KOREAN LESBIANS AND HETERO-NORMATIVITY: 
FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF SIX SOUTH KOREAN LESBIANS

By

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Research Question

The aim of this research is to use queer theory as the basis to answer the question ‘what are the effects of compulsory heterosexuality on contemporary Korean \(^1\) lesbians?’ More specifically, ‘does heterosexism have any effects on how Korean lesbians self-identify, and how they live their lives?’ In assessing the breadth and scope of this question I hoped to discover what, if any, affect their sexual identities have on the daily lives of Korean lesbians and their interactions with others in Korean society. Undertaking an investigation into the experiences of lesbians in the context of South Korean culture, it is imperative to first gain a basic understanding of Korean culture. Along with discourses important to Korean culture, in the following paper I outline the theory that informs my work, ethical considerations, methods of data collection, and my findings including some suggestions for future consideration.

Theoretical Overview – Queer Theory

Queer theory has been used to analyse heterosexist cultures around the globe and in many historical backgrounds. Queer theory focuses on the structures of power, knowledge, politics and social institutions that create traditional categories of sexuality, all of which have been based on the heterosexist values of Western patriarchal societies. Largely based on the theories of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, and influenced by Adrienne Rich’s concept of a compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), queer theory has provided a way of transgressing conventional categorisations and cultural investigations. Although Western gay and lesbian liberationist movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s focussed solely on anti-assimilation

\(^1\) In this paper ‘Korea’ and ‘Korean’ will refer to South Korea only. Although the two countries have a shared history, the cultures have been developing independently for over 50 years. It is impossible to assume that the experiences of the six South Korean womyn interviewed here would encompass the experiences of lesbians in the North as well.
and consciousness-raising, the goal of contemporary sexual minority groups is to destabilise the formation of identities around “fixed poles of gender or sexuality” (Gunther, p. 23). Today, queer theory is a form of politics that while simultaneously resisting fixed identity has moved beyond the discourse of sexuality and gender to encompass many other discourses of identity formation. With a strong focus on destabilizing forms of hetero-normativity, queer theory offers a cross-cultural basis from which to critique gender and sexual norms.

In many ways queer theory is both a reaction to earlier critical theories such as post-structuralism, lesbian-feminism and both gay and lesbian liberation movements, as well as an extension of them. There have been many debates surrounding exactly what queer theory is, but the characteristics which seem to be accepted without question are its ways of analysing identity formation by criticising hetero-normative structures, and its inclusion of an indefinite number of sexual categories of identification. By postulating that meanings and categories of identification are always shifting and unstable queer theory moves beyond the binary codes of identification found in earlier theories. Some academics, such as Plummer and Stein (1994), have claimed that the roots of queer theory can be found in the study of the sociology of homosexuality, which is predated by the study of communities in general within the field of symbolic interactionism. Warner (1993, 9), however, points out that although it is true that social theories have persistently focused on the role of sexuality, these theories have always marginalised queer sexuality in accounts of the world. Others, such as Seidman, (1993) posit that queer theory was born out of the gay and lesbian liberationist movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Still others link queer theory to feminist theory and practice because of feminist focus on the importance of sex and gender before these became fashionable in traditional disciplines like sociology, history, or literature studies (de Lauretis, 1991). The focus of the sociology of homosexuality of the past
did not include lesbians, bisexuals, transgender peoples or any other sexual minorities, early feminist studies concentrated on heterosexual, white and middle class women, and the liberationist movements of the past presupposed non-existent or non-political unified women’s, gay, and lesbian communities. Therefore queer theory cannot be definitively linked to only one specific theory, academic or political tradition because it represents a way of perceiving the world that is fluid, transformative and multi-faceted. Queer theory attempts to fill in gaps by creating a new space where the world can be questioned and interpreted from the point of view of all those who feel they do not fit into the binary categories of woman and man, or homosexual and heterosexual, as defined by the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality.

One criticism of queer theory is that it is seen to have been born out of the cultural politics and experiences of American queers and that it is not easily exported to other cultural frameworks. In fact, in some countries the word “queer” does not translate, and some cultures are reluctant to consider queer theory by virtue of the fact that it is seen as an American-only import (Gunther, 2005). Perhaps one of the greatest criticisms of queer theory is the exclusivity of the word itself that effaces the different experiences and existence of marginalised sexualities such as that of lesbians and the transgender peoples. Historically, lesbian-feminists have been almost invisible in discourses on homosexuality, (Hawthorne, 2003; Jagose, 1996; Whitford, 1991) and using the umbrella term “queer” is felt to further erase them, and other non-gay, non-heterosexuals from existence. However, even with these criticisms, queer theory has successfully been embraced in fields of study outside of the discourse of gender and sexuality. Sedgwick pointed out in 1993 that queer theory is “not restricted to sex-specific issues” (p. 14), and this is becoming a central topic for current discussions in the theory. Because one’s identity cannot be tied to sexuality alone, other considerations such as nationality, ethnicity, class, race,
religion, age, occupation and education, as well as a myriad of other factors must be considered in queer theory and politics.

In this paper I use queer theory to gain a better understanding of hetero-normative culture on self-identified South Korean lesbians. Although, there have been a plethora of essays written on both contemporary heterosexuality and queer issues in Western academia, Korean academic, political and social discussions have yet to incorporate the question of how hetero-normative culture affects South Korean lesbians. In English it is virtually impossible to find research focusing on the discussion of the lives of Korean lesbians specifically, and in Korean it takes a great deal of effort. This is largely due to the fact that it is a taboo subject in Korea and is virtually absent from public discourse. This is a clear indication that studies in this area are necessary in any language. My study addresses the lack of research in either Korean or in English.

When considering the lives and experiences of those outside of the norms of heterosexist cultures, it is of utmost importance to first navigate the national identities of those cultures. According to Rankin (2000) there is a powerful connection between the discourses of nationalist, feminist and queer politics, and “most nationalisms are intrinsically homophobic” (ibid, p. 178). In fact, as Rankin elaborates “some nationalists equate preservation of patriarchal, hetero-sexualised, familial relationships with the survival of the nation” (ibid, p. 179), thus we can come to understand the necessity of looking at the laws, structures and ideologies of specific cultures to better understand the social environments in which gendered identities are formulated and negotiated. This can be accomplished by looking not only at how these work to create and hold up hetero-normative ideals, but also how non-heterosexuals create acts of resistance to these norms in ways that are unique to their distinctive historicity and experience.
Consideration of the local histories and experiences, that shape and define sexual identity also problematizes Dennis Altman’s greatly referenced notion of ‘global queering’. Sullivan (2001, 254) explains Altman’s reference to an international gay identity appearing in a myriad of cultural contexts, and explains that globalisation plays a crucial role in this phenomenon. Although Altman claims that “American books, films, magazines and fashions continue to define contemporary gay and lesbian meanings for most of the world” (Altman, 2006a), this assertion does not consider the fact that for many global queer individuals, especially those who do not identify as gay-male, Western consumerism and popular media have little impact on their gendered identities. Often, the notion of a global queer identity is specific only to Western queer gay male culture, and this lack of gender nuance can effect many lesbians, transgendered and others who are not gay-male identified as well as those from lower economic social groups, those in rural settings and those engaged in more traditional familial and occupation practices. Altman also fails to notice the fact that not all people in the global village are enamoured with American popular culture.

Altman’s insistence on a global queer identity relies on the acceptance of Western ideals of queer. He assumes that other cultures do not have a historical or social basis of understanding gender and sexual difference, and runs the risk of being interpreted as Western condescension. Jackson (2001) explores this Western academic and cultural arrogance in relation to the Asian queer experience. Although Jackson acknowledges the fact that Asian queer experiences are bound by specific social structures and cultural mores, he does point out the fact that Asian countries, in general, have their own histories with queer experience. In order to rectify this bias of Western academic and social queer theories Jackson posits that it may be necessary to revise current accounts which imagine the West, in particular,
the United States, as the original site of contemporary gay and other identities and instead see these identities emerging by processes of parallel development in diverse locales (ibid, p. 4).

As an outsider researcher who does not speak Korean fluently, who is a Caucasian womyn\(^2\) from a Western country, I have been cautiously and continuously reflexive when using a Western theory to analyze the interview materials from my research participants.\(^3\) My participants have read over my paper and provided feedback so that I have changed and ensured that their meanings are reproduced accurately in my research paper. This is of the utmost importance to me as I resist stereotypes and negotiate my own power/knowledge regime of truth in relation to those whose voices have only recently broken Western silence.

**Methods & Ethics**

Looking at other research conducted on the lives of lesbian womyn around the world, it becomes evident that research in Korea must be approached sensitively and uniquely. In research done in Western countries such as the United States (Meyer, et al, 2002), and New Zealand (Skegg, et al, 2003) successful research on the lives of lesbians has been carried out in environments where the rights of alternative sexualities are openly debated. Meyer, et al. (2003)

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\(^2\) I have opted to use one of the alternate spellings of woman/women, removing the exclusively male terms ‘man’ and ‘men’. This is an attempt to see womyn as individual and independent of men, and a break from traditional patriarchal language that often oppresses females.

\(^3\) I had hoped to not use the English word ‘lesbian’ here, and to use a Korean word for lesbian instead. Unfortunately I found that there is no word specific to this community which they use to describe themselves, instead they usually use the English term lesbian. However, there is a "formal" word that is used in the Korean media and broadcasting (yeoja dong-sung ae-ja), which is never used by the community itself. Also, the straight community is referred to (by the queer community) as "ilban", which means the general or the norm, and the queer community refers to itself as "iban", meaning outside of the "ilban population. However, this term is not used by the lesbian community exclusively, but by gays, bi-sexuals, transgender peoples as well as anyone else who does not identify as "ilban".
conducted research through the use of random telephone sampling. In the United States this was successful because the study took place in a known gay and lesbian neighbourhood. In New Zealand Skegg et al. (2003) were able to carry out a study involving over 1000 participants over a twenty-six year period as part of a Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study. In the current social and political climate of Korea I felt it would be difficult and inappropriate to ask participants to participate openly or over an extended period of time. It was correctly assumed that many participants would want to participate discreetly; therefore casual telephone interviews where friends or family members are often in listening range would be out of the question. Anonymity and discretion are important in all research, but because of the sensitivity of these issues in Korea a more time efficient interpersonal approach was necessary. Qualitative interviews allowed this kind of approach.

Qualitative research may be described as research that captures a process and relationship between the researcher and those researched, which is grounded in everyday experiences of those being researched (Wolcott, 1988; Van Maanen, 1983). Those being researched are the knowers and experts, even though this may be an unknowing or tacit knowing and expertise. Qualitative research relies on the researcher being there, in situ (Spradley as quoted in Spindler and Spindler, 1987), to either witness, interrogate, interview, and record an/or many experiences. The term qualitative interview according to Byrne “generally refers to in-depth, loosely or semi-structured interviews” or conversations with purpose (2004, p. 181). The interview process is not one of data collection and instead is one of data generation (Byrne, 2004). Given my theoretical use of a Western theory, ‘queer’ theory, qualitative interviews provided me with a research process that honoured the cultural differences between myself and research participants by allowing for data generation, or in Foucaultian terms data production,
rather than data collection.

Elsewhere “feminist theorists … argue … that no researcher practices research outside his or her system of values and that no social science method can ensure knowledge is produced independently of values” (Brunskell, p. 46). Considering the delicate nature of this issue in Korea it was important to allow the research participants to speak in their own voices and be given the opportunity to tell their own stories.

For this reason, as a Caucasian Canadian womyn I reasoned that conducting oral interviews with open questions (Appendix A) would create the best environment for my subjects to comfortably speak in their own voices and with the option of communication in their own language. I believe that the impersonal nature of using written questionnaires would have further distanced me from the participants as I already struggled with: the stereo-types associated with defining my status as ‘other’ along with coming from a culture which is seen as more affluent and where womyn are believed to be living a more independent and free lifestyle. As well, the dominant culture of hetero-normativity and homophobia that permeated both their culture and mine, albeit with different variations, was as well a culture of silence and absence. Being together through shared physical space, a space that resisted hetero-normativity, was important to breaking silence and erasures for all of us. It was important to me to create an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie and face-to-face interviews made this and more possible.

**Ethics concerns and protection of Human Rights**

All participants were asked to sign a *Statement of Informed Consent* (Appendix B) that carefully outlined the terms of confidentiality and the nature of the study. My contact information, as well as that of the Athabasca Research Ethics Office and the project supervisor
was included on the form. Additional information outlined was the breadth and scope of the research, research methodology, and the assurance that the participant had the right to refuse to participate at any time during the research process. These signed forms as well as the Confidentiality Pledges (Appendix E), recorded interview files, interview transcripts and all notes on the interviews were kept in a locked drawer or password protected computer. After completion of this project and its final submission, all interview documents will be destroyed to protect the participants’ identities. For the purposes of this research paper, all names have been removed and instead each participant’s words are identified through designations as Subject A, B, C, and so on. In this way I preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of my participants. This was especially important in a country that did not have the same legal protections through protective human rights codes, that I had access to within my own country.

**Data Production**

Upon receiving approval from the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board a *Letter of Recruitment for Participants* (Appendix C) was posted, in both English and Korean, on TGnet, the largest online lesbian community in South Korea. It was also given to an acquaintance of mine in order for her to pass it on to her friends who might have been interested in the project. The letter served as a self-introduction as well as outlining the aims and goals of the proposed research. I asked for volunteers who were willing to share their experiences, while guaranteeing one hundred percent anonymity and the option of conducting the personal interview in either Korean or English. All interested parties contacted me by email and after answering any questions they had, on review of their location and availability, six participants agreed to meet with me at a time and place of their preference. Because of logistical considerations of meeting
for interviews all participants lived in the Seoul region. Interestingly, half of the participants opted to conduct the interview while drinking alcohol, and four of the six chose to meet in a public social setting in an area of Seoul popular with the lesbian community. The remaining two participants chose to conduct the interview together at an intimate dinner party with only the three of us, also including alcohol. It seemed obvious that efforts were made by each of us, myself and the research participants, to create a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere where they would feel at ease to discuss sensitive issues.

On the same site I also posted a Letter of Recruitment for Translators (Appendix D), as I did not assume or expect my participants would fluently speak English. Happily, the first participant was fluent in English and offered to act as translator for any subsequent interviews I conducted. She signed the Confidentiality Pledge, and served as translator for three other participants when necessary.

Data was generated through conducting and recording face-to-face interviews with all six participants, focussing on nineteen open-ended questions. Because of the free-style of the interview process and the natural flow of generated conversation, not all questions were necessarily verbalised. If some questions were naturally covered, it was deemed unnecessary to specifically ask them. Of the participants, four chose to have their interviews in pairs with their friend, and the other two participants participated individually. All interviews ranged in time from forty-two minutes for an individual interview to two hours and ten minutes for a pair interview.
Cultural Background: Discourses of Korean Confucianism, marriage, hetero-normativity, and the importance of family lineage

Overall (1990) points out that in Western culture “the heterosexual institution is the strongest arm and most powerful manifestation of patriarchy” (p. 264). Along with others, I argue that in South Korean culture national identity is premised on the heterosexual institution as embodied in the overtly patriarchal mores of Confucianism that not only define traditional Korean culture and identity historically, but also permeate modern Korean consciousness. Heterosexism is the strongest arm of patriarchy, and Confucianism is the perfect structure in which it can flourish. To support this assumption we merely have to look to the article South Korea (Taehan Min’guk), found on the online reference site The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality, which reads;

The strong historical dimensions of this chapter and the recurring references to the historical and contemporary influence of Confucianism and its patriarchal views might seem to be unimportant, because 96 percent of Koreans are either Christian or Buddhist and only 3 percent identify with the Confucian/Neo-Confucian philosophy. However, Confucianism, and particularly Neo-Confucianism, continue to play a major role in Korean sexual culture” (Choi, South Korea).

Korea’s Confucian background has had a profound effect on the collective mindset of the Korean people. Park (2003) defines Korean society as much more “anti-individual” than Western culture and that the “family is the primary model of the state.” This is most obviously noted through Korea’s Confucian traditions that affect the institutions of family and marriage.

According to Mi Jeong Lee (1998) the question for young Korean womyn does not seem to be whether to marry, but rather when to marry (p. 60). With such public pressure pushing young womyn into heterosexual unions, it leaves very little opportunity for dissenting ideals and goals. Therefore, for Korean lesbians there is enormous familial and societal pressure to marry.
Many Koreans without a partner rely on blind-dates, arranged meetings and even professional match makers to introduce them to their life partner when they, their parents, or society, decide they are at the right age to marry. In fact, almost all Korean womyn, regardless of their sexuality, marry by the age of 35 (ibid).

At present the South Korean social and political climate make the public discussion of sexualities other than heterosexuality virtually unacceptable (Prusher, p. 1-2). Perhaps because of the deep-seated Confucian traditions which Korean customs and culture are based on, it seems as if the possibility of alternative sexualities is not a concept that is given any realistic consideration. The need to carry on the family bloodline is the driving force behind family, national and social politics therefore heterosexuality is deemed the only viable, acceptable and conceivable avenue in contemporary popular Korean discourse. The institution of compulsory heterosexuality can then be seen as an oppressive factor in the lives of average Korean womyn; however the discussion has not yet incorporated the question of how it affects South Korean lesbians.

According to Overall (1990), Valverde (1987) and Card (1996) there is undeniable social pressure in Western culture to aspire to find our perfect heterosexual romantic partner regardless of the fact that heterosexism inherently acts against the best interests of womyn, generally, and lesbians specifically. The social pressure on Korean lesbians to marry may be much more detrimental to their psychological and physical well being because there is so little recourse for them to live otherwise within contemporary society. As will be shown, there are few other options and little to no social support to live openly as lesbians in Korea, therefore it is important to gauge the adverse effects of compulsory heterosexuality on their lives.
The Korean Womyn’s Movement and Lesbians

Korean feminism was born out of a long Confucian history where womyn have been oppressed within their homes, families, in the work place and in society as a whole. In the late 1970’s the feminist movement was first introduced in Korean culture. The movement has been seen as a direct “threat to (Korea’s) social values” (Chang, P., p. 317) and for this reason was not readily accepted by Korean society at large. Yayori Matsui (1987) traces the birth of Korean feminism to a womyn by the name of So Sun Lee. Lee was a womyn who, inspired by the suicide of her son, a labour activist, spent much of her time in and out of jail struggling for the plight of all Korean labourers, not women specifically. The struggle of Korean womyn began with the struggle of the Korean labour class and from there developed to incorporate the issue of domestic violence as well. Only in the last 10 years or so has Korean feminism begun to look at other issues such as the representation of womyn in media, equal education, and the struggle of female migrant workers in Korea (Chang, P., p. 319). According to Kang (2002), domestic violence, date rape, equity in the work place, and other issues of deep concern to womyn specifically, have been given little to no attention by Korean courts, politicians and mass media. This trend is slowly changing, meaning womyn’s issues are discussed more in mass media and in politics, yet the question of lesbian rights is still glaringly absent from mainstream discourse.

While attending both national and local events in Korea to honour International Women’s Day in March 2005 and 2006, I was startled by the lack of any vocal lesbian feminist groups, though, I heard repeated cries of “Adjuma Innida!!” which loosely translates in to “I am a married womyn”. It has become quite apparent that vocal, mainstream contemporary Korean feminists focus on improving the lives of Korean homemakers, wives, migrant workers and those involved in the sex industry, but they are still silent on the issues lesbian womyn face
Contemporary Lives of Korean Lesbians and Available Research

Although the Korean government now supports a number of centres focusing on womyn’s issues, there is presently no governmental support for lesbians. According to Huso Yi (2003, Part 2), homosexuality and lesbianism are not officially banned in Korea because they are not recognised as existing at all. Further, homosexuality and lesbianism are psycho-pathologized through classifications within Korean psychiatry as behavioural disorders and websites dedicated to lesbian and gay issues are designated by the government as obscene and as being potentially harmful to teenagers (Yi, “Part 3”, 2004).

In all research available to me in English the subject of Korean lesbians is virtually missing. On the Korean Women’s Development Institute (established under the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare to deal exclusively with women’s affairs in 1983) website the topic of lesbians’ lives and experiences are absent from all research and reports available. In a phone call and subsequent visit made to a Korean NGO, the Korean Sexual-Minority Culture and Rights Center (KSCRC), it became clear that there is insufficient funding for and a lack of social acceptance of studies carried out in this area. I was told that there has yet to be any studies made on the subject of heterosexism and lesbians in Korea, other than a number of student research projects carried out as Masters Theses in domestic women’s studies programmes.

A reality of the lives of Korean lesbians is that the pressure of society to act in ways conforming to a heterosexual norm, and the stress of facing rejection by friends, family and society at large is often too much for these womyn to bear. Yi (“Part 1”, 2003) reports that Korean lesbians often resort to suicide when social pressure to marry becomes unbearable or

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It is interesting to note that in 1969 (almost 40 years ago) homosexuality was removed as a classification (of psychopathology) from the American Psychology Association’s DSM handbook.
after coming out in a less than hospitable environment. It is apparent, then, that the stigmatisation of Korean lesbians is a social problem in Korea and attention to this issue would be greatly beneficial.

**Data Analysis**

After all interviews were completed two more volunteer translators were recruited, once again through online posting, and they were also required to sign the *Confidentiality Pledge*. As well, the names of participants were not revealed on the tapes. Together we transcribed all of the interviews with Korean sections of the interviews translated into English by the volunteer translators. Keeping in mind queer theory’s focus on subjectivity, identity and sex/gender discourses (Filax, et.al, p. 82) the six interviews were then compared and analysed to find common themes and topics.

The first five questions were preliminary closed questions, intended to solicit general information about the participants’ backgrounds. However, the majority of the questions were open questions, designed to allow the subject to “answer on their own terms” (Seale and Filmer, p. 130), and encourage a natural flow of conversation in which participants could freely share their thoughts.

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5 All quotes from the interviews conducted in English were not corrected for grammar or vocabulary errors. Out of respect for the globalisation of the English language all Konglish (Korean+English) was left intact. It is not my intention to condescend to any participants, but rather to celebrate their individuality, authenticity of voice and freedom to self-express.

6 In order to respect my participants’ right to privacy they are merely referred to in the order that they were interviewed. Referring to them as subject A, B or C, is not intended to depersonalise, but rather to conceal their identities.
**Personal History**

All six of the research participants were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-one at the time of their interview. All hold at least a four-year bachelors degree in various majors in the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences. One participant had completed a master’s degree in women’s studies (subject E), two hold a bachelor’s degree in foreign languages and literature (subjects B and D), two in the arts (subjects C and F) and one in the social sciences (subject A). Of the six participants five were gainfully employed in full time career related jobs, ranging from NGO work, to work in the arts, to office work. At the time of the interview subject E was preparing to study overseas. Also, although three of the participants had grown up outside of the capital city, Seoul, (subject A, abroad, and subjects E and F in smaller cities in South Korea) all participants resided in Seoul at the time of the interviews and considered Seoul ‘home’.

**Family Background**

In answer to the question *do you consider your family and/or upbringing as traditional, conservative, modern, progressive, or other?* all six of the respondents answered that they were from conservative and/or traditional families. One participant spoke fondly of her parents then said, “but, only conservative. That’s a problem” (subject B). Another participant described her parents, which she had labelled as conservative, by saying that “my father is son of farmer, so he is all about being diligent, hardworking, like that. Actually he is really strong. My mom grew up in well-off family. She is very popular and gracious like Buddha” (subject C). Subject D answered “and typical” after describing her family as traditional and conservative, and subject E said “actually, it’s very typical. It’s a very typical type in Korea.” The perceived conservative and traditional up-bringing of the six subjects will be important to keep in mind when
considering the answer to other questions in this research.

*Relationship Status*

At the time of the interviews subjects A and B were single, subjects D, E and F were in long term relationships (one long distance) and subject C was at the beginning stages of a new relationship. Regardless of their current (at the time of the interview) relationship status all subjects had had prior experience with same-sex relationships. Of those currently in relationships, all had met their girlfriends at university, or in women’s centres related to their university life. The participant at the beginning stages of a relationship had met her potential partner on an online and offline lesbian photography club. One of the single participants had met her previous girlfriend in an online lesbian club, and the other had met her previous girlfriend at work.

*The journey of self identification: Do you identify yourself as lesbian, bisexual, other, or no label?*

Although the *Letter of Recruitment for Participants* for this study called for self-identified Korean lesbians, I was surprised to find that only one of the research participants readily answered ‘lesbian’ to the above question. At the time of the interview subject F, who was in a five year long relationship, and had moved to Seoul from her home in a much smaller city after graduating high school, was the only one who answered “lesbian”. In contrast, all other participants seemed to elaborate on their answers, discussing their process of self-identification at length. Subject A, who had had long term relationships with both men and womyn in the past,
chose not to label herself. After a heartfelt elaboration on having ended a 7-year relationship with a boyfriend, and entering into a 4 year relationship with a womyn which had recently ended, she turned her attention to the question. She told the story of a conversation she had with a gay friend of hers whom she had posed this same question to. She said “he said, “I think that you are just a curious person.” I don’t know, ever since that I don’t really try to label myself in any way.” Subject B answered as follows “I think I am a lesbian, but when I was very young, I think I have no special gender. Not man, or not woman, just in the middle, because every time I wanted to be some of that, it’s not satisfied with me. But sometimes I think I just enjoy this culture.” When discussing the possibility of being bisexual she said “the problem is I've never had a relationship with a guy, that’s the problem. But if I tried it maybe I can, I can have an opportunity to be attractive with guys.” However, in the end, her conclusion was “at most of my life style I do not prefer to be just one choice I prefer a large choice.” Subject C also hesitated to label herself, and instead replied with “bisexual, I think I am bisexual… but I haven’t really tried to meet guys. There are too many good and nice girls out there” but later said “you can say it’s this, or you can say it’s that, but then it’s no fun.” Another participant, subject D started answering by saying “in my case I feel uncomfortable for the word lesbian, because lesbian, the word, is the only way to express myself. It sucks, I don’t like that, but I usually use the lesbian word because of the effect.” She went on to outline how she uses “lesbian” when talking to her heterosexual friends to avoid their telling her that she would “come back” to heterosexuality one day. However, she said that she is called a “coward” by her lesbian friends when she labels herself bi-sexual. On the topic of identifying one’s own sexuality she went on to say “if there are 100 people then there are 100 kinds of preference for sexual orientation.”

So, I can not tell you that I identify that I am bisexual or that I’m lesbian, but frankly speaking, it’s more bisexual, I think. But now I’m having a relationship
with a woman and I love her. Yeah, I love her as a human being, or I love her as a woman.” (subject D)

The final participant, subject E also hesitated to answer the questions. She started by telling the story of the first womyn she had fallen in love with and what a confusing time it was for her. At the time she was in university in a conservative part of the country and she said

I had no prejudice about gay or homosexual people because I studied women studies and queer theory at that time. I had some lesbian friends, but it was so strange, “What is my identity? Bi? Or lesbian?” But, it was so big deal, I decide to stop thinking about my identity. But, as time goes by I naturally accepted my identity. As soon as I moved to the city of Seoul, wow, it was a big change for me, for my life. Very different condition and culture. It changed me to accept that identity.

Thus, she currently identifies as a lesbian, but it was only with the support of her feminist groups and women’s studies that she was able to comfortably accept it.

In conclusion, with only six womyn answering the question, I heard six greatly differing answers. These include one strong ‘lesbian’, one “I don’t label myself”, one “I think I am a lesbian,” tempered by “I prefer a large choice”, one “bisexual, I think I am bisexual”, supported by ” you can say it’s this, or you can say it’s that, but then it’s no fun”, one ” frankly speaking, it’s more bisexual, I think”, coupled with “if there is 100 people then there is 100 kinds of preference for sexual orientation”, and one “I decide to stop thinking about my identity. But, as time goes by I naturally accepted my identity.” If this is an indication of the larger lesbian community, it would seem easy to assume that it is an extremely diverse society. These responses support the deconstructing impetus within queer theory by refusing or problematizing identity categories that are too narrow.

A related interview question was “when did you first recognise that you were attracted to womyn?”, and in discussions surrounding both of these questions the theme of coming to terms
with their identity often became intricate parts of the discussions. Of the six subjects, four said that they had first recognised their attraction during middle school, two being attracted to their teachers and two attracted to females of their own age. The remaining two participants said that their first recognition took place in university. However, all six participants had very different journeys to self-discovery and acceptance. Subject A said that she was first attracted to her female middle school teacher, at the Christian mission school she had attended. She went on to say that “you get really confused at that age, growing up (outside of Korea), where it is totally taboo, like no, no, no, no homosexuals, gay” and that “I guess no one really recognised the fact that I might be lesbian in that way because it was just not something they could really think of in the community that I grew up with.” Subject A also went on to describe the men she had dated from middle-school age onwards by saying “and a guy likes you so, well that’s only normal because that’s part of the whole flow, where you go with the flow.” The theme of ‘going with the flow’ was repeated several times during our interview in the context of dating men, possibly marrying men and the desire to satisfy family and social expectations. The word ‘flow’ was mentioned five times in total, in the course of our forty two minute interview.

Subjects B, C and F all also said they were first attracted to womyn in middle school. Subject B and F, both first found themselves attracted to friends; subject B during a school trip. After a pillow fight, she said, they “hugged. At night we slept together, fell asleep still in the same pose. I could feel very comfortable, lightly.” After thinking that she had “no special gender, not man, not womyn”, this was her first memory of recognising that she could be lesbian. Subject C was also attracted to her middle school teacher, which caused her to start to ask herself, “what happens when I’m older and I start liking, like her, when I’m in my 20’s?”

Subjects D and E, who identify themselves as lesbian-feminists, came to accept their same-
sex attraction during their years as undergraduate students. Although subject D said that she had been “falling in love” with both females and males before this time, it was also a class trip where she felt something “different.” “It was ‘what is this kind of feeling?’ I was so shocked and could not accept that feeling at all.” However, she said that it was her interest and study in feminism that helped her accept herself. She said “maybe if I couldn’t meet the feminism, I, you know, I marry even.” Subject E, also found that her feminist community and her move to Seoul helped her come to terms with her identity. When asked this interview question she responded “even physical attraction? It’s difficult to decide that point.” As established above, she had come from a conservative city and in her words “my hometown was the city of (withheld), you know that (withheld) is very conservative and Confucian,” and that when she lived there “there were no lesbian, there were no friends. I just heard about lesbian culture and lesbian people, but I never had met the real lesbians”, so coming to terms with her identity was also a “difficult process”. Like her friend, subject D, she gave credit to feminism and the greater feminist community that she found in Seoul with making the process easier.

The support that these two participants have found within the feminist/lesbian-feminist community directly related to the interview questions; do you belong to any lesbian groups or communities? and, do you feel like you have a strong support network as a lesbian? Although all six participants were members of, or at least familiar with TGnet, the online community where I had originally posted my Letter of Recruitment, once again their answers varied greatly. All but participant C (who belongs to a photography club with a lesbian membership) said that they do not belong to any organised group. Participants A, B, C and F mentioned that you can find some on-line groups offering advice and counselling for lesbians, but no one spoke positively about these sites. This resulted in many participants comparing the resources and
community building of the Korean gay community to that of the lesbian community. Four of the six participants strongly felt that the gay community was more organised, had a longer history and was more political in structure. In their opinion, while the lesbian community, both on and offline, concentrated more on “personal relationships” the gay community was more diversified in its activities. According to participant A “when you compare the contents that they have like some of the biggest gay communities … they have vibrant discussion groups. It’s not just for personal relationships” and “TGnet’ is just for meeting people.” This opinion was echoed by subject C who said of the gay community, “it has very long history and always there are researchers on communities, so they are still active”. Furthermore, the focus of the lesbian community on personal relationships was supported as subject B stated “compared to gay community, they are so independent and divided. Only some of them are interested in the lesbian life. As far as I am concerned, they are more in for their relationship.” When asked why there was such a difference between the two communities a common answer focussed on the economic disparity between the two communities. Subject B said “the gay guys have very prosperous job. Then they can donate a lot of money for the gay community”, which was supported by subject D saying “you know the richest couple are gay couples. Yeah. And poorest couple is the lesbian couple.”

Further perceived differences between the two communities were revealed throughout the interview process. Also, the subjects’ perceptions of these differences were also revealed to be quite different. For example, subject A strongly felt that it was more advantageous to be a lesbian in Korean society than to be a gay man, saying

I guess it’s because in Korean conservative Confucian society the male figure is such a big, big, big fixed figure. Head of the family, or head of the group or whatever else, so it’s really unacceptable for a guy to accept another guy, but
when it comes to women with women it’s more, it’s not acceptable in the same way that it’s not acceptable for guys.

She went on to say that for this reason “you hear of more lesbians getting married and having families of their own, it’s a very conservative Confucian society where women are expected to get married.” In contrast, subject D claimed that it is much easier to be a gay man in Korea because a man has a social life and home life. If they are married and gay, they can do anything related with social life. So, maybe his wife doesn’t know that. I mean gay people in Korea, they can marry. And be gay and have a boyfriend both. But lesbians can’t - I think.

She elaborated by explaining that most Korean wives are expected to stay close to home, so it is much more difficult for her to live a double life; “many Korean woman, they only have the house life, so if she is doing something in a social way, the family must know it as well.” While other participants, such as subject E merely said “I don’t know much about that, gay life or gay society. Sometimes I think, I assume man, gay man is misogynist.”

**Coming Out: Have you ever told any of your heterosexual family members or friends that you are lesbian? If so, how did you feel afterwards?**

For many people who identify as non-heterosexual, the issue of ‘coming out’, is often one of the most sensitive to deal with. According to the responses of my six participants to the above questions, it seems to be no different for South Korean lesbians. Of the six participants in the study not one had come out to their parents or extended family. Furthermore they all voiced the opinion that they have no intention of ever telling their parents. Four of the participants voiced this opinion quite strongly by saying; “To my family, no. Not in Korea” and “not, not my dad. Never, never, never, never. 70’s traditional Korean man…do I need to say more?” (subject A),
“they will be gone. Too much shock for them when they are alive” (subject B), “but, I couldn’t
tell my family at all. I never plan to,” and “if I came out to my family maybe my mother will
think it’s all her fault” (subject D). Finally, subject E said “it’s very fearful, yeah they scare me.
Because I love them, I love them. If I confess my identity, they abandon me. It’s my…it’s
my…it’s yeah, fear”. (subject E).

Although all participants had not come out to their parents, subject C had come out to her
younger sister who was “very curious”. This was the only example of familial support, however,
as evidenced with subject B who had come out to her brother. He had responded by saying “it’s
okay you are a lesbian, I thought sometimes you are one of them, but I never expected your
answer. Never tell to our parents,” and occasionally asks her “are you still have a relationship
with girls? You don’t give a thought to the guys sometimes?”

Outside of family members, all six respondents were also cautious when coming out to
other people in their lives. Those who majored in and work in the arts or doing NGO work
found their work and/or study environments more open and welcome than the others. The two
respondents working in a traditional office job (subjects B and D) would not consider coming out
at work. In fact, the two participants working in Korean offices were the most concerned about
keeping their identities camouflaged in this study, for fear of being outed at work. As subject C
said “because we respect artistic multiplicity, they accept it very easy and fast”, but those
working and living in less open and artistic fields had to work harder to keep their sexual identity
unknown at work.
Social Pressure to Marry and Have Children

The theme that was most recurring during all six interviews, and in response to varying questions, was the social pressure to engage in the institution of heterosexual marriage. In Korea it is very common for parents to arrange “sun” for their children when they are deemed to be old enough to consider marriage. “Sun”, is fundamentally a blind date, with the possibility of marriage, and five of the six research participants had all been on blind dates with males, arranged by both family and friends. Subject A, made no mention of having been on a blind date, however she had had long term heterosexual relationships in the past. Subjects B, C, D, E and F, had all been on blind dates with the opposite sex.

Subject F had been on blind dates in university, out of curiosity, but said she found it “very uncomfortable.” Being the only participant who confidently identified herself as lesbian at the beginning or our interview, she has not been on any blind dates since. She did say that she avoids going to her hometown to visit her family, to evade their pressure to marry. Subject B said her parents set up blind-dates for her, and since she was now single she had been agreeing to go, just to “have a dinner or chat.” She said “as I get older, my parents want me to meet guys, it’s time, it’s high time to marry.” After an uncomfortable incident where her mother discovered a book she was reading on homosexuality, subject C said that she is happy to go on blind-dates to try to “reassure” her mother. She also said that she may be bi-sexual, so she does not mind going. Subject D said that she had been on several blind dates “to pretend to be heterosexual”, and that her mother and cousin had been pushing for her to go on more. Subject E said that she had been on a blind date with a man, because she knew his mother, but that “frankly speaking, I was so bored.” It seemed from the responses of all five of the subjects who had been on blind-dates that they did so simply to assuage the pressure from family and acquaintances to actively look for a
husband.

The familial and social pressure to marry was evident at many other times during the six interviews, as well. In answer to the question *would you consider marrying a man,* all six respondents answered in the negative with answers such as “No, never” (subject F), “In my future? I don’t think so” (subject D), and “I don’t have any intention of marrying” (subject B), however, they all felt social pressure to consider marriage. Even if their parents were not arranging “sun” for these subjects, pressure was applied in other ways. One participant said “my mother, my parents want me to marry … with man. Yeah, since last year my mother push me. ‘Oh, meet the man, nice person, and you have to think your future.’ So you have to meet the good person and marry a man” (subject E). This sentiment was echoed with other interviewees as well who said “but the Korean, they always push me ah, “you have to marry. You have to marry. You have to …” My mother and my cousin or … family, and in my office. They always say “you are (old enough), but you have to start to get married” (subject D), and “friends or just acquaintances - everyone, of course including my family members. Yeah, people are saying, ‘why aren’t you marrying? Why don’t you have a boyfriend?’ If you don’t have one, they want to introduce some really nice guy to you” (subject B). Subject C also felt indirect pressure because of the close relationship she has with her family. They often have gatherings with other friends of the family and their children bring their boyfriends and girlfriends to these events. About this she said “they are a lot of fun, but in that kind of way, I can’t imagine bringing my girlfriend into that, so I consider a future husband to blend in and mix into this mood.”

However, three of the participants did speak of the fantastical ideal of heterosexual marriage that many believe would make their lives easier. Subject E said that she sometimes imagined a heterosexual marriage because “in Korea, it’s difficult to live alone, living alone. I
will be poor…. So I can imagine, if I marry with a man I can live in a big house and I have some money. But, it’s very fantasy.” Subject A spoke of the dream of having financial security, and the fact that she had dated her ex-boyfriend for as long as she had because “he represented something sort of like safe and stable in Korean society,” and that she sometimes still wants “that jacuzzi with a nice view on a hill.” Subject D said that she sometimes envied heterosexual couples because “they can borrow big money as a married couple. Or their parents didn’t push them anymore, to get married, at least.” However, she followed with “you know, I have a fantasy about relationships too. You know, when we are washing the dishes there are so many dirty parts, but they don’t think about that dirt, they just focus on the fantasy.” Both feminist-lesbian participants D and E, went on to debunk the myth of heterosexual marriage in South Korea, by concentrating on their observations of the high rate of Korean husbands committing acts of marital infidelity, and the social pressure on wives to accept this as natural. Comments like “every Korean man commits adultery with another woman”, “many women have to stand their hard situation in the marriage system” (subject E), and that people think that “women should stand it, then he will go back. Because of the idea that …. “You are so sucked so your husband left you”” (subject D).

**Results Discussion**

Foucault (1978) challenged the notion that a common understanding or experience of sexuality is an intrinsic aspect of the human body, and instead revealed sexuality to be something “constructed though institutional discourses which come to constitute ‘regimes of truth.’” (Plummer and Stein, p. 183) If there is no ‘true’ understanding of gender [sexuality], then the body becomes a “variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a
signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990, p. 177). After closely examining the interview transcripts from the six interviews I conducted, we can see the interplay of the socio-political and personal elements in each of these womyns’ lives as they identify themselves and their own sexual beings. Foucault stated that there is no one all-encompassing form of power relations that will be applicable to all facets and manifestations of sex (Foucault, p. 103) which is revealed by the fact that the question of how heterosexism affects Korean lesbians cannot be answered by looking at each of these womyn’s attraction to females alone.

To Butler (1993) the very idea of people ascribing to one specific identification category to describe themselves is problematic and reveals the regulatory ways that gender discourse becomes internalised as an identity (p. 307). The varying answers and experiences of the six participants show us that although they share some similarities, their differences also aid in the social construction of their identities. The region in which they grew up, their familial relationships, their relationship to feminist organising, the subjects they studied in school and their current occupation all played large roles in the answers they provided and the opinions they expressed. Although they all consider themselves under the large umbrella of “Korean lesbian”, this shared characteristic alone does not a community or shared identity make.

Judith Butler states “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (Butler, 1993, p. 313). For Butler, gender is a ‘cultural fiction’, and every gender label we wear is merely a representation of this fiction. In fact, according to Butler, there would be no common element linking all lesbians and claiming to be lesbian is to “come out only to produce a new and different ‘closet’” (Butler, 1993, p. 309). Therefore, although my subjects share many of the same opinions and experiences, we cannot say that these alone define who they are as lesbians and as Koreans. The participants seemed very self-aware of this when they were asked do you think your experiences are common for other lesbians in Korea? In response, only one womyn responded yes.
We can say that it is apparent from the interviews that all of the subjects recognise a collective cultural expectancy to participate in the institution of heterosexual marriage. It is also apparent that this pressure comes not only from parents and family members, but comes from society at large that, in turn has an effect on these participants and likely most other South Korean lesbians’ work and other social relationships. Self-identification as lesbian became possible when two subjects moved to Seoul, and all subjects felt obliged to attend blind dates to appease their parents. Some subjects expressed envy of hetero-sexual couples for the advantages they perceive them having in Korean society, but not one subject expressed any real desire to be in a heterosexual marriage. However, it cannot be said that the subjects self-identified as being oppressed, or overwhelmingly victimised. Although all subjects shared the same social pressures of hetero-normativity, they also treated these interviews as an opportunity to network and socialise. One couple was created, and new friendships were made through these interviews, and every interview was conducted in an atmosphere of socialisation and camaraderie. One other common thought amongst the participants was that the Korean lesbian community was not particularly politically active, but rather is characterized by personal relationships. However, these personal relationships, and the act of building these personal relationships, both on and off line, can be read as political acts of subversion in and of themselves. To identify as lesbian and network with other self-identified lesbians in a culture which they described as “conservative” “Confucian” and pressuring them to marry and have children, is political and subversive on its own.

**Future Considerations**

The small scope of my final project research questions as well as the length of each interview were constraints that provide a starting point for much needed further research into the lives and experiences of South Korean lesbians. Group representation was narrow and consisted of only highly educated, independent women of the same demographic age group, all residing in the capital of Seoul. What this project does is indicate the diversity that can be found in such a
small group, and begs the question of what other Korean lesbians’ experiences might be. Lesbians who are married to men, senior citizens, teenagers, the impoverished, the uneducated, those living in rural settings and those without access to the online lesbian communities were not represented in this paper. The results of this paper, however, point us to the need for further studies that could potentially give voice to these various segments of the larger Korean lesbian community. It will be important as well, that at least some future research be conducted by researchers who are fluent in Korean as well as researchers who are themselves Korean.

**Conclusion**

The six research participants who participated in qualitative interviews regarding their experiences of living as sexual minorities in South Korea provided a series of rich dialogues excavating what is termed by Foucault as subjugated knowledge (Foucault, 1980). While these interviews and my analysis cannot represent an entire minority group of a country, they can be said to represent themselves. As a Canadian womyn doing this research in Korea I cannot assume to fully understand and represent the life and experience of the Korean lesbian individuals or community. What I have accomplished is the provision of a forum for six Korean lesbians to share their personal lives, opinions, and experiences living within a Confucian, patriarchal, hetero-normative culture. Butler tells us that “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulating regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberating contestation of that very oppression” (Butler, 1993, p. 308), and I am happy and proud to be able to represent the liberating stories that are embedded in daily actions of hetero-normative oppression that these six subjects revealed to me. The fact that these womyn agreed to participate in these interviews symbolises their willingness to share their
stories and build communities while explaining to me how they resist discourses of hetero-
normativity on a regular basis.
Bibliography


Korean Women’s Development Institute. (website) <http://www2.kwdi.re.kr/>.


Lesbian Institute for Lesbians. (Website) http://lesbian.or.kr/htm/em2-3.htm


Appendix A

Possible Interview Questions

Heterosexism and the lives of South Korean Lesbians

1. What is your age?
2. Where is your hometown?
3. What is your highest level of education completed?
4. What is your employment type?
5. Are you currently in a relationship? If yes, how did you meet? If no, have you ever been in a relationship?
6. Do you identify yourself as lesbian, bisexual, other, or no label?
7. When did you first recognise that you were attracted to womyn?
8. Have you ever told any of your heterosexual family members or friends that you are lesbian? If so, how did you feel afterwards?
9. Do you consider your family and/or upbringing as traditional, conservative, modern, progressive, or other?
10. Do you belong to any lesbian groups or communities? If yes, how did you meet them?
11. Do you feel like you have a strong support network (emotional/cultural/psychological) as a lesbian?
12. Have you ever dated men?
13. Would you consider marrying a man?
14. What are the advantages or disadvantages of being lesbian in Korea?
15. What are the advantages or disadvantages of being heterosexual in Korea?
16. Do you think lesbian experiences are the same or different to those of homosexual men and other sexual minorities in Korea?
17. What are your hopes for your future?
18. Do you think your experiences are common for other lesbians in Korea?
19. Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you think is important to share?
Appendix B

Statement of Informed Consent

Heterosexism and the lives of South Korean Lesbians

As a participant in this study you should understand that….

1. Jenny Bourne is undertaking research on the role of heterosexism in the lives of South Korean lesbians. This project has been granted approval by and in accordance with the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. General questions about the research design and procedures should be directed to the researcher, Jenny Bourne, at loogenism@yahoo.com or 019-576-1910. To discuss concerns about the way in which you are treated as a research participant, you may contact the Project Supervisor Dr. Gloria Filax by e-mailing glorifa@athabascau.ca or calling long distance 1-250-247-8953.

2. This research seeks to gain an understanding of the effects of heterosexism on the lives of South Korean lesbians. Heterosexism or compulsory heterosexuality has an enormous impact on the lives of all women the world over and Korean womyn are no exception. There have been a plethora of essays written on this topic in Western academia; however, it is virtually impossible to find English research focusing on the discussion of the lives of lesbian Korean women specifically. This study seeks to answer the question: What are the effects of compulsory heterosexuality on contemporary Korean lesbians? In assessing the breadth and scope of this question Jenny Bourne hopes to reveal what Korean lesbians need and want to make their lives more understood and to provide them with a greater quality of life. You are invited to be a participant/collaborator and your responsibility is to attend and participate in a preliminary open-ended personal interview of no more than 2 hours duration and at least one follow up interview of no more than 2 hours duration. Any further collaboration, suggestions, and feedback that you choose to offer are welcome but not required.

3. The method for data collection consists of one open-ended personal interview and at least one follow up personal interview. You are asked to come prepared to discuss your personal experiences, opinions and feelings related to your life as a Korean lesbian living in South Korea. After your interviews are complete common themes, ideas, values, norms, and beliefs linked to the idea of a Korean lesbian identity will be explored. This format allows for open-ended, semi-directed discussion.

4. Jenny Bourne will be submitting a copy of this final report to Athabasca University, Canada for completion of her Master of Arts degree in Integrated Studies. All recordings of interviews, transcripts and notes will be kept locked in Jenny Bourne’s office at Sungkyunkwan University. When the final project has been submitted to Athabasca University all recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed.

5. All information you share as a participant will be kept confidential. All names of participants will be withheld in the final report and identities will be disguised in a manner that will make them unrecognizable to the reader. The nature of personal interviews is such that confidentially can be guaranteed. In order to facilitate a
confidential and comfortable interview process the interviews will take place at a location of your choosing.

6. Participants have the right to refuse participation and withdraw at any time during the data collection process. A decision to participate or not will in no way affect your relationship with Jenny Bourne, or her opinion of you. It is imperative that participation be voluntary and in no way coerced. No compensation can be offered for participation, but each participant will receive a copy of the final report.

7. When the final project is complete it will be submitted to Athabasca University to be housed at the Library’s Digital Thesis and Project Room (DTPR) for other students and researchers to access.

8. The personal interviews that will take place with participants are intended as intellectual discussions and intelligence gathering, and are in no way intended to cause emotional or psychological distress.

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CONSENT BY PARTICIPANT

Signing this consent form confirms that I have read and understood what this research project is about and what is required of me. By signing this consent form I have agreed to participate in the research project, with the understanding that my participation is completely voluntary, that I may refuse to engage in discussion, and that I may withdraw at any time without explanation and that my data will not be included in this research, should I withdraw.

Participant

--------------------------------------------------- -------------------------
Print Name      Signature

Address, phone number, email

Researcher

--------------------------------------------------- -------------------------
Print Name      Signature

Address, phone number, email
Appendix C
Letter of Recruitment for Participants
Heterosexism and the lives of South Korean Lesbians

Dear Potential Participant;

My name is Jenny Bourne and I am a Canadian women currently working at Sungkyunkwan University while completing a Masters Degree at Athabasca University in Canada. I am conducting a research project on the lives and experiences of Korean lesbians, and I am looking for potential participants who will be happy to share their experiences living in South Korea as a lesbian. This project will seek to understand the effects of heterosexism on Korean lesbians and research will be conducted through personal interviews.

The institution of compulsory heterosexuality is an oppressive factor in the lives of womyn the world over and Korean womyn are no exception. There have been a plethora of essays written on this topic in Western academia; however, it is virtually impossible to find English research focussing on the discussion of the lives of lesbian Korean womyn. This is a clear indication that studies in this area are necessary and would be very benefical in the global discussions of queer and lesbian communities.

I am asking you to please contact me if you are interested in participating in this study and provide me with your phone number or email address so that we can arrange a time and place to conduct an interview. Also, please contact me with any questions you have about this research project. I assure you that this study will be 100% confidential, and your identity will be protected at all costs. All questions or concerns related to the research are welcome. I may be reached at 019-576-1910 or by email at loogenism@yahoo.com.

I am very enthusiastic about this project and look forward to hearing from and working with you.

Sincerely,

Jenny Bourne
Appendix D

Letter of Recruitment for Translators of Transcripts

Heterosexism and the lives of South Korean Lesbians

Dear Potential Volunteer;

My name is Jenny Bourne and I am a Canadian women currently working at Sungkyunkwan University while completing a Masters Degree at Athabasca University in Canada. I am conducting a research project on the lives and experiences of Korean lesbians, and I am looking for potential participants who will be happy to share their experiences living in South Korea as a lesbian, and volunteers to aid in translating interview transcripts from English to Korean and Korean to English.

The institution of compulsory heterosexuality is an oppressive factor in the lives of womyn the world over and Korean womyn are no exception. There have been a plethora of essays written on this topic in Western academia; however, it is virtually impossible to find English research focussing on the discussion of the lives of lesbian Korean womyn. This is a clear indication that studies in this area are necessary and would be very benefical in the global discussions of queer and lesbian communities. Therefore, in order to volunteer as a translator for this project, it is imperative that volunteers prove to be non-heterosexist, open-minded and accepting and encouraging of ‘alternative’ lifestyles.

I am asking you to please contact me if you are interested in volunteering as a translator for this study and provide me with your phone number or email address so that we can arrange a time and place to meet and discuss the project. I may be reached at 019-576-1910 or by email at loogenism@yahoo.com.

I am very enthusiastic about this project and look forward to hearing from and working with you.

Sincerely,

Jenny Bourne
Appendix E

CONFIDENTIALITY PLEDGE

Name of Study: Heterosexism and the lives of South Korean Lesbians

Principal Investigator: Jenny Bourne

In undertaking the translation of interviews for the above-named research study, I understand that I will be translating data gathered in audio-taped interviews with the individual participants whose identities I may or may not come to know.

I understand that all possible precautions are to be undertaken to protect the identities of the participants as well as the information they share during their involvement with the research study. I hereby pledge to keep all the information that I see or hear during my work as a volunteer translator strictly confidential, and I agree not to discuss the information or the identities of any of the participants with anyone other than the researcher, Jenny Bourne.

My signature (below) indicates that I understand the importance of, and agree to maintain, confidentiality.

Translator’s Signature: __________________ Date: ___________________

Researcher Signature: __________________

________________________