particular, referenced the historical genealogy of Christianity as part of his interpretation. An interpretation which posits Christianity was once a progressive force, but now had become more of a conservative hazard in contemporary Korea.

“I think Christianity in modern Korea has been a modernizing force because when the Protestant Church was first introduced to Korea, many missionaries founded schools – by American missionaries or so – the Catholic church even before that. When Koreans first got to learn Catholic things, it was kind of an enlightenment for the Joseon dynasty. It had some kind of egalitarian doctrine. [...] Nowadays, the Christians are the main enemy to progress in contemporary Korea.”

Anton's response mirrors what has been written about the historical genealogy of the Korean Christian church. Clark (1986) who wrote a comprehensive historiography on the history of the Korean Christian Church in English supports Anton's statements. Further to this, according to Cho M (2011), Christian conservatives, saw their political influence wane at the successful ushering in of democracy in Korea at the end of the 1980s. He argues that Christian conservatives once found their power in the anti-communist discourse perpetuated by the authoritarian state. Once this disappeared, so did their opportunity for defining the 'other' and essentializing them as an enemy of the state. Informants themselves were very aware of this.

The importance of this is when we juxtapose this with informants' way of storying their own familial structures and decision making processes around coming-out. What their narratives showed was that the Korean family as a whole was malleable enough to find a way to integrate a gay son in a new form of positionality that is negotiated by members of the family. However, where this is complicated is when there is a strong Christian element within the family. The power of Christianity in the Korean public sphere is already well signposted in this dissertation. What this points to, is a public sphere impregnated with Christian discourses around heteronormativity and morality – historically bestowed – that according to my informants appears more rigid than a Korean family that was conservative, but possible to navigate through adaptive strategies. If we look to Anton's coming-out story again, we can see this tension clearly in the response of his father when he came out.

“He said, there are many different types of people in this world, but our society is not progressive, Korea is yet to accept these people.”

For Anton's father, the fact that he had a gay son was disappointing for him, but his disappointment was couched in an instrumental sense in that he feared for his son's safety and ability to succeed due to wider societal structures. Within the family itself, Anton was never disowned or kicked out of home despite coming from a wealthy family with reputation in tow. The psychological effect of religion that othered him was on display in his mother's reaction.

Researcher: *What did she say?*

Anton: *You are dirty, and even now she says to me that I should date a girl, maybe I can change my identity. [...] She's not so accepting; she's still trying to deny the reality.*

Researcher: *Is it because of the religious aspect?*

Anton: *Yeah, I really think so.*

Anton also came from a strong religious background. He took pride in his Christian background in relaying to me that it gave him guiding principles for his life. But it was also, clearly, something that affected how he was navigating his gay identity deeply.

Researcher: *How do you resolve being a Christian and being gay in Korea? As we know, the Christian community is aggressive in stopping the advancement of LGBT minorities.*

Anton: *Frankly speaking, I haven't really resolved the problem. It's still complicated in my mind. How to reconcile that relationship; I've thought about it very much and still no conclusion.*

Anton was not the only informant to grapple with the issue of religion when coming-out. For Silas, his narrative brought forth the intertwined nature of Christianity with the Korean

diaspora in the US. Having spent most of his formative years in the US, Silas indicated that his family had fallen into a Christian Korean American community in California. For his family, it was the Church network that had helped them setup in California and supported them as they transitioned across the Pacific.

“My entire family is Jehovah’s witness. Right when we moved to America my mom got help from other witnesses. They were a Korean congregation, they helped us in going to school and moving in. [...] The thing is with Jehovah’s witness is that I was born into it. I didn’t have a say whether I liked my religion or not. I was forced to attend these meetings. But as I started to figure out what I was, my mentality began to crash. I told my mom in high school (in the US) and she broke down and said “no”. She told me that I am going through a phase. So I kept it hidden. Then I went onto college and I became more forward. I told her “Hey I’m gay, I have a boyfriend.” She stopped talking to me, stopped my allowance and didn’t even support my tuition for college. It was a very rough year for me. [...] After that I didn’t talk to my mom for 3 months, I had to juggle different jobs and stuff. Eventually she realized she loves me more than the religion.”

For Silas the role of religion had a profound impact on his positionality within the family. In building their social support networks through the Church, their familial structure was affected by Christian normative constructs, so much so that he was nearly disowned when he decided to come-out. Since then, his mother had come around and Silas was now studying again. What marks Silas’s narrative out separately from other informants is that he spent most of his formative years in the US. Meaning, he was directly exposed to Western constructs of sexual visibility including what can be considered the linear coming-out process. In fact, what Silas’s narrative demonstrates

are the two mediating factors that seemed to be having the biggest effect on informant narratives. Informants were more likely to experience exclusion or feel an existential threat from religious norms as opposed to Korean conservative norms. With conservatism often being narrated as a type of affect that could be negotiated. Almost all informants relayed to me that Christianity was far more rigid and the biggest stumbling block to making any progress in South Korea because of the hold it has politically in the public sphere. A claim well-supported by prior research.

But another important aspect of Silas's story is that the direct exposure to a Western narrative of coming-out, it appears, made it more likely for those informants to take a more linear approach to the coming-out process. Silas and Chad, the two informants who had spent the most time living abroad demonstrated this. Thus, the role of religion for informants can be described as being impactful in terms of driving discourse on sexuality and deviant forms of it for exclusion in the public sphere and in the family. Depending on the level of religiosity adhered to, it would make coming-out more difficult.

The connection here though between Christianity and Western normative constructs is an obfuscated one. In Korea, both came from outside, namely centered in Euro-American locations. Christianity was once an emancipatory force and is now seen as an impediment to social progress. Sexual identity politics, or sexual exceptionalism embodied in the discourses that seek the liberation of queer, namely gay subjects shares the same geographic-historio-genealogical roots as Christianity. Yet, this connection is often overlooked. Temporality and teleological obfuscation has helped to elide the connectedness both these discourses share in their power configuration with Korean society and culture. In other words, although they entered Korean normative frameworks at different moments of history, their entry was both premised on a power-configuration that places

them as superior, progressive, and modern, above what was inherently barbaric and in need of rescuing, in the Korean local.

Conclusion

The narratives produced by informants in Seoul demonstrated that there were multiple discourses around family, religion, culture, coming-out, sexual visibility and Western sexual exceptionalism they were navigating. Discourses that they were adapting to, negotiating, producing and reproducing through a variety of contextually specific ways. In particular, what this chapter has argued is that informant narratives demonstrates that although prior literature has highlighted the role of intensely heterosexist familial norms related to Confucian familism and its potent residue in the Korean context, this context is now more often than not, a negotiated one. Informants were forming new positionalities within their families that demonstrates a diversity in narratives that prior literature has not documented well.

For one thing, despite Confucian familial norms persisting in various forms, informants adapted to this through the cultivation of self-reliance and planning careful strategies to approach the coming-out process. For informants that did come-out, the process became relational, in that their relationships with specific family members also dictated how far along the familial chain their disclosure would go. Moreover, the multiple forms of Korean familism were present in the ways in which the informants narrated their own stories. Throughout the entire process, none chose to break off relations with their families. This suggests that for Korean gay men in Seoul, coming-out was not a journey of individual subject or personhood construction alone. Rather, one that was mediated by the particular context of their familial relationships.

Globalizing normativities like a cosmopolitan gay identity has clearly discursively productive modalities. For informants, the power of Western sexual norms presented opportunities for pushing Korean society forward. On an individual level, it also allowed them to constitute a gay identity that was progressive, forward looking and created imaginaries of gay relationships that are not possible in South Korea at the moment. This discourse inevitably led to informants discursively setting up South Korean society as the lesser other, in relation to sexual identity politics. This practice is theorized and predicted by Jasbin Puar, through their theory of queer assemblages and homonationalism (to be further discussed in the next chapter). In this light, we can see that Korea and the West has been constituted by informants in a *differend*-type power configuration that informants settled by using the terminology of the West. In doing so, the reflexive critique is lost, as informants re-inscribed the superiority of Western ideologies. The productive modality of these discourses and formations circulated through Western films, television programs and music, which all informants took to be important factors in exposing them to ideas that related to a gay identity.

Of additional importance and note is the role of Christianity. In the last part of this chapter, I analyzed informant narratives through the lens of Christianity and identified how it impacted informants' experiences. What is clear is that Christianity functions more like an interaction variable, in that Korean familial norms show more signs of malleability in being able to incorporate a gay son. For informants whose families did not have strong ties to Christianity, the possibility of renegotiating space for them within the structure of the family was generally difficult but not impossible. However, when Christianity is also added into the context, it creates a different outcome for informants which related to the way in which Christianity operates in South Korean discursive formations.

For informants' families, the issue for them was the ability of Christian conservatives to set the public agenda in terms of discourses around sexuality that are wedded to state biopolitical forces. Informants' family members referenced the difficulty their children would face as a result, being the reason for fearing for their child living a gay life in contemporary Korea. The other factor is that Christianity was also a way for some informants to link with other Koreans when they moved abroad, as was referenced by Silas in his narrative. Meaning, Christian norms and ways it permeated familial relationships, caused stress between them and their parents. One can see through Silas's narrative that the reach of Korean Christendom is clearly extensive, affective and transnational.

This nuance is important, for this allows us to disentangle the ways in which conservative norms are almost always paired with Christian constructs in Korea in the literature as primarily being oppressive to gay identities. Yet, Christianity is a religion of the West, when by contrast, Confucian normative structures are indigenous to this area of the world. The marrying of the two can easily be taken for granted as their relative outcomes on repressing diverse sexual identities can be seen to share many similarities. However, what this misses is that South Korean society and the family in particular has undergone major social structural shifts. Firstly, moving through the post-authoritarian regime, across the democratization period, in-line with rising liberalism and now with the explosion of transnational connections post-IMF¹⁷ and Global Financial Crisis Korea.

What I hypothesize here at the end of this chapter is that in many ways, the Korean family and the multiple forms of Korean familism that have transformed it demonstrates its flexibility historically. Therefore, informants who were storying it as a site of negotiation and possibility is

¹⁷ The Asia Financial Crisis of 1997 required the South Korean government to receive a substantial bail-out from the International Monetary Fund. This period of history has become known in South Korea simply as the IMF crisis.

supported. The Korean family has evolved to incorporate instrumental, affectionate and individual forms, and is more dynamic in 2018 than what discourses of conservatism popular in prior literature in both the US and Korea would allow us to theorize. This inevitably posits that the biggest factor holding back progress for Korean gay men then is the fundamentalist Christian bloc. When Christianity is removed as an interacting variable, it appears that new possibilities emerge for informants.

In the next chapter, I will home-in specifically on the generative nature of Western discursive constructs around sexual visibility and the racialized elements of transnational modernity. I will discuss in more depth Jasbin Puar's concepts around assemblages and homonationalism. I will also introduce a Critical Race Theory lens to demonstrate the connectedness and convergence of racialized and racializing forces through the narratives of both informants in Seoul and Seattle. This chapter has allowed me to identify some specificities of the Korean context in Seoul, the next aims to illuminate how Korean gay men in Seoul and Seattle in 2018 have their sense of self, subjected further to transnational convergences around racialized forms of modernity as part of the global gay assemblage.

Chapter 5: Insidious Collusion: Exploring Issues of Race through the Narratives of Korean Gay Men in Seattle and Seoul

Chapter Summary/Abstract

In this chapter, I draw on insights from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Jasbin Puar's concepts of homonationalism as an assemblage, to demonstrate through informant narratives, how Korean gay men in Seoul and Seattle are constituted as both racialized and racializing subjects. I argue here that the productive modalities of whiteness mediated informant narratives in some contexts as a hegemonic structure, yet, rendered them complicit in the racialization process in other contexts. The reference to insidious collusion, is an interpretative construct I deploy here to describe how immigration law in South Korea, by limiting English teaching visas to 7 "Western" nations to source the bulk of Korea's native English teaching work force, not only colludes to reinforce racial hierarchies present in the Korean construct of the foreigner that derives from ethno-nationalism enhanced by globalization; but also allows White gay men to become centered in the Korean gay community's construct of the foreigner simultaneously. Thus, linking the two locations through the valorization of whiteness as a referential point. Informants in Seattle experienced racialization as model minorities in various settings resulting in moments of racialized exclusion, whilst informants in Seoul were more likely to encounter White gay men than any other type of foreigner. In the process, they too reproduced Korean hierarchies of race. I argue that all these interactions orbited around whiteness at its center. Thus, structural racism inherent to Western countries, like my own, converges and colludes with ethno-nationalist racism in South Korea to racialize gay subjects whilst continuing to center whiteness at its core.

Introduction

The issue of race and racism in South Korea is a controversial topic often discussed in reference to Korean constructs of nationalist discourses (Shin G, 2006; Lee J et al., 2017; Kim S, 2012). Recently, the arrival of 550 Yemeni refugees has caused much controversy over how foreigners are affecting the ethnic makeup of a rapidly changing Korean society and Korea's role in accepting asylum seekers, provoking heated public debates. More than 700,000 people in South Korea have signed a petition calling on the Korean government to expel the refugees who arrived in Jeju-do (Haas, 2018). This situation is complicated. Korea has lofty international ambitions to become a world leader pursued under the auspices of its Global Korea strategy, which has required a full embrace of globalization by the state (Dae C, 2009). As Incho Lee (2011) explains, for most Koreans, globalization means global economic leadership and economic advancement that is represented by Western nations. Lee also explains that as a result, Koreans view Whites as symbols of Western wealth, and as an ideal globalized group not only because of their skin color, but because of their symbolic power (p.4).

While racism within the gay community in the US has long been an area of academic and theoretical analysis (Loiacno, 1989; Diaz et al., 2001; Teunis, 2007; Ibañez et al., 2012), no study is yet to look at the ways in which racism as a structure or discourse affects the ways Korean gay men navigate and narrate their own marginality. This chapter begins to address that gap by using a Critical Race Theory and homonationalist assemblage lens to understand where moments of racialized inclusion, and exclusion are both experienced and reproduced by Korean gay men in both Seoul and Seattle. CRT posits that social relations are colored by a racial system in which white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material (Delgado and

Stefancic, 2017). A homonationalist lens judges the morality of particular social formation by how a nations' homosexuals are treated. The addition of an assemblage lens is how Puar (2007) conceptualizes the transnational gay, imbricated within homonationalism, an articulation that decenters the fully-realized subject as a way to understand gay inclusion and exclusion. As an assemblage lens allows a departure from teleological and territorialized bounded analyses. In other words, an assemblage lens means that moments of inclusion and exclusion can occur at simultaneous times to the same gay body in different locations. The need to interrogate race as an affective structure and lens is derived from the critiques leveled at cosmopolitan identities, which posit that these liberating discourses centered on a gay subjectivity are not only steeped in Western productions (including English), but carry racialized and universalizing tendencies (Grewal, 2005; Altman 1997; Puar, 2007, 2013, 2016). In examining the narratives of informants in both Seoul and Seattle using a CRT lens, I also aim to illuminate how the forces of racialization within the assemblage are transnationally connected, interwoven and dispersed through discursive formations. A process I argue also takes place at an interpersonal level providing context to structural analyses that I story through informant narratives. In drawing on a homonationalist assemblage lens my analytical focus is on how racialized structures in two different locations and contexts find themselves connected by state policies and neoliberal affects that collude to constitute racialized gay subjects that are both subjected to and uphold whiteness as a central reference point at different moments.

In a push to increase its global competitiveness, successive South Korean governments have sought to recruit global talents including a large number of ESL English teachers (Shin G and Choi J, 2015). South Korean immigration laws limit English teaching visas to citizens of one of the “big seven” or countries that are considered to be native speakers of English: The US,

Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, South Africa or New Zealand (Korea Immigration Service, 2018). I argue that Korean immigration policy, a structural condition informed by globalization and rationalized by neoliberal logics, connects the racialized nature of Korean constructs of the foreigner with racialization processes in Western countries. In addition, due to the relative middle-class level position of EFL teachers in South Korea, informants in Seoul were meeting more White men in the Seoul gay community, developing relationships, integrating and instrumentalizing these men into their communities and re-creating racialized hierarchies in their imagery of foreigners and excluding them in other moments of expediency. Seattle informants, on the other hand, were simultaneously experiencing instances of racial microaggressions and subjected to issues of racial reductionism embodied by the model minority myth. Insidious collusion is the term I use to articulate how two seemingly disconnected societies geographically, share an experience of racialization that forms an inverted type of transnational interest convergence, a concept borrowed from CRT. In CRT, interest convergence, also linked to material determinism, explains how often, when the interests of White elites coincide with the aspirations of racialized minorities, only then do we see attempts to reform racial inequalities in society (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). My deployment of the term here is to illustrate how there is little motivation to interrogate racism intra-gay community in Seoul, as it does not align with the interests of the White elite that make up the majority of the foreigner gay community.

During 2 years of fieldwork in Seoul and Seattle, I completed an ethnographic survey of Korean gay men's narratives that covered issues related to family, culture, contact with Western culture, human rights norms, dating life and coming-out or sexual visibility. During the course of these interviews I also asked questions that related to informants' experiences with racialization in

both settings. I situate these responses within literature that analyze the issue of racialization after which I further embed them within Korean contexts to form the basis of this paper's discussion, analysis and conclusions. I argue here that Korean gay men are both subjugated and co-opted agents under conditions of racialization that orbit around whiteness at its center. I also document moments how in South Korea, racism as experienced by 'foreigners,' also allows for White gay men in Seoul to co-opt a People of Color (PoC) experience that reconstitutes their privilege within a community of others. In doing so, this chapter also argues that the Korean context presents a deeper nuance for the critical project of transnational queer subjectivities.

Literature Review: The Foreigner in South Korea

If the gay subject has been marginalized by the Korean studies epistemological community (Henry, 2018), the study of racialization in Korean studies has tended to center on multiculturalism, the role of migrant laborers, nationalism and belonging versus a politics of exclusion (see Lim, 2010; Kyung-Koo, 2007; Ha S, 2012; Kim N, 2012; Watson, 2012; Ahn J H, 2013). According to Kim Choong Soon (2011) many Koreans subscribe to the ethnonationalist view of Korean nationalism that advances the notion of Koreans as a nation of "pure-bloods" (*sunhyŏl*) descended from a common ancestor. Pai H (2000) explains how Koreans who were raised in the Park Chunghee era in particular were indoctrinated with the idea of a single national historiography, (*minjok sahak*) that stresses the origins of the Korean national identity in a single unique and pure race (*tanil minjok*). However, mounting evidence suggests that this discursive construct has no real foundation with the origins of the Korean people attributed to two major racial groups from the Neolithic era into the Bronze era who were Caucasoid and Mongol. They were later infiltrated by

groups of foreigners such as the Han Chinese, Mongolians, Manchurians, Vietnamese, Jurches, Khitans, Yen, Japanese, Arabs, and various groups from the south and southeast - who immigrated to the Korean Peninsula and were naturalized (Kim Choong Soon, 2011). Thus, the ethnocultural nationalist construct is an invented narrative created specifically to other foreigners, which first emerges prominently during the Middle Age Goryeo (918-1392) period as a response to threats from Chinese and non-Chinese forces (Goulde, 1999). A narrative that continues to affect South Koreans' views today, where foreigners are often presented in public discourses as essentialized and stratified others through exclusionary media representations in particular (Joo. J, 2015).

Extrapolating from the 2017 Population and Housing Census, Statistics Korea (2017) approximated that 1.5 million or 2.9% of the 51.2 million residents in South Korea were non-Korean. A large number counted in the 2.9% were Ethnic-Koreans of Chinese origin. Since the 1990s, South Korea has seen a massive increase in the influx of foreign workers first as labor migrants, second as international brides in mostly rural areas, and later through a growing influx of English teachers and business professionals (Park K, 2014). As a result, Ji-Hyun Ahn (2012) states that the adoption of the term multiculturalism has become a trend within the government and the press to explain social changes, yet these discussions are either too superficial or absent altogether. Watson (2012) argues that the discourse of multiculturalism in South Korea is driven by the *Segyhewa* policy (global Korea) that is tied to transnational forms of neoliberalism. One that allows the realities of racism experienced by foreigners in South Korea to continue to go unrecognized.

More recent studies on multiculturalism has begun to connect this discourse in different forms to the processes related to racialization and its exclusionary effects on foreign subjects. Bae H et al. (2018) studied the bullying experiences of racial and ethnic minority youth in South Korean

schools, demonstrating how ethnic minority youths were much more likely to be bullied than their Korean-majority counterparts. A study by Kim H et al, (2018) documented acculturation strategies used by manual laborers or those that are considered to be unskilled migrants in South Korea, which they argued was needed to navigate South Korea's unique culture and policies of discriminative exclusion that arises due to the assimilationist texture of the multicultural discourse and its exclusionary effects in Korea. Soon-Won Kang (2010) connected contemporary Korean forms of racism to the colonial period, a force that persists in Korea today. Kang also posits that as a result, it requires a decolonization of thinking amongst Koreans if Korea is to move from a mono-culture to a multicultural society. Related to this, Andrew Eungi Kim (2009) argues that a combination of factors including a low birth rate, influx of foreign workers and a shortage of brides means South Korea will not be able to avoid the disintegration of its homoethnic society.

Indeed, Seol D (2012) now calls South Korea a defacto-multiethnic society that challenges the self-evident nature of a "pure blood" narrative around nationalism. Seol's study also suggested a hierarchy exists between foreign migrant workers, where professional workers and foreign investors enjoy the highest status, while less-skilled workers take the lowest position on the employment ladder. Hundt et al.'s (2018) discourse analysis study on newspaper editorials in South Korea, argues that the notion of citizenship has now changed, where South Koreans accept the inevitability of their country becoming more ethnically diverse, but now place conditional acceptance on foreigners. Those who choose to live there as foreigners are expected not to disrupt notions of what it means to be a South Korean. In other words, foreigners should assimilate into South Korean social and cultural norms.

Incho Lee's (2011) study centers racialization as a productive discourse in presenting an analysis of how situated globalization intersects with racism in Korean high school EFL textbooks.

Lee posits that textbooks promoted Westerners and their cultures in positive terms, while non-Westerners and their cultures are consistently marginalized. Incho Lee argues that Koreans understand globalization as part of ferocious competition among countries that means Korea should gain global leadership and economic power to survive. As such, Koreans are eager to position themselves closer to role models that have attained economic and political power. Lee also argues that for most Koreans, Whites symbolize economic advancement and have become a global representation of power. In-line with an instrumental critique then, Lee's study connects with multicultural analyses of race in South Korea that attribute it to the utilitarian deployment of foreigners to fill an economic need of the Korean state on one hand, coercing the population through the need to cultivate closer links to symbols of Western prosperity, on the other.

This instrumental reading is supported by a study completed by Park K (2014). In performing a discourse analysis that focused on the Korean media's framing of migrant workers, Park concluded that they were likely to be perceived as legitimate and spoken of fondly if they were constructed by the state as filling a particular labor shortage in the Korean economy. Especially in areas where Koreans were less likely to take up employment owing to its low wages and poor employment conditions. Moreover, immigrants are more likely to be portrayed as victims, rather than a threat, when they are perceived to be channeled into the lowest rungs of society, with little room for upward mobility. The racialized inflection of this practice is evidenced by the fact that the majority of these workers are from South and Southeast Asia, and their non-threatening positionality is derived from their inability to be upwardly mobile. This situation contrasts sharply with the positionality of professional migrants to South Korea who for the most part are seen to be from Western countries. Seol D's (2012) study posited that a divide exists within the foreigner community between professional foreign workers from "core" countries at the center of

globalization of the world economy who are regarded to have higher status, and working class migrants from countries from the periphery who are deemed to have lower status.

The productive nature of this discourse of race hierarchy is rarely recognized, but some foreigners have narrated an experience of racism directed at whites. In their article titled: HIV/Aids Tests as a Proxy for Racial Discrimination, Walker and Van Volkenburg (2012) argued that the adoption of HIV/AIDs testing requirements for foreigners who teach English in South Korea by the Korean government was a proxy for a racist-inflected policy aimed at expelling undesirable foreigners. They explained that the uneven application of testing requirements, which exempted Korean teachers and those of Korean ethnic heritage was a response to anti-foreigner sentiments in South Korea that derive from Korean constructs of pure ethnic nationalism. Their thesis also argued that the policy targeted mostly White foreigners by virtue of the fact that the majority of foreigners teaching English in Korea came from North America and Britain. As a contribution to the literature on racialization and racism, theirs is an important argument, as they demonstrated how structural forces imposed by immigration law, colluded with and was formed by forces of Korean racialization connected to ethno-nationalism.

However, a gap in this study and much of the literature on race hierarchy in Korea is that the research has not been designed to interrogate the power-differentials that are inherent to the relative positioning of different foreigners by racial/ethnic background within the two polarized groups identified by Seol D. (2012) and others. In particular, Incho Lee's (2001) study suggested that foreigners of different ethnic backgrounds experience racialization or racism in different ways. Despite this, even the most recent studies on experiences of racism in South Korea continue to position the foreign community as a collective other, experiencing racialization by a dominant Korean mainstream. The Seoul Institute Survey (2015) reported in the Korea Observer (Hyams,

2015) presented a picture where 94.5% of foreigners reported experiencing racism in South Korea. The published statistics which were widely reported did not breakdown the experiences of racism by racial or ethnic background. However, by collectivizing the experiences of all people living in South Korea from other countries under the umbrella of “foreigner” the nuances and differences in experiences of racism are lost. In such cases the hierarchy of races and its insidious nature to produce different forms of racialization becomes obscured. For example, the Walker and Vanvolkenburg study carried out by two White-men was able to center a White experience of racialization that elided the specific experiences of racism that non-White North Americans, or non-White citizens of countries granted E-2 visas from, have whilst living as both a foreigner to South Korea and as an ethnic minority within the racial constructs of their own settler-colonial states.

On the flipside, studies into the experiences of migrant labor workers and marriage migrants in South Korea focuses on how racialization takes place through a discourse of multiculturalism in South Korea. These analyses tie a critique of neoliberalism and racial hierarchies to a transnational class lens. They focus the narratives to shine light on a neglected part of the Korean development story, on what the Korean state has termed “low-skilled migrants.” From this perspective, however, the experiences of the racialized other who are part of this group are also presented as being uniformly one of class-subjugation with a racial inflection. This reading of racism within South Korea, however, masks the power of whiteness to racialize from within. It misses how whiteness can also create feedback loops as a guiding and generative force of racialized modernity.

Therefore, I argue that the narratives of my informants in Seattle and Seoul can offer important insights into this transnational process. My Seattle informants live as part of immigrant

populations in a settler colony where the norms of universal gay identities first emerge, whilst informants in Seoul, are positioned ethnically/nationally, as part of the Korean mainstream. Yet, as Puar advises, sexual politics in a Western frame and a Western idea of sexual exceptionalism is a racially-inflected, transnational process, that must complicate their positionality further. As such, I am not entirely convinced that Korean gay men in Seoul are only racializers in this global context. I infer from this, a need to examine their narratives as well as the stories of foreigner gay men in South Korea to nuance our reading of racism and racialization processes in both a transnational and Korean context.

Theoretical Additions

Gay Racism in America and the Asian American Community

“Despite the growing visibility of queer communities of color, the mainstream gay community and its political aspirations remain White in its orientation.”

- Teunis (2007) p 263.

Teunis’s (2007) study directly examined and challenged the ways in which White gay men sexually objectify gay men of color through racialized stereotypes. Teunis reads sexual objectification as a product of racism in the gay male community that simultaneously allows for the production, and positioning of the White gay categorization as the idealized center. According to Teunis, this occurs because ideologies of inclusivity and non-discrimination blind White gay men to the harmful effects of sexual objectification. Moreover, this sexual objectification forces men of color to play specific roles in sexual encounters that are not necessarily of their own

choosing. In the Teunis article White men were shown to be using racialized tropes to create their own sense of sexual freedom at the expense of Black men. In particular, Black men in his study storied ways in which White men expected them to take hypermasculine, top (insertive) roles in the bedroom, even against their own sexual preferences that Teunis linked to racialized stereotypes. Whilst within the community, Black organizers were only seen capable of taking leadership roles that served minority gay populations specifically. As such, were denied leadership roles that would allow them to be centered above White gay men who drive the gay movement.

Asian men were noticeably absent in the Teunis article. Since then, other studies have emerged that focused on the specific experience of Asian American gay men that was extensively reviewed in chapter 3. Han, C (2008), used CRT in their provocatively titled article: “No Fats, Femmes or Asians”, by adding that Asian American gay men were also subjected to racialization from within the gay community that set the White gay man as the reference point. Han and other scholars in Asian American studies (Chan, 1992; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Cochran et al, 2007; Chung & Szymanski, 2007; Tsunokai et al, 2014; Narui, 2011; Leong, 2014, Harris et al, 2017), have identified common stock narratives that deeply affect the Asian American gay men experience. These men are subjected to 1) a model minority myth 2) demasculinized through their constitution as being effeminate, with small penises 3) are ripe for White consumption 4) trapped within an ultra-conservative cultural community deeply embedded within deep religious structures (see Han, 2008a; Han, 2008b; Fung, 1996; Eguchi, 2010; Phua, 2007; Ocampo and Soodjina, 2016 and others).

In an attempt to talk back to and challenge these dominant narratives that center White ways of knowing, Han C (2008a) advocates both the theoretical use and methodological approach of CRT, which is an episteme that aims to reformulate both our understanding and the power

relationships that are formed through racialization (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). In particular, CRT advocates for the use of counter-narratives to reclaim old stock narratives. CRT centers on the experiences of PoC in allowing non-White subjects to tell their interpretations of events and stories of events. This is seen as a powerful tool in helping to reshape racialized narratives (Han C, 2008).

Critical Race Theory

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explain that: The Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (p2). Developed in the mid-1970s, CRT was a response to what many legal scholars of color believed was a failure of critical legal studies to address the issues of race and racism adequately (Han C., 2008a). CRT considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings as well as the unconscious (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p3). CRT also builds on the insights of radical feminism, European philosophers and theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida, as well as from the American radical tradition exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements of the sixties and early seventies (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p4).

As an analytic, CRT has been taken up in a variety of contexts but all share some certain tenets. According to Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) these tenets include the following assumptions: 1. Racism is ordinary, not aberrational; it is embedded in the usual way society does

business. 2. White-over-color ascendancy serves both psychic and material purposes. Thus, the ordinariness of racism makes it difficult to “cure” or address as there is little incentive to do so. As a result, color-blind or formal conceptions of equality can only remedy the most blatant forms of discrimination. 3. Race is a social construct, not biological and has no genetic reality. Thus, it is a category that is manipulated, invented and discontinued when convenient. Which leads to analyses of racialization, or the process in which dominant groups in society constitute racial categories at different times, for different purposes, in response to shifting needs, most noticeably in the labor market. 4. Racism and interest convergence also termed material determinism, which posits that because racism advances the interests of both White elites and working-class people, large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it. An additional and important spin-off of CRT is intersectionality and anti-essentialism. Which was reviewed in chapter 4. All these tenets of CRT will be deployed throughout the paper’s analysis, however, particular focus is placed on interest convergence and material determinism.

Interest convergence can be explained simply by the example presented by CRT scholar Derrick Bell (1980). Bell challenged the discourse that presented the *Brown v Board of Education* 1954 US Supreme Court decision, which suddenly desegregated schools, as a victory for racial progress in the United States. By situating the decision in wider socio-political-historical contexts, Bell argued that in a brief moment, the interests of White elites and the Black community converged. Which was a more fitting explanation for the decision than racial progress. He hypothesized that due to the US’s role in containing communism in the “Third World” - much of whom were black, brown or Asian - it would not serve US interests well if the world press continued to run stories of lynchings, racist sheriffs, and murders like Emmett Till’s, whilst trying to sell the American form of capitalism and democracy. Therefore, it was not any particular desire

to right a racial injustice, rather a convergence of interests that facilitated this decision. Historian Mary Dudziak vindicated Bell's assertions, when she conducted extensive archival research in the files of the US State Department. When the State Department intervened on the side of the Black community for the first time, it was responding to a flood of secret cables and memos outlining the United States' interest in improving its image in the eyes of the Third World (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017).

The idea of interest convergence as a concept is one that has racism embedded at its core. Racism as a structural determinant can be seen in the uneven way the racialization process takes place (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). The differential racialization thesis, maintains that each disfavored group is racialized in its own individual way and according to the needs of the majority group at particular times in its history.

“Few blacks will be yelled at and accused of being foreigners or of destroying the automobile industry. Few will be told that if they don't like it here, they should go home. Few will be ridiculed on account of their unpronounceable last names or singsong accent. Few will have a vigilante, police officer, teacher, or social worker demand to see their papers, passport, or green card. By the same token few Asian-looking people will be accused of being welfare leeches or having too many children out of wedlock (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p.70).

In this paper, I draw on the differential racialization thesis as one of the framing devices used to emphasize that racialization in the US and the other “big 7” impacts and connects to the racialization process in South Korea. A process that I argue impacts the type of gay foreigners my informants in Seoul were encountering.

The New Homonormativity, Homonationalism and the Assemblage Lens

As discussed earlier, Jasbin Puar (2007, 2013, 2016) coined the term homonationalism to describe how the use of the terms “acceptance” and “tolerance” for gay and lesbian subjects became a type of barometer for the legitimacy of, and capacity for, national sovereignty. In other words, Puar’s work interrogates how the question of whether you treat your homosexuals well or not became a way to adjudicate the morality and right to govern of particular state formations. For Puar (2013), while the discourse of American exceptionalism has always served particular heteronormative nation state formations, her work focuses on how sexuality has become a crucial part of the articulation of proper US citizens across other registers like gender, class and race, both nationally and transnationally. In this sense, homonationalism is an analytical category deployed to understand and historicize how and why a nation’s status as “gay-friendly” has become desirable in the first place (p 336).

Puar’s homonationalism draws on the concept of the new homonormativity, developed by Lisa Duggan (2002) and the idea of assemblage theory she drew from Deleuze’s work. In terms of homonormativity, Puar extends Duggan’s focus on the imbrication of privatization of neoliberal economies and the growth of acceptance of queer communities (Puar, 2016, p321). Where Duggan explains how neoliberalism is also a type of sexual politics, albeit contradictory and contested. It is a type of politics whose defining feature is that it does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (p.179).

In other words, the new homonormativity promotes the streamlining of gay identities through consumerism and positioning of gay identities through a type of activism that uses a rhetoric that defines equality narrowly as formal access to heteronormative institutions like marriage. In her famous essay, Duggan (2002) uses the example of the now defunct Independent Gay Forum (IGF), who positioned themselves as the new “cutting edge” of the gay movement through publishing works that sought to create a “third way” or centrist core of gay liberation that focuses on bringing gay into the mainstream that appealed to neoliberal rhetoric of gays as consumers and capable of modeling “normal” relationships like heterosexuals. Writers in the IGF produce this politics through a double-voiced address to an imagined gay public on one hand, and to the national mainstream constructed by neoliberalism on the other. This address works to bring the desired public into political salience as perceived mainstream, primarily through a rhetorical remapping of public/private boundaries designed to shrink gay public spheres and redefine gay equality against the “civil rights agenda” and “liberationism,” as access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the “free” market and patriotism (p179). This strategy attempts to strangulate diversity among the gay and wider queer community to advance the interests of a few, by redefining and centering the interests of the gay movement in the wealthy White gay male (Bérubé, 2001).

One of the examples from Duggan’s article is of IGF writer Rob Blanchard. Along with 5 other White gay men, whilst claiming an affiliation with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, wrote a letter to the San Antonio City Mayor’s Office, asking that a progressive arts and community organization led by Lesbians of Color, Esperanza, be defunded. Claiming that the organization was “obsessed with victimhood and using sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia as rhetorical and political ploys to extract guilt money from individuals and organizations.”

However, worst of all, according to Blanchard, was the divisiveness they created within the gay community by repeatedly injecting issues of class, race and gender (Duggan, 2002, p183). In other words, they were distracting from the main focus of the gay movement, which was the legalization of same-sex marriage and the integration of gay identities into public and neoliberal institutions. However, for Duggan, all of this amounts to a new gay center with no vision of a collective, democratic public culture or of an on-going engagement with contentious, cantankerous queer politics (p198). Instead, with the center's obsession with marriage equality, and at the time overturning Don't Ask Don't Tell, in the US military, the gay community had basically been administered a political sedative - we get marriage and the military then we go home and cook dinner forever (p198).

Puar builds on the concept of homonormativity to create the analytical concept, homonationalism, which aims to critique how gay liberal rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to cultural and legal forms of citizenship at the expense of the partial and full expulsion from those rights of other populations (Puar, 2016 p.321). In her monograph titled: *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Puar used 9/11 as historical cleavage to mark a shift in time for the project of US imperialism, where the homosexual was accorded citizenship in order to add to Orientalist discourses that condemned the barbarism of Muslims. As a result, certain homosexuals were brought into this nationalist discourse, whilst others were kept out, namely gay Muslim, and gay PoC. Homonationalism as a discourse and state formation, was taken globally by US neoliberal interests through globalization. A discourse that was deployed not only by the state but also by corporations. Where corporations found value in supporting "rainbow" causes for their own financial benefit. A process she calls "Pinkwashing" where both states and corporations give

conditional support to gay communities and subjects as long as they are able to fit into well-established heteronormative structures that maintain the status quo and did not challenge them. A side-effect of this was it also created racialized gay subjects within the US, whilst targeting non-Western states for criticism over their lack of movement on gay liberation. Puar (2016) defines homonationalism in the following excerpt.

“Simply stated, homonationalism is the concomitant rise in the legal, consumer and representative recognition of LGBTQ subjects and the curtailing of welfare provisions, immigrant rights and the expansion of state power to engage in surveillance, detention and deportation. The narrative of progress for gay rights is thus built on the backs of racialised and sexualised others, for whom such progress was either once achieved but is now backsliding or has yet to arrive. This process relies on the shoring up of the respectability of homosexual subjects in relation to the performative reiteration of the pathologised perverse (homo- and hetero-) sexuality of racial others.”

In highlighting the uneven ways in which rights of citizenship are applied and distributed by the US state to the gay subject, Puar aims to shed light on the racialized and gendered nature of homonationalism, where gay Muslims in the US as an example, are often barred from joining US discourses of nationalism. With many subjected to immigration surveillance in the US under suspicion of terrorist links, denied basic civil rights in the aid of the preservation of the US state. Whilst simultaneously, the US state aims its neo-imperialist gaze at Arab and Muslim states to highlight their shortcomings in not according their homosexuals liberal rights. Puar’s analytic also aims to shed light on those at the margins of the queer community, transgendered folks, queer PoC,

whose marginalized subjectivities prevent them from being fully-imbricated as national subjects, yet are compelled to comply with the neoliberal-driven goals of the White gay center of the gay movement. In other words, to be queer, requires queer subjects to assimilate into domestic institutions that are founded on heteronormative constructs of social and romantic relationships. Which also requires an acceptance of Western-defined forms of queer, more specifically, gay subjectivities.

In articulating homonationalism, Puar attempts to move past what she calls “wounded attachments” that have often led to others articulating homonationalism as an accusatory framework against gay racism alone. Rather, Puar, posits that it is an analytic designed to allow us to interrogate the multiple ways in which the gay subject becomes included and excluded depending on the needs of the state and its neoliberal projects. As such, questions about identity and the subject which are central to structural theories, Puar attempts to move past by bringing in an assemblage lens.

I do not think of homonationalism as an identity nor a position — it is not another marker meant to cleave a ‘good’ (progressive/transgressive/politically left) queer from a ‘bad’ (sold out/conservative/politically bankrupt) queer. Rather, I have theorised homonationalism as an assemblage of de- and re-territorialising forces, affects, energies, and movements. Assemblages do not accrete in linear time or within discrete histories, fields, or discourses. In naming a movement in contemporary U.S. queer politics, homonationalism is only useful in how it offers a way to track historical shifts in the term of modernity, even as it has become mobilised within the very shifts it was produced to name. (Puar, 2016 p 321)

Although homonationalism is a critique of the weaponization of gay identities by the US-state that Puar focuses on, it is the collection of de- and re-territorializing forces, affects, energies and their movements in particular that I draw on from the assemblage lens, to connect the narratives of informants in both Seoul and Seattle. The way in which a cosmopolitan gay identity and its productive value as a discourse is spread to all corners of the world is sustained through the power of transnational connectedness. A connectedness that is driven by forces like homonormativity, homonationalism and its generative relationship with neoliberalism. Neoliberalism as a guiding force has also been implicated in the South Korean contemporary context of facilitating racialized hierarchies in relation to how Koreans view foreigners in their country.

Connecting the Assemblage

As Lisa Duggan explains, the new neoliberal sexual politics (of the gay community) often attacks divisiveness (or diversity) within the gay community to an inclusive agenda and locates unity in the unmarked centrality of prosperous white men, whose interests unproblematically define the interests of “the gay and lesbian community (p183).” Teunis’s (2007) assertion that White gay men are centered and racialized others in the US gay community mirrors Duggan’s work from a sexuality and affective position. Thus feeds into the critique of the rise of a discourse of cosmopolitan feminist and gay identity that Altman (1997) and Grewal (2005) note masquerades as a universalizing discourse, but actually carries with it colonial power configurations that create a racialized other/subaltern (Spivak, 1988). CRT identifies how racialization, which a post-colonial critique would also share (Said, 1978), creates a type of racialized other within global

relations between the Global South and North. This is taken transnationally by Puar (2017) in her articulation of homonationalism as a feature of the global gay assemblage.

In highlighting the CRT aspect of homonationalism, I use the assemblage lens to construct a link between Seoul and Seattle. I argue that in the US, racialized inequalities in education outcomes has an effect on how Korean gay men in Seoul are experiencing racialization. For example, many studies point to how non-White and non-Asian PoC have educational outcomes affected by racism (see Steele, 1992; Hallinan, 2001; Williams, 1999; Ford et al, 1997; O'Connor et al., 2006 for a review). But in more simple terms one needs a college degree to teach English in South Korea. In the US, the example I use here, there simply are far more White graduates than Non-Asian PoC. According to the US Department of Education (2017), in the 2014-15 school year, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to White students in the US was 1,210,523, whilst during the same time, 192,725 were awarded to Black students. Yet, this number represented a sizable statistical increase of 41% from 10 years prior. Which suggests, that historically, the number of White graduates in comparison to Black graduates could form a much larger pool in which South Korea's immigration policies can draw from.

The idea that there are simply more White graduates to choose from is supported by Wagner and Van Volkenberg (2012) who asserted that most native-speaking English teachers in South Korea are White. Yet, they did not connect this to unequal racial distribution of college degrees in the education system that is inherent to North America. Their assertion was merely a geographical description. However, from a CRT lens, this transnational migration process from the US and other settler-colonies part of the big 7 does have a racially-inflected feature. If we take the concept of interest convergence, or insidious collusion, which I have repurposed it to be here, one can deduce that the likelihood of racialization being questioned in the gay community in South

Korea would be low. As the South Korean construct of the foreigner, places college-educated Whites in a position above other racialized groups. Thus, a CRT critique supposes, that there is convergence of interests between middle class White men being given preferential treatment due to the process of racialization in South Korea that is derived from South Korean ethno-nationalist discourses driven by neoliberal goals of instrumentalizing foreigners. But in this case, the interest convergence is a type of collusion, where one non-White group (Koreans) find their interests align with those of college-educated Whites, that in-turn demotivates them to interrogate the effect this has on Brown or Black foreigners in South Korea.

The history of ethno-nationalism reviewed earlier in this chapter demonstrated how in South Korea this has created an aversion to foreigners in general. However, this aversion is mediated by a constructed view of whiteness that is associated with prosperity and modernity. As Incho Lee (2011) detailed, the exalted position of whiteness in South Korea can be attributed to its proximity to globalization and its promises of prosperity. Informants often supported this thesis, when they explained the preference for Whiteness in South Korea being related to a narrative of progress and development. I argue that this can help to explain why Black American and Brown teachers in South Korea have reported suffering from experiences of racially discriminatory hiring practices (Strother, 2007). Therefore, foreigner as a constructed category is not a stable label, nor is it adequate for analyses to continue to focus on the division between professionals versus low-skilled labor vis-a-viz Korean ethno-nationalism in order to understand all the facets of racialization in South Korea. Korean gay men I argue may offer more nuance. I conceptualize them as part of an assemblage of transnational gay forces that have racially inflected discourses that surround, constitute, include and exclude them in different settings. However, at every moment, whiteness is still the central reference point that these processes orbit around.

My intention in highlighting the methodological difference offered by Puar (2007) that focuses on assemblage as a lens, is to allow us to reimagine the subjectivity of gay identity as one that is not fixed in its moments of validation. Puar asserts that homonationalism helps us to understand that moments of inclusion and exclusion occur at different points in history, and in different contexts that are dependent on the needs of the most powerful, be it states, corporations or other institutions. I take this lens and apply it to an inter-personal level, where informants in my study constructed moments of inclusion and exclusion into gay communities discursively, and that these show a connectedness between racialization process across national borders.

Methodology Modifications

As has been explained throughout this dissertation, the methodology employed to generating data here has been qualitative in that it combined post-structural ethnography with insights from *talanoa* dialogue (Vaioleti, 2016). As this has been extensively covered in chapter 1, 3 and 4, here I offer some modifications to the previously outlined methodology sections. The data used to construct the arguments came from both Seattle and Seoul informants in formal interview settings inflating the formal interview sample to 30. I also collected data through participant-observation, informal interviews and through a collection of visual materials. For this chapter, I also draw on additional interviews and observations whilst interacting with foreigner gay men in Seoul in particular. These men were co-opted into my study through a late modification that was added to my IRB approval whilst conducting fieldwork in Seoul. My initial approval limited who I was able to interview to just Korean gay men, self-identified. The widening of my approval allowed me to interview any stakeholders related to the research topic at hand that I identified as being important.

It also allowed me during participant-observation settings to seek verbal consent in-lieu of written consent whilst in public. The condition being that in private establishments or organizations where I conducted this additional research, that I would gain permission from leaders of organizations or owners of premises. I add that data to the discussion here in constructing the arguments. What follows is a narrative discussion, interpretively nuanced, in the form of a *talanoa*, which stories how the process of insidious collusion takes place across both Seattle and Seoul through my experiences with my informants.

As a racialized subject in South Korea, I am written into the narrative. As such, the reading of this should necessarily implicate me as part of the data generation process, which reflects my epistemological position as a social researcher. Jennifer Mason (2002) defines an epistemology as one's theory of knowledge concerning the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known and how knowledge can be demonstrated (p.16). My epistemological position is that concerning matters of racialization, they carry both material and discursive elements (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Thus, the use of narratives and counter-narratives or storytelling I argue is a valid way to understand the process from individual perspectives. As I also adhere to a somewhat relativist ontological position toward the nature of social reality, I am convinced by the interpretation that the external world consists of representations that are the creations of individual minds, and that social reality is made up of shared interpretations, produced and reproduced by social actors (Blaikie, 2007). Therefore, being implicated throughout this chapter as co-constructor of knowledge is consistent with this ontological and epistemological way of knowing and constitution of knowledge.

The Talanoa (Narrative Discussion)

Korean Sons for the Return Home

“Everyone on my mother’s side has passed away except my mum’s eldest. All her cousins came, and so Joseph (alias) is the Chinese one, he’s a good looking kid, and everyone was like: Oh. He’s the Park! So he instantly gets \$100, and then they look at Sarah (alias), she’s got green eyes, dark skinned, she’s not thin, they looked at her and were like, “too fat; too dark.” (aside: I said I love Korea; they don’t beat around the bush). The relatives were all ignoring Sarah, but she’s half me. Everyone was wearing visors, and Sarah asked me, “Why are they covering themselves?” I said to her, “It’s because they value light skin,” and then there comes my redhead, pasty white. And people’s reactions were, “Your wife must be so white”. I just didn’t say anything, mom was like, “yeah,” she’s working at home. Because my husband didn’t come as well, he knew the drama and flaked out at the last minute.” - Barnabas, Seattle informant.

This extended excerpt from Barnabas’s interview highlights many of the issues that are central to the discussion of this chapter. As part of the Korean diaspora, Barnabas had returned to his birth place two summers before our *talanoa* with his mother and children. Joseph was an adopted son, whilst Sarah was his biological daughter conceived through surrogacy. Upon returning to Korea, the lively tale he had to tell about how his extended family reacted to meeting his children for the first time demonstrates many features of Korean social norms and interpretive constructs of skin color that inevitably impacts on the racialization process. One may recall that CRT (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017) argues against the biological or genetic deterministic definition of race, positing that it is rather a construct designed to serve instrumental purposes by

different groups in society. The fact that Joseph, an adopted son was able to embody the desired aesthetics within Korean cultural norms crafted him as a more desirable family member aesthetically, inducing a real monetary reward. Whilst, Sarah, who was described as more plump and darker was considered to be less attractive.

The commentary of how Sarah was startled to see people wearing visors, and Barnabas explaining it as a preference for white skin is also something that is supported by literature that argues Korean preference for White skin is related historically to class (Li et al., 2008). In Korea, people who have white skin have long been told that they look noble. In the upper class of the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392), children washed their faces with peach flower water to make their skin clean, white, and transparent, and girls before marriage were desperate to have white skin (p. 445). What is also important here though, is that as a Korean living in America with a mixed family, Barnabas's return to Korea brought with him a new positionality in that his family made gendered assumptions in-line with Korean familial constructs, but his was also modified by racialized ones. One in which his spouse, or presumed wife, was White. He storied this as a type of wonderment for his extended family that he and I laughed merrily about. Yet, as a direct result of him living in the United States, his children, and his mother's complicity in pushing this narrative of convenience, allowed him to navigate the complexity of a familial situation. One where he can avoid the exclusion of a gay male in one moment by inadvertently drawing on a type of positionality constituted by the forces of racialization and culture. In this case, it opened up a moment of inclusion for him that orbited around whiteness.

Moments of racialized inclusion for returned sons of Korea was a theme that continued in the responses of other Seattle informants. Over the year of fieldwork in Seattle I became very close to Reuben and his husband. Often we would meet for a meal or coffee to talk about nothing in

particular. We spent one lovely afternoon in Greenlake on an Early-Spring day, where I connected him and his husband to some of my other friends in Seattle who were a married gay couple. Since then, I heard that they had continued to stay in touch with each other. Reuben and his husband would also cook Korean food for me at their apartment, allowing me to participate in an expression of a longing for a return to Korea that we storied as a collective memory. Although we had not known each other before meeting in Seattle, we had lived in Seoul at around the same time. For Reuben, the issues of racialization and the process in which Koreans valorized whiteness was something he was well-aware of. It featured a lot in our conversations as a result of my clearly racialized positionality. Having experienced it firsthand myself in Seoul, all of my informants inevitably thought it something that was worth mentioning. For Reuben, when we spoke about his biracial status, he storied it as a type of advantage, something that gave him a competitive edge in the ultra-competitive job market in South Korea. But further to this, he also believed that this allowed him to enjoy better social interactions and create links within South Korea

Researcher: *Do you think claiming an American identity in Korea affects the way other people interacted with you?*

Reuben: *Yeah, I think being a Westerner kind of comes with some level of prestige especially being a native English speaker, and especially being an American. Because Korea has so many ties with the US. And I think Americans are generally well-liked, it's one of the few places in the world where Americans are liked.*

Researcher: *What sort of prestige or privilege did it bring you?*

Reuben: *People want to be your friend more. People are nicer to you and their interactions are just nicer.*

Researcher: *Is this in comparison to other people's experiences?*

Reuben: *Yeah, I mean in comparison to other foreigners from like Southeast Asia and non-Western countries.*

On the day of this particular conversation, Reuben informed me that he was expecting a friend of his to arrive from Thailand whom he met in Seoul during his time living in Seoul. Although he did not give specific details as to why he believed this, he intimated that his friend had received less than favorable treatment from Koreans in comparison to him despite they both technically being foreigners.

For Reuben, the issue of racialization is rather complicated in comparison to Barnabas. For one thing, he is biracial, so the feelings of inclusion he storied could be theorized as being part of a shared cultural identity. However, whilst the experiences of biracial Korean-Americans in the United States is considerable (see, Young, 2009; Standen, 1996 as examples), the literature that focuses on the experiences of biracial Korean Americans' in South Korea is actually quite scant¹⁸. Ji Hyun Ahn's (2015) study on the rise of White mixed-race celebrities as a desired marker of global Koreanness recently examined this. She concludes that mixed-racality - white biracial - is desired to imagine Korea as a Global nation. In other words, unlike other types of racial/ethnic minorities, such as migrant workers, Asian mixed-race people, often discussed under multiculturalism, while white biracial celebrities are deployed as a symbol of transnational

¹⁸ Amber Hyein Kim's (2016) study on the experiences of biracial (Black-Korean) Koreans in South Korea demonstrated how ethnonationalism and its discursive power forced her informants to navigate issues of racism in a contemporary setting. Hyoung-Sook Cho et al.'s (2015) study on biracial children in Korean schools dealt with how a biracial identity is being constructed in South Korea. However, neither of these studies deal with differences in experience between being White biracial Korean, or Black biracial Korean – nor do they deal with the issue of being a gay biracial Korean.

mobility associated with global competence. Using the example of biracial Korean actor Daniel Henney, Ahn argues that as a white mixed-race celebrity he does not have to fight for cultural recognition or engage in a battle of ‘multicultural recognition’ because whiteness is already desirable and has cultural currency. Where Reuben’s narrative is important is that he may have felt moments of inclusion due to his American identity, which he chose to deploy when convenient. While others have storied predominant Korean-American experiences of confusion and exclusion (Danico, 2005), where being Korean-American means being raised Korean in America, not necessarily being half Korean, half White, which is a different positionality altogether. However, they are still instrumentalized by the state in order to fill a particular need. Many of them utilized for their ability to speak English like native speakers and usually occupy jobs that require high levels of English proficiency as a result (Cho J, 2012). But as Reuben is a gay biracial Korean, further nuances can be distilled, where his biracial identity allowed him moments of inclusion as an American, whilst his gay identity would have excluded him if he had chosen to disclose his sexual identity in public.

What Reuben’s positionality also suggests, supported by Ji Hyun Ahn’s (2015) study is that biracial Koreans (half-White American) may be able to access certain privileges in Korea that may make their navigation of reverse-migration different than other returnee Koreans. In his White-American half, he believed that he found moments of racialized inclusion, where the centrality and symbolic power of whiteness associated with Americans brings with it a more respected and liked positionality. Reuben himself contrasted this with what he believed the experience was for other foreigners. Reuben explains here why he believed that when Koreans referred to Americans, they were constituting Americans as white. Reuben’s appearance in particular was important in that he clearly appeared to be half-Korean, tall and White.

“I think the way Koreans don’t separate nationality from race. For them, Korean it’s not just your nationality, it’s your cultural identity, your race, it’s your language it’s everything. So I think when most Koreans think of Americans, they’re thinking of white people, if they see that you’re not white, they think you’re not American.”

One interesting point presented by Reuben in this excerpt he explains how he believes Koreans do not consider someone who is not White, to be American. This suggests a racialized image of Americans that disqualifies non-White Americans as being considered part of the group of foreigners from this “Wealthier Western nation.” In positioning whiteness as a central feature of how Koreans construct Americans, Reuben’s narrative is brought in-line with Incho Lee’s (2011) study, which posited that Koreans positioned themselves in relation to whiteness due to its proximity to prosperity associated with globalization. His earlier remarks that he felt more included and welcomed in Korea because of his American status finds parallels with Barnabas’s experience as a returned son of Korea with one light-skinned child versus one with darker traits. Although, in Barnabas’s case, it may also be linked to the fact that his son looked like a “Park” – or in other words, more Korean. I argue that this is still a racialized construct, as was noted earlier, the lighter-skinned aesthetic is a desirable one related to class status in South Korea’s construct and view of skin color. Therefore, subjecting his son’s acceptance to a Korean form of racialization tied to perceived class status.

Becoming the Racialized Other in Seattle

“I think that these spaces of queer PoC that are exclusive, are so important, that they only have the voices of these folks that belong to this community. [...] Primarily in my experience, I’ve dated mostly white, cis-bodied, gay LGBT males. It’s interesting the conversation with these guys [...] For example, I was dating this one man who is a cis white man, who really wanted to support the trans community, but because he was cis, he found it difficult. In terms of the PoC community, it’s been a lot harder to approach the cis white gay men that I’ve dated/interacted with (about this). I’ve heard some really unpleasant things regarding race. There’s racism in the gay community. If you look on Grindr or OK Cupid, all this research on the hierarchy of racial preference, it’s really disgusting, I’ve also tried to steer away from dating white men, but that’s something that’s proving really difficult. That’s also something I’m trying to unpack.” - Cain, Seattle informant.

For Cain, the issue of race and racialization was at the forefront of our *talanoa*. As an organizer in Seattle he was forced to grapple with a lot of the issues that have been identified in the critical queer studies literature. The presence of overt racism within the gay community for one (Teunis, 2007; Han C, 2008a; 2008b), the issue of transphobia another (Weiss, 2004), and the need for queer PoC spaces (Skillshare, 2016). What this excerpt also demonstrates is that despite his own awareness of being a racialized subject, constituted as a lesser other through racialized discourses, he still felt attracted to dating white men. I make no pretense in being able to systematically assign to any of my informants what formed the object of their sexual desire. But what this demonstrates is a feature of how racialization not only creates racialized others, but also due to the power of the dominant racial group, compels subjugated groups to continue to desire bodies that embody the

racialized ideal. In a study of dating preferences among Asian American gay men, Tsunokai et al (2014) showed how Asian American men, despite being subjected to racial stereotypes that depicted them in ways Han C (2008a; 2008b) identified (namely effeminate, ripe for White consumption with small penises), still preferred dating White men above other groups. Phua (2007) also demonstrated how many of his Asian American informants preferred dating White gay men despite being subjected to racialization in the community.

Moreover, Cain's experiences with being racialized as the other was not limited to his interactions with cisgender White men that he was encountering. Toward the end of chapter 3 when Cain was first introduced in this study, he talked about his experiences of going through therapy whilst dealing with his emerging gay identity. I present that particular passage here again now for emphasis:

"I've been trying to see therapists lately, and it's with this White lady at the moment and after I've been telling her about what I'm going through, her response was simple, "Why don't you move out?" I wanted to scream at her, "Lady I'm Korean, It's not that easy!"

In chapter 3, the racialization aspect of this interaction was relatively glossed over, however, I point to this interaction and our subsequent discussion following this, as an introductory indicator to the ordinary ways in which racialization affected the daily lives of my Seattle informants. CRT argues that racism is not aberrational, rather ordinary. I add that it can also appear well-meaning and unintentional. By assuming that Cain would be able to "just move out" the therapist he was seeing had unintentionally re-inscribed the ascendancy of her worldview above Cain's. In doing so, she was not only being culturally insensitive, she was unintentionally constituting him as a

racial other. A position that Cain was forced to claim in this interaction by pointing out the difference in his worldview in order to validate himself. He would later explain how she continued to struggle to understand why for him it was a difficult proposition to just up and leave his family. In doing so, he was again being required to define himself in relation to the centered worldview that the White therapist was insisting on being the bespoke of normalcy.

Moreover, in returning to Barnabas and I's *talanoa*, two parts of the interview stand out as moments of racialized exclusion where his Korean background led to his conscious understanding of the power of whiteness to center itself as an organizing and hierarchizing force even for gay males.

"We face challenges not as much as gay parents. My husband is Caucasian, I am a minority, LGBT person, kind of a triple negatives. The racial profile is a big thing, sexuality - we live in a place where everyone is tolerant, before we even get to the sexuality issue, there's just the racial issue. My husband doesn't experience it like I do but he understands that there is racial prejudice. For instance, 2 years ago when we went to Spokane, we stayed downtown, we all got up. Him and my redhead, ran into Starbucks. There was a Caucasian homeless woman asking him for money. My daughter was like, "Daddy, I want to give the woman money," and the lady was so into her saying, "Oh, poor baby", but then me, my Chinese kid and my biracial child, 3 of us holding hands who were following behind. The same woman, spat at us as we were going in, saying, "I don't want your money."

Granted that this incident took place in Spokane in Eastern Washington, rather than Seattle, the experience of racialization still formed an important part of Barnabas's story. This excerpt carries

with it many coded ways of marking social hierarchy that I interpret as an example of one moment where racialization as a process of exclusion, can push the racialized below the gendered and class oppressed other. For one thing, Barnabas and his husband are both aware of how they experience and perceive issues of race from different positions. And the tacit acknowledgement from Barnabas's husband also demonstrates how he is implicated in the process. As Barnabas is able to story his own marginalization as the other, he uses his husband's status as a Caucasian man as a reference point in which he understands his racial marginalization. Further to this, the difference in treatment where he is spat at by a homeless woman whilst his husband and his redhead, are welcomed as generous and caring is clearly evidence of how hierarchical constructs of race and racism affected the difference in their treatment by the homeless woman.

A class frame may posit that perhaps she was resisting the power-differential that is inherent in the interaction where she is offered money from someone visibly in a better financial position. However, this does not account for the difference in her reaction between Barnabas and his ethnically-coded children versus his White husband. For if a class frame were more appropriate, then the reactions should have been more similar. Instead we have warmth and affection in response to a White man, and disgust toward a racial other. A homeless woman sitting outside a Starbucks who would usually be coded by patriarchal neoliberal structures into a social positionality lower than Barnabas's. The rationale she accessed in making the decision to spit at him suggests that the force of racialization differentials in her mind was strong enough to overcome a class and gendered positionality that she was subjugated by. CRT articulated by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argues that racialized differentials have mental and material consequences for both the racializer and racialized.

Another incident that Barnabas storied that showed how racialization coded him as an outsider took place among what he called “soccer moms” at the school his children attended. Women whom he explained “don’t know what to do with me!” As a gay father, he found that women in the PTA at his local school loved him and his husband, but when it came to issues of race and racialization, it presented an area of ambiguity for many he associated with.

The challenge with us is that two gay men living in a suburb like [redacted] full of Reagan Republicans, people love us, but, one of the challenges is that, here are all these blonde mums - PTAs are run by blonde mums - then along comes this loud Korean gay. They love me, but at the same time they don’t know what do with me. [...] In this city it’s wonderful, but then I think ignorance is more a problem than blatant prejudice. For example, I like to entertain people. Once I said I’ll make sushi and kids can learn how to make sushi with me (a week before Christmas). Everyone’s gathering except for one mother, half an hour later one of the parents came in, she walks in out of breath. ‘Sorry Barnabas, we were at Nordstrom to visit Santa’ (aside: where most of us go every Christmas season). She goes: “Well, there was an Asian Santa. We didn’t want the Asian Santa. So we waited and waited till the White Santa came.’ I don’t think she understood that I’m Asian, I don’t think she meant to say that. She probably thought that we are just one of them. I don’t think she meant it, she thinks we were White. When you think of ideology of race and racism, it’s more like, once you get to know them, those categories start to dissipate, you just become one of them. For me, I live with it. She doesn’t have to live with it.

CRT is suspicious of liberalism and its scripts of equality where treating everyone the same or providing procedural rights as an example, cannot effectively deal with the racialized disparity

experienced as outcomes by diverse racial and ethnic groups (Pyle, 1998). For Barnabas, being treated as an equal by his fellow parents in the PTA is clearly derived on the basis of his status as a parent. And the fact that these women welcomed him and his husband as gay dads speaks to a type of equality afforded to gay couples in Seattle. However, this obviously racially-coded incident highlights the insidious nature of racialization, where even within a gay-accepting community, the issue of race is not perceptively foregrounded in other interactions. By constructing an image of a White Santa as being the right Santa she was waiting for, the guest to Barnabas's party had not only committed a racially-inflected faux pas, she had racialized Barnabas in a moment of ordinary innocence. Barnabas felt compelled to interpret this incident as a product of a lack of cultural understanding. In doing so, he took on an apologetic tone in the way he spoke and even assigning meaning to her intention as one he believed to be innocuous. *"I don't think she meant to say that"*.

CRT scholars argue that one feature of racism is how it can also gaslight its victims (Roberts and Andrews, 2013). Gaslighting is a type of emotional abuse where the abuser deflects responsibility by provoking the receiver through manipulation to believe that the harm or impact was just an effect of their own imagination or mental instability (Wozolek, 2018). In this situation, Barnabas apologized on behalf of his racializer in our *talanoa*. I posit that Barnabas experienced a form of gaslighting resulting from colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This is where the racializer says they do not see color, but by treating Barnabas as just another White person, she inevitably racialized him in a moment, where I argue, her forgetful moment of his race, is also a type of gaslighting. By not acknowledging his clearly Asian-coded appearance, she denies his experiences of racism matter. Also, the fact that Barnabas felt compelled to apologize for someone who was not present at the table, was not unexpected but demonstrates how powerful whiteness is as an affect. As Teunis (2007) revealed in his study among White gay men, even just the mere

mention of racism or racialization processes garnered violent reactions from his White informants, where they felt it to be an accusatory frame. Many of my informants responded like Barnabas, including myself in other situations, in trying to appease an imaginary White subject who was not physically present, but was *still* present at all our *talanoas*.

I suspect that my informants' reluctance to center themselves in these stories of racialization as the victims, by softening the intent of the racializer may be connected to how they have had their experiences of racism gaslit in certain instances. In other words, victims of casual racism also feel some type of responsibility to protect the feelings of the racializer because these incidences take place in situations where there is no deliberate or intentional statement meant to be racist. A type of "racism without racists," (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Moreover, nearly all my informants relayed to me the difficulty they experienced in being able to articulate their own positions and experiences to White people they came across in their daily lives. Cain narrated his experience in a similar way when he centered the experience of a White man he dated who expressed his (White man) challenges in connecting with PoC and trans communities. Reuben when talking about race and racism he experienced in high school in America, brushed it off as, "the usual stuff that happens to Asian American kids as a minority".

Thus, as the racialized subject, Seattle informants were not only subjugated as the racialized other, but by virtue of being in the position, they are actually co-opted in claiming this racially inferior posit by defining themselves in relation to the White racial superior. Thus, as both Barnabas and Reuben were now married, in stable work, creating a type of domestic gay life that is seen to be "acceptable" to our modern social norms of relationship formations, they were co-opted into the transnational gay assemblage by virtue of their same-sex relationship now being given the legal protection and rights of citizenship that normalized them as sexual subjects in the

US. However, at the same time, found themselves racialized and expelled by racism at other moments.

The Korean Gay as Racializer? Instrumentalizing Foreigners in Constructing Moments of Inclusion and Exclusion

As previous literature has explained, Korean racialization processes are heavily implicated in its ethno-nationalist project (Shin G, 2006; Lee J et al., 2017; Kim S, 2012). In that the cultivation of an exclusive racial category “Korean” being linked to the discourse of a single point of origin for all Koreans (Soon C, 2011; Pai, 2000). Recently, the rise of multiculturalism in South Korea has led to moments where foreigners are included and excluded based on the needs of the South Korean state, i.e. low-skilled migrants and English teachers as part of Korea’s newfound global outlook policy (Lim T, 2010; Kyung-Koo, 2007; Ha S, 2012; Kim N, 2012; Watson, 2012; Ahn J H, 2013). This is a process that has created racial hierarchies associated with the level of prosperity of the home country of migrants to South Korea (Seol D, 2012). I add here that gay Korean men offer a valuable and unique view of racialization processes in South Korea where all these forces and racialized discourses are brought together through the narratives of informants. Across these moments, informants not only became constituted racialized subjects, they also experienced moments of becoming self-racialized and racialized others in different contexts. In doing so, however, I argue that these forces continue to orbit around whiteness in Korea.

Dating Foreigners in Seoul

Researcher: *Have you dated foreign guys before? If so where are they from?*

Seunghwa: *America, America, England, Korean American, those were the serious ones. I have dated many people from European countries oh, and some Asian countries too. Taiwan China, there was a Greek guy and an Australian. It depends on what you mean by “date”*

Researcher: *How you define dating, so if you consider it dating we’ll go with that, what about their ethnicity?*

Seunghwa: *White, but I’m not necessarily looking for White men. I also dated a half-Mexican, half-White guy.*

Researcher: *How do you usually meet them?*

Seunghwa: *Apps. Jack’d, Grindr and Tinder.*

Researcher: *When you use these apps what are the common type of foreigners that you come across?*

Seunghwa: *Koreans obviously, but then White Americans usually. I think it’s because there are many English teachers and students. When it comes to English teaching jobs, I know they prefer White instructors, that’s why.*

All of the informants I spoke with in Seoul had at some stage come in contact with foreigners. Most commonly they were introduced to foreigners in their school life when studying English. Sam, one of my Seoul informants told me how he had a huge crush on his English teacher in high school, who was a White man from New Zealand. He said he loved the accent and that he fantasized about having a sexual liaison with him. What stood out further was who my informants dated. Of all 20 Seoul informants formally interviewed, even those who had never left Korea, they had all at some stage dated a White male. Most likely to be someone from one of the 7 countries that are identified as native English speaking countries. Granted, this may have been an effect of

inherent biases in my sample, but their narratives still represent an important experience that is worthy of being storied. For Seunghwa, he hypothesized it as a product of there just being more White English teachers in Seoul. Something that other informants felt to be the general case. Soonchang, had this to offer about living in Seoul and how that affected who he ended up dating.

“There are more White guys here, than Black guys. Out of all the foreigners in Korea they’re mostly White guys, even more than other Asians in Seoul. Southeast Asians are more like kind of factory workers so they don’t live in Seoul. They live in rural areas. But for me it’s not about that. It’s whether they can hold a conversation. I can hook up with any guy. When it comes to (dating), their ability to hold a conversation with me, anything we can talk about. If we don’t have anything in common with each other, we can’t go on dates with each other. I don’t think I have a special thing for White guys, but I date White guys.”

For Soonchang, his interpretation for the higher probability of him dating White men relates to their relative number and proximity in Seoul. Here he stories it as a product of a racialized class divide that plays out geographically. Also, by asserting that White men are just more likely to be in Seoul in contrast to Southeast Asians who are more likely to be factory workers in his view, he constitutes the White foreigner as a “special” foreigner that has been designated by the Korean state by view of profession as being more worthy of being part of the middle class and elite categories. This interpretation is consistent with other Korean studies literature that posit that Korea’s foreigner community are split between a professional elite and low-skilled migrant class (Seol, 2012). What is significant about this is that it has a type of sexual-affective effect, whereby according to Soonchang, he is forced to date White guys as the proxy for foreigners as there are

simply more of them in Seoul. When I asked him if he understood the sporting terminology, “play the field” or in other words, you can only ever make a play in a game on what is directly in front of you, he agreed that this was the basic way in which this racial divide was occurring.

For Sam however, it was not as simple as just “playing the field.” He had relayed to me that he hated dating Koreans as he did not see any type of futurity for gay marriage in South Korea. As such, Korean gay men were less likely to want to engage in a long-term relationship that he craved for. When I asked him whether he felt there was a racial preference among the gay community in Korea he was emphatic in his response.

“Korean gays are racist: they prefer White guys. I think it’s possible you’ve experienced that, but I’m not sure if you’ve seen it. They don’t want to date anyone who is from Southeast Asia and they don’t really like brown guys much unless they’re Latino.”

From Sam’s response what is important to note is that he stories racism within the Korean community toward foreigners as hierarchized where not all foreigners are treated the same. White sits at the apex and othered brown bodies are constructed as undesirable. Why this is important is that it mirrors the racialization patterns that have been found in studies conducted in the United States among Asian American gay men. Where there is a strong preference for the White gay male whilst other brown bodies are subjected to different standards of aesthetic value (Tsuonaki et al, 2010; Phua, 2007). The other interesting point to note is that Sam used the pronoun “they” as opposed to just using the term “Korean,” which suggests that in some way he may have been trying to distance himself from this racialized practice considering he was talking to a Brown researcher.

Although speculative, later on, Sam was careful to emphasize that his only boyfriend at that moment in time had been Brown, despite having dated White guys in the past.

For Martin, his first ever boyfriend was actually a White American English teacher. And his explanation of the racialized structures of preference in dating that existed within the Korean gay community related to wider social structures and views of race. In explaining what he thought the hierarchy was, he also introduced a friend from Malaysia who loved Korea but in-turn experienced racism from Korean gay men that he felt compelled to be apologetic for. Martin's explanation added complexity to what Sam had mentioned during our interview.

“One of my gay friends from Malaysia, he loves Korea, but he has had many bad experiences with Korean gay guys, racist experiences. It makes me feel awful. In Korea there is rank related to race. Koreans come first, second would be Japanese, third are White Westerners or Taiwanese and after that all colored people are the same. In my experience that is how people think. It's not just gay people, it's across the board. If you're a Korean parent, it goes, Korean, Japanese, White Westerner, maybe Chinese is OK, except that, they don't like anyone else.”

Martin's explanation ties in with many pre-identified themes in the literature and also discussed previously in this dissertation. The fact that he believed that racism within the gay community in Korea was a direct reflection of societal-wide racialization processes, he tied to the desires of parents, is logically consistent if we consider how important the Korean family is a site of identity formation, extensively covered in chapter 2. Moreover, by stratifying the desires of the gay community, he presents a different interpretation of racialization which Sam presented by positing that Korean gay men prefer Japanese men above Westerners. This is a plausible interpretation

considering some literature has described how Korean families when having to marry outside of the Korean race preferred that their sons married women from countries who demonstrated the ability to easily assimilate into Korean life both culturally and aesthetically (Kim C, 2011). What is important to note though is that beyond this, White gay men were still given a special category in Martin's interpretation. They were included as an acceptable other, whilst everyone else was excluded.

When I spoke with Gene about his experiences of dating with foreigners, he shared similar sentiments with Sam, taking an accusatory tone toward the racially-inflected desires of Korean gay men. Gene was also critical of this practice, yet, was still a participant, co-opted into this scheme of desire, offering this toward the end of our *talanoa*.

Researcher: *Do you have any preference to the type of guys you prefer to date?*

Gene: *Westerner with a good personality. I need to find many things in common. He should drink and enjoy going out. I prefer bigger and taller guys than me.*

Researcher: *Which ethnicity have you dated before?*

Gene: *White*

Researcher: *When using apps here in Korea, what kind of foreigners do you come across?*

Gene: *Mostly White, but I've seen some Asians and Latinos.*

Researcher: *Do you have a preference?*

Gene: *White and Latino*

Researcher: *I think that's about it, is there anything else you want to add that I may have missed, thoughts about gay life in Korea?*

Gene: *In Korea, gay society is really small, especially in Itaewon. We all know each other. I can know who they are, or who their ex-boyfriend is. So bad rumors can follow you. I've met a lot of exchange students and they're kind of like playboys, you know. They're here for a short time and have fun then leave. Especially White as they are popular here in Korea so they are very rude and not polite.*

Researcher: *Do you believe that White gay men are treated better in Korean society?*

Gene: *Yes, I found Korean society very racist because we prefer White people. I have a Filipino-American friend and he was rejected as a native speaker teacher in Korea because of his ethnicity.*

What Gene's narrative highlights is how the process of racialization in the gay community is something that generally-speaking, all informants were aware of. What marked Gene out from a lot of other informants was that he never sought to distance himself from the practice. In acknowledging that he did have a racial preference in the way he dated, he was highlighting his role in the racialization process that he was complicit in reproducing. Karen Pyke (2010) talks about how internalized racism and its contribution to the reproduction of racial inequality has been largely ignored and is problematic. She argues that only by defying this taboo will we be able to expose the hidden mechanisms that sustain White privilege. Gene's narrative acknowledgement is important as he demonstrates how racialization works insidiously to co-opt even racialized subjects. In structures that uphold racism, we are all implicated, even as allies (Gordon, 2005).

By recognizing his positionality within this structural formation in the way he storied his narrative, Gene not only revealed his complicity in the perpetuation of racialized hierarchies, but also the power of recognition inherent to his understanding and acknowledgement of how race and racism constituted others. His mention of his friend who was denied an English teaching job

because of his dual-nationality or ethnicity status challenges a racialized practice that has been hidden by the globalization-lens that the global Korea policy had engendered and has been reviewed in this chapter.

His response to the question of ethnicity was interesting in that he understood it as a question about skin color when originally I was probing to see if he had dated men from a contrasting cultural background. The concept of race according to CRT is a constructed category based on the essentialization of skin color (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). The fact that he defaulted to skin color, suggests how powerful the label White is as a discursive marker. He also identified the multi-layered effects and points of entry that White gay men utilized as part of the valorized category of entering South Korea. He was the first informant to mention exchange students that he had come across and from his experience how they were mostly White.

Utilizing The Foreigner Construct as Point of Reference

For informants, having foreigner friends also allowed them to instrumentalize their positionality as foreigners in two ways. The first was related to their foreign friends' proximity to Western liberation discourses that could be used to help them to challenge the heteronormativity of Korean society. The second was when it came to finding support in constructing a full coming-out process that mirrored that of Western models like the Cass Model of homosexual identity formation (1979).

Hank, one of the informants introduced in the previous chapter, has become one of the Seoul gay community's most well-known performers and activists. Born and raised in South Korea, Hank is a regular at queer culture festivals all over the country and a long-time friend of mine. He also runs quite a prominent online group dedicated to highlighting the complexities of gay life in

Korea. His group also aims to bridge the gap between Koreans and foreigners in South Korea that exists often as a result of the language barrier. In this excerpt from his interview, he explains the role that foreign members play in supporting the work of his group.

Hank: *My organization is the only one that I am part of now. There are some secret groups like 'Gay Men in Seoul' 'Gay People in Daegu,' but I wanted to make a public group and one that was nonprofit. I started with the couple hundreds of my Facebook friends. In 2015 we had over 1000 members and right now we have 5600 people. It is growing very fast. I think it is playing a huge role in (the lives of) LGBT people in Korea because It's mainly for English speaking people. Because there are lot of bilingual Korean people, we can translate lots of articles and information. We've been the bridge between Korean LGBT community and foreign LGBT community.*

Researcher: *What sort of information have you guys been translating? English to Korean? Or Korean to English?*

Hank: *Both. We don't hire professional translators. Group members just voluntarily translate important articles from countries about legalizing gay marriage or issues regarding LGBT in Korea. So for the most part, Koreans and non-Korean LGBT members can interact.*

Researcher: *What is the group's demographic mostly?*

Hank: *More foreign. There are lots of Koreans and Koreans from overseas.*

Researcher: *Do you have rules about people in your group that need to be from Korea or in Korea?*

Hank: *No. They can be foreigners, Koreans as long as they are interested in learning LGBT culture in Korea. Also if they want to have connections with Korean LGBT agencies or people, they are welcome.*

Researcher: *You said you not only allow people not necessarily from Korea to learn about LGBT culture in Korea. Do you have any idea of how you would differentiate the LGBT culture in Korea versus cultures in America and other European nations? Are you aware of these differences?*

Hank: *Yes. Lots of things I know about from overseas are through the media because I haven't been to many countries. I have only been to England, Japan and China. So I guess obviously, the main thing is our country is conservative which caused not many people to come-out.*

Researcher: *Do you think that is changing and it's easier for people to come-out now?*

Hank: *I think so. I wouldn't say it's a lot easier than 5~6 years ago. It is changing but the difference between past 5 years and now is very small. But the social atmosphere and acceptance is lot more different from back then. The speed for change is accelerating forward.*

Researcher: *What makes you optimistic about it?*

Hank: *Because of everything I've seen from LGBT activists and reformers. In the center of everything, I see everything. Events, shows, and protests I witness and hear about everything. Because this year's queer protest was the biggest I have ever seen it.*

Researcher: *Yes, they said it was 85,000 people. How does that compare to your experience from previous ones?*

Hank: *My prior experience was in 2011 at Jongro. There were only 2,000 or couple thousands of people. Then the next year, it was 4 to 5 000 people. Then the next year was at Hongdae, 2013, that was 15,000. The next year was 20 something thousand. In 2015, it moved to Seoul City Hall and there was 30,000 people. Last year was 50,000 and this year 85,000.*

What this excerpt from Hank's interview demonstrates is the strength often perceived by informants that having foreigner connections brought them. By drawing on the connectedness of

the transnational gay assemblage, Hank was able to deploy the internet as an online community-building site capable of providing him free translation services and access to information that could be used to help disseminate useful discourses aimed at establishing Korea's LGBT community within a wider global gay subjectivity.

In this way, I argue, for activists like Hank, having foreigner friends and acquaintances represents an instrumental utility related to reforming heteronormative erasure of gay identity in South Korea through two mechanisms. The first, the material effects of free labor through volunteer translation services, the second, through a queer developmental citizenship lens deployed by Woori Han (2018). The reverse flow of these connections, allowed Hank and other gay Korean men to talk back to the global community, showing the progress they were making. Thus, Hank is able to story the development of tolerance for LGBT people and show the teleological development of South Korean gay life attempting to transform itself into becoming more like the West through his group and their international connections. In many ways, he was engaged in constructing a type of South Korean homonationalist imaginary that seeks to bring the homosexual question to be an arbiter of moral judgment on the legitimacy of the South Korean state.

In addition, for Hank, having foreigner friends and being enmeshed within a foreigner community was particularly important as he began to develop his own desire to formally declare his identity as a gay male. He explained how he had decided to come-out to his mother as gay and part of what made him comfortable enough to do this was because of embeddedness within social communities that he described as being more Westernized, allowing him to create kinship ties with foreign friends he considered to be his community in Seoul.

Researcher: *You told me that you have come-out. Can you tell me when it happened and how that happened for you?*

Hank: *It was in 2013 and back then, after graduating from Korean high school, I didn't hang out with Korean, Korean friends partly because of my sexuality and what I wanted to do. It's hard to achieve that around typical Korean men. I started to make new friends who studied abroad and Korean Americans. And even with complete foreigners. By 2013, most of my friends were not conservative and Westernized. I didn't have to hide my sexuality to them so all my friends knew about my sexuality. At that time, I decided to come-out to my family in 2013. I didn't want to do it alone, so I brought my best gay friend who's from Israel. He was just there with me for the whole time. I asked my Mom to come to a coffee shop and came out there.*

Researcher: *Why did you choose a coffee shop? Was there a reason?*

Hank: *Because at that point I wasn't living with my Mom.*

Researcher: *So it was because you wanted to meet somewhere neutral. [Hank nods in agreement] How did your mother react if you don't mind me asking?*

Hank: *She was very calm. She was surprised but she was okay with it. She knew I had a lot of gay friends. She watched a lot of Western movies and shows. She was comfortable with the idea of gay and everything. Later that night, she texted to me that it is okay to be gay and she still loves me. Maybe [a] few months later, my mom told my sister and sister also texted me that she also supports me.*

Hank's coming-out story intertwines the role of foreigners as reference points for material benefit with their ability to facilitate new kinship alignments in navigating familial relationships for informants. Hank, throughout his development of a gay identity drew on the divide between

Korean conservatism versus foreign progressiveness over sexual identity to make sense of his own marginality. By grounding himself among a foreign community, it appears that it gave him a source of strength to be able to confront the prospect of having to try and form a new relationship with his mother with him as a gay son. By taking his Israeli friend with him to his coming-out story, it may have also contributed to the sense of neutrality that the coffee shop as a venue for his coming-out provided. In both these ways, he was able to draw on the foreigner construct as other, to help him achieve the successful negotiation of a new kinship relationship. Additionally, according to him, his mother's own reactions he interpreted to be mediated by her exposure to Western movies and shows and her pre-exposure to his gay friends. In many ways, he is suggesting that in order for his successful renegotiation of his position within the family of son, to gay son, it required reference points for not only him, but for his family members. Having positively-reinforcing reference points for both was key in helping him succeed. For both, the source of these reference points were foreigners. This is the second utilitarian use of foreigner in the Korean context that informants were storying.

However, in other moments, foreigners were not seen as an advantage. As alluded to by Gene, there has been a huge influx of international students to South Korea recently. From 12,000 that were studying in South Korea in 2003, to 123,850 in 2018 (Chung, 2018). Many of these students have joined LGBT clubs at their Korean universities. A member of the Seoul National University LGBT club who spoke to me during the course of my fieldwork explained that since I had studied there, the club had grown in size but had fractured somewhat. It now had a dual membership structure. There was a LGBT club for Koreans, and an LGBT club for foreigners. This was something that was common in universities where there was a large number of foreign students, which Martin explained was related to the issue of language. Where Hank had found

utility in building connections with foreigners online, and in gaining support for his coming-out story, some LGBT clubs in Korea actually found having foreigners as members of their clubs was at times a hindrance. Martin was the former president of his university's LGBT club, at one of Korea's SKY group of universities. The SKY universities, consisting of Seoul National, Korea and Yonsei Universities are considered Korea's elite 3 (Choi, Á et al., 2006).

Martin: I went to their homecoming party (university he attended LGBT club), there were so many international students, there was even a separate section for international students, and Korean universities have so many international exchange students now, so the gay clubs got so much bigger.

Researcher: I heard that some LGBT clubs in Korea now have a separate club for international students and a separate one for Korean students. That's what happened at my old university.

Martin: Yeah, that's because if you want to unite them you'd have to make bilingual materials and that's really difficult and time consuming.

What this suggests then is that gay foreigners' inclusion into the structures of Korean gay life are highly conditional based on moments of their perceived value and utility to Korean gay men. These conditions are complex and story in complicated ways the multiple effects and outcomes in which the processes that undergird racialized modernity, imbricated through neoliberal affects create and appear and reproduce themselves in the South Korean context.

White Gay Men and the Cooptation of Racialization Narratives

“Koreans are racist, and homophobic. You know this society has a long way to go with that sort of thing. I mean it’s changing, but in general I experience racism here a lot. On public transport, people don’t want to sit next to you cause you’re a foreigner. It can get really annoying really fast, I mean even at my job. I speak really good Korean, but they insist on speaking broken English to me. But they don’t do it to my other co-workers who are Asian and speak Korean, when my Korean is better than theirs.”

As Michael (alias) a White American male, retold his account of experiencing racial prejudice in South Korea, I sat alongside him in a Seoul bar among a group of 5 of us around a low-set table. Michael was a “professional worker” was tall, blonde and blue eyed. He was thin, had studied in Korea in the past but had lived in Korea for a considerably shorter period of time than I had. That night our table included 3 Korean gay men whom I was also familiar with. The 3 Koreans in our party nodded at Michael in sympathy, occasionally interjecting with offers of acknowledgement and comments that supported his characterization of Korean society’s tendency to treat foreigners differently. Throughout the entire interaction, Michael not once acknowledged the way in which foreigners of different ethnic and national backgrounds experienced racialization differently. When I suggested that migrant workers in South Korea from South and Southeast Asia may be treated worse than we middle-class professional workers due to the nature of the industries they are employed in, he brushed it off by merely saying “I can’t speak to that experience” and continued on for a lengthy period of time explaining his experiences of exclusion.

Although he did not deny that differences existed between his experience and that of non-White foreigners in South Korea, by continuing to speak on his experience whilst refusing to interrogate the differences in positionality he enjoyed as a White man, he not only centered himself, but was complicit in the racialization of others. In fact, as I sat there, a clear PoC, after about 15 minutes of his confessional monologue, I realized that it was a topic of conversation he was trying to draw me into as well. He constantly paused and looked in my direction after presenting anecdotes of his experiences of racialized exclusion. In those moments, it became apparent that he was attempting to build a narrative bridge between the two of us as foreigners, inviting me to comment. Eventually, I obliged, offering anecdotes of my own experiences of racialization to ensure he did not feel alone in the conversation. Later, I wrote in my researcher diary that I was unsure whether I had participated as a type of catharsis, which I also noted was highly unlikely, considering I had made peace with my racialized status in South Korea long ago, or whether it was to offer Michael support. I later concluded that it was the latter. Throughout the conversation, I was selective of what I presented, aware of the group mood, I did not offer any of the examples of where I had experienced racism by White men in South Korea, so as to not offend him and in doing so bringing the social interaction into an uncomfortable space.

The process I just storied is an example of how complex the affect and forces of racialization are when a White gay man navigates race from the position of racializer whilst claiming the positionality of a victim in the presence of PoC within the foreigner community in South Korea. According to Alan Bérubé (2001), this is one way in which gay stays White. Where White gay men with the most visibility and power in the gay community stay silent on the racialization process of others, whilst simultaneously centering their own experiences of marginalization. In this situation, we can see that Michael, by virtue of his position as a White

male in South Korea, who occupies a racially-privileged position within the foreigner community also possesses the power to cast himself as a victim of racism due to South Korea's own structures and processes of racialization. For Michael, because he is a victim of racism, it means that empathy for other victims of racism is merely optional. Whilst, for racialized subjects who have their skin color coded, it is a mandatory marker of their social positionality.

What this demonstrated is how foreigners living in South Korea are constituted in and racialized in different ways that are hierarchical. However, all those who are not Korean are represented in a singular way - as foreigners. According to Statistics Korea (2018), as of 2017, foreigners make up 2.9% of the population with nearly 49% of those being Chinese, including Chinese-Koreans (33.6%), Vietnamese 10%, Thais 6.3% with the rest categorized as "others" at 35.7%. The total foreigner population being just under 1.5 million. For Americans in particular, there are two main entry points: through the military, where there are approximately 28,500 military personnel, and as professional workers mainly as English teachers. At June 2017, there were 15,189 foreign residents who were teaching English (Bak S, 2017). However, there is no distinction made in any of these statistics around ethnic or racial difference intra-nationally. For one thing, the ethnic diversity that exists within countries like the United States, and even my native New Zealand is effectively erased. No dataset currently exists in South Korea that looks at the ethnic breakdown of foreigners who come from the big 7 carrying multiple national or ethnic affiliations.

Therefore, the process of valorizing Whiteness in South Korea as the dominant image of a Westerner has not been systematically interrogated for its own discursively erasive modality in this context. This was recognized by some foreign gay PoC whom I encountered over the course of my fieldwork in Seoul. When I met James, he was working as an English teacher. James was

Filipino American and had found it difficult to date Koreans due to what he called their racialized images of Westerners. But further to that, he had found that it was often difficult for him to find work in comparison to his White American friends. This excerpt is from the notes I took of our conversation one evening at a Seoul bar in Korea's foreigner district after an event that I had hosted for Pacific people in Seoul.

James: Yeah, Korean guys are way more into White dudes, you know, the frat types. Them, they usually look down on guys like me coz they think I'm just Filipino, and they just don't seem to like people from Southeast Asia. It's that whole from-a-poor-country bias thing that Koreans have. But it's also even when they're hiring for English teaching jobs, they prefer White teachers.

Researcher: I have heard stories like that too from some of my friends, and I was also turned down for an English teaching job for the same reason. They literally told me after the interview that they really liked me but the parents wanted a White teacher.

James: That happened to one of my friends as well. But you kinda just get used to it coz that's life here, I guess.

Researcher: Yeah, I know I'm over it, I mean, not in a bad way, over it in the sense that there are other things I love about living here, and let's be honest, there are issues to do with race that our own countries haven't yet figured out, so I give Korea a much wider berth than my own country considering Korea's limited experience with ethnic diversity.

James: I feel the same way. I love it here despite all these problems. I have some amazing Korean friends who are like family to me as well. So I don't even think about it until something happens.

After our interaction, I realized that what James and I had engaged in was a type of rationalization of marginality that negotiated our relative exclusion from a racialized lens in the

context of Korean realities. But in giving a free-pass in this way, we were in-effect allowing the re-inscription and centering of Whiteness at the apex of the racial hierarchy in the South Korean foreigner construct to continue. CRT argues in order to challenge the uneven textures of racialized modernity, PoC and other marginalized people can make use of counter-narratives to talk back against the dominance of White scripts that discursively construct us as racialized others (Han C, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). In many ways, it was what James and I had engaged in. However, even in counter-narratives, the White hegemonic narrative is still the core target and remains centered. Thus, whether counter-narratives are possible to shift the material aspects and effects of whiteness and the types of relationships it then engenders between different people is doubtful. It was as Gordon (2005) postulated, where we were also implicated in the perpetuation of Whiteness being positioned as the center, as our narratives continued to orbit around it as a referential.

Greg was a White gay male from the Midwest US whom had contacted me via a dating app. At first he had seen my profile and broached the idea of perhaps going out on a date with me, but I made it clear that I was not particularly interested in dating anyone while doing fieldwork for my dissertation. Hence, we ended up becoming friends over the course of my time in Seoul. We ended up meeting regularly for coffee and chats about life as foreigners in Korea. Unlike Michael who was introduced at the beginning of this section, Greg found nuance in his discussions with me when the issue of race was brought up. In navigating the topic, he acknowledged the differences there were between our experiences. Despite being in Korea for a much shorter period of time, explained that he had experienced multiple forms of racial discrimination in that period.

Greg: *Ugh, it's hard here sometimes living as a foreigner, being excluded all the time, the way people talk about you, especially in Korean, when you can understand Korean. But when my Korean wasn't so good, people would treat me like you're stupid because you're not able to speak Korean well. But you know, everyone who's here on a teaching visa has at least got a degree.*

Researcher: *Well, that doesn't exactly make you smart either. Having a degree, especially in Korea where nearly everyone has them.*

Greg: *Right, but also they look down on English teachers here for some reason. I feel that a lot, it's like they think we're just here to drink and party and commit crimes all the time. Remember how everyone keeps bringing up that pedophile case, and that all foreigners have AIDS and are child molesters. But you know what, I can't imagine what it must be like to be a PoC in Korea having that prejudice against you, plus experiencing racism in your own country too. I imagine it must be way worse than what I experience here. But you're from New Zealand, so it might be different than America.*

Researcher: *It's definitely different, I mean, the whole foreigners as child molesters and carriers of AIDS I'm aware of, but it's not really the first thing I think of when someone mentions racism in Korea. I tend to think more of the racism in hiring practices among employers that favor White teachers, and the favorability of the White aesthetic in KPop and Korean beauty cosmetics industries. But yeah, coming from New Zealand, racism definitely exists there, don't worry.*

Greg: *Ahhh, that's interesting. But also, that's where we are different because I don't have to deal with any of that. That's my privilege.*

Short of Korean society itself accepting the need for and driving normative reforms around White privilege as an aesthetic and neoliberal currency of capital, counter-narratives told by PoC

in the Korean gay community, even when acknowledged by White gay men, will struggle against Whiteness and its symbolic value as a productive modality. I offer this assertion not only because of the allure of Whiteness as symbolic power, but due to the transnationally-linked relationship of the structures that facilitate its flow within the gay community. The gay community is small and relatively hidden in South Korea and despite this isolation it does not seem to be a place where resistance to racialization across diverse forms is likely to take place. As part of a globalizing discourse around a universal gay identity that seeks for its own liberation from barbaristic and backward cultural formations, South Korea's gay community are subject to the machinations of neo-colonialism that colludes with its own state's neoliberal biopolitical projects. For South Korea, the influx of foreigners is highly regulated and predicated on notions of citizenship and one's membership into particular nations that South Koreans then arrange by class divisions, whereby richer, Western countries are given a higher position by virtue of its proximity to prosperity in global historical narratives.

Big Dicks and Potato Queens: Ameliorating Racial Deficits

If being of a darker skin tone created moments of structural exclusion in both Seattle and Seoul, for Seoul informants at least, racialized hierarchies brought opportunities for the realization of the objectification of racialized corporealities tied to hypermasculinity. Some of my informants explained that the racial tropes that hypermasculinized African American men with large penises, and White gay men as "potato queens" was present in the Seoul gay community as well. A "potato queen" is the term given in the gay community for Asian men who only date or prefer White men.

This stands in contrast to a “rice queen” who is a White man who fetishizes Asian men, in choosing only to date or pursue Asian gay men (Poon and Ho, 2008).

Soonchang: *I prefer handsome, hung, preferably taller than me, brain is definitely a plus, not only face is important for me. You should be smart, so if you're not smart, at least have a big dick. Redeeming qualities, (joking) I have a scorecard to check you off against, if you don't have this you should have that at least. [Laughing] Yeah, race..... I had one fling with a Black guy when I was 21. He was really kind. I was younger and he was really good looking, taller, hung, really good in bed, and ummm he was kind to me, that's also a thing. I sound like a shallow skank but I am a genuine person who cares about those things too.*

Researcher: *So did you have any preconceived stereotype of Black guys before you dated him, like had you heard the trope about Black guys being more hung for example?*

Soonchang: *Of course I had heard a lot of stereotypes, when I had my fling with him. It was my first real fling. I wasn't a virgin. I was 21.*

Researcher: *What are other stereotypes you have heard?*

Soonchang: *Like I said before, White guys have BO (body odor), I have a good sample size honey. I lived in Australia and I fucked a truckload of White people. In my sampling that stereotype is true, and yeah Black guys in general, I think they do have big dicks, comparatively. I know because I sucked them and I know it. I think the dick size, the genitalia. Asian guys in general do have smaller dicks. I'm not joking, it's more like an observational fact now. I can tell you that I've passed the sample size of 30, yeah the central theorem and all that shit. There's a term a potato queen, and for me I asked myself if I'm a potato queen, and I've definitely dated more White guys than any other race. I don't want to be one, but I made peace with it, I am in a way.*

In this candid exchange with Soonchang, many stereotypical images of the racial other present in the gay community in Western communities like the US are put on prominent display in this cafe in Seoul. In particular, his characterization of Black men who are well-endowed with large genitalia, and Asian men with smaller penises recall images identified by previous studies by Teunis, 2007; Han C, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Tsunoaki et al. 2010). These studies identify these stereotypes as part of the discursive elements in which gay PoC are often constituted by within the gay community in the United States. To see them so prominently on display in Seoul through Soonchang's narrative suggests that there is a link between the two communities' discursive practices. Soonchang himself connected this to his experiences of living abroad. However, what is also of interest is the fact that Soonchang located himself within this framework, referring to his own sexual practices among other stereotypes that have developed out of Western gay communities. What is also important to note is that the term potato queen, which refers to Asian gay men who have a preference for White men works as an opposite for the term rice queen. which refers to White gay men who have a preference or fetish for Asian men (Poon and Ho, 2008). In contrast though, there is no term for an Asian gay man who fetishizes a Black man, and none for a Brown either. This again illustrates the centrality of whiteness as a referential in the gay community in both the US and South Korea.

However, much like Soonchang explained in our exchange, race was just one part of the picture when it came to attractiveness for informants. When it came to the issue of racialized foreigners/others, hypermasculinity could help to ameliorate a racial deficit related to skin color. In other words, possessing a muscular body with low body-fat, being tall, conventionally handsome and strong allowed racialized others to move from outside the realm of exclusion to

inside the sphere of attractiveness. Phua (2007) also found this in his study on the dating experiences of Asian American gay men. This was best explained by Dennis when he talked about racialization in his interview.

Researcher: *In terms of body types, the Korean gay community is similar to a lot of places I hear? Tall, muscular, hunks are popular too.*

Dennis: *Yes, those are the major groups, then the second group is the bear group, it's quite big in Korea, Korean gay culture is affected in part by Japanese culture. In Japan bears are really popular, so we have that too. That's second rank, the third ranking is twink type, KPOP performers, 1st, well hung and built, and in terms of racial preference it's the same as what is in Korean culture as a whole. [...] If you have the body type someone likes, hunk, muscular, or if someone likes bear, then race and all that sort of thing doesn't matter.*

Previously in the interview, Dennis had laid out the racial preferences for dating in Korea in his view, Koreans first, East Asians second with Whites being acceptable and the rest disqualified. However, as long as someone was able to embody physical characteristics that were desirable, for Black men - hypermasculinized images - they would be able to overcome this. Dennis's separation of race and body type however is unsustainable when one considers the intertwined nature of racial constructs and their connection to the body. For example, the gendered construct of Orientalism (Said, 1978), which posits that the colonized equals the feminized body, versus the masculine, encapsulated within the White dominant body. Thus, in moments of amelioration of racial deficit, the racializing lens is still present, even if informants were not aware of it. Soonchang's depiction

of himself as a potato queen despite not having a preference for White men is also illustrative of this point.

Conclusion

Korean gay men in Seoul and Seattle are both constituted as racialized and racializing subjects whose process of racialization orbits around whiteness as the affective aesthetic both in terms of desire and as a structuring force. Seattle informants experienced overt forms of racism from members of the public, whilst interacting with others around them. The multiple effects this produces has been well-covered in this chapter, where Barnabas was spat on by a homeless woman in Spokane because he was Asian. He also experienced racialization in his own home, whilst Cain was simply told to move out by his White therapist when he was struggling to navigate the complexities of being Gay and living as a Korean in Seattle. As Jasbin Puar explains, as an assemblage, the transnational gay does not accrete in linear time or within discrete histories, fields or discourses. In other words, the moments of exclusion and inclusion experienced, produced, resisted and reproduced by my informants at various points of time in their own narratives are all part of the processes and manifestations of racialized modernity. As Puar further posits, homonationalism, or an examination of racializing affects from this perspective is not merely an accusation, or a synonym for gay racism. Instead, it is an analytic for apprehending the consequences of transnational movements and their successes around LGBT rights movements in particular (Puar, 2016).

I have attempted to show in this chapter that the intertwined conditions of racialized modernity that we live under can be apprehended through the purview of my informants' narratives in specific

and nuanced ways. For Seoul informants, they encountered racialization in the form of structured and embedded whiteness as a product of ethno-nationalism, which they critiqued and tried to resist in certain moments but were complicit in upholding in other situations. An example of their dual role in this process being how many of the informants recognized the problematic contours of racialized hierarchies in Korean constructs of racial othering, especially when they had foreigner friends who were non-Korean PoC who explained to them their experiences of racism in Korea. Yet, at the same time, all my informants who were dating foreigners were either with a White man, or had been with a White foreigner as their main experience of dating with non-Koreans. In addition, they found moments where whiteness and foreigners were useful and able to be deployed in their own lives. This came in instrumental ways when they wanted to reform the homophobia they saw within Korea or when they wanted to access a reference point for a full coming-out narrative. For Seattle informants, when they travelled back to Korea their proximity to Whiteness as members of the Korean diaspora provided them a social advantage in different settings. As Korean Americans, or a biracial American like Reuben, his positionality shifted, allowing him to be included in Korean society in ways that other foreigners did not have access to. He contrasted this with the experiences of his Thai friend who had been subjected to negative forms of racialization. For Barnabas, returning to Korea with children who embody different racialized aesthetics garnered uneven responses from his extended family that had real material effects. His son who looked whiter, whom they took to be more Korean, was literally rewarded with more money, while his daughter, who was darker, and fuller in figure was criticized for not complying with a strict Korean ideal beauty aesthetic. An aesthetic where whiteness is also a central part of that construct.

All the while, White gay men continue to arrive in Seoul and are able to take advantage of a type of positionality that they usually do not occupy in their home countries, which is the position of racialized other. This is facilitated by a structural link established by South Korea's desire to position itself as a competitive actor in the global race toward transnational neoliberal forms of development. A link that I have referred to here as a type of insidious, racialized collusion. White gay men are more likely to be traveling to South Korea as teachers than gay men of other ethnic backgrounds, simply because there are more White gay men that qualify. In this way, our own processes of racialization are abetted by Korea's, in that the conversation around discrimination around these English teachers always center on how Koreans treat foreigners, and never mention how within our countries, racial discrimination and uneven distribution of qualifications is also racialized. Thus, making it more likely that White men and women are the representatives of our countries to South Korea, which plays into the South Korean construct of the foreigner and racial hierarchies. These White English teachers do not have any vested interest in interrogating their own role in the Korean racialization process. As a result, the White gay men who can take the position of foreigner are able to position themselves as a disqualified racial group, documented by Walker and Vanvolkenburg (2012), whilst at same time, still access White privilege in hiring processes and even social interactions that afforded them ways to be treated better than other non-Koreans in South Korea's gay community. This collusion is another way in which Whiteness reproduces itself as a mechanism of power.

By keeping the rules strictly as only people from native English speaking countries being allowed to migrate to Korea to teach English, and by importing cheap labor specifically from "brown" countries to lower end factory jobs, the South Korean state is racializing its foreign population. The side-effect of all of this is that in 2018, the process of racialization in South Korea

is uneven among the professional class of foreigners despite there being uniform patterns in the way it appears in the literature and popular discourse. The marginalized foreigner is mostly seen as the English teacher, or the lowly-valued manual laborer. Both narratives that are still relatively marginal to South Korean society. However, as the predominant narratives as discursive representatives of the foreigner community, they can easily elide the differences in experiences between White foreigners and their PoC colleagues in professional settings especially. The contours of exclusion, the specifics of these experiences and narratives are glossed over as whiteness continues to be centered, referenced and ultimately, desired by Korean society.

To close the chapter and the analytical papers of this dissertation I leave you with this excerpt from an interview with one of my informants that became a great friend of mine. This excerpt shows in some ways the multiple manifestations and complexities involved in which informant narratives are affected by racialization as an assemblage of transnational connections, affects and flows across multiple locations.

Informant: *I usually date White guys because most guys who approach to me are white guys. They are usually from Europe and America. They are very comfortable dating with drag queens too.*

Researcher: *So you don't actively seek White people out they just approach you. Also do you think the LGBT foreign community might just be predominantly white here?*

Informant: *Yes.*

Researcher: *So then, it just becomes a case of what is in front of you right? Not something where it's just a fact that you only like to date White people.*

Informants: *I don't know. But, yes, Korea is welcoming of White people.*

Researcher: *Do you think that's just to do with preference? Korea has been said to have hierarchy of race with preference?*

Informant: *Yes. absolutely, just look even in hair salons, you'll never find a black model in there.*

Researcher: *Why do you think that's the case? Is it because Korean culture just prefers Whiter people?*

Informant: *Yes. Korea has already got an obsession with pale skin.*

Researcher: *Do you think that ideal has also filtered down into the gay community?*

Informant: *Yes. When I came back from California, I wanted to become White. My friends even said I should use sun block. I think I started to care a lot more about my skin color when I came back to Korea.*

Researcher: *Well, I think we should all wear sunblock to take care of our skin [laughter]. Does it matter to you if your boyfriend is White?*

Informant: *No, I don't think so, I just want someone who gives cuddles, after all, we all just want someone to love.*

Researcher: *That, I agree with.*

Figure 1 - Seoul City Hall Square, Venue of the Seoul Queer Culture Festival 2017/18

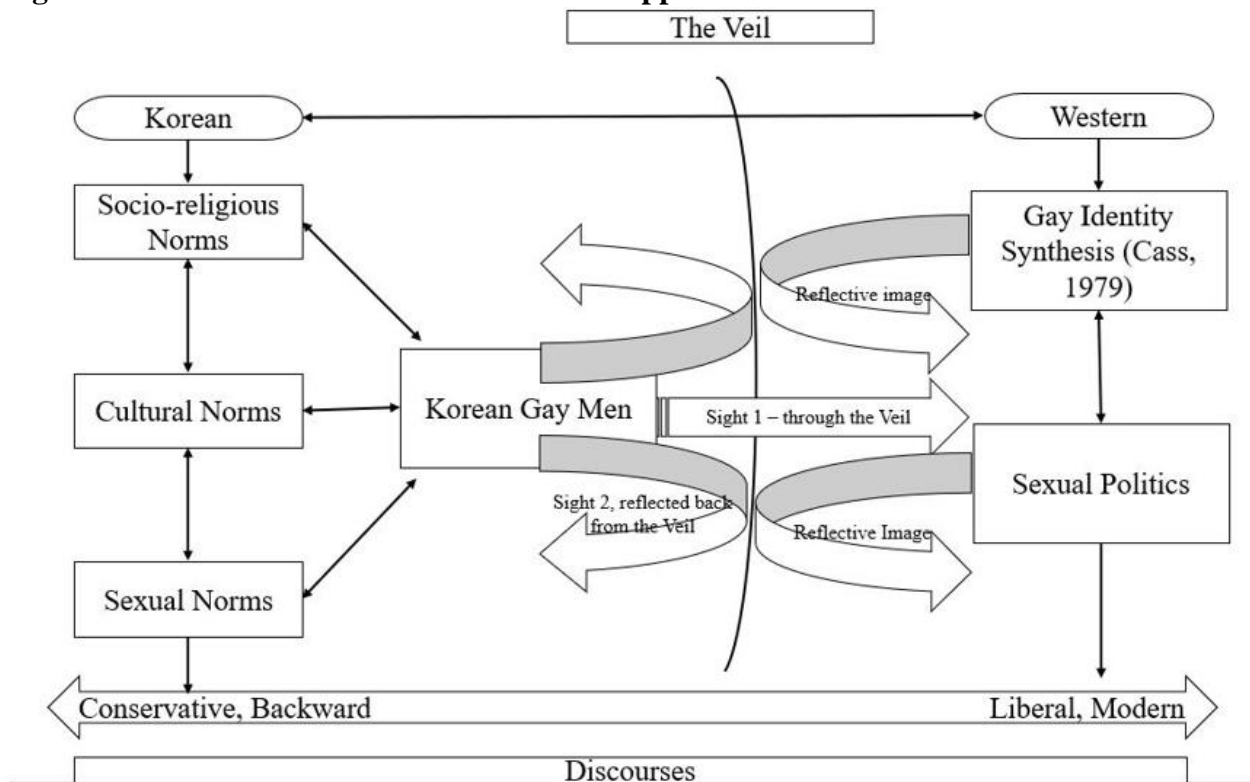


*This picture of the front of Seoul City Hall was taken at the conclusion of my fieldwork in 2018.

Conclusion Chapter - Double Consciousness and Visions of a Korean Gay Futurity

Korean gay men and Seattle have their stories of coming-out mediated by a milieu of discourses that circulate around race, family, culture, and Western sexual exceptionalism. A milieu that has produced complex decisions that relate to sexual visibility. I argue that what my study shows is that Korean gay men in 2018 navigate their marginality in a space of transition, that has facilitated what can be also conceptualized as a Korean gay double consciousness. I have mapped how this presented itself in the diagram below and explain how all three analytical chapters in my study are connected in relation to double consciousness in the following paragraphs.

Figure 2 – Du Boisian Double Consciousness Applied to Informant Narratives



The term double consciousness I take from W.E.B. Du Bois (2007), whose articulation of this concept was used to describe the internal conflict experienced by African Americans of

“always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others. Where: one over feels his two-ness... measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (p7). This articulation of double consciousness is a type of micro-analysis of self- and group-identity formation under conditions of racialization. One where a type of veil exists between a dominant race/group and that of those who live behind it.

I argue that my informants as gay Korean men lived behind a racialized veil. A veil where Western constructs of gay identity, constructed as liberating, supported by coming-out narratives like the Cass model (1979) promotes, formed a lens against which they were forced to measure and adjudicate the Korean way of knowing sexuality through. As outlined in chapter 4, For Seoul informants, Western notions of sexuality were projected onto the veil through television programs like *Sex and the City*, *Modern Family*, Ru Paul’s *Drag Race*, human rights discourses disseminated through international activist networks and musical artists like Lady Gaga and her *Born This Way* anthem. As a result, required informants to reflect on their Korean society through the eyes of the West. This involved re-evaluating Korean norms of sexuality, cultural norms and religious norms using the concepts they imported from the view they received from the veil. In chapter 4 some of these examples were captured through informant narratives. Here is one excerpt that models this procedure, where Silas used the Western media’s portrayal of the Pulse Night Club shooting to help him make sense of the Korean media’s behavior, ultimately concluding that it was backward.

“I’m trying to stay away from the Korean media because they make me so angry. I saw how they reacted in Korea (when the Pulse Night Club Shooting happened) and they made it seem like an ordinary night club shooting, not mentioning that it was a hate crime against the LGBT community. It wasn’t until there was some backlash from the community here that they finally reported it as a

gay club that was targeted. Seeing behavior like that makes me realize that Korea is still very conservative.” - Silas

For the record, I shared the same reaction as Silas, but my goal in highlighting this interaction is to show how interconnected Seoul informants’ views of Korean society are on images that are projected onto this veil from the “West.” In a way that helped them reformulate a reflexive view of Korean society.

For Seattle informants, they lived behind a veil within a Korean American community that had been discursively constructed as heterosexist, conservative and deeply religious. This image was projected onto the veil by a wide range of discourses including experiences with other Americans. But also, academic discourses that had placed them in the category of Asian Americans. A category itself that was subject to on-going racialization by mainstream US society and from within the gay community itself. Hence, they too, were forced to mediate their view of Korean ways of understanding sexuality, socio-religious norms, and Korean culture through the lens of the Western exceptionalist veil. This was clearly put on display by Cain in chapter 4 when he had the unfortunate experience of having to justify his Korean way of understanding family to his White therapist:

“I’ve been trying to see therapists lately, and it’s with this White lady at the moment and after I’ve been telling her about what I’m going through, her response was simple: why don’t you move out? I wanted to scream at her, lady I’m Korean, It’s not that easy!”

Du Bois also emphasizes how the presence of the veil means there is no process of mutual recognition between racialized and racializing subjects (Itzigsohn and Brown, 2015). In other

words, as the racializer is able to set the discourse and dominates the normative conversation, there is little way in which the racialized subject can communicate from behind the veil to shift the norms that have been projected onto the veil. As there is an inherent power asymmetry that places the racializer in the dominant position to be able set the normative constructs. Evidence of the asymmetric power relations can be seen in this excerpt that was presented in chapter 5 during Martin's interview:

"Maybe Korean society follows some sort of global standard. Actually, I think that Sex and the City helped us a lot. Because many girls thought after watching the show: "there are gay people" because they watched the show and after the popularity of Sex and the City, there are gay guys in society."

Thus, when I asked the question at the beginning of this dissertation, "where are all the Korean gay men?" – the answer may be related to the fact that my question was informed by a normative understanding of coming-out that came from the other, more dominant side of the veil. In other words, living in a time that Puar termed racialized modernity, informants were drawn to a Western construct of sexual liberation because they believed it to just be better than Korean ways of sexuality. However, Du Bois's conceptualization of the veil helps us to understand that due to the inherent power-imbalance that the veil is a product of, informants simply could not *just* be indigenizing a Western ideal. In other words, they were not merely deploying in a local context a gay identity that they inherently carried, their sexual identity was being discursively formed this way too. This quote from Martin shows that there *is* a homosexual frame in the Korean historical

narrative. Yet, rarely was this ever discussed in reference to, or in a nuanced way about Korean ways of knowing sexuality.

“Yeah, maybe there are sexual orientation things like bromance, or the Hwarang, in Korean culture, local villages with packs of guys that would just “play” with each other, but that’s not “gay” that diverse identity is something you’ll see maybe in Southeast Asia or India, but not in Korea.”

If Judith Butler (1990) is to be trusted, sexuality itself and its forms can be seen as a type of performance. In that, as one *learns* how to perform their gender, or their sex, they come to assign the meaning to the label itself. So what this tells me is that there *must* be a Korean way of knowing gay or homosexual identity, which Cho J (2011), Bong Y (2008) Seo D (2001) and Lee I (2016), documented as being part of Korea’s norms of homosociality. A Korean norm that due to Korea specific cultural norms and religious conditions. was not allowed to form into what we know as a gay identity in the West today.

Therefore, for informants, their desire to live more open lives as gay men in Korea and as Korean gay men in the US, is not just a product of their individual agency trying to escape oppression, but was also facilitated by Western power to be able to define the *right way* to be gay. This is the space in-between that my informants were occupying whether they were cognizant of it or not. There were often double layers in which informants were forced to discuss the concerns they had as Koreans and as gay subjects, the latter being an identity construct that they wished to also claim and legitimize. This showed up in the ways they spoke about their concerns for their family, and how to protect them from their coming-out narratives. I purport that this is evidence

of this double consciousness and of their status of living behind the veil as racialized gay subjects. Their decision to cultivate self-reliance was an adaptive strategy, particularly in Seoul to ensure they would be able to renegotiate new possibilities within their families. This excerpt from Aaron's interview presented in chapter 4 that illustrates this point:

"I've come-out to everyone, but only my immediate family, so my dad, my mom and sister, but not my extended family know, like my cousins etc. It was my dad that asked me not to tell them. I guess it was because of the humiliation or some kind of stress it might be for him from me going against the norm. [...] he did want to know why it took me so long to come-out, because I knew I was gay when I was 15, so it took me about 10 years to come-out. I said to him (father) when I came out that I had waited to tell them because I was not independent, I was not ready financially, and had to rely on my parents. They could have used their power to rule over me and they could try to change me. I was worried about that and I didn't really know who I was either at the time. I decided that I needed time to define who I was and waited for the perfect timing before I came out."

Du Bois advises that for racialized subjects, life behind the veil can lead to the development of a second sight, one that allows the racialized subject to see into the world that exists beyond the veil. Clearly, in contemporary times, transnational links fueled by up-to-the-minute communication technologies makes the ability to see into other worlds a much easier prospect than when Du Bois first wrote his book in 1901. But in the narratives of informants in Seoul and Seattle, it was clear they had developed a second sight. Many of my informants were able to see the promises of futurity that Western liberation norms brought them, whilst they also picked up on the

problematic way in which they were racialized or how their own community racialized others. This second sight also extended, reflectively to view their own culture as backward and in need of reforming. As Lyotard (1988) informs us, a mismatch or clash of understanding, which I extrapolate to also mean views, can only be settled in the favor of a more powerful party. Thus, many informants believed that the right way to be gay was the Western way. This was illustrated by this excerpt from Chad's interview that was not presented earlier.

“With the increase of using SNS and lot of people who can speak different languages, there is more awareness of what is going on. There are obviously lots of people glamorizing about Western Countries that legalized same sex marriage and gave comprehensive rights for LGBT people. At the same time there is a need for understanding the historical background of how it came to be. But in the short term, maybe it is easier to get their help. To blast our country of misgivings.”

Chad's response here clearly demonstrates the development of this second sight, where he is aware of the allure that Western discourses have in inciting change in South Korea. However, at the same time is weary about the cultural specificities of the discourses and situations in Western countries. For informants in Seoul, their desire to live more openly as gay men can also be characterized as a result of their ability to draw on their second sight that looked to Western normative structures of gay identity. Their adaptive strategy tended to be around self-cultivation, which in itself is born out of growing neoliberal restructuring of Korean society in the age of globalization. By being able to see the promises of futurity that Western gay life may present them, their decisions to focus on self-cultivation was an adaptive strategy that allowed them to transform kinship relations in their mind, and reimagine what a gay identity could look like in South Korea in the not too-distant future.

Furthermore, in-line with this concept of a second sight, it did not mean that informants felt obliged to reject their Korean heritage altogether. Rather, it forced them to strategize ways in which they could navigate a gay identity whilst maintaining a Korean one. Hence, the development of Situated Embedded Narratives (SENs) in Seattle can also be seen through this lens. My informants there were well aware of the promises that Western modes of legalized same-sex marriage brought them, as well as the freedom they could enjoy as openly-gay subjects in the US homonationalist project. However, their experiences of racialization also made some of them weary of when they would be excluded by mainstream US society. When read in tandem with the multiple lenses of Korean familism that was covered in chapter 2 of this dissertation, it brings to light the ways in which a narrative of convenience can be seen as an adaptive strategy that is also born out of a double consciousness. This excerpt was presented in chapter 3 from Cain's interview:

"I feel like American culture is problematic in a lot of ways. In terms of rejection of family, 18, you move out. I find value in family ties, that's your original support network. It's also helped form my identity. That's a really important question, especially now coz I ask myself: What is my duty to my family, my community, my Korean identity. But also, what is my duty to my queer family, to my queer brothers and sisters? How can we reconcile the two? Yeah so those are the big questions, I don't have an answer for you."

Another strategy that was employed by some informants is what Du Bois terms breaking through the veil. In this scenario, the racialized subject, instead of trying to adapt to the conditions of living behind the veil, could choose to just break through and join the other side. In other words, assimilate. This happened in different moments for different informants in my study, the result for these informants were clear, it often meant a severing of meaningful connections to their Korean

community or heritage. Some were able to return, like Cain, but when they did, it was under strictly regulated conditions. For Simeon, it meant he simply did not associate with Koreans anymore.

The Transformative Power of Western Normative Constructs of a Gay Identity

What a Du Boisian double consciousness lens combined with the other theoretical approaches taken in this dissertation, tells us, is that Western normative constructs around gay identity *is* having a transformative effect for Korean gay men. For Seoul informants in particular, the utility of Western constructs was important in driving social movements and raising visibility of a gay identity. It was also very helpful in helping them form their own sense of sexual identity. Many referencing the role that pop icons and television shows in the West had in helping them accept who they were in terms of their sexuality. Here are some excerpts that were presented in chapter 4.

“I met a new guy in 2015 and he said you should watch it (Ru Paul’s Drag Race), we literally netflixed and chilled all the seasons and I just loved it. Crack up and funny. But also, I don’t know, when I was first dating my ex, I wasn’t transphobic, maybe a little dragphobic? I didn’t like the idea of gay people being portrayed feminine, but back then that was the image of gay people, that stereotype of how straight people think of gay people, when there are a lot of different types of gay people, you know what I mean? You can easily portray gay people like this. Even in Will and Grace, Jack was kind of like this. In movies they’re always portrayed in fashion, flamboyant, I didn’t kind of like that idea at all, that was my justification of why I didn’t like drag queens back then, but I’ve opened up since then, I went to gay clubs a lot and I’m at peace with it. Finally, I

accepted, it's really fine to be whoever you are, a drag or whatever, that's why I got hooked into it." – Soonchang

"Back then I didn't know about the gay situation among musicians. But the more I listened to music and the more I got to know about particular musicians, I realized that they were related to gay society. Mariah Carey, Janet Jackson and Madonna, they were huge fans of gay people so they are somehow related to gay people. Music is very influential. Even the music that people listen to in clubs were influenced by gay people. I am not a clubbing type person, I don't really know the club music scene well, but music is very related to gay culture, which tells a lot of my stories."- Bob

"I think it's happening slowly, at a slow pace. Little-by-little in that way the Korean gay community is being affected I guess. This country will move forward on homosexuality. I see it everywhere. I've seen on YouTube, there are Korean gay tubers and transsexual YouTubers who host talk shows, using YouTube as a powerful platform these days. [...] If I have to compare gay guys in Korea in their 30s, 40s, 50s, there's a huge disparity because we are more comfortable. Comparatively we're more open, we're not discreet and that's proof of change."- Martin

Inferring from my informants' narratives then, as Western discourses around sexual identity continues to flood South Korea due to its greater interconnectedness with the West, the category of gay Korean will come to be more recognized as an identity marker within South Korea. As such, we can expect that more Korean gay men will emerge to claim a public gay identity over the next decade and beyond. Gay vernacular which emerges from mostly English-speaking

Western countries will continue to be imported in South Korea as a side-effect of Korea's own obsession with English education. My informants showed a deftness with navigating English gay terminologies like bears, tops, twink, hunks, gender neutral, etc. And a target that all my informants were hoping to reach, was having South Korea one day legalize same-sex marriage.

Lacking a Race Critique of Western Discourses Coming into South Korea?

Despite all these discourses clearly being formed in the West, carrying with them the ability to racialize Koreans, what my informants rarely did was interrogate the neocolonial frame within which the spread of these discourses are sourced from. Although it may appear here that Korean gay men are accepting these liberating discourses without a critique of race, or coloniality, the previous chapter clearly demonstrated that Korean gay men were aware of the racialized nature of constructs of desirability within South Korea that are racially-hierarchized. However, their cooptation into a "global gay" community also coopted into the racialization process of others in certain situations.

In other words, the ability for Western discourses around sexual liberation and a gay identity to come into South Korea is facilitated by a lot of my informants themselves looking to the West as a reference point to escape what they consider to be an oppressive Korean frame. Yet, in the setup of such a relationship, they are also presented with conflicting ideas that circulate neocolonial practices that intermingle with Korea's own constructs of the foreigner. When informants spoke of racism in the Seoul gay community, they only spoke of instances where others experienced racism due to Korean constructs of the foreigner. The majority acknowledging that Koreans do have a race problem, but often deflecting it as just an effect of Korean society as a

whole. I argue that this resulted in informants having to leave the racial critique of the Seoul gay community in limbo.

By constituting the West as the teacher, or superior culture in this way, I also argue that Korean culture, society and ways of knowing are undercut. Without a reflexive critique of this practice that relates to this power-configuration, it can create an inadequately prepared gay and queer movement for battles against nationalist rhetoric. Woori Han (2018) also drew a similar conclusion in their study. However, Han postulated that Korean queer subjects were able to build cross-cultural, transnational networks with other People of Color to circumvent the lack of a reflexive critique against Western scripts of gay liberation. I go further, in presenting my own interpretation by arguing that queer Koreans are not the same as Gay Koreans like men in my study. Therefore, that conclusion does not neatly fit my informants. I argue that by not confronting the scripts of Western superiority that accompanies liberation discourses, it will allow detractors like Christian fundamentalists to other a Korean gay identity form within, like Dongjin Seo (2001) postulated nearly 20 years ago now. It will also allow for the continual racialization of Korean gay men by White Western gay men, continuing to leave Korean gay men in the position of “lesser” in the gay community. This should be taken seriously, because despite tacit acknowledgement of racism against PoC by informants in Seoul, there was nothing in their narratives to suggest that this was a process that may be undergoing changes there. In making these statements, I am clearly speaking from the position of a PoC, a position that carries with it its own form of politicization. So as stinging as this critique may present itself, it is still a biased one. The fact that I have to qualify my position in this way, suggests exactly how powerful the forces are of Western-ways of knowing, that even when we speak back against our racialization, my marginal way of knowing still must be minimized further.

Moreover, the presence of White gay men who were now able to coopt an experience of racialization within South Korea did sit uncomfortably for me and many of my informants who were also gay PoC. For racialized exclusion in South Korea and the gay community at large was hierarchical and although all experiences of racialization are important to note, an insidious form of collusion appears to be taking place. A process that allows White privilege embodied in White gay men as mouthpieces for foreigners in South Korea, the ability to re-establish themselves as racialized victims while also accessing the benefits of being the preferred racialized group at the expense of PoC. Recall the conversation I had with Greg in chapter 5.

Greg: Ugh, it's hard here sometimes living as a foreigner, being excluded all the time, the way people talk about you, especially in Korean, when you can understand Korean. But when my Korean wasn't so good, people would treat me like you're stupid because you're not able to speak Korean well. But you know, everyone who's here on a teaching visa has at least got a degree.

Researcher: Well, that doesn't exactly make you smart either. Having a degree, especially in Korea where nearly everyone has them.

Greg: Right, but also they look down on English teachers here for some reason. I feel that a lot, it's like they think we're just here to drink and party and commit crimes all the time. Remember how everyone keeps bringing up that pedophile case, and that all foreigners have AIDS and are child molesters. But you know what, I can't imagine what it must be like to be a PoC in Korea having that prejudice against you, plus experiencing racism in your own country too. I imagine it must be way worse than what I experience here. But you're from New Zealand, so it might be different than America.

Researcher: *It's definitely different, I mean, the whole foreigners as child molesters and carriers of AIDS I'm aware of, but it's not really the first thing I think of when someone mentions racism in Korea. I tend to think more of the racism in hiring practices among employers that favor White teachers, and the favorability of the White aesthetic in KPop and Korean beauty cosmetics industries. But yeah, coming from New Zealand, racism definitely exists there, don't worry.*

Greg: *Ahhh, that's interesting. But also, that's where we are different because I don't have to deal with any of that. That's my privilege.*

The acknowledgement from Greg, and from Korean gay men themselves was a welcome nuance in my fieldwork. However, the acknowledgement itself did not translate to any material efforts to change the image of foreigners in the gay community in Seoul besides what is focused on in the public discourse that was reviewed in chapter 5. This situation then means that gay PoC are often forced to negotiate a different type of positionality where they rationalize their own erasure and experiences of racial discrimination. Recall the conversation I had with James at the conclusion of chapter 5.

James: *Yeah, Korean guys are way more into White dudes, you know, the frat types. Them, they usually look down on guys like me coz they think I'm just Filipino, and they just don't seem to like people from Southeast Asia. It's that whole from-a-poor-country bias thing that Koreans have. But it's also even when they're hiring for English teaching jobs, they prefer White teachers.*

Researcher: *I have heard stories like that too from some of my friends, and I was also turned down for an English teaching job for the same reason. They literally told me after the interview that they really liked me but the parents wanted a White teacher.*

James: *That happened to one of my friends as well. But you kinda just get used to it coz that's life here, I guess.*

Researcher: *Yeah, I know I'm over it, I mean, not in a bad way, over it in the sense that there are other things I love about living here, and let's be honest, there are issues to do with race that our own countries haven't yet figured out, so I give Korea a much wider berth than my own country considering Korea's limited experience with ethnic diversity.*

James: *I feel the same way. I love it here despite all these problems. I have some amazing Korean friends who are like family to me as well. So I don't even think about it until something happens.*

Christianity and the Battle for Korean Gay Futurity

Although prior literature has identified the role of Confucianism and its inherently oppressive cultural norms. What informant narratives demonstrate is the slight eroding of the total relevance of Confucian normative structures on the Korean family. Indeed, my informants storied Confucian cultural norms as a force whose power has begun to wane. And although it will remain a guiding force in their opinion toward the ways in which they develop their relational identities, the Korean family is far more elastic and *is* able to incorporate a gay identity if one strategizes a culturally-sensitive way of coming-out.

For informants then, the one force that remains the biggest stumbling block to a gay futurity in South Korea is Christianity, more specifically fundamentalist groups. Throughout the dissertation I have left the definition of Christianity deliberately opaque. My focus has been on discourses and Christianity as a discourse was storied by informants as oppressive in one breath, whilst comforting in another. In Seattle, among my informants there, related this to the way in which the Korean American community itself was formed simultaneously through the development of the Korean American Christian Church as a site of community building. Communities that many of my informants subsequently grew up in and were connected to in meaningful ways. Therefore, for some informants who moved to Seattle from South Korea, they found themselves estranged and voluntarily stayed out of the Korean American community in Seattle for this reason. Whilst one younger informant chose to withstand the oppressive Christianity-derived discourses from within the Korean American community in Seattle, just so they could feel a sense of connection to their ethnic heritage. All this suggests that Christianity as a stumbling block for Korean gay men in Seattle, is a real hurdle that informants needed to navigate and will continue to affect the lives of Korean gay men for many years to come.

In Seoul, informant narratives suggested that divergence is already underway. In families where Christianity was a big part of their familial structure, coming-out was still practiced by some of my informants. When they did come-out, the frame in which Christianity was deployed by some parents shifted the discourse around Christianity. Naturally, some like Anton, were told by their mother that they were in violation of Church norms. However, Anton's father shifted the nuance, changing the role of Christianity to an existential threat to the family. Which was a discourse shared by informants whose families were not Christian. In other words, even families that were

Christian knew deep down that the issue was not their children's homosexuality, rather, the power that Christian norms had over the way in which Korean society viewed homosexuality.

"I think Christianity in modern Korea has been a modernizing force because when the Protestant Church was first introduced to Korea, many missionaries founded schools – by American missionaries or so – the Catholic church even before that. When Koreans first got to learn Catholic things, it was kind of an enlightenment for the Choson dynasty. It had some kind of egalitarian doctrine. [...] Nowadays, the Christians are the main enemy to progress in contemporary Korea."

- Anton

Thus, the final conclusion I wish to make is that in terms of a gay futurity in South Korea and for Korean gay men space certainly does exist. For gay men in particular, their ability to access the patriarchal norms of Korean society presents them with more options within their society to be able to renegotiate new kinship relationships that could possibly one day allow for a gay identity to become integrated in some form within South Korea legally. However, the biggest threat to that possible futurity continues to be Christian fundamentalism. In the past, one would presume that Confucian familial norms would conspire with Christian fundamentalist norms around sexuality to doubly oppress Korean gay men, but that situation may be starting to diverge, albeit slowly.

So, where are all the gay men? A question I posited at the beginning of this dissertation. The final answer I give to that question is: they are on their way to the gay party. There are some roadblocks they have to negotiate, before they can lift the veil from the eyes of Westerners who are already at that cosmopolitan celebration. For what has been another central learning point from this dissertation is that Western ways of knowing are still centered in gay discourses and obfuscate

what we can know about the specificity of a Korean gay coming-out narrative. And being able to make use of my own positionality as a researcher has opened up the terminology “coming-out” for re-usage and ultimately the possibility of new knowledge to emerge. However, my positionality supposes that in some ways what I have presented here is merely a different framework of theoretical imposition. I accept that this dissertation has drawn its arguments from this space. However, on what criteria do we base such a critique of a Pacific way of knowing and PoC experiences being an invalid way of producing knowledge or analysis? Especially when the entire academy and episteme in the Korean studies space outside of Korea are dominated by White, Western-ways of knowing. This space I occupy is an alternative way of knowing that I believe still adds valuable knowledge to the fields of Korean queer studies and international studies.

To conclude I argue that as a transnational gay Person of Color, the work presented here from within my own perspectives and bias has allowed me to question the ways in which we have constructed Korean gay men as agentially-bereft, oppressed, and waiting to be liberated by Western scripts of freedom. The importance of this perspective is not because it presents or reveals the “real” way in which Korean society operates around gay subjectivities, rather, by presenting my interpretations in this dissertation, I am merely pointing out that there are other culturally-sensitive ways in which we can read and interpret the subjectivity/visibility of Korean gay men. In doing so, my goal was not to “correct” Western hegemonic discourses (which some would argue is impossible), it is designed to open up spaces for discussions around a Korean gay futurity to explore the many facets in which it is being produced like a record, by the cosmopolitan gay identity. Therefore, limiting the possibilities for what Korean gay men and their futurities may look like to a Western construct. Much like Puar argues, this is not an accusatory-framework, it is a generative space, imbued with power. Like all asymmetric power relationships, one party enjoys

a dominant position over others. This domination can allow other forces, discourses, and engender new asymmetries if a reflective critique is not deployed. This dissertation has been about generating new ways of knowing, rather than focusing on damage-centered and damaging research (Tuck, 2009). Korean gay men are navigating their marginality from multiple positions that are not always disempowering. Seeing past a Western-centered framework of knowing presents us with the potential to explore the productive modality of this space. A project I hope that will allow a Korean way of knowing to be centered more as my informants move forward in their pursuit of their own futurities.

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Appendix A - Profile of Seoul Informants

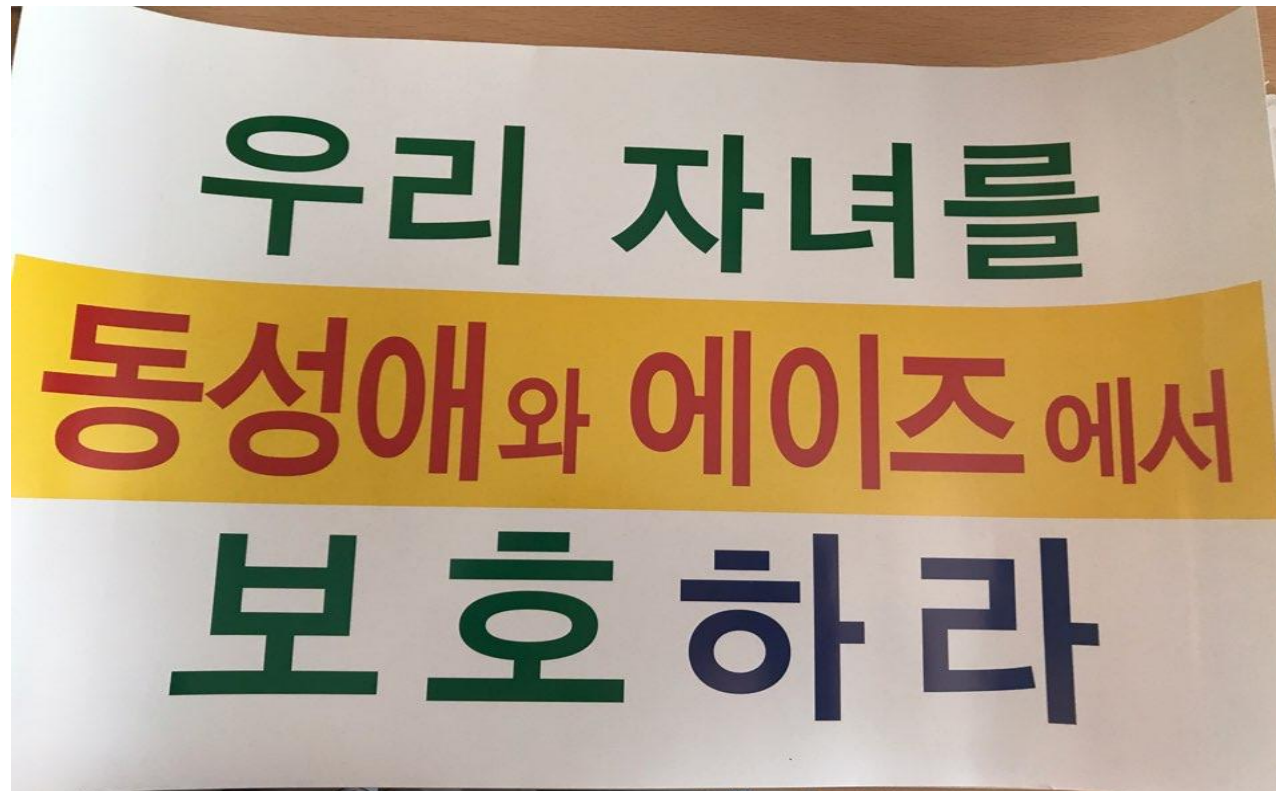
Name (alias)	Age	Born	Religion	Class*	Education	Time Overseas**	Relationship Status	Disclosure - Family	Disclosure - Community
Aaron	30-34	Outside Seoul	None	Low Income	Bachelors	2 years	Single	Immediate	Gay community only
Jeremy	30-34	Outside Seoul	Raised Catholic	Low Income	Bachelors	None	In a relationship	Immediate and extended	Gay community only
Henry	30-34	Outside Seoul	None	Middle Income	Masters	Travels Frequently for Work	Single	Immediate	Gay community and 1 work colleague
Ella	30-34	Outside Seoul	Raised Jehovahs Witness	Low Income	High School	1 year	Single	Immediate	Open to everyone
Vincent	20-24	Seoul	Raised Christian	Low income	Bachelors	None	Single	Mother and Sister	Gay community only
Seunghwa	25-29	Outside Seoul	None	Middle Income	Bachelors	None	Single	Immediate	Gay community only
John	25-29	Outside Seoul	None	High Income	Bachelors	7 years abroad	Single	None	Gay community only
Bob	40-44	Outside Seoul	Buddhist	Low Income	Bachelors	Short Work Trips	Single	Brother and Sister	Gay community only
Silas	20-24	Outside Seoul	Raised Jehovahs Witness	Middle Income	University Student	High school life	Single	Immediate family	Open to everyone
Jonathan	20-24	Seoul	Former Christian	High Income	University Student	Studying in America	Single	None	None
Sam	20-24	Seoul	Catholic	Middle Income	Bachelors	1 year	Single	None	None
Chad	25-29	Outside Seoul	None	Middle Income	Bachelors	16 years	In a relationship	Immediate family	Open to everyone
Hank	25-29	Seoul	Parents Catholic	Middle Income	Bachelors	Some overseas trips	Single	Mother	Open to everyone

Soonchang	25-29	Seoul	Catholic	High Income	Masters	4 years	Single	Mother	Gay friends only
Martin	35-39	Outside Seoul	None	Low Income	Masters	2 years	Single	None	Gay community only
Anton	25-29	Seoul	Christian	High Income	Masters	3.5 years	Single	Parents	Gay friends only
Paul	25-29	Seoul	None	High Income	Bachelors	6 months	Engaged	Parents	Gay friends only
Dennis	36-39	Outside Seoul	None	Middle Income	Masters	3 years	Single	None	Gay friends only
Gene	30-34	Outside Seoul	Catholic	Middle Income	Bachelors	2 years	In a relationship	None	Gay friends only
Ian	25-29	Born in China	None	Low Income	Bachelors	7 years in China	Single	None	Gay friends only

*The label for class was self-selected by informants, they indicated to me during interviews what they believed the income bracket was that their family belonged to.

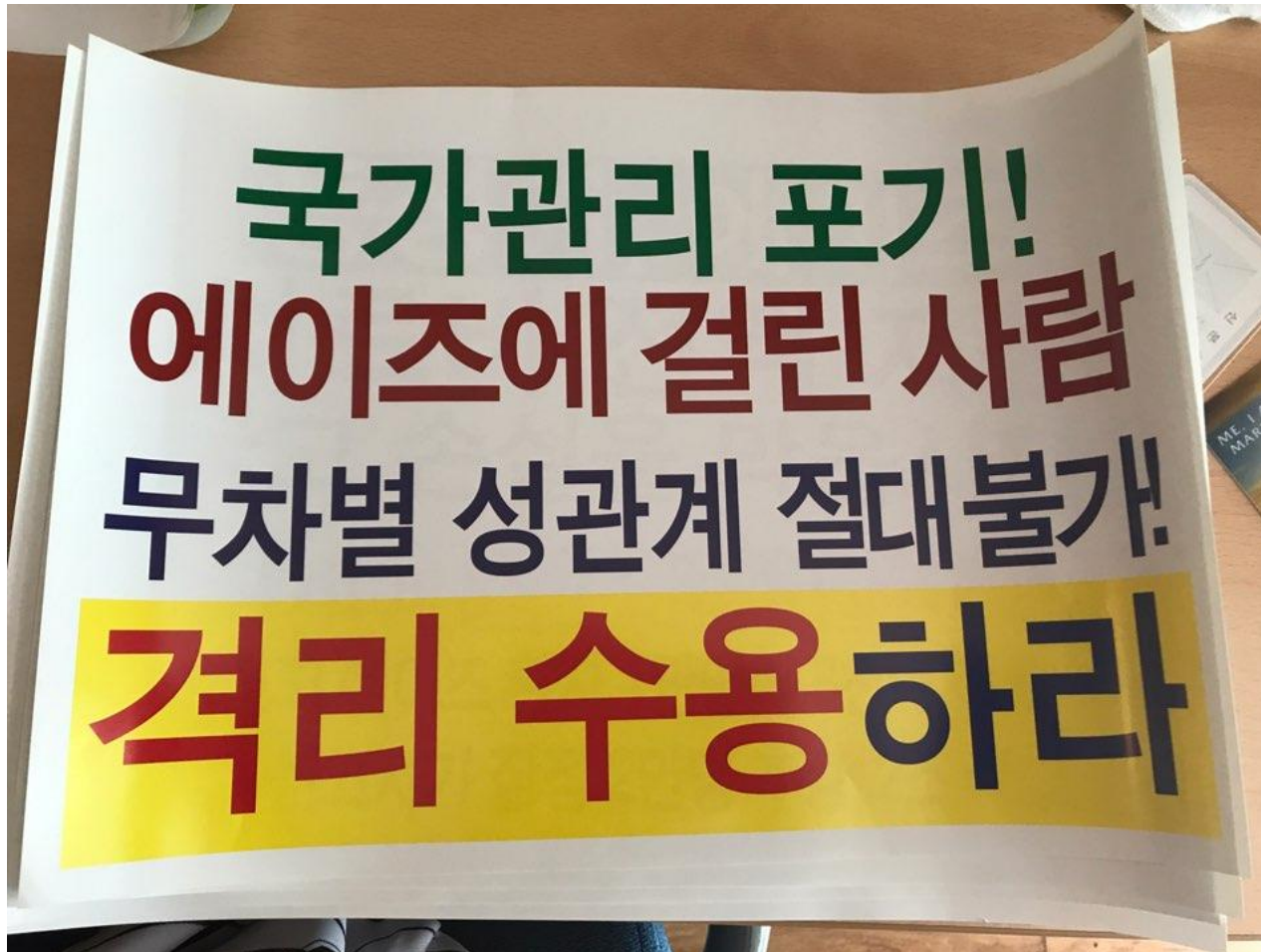
** Although informants often said they “never lived abroad” I counted the amount of overseas trips they took as part of their experiences overseas.

Appendix B - “Protect our Children from Homosexuality and AIDS”



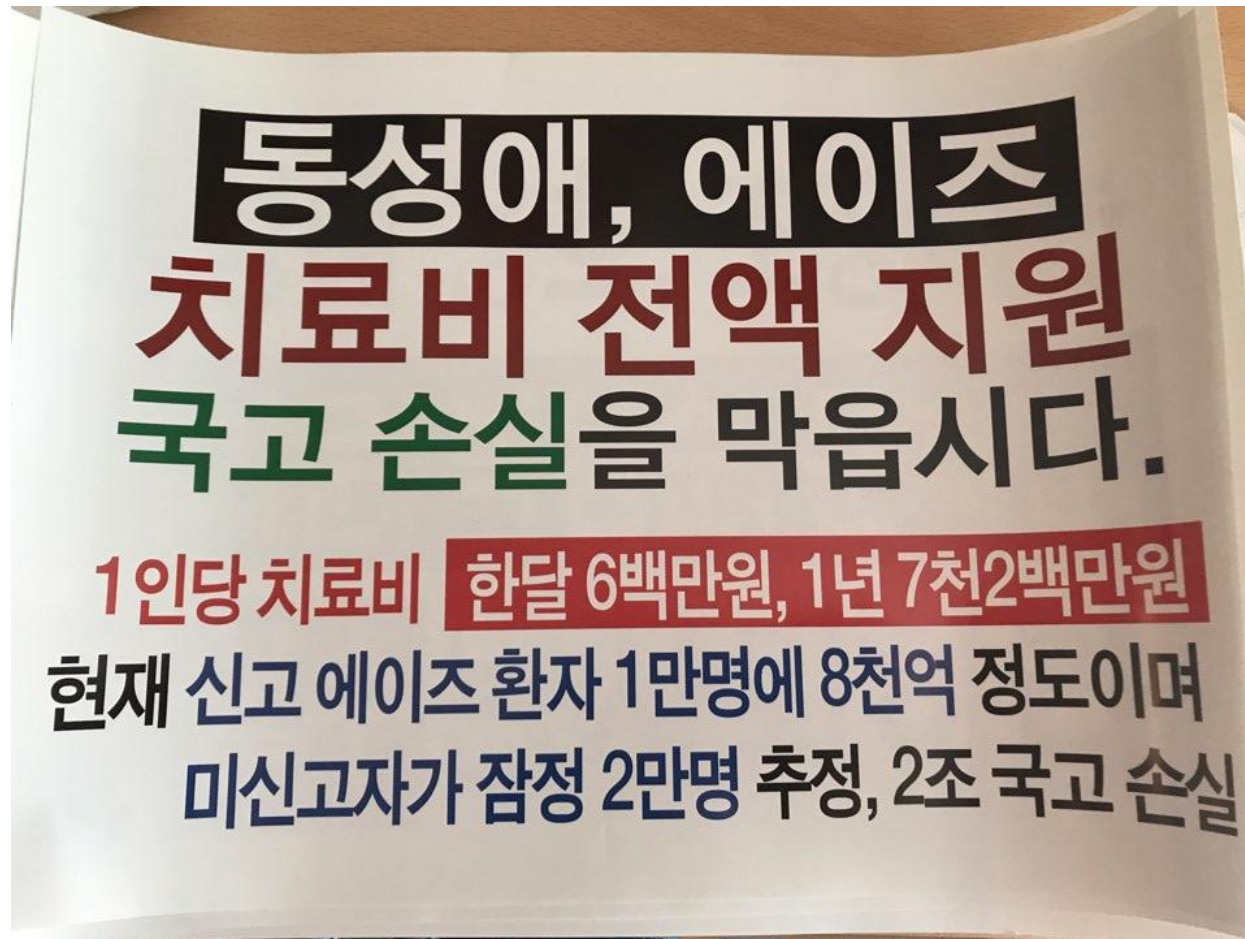
*This sign was part of a bundle of signs given to me by a group of Christian fundamentalists protesting outside Seoul Pride 2017. This sign demonstrates the connection that this group of protestors were attempting to draw on that portrayed homosexuals in Korea as a threat to children as carriers of the AIDS virus. The sign literally translates to: “Protect our children from homosexuality and AIDS.”

Appendix C - “The State Should Detain People with AIDS and Ban them from Having Sex, Isolate Them!”



This was another sign that was part of the bundle given to me by the Christian fundamentalists. Throughout the day I saw many children holding signs like these.

Appendix D - "Homosexuality, AIDS is Causing a Drain on the Country's Finance, Stop Funding It!"



This sign gives specific figures as to how much it costs to take care of an AIDS patient. They claim it is costing Koreans 6 million won per month (about 5,000 USD), or 72 million won per patient, per year (60,000 USD). According to this sign, the number of reported AIDS cases is now around 10,000 registered patients costing the Korean government around 800 billion won a year (705 million USD). They suspect there are 20,000 more who are not registered. And if they do it will be an even bigger drain on Koreans.

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