THE COMMODIFICATION OF INTIMACY AND GENDER INEQUALITY WITHIN SOUTH KOREAN DATING RITUALS

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Anthropology - Doctor of Philosophy

2021

ABSTRACT

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The economic boom of the 90's promised increased gender equity for South Korean women through their new ability to "find employment off the land and outside of the family economy," gaining some level of autonomy from their families. However, South Korea now has the widest gender income gap among OCED nations. I argue that, while women have gained the power to choose their own marriage partners, the hyper-commodification of dating rituals has left them as unequal partners in the negotiation of romantic courtship. Additionally, the commodification of intimacy has also increased inequality between men and women within the South Korean sexual field, hardening class hierarchies. This has had negative effects on men's ability to materially express their feelings of interest, love, and intimacy with their dating partners during a time of slow economic growth, concentration of wealth among elites, and high unemployment among South Korean youth. I found that a reversion to a reliance on South Korean singles' parents class status and economic clout in the competitive South Korean sexual field has taken place despite tremendous economic development, and advances in women's rights and education. While the democratizing effects of capitalism that have allowed South Korean women to choose their own marriage partners would seem to have increased gender equality, my study calls this assumption into question and asks how this shift instead creates new inequalities. I investigate how the development of a consumer economy has affected gender

inequality through the commodification of intimate relationships within dating and marriage rituals.

I use dating and courtship rituals in South Korea as a lens through which to examine how the commodification of intimacy has affected gender and class inequality. Unequal access to income between genders and classes unevenly effects the expression of intimate relationships that are heavily mediated by the hyper-consumption of commodities. I argue that inequity in the economic market creates analogous inequity in dating, marriage, and intimate markets with especially negative repercussions for those who do not fit what that market has deemed ideal feminine or masculine actors. Class inequalities within the sexual field are most apparent between men whose evaluations are based on breadwinner masculinity; strongly correlated with their incomes and the class background of their parents. Women too ascend or descend the hierarchy of the South Korean sexual field through their adherence to marketable ideals of femininity and a "good wife," namely their education, docility, and erotica capital.

The emancipatory power of new technologies of intimate consumption such as the internet are interrupted by both commodification and the threat of abuse by South Korean singles with the ability to weaponize their higher incomes within their intimate relationships. Online matchmaking agencies who perform such screening services are expensive and reintroduce economic inequalities and hegemonic male power back into intimate relationships. South Koreans exploit the internet to discover new social groups and extend the reach of their existing social networks through meetup groups and hobbies rather than deploying dating applications more directly to find a dating partner. However, I argue that the rise of online dating in South Korea and its intensive commodification has actually led to the retrenchment of existing gender norms and ideals rather than their subversion.

In loving memory of my father Edward Paul Glayzer who passed away before being able to see me graduate. Also, in memory of Nancy Abelmann who guided me when applying to graduate school.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this dissertation would not have been possible without the help of a multitude of people and organizations which have guided and supported me along the way. There is no way for me to repay their generosity, nor a way for me to include all of them in this acknowledgement. For any omission on my part, please accept my apologies.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee, Andrea Louie, Laura Nelson, Chantal Tetreault, and Adan Quan, for their support and guidance in shaping my academic career. I am also forever indebted to my wife Jennifer Glayzer who sacrificed so much of her time to be with me in the field and, of course, help with editing my writing. I also acknowledge all of my family and friends who have helped support my entire graduate endeavor. Without these support networks, few dissertations would ever actually be completed.

Thank you to Kim Hyeon Mee at Yonsei University for supporting and mentoring me in the field. Thank you to my writing group, Anna Martinez-Hume, Marcela Omans McKeeby, Livy Drexler, and others who came and went, for tirelessly reading all of my drafts and giving me their honest feedback. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Alex Nelson who worked with and supported me in the field, collecting, and analyzing data together. I would also like to thank Hwani Lee, my research assistant who helped me with data collection and translation, in addition to being an untiring sounding board for all of my ideas. I would also like to thank Minjin Song, who helped transcribe and translate the most difficult interviews.

Thank you to the Critical Language Scholarship, the Asian Studies Department at Michigan State University and the Foreign Language Area Studies Program for their funding and support.

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INTRODUCTION

I would thus define courtship as a structured social framework for decision-making, where the decision was either emotional ("Do I love him?"), practical ("Do I want to marry him?"), or both. It has a beginning, a set of ritualized rules that organize its progression, and a formal end (usually moving to a marriage proposal, but occasionally ending the connection). Courtship is thus a cultural technique to make a decision by providing procedures in which the interiority fixated itself and gelled around known rules. - Illouz, Eva. The End of Love (2019:34-35)

1.1. Overarching Argument

Individualism, the rise of the market economy, democratization, and expansion of employment and education for women, was expected to lead to greater gender "equality" in South Korea in the post-authoritarian 1990's and beyond. Indeed, there are many important indications of improvements, but South Korea still leads the OECD in many measures of gender inequality (Korea - OECD, 2017). I argue that, unexpectedly, it is in the domain of heteronormative dating and marriage that some of this inequality is maintained and reproduced. Further, this inequality is restraining the class mobility that characterized much of the dynamism of South Korea's industrial and technological launch.

At the time of my field research in 2017, South Korea had the widest gender income gap among OECD nations (Earnings and Wages - Gender Wage Gap - OECD Data, 2020). The implied goal of South Korea's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is to foster equality for women within the workplace and their families. These goals have been attempted to be achieved through economic development and female workplace participation. The economic boom in South Korea during the 1990's promised increased gender equity for South Korean women through their increasing ability to "find employment off the land and outside of the family economy," gaining some level of autonomy from their families (Kendall, 1996:102). I argue that while women have gained the power to choose their own marriage partners based on their ability to work outside of the home and earn their own incomes, the wide gender income gap and hyper-

commodification of dating rituals has left them as unequal partners in the negotiation of romantic courtship. Additionally, the commodification of intimacy has also increased financial strains on a new generation of men and women who are enduring unprecedented levels of youth unemployment within a stagnant economy (Choi, 2017). These economic crises combined with the increasing commodification of intimacy has led to new financial strains. These financial strains affect men and women in different ways, generating disparate inequalities between men and women within the South Korean sexual field and assorting people based on class hierarchies. Hypergamy is becoming increasingly impossible for men at the same time it is becoming one of the only options for women.

Increasing levels of intimate commodification during a time of slow economic growth, concentration of wealth among elites, and high unemployment among South Korean youth has intensified the importance of material expressions of inner emotional states such as love and affection. This has had negative effects on low-income men's ability to materially express their feelings of love, interest and intimacy with their dating partners. Past generations of South Korean singles married primarily according to their family's wishes and under the further constraints of their family's class background. South Korea's meteoric rise from one of the poorest nations on Earth to one of the wealthiest what in sometimes referred to as "compressed modernity" helped young South Koreans to wrestle control over their marriages away from their parents. However, I found that a reversion to a reliance on South Korean singles' parents class status and economic clout in the competitive South Korean sexual field has taken place despite tremendous economic development, and advances in women's rights and education. While the individualism that has arisen in concert with the marketization of life in South Korea has allowed women to choose their own marriage partners would seem to have increased gender equality, my

study calls this assumption into question and asks how this shift instead creates new inequalities. I investigate how the development of a consumer economy has affected gender inequality through the commodification of intimate relationships within dating and marriage rituals.

1.2. Thematic Overview

1.2.1. The Commodification of Intimacy

The commodification of intimacy is a central theme that runs throughout my dissertation but is especially important in chapters one and three, which describe and analyze the commodification of courtship rituals and how commodification of online dating has reintroduced gender inequality to what may have been a potential liberating new technology. In both popular and academic discourse, fears exist that our intimate relationships may become marked by the same inequality that has come to dominate access to things like healthcare, education, or social mobility. However, other authors argue that commodification has always taken place in intimate relationships, but the degree to which it is masked or hidden may vary between cultures and merely appear to be on the rise due to new communication technologies such as the internet (Constable, 2009). I attempt to avoid this dualistic debate by focusing on how South Korean singles themselves view the costs and expenses of courtship rituals while also paying close attention to what strategies singles use in order to avoid the negative results of this commodification.

I use dating and courtship rituals in South Korea as a lens through which to examine how the commodification of intimacy has affected gender and income-based class inequality. Unequal access to income between genders and classes unevenly affects the expression of intimate relationships that are heavily mediated by the consumption of commodities. I argue that inequity

in the economic market creates analogous inequity in dating, marriage, and intimate markets with negative repercussions for those who do not fit what that market has deemed ideal feminine or masculine actors.

1.2.2. The Intimate Market

I argue that the current landscape of intimate dating partners in South Korea is highly commodified. This commodification of the intimate market within a late capitalist, neoliberal society creates large disparities of income and economic capital. This economic inequality is then embedded into inequality within intimate relationships. However, what is a market and what does it mean to talk of a marketplace of dating partners? Here, I wish to provide a conceptual framework about the South Korean dating market, how it sheds light on the way that economic inequality affects South Korean dating culture, and where it falls short in explanatory power.

Markets are arenas in which commercial transactions take place, where economic ideas about competition, supply and demand, and scarcity playout to determine price and value. A market is also a social place of gathering for people who wish to buy and sell commodities. Commodities are produced for the purpose of sale and their prices and value are inscribed through market mechanisms such as supply and demand. A great deal of economic theory has treated markets are places of cold, calculating, rational thought and decision making but more recent work from scholars devoted to behavioral economics such as Thaler and Sunstein have devoted their work to showing how human beings do not always behave this way, even within markets (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). The “pure” market, an economic system in which resources are allocated exclusively by market mechanisms, has yet to be discovered, invented, or implemented. Markets are embedded within social systems and societies and no one within these

markets behaves purely rationally, seeking to receive the highest prices while paying the lowest for their goods and services, all of the time. Instead, the market is a metaphor, a tool we can use during our analysis of South Korean dating rituals and culture. It's a tool that is, as Lévi-Strauss once said, "good to think with." However, the often understudied and under theorized social aspects of the market recognizes that humans do not always behave rationally, especially when it comes to romantic decisions. When applied to South Korean dating and courtship rituals the various market metaphors all have their limitations which I will explore here.

The metaphor of the market is useful in understanding South Korean dating rituals and culture in a number of ways. There are relatively broad, homogenous, and gendered preferences for dating partners that are informed by popular culture, breadwinner masculinity, and extreme competition. By imagining the dating-scape as a marketplace where these individuals who embody these ideals are in limited supply, we can make sense of how these individuals are able to use their cultural capital to gain advantages within the market (Eckert, 1994; Gal, 1978).

The progression of relationships take place across time and dating market forces intersect with South Korean courtship practices more forcefully during three critical phases of courtship scripts. These phases are choosing someone with which to date, making the decisions to become exclusive with a dating partner, and during marriage negotiations.

Searching for and choosing someone with which to become a dating partner caused my informants, at points, to rationally compare and contrast their options. Oftentimes this took the form of choosing what kind of dating method to use to find a dating partner and also to compare the "specs" of several potential partners. Without intimate or personal knowledge of any given individuals, South Korean singles must rely on basic facts and figures about each, weighing pros and cons, evaluating potential future happiness, and making a strategic selection. However, while

this phase of searching and selecting a dating partner introduces elements of a market to South Korean courtship, South Korean singles also create human emotional bonds that are more difficult to quantify. My data shows that each individual has strong idiosyncratic preferences that sometimes diverge widely from the stereotypical, standardized, idealized dating preferences that I present throughout this dissertation. That South Korean singles in my study are influenced by cultural norms of idealized masculine and feminine dating partners while also holding their own personal preferences is not terribly surprising, it does complicate and limit the applicability of the market metaphor to South Korean courtship. Scholars such as Bourdieu have attempting to theorize the notion of symbolic capital as a better way of understanding capital. Symbolic capital, such as high-class tastes, education, or physical attractivity can sometimes be converted into financial capital and will be discussed throughout this dissertation. (Bourdieu, 1985; Eckert, 1994; Gal, 1978).

The second phase of courtship in which the market intersects with South Korean dating is when choosing to become exclusive with a dating partner. Like when choosing someone to date, making the decision to become exclusive with an initial dating partner usually necessitates a calculation and comparison with other options. The normative stereotypes and gender roles of the wider South Korean society are reproduced within the intimate relationship when discussing decisions about becoming exclusive with friends. According to my informants, their wider social circles would often play a role in comparing their dating partner against imagined gendered heteronormativity ideal dating partners. However, unlike with choosing an initial dating partner, this decision also has an opportunity cost. While choosing to date a given individual does not preclude the ability to meet and date others, the decision to become publicly exclusive with a single person removes other potential opportunities within the market. This is another example of

where the power of the South Korean market reins in idiosyncratic preferences and where the market's influence is plain to see.

The third phase of South Korean courtship rituals where the market intersects with and shapes individual choice is when getting married. Like choosing someone to begin dating with, there is feedback from friends and another round of comparison with the marketplace of marriage candidates as well as against cultural norms of idealized romantic partners. Like the decision to become exclusive with a dating partner, this phase has significant opportunity costs. Also like these other phases, there is resistance to this system. Individuals not only weigh the pros and cons of a given partner against what the qualities that the market values but also against their own personal values, preferences, and idiosyncrasies. They also usually attempt to match with someone whom they believe fits well with them and their own individual qualities. None of my informants had ever been married or engaged to be married and so I have little of my own data on the subject. However, the normative arrangement of the bride's family paying for the wedding while the groom's family pays for the new nuclear home complete with furnishings and appliances is well understood. The negotiation over the sharing of these costs, along with other new costs such as the honeymoon, are yet another example of the ways in which the marketplace of South Korean singles comes to impact the personal intimate relationship, even in this late and final phase of courtship.

There are many other times during courtship that the market does not seem to intersect with South Korean courtship norms and practices. While the dating market may intersect with and inform a person's decision of whom to date, my data shows that after several dates with the same person, South Korean couples individuate their relationship and courtship rituals described in detail in Chapter 7. The couple resists the homogenizing forces of the market as they tailor

how they share the costs of dating, choose which couples' holidays to celebrate, and find ways to subvert the commodification of intimacy. At the same time, couples also begin to build their specific emotional connections with each other as they become closer and more intimate. My data shows that as these connections form and deepen, the intimate relationship conforms less and less to the selective pressures of the dating market. During courtship market pressures shape relationship trajectories within the dating-scape, but strong human emotional bonds of love and friendship are enigmatic and amorphous also shape these trajectories, subverting market pressures.

My informants were cognizant of the ways in which both economic inequality and the marketplace of South Korean singles affected their courtship practices, limited their choices, and impacted their intimate relationships. Women were particularly keen to point out the way the system benefits the patriarchy, supports misogyny, and creates intense pressure to conform to high female beauty standards. Men were equally keen to point out the pressures that this system places on them to perform breadwinner masculinity at a time of uncertain employment and expanding economic inequality. However, South Korean singles take great care to try and limit the effects of the market's intrusion into their intimate relationships. The extensive gift-exchanges that take place during and between the expansive number of couples' holidays discussed in Chapter 4 is one important example of this. Almost universally, informants indicated that gifts given that were spontaneous or highly thoughtful and individualized to their relationship were more meaningful and impactful to them than generic commodities such as flowers or designer purses. Similarly, the high number of gift exchange occasions allows courting couples to attempt to rapidly and repeatedly individuate their intimate relationship from the homogeneity of the market. Yet, this attempt at individuation, or what Polanyi called the

double-movement, is done via the exchange of commodities and the market (Polanyi, 1944). These attempts at resisting the market are ineffective because these exchanges of commodities take place within the same market.

My informants outline a number of ways in which they and their partners attempt to escape what they sometimes described as the "trap" of the South Korean sexual market and some individuals had greater access to these strategies. Leaving the country was one way in which three of the women in my sample opted out of the South Korean dating market and several other women expressed an interest in traveling abroad for better marriage and work opportunities. One woman in her mid-twenties said that she had been depressed and suffered from mental illness in South Korea because she was overweight by South Korean normative female beauty standards but upon moving to the UK for a training program she had a social and emotional awakening because she found that many men were interested in dating her. A few women in South Korea also expressed a desire to meet and date a foreign man because of their perceived egalitarian gender views and were using Tinder expressly for that purpose. Some Korean men too harbored such ideas but were more skeptical of their ability to attract Western dating partners in either the domestic South Korean dating market or the globalized dating marketplace. Other informants, male and female, expressed doubts that they would ever be in a position that would allow them to marry. Women who did not possess conventional, normative beauty or did not embody traditional South Korean femininity did not see a way to attract a quality marriage partner. Men faced a bleak job market full of long hours and stiff competition that would be required of them to fulfill their masculine role as sole breadwinner. LGBTQ and non-gender conforming informants similarly felt that the normative market would prevent them from finding a marriage partner. For these reasons, many in this group simply shunned marriage all together and either

considered remaining single for the rest of their lives or at least never marrying and thus, escaping the market.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how dating and courtship rituals in South Korean are a clear example of how neoliberal economic development modifies people's behavior in unpredicted ways. Furthermore, I am able to show the extent and limits of this neoliberal commodification. Rather than fearing the inescapability of a rampaging globalized capitalist marketplace bringing more and more aspects of intimate relationships onto the market, I am able to discuss what some possible limitations are to the process of the commodification of intimacy and discuss the implications of such discoveries. My data shows the extent of and limits to neoliberal commodification. I show how people are drawn into this system but also their complaints and resistances.

1.2.3. Inequality in the Sexual Field

Another theme throughout this dissertation is inequality within the sexual field, particularly in chapters two and three. Following the work of Adam Green (2013) and his theory of the sexual field as a place of competition where actors vie for dominance, partners, social position, and esteem, I analyze the ways in which individual singles exploit their advantages within the sexual field for their own benefit. Race, age, class, gender, education, and erotic capital are all used strategically to gain these advantages within the field (Green, 2008, 2013). The ironic contradiction being that the intimate marketplace stands for many of the principles that intimate relationships are supposed to reject in order to be successful such as inequality and exploitation. While there are many aspects to the sexual field that deserve investigation, I focus on inequalities of class and gender.

1.2.3.1. Class Inequality in the Sexual Field

Class inequalities become apparent between men who are normatively evaluated based on breadwinner masculinity. Within the South Korean sexual field, this is strongly correlated with men's incomes and the class background of their parents. As South Korea has developed over the decades, class divides have become more distinct and deeper. While some nations have been more successful in resisting the growth of inequality, the situation in South Korea mirrors the transition to late capitalism taking place in nations such as the United States. However, the extensive commodification of intimacy has brought these inequalities into stark relief within the intimate relationships. I show how higher incomes and upper-class backgrounds are used to advantage men while searching for a dating partner through friends, work, or online, and also within intimate relationships themselves in order to wield influence over the course of the relationship and the extraction of emotional, sexual, financial resources. With class and income being the primary determinants to status within the sexual field, low income and lower-class singles find themselves at the mercy of the South Korean sexual marketplace, unable to afford to normative marriage or even intimacy.

1.2.3.2. Gender Inequality in the Sexual Field

Women, too, climb or descend the hierarchy of the South Korean sexual field through their adherence to marketable ideals of femininity and a "good wife," namely their education, docility, and erotic capital. This is particularly salient in chapters one through three. While chapter one outlines how the commodification of intimacy has created inequality between dating couples, chapter two demonstrates how fears of becoming the subject of inter-intimate relationship emotional, sexual, and physical exploitation are an important consideration when

screening potential dating partners. Economic gender inequality in South Korean society in the form of a low glass ceiling, discrimination in the workplace, and housing markets becomes gender inequality between the courting couple. Chapter two goes on to show the sometimes-great lengths South Korean singles must go in order to screen for would be abusers and find love, intimacy, and equity. Chapter three where South Korean singles both resist and acquiesce to a focus on "specs" in the form of online dating agency ranking systems.

1.2.4. Deritualization and Reritualization

Deritualization and reritualization are themes that intersect within each of these chapters but is also the main subject of chapter seven which evaluates the current state of the literature on the supposed breakdown of courtships rituals in advanced late capitalist societies. While some scholars of economics and courtship have celebrated sexual liberation, the decline of the sexual double standard, and the supposed decoupling of sexual and emotional intimacy in the United States and other western nations, others have pointed out the ways that the dissolution of courtship ritualism has led to proliferation of ambiguous relationships where men are able to extract sexual resources but women are unable to secure the emotional and economic commitments that they desire (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006; Illouz, 1997, 2019b; Lamont, 2020; Rofel, 1999, 2007; Waters, 2016).

By describing in these four chapters the intensive commodification of intimate relationships through extensive gift-giving celebrations, the various and numerous ritualized methods of searching for a date, and the lack of interest in free dating applications such as Tinder, I demonstrate that South Korean dating does not lack ritual. In fact, South Korean singles and couples take part in an incredible variety of ritualistic behavior. True, many of the previous

rigid dating practices described by Kendall in her study of marriage in the 1990s have been cast aside. From old practices such inspecting the needlework and sewing prowess of a potential female partner observed in the early 1900s to more recent rituals such as "elevator dating" where singles meet at a tall building and stagger potential suitors on each floor, have all fallen by the wayside as South Korean society has advanced economically and transformed socially. However, what remains is not the ambiguous and amorphous relationships described by Illouz but a plethora of new rituals that serve arising and diverse needs. This is not to argue that these new rituals are devoid of gender inequality. Far from it. However, I do argue that some rituals are more egalitarian than others and that the ability to choose or enact these rituals is not always guaranteed. Equality, it turns out, is expensive.

1.3. Summary of Chapters

1.3.1. Chapter 4: The Commodification of Intimacy within South Korean Couples' Holidays

My fourth chapter investigates the commodification of South Korean coupledom by examining the hyper-commodification of intimacy in South Korea which is evident in the sheer quantity of couples' holiday celebrations and elaborate gift exchanges surrounding dating rituals. Today, South Korean couples can choose from a dizzying array of couples' holidays to celebrate annually, with new holidays being promoted popular media all of the time. South Korean couples observe these anniversary-like celebrations on yearly, monthly, and 100-day intervals with specific, ritualized, and sometimes elaborate gift exchanges. These couples' holidays usually have a commercial component to them in which a specific type of gift, brand of gift, or date is prescribed to take place on that day. The hyper-commodification of dating rituals combined with

a vast gender pay-gap contributes to a system of debts and obligations where inequality within the market produces inequality within intimate relationships.

In this chapter I examine the high degree of commodification in South Korean dating, explore its relationship to gender inequality, and its effects on gender roles and intimacy for both men and women in South Korea. In particular, I ask if inequalities within the marketplace, in the form of the substantial gender-income gap, lead to inequalities within intimate relationships that are often idealized and imagined existing "outside" of the market. Inequalities within intimate relationships often manifest themselves in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. However, in this dissertation I focus most of my attention on how income and earning power affects inequality within intimate relationships. In doing so, I am cognizant of how income inequality within the job market in South Korea is itself highly influenced by diverse forces such as sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny that exist within larger South Korean Society.

I argue that the existence and ubiquity of couples' holidays contribute significantly to existing inequalities between men and women within their intimate relationships. Besides being a major source of stress and conflict for some couples, negotiations about which holidays to celebrate and how to celebrate them reveal the unequal imbalance of power between men and women but also between wealthy men and low-income men competing within the dating and marriage marketplace. Other forms of relationship and dating commodification that take place in South Korea similarly contribute to these inequalities. I explain why South Korean couples willingly participate in this commodification by scrutinizing how gender norms and ideals are created, maintained, or subverted through these ritual purchases and displays of affection. At the same time, I demonstrate how the idealization of a romantic love that is imagined existing outside of or unconstrained by the commodification of intimacy lead many of my informants to

attempt to strategically create equitable, if not equal, power dynamics within their intimate relationships. The extent to which these strategies succeeded or failed varied widely from couple to couple.

1.3.2. Chapter 5: *Sogaeting*: Searching for Love Without Feeling "Uncomfortable"

In this fifth chapter, I explore how South Korean singles negotiate emergent and existing dating practices that include matchmaking companies, arranged marriages, parent-introductions, blind-dates, group-dates, and "hunting" strategically to optimize their chances of finding a dating partner while minimize feeling "uncomfortable," a common euphemism for financial, sexual, or emotional exploitation. In particular, I focus on the reasons for, and consequences of, a strong preference for blind dates among South Korean women. Single South Korean men and women with limited value within the South Korean sexual field, can easily find themselves feeling "uncomfortable" when dating. The choice of, and preference for, different types of dating has important ramifications for who bears the financial costs of the date but also the expectations how the relationship will proceed sexually and with what kinds of emotional, financial, and sexual commitments. South Korean singles take great care before entering into a sustained intimate relationship, or even a first date, with any partner who could potentially abuse their asymmetrical power within the relationship, much of which results from the commodification of intimacy.

I draw from sexual fields theory where the sexual field of Seoul has a "distinct sets of actors, internal logics, institutionalized modes of interactions and self-management, and positions in social space that confer advantages on some and disadvantages on others" (Green, 2013:3). These unequal gendered advantages and disadvantages contribute to a correspondingly

unequal system of vertical sexual and intimate stratification. This Bourdieuan field of sexual stratification shapes and determines the choice of intimate relationships with profound implications for the rest of an individual's life path (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985; Green, 2013). This field is both a "field of force" and "field of struggle" where actors vie for dominant power (Green, 2013; Martin, 2001). I also argue that it is a field of exchange where economic, social, and sexual capitals are interchanged and reinforced.

As Kendall wrote, "through courtship and through all of the talk about getting married, notions of ideal "man" and "woman," "husband" and "wife," "son-in-law" and "daughter-in-law" are constructed, reinforced, and resisted" (Kendall, 1996:91). In this way I am able to answer questions about how participation in the neoliberal market impacts and mediates romantic courtship and intimate relationships.

1.3.3. Chapter 6: The Commodification of Intimacy Goes High-Tech: Dating Applications and Matchmaking Agencies

In my sixth chapter, I discuss why South Koreans shun the use of the internet to find a dating partner despite its potentially liberating benefits. Scholars have pointed out how new technologies of communication and intimate consumption, especially the internet, have been adopted in order to subvert older forms of male hegemony (Agustin, 2007; Bernstein, 2010; Brennan, 2004) and parental control (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014a; Ono & Kwon, 2013). Economic development in the form of capitalism's expansion, female participation within the labor force, and the adoption of new technologies are assumed to contribute to this gender egalitarianism. In her annual review of the commodification of intimacy Nicole Constable (2009) writes that "internet technology plays a central role in the commodification of intimacy and in shaping new

movements and geographic and electronic landscapes of intimacy" (Constable, 2009). The persistence of gender inequality in South Korea despite tremendous economic development and technological advancement will be the subject of this chapter. By examining the utilization of internet technologies to search for a dating partner I am able to ask whether or not the commodification of intimacy is actually on the rise or if it simply makes explicit and visible existing commodification.

Powered by the internet, dating applications such as Tinder have the potential to disrupt and subvert existing hegemonic male power structures by providing their matching services for free or little cost, bypassing some of the commodification of intimacy described in chapter five. The high costs of maintaining a relationship with near constant gift-giving, the expense of dating outside of the home, and costs of searching for a date may be subverted by free dating applications which allow a greater degree of intimate freedom to date outside of their own social, class, and educational backgrounds. However, South Korean singles do not often utilize these free apps due to deeply held fears of meeting someone from outside of their social network. The emancipatory power of new technologies of intimate consumption such as the internet are interrupted by the desires of South Korean singles to screen for potential abusers. Online matchmaking agencies who perform such screening services are expensive and reintroduce economic inequalities and hegemonic male power back into intimate relationships. South Koreans exploit the internet to discover new social groups and extend the reach of their existing social networks through Meetup groups and hobby interests rather than deploying dating applications more directly to find a dating partner. I will argue that the rise of online dating in South Korea and its intensive commodification has actually led to the retrenchment of existing gender norms and ideals rather than their subversion.

1.3.4. Chapter 7: Rituals of Romance in South Korea: Questioning Love's De-Ritualization

This chapter is the results of a collaborative study with Dr. Alex Nelson at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. We plan to publish a version of this chapter as a manuscript with myself as lead author and Dr. Nelson as second author. Data from this chapter was collected by both of us, oftentimes while we worked together jointly in the field. This chapter investigates Eva Illouz's *The End of Love* (2019) which claims that the dating in advanced and late capitalist societies has become deritualized, dominated by smartphone apps, and casual sexual relationships. Comparing their experiences to those of Victorian England and the United States in which literary accounts suggest that love and courtship were highly ritualized and explicitly scripted, Illouz asserts that contemporary romantic relationships fail to meet women's desires for emotional intimacy and commitment, leaving them fundamentally confused as to the longer term intentions of their male romantic partners. She argues that despite the seeming gender egalitarian logic of this culture of casual sex, which some feminists theorize as being liberating women from stigma of the sexual double standard, she suggests that casual sexual relationships serve men's desire for sex without emotional entanglement while failing to meet women's needs for emotional intimacy. Late modern societies are experiencing a process of de-ritualization of their romantic lives and that this process, while liberating from certain sexist and patriarchal restrictions that once held hegemonic sway, have given rise to increased anxiety, uncertainty, and feelings of romantic dissatisfaction, particularly for women. A suitable explanation for the existence of the sexually dimorphic desires Illouz describes is lacking in her account.

Illouz's problematization of the individualization of love and assertion that these changes produce sexual anomie and uncertainty for heterosexual women requires interrogation not only

in the societies she studied but cross-culturally. We ask whether the historical and social correlates she ascribes these changes to predict similar outcomes elsewhere, or whether she is observing a culturally idiosyncratic transformation produced by the current permutation of Europe's evolving Judeo-Christian derived sexual fields rather than a product of the global social and economic transformations associated with modernity. In this chapter we draw on our extensive ethnographic field research into the transformation of romantic relationships in South Korea, a society that underwent modernization in a way often described as "condensed," developing from a "hermit kingdom" and one of the poorest nations in the world into the 13th largest economy and one of the most technologically advanced societies on the planet in a little over a century. We argue that South Korean singles have largely resisted deritualization and have actually ritualized novel, emergent methods of dating.

CHAPTER 2:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

I lived in the Gangnam district of Seoul for approximately 10 months with my fiancée. We chose this location because of its proximity to the English academy where my fiancée worked and also because of its thriving entertainment district. After receiving news that she had been accepted to a graduate program of her own in the United States she left South Korea and I moved from a one-room studio apartment in Gangnam to a low-cost boarding house (*goshiwon*) in Sinchon for the remaining two months of my stay. I returned the following year to Seoul for approximately three months to conduct additional data collection while observing South Korean couples in public. The results of that co-collected data are the subject of my final co-authored chapter.

I located informants by participating in speed-dating events, online dating applications, and meetup groups for activities such as hiking, language exchange and book clubs. I also solicited participants through online university message boards and through the observation of my South Korean friends "*hunting*," approaching strangers of the opposite sex with South Korean informants at clubs and bars in Seoul. I located informants by participating in speed-dating events, online dating applications, and meetup groups for activities such as hiking, language exchange and book clubs. At these events I always identified myself as a researcher in a committed relationship. At times, my research assistant participated in speed-dating and other types of dates. She was single but also identified herself as a researcher. I also solicited participants through online university message boards and through the observation of my South Korean friends "hunting," approaching strangers of the opposite sex, with South Korean informants at clubs and bars in Seoul.

My positionality as a heterosexual, white, male colored all of my interactions with my informants. Before leaving for the field I worried deeply that women would not agree to meeting me alone for interviews because of stereotypes about the more casual approaches to sex of white men and that they might think that my research was an excuse to take them out. In fact, during predissertation research when I was single and studying Korean language at Sogang University, I met another American woman at a bar in Hongdae. She asked me what I did and when I explained to her that I studied South Korean dating rituals she laughed hysterically, picked up her drink, and abruptly walked away from me say, "What a line!" When I did finally arrive in the field for dissertation research, I was engaged to the woman who is now my wife. This worried me further as I feared that I may have trouble fitting in with South Korean singles or that they may feel uncomfortable inviting me out with them to look for other singles, a practice known as *hunting*. Luckily, I was wrong on all accounts.

My status as an engaged man affiliated me as being taken, making it easier for South Korean women to meet with me, always in public, without fear of misunderstandings about the nature of the meeting. Further, my foreignness allowed me to serve as a kind of socially disconnected confidant that South Korean singles, men and women, seemed to feel they could tell their feelings and sexual exploits to without worrying that I would gossip to mutual friends. How could I? Identifying as an anthropological researcher also gave the impression that I was liberal in my attitudes towards gender and sexuality, allowing me to be able to maintain friendships with the opposite sex. Further, rather than a hinderance, my native English language abilities were a boon in that, a number of my informants agreed to participate in my research in order to practice their English conversation skills. At the time of my field research the private

language academy where my fiancée was working charged their clients over 70,000 won ($70) per hour for such conversations.

This leads to one of the main strengths and weaknesses of my methodology. On the positive side I had little trouble finding informants who wanted to meet with me and form personal relationships in order for them to increase their Western cultural capital and English language abilities. Further, as a former ESL instructor in South Korea I was already well connected with the entertainment and educational company which I have given the synonym of Seoul Connections which facilitate English language exchange meetings, book clubs, speed dating, and other social gatherings. Although these were not the only places in which I located informants they did make up a significant portion of my data. A weakness of using these particular social networks to locate informants is that about one third of my interviews were done entirely in English. Oftentimes the informants who elected to interact with me only in English were near fluent speakers, having spent time abroad in a native English-speaking country or had significant language education. This selection effect could have led to a more cosmopolitan, educated, and wealth sample. However, it would have been ideal to use Korean in all of my interactions so as to keep translations consistent across all informants. About one third of all my informants interacted with me in Korean only, and the final third interacted with me using a mixture of English and Korean depending on the subject.

Fears of economic disaster due to one of the world's lowest birthrates and a rapidly aging population has meant that the South Korean State, numerous NGOs, and advocacy groups within South Korea have conducted large scale quantitative studies concerning marriage and childrearing. These studies have largely focused on the economically quantifiable aspects of relationship codification in a narrow attempt to explain the lack of interest in marriage and

raising children among South Korean youth, blamed largely on economic hardship. While economic hardship likely plays a key role in contributing to South Korea's advancing birthrate woes, my research suggests that a dearth of marriages and children are likely downstream symptoms of larger issues of economic injustice and less quantifiable reasons that take place during dating rituals. For these reasons, I have chosen a largely qualitative methodology to fill in the gaps and add nuance to previous discussions about economic and gender inequality of increasing importance in South Korea today.

The use of English during some interviews and locating some informants from English language learning groups also likely makes my sample of informants more educated, liberal, and wealthier than what is average for South Korean singles in the general population. However, I do not want to overemphasize these points as South Koreans generally are highly educated, study English extensively, and have enough extra income to be able to afford the inexpensive language exchange groups (10,000 won [$10] per meeting).

2.2. Research Assistant

Upon my arrival in the field, one of the first things I did was set about hiring a research assistant to help me translate and implement my survey and interview instruments. I put out a call for applicants for the paid position through Dr. Kim Hyun Mee, the department chair of anthropology at Yonsei University. I interviewed three undergraduate anthropology students who were all extremely qualified but decided to hire Hwani Lee, a senior at Yonsei with some experience conducting interviews, coding data, and with an interest in South Korean feminism and gender issues. She often served as a sounding board for my ideas as well since she was part of my target population for this study. She occasionally helped to conduct focus groups and an

interview or two. She often assisted with translations and interpretations of survey and interview data.

In addition to the work outlined above, Hwani conducted participant observation for me on several occasions. Since I was engaged and it would have been unethical of me to fully participate in an intimate relationship for the purpose of academic research, Hwani volunteered to attend the Christmas Speed Dating Party as a single South Korean participant. I also attended the event with my fiancé, but we were merely observers of the event during the speed dating portion, which later morphed into a dance party and pub crawl. Hwani took detailed notes on the experience as well as other experiences she has had while dating during our study. Many of her personal friends also served as initial "test subjects" for the first drafts of my survey instruments.

2.3. Surveys

In total, three survey instruments were used throughout my time in the field. All three surveys were distributed using Qualtrics's online platform and many informants likely completed them on mobile devices. In total, I received 1,247 responses to my various surveys. The last question on all of my online surveys asked if participants would be willing to meet me in person for an interview and this is how many of my informants were located.

2.3.1. Survey Instrument #1

The first survey was exploratory and distributed to my existing South Korean friendship network and their friends using a snowball method. Questions were asked about dating practices, expenditures, and cost sharing. Almost all questions were open ended with text boxes for answers. I received 73 responses to this survey (see Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C).

2.3.2. Survey Instrument #2

The second survey was created using the answers from the first survey as a guide. Common answers submitted via the text boxes were converted into multiple choice ranked, and Likert scale questions. This survey was distributed much more widely. It was posted and shared via social media and other websites related to Yonsei University, Konkuk University, Korean Cyber University, and a university in Gyeonggi province near Suwon. The survey also went slightly viral when it was shared by TheGrandNarrative.com, a South Korean feminist blogger, and then shared again by Yangpa, a feminist social media site run by a South Korean academic living in the UK. It was also widely shared by my previous informants and my friendship network of ESL teachers in South Korea. I received 888 responses to this survey.

2.3.3. Survey Instrument #3

The third and final survey was developed during my return visit to South Korea. This survey was rather different than the previous one. It was much more targeted, asking participants questions about what kinds of restaurants they liked to go on dates in, what kinds of outfits they preferred to wear, and what expectations they had for who would pay for the costs of dates when using various dating methods. I received 286 responses to this survey.

2.4. Focus Groups

I conducted nine focus groups ranging in size from 2 to 12 participants. Most focus groups were single gender but the largest focus group of 12 participants was mixed gender. Sometimes focus groups had a particular theme, such as “what is the purpose of dating” or “gender inequality and dating expenses.” Just as often though, the focus groups were open ended, and I

tried to allow the participants to discuss whatever they wanted. In total, 34 informants were interviewed via focus groups.

2.5. Interviews

Through survey respondents and the various participant observation methods listed below I conducted 19 interviews with men and 22 interviews with women for a grand total of 41 unique people interviewed. Each interview lasted for at least an hour, but most took much longer. Some informants were interviewed multiple times on many different topics, but most informants were only interviewed once. Interviews were semi-structured to ensure that I got key data from each participant, but I was also careful to make sure that informants had the ability to direct the conversation into whatever direction they felt was important to them. Interviews were typically conducted in public spaces such as coffee shops, study halls, and sometimes bars. However, three interviews were conducted via video call because the informants had recently moved to the US, UK, or Canada. I typically paid for the costs of the study hall and related coffee, or drinks that were consumed during the interview. My oldest informant was 39 while my youngest was 18. However, one older looking informant declined to tell me their age. The majority of informants were in their mid-twenties to early thirties. While I was focused primarily on heterosexual informants, three informants identified as members of the LGBTQ community. Additionally, five female informants identified as heterosexual but acknowledged that they would have liked to experiment with dating other women if only South Korean culture were more accepting of them.

2.6. Seoul Connections, Speed Dating, and Singles Events

I attended two speed dating events and a number of other events put on by the same entertainment companies. While these other events, such as a "New Year's Eve Party" were not explicitly for singles, the advertisements and other related materials made clear that meeting young, attractive singles was a big part of the draw. Seoul Connections, a pseudonym I created, was primarily a foreign language education company that had multiple weekly meetings at bars. Each meeting was 10,000 won ($10) to attend and included two free drinks. There was a mix of attendees wanting to practice their English, Korean, Chinese, and Spanish with other attendees. However, at the time of the field research Seoul Connections was also beginning to expand into hosting other types of events such as their Christmas Speed Dating and Dance Party. Since returning from the field Seoul Connections has continued to expand, hosting other multilingual singles events on New Year's, Halloween, and St. Patrick's Day.

2.7. Meetups

Besides utilizing English language and entertainment companies such as Seoul Connections to expand my social network of singles, I also frequently attended Meetups using their popular mobile application. I attended Meetups that pertained to my own interests such as book clubs, hiking clubs, Korean cooking, Korean traditional alcohol, and cycling groups. All of these groups were made up of populations where the vast majority of attendees were South Korean, single, and in their mid-twenties to early thirties.

2.8. University Guest Lectures

I actively sought out guest lecture and teaching opportunities in order to come into contact with South Korean singles attending universities. I typically would lecture on topics related to my dissertation research which got many students interested in taking my surveys and interviewing with me one-on-one.

2.8.1. Korean Cyber University Guest Instructor

Through a friend who worked as an Anthropology and ESL instructor at Korean Cyber University in Seoul I guest lectured on a number of occasions. I also conducted a focus group with a group of 12 of these students who told me about their experiences dating in South Korea. Through this experience I was able to meet informants from lower educational and class backgrounds than through some of my other methods which tended to favor well educated and higher-class status. I worked with this group of students for most of an academic semester, getting to know them very well, and often going out for beer and fried chicken with them after class.

2.8.2. Konkuk University Guest Lecture

Through an academic acquaintance in the Economics Department at Konkuk I was able to arrange a guest lecture where I discussed the economics of dating and cost sharing. These students were more traditional students than those at Korean Cyber University but not class elites like the students whom I met through Yonsei and Seoul University.

2.9. Loud Mouth English Class

Loud Mouth is a pseudonym for a private informal ESL class that meets in the evening for an hour of lecture before a night of drinking. In each class there are 10-15 adult students from a wide range of ages, classes, and educational backgrounds. Through an ESL instructing friend, I arranged to serve as a substitute instructor at Big Mouth on a number of occasions. I often lectured on topics related to my research which usually resulted in a number of survey and interview participants. This is also where I met one of my key informants, Jackson. When the one hour of instruction was over the classes converged at a South Korean bbq, chicken and beer, or other drinking focused venues. Typically, these gatherings would comprise of 40-50 people.

2.10. *Hunting*

On several occasions I went out *hunting* with my South Korean informants. *Hunting* is the act of approaching people with whom you have no existing social connections and asking them for their contact information. *Hunting* is almost exclusively done by men who *hunt* women. Sometimes women do go *hunting* but it is considered rare. We typically went *hunting* in bars near Hongdae, Sinchon, Gangnam, and Itaewon. These locations were recommended to me by my informants and also through information obtained in surveys on popular places to go *hunting.* I went *hunting* often with my single male informants but was also able to convince one of my female informants to do some *hunting* while I was out with her to observe.

2.11. Dating Observations

During my three month return trip to Seoul, Dr. Alex Nelson and myself went to bars and restaurants that had been identified by my informants and survey participants as popular for

dating. Detailed notes were taken observing 274 couples. Couples were described in detail as was their body language, and public displays of affection. Their meals were tracked and estimates of the cost of their expenditures were created. We also observed who paid the final bill, if it was split, or if there was an argument over who would pay. We also repeated this observation at movie theaters in the same locations.

2.12. Dating Applications and Tinder

I frequently used Tinder in order to locate informants, conduct participant observation, and collect data. I tried to use other dating applications and websites but many of them required a South Korean citizenship number which I did not have. Instead, I collected data on other dating applications and websites outside of Tinder through interviews and surveys.

On my Tinder profile, I selected to use three photos of myself and my then fiancé together along with profile information identifying myself as a happily engaged anthropological researcher who was not looking for a date. I further explained that I was only interested in meeting informants who were Korean and that would like to talk with me about my project, about which there was a brief description. I wrote my profile in both English and Korean. My profile settings were prearranged to allow anyone of any age to contact me as long as they lived in or around Seoul. I frequently changed both my gender and the gender of those who I was trying to match with in order to be matched with straight men, straight women, and LGBTQ members. I made information about myself in the prominent biographical portion of my profile that explained that I was an engaged man conducting research in both English and Korean so as not to misrepresent myself. The informants I met online were often quick to agree to meet for a face-to-face interview, although I was eventually banned from the platform after a straight man

made a complaint about my profile. I tried several times to contact Tinder and to regain access to my profile after the ban but nobody at Tinder who I reached out to would respond with anything other than a blanket statement about their user agreement, which I pointed out did not seem to say anything about using the platform for research purposes.

There are a large variety of dating applications that South Korea singles use to meet dating partners and to make other kinds of less formal intimate relationships that may or may not include sexual encounters or long-term commitments. However, the majority of these dating services required a citizenship registration number which I did not have, nor did I have access to obtaining. There have also been reports of foreigners being kicked off of South Korean run dating applications for being non-Korean. This effective ban on foreigners joining many of the online dating platforms is worthy of its own investigation but I found that foreign owned dating applications such as Tinder, Grinder, Bumble, OKCupid, and others did not have such requirements. Additionally, according to my informants and my survey results, Tinder was the most popular dating applications followed by Amanda, OKCupid, and Noon Date. I choose to focus on Tinder for several reasons. The first is that I was already very familiar with the platform and how to use it having recently become engaged to my then fiancé, now wife, whom I met on Tinder several years previously. Additionally, Tinder allowed me to set search parameters that allowed me to target certain populations geographically and also by demographics such as age, gender, and sexual preferences.

While using Tinder, I swiped right on every single profile until I reached my 50-swipe limit for the day, every day. When someone else swiped right after viewing my profile, I would get a message saying that we "liked" each other and that we could then begin sending each other private messages. When I had my account setting's gender as a man, I had a match ratio of about

1 in 20 or perhaps even lower. Alternatively, when my account setting was female, my match ration skyrocketed to at least 1 in 2 and often higher. This illustrates men's and women's differing strategies on the platform to find dates. Women had to be cautious with whom they swiped right on because they had large numbers of matches and did not want to be inundated with conversations or perhaps sexually suggestive language or unsolicited photos, as I was occasionally when posing as a female. Meanwhile, it seems that most men were using a similar strategy as me, swiping right far more frequently in the search for a potential match. Further, my impression was that the majority of men who swiped right on my profile did not read a single word of my profile explaining that I was a happily engaged man looking for people to interview. This was evidenced by my inbox that would be full of messages from straight men saying "yo, what's up gorgeous?" "what are you up to tonight baby?" "you look fun, want to meetup?" or any innumerable variation on this same theme. This was all apparently in reference to my fiancé who was with me in all my photos whom these men thought was the owner of the profile. I responded to each and every one of their messages simply cut/pasting my profile information into the private message that was sent to me, giving them an additional chance to actually read it. Virtually all men stop responding to further messages or simply unmatched with me. The cruder or more sexually explicitly the original message to me, the less likely the man was to respond to my request to meet for an interview. On one occasion, after sending me a particularly lurid first message and responding with a cut and paste of my profile information, a man became upset with me for what he felt was an apparent deception. I was polite and pointed out that if he had read any of my profile he would not have been deceived. The following day my account was banned citing Tinder's user agreement. I had wanted to keep a running count of how many men messaged me this way and run a quantitative analysis, but I was never able to regain access to

my Tinder account due to Tinder's unresponsiveness to my enquiries. Thus, much of this quantitative data was lost, as were many of the very polite and productive conversations I had had on that platform with countless other informants.

2.13. Notes About Language

As noted earlier, I spoke only Korean with about a third of my informants, only English with a third, and a mixture of English and Korean with the final third. For readability, all quotations from surveys and interviews have been translated into English. Additionally, I have made small changes to some interviews conducted with informants lacking native English fluency for clarity of comprehension. The original Korean language content of my survey instruments has been retained in Appendix A-C. Korean words that sound similar to their English counterpart words are written in italics. All interviews and focus groups were recorded on my smart phone with a microphone attachment for better sound quality.

2.13.1. Notes about Pseudonyms

Some readers may rightly wonder why my South Korean informants were given English pseudonyms rather than more authentic sounding Korean pseudonyms. Given South Korea's extensive English language education requirements, that I met many of my informants through language exchange meetings, and that informants often wanted to speak in English in order to practice their skills, the vast majority of my informants introduced themselves to me using their English names. Typically, these English names are given to them by the ESL lessons in elementary school when they begin their compulsory ESL training, but some Koreans later change their English names on their own. In either case, I chose to respect the names which the

majority of my informants introduced themselves to me and then keep that system consistent. The exception to this rule is Chapter 7 where Alex Nelson and myself have chosen to mix English and Korean names depending on how informants introduces themselves to us. When giving pseudonyms to agencies, companies, and other organizations I have tried to retain as much of the original meaning and insinuation of the name while also protecting their identity.

2.14. Transcription and Translation

All interviews and focus groups were transcribed using F4 into the language that was spoken. Some of the translations are my own but I also hired a translator, Minjin Song, to assist me with the most difficult transcripts. I do not differentiate in my quotations whether or not the original utterance was in Korean or English except where it is necessary for clarity or for emphasis. This helps to keep the dissertation comprehensible to non-Korean speakers.

2.15. Coding

All of my interviews and focus groups transcriptions were coded using MAXQDA software. My coding system had several major sections associated with semi-structured lines of questioning. These major sections were developed in the same way that my survey instruments 1-3 were created. In fact, the semi-structured interviews were largely derived from these various survey instruments but with questions that were more open-ended and with additional time for informants to elaborate and answer follow-up questions. These major sections were also imagined corresponding to what would become the subject of the chapters of this dissertation.

In the first major section, each informant was asked about their standard demographic information (age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) personal and familial income, and dating

history. This information was used throughout all of the chapters of this dissertation in order to locate informant's positionality within the hierarchical South Korea sexual field. The second major section of the interview focused on perceived obstacles to dating, sharing the costs of dating, what couples' holidays they had celebrated, how the negotiated with their partners which holidays to celebrate, and gift exchange. The answers to these questions were used primarily to develop my arguments in Chapter Four. The third major section of questions were primarily about methods of searching for a date, gender inequality within the relationship, the subject of Chapter Five. The fourth major section of questions were about their thoughts on online dating and matchmakers, which often lead to further discussions of gender inequality in South Korean dating culture broadly and became the subject of Chapter Six.

Other major themes that emerged organically during unstructured portions of the interviews were debt, couples' bank account, couples' clothes (sets), prostitution, gender roles, the equation of spending money with how much a dating partner values you, money and power, sexual pressure, sexual violence, and *kimchinyeo*. These subjects were coded and integrated into various chapters of this dissertation but especially helped to develop the arguments in Chapter Seven.

2.16. Limitations

Due to the nature of my research methods and sample outlined above, my findings are not necessarily representative of South Korean dating culture as a whole. While my research methodology and sample were beneficial in many ways, they are also not without their limitations. In particular, women informants had obtained higher educations and higher incomes than is average. I also had trouble locating men towards the bottom of the economic range. This could have been caused by several factors such as being intimidated to meet with a foreign

researcher, a lack of English language skills, or by simply having given up on dating all together due to their competitiveness within the South Korea sexual field. I made several attempts to correct for this imbalance in my sample by guest lecturing and interviewing informants from The Cyber University of Korea which had lower income students of highly variable ages. I also found older, lower income men to interview while living in my *goshiwon* but was still unable to completely neutralize this economic and gender imbalance in my sample. This made the overall average of women's vs. men's incomes among those sampled to be much less than average. In this way, my findings are not necessarily generalizable. However, because of a tendency to date men with slightly higher incomes and educations than themselves, most women still found themselves dating men with significantly higher incomes than themselves.

The women in my sample who were well educated and had higher incomes had experiences within the South Korean dating market that differed from average or low-income women who generally had less education. Perhaps most prominently, women in my sampler were more likely to consider moving abroad or dating foreign, usually western, men within South Korea in order to escape what they saw as a patriarchal society. They were also more aware and better able to articulate how various systems of economic and cultural forces shape their individual experiences of dating. This, combined with their higher incomes, allowed them more leverage and power to negotiate the terms of their intimate relations compared to less educated and lower income women. The degree to which this took place varied a great deal both between individual women but also between an individual's various romantic relationship. I am attempted to highlight these variations and the factors that contribute to them throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3:

SOCIOHISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

There are risks and benefits associated with the notion of commodification. This notion both offers a way to illuminate power relations inherent in a variety of intimate relations but also can overdetermine the political-economic frame, thus masking the multiplicity of power and the potentially liberating and transformative aspects of intimate subjectivity.- Nicole Constable (p.58) Annual Reviews: The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage Sex, and Reproductive Labor

3.1. Introduction to the Literature on the Commodification of Intimacy

The anthropological literature on the commodification of intimacy can be separated into three general categories of studies concerning: new technologies of consuming intimacy and their effects, cross border marriages and the gendering of migration, and the debate over the empowerment or disempowerment sex worker. There is also a long historical tradition within anthropology, and in related disciplines, of studying intimacy through the lens of political economy (Agustin, 2007; Bernstein, 2010; Brennan, 2004). However, several other important themes emerge from the literature as well. While not all the scholars in this review reach agreement, much of the academic literature challenges and problematizes old dichotomies of public and private, love and money, and victim and agent that were common in previous decades. Several authors conclude their works with the suggestion that more research is needed to fully contextualize the complex structures of state and corporate powers and how these structures are influenced by globalizing market forces in the lives of everyday gendered subjects. In her literature review of the commodification of intimacy in 2009, Nicole Constable called for research to be done where the commodification of intimacy is the main subject. This dissertation represents an effort to combine both of these shortcomings of the literature by both focusing on the commodification of intimacy directly and the ways that this commodification has been affected by the expansion of capitalist markets globally.

Since the 1980s, anthropologists have begun to study the intensification of complex interconnections between the local and global political-economy that we call globalization.

Wallerstein's World-Systems analysis which divides nation-states into hierarchies of production which include core, semi-periphery, and periphery, has been fundamental to the study of globalization and my own research (I. Wallerstein, 2004). While globalization has been one of the most widely studied phenomena in recent academic history, anthropologists have been particularly keen to study its effects on intimate and personal relationships. This is especially true for relationships that are linked to the household or domestic unit, which are most often the focus of reproductive labor. Many scholars argue that it is becoming increasingly apparent that the commodification of even the most personal and intimate of human relationships is on the rise due to capitalist expansion in the form of economic development. These intimate and personal relationships include sex workers, child and elderly caregivers, as well as intimate dating and marriage partners. Further, that this commodification has brought aspects of close human relationships such as sexual pleasure, intimacy, and love into the globalized market where they can be bought and sold, mirroring the global capital flows that are the hallmark of modernity. However, some authors have tempered their critiques of the globalization of capitalist markets by citing that commodification has always taken place in intimate relationships but the degree to which they are masked or hidden varies greatly from one society to another. One point that does become clear: the study of the consumption of intimacy requires a paradigm shift in thinking from western logics of "true love" and "soul mates" for anthropologists to come to grips with the reality of the everyday lives of global citizens.

Is the commodification of previously uncommodified human relationships or aspects of human relationships such as intimacy really taking place? If so, is it caused, or sped up by, processes of globalization? Many scholars have attempted to address romantic love as a historical phenomenon, even going back as far as Plato's Symposium which deals with the

connection between “love” and the concept of a “soul mate.” (Plato, 2003). However, more content scholars have asked whether or not the concept of love was Eurocentric and something that other more “primitive” cultures have not developed in the same way but has been diffusing around the world starting in the late 20th century (Baldacchino, 2008; V. de Munck et al., 2016; V. C. de Munck & Korotayev, 1999) These are important questions for many today in fields of social science as globalization causes the capitalist market logic to seep into, or is at least imagined to seep into, more areas of our lives they may similarly become marked by the same inequality that already dominates access to things such as healthcare, education, or income. After all, what would our world look like if access to intimacy and sexuality became as constrained by ones’ income as access to other commodities on the marketplace such as cars or houses?

Feminists scholars from diverse disciplines have questioned whether heterosexual pairing can ever not be oppressive to women (Ward, 2020). Others have concerned themselves with critiquing the idea of marriage as inherently patriarchal as it depends on legal contract commodifying and making-as-property relationship between marriage partners (Pateman, 1988; Rich, 1980; Ward, 2015, 2020).

The commodification of intimacy has been addressed and studied in a variety of ways, including through quantitative and qualitative analysis. However, anthropological and ethnographic studies have the advantage of being able to combine these two methodologies. The degree to which any individual study successfully balances these two approaches varies from researcher to researcher. However, as a body of literature overall, it offers one of the most complete pictures of the actual lived, personal experiences of individuals as they attempt to navigate their cultural landscape of intimacy. This combination distinguishes anthropological

approaches from other disciplines which is why I draw primarily from the ethnographic and qualitative literature on the commodification of intimacy.

This review of the commodification of intimacy will be organized into four broad sections. The first section will chart the ways in which scholars have theorized the role of emerging technologies of consuming intimacy and their effects within specific ethnographic contexts. The second section will be an examination of the gendering of migration through the consumption of cross border marriages and migrant worker's labor. The third section will review the debate surrounding global sex workers and either their empowerment or disempowerment within the marketplace. The fourth and final section will address the ways in which the literature on neoliberalism, economic development, and South Korea intersect. The chapter will then conclude with take away lessons as well as some suggestions for future research.

Many of the scholars discussed in this review have also conducted research on other facets of intimate commodification such as elder care, childcare, and sex worker. Parreñas' in particular has endeavored for a holistic approach to the study of intimate commodification and its intersection with globalization (R. Parreñas, 2011; R. S. Parreñas, 2005; R. S. Parreñas et al., 2016). However, in this review I primarily focus on the literature related sex, romance, dating, and marriage. I do this not because it is particularly special but because it is the least studied and often left unattended in the literature. By focusing on this smaller slice of the literature I hope to emphasize and consolidate its under recognized contribution to anthropological knowledge and implications for this dissertation.

3.2. Emerging Technologies

New technologies of intimate consumption have profoundly changed the ways in which intimacy can be realized and articulated across geographic space. Technologies that facilitate rapid, inexpensive communication such as the internet, have created new ways for potential marriage partners to meet, domestic workers to find employment, and sex workers to find customers anonymously. While arranged marriages and marriage based on correspondence or economic exchange are hardly new, the internet has played an important role in the recent proliferation of businesses that cater to promoting international marriage introduction services, migrant labor, and prostitution. Some scholars have cited this as evidence for the increased commodification of intimacy (Constable, 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006; K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014a; Padilla et al., 2008; Strasser, 2003). In this way, the Internet plays a central role in shaping what Nicole Constable calls, the new "geographies of intimacy" that allows geographically dispersed populations to create and maintain intimate contact. In this way, the globalization of capitalist economic development that took place in Asia, particularly after the 1997 economic crisis which South Korea conceded to rapidly liberalize their economy in exchange for bailout loans form the World Bank, also brought about the globalization of dating and marriage markets (Constable, 2004, 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006; K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014).

Constable's (Constable, 2003) influential early work on this subject, *Romance on the Global Stage* studies Internet correspondence between U.S. Men and Chinese and Filipina women in the hopes of finding a suitable marriage partner. One particular example is of a divorced California man who complained that his ex-wife was too "liberated," "independent," and "unfeminine." He eventually married a Chinese woman who was not considered to be a

suitable wife by most Chinese men because she was over 30 years old, over educated with an advanced degree, and too non-traditional. The conclusion that Constable reaches from this and other examples from her detailed, multi-sited ethnography is that the internet and internet marriage introduction services have been successful in bringing groups of traditionally minded American men together with groups of progressively minded Asian women. In this way, the personality archetypes that are not in demand within their own national boundaries are traded on the globalized market like any other commodity, ultimately resulting in more ideal matches for both partners. New technologies allow for the meeting and commodification of potential spouses from across borders. This phenomenon has taken place extensively in South Korea and the government there has actively sought to import foreign brides from poorer nations to marry traditionally minded rural men, hoping to help fight the declining birthrate. However, this also brings South Korean and international women into the same sexual field, or dating and marriage marketplace, increasing competition (C. S. Kim, 2011).

New technologies allow the maintenance of social ties with home country family and friends further increasing the viability of international relationships, marriages, and intimate labor. Parreñas' (2011) ethnographic study of migrant Philippine "talents" working in Japanese hostess clubs points out the ways in which Filipina hostesses live Philippine lives in Japan, actively staying connected to family and friends in their home country while hardly ever leaving their small, crowded apartments in their host country. Further, Philippine hostesses are able to send money and presents from Japan back to their families in the Philippines thanks to new advances in mass transportation and banking systems. Similarly, Smith's (2005) ethnographic case study shows how Mexican immigrants in New York use the Internet and other technologies to influence political outcomes in their small rural hometowns in Mexico. One Mexican migrant

in particular was successful at masterfully creating and maintaining close friendships and political connections in both his Mexican hometown and New York City, using the strategies of the internet and monetary remittance earned in the US, allows him to become one of the most important political and economic actors in two communities. These authors demonstrate the ability of new technologies generally, and new technologies of consumption specifically to empower groups such as Mexican, Philippine, Chinese, and South East Asian to commodify their intimate labor and relationships on the international market for their own benefit.

New Technologies allow sex workers to empower themselves by cutting out middlemen (pimps, dealers, brothels) and locating customers directly. Parreñas argues that the US State Department describes Japanese hostess clubs as hotbeds for the sex trafficking of Philippine women, recommending and instituting a blanket, top-down solution of rescue and rehabilitation. However, what Parreñas discovers through working side by side with "migrant talents" within one Tokyo hostess club is quite different. She makes the case that Philippine hostesses are not enslaved sex workers but indentured migrants. In this way, having their passports confiscated by their employers, being saddled with huge debts by their "managers" for "training" and passport fees before their arrival in Japan, and the charging of extortionary fees by their "promoters." However, she later aptly points out that all of these examples of coercion are actually caused by protectionist laws that require the use of promoters, managers, and trainees to legitimately enter Japan as foreign entertainers. "After all, it is not the occupation itself but the conditions, from long hours to stringent penalty systems, that hostesses do not like" (R. Parreñas, 2011:272). Kim levies a similar critique of the South Korean governments rules that are more concerned with ensuring the South Korean men's foreign brides do not return to their home countries. The sad

result has been high levels of domestic abuse of international brides in South Korea (C. S. Kim, 2011).

Like Kim, Parreñas argues that government efforts in the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines to paternally protect female migrants through immigration regulation have instead led to their increased exploitation. While she expected to find that the work of being a hostess itself would be a source of misery for the Philippine migrants, most of the women interviewed described their actual job requirements as being relatively enjoyable. “Rather than deter abuse, protectionist laws actually increase a woman’s likelihood of forced labor because they diminish women’s ability to migrate independently” (R. Parreñas, 2011:32). An alternative technique for improving the lives of migrant intimate laborers, sex workers, and brides is proposed by Brennan (2004) who documents the methodological challenges in research with trafficked persons. Brennan observes the ways in which sex workers improve their quality of life by controlling their own sex labor through the internet. By using the internet to meet clients, these sex workers become relatively free from overburdened middlemen managers, corrupt bureaucrats, pimps, promoters, and brothel owners. Thus, allowing themselves to become the main benefactor of their own sexual or intimate labor. They also exploit the internet in order to screen potential abusers and scammers, blacklisting those with complaints. These same forces that have empowered the female sex works that Brennan observed has also brought sex workers in South Korea into more direct competition with single South Korean women within the South Korean sexual field, increasing competition and, according to market logic, decreasing commodified intimate value. Of course, sex workers have not become direct competitors with dating and marriage partners. Sexual services are just one aspect of an intimate romantic relationship dating and marriage partners provide. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, I discuss

my own ethnographic data that demonstrates at least one way in which sex workers and romantic partners do compete with each other.

Similarly, Eva Illouz has argued that the experience of what constitutes “true” love is deeply embedded in consumer driven capitalism and its related technological advancements (Illouz, 1997). In particular she singles out advertising and movies for displaying cliché imagine of a “romantic utopia” full of commodified dating and marriage rituals which encouraged consumption and equate the spending of economic capital with feelings of love (Illouz, 1997). In her more recent work, *The End of Love*, Illouz focuses even more specifically on new technologies of consumption and accusing dating applications in particular for having decoupled sexuality from kinship. She argues that despite the seemingly gender egalitarian logic of the culture of the resulting casual sex, which some feminists theorize as liberating women from stigma of a sexual double standard, casual sexual relationships appear to serve men's desire for sex without emotional entanglement while failing to meet women's needs for emotional intimacy. This essentialization, where men are seeking sex without connection, is an issue I take issue within Chapter 7. Lamont identifies a similar situation in *The Mating Game* among liberal elites in the San Francisco Bay Area who assert their desire for equality and gender egalitarian intimate relationships yet just as often end up in relationships where women are expected to quit their jobs, raise children, and conduct other domestic chores rooted in age-old assumptions about gender differences. However, both studies suffer from studying primarily Western liberal populations in the US, Western Europe, and Israel. While their critiques of the role of new technologies of intimate consumption and the expansion of capitalist market logics into the intimate sphere are sound, their assertions that all societies are cultures are doomed to similar fates seems premature given their lack of cross-cultural evidence.

The important role of new technologies in the creation, maintenance, and increased flexibility of intimate relationships across geographically disparate locations can hardly be overstated. While some researchers have theorized that these new technologies, such as the internet, mass communication, and rapid mass-transportation have increased and intensified the commodification of intimacy, others have observed the ways in which they also create newly emerging opportunities for individuals to seek better marriage partners, improve earning power, and labor empowerment. The diverse and sometimes contradictory ways globalized technologies have shaped the consumption of intimate relationships demonstrates that idiosyncrasies across transnational populations vary to a high degree. Drawing grand conclusions about the overall positive or negative effects of any of these examples would be imprudent. Instead, it should be realized that variation in the ways that societies with different cultures, histories, and gender systems is too high to evaluate the overall positive or negative impact of these new technologies on the consumption of intimacy. Further, that new technologies are adopted or ignored are often influenced by random historical and cultural accidents that are difficult to predict.

3.3. The Gendering of Cross border Marriage and Migration

The following section will summarize the literature on cross border marriage as well as the gendering of migration. Early work on migration focused almost exclusively on male migrant workers creating a gendered bias within the literature. However, recent studies have shifted focus to female migrants and the feminization of labor. Parreñas (2011) provides a strong counter example where it is actually the female migrants to Japan who are the sole breadwinners for their families back home in the Philippines. Hochschild (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2004) argues that the explosion of childcare labor in the first world by third world laborers is similar to the

extraction of natural resources such as rubber and gold, from the developing world. Along the same lines, Hochschild (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2004) writes in, *Global Women* that globalization has increased the available opportunities for intimacy across geographic space. Hidden in this analysis is the implicit insinuation that a hallmark system of global capitalism, in this case World System Theory (I. M. Wallerstein, 2004) has been applied to intimate relationships.

Scholars have attempted to study and track a variety of "marriage scapes" suggested by Appadurai (1996) early on in the study of globalization. For example, Ablemann and Kim (Abelmann, 2003; C. S. Kim, 2011) study the marriage of poor Chinese-Korean women to South Korean men. This establishes what they argue is a general pattern that has emerged around the world of men from wealthy countries marrying women from poor countries. However, these women are not victims, but their choices are the result of a complex interaction between the emerging global economy, family strategy, and individual agency. Constable (2003) too demonstrates that despite discourses of trafficked sex victims, cross border marriages show female agency in the third world, disproving stereotypes of "mail order brides." In this way, she repositions the anthropological literature squarely on the female subject showing her as an active and thinking agent of free choice, however confined by the larger structures of social and economic inequality that surround her. Perhaps though this is only the illusion of agency? As Marx warned us about the illusion of choice caused by market mystification, the ability to choose between products within the market becomes mistaken for true freewill within a system in which we are forced to sell our labor and forced to our necessities (Marx & Mandel, 1992:35).

Scholars have also reflected on the emerging global power dynamics that shape who has the opportunity to migrate and for what purposes. Ong (1999) gives several detailed examples of

"astronaut families" [1]where the male head of the household works in a lucrative country, his family lives in country with a low cost of living, and his children go to school in a country with higher quality education system. This study shows both how intimate family relationships and living arrangements can be shaped by globalization but also how these relationships become mediated primarily through the consumption of these technologies such as jet air travel, Skype, and electronic monetary remittance. This flexible model of family, work, and citizenship allows these Hong Kong and San Francisco economic elites to take advantage of the flexible accumulation of capital in the globalized marketplace. It is not unusual for this group to possess half a dozen different passports to safeguard against a full Chinese takeover of Hong Kong. The ability of these wealthy elites to possess several passports, accumulate wealth based on transnational mobility, and afford elite foreign schools for their children is in part thanks to emerging technologies of transportation and communication, but more importantly, it demonstrates how global power dynamics of capitalist accumulation shape the opportunities for the consumption of intimate transnational relationships. Thanks to the South Korean government's efforts, poor, rural Korean men have the ability to seek brides from poorer nations such as Vietnam, Thailand, and China. However, this empowerment does not come to all parties equally as economic inequality is reproduced transnationally.

While the study of transnational migration patterns originated with men and male labor, the literature has increasingly become female centered. Recent research on migrants from the global south moving to economically advanced countries for the purpose of intimate reproductive domestic labor has helped to reshape the gendering of migration studies. Other research has focused on cross border migration where the general pattern has been for women

[1] These are often referred to as "goose families" in Korea.

from poor countries to marry men from wealthy countries. However, the literature does not focus solely on the plight of women or of the poor, as Ong (1999) tracks the flexible citizenship practices of Elite Hong Kong families as they move from location to location around the world. Overall, this research reflects recent trends in the literature to problematize Western assumptions about agency and to shift the main subject of study away from men.

3.4. Sex Work and Migration

The following section will describe the literature on migration across borders for work in the sex industry. This is an important area of study because it highlights the confluence of gender, sexuality, and consumerism through the consumption of sex in particular. Many previous studies have focused on the consumption of third world sex workers' services by men from wealthy countries. They are often portrayed as "victims." However, as described earlier, recent work helps to elucidate their agency. Parreñas, for example, points out that Philippine hostess in Japanese nightclubs work in what is considered the "sex" industry but usually do not actually engage in "prostitution." Instead, hostesses attempt to convert the social capital that they have gained from making repeat customers into "boyfriends" and learning the Japanese language, into monetary gain and upward mobility for themselves and their families in their home country. Brennan, Bernstein, and Constable's arguments synergize and help to demonstrate that most sex workers are active agents in choosing their sexual customers and the benefits of sex work rather than as helplessly victimized "trafficked sex slaves" (Bernstein, 2010; Brennan, Laczko, Frank, and Elzbieta M, 2005; Constable, 2003, 2009).

Some of the previously discussed literature of sex workers as "sex slaves" likely demonstrates a Western bias. Western notions of an ideal past where love and intimacy were

separated from the profane world of commodification have heavily influenced the literature. In her critique of this dichotomy Zelizer refers to this dichotomy as hostile worlds or separate spheres where love and intimacy becomes contaminated through its commodification. She and others no longer believe this method of analysis to be productive (2009). Other more recent authors also challenge the hostile worlds analysis, its Western biases, and its assumptions. They point out that a separation between love and its supposedly distinct sphere from the profane world of the market has actually never existed in the West or anywhere else. A more productive framework of analysis would be "connected lives," analyzing how people navigate fraught relationships by matching intimate relationships with appropriate market exchanges. I make use of this framework throughout this dissertation but primarily in Chapter 4 where I discuss the extensive gift-giving rituals that take place among young couples who wish to signal that their intimate relationship is one of a courting couple and not one of a sex worker and client.

The commodification of love is often hidden or obscured through gifts, exchanges, and an ideology of altruism. Brennan (2005) reveals that intimacy and love have always been commodified, even in our idealized past. As other authors have pointed out, in fact, "to label a payment as a gift (tip, bribe, charity, expression of esteem) rather than an entitlement (pension, allowance, rightful share of gain) or compensation (wages, salary, bonus, commission) is to make claims about the relationship payer and payee" (Zelizer, 2007:27). For example, Parreñas (2011) documents processes by which Philippine hostesses in Japan use their relationships with repeat customers to elicit tips from them in the form of luxury clothing and electronics. However, equally acceptable for them is cash to help them support their families back in their home country. Sometimes these repeat customers will eventually become a hostess's boyfriend outside of work, at which point, the steady stream of tips and monetary compensation for time

spent with the hostess come to be referred to as "gifts." Claiming that some form of exchange is not a commodity then, is actually simply a way to mask its economic implications. As I will argue, the sheer visibility of the prostitution industry in South Korea, combined with high levels of intimate commodification, and expensive courtship rituals sometimes endanger South Korean relationships by a potential mismatch of economic exchange and desired relationship. This is also exacerbated by extensive economic inequality between men and women.

Several authors have suggested a solution to theorizing outside of the Western bias against sex workers as actors. Rather than viewing sex work through the dichotomy of love vs. money, victim vs. agent, or freedom vs. slavery, these women should be viewed as agents who work within a power matrix that influence, but does not determine, women's choices of intimacy. Feminist scholars in the field of gender and sexuality studies have a long history of legitimatizing sexual labor as both "authentic" and intimate (Brennan, Laczko, Frank, and Elzbieta M, 2005). Faier (2003) makes obvious the female agency of Filipina hostesses in their attempt to marry Japanese men for both material gain and love. The level of complexity around idiosyncratic decisions to marry reveals the complex ways in which these women work within existing power structures but still seek to maximize their own agency through choice. Furthermore, this example highlights how taking them both into consideration challenges the dichotomy between both love and money. I too attempt to both show South Korean men and women's agency within the South Korean sexual field but also try to explain how economic inequality and globalization are increasingly coming to limit that agency.

3.5. Economic Development, Courtship, and Intimacy

Within the field of Anthropology, societies with economic systems based on intensive agriculture are commonly thought to have much less gender equality than those with economic systems that have undergone industrialization at an advanced level (Kottak, 2014; Miller, 1997; Whyte, 1978). Gender stratification tends to increase when men contribute the bulk of the dietary or economic resources but decreases when men and women made roughly equal contributions. However, the case of South Korea's particular sociohistory and economic trajectory challenge such broad generalizations. An examination of South Korean dating rituals and couples' holidays specifically, illustrate the ways in which South Korea's rapid economic development that resulted in a transition away from arranged marriage has not led to equality of intimacy, especially for South Korean women. Similarly, this same transition has not been universally beneficial to South Korean men in their ability to choose their own spouses or gain economic independence. Instead, the commodification of intimacy resulting from an advanced consumer driven economy has intensified previous gender and class inequalities as well as creating novel forms. In this way, gender equality has not necessarily made vast improvements since the early 20th century but has merely changed its form.

Some of the authors discussed above have attempted to argue that the commodification of intimacy is on the rise globally while others have insisted that courtship and intimacy have always been heavily commodified. Instead of rehashing these dichotomous discussions, I now turn to descriptions of how economic exchange has changed and modified intimate relationships in response to economic development and wider social developments.

Turning to China briefly, Farrer (2002) offers some insight into how the market can intrude into the intimate realm with his study of changing youth sex culture in Shanghai where

an older dominant cultural ideology attempts to come to terms with the market forms of the 1990s during a period of intense economic growth and social change. While experiencing his own romantic relationship with a Chinese woman, Farrer heard countless stories of relationships between foreign men and local women told to him by another Shanghainese. However, these stories were often conflicting and fell into two broad categories with familiar narratives. The first kind was of foreign men as convenient vehicles of economic and legal emigration, with their Chinese counterparts as being "conniving pragmatists." The second kind of story was of romantically and emotionally passionate relationships with foreign men and Chinese women. Farrer writes,

> Gradually I realized that this dual discourse of material and romantic motives was widely employed by Shanghaiese, not simply to relationships involving foreign men, but as a general rhetoric for expressing and disputing the temptation and compromise of sexual relations in the new market society. [Farrer 2002: 2]

In these stories, foreign men metaphorically came to represent the market economies of the "other" and the West. In this way, Farrer argues that Chinese citizens use this style of storytelling to critique their new market society based on consumption and come to terms with their fears that new forms of conspicuous consumption will push their way into our most private and intimate relationships. This tension between materialism and intimacy is neither new, nor specific to the emergence of a consumer market economy in China, but one that has played itself out in countless other narratives around the world and continues in modern South Korea.

Similar to the discussions described by Farrer where Chinese citizens critique and temper their fears of the market economies affect on intimate relationships, My South Korea informants metaphorically critique their own society in discussions of the intensive commodification of intimacy and how they share the costs of dating with their partners. One of the most contentious forms of this commodification is the high number of couples' holidays and celebrations.

Courting couples continue to choose to take part in such events despite their overt commercialism and many couples' own economic hardships.

Below, I trace the historical intersections between economic development, courtship, and intimacy in the United States as a reference. I then similarly trace these same intersections in South Korea in order to demonstrate similarities but also differences that have explanatory power to elucidate divergent cultural patterns. While many of the developments in South Korea mirror global trends, there are also striking peculiarities and historical accidents that help us to better understand modern South Korean gender and class inequalities in intimate relationships.

3.5.1. Economic Development in Korea

Indeed, the historical transition that took place in South Korea from an agrarian to industrialized economy in the post Korean War. These two contexts share some similarities but also some major departures. Those not familiar with Korean history or economic development must consider the how South Korea's transition from a quasi-feudal peasant nation has rapidly transformed itself into one of the wealthiest nations on earth which I will briefly summarize. The Japanese colonial period from 1910-1945 forcefully opened up the "hermit kingdom" that had been slow to adopt new technologies while also subjugating its economic interests to Japan's own imperial aspirations. While Korea had instituted some economic reforms prior to colonization by Japan, many more were forced on to them in order to aid the extraction of resource and the Japanese war effort. The Korean peninsula was liberated from Japan following the 1945 peace treaty between Japan and the US, but North and South Korea were quickly divided along the 38th parallel. The North developed economically rapidly at first, aided by generous contributions from its communist bloc allies Russia and China. The US and its allies

did not invest as heavily in South Korea and their efforts to develop leading to the invasion of South Korea by the more advanced and heavily militarized North, kicking off the Korea War in 1950. The US quickly rushed to South Korea's aid, recognizing the strategic importance of the South as a buffer between China and Japan. China too entered the Korean War and after years of war bloody war both sides ended up back at the 38th parallel in a stalemate that still remains today with the two countries never signing a formal peace agreement. After the armistice agreement North Korea became stagnant economically while the South began receiving considerably more aid from its allies. Unfortunately, South Korea's industrialization took place under authoritarian military governments which were often brutal and that severely curtailed many freedoms. These brutal regimes came to a head in the Gwangju Massacre in 1980 where the military government put down a popular uprising by force killing as many as 2,000 civilians (Yonhap News, 2005). The resulting backlash against the government miraculously culminated in a peaceful transition of power to a civilian lead government in 1992 after 30 years of authoritarian rule. This particular path that lead South Korea to development did so in a very different way than that of the United States. However, for the purposes of this dissertation some of the resulting inequalities bear similarities. Some of these similarities and differences will be outlined below.

3.5.2. Economic Development and Courtship in the United States

The transition from courtship practices that took place within the domestic sphere and controlled by the extended family, to courtship rituals that take place in the public sphere between controlled by the couple themselves took place in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. The practice of "calling" in the United States during the late 18th century,

where a young male suitor would make a formal visit to the home of the woman he wished to court in order to introduce himself to her family and ask their permission to begin courtship arranged by those in control of the household's economic future. Illouz argues that the transition from courtship in the United States that took place within the domestic sphere to the public sphere commodified the courtship ritual by necessitating the costs such as dinning, entertainment, and transportation (Illouz, 1997). This transition had a number of causes which included economic development but also the advent of the automobile, increased autonomy for women, and other developments. However, one critical change is the development and marketization of romantic love through advertising, magazines, self-help and advice columns, and other forms of commodification (Illouz, 1997).

In traditional marriage, in the US and South Korea, partner selection was prioritized to benefit either the family unit as a whole or the parents themselves through the strategic alignment of families and resources. The assurance of economically productive bride and groom that are also capable of bearing children, ideally male children, was also of significant value. The values that are commonly used to select marriage partners today in advanced industrial and late-capitalist economies, such as love, kindness, and physical attractivity rarely entered into matchmaking decisions.

The adoption of new technologies associated with economic development helped to cast off the shackles of parental control of their children's intimate lives through subversion. In the United States the newly adopted automobile provided the younger generation with a way to convene with intimate partners of their own choosing, away from the prying eyes of their parents (Illouz, 1997). In much of Western Europe and pre-automobilized America, the invention of the bicycle allowed women to adopt the clothing and mode of travel that gave them a freedom of

movement unthinkable to previous generations. The image of a woman riding this new invention even came to epitomize the women's suffrage movement in the UK (Macy, 2017).

This development brought romantic courtship rituals away from the home and into public followed a similar pattern that took place in the United States during its own industrialization in the late 19th century (Illouz, 1997; Kendall, 1996).

> Dating appeared alongside the rise in real income of the early twentieth century and was defined within the practical and symbolic boundaries of an emerging mass market of goods. These developments moved the romantic encounter from the familiar confines of the home to new locales that were both public and anonymous. At the same time, these circumstances made consumption an inherent element of any romantic encounter. (Illouz, 1997:54)

As economic development advanced in both the US, young singles found work away from the household economy, earning their own incomes, and were able to assert their influence in the decision of whom they were to court and marry for the first time. In both cases it was young men who lead the charge against controlling parents in fighting for their rights in exercising veto power over a selected dating partner or even choosing their own partners. Later, women who were able to join the workforce and earn their own incomes were also able to demand some of these same rights over the selection of their own courtship. Further, as working outside of the home became the norm, the household ceased to be sites of economic production and instead became sites of economic consumption and social reproduction. This shift also began to have an affect on marriage which changed from being based on forming an productive economic unit to being a relationship of pleasure, consumption, and social reproduction.

3.5.3. Economic Development and Courtship in South Korea

Courtship in early 19th century Korea took place primarily, but not exclusively, through arranged marriages by parents (Kendall, 1996). In fact, before 1910 many couples did not even lay eyes on each other until the day of their wedding and were certainly unable to have

significant influence on who their marriage partner might be. At the time, courtship usually consisted of the potential groom's family visiting the potential bride's home to inspect her for mental or physical deformations as well as to evaluate her ability to sew, an extremely important domestic economic task of all married Koreans of that time. The decision of whom to marry was not given to the individual who would wed. Instead, this decision was made primarily by their parents but also their wider familial network which included grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives (Kendall, 1996). Due to this, marriage partner selection decisions were made for the benefit of the entire family. While efforts were often made to accommodate the individual preferences and distinct personalities of the couple, the quality of the marriage was not judged based on these factors. Instead, class standing, social class, education, and economic earning potential were prioritized.

Hirsch and Wardlow refer to social arrangements where domestic units were organized around the extended family and where the relationship between spouses was not of central importance as traditional marriage. In these traditional marriages, they argue, intimate relationships between kin members in the domestic unit were of primary importance (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006; Padilla et al., 2008). Companionate marriage gained popularity around the world unevenly but is correlated with other cultural changes such as the reorganization of the domestic unit to the nuclear single household family and industrialization. Companionate marriage was distinct from traditional marriage in that the quality of the intimate relationship between the spouses took central importance and was indicative of the quality of the marriage as a whole. This change also refocused from being organized by parents to being organized by individuals based on their camaraderie and friendship.

Resistance to this system of familial control over courtship and marriage choice would come from those who would gain power under the new market economy that would develop. The beginning of Korea's economic transformation during the final years of the Choson Dynasty when the Korean economy was opened to the international market system by force by an American gunship in 1876 (Nahm, 1993). This, along with the Japanese colonial period of 1910-1945 allowed some groups of elite Korean men to advocate for the right to influence arranged meetings between potential bride and groom before marriage (Eckert, 1994). Through their new ability to earn income outside of the home these men had gained the power to demand to see, and to potentially say "no" to, a parentally arranged marriage. Korean women, who were not yet allowed to earn their own incomes outside of the home were bestowed no such new rights (Kendall, 1996). "New professionals were in the vanguard of the many men who, beginning in the colonial period (1910-1945) and accelerated with industrial development from the 1960s, would find employment off the land and outside the family economy" (Kendall, 1996:102).

According to Kwon, one example of an important technological adoption in South Korea that allowed for rapid forms of communication was the post office in the 1920's (Ahearm, 2001; K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014) During a time when women's movements away from the domestic home were tightly restricted, the ability to send a love letter to someone discreetly allowed South Korean youths to express their own intimate desires in a new way, private, and accessible way. "The expansion of the postal service made it easier to approach the opposite sex in writing… A love letter thus served as a substitute for meetings and conversations that could not be had in real life" (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014:30). The development and adoption of the postal service is just one example of a new rapid form of communication, enabled by new forms of rapid transportation, that has led to South Korea's globalization. Not only did this development bring

South Korea into the global world-system, but it also helped to subvert parents and patriarchal authority.

More recently, in the 1990s, the early adoption of the internet and the corresponding ubiquity of *PC bangs* (cyber cafes) with “love seats" served as another example of technological adoption that further emancipate single South Korean’s intimate subjectivity from the surveillance of helicopter parents (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014). However, today South Korea has one of the most advanced economies in the world yet lags behind all other OECD nations in terms of gender equity. As Inkyu Kang (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014) warns us that the adoption of novel technologies need not always have the same social affects in every society.

> “There is no one-size-fits-all model to account for technological adoption. The challenge of sociological approach to technological diffusion is not only that people do not respond to socioeconomic factors in a passive and predictable way but also that factors influencing technological diffusion are full of random historical n accidents and thus cannot be neatly quarantined for analysis.” (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014:56)

The cumulative effects of market driven economic development, the expansion of a globalized capitalism, and the adoption of new technologies that increase the speed and volume of transportation and communication between the genders corresponds with increased gender equality by being able to subvert parental and patriarchal authority. However, as I explain in Chapter 7, this was not the case for dating applications due to South Korea’s unique social and historical circumstances.

Due to these technological advancements and social changes, by the 1950s the grooms right to see his future bride during an arranged chaperoned meeting had become common in Seoul and in standard practice across the peninsula by the 1970s (Kendall, 1996). It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that women, now in the workforce and university, had gained the similar right to veto a parental made match (Kendall, 2001). In fact, Kendall explains that the parentally arranged match meeting (맞선) itself had fallen out of fashion in favor of the newly

budding institution of "love marriage." However, economic development and the ability of women to veto the groom of her parent's choosing did not create a steady march towards gender equality as is sometimes assumed. While South Korean men were evaluated by a potential bride's family based on their incomes and family background, a South Korean women's' value rested squarely on their ability to attract socially upward men. "If Korean brides are now more than pawns in the matrimonial schemes of their elders, they are less than equal players in a marital enterprise constructed on the premise that women attract and men choose" (Kendall, 1996:110). It was considered too forward and assertive for the bride's family to begin the processes of matchmaking and so the potential match had always to originate from the groom's family. What was at stake in the quest for a suitable marriage partner was not the same for both parties where "a man's worth is defined by his career and a woman's future is by the man she marries"(Kendall, 1996:110).

Since the 1990s when Kendall conducted her ethnographic research on courtship and marriage in South Korea the economy has continued to advance, women have continued to improve their education and climb corporate ladders, but huge social inequalities still persist. The literature on the commodification of intimacy that is specific to South Korea is dominated by a small number of scholars. These scholars have not focused on the commodification of intimacy directly but have examined the role of economic development in shaping gender and gender inequality in modern South Korea. As the South Korean economy has continued to develop and climb the global chain of production, the bulk of male labor moved from the factories to white color labor in corporate offices. Women's labor became increasingly important in this economic system and their new ability to earn their own incomes gave them new power within their domestic spheres to influence and control the decision of who they would marry

(Kendall, 1996). However, the legacy of cheap female labor and the traditional expectation that women will leave their employer after marriage has kept women's wages extremely low and their employment insecure, part-time, and without durable benefits (Moon, 2005; Song, 2014). Today, South Korea has the highest gender pay gap in the world among the OECD nations (*Korea - OECD*, 2017**)**. While women have gained the power to choose their own marriage partners the hyper-commodification of dating rituals has left them as unequal partners in the negotiation of romantic courtship and exposes them to the inequality of the globalized intimate market.

South Korea's rapid industrialization is often held up in pride as a prime example of the power of capitalist development. However, the astonishing speed of economic development has required equally astonishing changes in social structure throughout the whole of South Korean society (Nelson, 2000). These rapid changes were further accelerated after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis which saw the IMF force neoliberal institutional reform (Song, 2014). While not focused on South Korea, Harvey noted the tendency of neoliberalism, "to increase social inequality and to expose the least fortunate elements in society ... to the chill winds of austerity and the dull fate of increasing marginalization" and he goes on to detail this historical process (Harvey, 1992, 2007:118). He uses China's prosperity and rising standards of living thanks to neoliberal economic reform as an example. Harvey argues that, contrary to popular understandings, neoliberalism is primarily an ideology about class construction rather than increasing individual freedom. While focusing on the question of whether or not these reforms are re-entrenching the elite class in the US and Britain, he writes that in China, an elite class is actually being created from scratch. These newly minted Chinese elites have benefited from these reforms and have also reproduced long held disparities between the rich/poor and

urban/rural residents. South Korea developed into an industrial powerhouse or "Asian Tiger" economy over the course of just a few decades beginning in the 1960s and 1970s while the US was beginning to institute its own neoliberal market policies. South Koreans have generally enjoyed a rapid rise in their standards of living based on consumption patterns, although this has been accompanied by the same unequal geographic growth, with some citizens benefiting from development exponentially more than others, a theme that I will show reoccurs and plays out within South Korean dating rituals.

Much of modern South Korea's national pride comes from its rapid economic advancement yet its three main moral educators, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity all decry and mistrust the amassing of material wealth and conspicuous consumption. Kendall (2008) explores this contradictory relationship between the desire to consume and the moral disdain of mass consumption in South Korea. In the 1950s, the ability to buy black market luxury goods, often smuggled in through American military bases, demonstrated to many that becoming wealthy was often obtained through morally questionable means. This idea continues today with highly publicized political scandals of economic misconduct. Kendall questions, "How do these contradictions between disdain and desire, between longstanding moral injunctions to thrift and the enticements of new, sometimes foreign luxury goods play out in social and ritual practice in the lives of those who are neither conspicuously wealthy nor desperately poor" (Kendall, 2008:158). Similarly, Laura Nelson found that women were often blamed for the nation's consumption practices in contradictory ways in the 1980s during a backlash against consumerism (Nelson, 2000).

One of the most visible ways in which South Korean couples' holidays have been commodified in South Korea is the exponential growth in the number of celebratory couples'

holidays. The establishment and promulgation of these new couples' holidays and commodified dating rituals are driven, at least in part, by contemporary anxieties around the creation and maintenance of intimate relationships at a time of historic youth unemployment, low birth-rate, and concentration of wealth among elites. I will briefly summarize some important points about the history of dating and marriage rituals in South Korea in order to not give the impression of an idealized, uncommodifed historical Korean past where the "separate spheres" or "hostile worlds" of the emotional or intimate realm is entirely separate and unrelated to the realm of the cold, calculating market (Zelizer, 2007). In doing so I also hope to avoid the trap of dichotomizing complex cultural, economic, and historical processes of change into simple idealization of a romantic pre-capitalist past.

The vast majority of dating takes place in public and this subsequently raises the price of dates when compared to more casual styles of dating such as "Netflix and chill" in the United States. Indeed, the historical transition that took place in South Korea from an agrarian to industrialized economy in the post Korean War era that brought romantic courtship rituals away from the home and into public followed a similar pattern that took place in the United States during its own industrialization in the late 19th century (Illouz, 1997; Kendall, 1996). "Dating appeared alongside the rise in real income of the early twentieth century and was defined within the practical and symbolic boundaries of an emerging mass market of goods. These developments moved the romantic encounter from the familiar confines of the home to new locales that were both public and anonymous. At the same time, these circumstances made consumption an inherent element of any romantic encounter" (Illouz, 1997:54). As economic development advanced in both the US and South Korea, young singles found work away from the household economy, earning their own incomes, and were able to assert their influence in the

decision of whom they were to court and marry for the first time. In both cases it was young men who lead the charge against controlling parents in fighting for their rights in exercising veto power over a selected dating partner or even choosing their own partners. Later, women who were able to join the workforce and earn their own incomes were also able to demand some of these same rights over the selection of their own courtship. However, this processes of men gaining advantage of rights over love and courtship over and before the women they choose to marry is mirrored in today's South Korean dating culture where women systematically earn far less money than men, lack job security, and are discriminated against in the rental housing market (Song, 2014).

The establishment and promulgation of these new couples' holidays and commodified dating rituals are driven, at least in part, by contemporary anxieties around the creation and maintenance of intimate relationships at a time of historic youth unemployment, low birth-rate, and concentration of wealth among elites. However, in order to not give the impression of an idealized, uncommodifed historical Korean past where the "separate spheres" or "hostile worlds" of the emotional/intimate realm is entirely separate and unrelated to the realm of the cold, calculating market. I will briefly summarize some important points about the history of courtship and marriage rituals in South Korea (Zelizer, 2007). In doing so I also hope to avoid the trap of dichotomizing complex cultural, economic, and historical processes of change into simple idealization of a romantic pre-capitalist past. This historical chronology of men gaining advantage of rights over love and courtship over the women they choose to marry is mirrored in today's South Korean dating culture where women systematically earn far less money than men, lack job security, and are discriminated against in the rental housing market (Song, 2014)

3.5.4. Conclusion

In order to be able to tell the story of modern South Korean intimate inequality I have outlined a brief history of Korean economic development, military occupation, globalization, and the commodification of coupledom. An in-depth analysis of South Korean attitudes towards the couples' holidays discussed in this chapter is located in Chapter 5. I have discussed how economic development is strongly correlated with increased gender equity but I will argue that this is not the case in South Korea due to their specific historical and geopolitical circumstances such as the history of imperial military occupation by Japan, cultural imperialism by the US, and the broad but pervasive influence of globalization which has led to the commodification of intimacy. In the following chapter, I will review the literature connecting these various themes to the topic of intimate and gender inequality.

There are several important points that can be taken away from a review of South Korean social history and literature review of intimate commodification. New technologies are changing the ways in which intimate relationships are commodified. Often, they have made processes of commodification more explicit and visible, which has led some authors to believe that the commodification of intimacy is on the rise due to the time and space compression that globalization entails. There are several examples within the literature of some disempowered groups, such as sex workers and low-income laborers, who have succeeded in using new technologies of intimate consumption to better their economic situations. However, it is unclear how these new technologies will affect these groups going forward as their intimacy must now compete on the global market that is increasingly characterized by extreme inequality.

Early work on migration, which was dominated by male anthropological perspectives, exacerbated bias in the literature. However, recent studies have shifted focus to female migrants

and the feminization of labor. This is especially true of migrant domestic workers, child caretakers, and sex workers. Constable demonstrated that globalization has increased women's choices in the marriage marketplace, it has done so at the cost of also making them more vulnerable to the larger power imbalances of the global political economy (Constable, 2003).

New research on the migration of global sex workers calls into question many of our most basic assumptions about intimacy and its separation from materiality. The commodification of love and intimacy may not be on the rise, but instead is just increasingly visible due to the rise of new technologies that not only allow these commodified interactions to take place but also, make them more visible. Anthropologists should be mindful of viewing sex workers not as trafficked victims, but as active agents that are constrained and influenced by larger, outside power structures. While recent work on the consumption of intimacy has built on and problematized old dichotomies of public vs. private, intimate vs. impersonal, and love vs. money, future scholarship should attempt to fill in the gaps within the literature.

Mauss's (2011) insights into the power inherent in gift giving remain valuable while older Marxist notions of commodification have become more refined. Lacking in the literature are studies where intimacy and commodification are the primary subject rather than separating out categories into marriage, sex workers, and domestic workers. Furthermore, the literature would greatly benefit from research where men are the subjects as both intimate consumers and producers of intimacy. How do the male Japanese men view their commodified interactions with Filipina hostesses, for example? While many of the women in these ethnographic studies have been shown to strike a delicate balance between marrying for love or for money, there seems to be much less known about the decision-making process of their male suitors. Worse still, in some cases it seems as if men are simplified and stereotyped as natural sex addicts, simplistically

seeking to maximize their own sexual pleasure or ego. If the motivations of sex customers were illuminated it would make this body of literature all the richer. In addition, there is a small but growing body of literature on the use of male prostitutes by women as well as females from first world countries seeking sexual or marriage partners from the developing world that promises to further the discussion of the globalization of intimate consumption.

3.6. Conclusions

The literature on the consumption of intimacy is an emerging field of study that began in earnest only recently through research done on globalization. Since its inception, anthropologists and ethnographers have been at the forefront of this research and debate because of their focus on the domestic unit and reproductive labor. Furthermore, anthropological inquiry has been particularly productive in this field of study because of its ability to call cross-cultural assumptions about values and morality into question, allowing the reader to learn about the society in which the commodification of intimacy takes place as a whole, making the data all the richer.

While globalization and commodification have brought aspects of close human relationships such as sexual pleasure, intimacy, and love into the globalized market where they can be bought and sold, it is unclear whether or not this commodification is actually increasing in intensity or if it is merely being made more explicit and overt because of new technologies of consuming intimacy. Fears about the marketplace taking over or entering into the most intimate of human relationships appear to be largely exaggerated as many anthropologists have pointed to the degree to which human relationships have always been commodified throughout time and how some groups have resisted this commodification. Still, more research remains to be

undertaken in order to better understand the complex ways in which intimate relationships are created, maintained, and mediated through acts of consumption.

CHAPTER 4:

THE COMMODIFICATION OF INTIMACY WITHIN SOUTH KOREAN COUPLES' HOLIDAYS

"Is this all you got me?" she asked, eyeing me incredulously while holding the cookies. "Yes, it's a box of Pepero for my Korean girlfriend on Pepero Day!" I explained, trying to give a compliment to her but really just feeling perplexed. I had been living in Seoul for a little over a year and was becoming enmeshed in the obligations that South Korean cultural dating practices entail. "Is something wrong? I thought I was supposed to buy you Pepero cookies for Pepero Day" I wondered. Looking at her huge, elaborate gift basket, and then back at my now diminutive box of cookies, I knew that I had not spent enough money. As I would find out, South Korean women often measure their partners feelings towards them with the price of the gifts that they receive from them. I spent $1.50. Until that moment, I had not realized the extent to which the maintenance of our relationship relied on the exchange of commodities. The following year I did not make the same mistake. To her delight, I had bought the most expensive gift basket I could find which became an object of praise, comparison, and status amongst her friends on South Korean social media.

4.1. Introduction

This vignette took place in 2010 when I was working as an English library program manager at a private elementary school (*hagwon*) in Seoul. I was in a relationship with this woman for over a year and a half, but we decided to end our relationship when I was accepted to graduate school in the United States. In 2016, I returned to Seoul to conduct field research on the commodification of intimacy and the explosion of couples' holidays that has taken place since Laura Kendall conducted her ethnographic research on South Korean dating and marriage rituals in the early 1990s.

The hyper-commodification of intimacy in South Korea is perhaps most evident in the ever-growing number of couples' holidays and anniversary celebrations, dating services, and elaborate gift exchanges surrounding dating rituals. South Korean couples' holidays will be the subject of this chapter. Today, South Korean couples can choose from as many as 36 possible couples' holidays to celebrate annually, with the merits of new holidays being promoted and debated in popular media all of the time. South Korean couples observe these anniversary-like celebrations on yearly, monthly, and 100-day intervals with specific, ritualized, and sometimes elaborate gift exchanges. South Korean courtship is explicitly commodified in other ways as

well, such as coordinated couples' outfits, couples' rings, mock wedding photography, couples' apps, and joint bank accounts for dating couples. The hyper-commodification of dating rituals combined with a vast gender pay-gap contributes to a system of debts and obligations where inequality within the market produces inequality within intimate relationships.

The commodification of intimate relationships does have its benefits. For example, the exchange of gifts and commodities helps young couples to solidify their intimate bounds. Commercialized holidays such as Valentine's Day give inexperienced couples goal posts and help to serve as "guides" to romantic courtship. While all of these examples do cost money, some are very inexpensive and can send important culturally understood signals to each partner and those in the social sphere as to the nature of their relations and the path along which they intend it to unfold. Is this a one-night stand, friends with benefits, an experiment, or a committed monogamous relationship? Questions such as these can often be answered by culturally legible markers such as which couples' holidays are celebrated and what kinds of gifts are exchanged.

The origins and reasons for the myriad of some of these couples' holidays are well known, such as birthdays, yearly anniversaries, or 100 Day celebrations. Others, such as Pepero Day, are the product of aggressive and intentional advertising campaigns by chocolate companies or other interested corporate entities to increase their sales. Still others appear to spring up spontaneously from popular or student movements, such as Green Day, Hug Day, and 2-2 Day. Holidays with obvious commercial origins are easy for South Korean feminists and netizens to write off as the overt commodification of their intimate relationships in the form of thinly veiled promotional campaigns using the universal human desire for love to sling chocolates and diamond rings. However, other holidays such as Green Day and Hug Day, that are not highly commodified and were developed at the grass roots level could be used as cheaper

more egalitarian couples holiday alternatives were also much less popular among my informants. Despite the majority of my informants complaining bitterly about the high cost and frequency of the various dating holidays, most worked with their partners to negotiate the celebration of 6 to 10 celebrations annually.

In this chapter I examine some of the effects of the high degree of commodification within South Korean couples' holidays, explore its relationship to gender inequality, and its effects on gender roles and intimacy for both men and women in South Korea. In particular, I ask how inequalities within the marketplace, in the form of the substantial gender-income gap, leads to inequalities within intimate relationships that are often idealized and imagined existing "outside" of the market. What I found was that the existence and ubiquity of couples' holidays contribute significantly to existing inequalities between men and women within their intimate relationships. Besides being a major source of stress and conflict for some couples, negotiations about which holidays to celebrate and how to celebrate them reveal the unequal imbalance of power between men and women but also between wealthy men and low-income men competing within the dating and marriage marketplace. At the same time, the idealization of a romantic love that is imagined existing outside of or unconstrained by the commodification of intimacy lead many of my informants to attempt to strategically create equitable, if not equal, power dynamics within their intimate relationships. The extent to which these strategies succeed or fail varied widely from couple to couple.

In the context of South Korea's unique sociohistorical background, advanced consumer driven economy, and vast gender income inequality, the negotiations over the possibility of near constant celebration of coupledom through gift-giving and public dating events takes on an outsized significance. Mauss identified that gifts are a "total presentation" that create and

maintain a bond between the giver and the receiver (Mauss & Evans-Pritchard, 2011). Mauss distinguished between three obligations: giving, the necessary initial step for the creation and maintenance of social relationships; receiving, for to refuse to receive is to reject the social bond; and reciprocating in order to demonstrate one's own liberality, honour, and wealth. The creation of these gift debts creates a durable social bond that is temporally and spatially bound until the future reciprocation relieving the debt. Thus, gift exchange leads to mutual interdependence and solidarity, highly desirable traits for an intimate relationship. However, how can this interdependence be equal or mutual within a market system of exchange that is inherently incredibly unequal? In other words, can South Korean lovers escape the market to create true equality within their intimate relationships (Kozinets, 2002)? I argue that they cannot.

I will attempt to elucidate and identify how individual participants traverse and negotiate their own idiosyncratic intersections of economic activity and intimate social relations. Following Viviana Zelizer's view in *The Purchase of Intimacy* that, rather than economic activity and intimacy inhabiting separate sphere, we all use economic exchange to create, maintained and renegotiate important relationships. I argue that my informants use the costs of dating expenses, couples' holidays, and gift-giving events to establish that their relationship as one of a courting couple, as opposed other types of intimate exchange such as a client and their prostitute, despite sometimes glaring income inequality and a thriving, visible prostitution industry (Zelizer, 2007). Anxieties over these negotiations run high in South Korea where rapid economic development and commodification draws more things into the market that were imagined, in a not so distant past, to be outside of the that market. The struggle over what couples' holidays to celebrate and who will pay for which associated costs is the struggle to define the type of intimate relationship that they are a part of (Zelizer, 2007). Extensive gender

income inequality affects and shapes these struggles by bestowing lopsided power and advantage within the South Korea sexual field to men who routinely obtain higher wages than women. I will show that while some participants use their greater gift-giving abilities within their relationships to exploit and manipulate their dating partners, most participate in extensive gift-giving rituals in order to attempt to appropriate their intimate relationships back from the market (Polanyi, 1944). Still others are effectively excluded from these practices due to prohibitive costs of entrance to this dating market.

The struggle by many of my informants to locate their intimate relationships within the personalized world of the gift is done paradoxically through extensive marketization and commodification of dating rituals. This desire to create reciprocal and equitable exchange within their intimate relationships embedded in an incredibly unequal job market is an attempted as a check against potential abusers. However, this system of checks inserts the value of gifts within relationships as the value of the intimate partner, mimicking Marx's concept of the fetishization of commodities (Marx & Mandel, 1992). Further, this cultural system of extensive gift-giving institutes a high entrance fee into the dating and intimate marketplace, further marginalizing low income men and physically undesirable women.

Extensive structural gender income inequality affects and shapes these struggles by systematically giving men larger discretionary incomes and contributing to the masculine gender expectation that men will bear the burden of the majority of the cost of dates and couple's holidays(Moon, 2001, 2005; Song, 2014). In so doing, men are able to act as headmen would in Potlatch, heaping the burden of debt onto their dating partners if they should choose (Mauss & Evans-Pritchard, 2011; Mauss & Schlanger, 2006). However, once involved in an intimate romantic relationship in which its maintenance requires a steady flow of commodities, many

couples attempt to create equity, if not equality, and wrestle their personal relationships away from the impersonal market through, paradoxically, the extensive use of economic exchange in the form of gifts.

4.2. The Price of Romantic Intimacy in South Korea

Dating in South Korea is expensive. Leaving aside for the moment the issues of the sheer number of potential South Korean couples' holidays to celebrate, I found my own dating rituals in South Korea to be more expensive than they had been in the United States. One source of this difference is that South Koreans generally live in their parent's home until after married. Among my informants, few had their own apartments and many of those who did live in independent domestically from their parents shared rooms in dormitories, long-stay hostels, or resided in *goshiwons*. Having at one point or another lived in each of these types of residences I can tell you that they are cramped, uncomfortable, and totally unsuitable for entertaining a date in. In fact, most of these types of housing do not allow guests of any kind and several lock their doors in the evening, usually between 9pm and 11pm, meaning that you cannot get in or out until morning. Like *goshiwons*, taking a date to your parent's house is almost totally unheard of in South Korea. Actually, its uncommon to have guests in one's home, especially romantic partners, for many reasons such as the generally high housing costs and small sizes of apartments Seoul.

Figure 1: *Goshiwon*
A mid-level *goshiwon* I lived in for 3 months in the summer of 2016 near Sogang University. The room cost 375,000 won ($375) a month and was an upgrade from the cheapest rooms which lacked an exterior window or the private bathroom with shower. It was distinguishable from more expensive *goshiwon* in that it lacked air conditioning, making it a miserable and sleepless summer. Not at all the best place to bring a date even if guests had been allowed, which they were not.

What this all has to do with dating is that the vast majority of dating takes place in public and this subsequently raises the price of dates when compared to more casual styles of dating that take place in the private, rather than public sphere such as "Netflix and chill" in the United States. Indeed, the historical transition that took place in South Korea from an agrarian to industrialized economy in the post Korean War era that brought romantic courtship rituals away from the home and into public followed a similar pattern that took place in the United States during its own industrialization in the late 19th century (Illouz, 1997; Kendall, 1996).

> "Dating appeared alongside the rise in real income of the early twentieth century and was defined within the practical and symbolic boundaries of an emerging mass market of goods. These developments moved the romantic encounter from the familiar confines of the home to new locales that were both public and anonymous. At the same time, these circumstances made consumption an inherent element of any romantic encounter." (Illouz, 1997:54)

As economic development advanced in both the United States and South Korea, young singles found work away from the household economy, earning their own incomes, and were

able to assert their influence in the decision of whom they were to court and marry for the first time. In both cases it was young men who lead the charge against controlling parents in fighting for their rights in exercising veto power over a selected dating partner or even choosing their own partners. Later, women who were able to join the workforce and earn their own incomes were also able to demand some of these same rights over the selection of their own dating partner and courtship scripts. However, this process of men gaining advantage over love and courtship over and before the women they choose to marry is mirrored in today's South n dating culture where women systematically earn far less money than men, lack job security, and are discriminated against in the rental housing market (Song, 2014). These economic and social inequalities within South Korean society are translated into intimate inequality in a number of ways but one important and often disdain feature is the near constant gift-giving events and couples' holiday celebrations.

4.3. Birthdays

The most often celebrated couples' holiday reported by my informants was the birthday of their dating partner. Thus, a given couple will celebrate this holiday twice a year. While this may seem trivial enough, South Koreans actually have two ages and thus, each person has two birthdays. Both ages have official uses by varying social, legal, and governmental institutions such as age of consent or the legal age at which one can buy alcohol.

The first birthday, sometimes called the "Korean birthday" is celebrated by all South Koreans on the same day, Lunar New Year. Koreans do not have a long history of celebrating individual days of birth with the exception of the 1st and 60th birthdays which have been used to represent serious milestones for past South Koreans who lacked access to modern medicine or

healthcare. Instead, most South Koreans consider the Lunar New Year to be the most important celebration of their change in age. At this time, Koreans traditionally travel to their familial rural villages to pay respect to their ancestors and all South Koreans increase their "Korean age" by one year. This collective birthday gives South Koreans their "Korean age" that will dictate their hierarchical social status and linguistic address terminology throughout their lives. However, this birthday is usually not considered to be a couples' holiday. Instead, it is a national and familial holiday more akin to Christmas or Thanksgiving in the United States. Few South Koreans in my study considered this to be a time for gift-giving with a dating partner.

The second birthday is the actual day of birth and carries far less cultural weight than its more communal counterpart that takes place on New Year's. Counting your age from the day of your birth is commonly referred to as a "Western age," hinting at the origins of this practice. An additional complication is that not everyone celebrates this birthday on the same calendar. While it has become to norm for most people to use the solar calendar to mark the day of their birth, this has not always been the case with many older people still using the lunar calendar. This has left space for it to be coopted, like other holidays that will be discussed, into the commodification of courtship and the holiday on which most of my informants spent the highest quantity economic resources on. In this way, the globalization of the birthday as a familial holiday in the West has been localized into a romantic holiday to suit new, emerging needs. In the case of South Korea, this need is to create more couples' specific holidays.

It is unclear when the practice of annually celebrating the day of birth originated in South Korea but 94% of survey respondents and all of my interviewees indicated that they had taken part in its celebration as a couple's holiday. According to my survey data, about 94% reported celebrating one of their birthdays with a dating partner and spending an average of 140,000 won

($140) which was similar to descriptions that I heard from my informants. While informants saw the celebration of birthdays as mandatory for dating, they also viewed this holiday as one of the least objectionable. This feeling was often validated by citing that the holiday was not "made up" or had some special attribute because it was the day of their partners birth rather than the product of successful advertising, neither one of which is really true since the commodification of the Western style birthday party has been extensively commodified and commercialized in order to sell all manner of cakes, sweets, and gifts to anxious couples (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014b). This is of course also true of Western style birthday celebrations around the world which may be why South Korean couples find this holiday unobjectionable. More than other holidays to be discussed later, the birthday celebration has been more successfully naturalized in South Korea which likely followed its introduction after at the turn of the 19th century. However, other holidays have not been so successfully integrated into social norms.

4.4. Valentine's Day, White Day, and Black Day

The celebration of Valentine's Day in South Korea probably began during the time of rapid economic development in the 1970's (Kendall, 2002). In 2018, Valentine's Day in South Korea got an additional boost of recognition from the international community, along with the entire trio of couples' holidays, due to its coincidence with the 2018 Winter Olympics. I discuss these three holidays together because of their chronological order on the calendar, (February 14th, March 14th, and April 14th) their successive symbolism, and their relative popularity with each other. Valentine's Day, which falls on the 14th of February, kicks off a three-month long series of couples' holidays in South Korea. This holiday celebrated in a similar style in Japan, in that

women, not men, are targeted by advertisers and encouraged to buy and to give dark chocolate or flowers to men to show their affection.

These symbols of affection are then supposed to be returned by men in the form of a gift on the 14th of March which is called White Day. In recent years, advertisers have attempted to further increase sales of their products by targeting both men and women on both days. Due to its connection to couples and dating, both Valentine's Day and White Day take on a more specifically romantic character rather than the generalized celebrations of Valentines' Day that takes place in other countries such as the United States.

While not widely adhered to by my informants, men explained the use of "the rule of three," purchasing and giving gifts that equate to three times the value of those they received on Valentine's Day. Also traditional is that these gifts be white, such as white chocolate, white lingerie, or white flowers. Together, these two couples' holidays are so completely commodified and commercialized that South Korean retailers often make the bulk of their sales during this time for a wide variety of sentimental products such as jeweler, lingerie, and couples' outfits, and romantic diaries.

Valentine's Day was the second most celebrated couples' holiday among my informants with 74% of those surveyed having taken part in the ritual with their dating partner. As one might expect, White Day was not celebrated as frequently with only 54% of those surveyed reporting having celebrated it. Black Day, while widely acknowledged, is also linked to Valentine's Day and White Day but my informants were divided on the subject of whether or not Black day was a dating holiday, a singles holiday, or just another commercialized celebration promoted in order to increase sales.

While some of the most important holidays for my informants and their partners, Valentine's Day and White Day are also the most visible of the couples' holidays on the streets of Seoul. They were particularly conspicuous in the areas of Seoul where couples' commonly reported going on dates such as Gangnam, Itaewon, Hongdae, and Sinchon. Convenience stores, department stores, grocery stores, and all manner of other outlets attempt to cash in on these well-established days by setting up temporary booths and tents outside of their storefronts for weeks leading up to the special dates, featuring Ferrero Rocher, Twix, Pepero, Chupa Chups, and stuffed animals. Commonly available gift baskets containing a collection of such items range in price from around 20,000 – 50,000 won ($19-$48).

Figure 2: Valentine's Day
A person is dressed up in front of a convenience store to promote the sale of Valentine's Day related commodities. February 13th, 2017: Gangnam

While not as widely celebrated as the Valentine's or White Day, I want to explain Black Day here due to their connections. Black Day takes place on April 14th following the now repeating pattern of the 14th of each month. On Black Day, singles who have been left out of the previous celebrations are said to take solace in their loneliness by getting together with other single friends and eating Jjajangmyeon, a noodle dish topped with a thick black bean paste. This may not seem like a couples' holiday at first glance but some of its elements, such as gathering groups of singles together for a meal, mimic common styles of South Korean dating such as *Meeting* (미팅) creating a ritualized time for singles to mingle. It could also be read as an attempt to make singles feel negatively about their lack of a dating partner and to shame them for not being in a relationship. I often asked informants about this idea, that maybe Black Day was a kind of "*meeting*" or group date. Some informants thought that it was a mildly interesting interpretation while others dismissed the idea outright. Joan, a 30-year-old software analyst living with her husband in the US said,

> "They hope but it's actually kind of not, because Black Day you know you when you eat jjajangmyeon (짜장면), you know black beans everywhere it's actually kind of ugly and jjajangmyeon in Korea it's a cheap quick food so maybe not romantic new-lover-finding day but still can be a fun hangout day actually."

In this way, some participants of Black Day maybe hoping that this will be like a date or a way for them to meet an intimate partner, but requirements of the holiday's celebration create a decidedly unromantic atmosphere. Perhaps a holiday that was meant to draw singles together to share a meal on a group date chose a stereotypically inexpensive meal to represent the holiday reflexively in order to help the less financially well-off find love for the low price of cheap noodles?

The commercialization and promotion of Birthdays, Valentine's Day, White Day is extensive and obvious but if the purpose of couples' holidays is only to promote sales, what is sold on Black Day? While it's easy to understand how chocolate, jewelry, and clothing or

lingerie companies might coordinate efforts to promote the introduction of a new couples' holiday in order to increase the size of the market for their wares, who does the commodification of Black Day benefit? According to both popular accounts and my informants, on Black Day South Korean singles are supposed to congregate together at their local Chinese restaurant and eat *jjajangmyeon*, a greasy, inexpensive, black, calorie filled noodle dish. Yet, during my years in South Korea I have never seen additional advertising for this dish or the increased promotion of these restaurants in the days leading up to the holiday. Despite this lack of advertising my informants often criticized the holiday for being "too commercial," which then begs the question of what is meant by this criticism other than to insinuated that the holiday lacks cultural legitimacy.

Single men were especially dismissive of Black Day but in other ways. Joe, an unemployed 23-year-old single bisexual male freelance writer said when asked about Black Day, "Umm that's the most pointless thing in the world!" "Have you celebrated it?" I asked. "NOPE! Not at all," he replied in a proud voice. Some individuals did say that they eat jjajangmyeon on Black Day with their dating partner, lending support to the argument that Black Day is really all about selling more bowls of noodles rather than creating new couples. Tyson, a 28-year-old pharmacist explains how Black Day is meant to ridicule singles.

> Glayzer: I think It's kind of like a Meeting or group date.
> Tyson: It's just a story. It's not a like a special thing.
> Glayzer: So lots of people get together and eat jjajangmyeon and it's not just singles?
> Tyson: Yeah it's just making fun of singles, solos. You have to eat jjajangmyeon today.

We can never know for sure what the intentions of the creators of Black Day had in mind but from these and other conversations I had with my informants the successful spread of the celebration of the holiday has been due to the tension between assisting and ridiculing singles.

I include Black Day as a couples' holiday for all of the reasons outlined above but also because this trio of couples' holidays has spawned the other nine "Love Days" that are celebrated on the 14th of every month in South Korea. If Black Day were to be excluded from this list of "love days" it would break apart the otherwise unbroken chain of couples' holidays. The other nine Love Days are discussed separately in another section because they do not receive anywhere near the amount of commercial attention that Valentine's Day, White Day, and Black Day have received.

Black Day and its uneven acceptance by South Korean singles is indicative of the recursive nature of the often observed spheres of authentic sociocultural celebrations which are the supposed opposite of commercial or artificial holidays. Much like Zelizer's observations of hostile words, the dichotomy between the sacred inner-emotional world of intimate love and the separate, polluting world of the market, authentic cultural practices and customs are imagined to be the antithesis of commercialism, the market, and advertisement. However, I would argue that these dichotomies actually take turns driving each other but with uneven impacts and historical longevity.

4.5. Pepero Day

The origin of Pepero Day in South Korea is unknown and sometimes hotly debated. However, the purpose of the holiday, as exemplified in the opening vignette, is to exchange stick-like cookies that have been dipped in chocolate and are very similar to Pocky in Japan. The most popular origin story of Pepero Day was that two middle school girls wanted to be tall and thin, like a Pepero cookie, so they ate 11 packets of Pepero on November 11th, at 11:11am and

again at 11:11pm at precisely 11 seconds. The repetition of the number eleven having to do with its similarity with the shape of two Pepero cookies placed side by side. In 1997 the makers of

Figure 3: Pepero Display in Gangnam
Pepero on display on the sidewalk in front of a GS25 in Gangnam on November 9th, 2016.

Figure 4: Up Close Pepero Display
Pepero on display in front of a small independent grocery store near my apartment in Yeoksam on November 11th, 2016.

Pepero, the Lotte Chocolate Company, launched a highly successful ad campaign in the 1980s disseminating the urban legend of the middle school girls exchanging Pepero and the holiday has since morphed into one of the most celebrated couples' holidays in South Korea with about 50% of all annual Pepero sales now taking place on Pepero Day.

In addition to Pepero Day being almost entirely the result of an ad campaign directed at selling more cookies, Pepero Day is also one of South Korea's most visible holidays, with virtually every convenience, department, and candy story setting up large displays outside their doors promoting the sale of cookies, gift baskets, and sometimes flowers. For these reasons Pepero Day has often been the target of choice for critics of the commercialization of South Korean dating culture by out its creation by a self-interested chocolate company and the paradox of its origination story where young girls actually eat large amounts of empty calories in order to become thin.

Figure 5: Grocery Store Pepero
Pepero on display at the grocery store E-Mart in Yeoksam on November 5th, 2017

About half of those surveyed said that they had celebrated Pepero Day making it the 7th most popular couples' holiday. However, during my interviews with informants the topic of Pepero Day was often the most divisive and took up the largest amount of time during out discussions. Informants would sometimes go into depth detailing discussions that they have had with dating partner who did not feel the same way about Pepero Day as they did, with arguments commonly ensuing. This was even true for some couples who were otherwise ardent couples' holiday celebrators.

4.6. Christmas Day

Christmas Day, for similar reasons as birthday celebrations, has been appropriated as a couples' holiday. Despite South Korea having one of the highest ratios of Christians in its population in Asia, only about 25-30% of the population identifies as Christian (Cumings, 2005). Additionally, this low percentage is probably inflated since many South Koreans began identifying as Christian in the 1980s due to that religion's association with modernity (Kendall, 1996). Still, the globalized image of Christmas Day as an important couples' holiday, rather than a religious one, has spread across South Korea to become a major day of celebration for intimate partners. With the exception of some communities that are deeply devout and practicing Christians, the holiday is mostly detached from the religious and familial connotations that we associate with it in the United States.

The origins of this decoupling of religiosity from Christmas Day date back to the late 1940s governance of the southern portion of the South Korean peninsula by the US immediately following the Japanese surrender in WWII. At that time, only about 3% of the population identified as Christian but Christmas Day became a national holiday immediately due to the

arrival of the US occupational forces. Like the Japanese before them, the US instituted a strict curfew that was only lifted on Buddha's Birthday, New Year's Day, and December 24th. December 24th became one of the few days of the year that the American troops could stay out late and a whole entertainment industry developed to serve them. This was also true of South Korean troops in the American military. The predictable consequence of this was the generation of an understanding of Christmas by South Koreans as being a youth-centered, late-night, joyful celebration. Like it's US counterpart, South Koreans also came to accept the commercialization of the holiday by companies looking to capitalize on the opportunities that these policies produced. The holiday "reflects a feature of the American society, freedom, desire for the western modernity and an extreme commercialism involving expensive brands and upmarket department stores"(Premack, 2017). In this way, the cultural pattern of Christmas as a secular commercial holiday entered South Korea before South Koreas modest Christianization.

Christmas Day was the 3rd most commonly celebrated couples' holiday among my informants with 71% of surveyed informants reporting having celebrated it. While not exclusively for couples, since some singles also celebrate Christmas, it is not a clan or family holiday. It was also the 3rd most expensive dating holiday, after Birthdays and yearly anniversaries, according to those surveyed with an average cost estimated to be around 90,000 won ($90). Further, couples often cited Christmas as being one of the most expensive couples' holidays that they celebrate due to its association with extreme commercialism and expectation of gift-giving. What seems to have been borrowed from Western celebrations of Christmas is the commercial gift-giving practices almost exclusively among couples rather than between family members and friends, as takes place in the USA. Like birthday celebrations, this is due to South

Korea already having a multitude of pre-existing gift exchange rituals focused on the family such as the Chuseok harvest festival, the Seollal Lunar New Years, and Children's Day.

4.7. *GoBaek* Day (9/17)

GoBaek (고백) or Confession Day is meant for people to be brave by admitting their feelings of romantic interest, usually someone they already know. September 17th is significant in that it is exactly 100 days before Christmas, meaning that, if their confession goes well and the pair begin a relationship, then their 100 Day Anniversary will coincide with the other popular couples' holiday on December 25th.

The fact that I was not able to gather much data about Confession day does however, lead me to some interesting points to consider for analysis. The first point is that I spent an entire year in South Korea doing little more than talking with single South Koreans about their dating habits and South Korean dating culture more generally. And yet, after all that time I was still learning about new holidays. This point highlights the extent to which the creation of new holidays has risen.

Despite having a significant online presence, with numerous websites explaining the holiday and its tradition, few of my informants listed the holiday when asked. This could have been for a number of reasons. The first is that this holiday could either just be coming into fashion or just out of fashion. With so many new holidays being created, negotiated, reinvented, and ignored on a regular basis, it is little wonder some holidays transition from being popular to unpopular with equal frequency. However, there is evidence to suggest that if the popularity of the holiday is in fact in question then it is likely that the holiday is not new but old. The evidence for this hypothesis is the that the holiday does not only have a strong internet presence on South

Korean websites such as Naver and Duam but also English language websites that explain the custom to travelers and new arrivals to the peninsula. This "trickle down" of information on a dating culture which is quick to change, sensitive to creating new holidays that the previous generation did not take part in, suggests that Confession Day has been around for some time. Since learning about the holiday several South Korean friends and informants who I maintain contact with have confirmed that they were aware of the holiday but simply neglected to mention it before. The fact that so many of my informants forgot about the holiday further illustrates the sheer number of holidays but also points towards a sort of banal attitude towards them in general.

A final explanation could be that Confession Day is not commonly celebrated because it can only take place one time in a given relationship. After one or the other members of the couple, usually the man, confesses their romantic interest in their future partner on 9/17, the couple has no reason to continually celebrate Confession Day because the following year it would simply be subsumed and celebrated as their one-year anniversary.

4.8. New Year's Day

As with birthdays, South Koreans celebrate two New Year's Days. The first is one of the most traditionally important in South Korea and is called *Seollnal*, which follows the lunar calendar. The second takes place on January 1st and has taken on some elements from other celebrations around the world including a countdown to the new year, a good luck kiss, and also staying up to watch the first sunrise of the New Year's Day. Seeing the first sunrise is considered a sign of good fortune with South Koreans frequently wishing for good luck, health, money and of course, love. For these reasons, New Years on the Gregorian calendar has become an important and popular couples' holiday in its own right, with couples climbing mountains, taking

trains to beaches, or going to the rooftop of their skyscraping apartment buildings to get above the smog and take in the view together. Of course, most of these things cost money to do.

Among my surveyed informants New Year's Day was the 8th most commonly celebrated couples' holiday with about 18% of couples' having celebrated it with an intimate partner, spending an average of 60,000 won ($60). Despite the relatively small number of informants having had firsthand experience celebrating New Year's Day with their dating partner, New Year's Day has many of the common elements of other couples' holidays. Romanticism in the form of staying up all night to watch the sunrise, a night out which will include a meal and multiple *cha* or stops for drinks at other bars and restaurants after the main meal, and commonly a nice hotel afterwards, which is why I have included this day as a holiday here. South Korean businesses have also honed in on the romantic sentiments felt during the New Year's holiday and attempted to capitalize on the opportunities such as couples' specific set menus at eating and drinking establishments, street hawkers selling flowers, "love motel" discount rates for those who check-in after sunrise, and a myriad of other services available on that day. Further still, I have celebrated the holiday with South Korean partners while living in South Korea, Gimhae and Seoul, during my 20s while working as an ESL instructor.

4.8.1. Idiosyncratic Couples' Holidays: Yearly, Monthly, 100-Day, and Two-Two Day Celebration (50th Day)

Idiosyncratic anniversaries are important times to celebrate the success of relationships but also to build and maintain bonds between couples. The various idiosyncratic anniversary celebrations to be discussed are almost universally identified as significant couples' holidays by my participants but few couples reported celebrating every available holiday with any given

dating partner. The pattern that does emerge is that couples deploy various anniversary holidays based on factors such as age, length of relationships, income, and inclination towards couples' holidays. The mean couple in my study celebrates 100 Days, 200 Days, 300 Days, 1 Year, 500 Days, 1,000 Days, and then yearly anniversaries.

4.8.2. Yearly Anniversaries

Yearly anniversaries were cited as the most commonly celebrated of the idiosyncratic annual holidays, if the relationship lasted that long, based on the couple's date of first becoming a couple. It was also the 4th most celebrated couples' holiday overall with 67% of respondents reporting having celebrated it. This is a high proportion considering that many of my younger informants had not had relationships that had ever lasted this long. Of course, many of those surveyed, especially younger South Koreans still in University and with little dating experience simply never passed this threshold. The average expenditure on this date was reported to be 120,000 won ($120), the 2nd most expensive dating holiday after Birthdays. The yearly anniversary was reported to be celebrated only slightly more often than 100-Days celebrations. Additionally, it is common for South Koreans to replace the celebration of 300-Days together with the 1 Year Anniversary, as Jean, a 25-year-old an unemployed fine arts major explained.

> Glayzer: Which couples' holidays have you celebrated?
> Jean: Ummm 100 -200 and I don't think I have done 300. Like a year, I have done a year one.
> Glayzer: Well if you did a year then you have hit 300 days!
> Jean: Ya, but like not, celebrating it. You know? Because it's like 2 months away and it like sounds crazy. Even that time for me I didn't think, I didn't think I ever… ya. Umm

Image A **Image B**

Figure 6: Dried Flower Vending Machine and Couples' Set Menu

Image A: Dried Flower Vending Machine
A dried flower vending machine in Sinchon.
Image B: Couples' Set Menu
Couples'" and "Romantic" Set menus at an Italian restaurant in Gangnam. The Couples Sets cost $35 - $45 and the Romantic Set costs $70 with upgrades available on each for salads, wine, and sangria.

Jean felt it was "crazy" to celebrate both 300 Day and the 1 Year Anniversary, but I found that it was not uncommon for South Koreans to celebrate both couples' holidays either. One possible reason why yearly anniversaries are the 2nd most expensive dating holidays in South Korea could be because of its combination with the 300-Day holiday. I asked Alvin, a 33 year-old graduate student at an elite university which holidays he had celebrated, "100 Days (*baek-il*), 200 Days (*i-baek-il*) , I think we did 300 Days (*sam-bake-il*) or 1 Year (*il-nyeon*) or we combined it." Several informants negotiated with their partners in order to reduce or minimize the burden of too frequent couples' celebrations. This was true for lower income couples but especially if the man in the relationship was lower income.

The 1 Year Anniversary was one of the most symbolically and socially significant couples' holidays among my informants. The significance and symbolism of the 1 Year Anniversary was important because it was sometimes when a couple decided to stop celebrating each 100 days together and instead switch to annual celebrations. However, many other couples still continued to celebrate both. Tyson, a 29-year-old pharmacist with a lower-middle class income summarized the importance of the 1 Year Anniversary to him and his dating partners this way.

> Glayzer: What about (the) 1-year anniversary?
> Tyson: Yeah of course! It's very very important day!
> Glayzer: Very important?
> Tyson: Yeah if…. If (a) man forget it… (long exhale) dead! (laughing)

The 1 Year Anniversary was also seen as more adult-like or grown up than the 100 Day holiday. As Bryson, a wealthy 31-year-old airline pilot explained.

> Bryson: Christmas, Christmas and uh anniversary
> Glayzer: One year?
> Bryson: Yeap one year
> Glayzer: What about 100 days?
> Bryson: Nah
> Glayzer: Never?
> Bryson: When I was little
> Glayzer: You were little?
> Bryson: Yeah

This helps to explain the creation of the many inexpensive and more minor couples' holidays that will be explained below. If long-term, committed relationships exemplified by the counting of hundreds of days and eventual in the counting of years is considered grown up and adult-like then so too is lavish spending on such anniversaries and the financial maturity to spend in order to demonstrate emotional affect.

4.8.3. Hundred Days

100 days, as a unit of time, has had special significance in South Korea's impoverished past when infant mortality rates were much higher than today. As in other places around the world with high infant mortality rates, children were given a special 100-day party called *baek-il* to celebrate its likely survival to adulthood (Scheper-Hughes, 1993). As South Korea has developed economically, *baek-il* (100 Days) has become a less significant milestone for infants today than in the past. The cultural weight and importance of *baek-il* has gradually given way to the first yearly birthday (*doljanchi*) becoming the more significant holiday.

Couples in South Korea routinely celebrate their first one hundred days together highlighting the relative frailty or precarity of young romantic relationships. This is also usually when couples will purchase their "couples' rings" that are usually made of silver or gold, often with precious gems such as diamonds, and match each other in design. These rings can be inexpensive but typically cost around 150,000 won ($150) according to my informants. Additionally, many couples continue to celebrate every 100 days together, but a more typical arrangement is to celebrate 100, 200, 300, 500, and 1,000 days together. Joan, who celebrates every 100 days with her boyfriend, described the holiday to me like this, "100 Days. It's a huge one! If you get through one hundred days, you're like, (an) official couple. That's a big one! So stupid. Haha!" Like infants surviving their first 100 perilous days of life, the couple also celebrates the durability of their relationship and become an "official couple" by wearing couples' rings that publicly symbolizes to everyone who sees them that they are engaged in an intimate relationship. I wore a steel wedding band myself, having recently become engaged to my spouse just a few weeks before moving with her to Seoul to begin my field research. Most South Koreans that I met, including my informants, treated me as if I was already married. They

did not make a vast distinction between wedding rings, engagement rings, or couples' rings for men and only a slight distinction seemed apparent for women's rings. Some informants reported that they knew couples who even celebrate 50 days together, excited to be halfway to 100, but no one in my study admitted to such a practice themselves.

100 Day anniversaries were reportedly celebrated by 65% of those surveyed, spending an average of 70,000 won ($70) on the cost of the date making it the 4th most expensive dating holiday after Birthdays, Christmas, and 1-Year Anniversaries. Again, this number is impressive since many of my younger informants had not yet had a relationship that was ever maintained that long. It is important to remember that this one dating holiday, unlike any of the other holidays discussed so far, usually takes place at least two to three times a year and so its combined total annual cost is in fact more than that of either Birthdays, Christmas, or 1 Year Anniversaries. If a couple were to celebrate the holiday three times a year by not combining the 300-Days and 1 Year Anniversary, the average total annual cost would 210,000 ($210) per person.

4.8.4. Monthly Anniversaries

Monthly anniversaries were one of the least popular couples' specific holidays celebrated by my participants with only 2.5% of survey respondents admitting to having celebrated it. Those who did admit to having celebrated it, or to knowing someone who celebrates it, usually qualified their statement by adding that it took place when they were "young" or in high school. Several informants also mentioned that they had celebrated a half-year (6 months) anniversary together, but not on a continual monthly basis. Couples that did admit to having celebrated a

monthly anniversary spent nearly as much, 61,000 won on average ($61), on the holiday. This was about what those same couples spent on their 100-Days holiday as well.

4.8.5. Two-Two Day

Very few of my participants admitted to having celebrated Two-Two Day, which takes place in on the 22nd day of a relationship. The admission of its celebration was almost always followed up by the quick qualification that they did it "when I was young!" It seems that middle school and high school students in relationships desire to mimic the couples' culture of older generations but with even more frequent celebrations. Due to their predictable brevity of their young romantic endeavors, middle and high school student relationships do not often last long enough to celebrate a one year, 100 days, or even a 1-month celebration. As Penny, a 31-year-old woman who spent several years living in Australia and has plans to relocate their permanently put it:

> "I know Two-Two Day. Yeah and the second one is I think kids are doing like 50 days the third oh sorry one-month anniversary serious oh my god how I can forget it! (Laughs) And fifty days! Every month! Monthly, okay monthly and 100 days, it's a huge one! If you get through one hundred days you're like, (an) official couple. That's a big one! So stupid!"

In this way, Two-Two Day has become an important couples' holiday that begins a much longer march towards becoming an "official" couple. It is also a significant holiday in that it is often the first form of socialization that South Korean couples take part in as young adults, possibly shaping much of their future feelings towards dating and couples' holidays in general.

My participants told me that they had assumed that the 22nd day of a relationships was chosen due to its symbolic repetition of the number two, as in two people. The celebration is usually conducted as a kind of mini anniversary with the couple going out to dinner and exchanging presents, similar to many other couples' holidays already discussed. Unfortunately, I

did not include questions in my survey about Two-Two Day. However, it did come up on several occasions during my interviews and it seems to me that most South Koreans are aware of the holiday even if they do not choose to celebrate it with their dating partner. The most common description of Two-Two Day by my informants is epitomized by this 29-year-old man, "Two-Two is for middle school or high school students. When I was (in middle school) … at that time, I did (it)." When asked about their feelings towards Two-Two Day, a 30-year-old woman living in Canada laughed and said, "That kind of day doesn't have any meaning for me. Usually it's just younger people like in high school who does that."

Jean, the 25 year old woman working at a language academy attempted to explain that the reason that people tended to celebrate Two-Two Day in middle school or high school may have less to do with the holiday being for adolescence as it does to do with a generational cultural shift in South Korean society.

> My brother is from the Baby Boom era. Even my brother's generation didn't have Two-Two (Day) and all those crazy like… 100s (days). I think they had 100s (Days) but I had 100s (Days) too, but it didn't matter that much. It was still sort of, I forgot the word but sort of stereotypical conservative and sexually repressed sort of generation, but it seems it is getting more open and more celebrated by the younger generation.

I had heard this argument voiced in other ways before and some of it rings true. According to my informants a primary reasons I was not successful in finding many people who celebrate minor couples' holidays like Green Day and Hug Day is that they are mostly for high school students but, as this woman points out, it could also be because the creation and maintenance of such couples' holiday frenzy peaked in the mid 2000s, before the global economic slowdown. It's possible that what I have been observing is actually a slowly building backlash against such commodifying practices of coupledom, the double-movement where society attempts to protect itself from the overreach of intrusive capitalism and commodification that Polanyi predicted and

will be discussed in the Conclusion (Polanyi, 1944). More likely though, the growing number of minor holidays such as 2-2 Day are actually training holidays for young South Koreans whose relationships do not after last to the full one-year anniversary or even 100 Days but where the desire to mimic these romantic courtship rituals is strong. Jackson explained his first experience with Two-Two day as young as middle school.

> Jackson: When I was in middle school, when I was a young boy, I had experience. We uh, Two-Two. Two-Two Days. There was that culture in our area. Culture. I'll give you 200 won for two-two. Let your friends collect 200 won each. Congratulations on Two-two.
> Glayzer: Oh, really? But this is not for dating. This is just friendship? Like friends ...
> Jackson: Dating.
> Glayzer: Oh, dating?
> Jackson: Dating. When it was Two-Two. 22 days dating. 22 days. Twenty second.
> Glayzer: Twenty-second of ... February? Or ...
> Jackson: (crosstalk) Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Like 22 days, like 100 days, 200 days. 22 days.
> Glayzer: Ah! So, what ...
> Jackson: (crosstalk) Two-two. We call it two-two.
> Glayzer: What is that mean?
> Jackson: Just two-two.
> Glayzer: (laugh) Like two people?
> Jackson Oh, maybe. (laugh) Maybe. (laugh) I do not know the exact reason. But we, we've got two-two. Like a hundred days. One hundred days, two days like 200 days. At first, two-two, my friends collect 200 won each. So, I go to karaoke with it, eat rice, and ...I went together. I go to karaoke with my friends. Then we ate two rice(s).

When asked about Two-Two Day, Joe, a 23-year-old man not long graduated from university said, “I think I celebrated it once with my first partner but… It’s some, university students and usually by high school they stop. Yeah. I think that’s kind of childish. It’s fun to celebrate but pointless.” Childish maybe but I argue they certainly are not pointless. Discussions of Two-Two Day among my informants were often dismissive but it was clear that many had had experiences with the holiday and virtually all were well aware of it. However, being adults and out of high school meant they had also graduated into other holidays designated for longer relationships.

4.8.6. Three-Three Day

No, this is not a couples’ holiday for threesomes. Instead, Three-Three Day is *Samgyeupsal* Day, which celebrates the staple South Korean BBQ dish of unmarinated pork

belly. The word for the number three in Korean is "*sam*" (삼) which is also the first syllable of the food item due to it containing three layers of fat. Hence, South Korean couples go to a pork belly restaurant to celebrate on March 3rd. Of all the couples' holidays, Three-Three Day was usually described as the least romantic and most clearly commercial. Three-Three Day was often compared to Pepero Day in that it was commercially derivative. However, it also seems to have been a much less effective marketing campaign than Pepero Day, as so few couples admitted to having celebrated it and several informants argued that it was not a couples' specific holiday. Perhaps because, unlike Pepero, a single company does not have a near market monopoly on the production of pork belly in the way that Lotte has on the chocolate cookies. This is similar to the example earlier of Black Day and Chinese restaurants.

Joan, ever vocal in her criticisms of couples' holidays was still forced to celebrate Three-Three Day despite any of her friends really knowing why they were doing it.

> Yeah so even that. Okay, 11-11 November 11th it's Pepero Day but after Pepero Day's huge success other (South) Korean marketing companies or whatever started use it. "Okay now three-three (March 3rd) is pork belly day. I have no idea where it's from. They have some meaning, but that's so random. But seriously, I thought that's stupid but seriously that day my whole friends and my boyfriend, "please go to eat pork belly", okay, and then we went to (wait in) the line (for) like (an) hour.

This seems to indicate that even though Three-Three day was far less successful than Pepero Day it still may have had a large impact on sales of pork belly at restaurants and that at least some couples used it as a reason to celebrate their courtship.

4.8.7. Other "Love Days"

On the 14th of every month there are additional couples' holidays or "love days" such as Diary, Green, Hug, and Kiss Day that similarly require purchasing gifts. The origin of these holidays are unclear and several of these holidays, Hug Day for example, are difficult to imagine

being commodified or having market driven motivations for their creation in the same sense that we have seen in other examples. However, Rose, Silver, and Kiss Day, the most popular of these holidays, did generally involve the purchase of commodities and are worth considering separately. Rose, Silver, and Kiss day were common enough that the majority of my informants were well aware of the holidays and how to celebrate them, whereas knowledge of the other more obscure "Love Days" was somewhat limited.

Diary/Candle Day: January 14th
Valentine's Day: February 14th
White Day: March 14th
Black Day: April 14th
Rose/Yellow Day: May 14th
Kiss Day: June 14th
Silver Day: July 14th
Green Day: Aug 14th
Music/Photo Day: September 14th
Wine Day: October 14th
Movie Day: November 14th
Hug Day: December 14th

Rose Day was the most popular of the "love days" outside of the "musts" described earlier (Valentine's Day, White Day, Black Day). Of the 459 respondents to my survey, about 9% cited having celebrated Rose Day, which falls on May the 14th. On average, informants reported spending 18,000 won ($18), about the price of a bouquet of roses from a convenience store or automated vending machine. However, some informants spent as much as 100,000 won ($100) or more lavishly on flowers or merely including the cost of the entire date in their reporting. Edie, a 23-year-old woman insinuated that these days were mostly for marketing but also for young, new couples without much dating experience.

Edie: But it's kind of… Facebook if you look at Facebook, I think there are many events like that. "It's Rose day soon. So, you have to do something. So, it's your… I recommend this product, like this, like this, …." I think it's used a lot for that kind of thing.
Glayzer: So, it's like recommendation, but not necessary?
Edie: Yeah. It's for when you just started dating. It's good to use it in that case. Because it's Rose Day, you can confess while giving roses. Other than that, I don't think I've seen much of it around me. But it's kind of... I think there are many events like that on Facebook. 'It's Rose day soon. So, you have to do something. I recommend this product, like this, like this, ...I think that's a lot of what it's used for.

> Glayzer: So, it's like a recommendation, but not necessary?
> Edie: Yeah. It's used a lot when we first started dating. It's good to use it. Because it's Rose day, you can give roses and confess. That's right. Other than that, I don't think I've seen much of it.

Only one of my informants, Jackson, a 30-year-old who returned to school to study Chinese who celebrates a higher than average number of couples' holidays, admitted to having celebrated Silver Day. However, perhaps due to the recent popularity of buying couples' rings for the 100th day celebration, Silver Day on July 14th, has fallen out of fashion. Also, of interest is that many couples' including Jackson now purchase gold rings instead of the traditional silver. This could be the product of couples trying to more closely emulate married couples or the result of gradual inflation of gift-giving expectations overtime. In any case, Rose and Silver Day belong to a similar category of couples' holidays most often celebrated by upwardly mobile couples in the late 20s or early 30s who are experiencing increased anxiety about commitment, marriage prospects, economic security, and a shrinking pathway to a middle-class lifestyle.

4.9. There Is No Choice. I Have to Present Something

When asked their opinion about the various couples' holidays in South Korea, the majority of those surveyed, 64% for men and 63% for women, complained that there were too many and that they were often burdensome on either themselves or on the relationship they have with their partner. The most common burdens imposed by these couples' holidays according to my informants are, in order of most burdensome to least burdensome, money, time, and the stress of trying to remember the various holidays. Informants with higher incomes did not cite the frequency of couples' holidays as being a financial burden as often as lower income informants. This was particularly true of high-income men.

During our interviews, women reported spending an average of 162,250 won ($162.25) per couples' holiday with a maximum of about 500,000 won ($500). Men reportedly averaged

219,160 won ($219.16) per couples' holiday with a maximum expenditure of about 500,000 ($500). Many informants were aware of the various holidays discussed below but some, especially those that were over the "western age" of 30 were unacquainted with less popular holidays called "love days." However, during our interviews, informants would need constant reminding of the number of holidays that they know about or had previously celebrated with a partner. Jackson, a 27-year low-income male student who celebrated a high number of holidays with his current girlfriend, attempted to describe the most important holidays that every couple "must" celebrate as follows.

> Jackson: We usually Christmas, and uh… Christmas and… White Day, then next is Valentine's Day… Pepero Day. These 4 holidays must be celebrated. Must be!
> Glayzer: These four are the most important?
> Jackson: Yes, the most important. Mus (celebrate). Have to prepare (a gift) … (laugh)
> Glayzer: These four are important? But what about 100 days?
> Jackson: You must also celebrate 100 days. Next, you must celebrate the personal holidays. Personally, 100 Days, 200 Days, 300 Days, 1 year, 400 Days…
> Glayzer: (crosstalk) Yeah, and Birthdays?
> Jackson: Birthdays! Birthdays… (laugh) All have to… (laugh)

Even for Jackson who is under 30 years old and an avid couples' holidays celebrator, keeping track of the various days is difficult. In this case, starting with four "must" celebrate holidays and ending up realizing that there are at least seven. For this reason, many of my informants in long-term relationships reported using smart phone applications to help them keep track. The most especially bothersome holiday to keep track of was the 100 Day anniversary because of its idiosyncrasy, it did not map well onto the solar calendar. These mobile applications, which are themselves another form of commodification of the intimate relationship, were especially important to some of my informants because of the dire consequences for their relationship should they forget to prepare sufficiently for the holiday. This preparation can take the form of an expensive date or a gift, but usually both are required. Jackson again explains one

such experience in which, like me, he neglected to fulfill the appropriate masculine rule as date coordinator.

> Glayzer: But what happened if you don't prepare on those days? Would your girlfriend be upset?
> Jackson: Yea... I have had this experience… On our 300 Day, my girlfriend told me not to prepare a present. So, it was a kind of weird thing to say, "I do not have much money, so do not prepare a present, just meet together and have a good meal."
> Glayzer: Did you?
> Jackson: Yes, but she said, "You don't have to prepare some gift for me because we'll just, we will meet and just eating." Just a good dinner.
> Glayzer: And did you pay for dinner or did you (split the cost) 50/50?
> Jackson: Actually uh, I didn't prepare a gift and did not pay for dinner. She paid for dinner and she even prepared some gift for me! Some cake, and… (laugh) some gift but I didn't (prepare) anything. I felt so sorry! My girlfriend was very angry. My apology did not make things better for me. I said, "Oh! Why? Why did you do this? Why did you prepare this? You said not to do it!" We just fought and ate. I was so annoyed! She was very upset. Yea, I felt very sorry and we fought. (laugh)
> Glayzer: Did you prepare a gift for her later?
> Jackson: I did on our 1-year anniversary.

Like myself, Jackson failed to live up to the expectations of embodying what a good boyfriend is supposed to buy, supposed to spend, and supposed to plan. Also like me, Jackson attempted to compensate for this misstep the following couples' holiday with a grand gift and date. However, while I was able to successfully claim ignorance of such expectations and overcome my mistake in the eyes of my significant other, Jackson had no such excuse and he described the reception of his grand apology one-year anniversary gift as being rather cool. It is not just men who feel socially pressured to give gifts on the various couples' holidays. Women also face pressure to give. As Karen, an unemployed 23-year-old woman studying for the South Korean civil service examination explained:

> Karen: At my school ages, I did Valentine's, White Day, Pepero, (giggle) and…
> Glayzer: So, you have experience for those…
> Karen: Yes, yes. I have experience. Because in the school if I didn't get the presents for that kind of days, then the boyfriends got disappointed very much. Because all the friends always ask the boyfriend "Do you get the presents from your girlfriend?" So (sigh)… so there is no choice. I have to present something.

"There is no choice. I have to present something" was a common description of how many of my informants described why they continued to celebrate the numerous couples' holidays despite being a financial burden and the apparent cause of many argument and confrontation. Men

shouldered the greatest financial burden in terms of the raw costs of these gifts and dating expenditures in the form of restaurants and entertainment that take place at the time of the date.

4.10. The Price of Couples' Holidays

One reason the costs associated with dating in South Korea are high because so much of it must take place is public. Compounding this problem is that public displays of affection are relatively taboo and so the use of "love motels" and pensions for intimate moments are ubiquitous. Combined with the costs of obligatory gift exchange, the total cost of some couples' holidays can be exactingly prohibitive.

Jean is an unemployed 25-year-old woman who recently graduated university and moved to the UK. We met over video conference call after she found one of my surveys through Facebook and wanted to participate. She recently had a kind of sexual and spiritual awakening once moving to the UK because she felt "a little chubby" and not appealing to South Korean men in Seoul but found herself to be highly desirable within the sexual field in the UK. She described a typical date for her and her South Korean boyfriend on a couples' holiday such as Valentine's Day when she was living in Seoul.

> Valentines and White Day is chocolate and candy. Valentine's day and Christmas is all about gift-giving. Anniversary usually goes like a little gift or go see a film in the cinema or go around like Express Bus Terminal to window shop or like buy a little item you know that sort of thing. I mean like a fancy hotel, and get like delivery food, and play games and… a fancier version, with AC.

The popular couples' holidays that Jean describes all revolve around conspicuous consumption, the purchase of specific ritualized commodities, and the spending of financial resources beyond the already expensive non-couples' holiday dates. A typical date might end at any number of "love motels" where the cost of the room includes two toothbrushes, a condom, "woman cleanser," a razor, and often times a battery powered cock ring. However, a love motel selected

for a couples' holiday will almost invariably be a "fancier version" which would typically include amenities such as AC, a computer with internet access for entertainment or pornography, mirrors on the ceiling, robes, slippers, or even a jacuzzi.

Figure 7: A Fancy Love Motel
A typical package of accoutrements that come standard in many love motels. (Left)
One of the fanciest love motels I stayed in during a cross-country cycling trip. Note the extra-large bed, computer connected to a large flat screen TV, red neon lighting, and the mirrors on the ceiling. (Middle)
A double-wide bathtub in our fancy love motel. (Right)

Despite being connected, Valentine's day was significantly more popular among my informants than White Day. Grace, a 31-year-old nurse whom I met at a Seoul Connections English language exchange event, is witty and funny. She had lived abroad for a short time in Canada and now dated mostly foreign men in South Korea and was applying to a nursing exchange program that would eventually send her to Texas to settle more permanently. She was suspicious of the commercialism surrounding couples' holidays, explaining that she had a long conversation about the various holidays with her boyfriends and that they decided they would not celebrate any of them, "Except for Valentine's Day and Christmas… We decided it's like too much commercialism, so it doesn't have (a) special meaning for us." In this scenario, the two dating partners discussed the various holidays and were in agreement in their feelings towards their celebration and choosing not to take part in holidays with "no special meaning" to them.

However, other couples reported having larger disagreements about the meaning of the couples' holidays and whether or not to take part, and to what extent. Within South Korean dating culture there are also a multitude of couples' holidays that draw from idiosyncrasies of individual couples to create couple specific "special meanings," that further commodify the relationship and increase the costs of intimacy. Many couples in my study, especially those that were in successful long-term relationships, made compromises such as these in negotiating which holidays and how many to celebrate. These calculations and negotiations were often determined by factors such as relative income levels between the couple and affinity or aversion to couples' holidays in general. I argue that, in this way, the majority of South Korean couples attempt to make equitable, if not equal, intimate relationships within a dating and marriage marketplace that is anything but fair or equitable. In doing so, they also created barriers to enter the dating marketplace to those with low incomes and those with low value within the South Korean sexual field.

The imbalance in the way that men pay more of the immediate or raw costs of the dates, typically 60/40 or 70/30, often corresponds surprisingly well with the difference in income between the two dating partners and the gender pay-gap in South Korea (*OECD*, 2020). However, according to my survey data, men and women disagree significantly on what counts as a dating expenditure and what does not. For example, women often included fewer tangible costs of dating into their calculations of their total dating expenditures such as the time spent getting ready for a date, the cost of makeup, plastic surgeries, and exposure to the risk of dating violence, sexual violence, and unwanted pregnancy. Heterosexual men never included these less obvious expenses and risks in their calculations of their total dating expenditures and sometimes complained that women did include them. Heterosexual couples virtually never split the cost of, nor consider these

types of expenses when opening joint couples accounts or considering how to share dating costs long-term. To be fair, much of the time heterosexual men did bear the burden of paying for the sometimes-frequent costs of staying in love motels and buying prophylactics such as condoms. Women almost universally refused to pay for such items because they viewed sexual pleasure as being almost entirely for men. The suggestion that they should be the only ones to pay for such expense was insulting to some South Korean women. In any case, these expenses often paled in comparison to the additional expenses of grooming, and in some cases plastic surgery, that women bore or the lopsided risks that they felt they assumed to protect their physical safety.

Even in the cases in which two heterosexual dating partners had similar incomes, the costs of these dating holidays were still shared unequally. This could be attributed to the precarity of women's employment, the assumption that they would quit their jobs once they become married or pregnant, or the anticipation of reaching a glass ceiling in their careers (Song, 2014). These problems are in addition to a slew of other issues that contribute to South Korean women's financial marginalization that will not be covered in detail here but includes what has come to be known as the "pink tax," describes how commodities that are made for women are priced higher than similar or exactly the same commodities that are made for men. These expenses are in addition to still other types of financial marginalization such as militarized modernity, discrimination in rental housing market, and the fact that women live longer lives on average and thus require more savings for retirement income (Moon, 2005; Song, 2014).

If South Korean women are systematically and unfairly marginalized in the employment marketplace leading to unequal access to the financial capital necessary to contribute equally to their intimate relationships as I have outlined above, why are there so many couples' holidays? The creation, propagation, and diffusion of such a vast array of holidays celebrating the intimate

couple necessitating highly prescribed gifts or types of dating activities would seem to heap onto the shoulders of already struggling women the addition of near constant gift-giving, gift-receiving, and gift-reciprocating obligations that many struggle to maintain. How do South Korean men and women understand these dating practices, how do they negotiate with their partner about which holidays to celebrate and which to ignore, and how they realign these decisions with their existing concepts of a freely given ideology of love that exists outside of the market?

4.11. Inequalities for Women in Modern South Korean Dating Rituals

The exchange of gifts is fundamental to the creation and maintenance of human relationships, but gifts also create a debt and an obligation to reciprocate (Mauss & Evans-Pritchard, 2011). In the context of South Korean dating culture, some people are effectively excluded from being able to take part in this system and others are relegated to passive or peripheral roles due to their financial status. Due to systematic gender discrimination that takes place with in the workplace, their gendered roles as consumers, and the expectation of extreme beauty, South Korean women are often forced into these passive, peripheral roles as the receivers of gifts in the form of commodities and having a larger portion of the costs of their dates paid for by men (Moon, 2005; Song, 2014).

The historical transformation from an agrarian to industrialized economy and from dating and marriage partner selection via arranged marriages under the tight control of parents to individual selection subject to the forces of the globalized neoliberal marketplace that accompanied it, has exacerbated long existing economic barriers to courtship (Kendall, 1996). In a dating and marriage marketplace in which women are unable to contribute equally due to the gender wage gap, and also compelled into near constant gift exchanges and couples' holidays,

how can women reciprocate? My informants describe a broad range of ways in which men wield their unequal power in their relationships. These would range from relatively innocuous examples such as dictating the times and locations of dates, requests for girlfriends to smile more, act "cute," or wear more makeup, to more extreme examples such as demands for sex acts.

Elsie, a 31-year-old female graduate student, splits the cost of dates and couples' holidays with her boyfriend 70/30, with her boyfriend paying the majority. She says this is the most comfortable split for them because "we considered status in respect to our income level, so we adjusted the level." However, at the same time Elsie recognized that it was important not to allow her boyfriend to pay for 100% of the dates. She said, "I would feel uncomfortable, not balanced status, 100% and 0…. seems dangerous. Maybe a man would have more authority, power, strength. I think that he would think he could do whatever he wanted with her." Another 29-year-old woman, echoed Elsie's sentiments about not wanting to incur a debt, "When I owe the man, I feel, I feel, I lost. Not win. I owe the man money. Money and *skinship*." "*Skinship*" is a Korean version of the English words that combines "friendship" and "skin" to convey the meaning of "intimate touching" which can range from holding hands to sexual stroking and petting. Women are in a vulnerable position if they accept too much of the costs of dating but they often lack enough money to pay equally, especially after considering their unequal earning power and the greater costs of adhering to strict feminine beauty standards. South Korean women struggle to find a way to maintain their own bodily safety, financial safety, and also somehow develop a relationship all at the same time.

Joan, a 29-year-old woman who recently moved to the United States to attend graduate school made the connection between gift giving and repayments even more explicit. "Okay so if he gave me some surprising gift like a necklace then he would say "I want to stay with you a

little bit longer tonight, something really cheesy and obvious" and "I gave you a surprising gift maybe special day today, maybe weekend"… something really pushy... Free lunch is actually not a free lunch." Joan also described a boyfriend who gifted her expensive makeup for their 100 Day celebration and would get upset afterwards if she did not wear it on future dates, failing to fulfil her feminine gender role and perform idealized feminine beauty standards.

Joan was again very helpful in explaining how she understood the way that she was expected to reciprocate her boyfriend for his financial contributions to the relationship.

> Like, they expect something cute. They do not expect any expensive big thing. They expect the time and the diligence that girls can do. Cooking or something, making something cute, or something you know like long time writing, long letter, or something like that. They expect something like that. It is not money. It's not about anything. But it's about the role they are expecting. Specific role playing for female people. So, I have to make a little lunchbox and this and that. So, yeah some of them think it's a huge deal. It's a big deal for me. It's really immature.

Joan was perceptive in identifying the expectation among many South Korean men that women reciprocate their gifts during couples' holidays by embodying the traditional conservative Confucian gender role of demure consuming female. South Korean women unable to reciprocate their intimate partner's gifts during near constant couples' celebrations are resigned to reciprocate via "making something cute," or "role playing" as the idealized South Korean girlfriend that appears so often in South Korean dramas. As we have seen, men's ideas about what constitutes is idealized South Korean female girlfriend varies and some men use their economic advantage to demand touching, *skinship*, and sex acts. This also leads me to ask the question, "What about women who are simply unable to properly embody this ideal femininity due to disposition or physical appearance?" What do women who are not "cute," submissive, and don't have the free time to be "diligent" do in this marketplace of gender roles? According to my informants, other women who remain single, unable to afford intimacy in that they cannot reciprocate most men's superior financial contributions to the relationship. However, at least three of my informants who refused or rejected this type of feminine performance did find dating

partners who also rejected hegemonic gender dating standards. The performance of gender roles affects men as well and further contributes to South Korea gender inequality.

4.12. Inequalities for Men in Modern South Korean Dating Rituals

The commodification of dating rituals has negatively impacted men in South Korea as well but with differing effects due to gender roles that narrowly define men's function as that of financial provider. The connection between masculinity and income is so strong that men's ability to express feelings of romantic interest, appreciation, or even love are bounded by their ability to give expensive gifts. While this system may work out more favorably for South Korean men than it does women due to their advantages in the income generating job market, it also introduces new inequalities between men.

Mathew is a 27-year-old man I met on Tinder while he was bored and looking to meet new people. We met at an Irish pub in Gangnam for dinner where he explained that he had recently graduated from college and was working at an entry level office job with one of the large conglomerates. After a few drinks he almost came to tears when he described his disillusionment with work, his lack of financial success, and dating.

> Before I (started) working, I really wanted to marry and make a baby. ASAP. Now I totally change it. I cannot… It's too expensive and I (don't) have any time. If I have a…. my baby I really have no time to play with him or my wife. I told you I met one foreign girlfriend before… I get a job. And I met her again after I got a job and I was so tired….I cannot have sex for the whole night, so tired! My working… it messed my whole life.

When asked about his feelings towards couples' holidays, Mathew again lamented the financial hardship of such celebrations. I asked him if couples' holidays contributed to his feelings of being financially burdened. He said,

> "There are a lot! There is too much! Too many but now I don't care about that small or stupid couple day. Kiss, some rose, and what else? Hug (Day) is fine! Because it's free. Why do I feel its too many holiday? Cause… Ummmm… Maybe they are aimed to guys to pay more to their girl. They give us a reason."

The financial burden of couples' holidays, commodified courtship rituals, and the expectation that men should outspend women, led this man to use the services of prostitutes. I asked Mathew if the high levels of prostitution in South Korea affect his way of thinking about dating, to which he replied, "The guy pays more. Sometimes, it is cheaper than (if) you have a girlfriend. A prostitute is cheaper than your girlfriend. I really agree with it in (South) Korea. It (prostitutes) maybe a more reasonable choice." In this way, South Korean women in the hyper-commodified dating and marriage marketplace, also come to compete with the services of prostitutes for men's intimate desires, further blurring the boundaries between "hostile worlds" (Zelizer, 2007).

Of all of my informants, the person who reported celebrating the highest number of couples' holidays, 18 that year, was Jackson, the 26-year-old man living at home with his family while taking foreign language classes in English and Chinese. He had no personal income other than pocket money from his parents but was dating a woman who was seven years his senior and had a well-paying white-collar job. His girlfriend paid 70% of the cost of their dates while he paid only 30%. Their ages, incomes, and dating cost sharing ratios are almost mirror opposites of what my informants felt was typical in South Korea. Yet, his feelings of guilt over not being able to fulfil his masculine gender role led to what he admitted being a form of overcompensation through the celebration of couples' holidays. South Korean men like Mathew and Jackson share a common problem with South Korean women such and Joan. They cannot fulfil their traditional gender role, only instead of embodying an ideal of cute and delicate femininity, these men cannot provide the appropriate level of financial contributions to the costs of their intimate relationship. Relationships that, as I have shown, are extensively commodified and expensive to maintain. Like Joan, these men are both fearful of, and apt to be, taken advantage of in a dating and marriage marketplace that narrowly defines gender roles and expectations by hegemonic

standards. In this hierarchy, where men's feelings and emotional desires are thought to be embodied in the price of the gifts they are able to bestow, men struggle to compete or even express their romantic interest in an intimate relationship.

4.13. Understanding South Korean Couples' Holidays

There seem to be three broad categories by which South Korean dating and couples' holidays can be understood. At times in my interviews both men and women accused the other gender of spreading and promoting the culture of constant couples' holidays for that gender's own benefit. Women sometimes argued that men like to control women and so they create new couples' holidays in order to keep women dependent on them and extract sex acts via the repayment for their purchase of commodities. Conversely, men accused women of inventing extensive numbers of couples' holidays in order to extract financial resources from men. As we shall see, both men and women sometimes insist on the increased celebration of couples' holidays in their intimate relationships but for rather different reasons.

The second way of understanding the expansion of South Korean couples' holidays is that the logic of neoliberal capitalist markets to expand infinitely has caused them to seep into the realm of intimacy where commodification is idealized to have never been before. This has become a popular narrative within the anthropological literature of capitalism, economic development, and intimacy (Constable, 2003; Harvey, 2007; Marx, n.d., n.d.; Miller, 1997; Polanyi, 1944). Furthermore, upon first arrival to South Korea this was indeed my perception and I found significant evidence to support such a frame of understanding.

The third way of understanding the expansion of South Korean couples' holidays and the way in that I find most productive for this analysis, is that South Korean couples attempt to create

equitable, if not equal, intimate relationships that are symbolically separate from an inherently unequal capitalist marketplace. By framing my analysis this way, I am able to move beyond hyperbolic or overly theoretical arguments about a secret conspiratorial war between the genders or a somehow self-aware economic entity that seeks to ensnare all of human existence with its commodifying tendrils. Instead, framing my understanding of South Korean couples' holidays as a negotiation between dating partners of differing incomes allows me to better understand the ways that couples negotiate dating expenditures and how they are to be shared.

4.14. Negotiating Intimate Courtship

Both men and women reported having to bargain and debate with their partners to limit the number of couples' holidays that they would celebrate and Pepero Day often elicited these disagreements and strong emotions the most readily due to the overtness of its commercialism. Joan, a 31-year-old data analyst I met through a friend of someone I met at a language exchange group is a great example. After having dated a previous boyfriend for eight years she recounted the six couples' holidays that they celebrated together. When I then asked her about Pepero Day her facial expression shifted and she said, "My boyfriend was kind of interested in (Pepero Day). I'm very concerned about that. I told him not to do Pepero Day or Valentine's Day. But my boyfriend gave me a small box of Pepero anyways because he felt it was absolutely necessary." Why did he and many of the South Korean men and women who celebrate these holidays feel that giving a small amount of Pepero, any amount, was so necessary, event after having a contentious discussion about it with their partner? The fulfillment of stereotypical gender roles has a strong grasp in what is a generally conservative South Korean dating culture. As I will continue to argue, many couples' holidays are the result of extensive commodification of the

traditional South Korean gender role system of which Pepero Day is a prime example. While these gender roles are not static and the actions the symbolically embody these roles have changed over time, despite women's entrance into the work force and extensive economic development men are still the primary economic providers and women the consumers (Kendall, 1996).

South Korean singles do not uniformly conform to these gendered expectations of gender roles in the form of couples' holiday celebrations. In fact, resistance to constant couples' holiday celebrations was sometimes just one of a wide range of things South Korean youth resist such as the overbearing education system and the uniform hierarchy of careers. Together, these are often referred to colloquially as "Hell Joseon," or sometimes just "Hell Korea." The term describes the feelings that many South Korean youth have towards their economic and social prospects during a time of youth unemployment, economic stagnation, and rising economic inequality.

Joan, who had spent time abroad and epitomizes many South Korean women's thoughts about the explosion of couples' holidays, expounded on her disgust of Pepero Day unprompted throughout our entire interview. I asked Joan where she felt like the idea that South Korean consumers equate their self-worth with the value of the gift that they receive from their intimate partners and she replied:

> First, from the companies like the Pepero company like something company something company. [2]Second is from the gender role of society itself make it worse so marketing companies really smart, they know what's going on in (South) Korea, in (South) Korea like you know like patriarchy and hierarchy then marketing companies use this society rhythm really well, make it even worse.

[2] Here, "something company something company" just refers to any random company in the same way we might say "ACME company" or "whatever company."

After telling Joan the story of my first Pepero Day described in the introduction, she discussed how woman sometimes come to see their worth as being equal to the cost of the couples' holiday gift:

> Yes that's (how) maybe young (South) Korean girls feel they are like "maybe I'm just (a) five-dollar girl" maybe that's what they really think although it's absolutely not, so yeah.

Despite its popularity among my informants, Pepero Day was often talked about in a derogatory manner. When asked which couples' holidays they had celebrated, a 23-year-old man said, "like, 100 Days, 200 Days, 1 year… Those things. And sometimes some mundane things like Pepero Day or yeah, (and) of course Valentines or White Day." Most of my informants were aware of the commercialized origins of Pepero day but felt either compelled to celebrate it anyways due to social pressure and visible ubiquity around Seoul. While some participants didn't take the holiday very seriously, explaining that the cost of the holiday was low and that it was an inexpensive event for them to take part in, others spent lavishly on the holiday by dinning in expensive restaurants or going traveling to romantic spots around South Korea. For example, when ask about the positive and negative aspects of the South Korean cultural expectation that men should pay more for the costs of dates Joan responded:

> People in (South) Korea care about to think they can see not they can feel or not they can think so people care about the things out there so if you're a girl and there's a girl hanging out if you get a Gucci bag from a boyfriend then her value goes high straight up. Her thinking is that her value is like a Gucci bag. So that's like huge deal in (South) Korea and if a girl's not pretty then her value is like bottom there but pretty going straight up not like not smart it's not enough for girls and it's not important or not doing anything good it's about the beauty the outside that's why the plastic surgery rate is crazy high in (South) Korea.

As other South Korean men and women in my study describe, Joan points out the direct equivocation South Korean dating couples often make when comparing the market value of the cost of their couples' holiday gifts to the amount that their dating partner loves them.

Informants in my study often complained about the complexity of remembering these holidays since they are idiosyncratic and don't track well with either the lunar or solar calendars.

Several technology companies, such as Naver and Between, have cashed in on this problem by creating online and downloadable apps that send alerts to your smart phone as the auspicious day nears. When asked if he felt burdened in anyway by the various couples' holidays one man said, "Sometimes I feel burdened, at that time. Yes. What do you have to do when you're 100? I was worried about that." Not only is 100 Days difficult to remember for this man but he also negotiates the difficult task of finding the right gift because the gift he chooses for this, and the many other couples' holidays, communicates to his intimate partner and others exactly how much he values his partner.

For many people, couples' holidays produced heavy burdens that were financial, temporal, and emotional; worrying about what the right gift to get was and what it would communicate to their partner about their relationship. Bradly a low income 34 year-old-man who owns a bar that he also lives in, complained about the "pointlessness" of South Korea couples' holidays described 100 days this way.

> Glayzer: 100 Days?
> Bradly: No.
> Glayzer: Really? I thought that 100 Days was really famous, but you didn't do it?
> Bradly: I won't. Never.
> Glayzer: Why didn't you do it? Because you don't like it?
> Bradly: I don't feel like I need to! I think it is stupid... Some people said to me this is why you have no girlfriend. Haha!

Bradly's attempt at self-defeating dark comedy is funny but it also highlights an element of truth, that the man's opinion about couples' holidays is not a popular one, especially with women. Further, it seems to put him at a disadvantage in the dating marketplace where he likely has had a difficult time competing for most of his life.

Alvin, the graduate student at a prestigious university, complained bitterly about the number of South Korean couples' holidays and belittled South Korean women for being materialistic in the process. In our discussions, he often blamed the number and frequency of

couples' holidays on South Korean women's greed, a sentiment frequently encountered in the popular media.

> Alvin: Yeah Valentine Day is ok, that one is reasonable we probably import from United States or other country. But ok 100 (day) anniversary…
> Glayzer: That's kind of indigenous right?
> Alvin: Yeah do you know *doljanchi* (100 day birthday ceremony)? Yeah, I think that is, they converted it. I don't know who really made it but anyhow.
> Glayzer: But they adopted it and now its…
> Alvin: Yeah anyhow but, that just, that's for woman. Yeah for woman.

In this way, the man frames popular narratives about *kimchi-neo* (kimchi bitch), an economically successful woman who exploits her female privilege to get out of work but also expects men to pay for dates and buy them expensive gifts, into his argument about couples' holidays.

Both genders take precautions during negotiations about the number of couples holidays, which holidays, and how the costs will be divided, in order to avoid accusations of being a *kimchi-neo* (kimchi-bitch), *kimchi girl* (kimchi-girl), *doenjang girl* (soybean-paste-bitch), gold-diggers, or materialist women. These terms all roughly translate to gold-digger but their use in South Korea also insinuates a woman that marries and dates in order to increase her social status and finances thus enjoying her elevated status as a trophy girlfriend or wife but who also shifts her traditional feminine duties of cooking and cleaning to others. In other words, they are a person who wants to have their cake and eat it too. There are equivalent male terms such as *kimchi-maen* (kimchi-man) but I did not encounter it during my field research. While women worried about being seen as materialistic, men worried about being duped, taken advantage of, or worst of all, poor and unable to fulfill the requirements of a male provider figure.

Negotiations over courtship rituals such as couples' holidays are also fraught with tensions about the value of each dating partner within in the South Korean sexual field. For women to demand the celebration of too many holidays may seem like she is taking advantage of the man who will inevitable bear the highest burden to pay. If a man demands too many celebrations, he

may be viewed with skepticism for trying to gain too much control of the relationship. Since the value of a gift giving during couples' holidays comes to symbolically represent the value of the dating partner themselves, these negotiations are often a source of contention within the relationship.

4.15. Conclusions

The ability of men, and then later women, to earn incomes away from their family economies due to industrialization has led to increased agency in the selection of marriage partners. These economic changes were just one, albeit important, of many rapidly changing elements of South Korean society over the last half a century. New dating rituals such as Pepero Day have increased the frequency and intensity of dating related consumption rituals, leading to a larger power differential in intimate relationships mirroring women's lesser economic power in South Korean society. This same phenomenon also threatens to recreate the gender inequalities of the past between men and women. Additionally, increasing levels of economic inequality and class rigidity within South Korea, as in around the world over the last several decades, has created an entire under class of men unable to afford the expression of their intimate desires and women with few methods of social mobility except through economic hypergamy. Further contributing to this unequal market problem is the oversupply of men in the modern dating and marriage market caused by the intentional termination of female fetuses in the 1980s and 1990s. As my next-door *goshiwon* neighbor, a sullen single man in his forties, said to me while we were both cooking in the cramped shared kitchen, "no money no honey."

One of the most insidious outcomes of this dating marketplace and the commodification of intimacy is the physical, emotional, and sexual risk of exploitation that many of my female

informants described when entering into a relationship with a man that was of higher economic status than themselves. This type of relationship, as discussed earlier, is sometimes sought after and coveted for South Korean women with few means of social mobility. However, in the following chapter, I will describe the sometimes elaborate strategic calculations that woman do in order to avoid becoming indebted to men who would abuse their economic might within their relationships.

Some South Korean couples are successful in temporarily creating intimate relationships that are symbolically equitable, detached from the realities of the inequality of income that they endure in the South Korean workplace. However, most of my informants shift in and out of the dating market as the majority of their dating partners do not go on to become their spouses. This is especially true of informants in their late teens and early twenties who have few expectations of meeting their future spouse right away. This movement back and forth between relationships statuses continually thrust South Korean singles into contact with potentially exploitative dating partners and causing their fears and anxieties of inequality to relapse. This will be the subject of Chapter 5. Even if a courting South Korean couple does eventually marry, women are perceived to give up much of their "power" after marriage. After telling me about South Korea's unfavorable divorce laws for women, a gender income gap that gets even wider as women age, and the stigma surrounding divorced women in the dating market, one female informant told me that "women have the advantage in dating but men have it after matrimony." Later a male informant would echo that sentiments but added the further nuance that, "just the pretty young women" had the advantage during courtship. Several of my informants made similar claims as those of Kendall in the 1990s. That South Korean woman have more autonomy and power within their relationships before marriage rather than after (Kendall, 1996). While Kendall argued that

this is due to the gendered inequality of requisite gift-exchange within wedding rituals in 1996, I have argued that this inequality is now reproduced within the complex gift-exchange rituals that now take place during dating rituals.

CHAPTER 5:

SOGAETING: SEARCHING FOR LOVE WITHOUT FEELING "UNCOMFORTABLE"

Han-ill is the cool one. Self-confident and stylish, he brags only somewhat sarcastically that he never has a hard time meeting women. Jackson is also handsome, but with boyish, rounded features and his confidence is shattered after breaking up with his longtime girlfriend. Han-ill knows this, he sees this, and he takes the lead in rallying us to go hunting. The five of us in our group play rock, paper, scissors to determine who has to go ask a woman for their number. I brought them to Iteawon because, as a waygook (foreigner) I know this area next to the US military base better than them. They asked me point-blank to take them because they wanted to meet white foreign women, but so far Han-ill has only been hunting South Koreans. This beer hall is a popular hangout for South Koreans, military expats, and ESL teachers looking to relieve some stress and, with its open floorplan, expansive bar, dartboards, and pool table, meet new people. Nonetheless, Han-ill returns to our table empty handed for a third time and I think the rejections are starting to wear on him. "Let's go someplace else," he suggests. This is already the 3rd bar of the night but we migrate to another location anyways, bleary-eyed and sticky in the summer's mugginess. The night goes on, so does the drinking, and so does our game. They know that I am engaged so when I lose, I try to be a good wingman by starting a conversation with someone and seeing if they want to join our table. It never works. By the 6th bar our hunting party had winnowed to just Jackson and myself and we are in Sinchon now, miles from Itaewon. We were barred from entering three different clubs earlier because they don't allow anyone older than 30 inside. That's me. This place let us in but even Jackson looked too old for this crowd. We drank more, danced some, and then Jackson finally, mercifully, ended our doomed hunting excursion at 5:30am.

5.1. Introduction

"What does it mean when a man attempts to pay 100% of the costs of a first date?" I asked 30 female and 30 male informants. I got several different answers all swirling around just a few related themes. "He wants to show off his wealth, demonstrate his traditional values, let her know that he really likes her," or simply, "he wants to get laid," they replied. In my own words, it means that man is romantically interested in the woman. "What does it mean when a woman attempts to pay 100% of the costs of a first date?" I asked. The 30 women answered quickly and in effective unison, "She never wants to see that man again." Men were less sure of what to make of such bewildering behavior. While the scenario of a woman attempting to pay 100% of the cost of a date in South Korea is somewhat rare, according to my informants it does take place. Additionally, it epitomizes an important asymmetrical gender relationship between dating partners. The exact same behavior, paying the total cost of a date, when done by one

gender is seen as expressing romantic interest but when done by another gender, it means precisely the opposite. Not only does it demonstrate a lack of romantic interest on the part of the woman, but it also communicates, perhaps somewhat imperfectly, that women are paying for the privilege to not be pursued. In other words, men must pay in order to express their feelings and women pay in order to be left alone.

Rapid economic development, mass urbanization, and one of the world's lowest birthrates have combined to create a highly commodified and competitive dating landscape in South Korea. However, youth unemployment, economic inequality, and a broad gender pay gap have left South Korean women as unequal financial contributors to their intimate relationships. Furthermore, the inequalities that exist within the employment marketplace have become recreated within the dating marketplace where some men and women rise to the top while others tumble to the bottom, unable to afford the cost of intimacy. In short, the change from dating and marriage partner selection from family controlled arranged marriages to individual selection subject to the forces of the globalized neoliberal marketplace has exacerbated existing economic barriers to courtship. In a dating and marriage marketplace in which women are unable to contribute equally due to the gender wage gap and also compelled into near constant gift exchanges, how can women reciprocate? In the previous chapter, my informants described a broad range of ways in which men wield their power in their relationships. These would range from relatively innocuous examples such as dictating the times and locations of dates, requests for girlfriends to smile more, act "cute," or wear more makeup, to more extreme examples such as demands for sex acts. However, the commodification of intimacy has serious implications for South Korean singles that begins long before entering into a committed relationship, during the search for an intimate dating partner.

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the commodification of intimacy through the lens of dating couples' holidays. Using a Maussian framework of analysis, I argued that the gendered economic inequalities that exist within the market economy were reproduced within the hyper-competitive intimate dating marketplace (Kozinets, 2002). In this chapter I explore how South Korean singles negotiate emergent and existing dating practices that include matchmaking companies, arranged marriages, parent-introductions, blind-dates, group-dates, dating apps, and "*hunting*" strategically to optimize their chances of finding love and intimacy while minimize feeling "uncomfortable," a common euphemism for financial, sexual, or emotional exploitation. In particular, I focus on the reasons for, and consequences of, a strong preference for blind dates among South Korean women. Single South Korean men and women with limited financial resources can easily find themselves feeling "uncomfortable" when dating. The choice of, and preference for, different types of dating has important ramifications for who bears the financial costs of the date but also the expectations how the relationship will proceed sexually and with what kinds of emotional and financial commitments. With full knowledge of the high emotional and financial obligations associated with maintaining an intimate relationships, epitomized by the ever increasing number of South Korean couples' holidays, single South Koreans take great care before entering into a sustained intimate relationship, or even a first date, with any partner who could potentially abuse their asymmetrical power within the relationship.

I draw from sexual fields theory where the sexual field of Seoul has a "distinct sets of actors, internal logics, institutionalized modes of interactions and self-management, and positions in social space that confer advantages on some and disadvantages on others" (Green, 2013:3). These unequal gendered advantages and disadvantages contribute to a correspondingly unequal system of vertical sexual and intimate stratification. This Bourdieuan field of sexual

stratification shapes and determines the choice of intimate relationships with profound implications for the rest of an individual's life path. This field is both a "field of force" and "field of struggle" where actors vie for dominant power (Bourdieu, 1985; Martin, 2001). I also argue that it is a field of exchange where economic, social, and sexual capitals are interchanged and reinforced.

By focusing on the gendered commodification of intimacy in contemporary South Korean society, which manifests itself in the complex consumption rituals that are normally associated with emotional interpersonal relations such as dating, I can explore broader questions about economic development, its effect on gender equality, and the commodification of intimacy in late capitalist societies. "Through courtship and through all of the talk about getting married, notions of ideal "man" and "woman," "husband" and "wife," "son-in-law" and "daughter-in-law" are constructed, reinforced, and resisted" (Kendall, 1996:91). This also allows me to ask questions about how participation in the neoliberal market impacts and mediates romantic courtship and intimate relationships.

5.2. What Kind of Date?

South Korean singles, both men and women, negotiate emergent and existing dating practices such as matchmakers, arranged marriages, parent-introductions, blind-dates, group-dates, dating apps, lighting dating, and *hunting* strategically to optimize their chances of finding love and intimacy while minimize feeling "uncomfortable," a common euphemism for financial, sexual, or emotional exploitation. South Korean singles with limited financial resources can easily find themselves feeling "uncomfortable" when dating with more well-off partners, typically men. Meanwhile, South Korean men worry about falling prey to a *kkoch baem* or

"beautiful snake," an attractive woman who uses their femininity to extract economic resources from unsuspecting men.

South Korean preferences for which type of dating practices they deploy depends on a large number of factors such as sexual orientation, income, gender, age, and desired commitment level. However, in this chapter I focus on income level and perceived gender equality within the type of dating ritual, levels of fear of feeling uncomfortable due to the risks of sexual violence, emotional manipulation, and financial burdens. In general, women preferred to meet men "naturally" through work, school, or social clubs that they attended. However, despite this strong preference the majority of my informants did not actually meet many dating partners at these places. This is also despite the fact that informants cited joining social groups like book clubs, language learning clubs, and hiking groups specifically in order to meet new dating partners "naturally." Women felt most comfortable meeting people by an introduction through a friend because they feared sexual or physical violence from males that were unscreened and outside of their social networks.

These fears of physical and sexual abuse were made especially salient during my field research in Seoul after Donald Trump's inauguration in January of 2017 following the release of the Access Hollywood tapes where he bragged about using his fame to sexually assaulted women. This lead to the #metoo movement, which began in 2006, going viral on social media and 22,000 people took part in the Seoul Women's March that I attended on January 21st near my home in Gangnam. The march was symbolic too because it took place in Gangnam where "the Gangnam murderer" had randomly stabbed a woman to death in the busy subway station's public bathroom in 2016, saying that he did it "because women have always ignored me". South Korean male misogyny was a frequent topic during my interviews among both male and female

informants, typically with each gender accusing the other of some sort of broad misconduct. While South Korea has one of the lowest crime rates in the world, cases of domestic violence are high and likely severely underreported (Ahearm, 2001; K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014). Despite these figures, South Korean men countered that some men felt forced to follow the "Pence Rule," a reference to the then new Vice President of the United States who revealed that he never went to eat alone with a woman that was not his wife or event went to events where alcohol was present without her by his side for fear of being accused of sexually inappropriate behavior. Clearly, the topic of gender equality and issues of power dynamics within intimate relationships was high on everyone's minds during this fraught period of time.

In this chapter I argue that the power dynamics within the intimate sexual field of dating in Seoul are highly gendered. I also argue that, like much of the South Korean market, the dating marketplace is deeply unequal with participants comparing potential dating partners against the yardstick of traditional conservative neo-Confucian gender roles which are largely determined by income for men and sexual attractivity and submissiveness for women (Kendall, 1996).

5.3. Meeting Naturally: *Jayeonseuleobge Baljeon*

"Meeting naturally" or developing an intimate relationship with someone that you came into contact with through school, work, or hobbies. In other words, meeting naturally occurs only when the primary purpose of a social event is not searching for dating partner such as through hobbies, work, or school. Typically, this category excludes intimate partners who were met purposefully using any of the other dating methods. Meeting naturally was both one of the most preferred ways to meet a new dating partner and most commonly employed methods for that purpose among my informants. This was especially true for my informants that were university

students who had easy access to meet new singles on a daily basis in "natural" settings such as the classroom, social clubs, and sporting events. Participants who did not attend university or had already graduated also often described this method of meeting dating partners favorably. However, without the aid of the university experience, these singles joined after work activities and clubs via social media apps and websites such as Meetup that were related to their personal interests such as sports leagues, hiking groups, and language learning clubs. Additionally, many informants, male and female, described finding a suitable dating partner as an important, if not the primary reason for joining such groups. Church was particularly praised for this purpose, as a place to meet high quality singles for the purpose of dating. In this way, the definition of what counts as a "natural" meeting becomes blurred and the boundaries between natural meetings and other forms of dating such as *hunting*, *meeting*, and singles dating events begin to overlap. The more that coincidental or spontaneous encounters with the opposite sex becomes the goal of attending an event or joining a group, the more my informants became uncomfortable with the label of "meeting naturally" or *jayeonseuleobge baljeon* to describe it.

Meeting naturally was described as the most romantic and desirable way to meet an intimate partner. Many of my informants expressed a desire to get to know a potential dating partner quite well, often in the context of spending a great deal of time with that person in small groups, before "confessing," telling someone that you are interested in them romantically. By meeting and getting to know a potential romantic partner within the context of a group of friends, South Korean singles integrate that person into their own social circle thereby creating a system of social checks and balances against bad behavior while also getting to know the person without significant financial, temporal, or emotional commitment. Additionally, in my experience this style of dating is also the most often portrayed in South Korean romantical television and film.

My informants, especially younger female informants, described meeting naturally as desirable because of its low-pressure nature, popular association with idealized romantic love, and the ability of women to exercise their own agency to prescreen their dating partners for perceived flaws. Younger South Korean couples were also more likely to split the costs of dating with their partner more evenly if they met them via meeting naturally. Despite the seeming desirability of meeting people naturally, this type of dating is not how most South Korean singles search for dating partners.

5.4. *Sogaeting* or Blind Dating

While natural meetings were usually preferred over other methods of dating, it was not always the most successful or common for my informants. In fact, the majority of my informants reported using *sogaeting* or blind dating more often than meeting people naturally. Typically, a mutual friend will organize the date or put two people into contact with each other that would otherwise have no reason to "meet naturally," expanding each other's "*circuits*" of participants (Green, 2013). The mutual friend, having good knowledge of both of the potential partners usually believes that they would make a good match for some reason such as shared interests, values, tastes, or preferences. These shared sensibilities and tastes constitute what Green has termed an overlapping *erotic habitus* (Green, 2013). The two people would then agree to meet for the first time in a public place like a restaurant or café. Sometimes the person who introduced the couple will even pop by during the date to see how it's going and possibly help to ease tensions between the two strangers. From here, the date can go just about anywhere or end after a short time depending on the inclination of the two on the date. Archetypally, a dinner or lunch date that is going well will be continued by the female suggesting coffee or desert.

South Korean women indicated that meeting a partner via sogaeting helped them avoid feeling "uncomfortable" and more "secure." Initially, I had thought they were referring to being emotionally secure or less awkward due to having a friend introduce them. However, when pressed on the meaning of these statements my informants indicated that they feared manipulation, sexual pressure, gossip about their moral character, and sexual violence, all of which they asserted were highly prevalent in contemporary South Korean society. They were particularly sensitive to meeting a new South Korean dating partner that was totally disconnected from one's own social circles. This unvetted kind of a date was considered dangerous by many women informants. Women informants said that if a man paid for the majority of the costs of a date and put pressure on them for sexual acts or became violent, there would be no social recourse and nothing stopping them. Women felt that South Korea lacked legal recourses against physical and sexual abuse, so that their only way to avoid such situations was to not get into them in the first place by having friends and peers pre-screen dating partners, along with a social system of checks.

When asked about her preferences for dating methods, Elenore, a 30-year-old graduate student explained, "Because my friends know the person and it gives more security…I think (it's) mostly dating violence. Um… pressure, I don't know but it is more guarantee. You know someone through your friend, because I trust my friend and they introduce the guy to me. And I feel more secure because I know my friend. And I know my friend will not betray me." A female 27-year-old office worker expressed this same sentiment this way, "By meeting someone that is introduced by someone who's a friend that I trust…That gives me more power in a sense. There is less chance to, you know, come across meeting risky people, that's all." In this way, arranging

a date via a friend, or sogaeting, women can gain some small amount of power, security, and not waste time with men who may have romantic intentions that differ from their own.

Besides being fearful of male informants who might use their greater socioeconomic power within their intimate relationships to extract sexual favors, women also feared men who might spread gossip about them. In particular, the gossip that many of the women informants feared was of their own sexual history. While not usually expressed directly, many informants seemed to feel that they have only hypergamy as a way to climb, or maintain their position on, the socioeconomic ladder by way of marriage via the appeal of their adherence to traditional South Korean gender roles to attract upwardly mobile men. Women feared any gossip about the existence of their sexual history might diminish their chances of climbing or maintaining the class hierarchy through marriage. By meeting men via *sogaeting*, South Korean women felt more comfortable that their partner would not brag to their mutual friends about their intimate physical relationship, thus keeping their value on the marriage marketplace intact. For South Korean women then, *sogaeting* has developed into a system for them to help counteract various types of gender inequality that they face within both the public and private spheres, as well as the income generating market that has severely impacted the dating and marriage market. While limiting the possibilities of who they might meet or of serendipitous encounters with relative strangers that could develop into happy relationships, women are instead nudged into a system of peer-reviewed possibilities, perhaps ironically further decreasing the potential for class mobility via hypergamy. For these reasons, I argue that while South Korean women have wrested control over their choice of dating and marriage partners from their parents, but they have also ceded some of that agency to the neoliberal economy which allocates high value resources such as wealthy men and beautiful women via market mechanisms. These mechanisms will be described

in Chapter 6. “The rewards of the sexual field—including both partnership choice and social significance—are in large measure dependent on the degree to which actors possess resources that articulate with the *structure of desire* of the sexual field in which they have a stake” (Green, 2013:15). In this way, South Korean women have limited agency to form intimate relationships outside of existing social networks while men with limited resources are less restricted but still constrained by their incomes to materially express a culturally appropriate romantic interest.

The result of the popularity of *sogaeting* for low-income men was quite negative with several reporting feelings of being unable to afford to find love and intimacy. The increased formality of having a mutual friend involved in the date put more pressure on men to pay for the majority of the costs of the first sogaeting event. Men complained of the burden and pressure to fulfill their gender role by paying for the costs of the date while *sogaeting* due to this social custom. Asking women to pay for too much of the costs of *sogaeting* was viewed tremendously negatively and socially precarious as word of such a misstep would surely circulate among his friend, his friend network, and among other potential future dating partners. Jackson, a 27-year-old low income non-traditional student complained that he had to pay for the first date during *sogaeting* even though the woman was sight unseen, physically unattractive, and that he did not want to meet her again. “She was not a beauty. My friend’s friend introduced us,” he said. “You still had to pay for the first date when sogaeting with her? Even though you knew that you are not attracted to her and that you would not want to see her again” I asked? “Yea. I should do that. She’s my friend’s friend, so because it’s my friend’s friend he should not be sorry.” Jackson astutely recognized that even though he had no further romantic intentions with the woman he met via *sogaeting*, he was forced to pay for the vast majority, less a small token cost such as a cup of coffee, of the costs of the date due to their shared social networks. “*Structures of desire*

eroticize and assign value to certain bodies, affects, and practices while rending others neuter or undesirable" (Green, 2013). He was obligated to pay more, despite not wanting to spend his money in order to express his intimate feelings of desire with a woman he found undesirable.

Meeting through a mutual friend places the burden of who pays more firmly on the man. This was especially evident and worrisome to lower income men on tight budgets. Tyson, a 29-year-old pharmacist explains his very different experience sogaeting. He felt uncomfortable asking the woman he was on the date with to pay for any portion fearing that their mutual friend would be upset about it. Casual sex was totally out of the question for him. "I pay for just a meal. And then I hope (she pays for coffee) but sometimes the girl didn't buy it. Then I pay. I didn't ask, 'it's your turn!' it's sooooo uncomfortable. If I say that, maybe my friend who introduced me to her will be very very mad. 'Why did you do that?'" While *sogaeting* was beneficial to numerous South Korean women and deployed in order to avoid being exploited sexually or physically by men who feel entitled to certain masculine privileges after paying for the costs of a date, the result of its popularity as a method of dating created a kind of pyramid scheme favoring wealthier men. Martin, a 25-year-old man who I met on Tinder was disabled and wheelchair bound expressed this same sentiment this way,

> Glayzer: What about … if you go to sogaeting? So, it's like a first date how do you split the cost?
> Martin: At that time, I pay. I pay for the food, if she likes me, she will say, "would you like to get a cup of coffee?" But most of the time guys ask first.

Martin's characterization of payment obligations during dates in Seoul were typical and illustrative of the same asymmetrical power dynamic pointed out in the opening vignette. To pay for a cost associated with dating is to express interest. The suggestion to extend the date to another venue and incur an increased debt by the woman is her way of doing the same. The stereotypical gender role of women doesn't allow them to pay for something in order to express

interest even if they did have enough income to support a sustained relationship where they shouldered the majority, or even half of the costs of expensive dating rituals.

While *sogaeting* presented lower income men with additional financial pressure, elite men actually benefited from the commodification of intimacy and women's preference for sogaeting. One example of this came from Elliot and he was on the other extreme side of the socioeconomic spectrum from Jackson. Elliot was able to wield his socioeconomic capital to demand photos of a woman before accepting a *sogaeting* invitation, in order to weed-out unattractive women. When asked about his favored dating method, the wealthy 31-year-old airline pilot explained how it was easy for him to avoid footing the bill on a date with someone that he was not attracted to.

> "I prefer *sogaeting* because I see a lot of beautiful girls in most of my working time, you know. When working I see a lot of beautiful airline (hostesses) and so my standard is you know, getting higher and higher. So, if I want to get a sogaeting partner, they show me a picture so I can choose, you know. I can choose. I have more choice."

Furthermore, his wealth and status as an elite bachelor allowed him to have casual sex while *sogaeting* without significant social repercussions. He explained, "*Sogaeting*, I had one experience. On that date I had sex with her but cannot be a serious. I mean, South Korean guys thinking like, if I have sex in a date—she's like a, like a you know, bitch." He said. "So, if you have sex with them on the first date then it's not a serious relationship?" I asked. "No, never. Maybe we can hang out two or three times more, but not for serious. Just for sex." Elliot's comments were unique among my informants for their sheer bluntness. Perhaps this was because he was financially and socially secure enough to state the situation clearly as he saw it, or that he wanted to show off to a foreign academic asking him about his sexual exploits (Cho, 2012). In either case, he exemplifies a type of callous privilege within the dating marketplace that no woman or man such as Jackson or Tyson could ever match.

Within this ritually commodified sexual field, men wield unequal and considerable power via their masculine and financial capital. This power can be used in a variety of ways. Eliot explained that he could date very beautiful women, despite his just average attractiveness, or influence women to pay for a larger portion of their dating expenses. As he explained candidly,

> Eliot: I mean, when I was 20 (years old) I paid more but now I am 30 years old. When I was (in my) twenties, I was like paying around 70-80% but nowadays almost half… I mean…you know like twenties…they feel…um, I mean they ... I mean girls they can get guys easily. Good guys. Cuz…Um, how do I say…cuz like they are young, and they are you know, twenties …Very beautiful and you know everyone likes twenties. Every guy likes twenties, right?
> Glayzer: So, does that mean as women get older, they have to pay more?
> Eliot: I guess so. Yeah.

Jackson lived with his parents, had no income of his own, and was still in school despite being almost the same age as Elliot. Meanwhile, Elliot had his own private apartment right by Hongdae station in a major entertainment district, an expensive foreign luxury car, and a desirable job with coveted travel perks. These advantages in the income generating marketplace allowed him to demand photos of women before he went out of dates with them, to avoid actually paying for the costs of his dates if he didn't want to, and even the ability to sleep with his dating partners casually without fear of social repercussions while also denigrating the women who did succumb to his sexual advances.

Both men and women strongly desired meeting people naturally, *jahyeonsuropgey baljon*, but fearing meeting men outside of their social circles. Many joined social activity groups such as book clubs, language meetups, and hiking groups, in order to widen their social circles of socially connected dating candidates but relatively few were successful in finding dating partners this way. There are also the places in which I met many of my informants. Women turned to searching for dating partners via *sogaeting* in order to restrain and screen men against the perceived threat of sexual pressure and physical violence. The nature of these *sogaeting* dates require men to pay in order to demonstrate their feelings and express interest in an intimate

relationship while also saving face for the mutual friend who introduced them. Women must pay in order to not become indebted to men. To allow a man to pay for the entire cost or a strong majority of the costs of a first date would create an obligation for women to reciprocate with a second date. In this way, South Korean women must pay in order to help mitigate the possibility of sexual and emotional abuse that could be brought on by becoming indebted to a man who is obliged to pay for a large portion or all of the costs of a first sogaeting date.

Conversely, what happens when women, who are economically marginalized systemically, cannot afford to pay in order to be left alone and not pursued? Like the economic hierarchy created between men of differing socioeconomic resources within the commodified dating marketplace, a similar situation occurs among South Korean women. Among my informants, women of lower socioeconomic means reported having to bear the burden of being unable to afford to stay out of undesirable men's debt, thus obligating them to become enmeshed in the reciprocity that South Korean dating culture demands. Younger women with higher levels of what Michelle Cho terms olgul-kap or *face value,* the exchange value of beauty, are able to overcome their lack of economic capital. Additionally, lower income women were more likely to rely on neo-traditional dating practices such as *sogaeting* in order to help mitigate these risks but which also limited their agency within the dating marketplace could ultimately reduce their ability to "marry up" to a higher socioeconomic status having been limited to their own social circles.

I found that the economic disparity between men and women informants in the early to mid-twenties was significantly less than that of older men and women informants. This is likely due to the egalitarianism of minimum wage, entry-level workplace compensation. Further, as time went on, men were promoted while women are expected to leave their job soon after

marrying or having children (Moon, 2001, 2005; Song, 2014). This is born out in my data where younger couples had significantly smaller wage-gaps between partners than couples in their late 20s and early 30s. This younger cohort also reported less conflict over splitting the costs of dates and smaller disparities in between men and women over total expenditures. This left women in their late 20s and early thirties as particularly vulnerable economically due to the increased wage gap with their partners but also because these women worried about becoming "left over women" and were thus more likely to use other types of dating that sogaeting where they had even less power in their intimate relationships. Women in their late 20s and early 30s felt more uneasy about dating a man with significantly greater income than themselves but also sometimes idealized marrying such a man for these same reasons.

On average, older female informants in their late 20s and early 30s faced larger income disparities with their dating partners and were cognizant that they had more power in their relationships when they were younger. However, economic inequality with a dating partner was not the only variable to consider. Candy, an unemployed 29-year-old woman who quit her job after experiencing depression and mental health issues, described how she felt women have much more power over their intimate relationships in their 20s rather than 30s. "Girls are kinda popular and on the top when, at 20s and 30s the boys on the top and man on the top… Men wears pants in 30s and girls wears pants in 20s." Despite their low incomes and the trend of dating a man who is usually 2-3 years older than themselves, women felt they had more power within their intimate relationship when they were younger. This demonstrates one way that youth and beauty are counted disproportionately for women in terms of their value within the South Korean dating and marriage market.

Meanwhile, upwardly mobile men experienced the exact opposite effects due to the commodification of intimacy, discovering that as their incomes rose, so too did their desirability in the dating and marriage marketplace. Eliot was one such male:

> Eliot: Umm, thirties but if they got a pretty good job like lawyer or medical doctor or like me, pilot, it's easier to get a good girl, pretty girl. But if I (am) dating with twenties I need to pay more than if I (am) dating with a thirties or the same age.
> Glayzer: So, twenty-year-old women are the most desirable category? They have the most relationship power?
> Eliot: Yeah exactly.

In fact, Eliot was actually able to extract resources from women older than himself because of his high desirability as a marriage partner due to his high income and social status.

> Eliot: A couple of month ago I dated with a twenties she was like umm twenty-eight years old. I paid like 80-90%. Now I am casually dating with a girl. She is 33 years old and she pays more (than me).
> Glayzer: Because she's older or because she makes more money?
> Elliot: In my age there's no one who makes more money than me. But anyways, I mean she need to get interest from me.
> Glayzer: So you think she's worried that she's getting older and that's why she need to pay?
> Eliot: Yeah. I guess so.

Despite Eliot's callous attitude towards women and his seeming openness to wielding his greater economic position within his intimate relationships to extract sexual and economic resources from women, many South Korean women seem to be similarly interested in exchanging the capital they possess within the intimate market in order to "buy" economic security. Perhaps a man that was a totally package, being wealthy kind towards women would be a better "purchase" for South Korean women but that too may come at an even higher price.

5.5. Conclusion

These observations indicate that women's power to influence the outcomes of their intimate relationships within the commodified dating and marriage marketplace is strongly linked to their youth and beauty. While the sexual field of competition for South Korean men is

more strongly linked to their traditional masculinity derived from their role as income provider, women's prescribed feminine role is that of attractor of men and consumers of gifts. The *erotic habitus* of South Korean collective system of dating partner evaluation and judgement recreates *structures of desire* across the dating marketplace even for those who do not necessarily share these same values but for which "all actors are obliged to consider should they wish to play the game" (Green, 2013). This is not to be reductivist, as if these are the only two factors that South Korean singles use to judge each other and inform decisions about who to date or marry. However, I do argue that the explicit commodification of intimacy in South Korea has helped to create a dating and marriage marketplace in which women feel *uncomfortable* dating men who have not been prescreened or vetted by close friends with strong social networks to police their behavior. Combined with a sexual field in which women generate significantly less income due to being systemically discriminated against in the job market, women navigate a complex dating landscape in order to avoid feel *uncomfortable,* becoming indebted to a man who might use his economic capital to extract sexual favors enforced by physical violence or emotional abuse. Women who lack the economic capital to pay for the costs of dates in order to express disinterest, or the *face value* of youth and beauty to equalize the balance of power within their intimate relationships are particularly vulnerable to feeling *uncomfortable*. While women must pay in order to show disinterest, men must pay in order to express their romantic feelings and intentions.

This same commodification of intimate relationships that defines a woman's value based on youth and beauty also narrowly defines men's value by their economic capital. Male informants complained that *sogaeting* felt like a job interview with prescriptive and predictable lines of questioning that stand in as proxies for their incomes, educations, and family

backgrounds. Some elite men who commanded the most economic capital wielded their increased power within their intimate relationships to extract further sexual services and avoid economic expenditure in the process. A preference for *sogaeting* among South Korean women meant that South Korean men of low economic means are forced into a system in which they feel compelled by traditional Confucian custom to pay for the majority of the costs of first and often times future dates. For these reasons, men of almost every economic status expressed concern over being taken advantage of by the "beautiful snakes" or "kimchi bitches," figures discussed frequently in South Korean social commentary and popular cultural discourse outlets. Further, low-income South Korean men express feelings of alienation from dating and intimate relationships due to their inability to express their very real feelings of romantic interests in a legible and culturally appropriate way through the purchase of commodities and dating expenses.

I have argued that *sogaeting* has developed into a system that South Korean women use as a check and balance against South Korean men who may abuse their greater economic capital to extract sexual or financial resources. This systematic inequality of economic capital is caused by the gender income gap, gender inequality, and discrimination in the workplace but is further exacerbated by a hyper-commodified dating culture in which gift-giving is nearly constant and expected. "*Sexual capital* situates actors differentially in the status order, conferring advantage on those who possess it, including rights of sexual choice, social significance, and group membership, and, conversely, invisibility, marginality, and, in some cases, stigma on those who do not" (Green, 2013). Comparing *sogaeting* with meeting naturally puts on display the negative consequences of gender inequality in South Korean society generally, but also how the commodification of intimacy has exacerbated these issues within intimate relationships specifically. "The evolution of Korean courtship practices provides one excellent example of

how notions of progress, of an enlightened "now" versus a repressive "then," mask the particular disadvantages for women in new forms of matrimonial negotiations, be they "matchmade" or "for love" (Kendall, 1996:91). While *sogaeting* seems to be a responsive attempt to limit or mitigate these negative consequences, in the following chapter, I explore the extent to which new technologies have been deployed to both further commodify intimate relationships but also feeling *uncomfortable* or avoid falling victim to a "beautiful snake."

CHAPTER 6:

THE COMMODIFICATION OF INTIMACY GOES HIGH-TECH: DATING APPLICATIONS AND MATCHMAKING AGENCIES

Are new technologies of intimate consumption emancipatory and will they help to improve gender equality?

6.1. Introduction: The Commodification of Intimacy and Online Dating

Figure 8: Notebook Covers
Two notebook covers found at Kyobo, a popular chain of bookstores.
Left: "If I study for ten more minutes, my [future] wife's face will change."
Right" "If I study for ten more minutes, my [future] husband's job will change."

Powered by the internet, dating applications such as Tinder have the potential to disrupt and subvert existing hegemonic male power structures by providing their matching services for free or little cost. The high costs of maintaining a relationship with near constant gift-giving and the expense of dating outside of the home discussed in previous chapters could be subverted by free dating applications. However, South Korean singles do not use these free apps due to deeply held fears of meeting someone from outside of their social network. The emancipatory power of

new technologies of intimate consumption such as the internet are interrupted by the desires of South Korean singles to screen for potential abusers. Online matchmaking agencies who perform such services are expensive and reintroduce economic inequalities and hegemonic male power back into intimate relationships. South Koreans exploit the internet to discover new social groups and extend the reach of their existing social networks through Meetup groups and hobbies rather than deploying dating applications more directly to find a dating partner. However, I will argue that the rise of online dating in South Korea and its intensive commodification has actually led to the retrenchment of existing gender norms and ideals rather than their subversion.

Economic development in the form of capitalism's expansion, female participation within the labor force, and the adoption of new technologies are assumed to contribute to this gender egalitarianism. The decline in bridewealth payments, arranged marriages, and the corresponding rise in "love marriages" in South Korea over the last century would seem to indicate greater gender equality and female agency in the selection of intimate partners. However, as I have pointed out in the previous three chapters, the commodification of dating rituals in the form of ever-expanding couples' holidays and the manifestation of male hegemonic power in the form of economic domination and intimate partner violence demonstrate exceptions to these assumptions. Scholars have pointed out how new technologies of communication and intimate consumption, especially the internet, have been adopted in order to subvert older forms of male hegemony (Agustin, 2007; Bernstein, 2010; Brennan, 2004) and parental control (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014). In her annual review of the commodification of intimacy Nicole Constable writes that "internet technology plays a central role in the commodification of intimacy and in shaping new movements and geographic and electronic landscapes of intimacy" (Constable, 2009:53). The persistence of gender inequality in South Korea despite tremendous economic development

and technological advancement will be the subject of this chapter. By examining the utilization of internet technologies to search for a dating partner I am able to ask whether or not the commodification of intimacy is actually on the rise or if it simply makes explicit and visible existing commodification.

Besides highlighting an important role that the internet plays in creating new online "landscapes of intimacy" Constable (2009) also points out the ways in which the internet can be used to subvert existing gender norms and conventions:

> Globalization does not simply result in greater commodification of intimate sexual, marital, and reproductive relationships; it also offers opportunities for defining new sorts of relationships and for redefining spaces, meanings, and expressions of intimacy that can transform and transgress conventional gendered spaces and norms. (Constable, 2009:53)

This recognizes that there are risks and benefits associated with the commodification of intimacy and these tradeoffs are the subject of this chapter.

6.2. South Korean Technological Adoption

South Korea has famously been described as the "most wired" nation in the world with fast, cheap internet being fed into 99.2% of households (Herz, 2002). The ubiquitous *PC bangs* (high speed internet gaming cafes), spread thickly throughout urban and rural South Korea, serve as important sites of socialization for South Korean youth desperate to escape the prying eyes of their parents. South Korea is also exceptional for being almost gender equal in terms of online gaming with a 55.3 percent male and 44.7 percent female split (K. H. Kim & Choe, 2014). Women's interest and participation in social online gaming at *PC bangs* has even spawned a novel type of dating called Lighting Dating or *bungaeting. Bungaeting* occurs when two singles who met virtually while playing video games meet up in person at a *PC bang.* The exponential proliferation of *PC bangs* across South Korea allowed the internet to become both a physical and

mental “Escape from, old-style mores that many find oppressive, especially the young" thanks to its anonymous nature (Macintyre, 2000:63). However, this same anonymity has also contributed to its rejection by mainstream South Korean society as a method for finding an intimate dating partner. This is in spite of the internet being a force for gender equality in other aspects of South Korean society outside of dating.

South Korea’s conservative gender dynamics combined with some of the fastest and cheapest internet in the world would seem to be a recipe for the proliferation of online dating and dating applications. However, my research on South Korean dating culture shows little interest among the majority of my informants in utilizing the internet to meet new singles. In fact, many characterized the sexual field of South Korean dating applications as too dangerous to consider.

6.3. Why Do South Koreans Shun Online Dating?

The introduction of new technologies such as the internet are frequently associated with rapid adoption by the marginalized in order to subvert existing power and norms (Watson, 2006). Yet, I did not find widespread adoption and use of the internet to find dates that you might expect as a respite from the prying eyes of helicopter parents and the crushing effects of Hell Joseon in Seoul. Instead, I found that the online South Korean sexual field of Tinder and other dating apps was mainly inhabited by two different groups of people. The first of these groups were South Koreans who were attempting to escape the broader South Korean dating and marriage marketplace through the acquisition of Western cultural capital. Tinder’s American ownership and high levels of use among South Korea’s native English-speaking populations allowed its South Korean members to acquire Western cultural capital via free opportunities to practice English, an opportunity many private academies charge top dollar for. While some in

this group were looking to date with other native South Koreas, many were open to dating or even marrying a foreign dating partner. The second main group of Tinder users was made up of South Korean singles, uninterested in Western cultural capital, who were looking for dating partners but were somehow marginalized within the competitive sexual dating field. Amongst my particular informants this marginalization was due to physical disability, sexual minority, or being a "leftover" person past the imaginary ideal age of marriage. Here, I use the term sexual minority to be inclusive of the LGBTQ community but also those with particular sexual desires, fetishes, and other preferences that would cause them to seek dating partners online rather than through friendship and family social networks. Marginalization within the sexual field of South Korean dating was often gendered, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the form of demasculated low-income men or women who were considered sexually unattractive by South Korean beauty standards.

To be clear, dating applications have proliferated in South Korea with Tinder being by far the most commonly used. However, among my informants few singles admitted to having tried or even having a desire to try online dating. Only 8.5% of survey respondents reported that they used dating applications "often," and 81% of those surveyed reported having never or rarely used them. Given these realities, along with South Korea's long history of utilizing third party matchmakers to find marriage partners, and the early proliferation of smartphones, it is surprising how few of my informants cited the use of dating applications in their search for love and intimacy. Despite the perceived dangers of meeting people from online dating applications, the internet has proven to be emancipatory for some South Korean singles, especially the LGBT community and those that use apps to find foreign dating partners or spouses. However, another way in which South Korean dating has subverted traditional power structures is the linkage

between dating and online gaming. The ubiquitous *PC Bangs* scattered throughout every residential neighborhood of Seoul serve as safe physical meeting places for men and women who met for the first time virtually. *PC Bangs* catering to couples have a couple's section featuring two computers together with a bench or high back couch where men and women can play together. As a story in wired magazine in 2002 wrote of these "love stations:"

> In Seoul, the broadband age is in full swing – online games have become a national sport, and cybercafes are the new singles bars… A hundred monitors glow with the candy colors of computer games. There are also a handful of "loveseat" stations, outfitted with two computers and a double-wide bench. Theoretically, this is so guys can play video games while their girlfriends' video-chat with pals. If you really watch the love seats, though, it becomes apparent that they're not so much a porch swing as an Internet-mediated bar stool. Every so often a girl will saunter by one of the stations, eye the occupant, and then sit down — or not. As it turns out, singles are video-chatting in game rooms all over town. If they hit it off, the guy says something like, "I'm sitting at love seat number 47 at this particular PC bang, if you'd care to join me." If the girl is sufficiently intrigued, she hops on the subway or walks — nothing is more than 20 minutes away in central Seoul. She cruises by, checks him out, and if she likes the look of him in person she sits down, hoping the lighting and shading algorithms she used to enhance her features in the video chat don't make her seem unglamorous in person.

Eighteen different dating applications and websites were identified but dating applications were rarely described as being a favorite or often used method of finding a dating partner. Individuals who did use dating applications valued the ability to meet various kinds of individuals, including native English speakers and LGBTQ members. The lack of mainstream popularity of dating applications is evidenced by the two groups that make up the majority of its users, which are marginalized people within the South Korean sexual field and those wishing to escape South Korea and its sexual field entirely. While new technologies such as the internet and internet dating applications were an emancipatory technology for these two groups, especially those in the LGBTQ community, these benefits have not reached the majority of the population. Gender non-conforming participants and those that identified as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender relied much more heavily on the use of online dating apps to find romantic partners than heterosexual cisgender individuals. For these same reasons they also tended to prefer dating outside of their existing social networks due to stigmatization of sexual minorities like

themselves and the stigma associated with dating non-Koreans. There are multiple reasons for this, but I argue that one contributing factor is the commodification of intimacy, an effect that has been magnified by the development of an expensive online dating marketplace.

6.4. South Korean Online Dating is Extensively Commodified

Some South Korean singles enjoyed the free or low cost of apps such as Tinder while decrying the high cost of others such as I-um which charges membership fees starting around 80,000 won ($80). However, free dating applications with little ritualism or formal structure such as Tinder were highly suspect by my informants who felt that these apps did not provide systems of checks and balances or screening in order to make them feel *pyeonhada*, or "comfortable." Still some other applications charge per message sent to other users that you want to chat with. Besides their cost structures, dating applications also varied in the ways in which they matched and screened potential dating partners such as by match score based on questionnaire, geographic distance, criminal history, or filtered search results based on demographic questions like age, sexual orientation, occupation, height, or even astrological sign.

Heterosexual South Korean singles looking to meet other South Korean singles felt more *pyeonhada* (comfortable) using internet-based dating applications and services with more stringent screening, which were often the more expensive online matchmaking companies. However, due to these costs, these services were also suspected of not having the customer's best interests because of the intrusion of the marketplace. I argue that the South Korean online sexual field is extensively commodified and that this commodification is due to South Korean singles' strong preference for prescreen dating candidates. However, while many of my informants expressed fears of being duped by unscreened dating partners on free applications such as

Tinder, many also distrusted pay-to-play dating applications due to the financial incentive these companies had to find them a match. The extensive commodification of intimacy and commodification of dating rituals severely limits South Korean singles' ability to use the internet as an emancipatory technology. Further, the commodification of online dating applications recreates and contributes to gender inequality.

Like many of my informants who preferred meeting dating partners via *sogaeting*, South Korean singles expressed the dangers involved in using dating apps. Jane, a 28- year-old female university professor's assistant explained that she stopped using dating applications because of worries of being lied to by men whose backgrounds have not been vetted by her friends and who could be economically, physically or sexually abusive saying, "I do not know exactly who I am meeting. I do not want to be fooled by my dating partner. I do not think I will use it anymore. I think it is dangerous in Korean society." South Korean singles strongly preferred dating other singles within their immediate social networks in order to avoid these types of abuse. These fears were amplified considerably when discussing with my informants the prospect of using dating applications to find dating partners. However, they also feared another type of manipulation; the distortion or exaggerate of "specs" (스펙), demographic information such as income, education, and family background.

South Korean women expressed discomfort about using online dating because it is easy for men to lie about their "specs" such as academic or employment history. As Karen, the same 23-year-old woman from above explained when I asked her about using free apps such as Tinder:

> Most of my friends are university students and... do you know about (South) Korean university hierarchy? In (South) Korea, there's a lot of college rankings, so my friends don't really want to meet someone from a lower academic background. But there are many different kinds of applications for that. Universities vary a lot. So, ought to… so. But my friends want to meet (people) from higher universities. So they don't use that kind (Tinder) of app.

Karen is afraid that men on Tinder can easily lie about their educational background while also illustrating many South Korean women's desires for hypergamy, one of the few routes of social mobility available to them.

There are dating apps specific to students and graduates from all of the elite SKY (Seoul, Korea, Yonsei) universities. In fact, the importance of educational background in finding a partner is so critical that in 2012 a dating website called snulove.net was created that is strictly for graduates of Seoul National University, largely considered one of the elitist universities. As one 28-year-old woman explained, "SNULOVE is a really casual, laid-back place where you can set yourself up for a blind date. And since everyone is from SNU, I can focus on the person's personality, not having to worry about educational background." The creator of the website, a 30-year-old male SNU computer programmer explained that he wanted to create a way for people *sogaeting* online "with fewer acquaintances and less money involved" and where the only criteria for joining is being a student of SNU or a graduate from there. A nice thought, with the supposed intention of decommodifying the search for a dating partner. However, the exclusion of non SNU graduates from the site serves as a classist screening process in itself and ultimately does not help to emancipate women from economic domination within a commodified dating market.

Alvin is a 31-year-old graduate student at one of these elite universities and majoring in the humanities. His experience using a South Korea specific dating application highlights the importance he feels that South Korean society places on looks, status, and "specs," especially in the dating marketplace. During one of our interviews, he pulled out his phone in frustration.

> I'll show you. Ok, so this is Amanda and this is what I got. 88% or 3.66666. That's me. That's my grade! I passed. Amanda is like that. Everything is appearances. Appearances are everything! So, I uploaded three pictures with Photoshop. Just a little bit of Photoshop because everybody Photoshops. Then the women, they rate me.

By receiving a "passing" grade from other Amanda users, this man was able to join the pool of attractive daters. In fact, the South Korean catchphrase that translate to "because you don't meet just anyone" (아무나 만나지 않는 당신을 위한 소개팅) is an acronym for the applications name, Amanda (아만다). A few Caucasian friends of mine who had stayed long enough in South Korea to gain a national ID number and join Amanda were then rejected by the administrators for not looking South Korean. This demonstrates how potential users of the Amanda app are policed and screened by both its users and its makers. However, screening potential users based on their appearances is only one of the many ways in which their user base is screened. The Amanda app is also highly commodified. This commodification of combined with its screening of users' appearances essentially commodifies beauty itself.

The Amanda app also imposes significant transactional costs in order to message other users and there are no other criteria for being able to join other than the grading of Photoshopped images by other users.

> I mean I can't believe it. I think I just was like, wasting my money… Well if you want to start a conversation with the girls then it costs about 500 won. It's quite cheap but she can ignore (me) so... oh my god! Do you want to talk to this guy? Then (she) rejects (my message) and my 500 won disappears.

Like other dating applications such as Tinder, Amanda users such as my informant worry about fake profiles and information online. He told me that after spending a significant amount of money, too embarrassed to give me an exact figure, sending various women 500 won ($0.50) messages he came to believe that many of the profiles were fakes. He, and other Amanda users, worry that the app developers have an incentive to create fake profiles of beautiful women that many men will pay to send messages to but never receive replies from. My informant also complained bitterly after I had asked him if his elite education at Seoul National University helped him find dates. He laughed, "Not school. School is quite meaningless. Not meaningless

but SNU doesn't guarantee your quality of life anymore in a changing society. So yeah money or appearances." I asked which one was the most important and he said, "Money for men. Appearances for women."

Peter, a low income 37-year-old man living in an international youth hostel with eight other men in room full of bunkbeds near my *goshiwon* and whom I met at an English language exchange event had a similar experience when using NoonDate (정오의 데이트). However, his experience using the app further highlights the extent to which dating in South Korea has become commodified, disenchanting many low-income South Korean men. After telling the story of his foray into South Korean dating applications he explained that he paid money on NoonDate twice in order to send messages to women he was interested in but did not receive a return message in either case. He felt that if you wanted to be successful in the dating marketplace on the NoonDate platform, you had to spend significantly more money. I asked Peter how much he thought he would have to spend to get a response and he replied,

> "Uh… it depends what kind of message I use. I mean if you, if the message, message template. If the message template looks very luxurious, then it's more expensive. I didn't use a luxurious template. I just plain, I just send the message. 'Nice to meet you'"

Peter felt that if you really wanted to have a chance at getting a return message, you had to invest in a luxurious looking message template and that women would take you more seriously the more money you spent. "If you pay more money and use a more luxurious template, you think you would be more likely to get a return (message)?" I asked. "I think so because women, they feel… it's more… I mean, sincere. That I am more devoted,[3]" he replied. "Because you're spending more money?" I asked. "Yeah. Spend money! Money can make sincerity" he responded. In this way, Peter is doubly penalized. Firstly, for his occupation

[3] They actually used the Korean term "더 정성을 들이다," which means "to put more effort into."

description on his profile which states that he is a part-timer, and secondly, for having to send less expensive looking messages to potential dating partners. These examples also mirror informants' comments about the ways in which gifts during couples' holiday dating events come to symbolize the extent and depth of feelings of the dating couple as discussed in Chapter 4.

Every dating application is different, but most have this same structure built in to maximize profits. For example, one respondent reported that the dating application, IM8 charged couples who had matched on their site 250,000 ($250) won to be able to contact each other. The maximization of profits, or the market incentive placed on the search for intimate partners, creates and recreates both gender and economic inequalities that exist within South Korean society more broadly.

Online dating presents significant challenges for low-income men but also for upper- and middle-class men as well. While many of my female informants worried about the risks of sexual or physical violence when meeting people through dating applications, having not been vetted by their social circles, men had no such fears. However, they did fear the "beautiful snake" (꽃 Flower, 뱀 Snake) Tyson, the 36-year-old pharmacist explained in interview:

> Glayzer: What about when you date online? Is that risky or dangerous?
> Tyson: It's… it's…. I cannot. I cannot (know) who she is… yeah. She can… She can…. Lie (about her) university or major, the job. You cannot know it. And you know, online meetings are too dangerous. Do you know Beautiful Snake?
> Glayzer: What is it?
> Tyson: After having sex and she sue.
> Glayzer: So, she claims that you raped her or something like that? Is that common?
> Tyson: Sometimes. Sometimes. And even in Taxi, even in taxi and the taxi… the taxi…. she… she proposed to her the taxi driver, "let's go to a hotel". And….
> Glayzer: And then sues...
> Tyson: And then let's talk… Flower and then snake. Yeah, Beautiful snake."

Here we see similar patterns presented in the previous chapter with *sogaeting* and meeting naturally. Men fear meeting someone who is unvetted because they may take advantage of them economically while worrying about being taken advantage of physically and emotionally for the

same reasons. At the time of my interviews, many men brought up the "Pence rule." The Pence rule is in reference to the Vice President of the United States who had stated that he does not eat alone with women or attend events where there was alcohol and his wife was not present. While it is unclear exactly why Pence himself follows this rule, some male South Korean informants praised it as a "good idea" in South Korea because they feared being falsely accused of sexual misconduct. Hence, South Korean men expressed a preference for dating partners who were within their social network or vetted by a dating agency.

6.5. South Korean Matchmakers Go High-tech and High Priced

Outside of the relatively Westernized Tinder and its particular clientele, South Korean online dating and matchmaking services are highly commodified. This commodification is both a major strength and weakness of these services according to my informants who express suspicion of these profit motives while also being weary of free services that could be potentially more egalitarian, like Tinder which lets "just anyone" use them. One of the most visible and expensive services that provides an extensive screening process is Duo, a modern online matchmaking service that competes with other commodified dating apps. In an explanation of their matching system on their website reads, "The great thing about DUO services, unlike online dating apps, is that each member is assigned to his or her own couple manager who will work together with the member throughout the entire membership term to determine the member's ideal type." It is the addition of a couple manager that screens potential dating partners and forms a bond of trust in order to connect socially disconnected singles that helps customers feel comfortable but also adds to their considerable expense.

As with dating applications, there are also widespread fears of being duped by couple matching companies. Elenore explained one iteration of this fear, being tricked into paying for dates with actors in a scam organized by the matchmaking service.

> I heard what they do is when a girl, when a woman gets, um, application and pay, they employ some random guys to be dating with the girl, a few times, and just they just count it as the first date, second, third… They just hire people for just dating, and they get paid just… because, because people, a woman pays for like... such as three additional dates, and the company hires like one or two guys for counting dating."

In this iteration, Duo charges so much money for women to meet potential matches for dates that they can afford to also pay actors to play the part of highly desirable male suitors.

The use of matchmakers which have a long history in South Korea (Kendall, 1996). Similarly, the fear of being duped by a matchmaker that is motivated more by profit than by initiating the best matches also has a long history. Professional matchmakers and matchmaking companies are big business in South Korea. Duo, one of the largest such companies, claims a membership of around 29,000 subscribers with subscription fees ranging from 1 million to 4 million won ($1,000 to $4,000) with additional add on fees for other services. Like other matchmaking companies, Duo takes a systematic approach to dating partner selection where each subscriber completes a 150-question survey asking about their character, family, education, income, debt, height, weight, smoking and drinking habits, occupation, hobbies, and desired characteristics of their future partner. Family background is also critical. This survey asks about the subscriber's parents' occupations and education, requiring documentary proof to back up their claims. Afterwards, subscribers are introduced with 3-5 "suitable" dating partners.

"Suitable" dating partners requires some explanation and has become the object of criticism among South Korean social commentators. Images like these have made the rounds among news outlets and social media where individuals who subscribe to various matchmaking companies are ranked or given grades such as an "A" person or a "B" or "C" person, for

example. The variables upon which each individual is ranked varies from company to company but also by gender.

Duo advertising was everywhere in Seoul during my field research in Seoul. Along with advertisements for couples' rings, plastic surgery, and the latest fashion trends in image sensitive South Korea, Duo advertisements were especially prominent in my trendy Gangnam neighborhood. Duo was also at the forefront of many of my informants' minds when discussing the economic costs of dating and marriage. As these ads depict, with the copy reading "married Duo," Duo advertises itself as a marriage service rather than a dating service.

Figure 9: Duo Subway Advertisements

While Duo USA is somewhat upfront about the costs of their service, $200 non-refundable initial registration fee, the Duo South Korea page has no information about fees or cost structure requiring you to first login. This opacity of costs fueled speculation among my informants about the unequal cost structure of the service. As Turnbull (2020) points out in an online article about Duo,

> Women dominate the clientele at (South) Korean marriage agencies, which is often used to justify extra costs for joining. But this differential pricing goes well beyond just sex, both reflecting and shaping consumers' notions of the "perfect" wife too. And it seems she's neither highly-educated, highly-earning, nor even over 32. (Turnbull, 2020)

Online marriage agencies and matchmakers have significantly more women than men subscribed to their services (Turnbull, 2020). Large companies like DUO and Gayeon report a 6:4 ration but some smaller agencies have been reported to be as high as 9:1. In a 2018 interview with Na Jin-Hee at the news outlet Segye Ilbo, an anonymous former agency employee was quoted saying:

> As there are fewer men, they naturally receive preferential service. "Professional" men [e.g., lawyers, doctors, and Samsung employees] receive discounts on membership fees, or may have them waived altogether. They get many more dates arranged [than women do] too. (Jin-hee, 2018)

In another article by the same author, the anonymous source reported that their agency employed fake customer profiles in order to lure in more clients and even out their sex ratios. One of the consequences of these unequal sex ratios among marriage agencies and online matchmakers is that women must pay higher fees in order to use their services, disadvantaging them in the sexual field. This is especially true of lower-income women but also women whose "specs" do not conform to South Korean traditional standards of what makes a "good wife." For example, it was recently disclosed that Duo charges 1.5 million won ($1,500) for five arranged meetings but other packages they offer can cost as much as 10 million won ($10,000). Concrete numbers and averages are hard to come by but stories of men who negotiate much lower prices or who pay nothing at all due to their excellent "specs" are numerous.

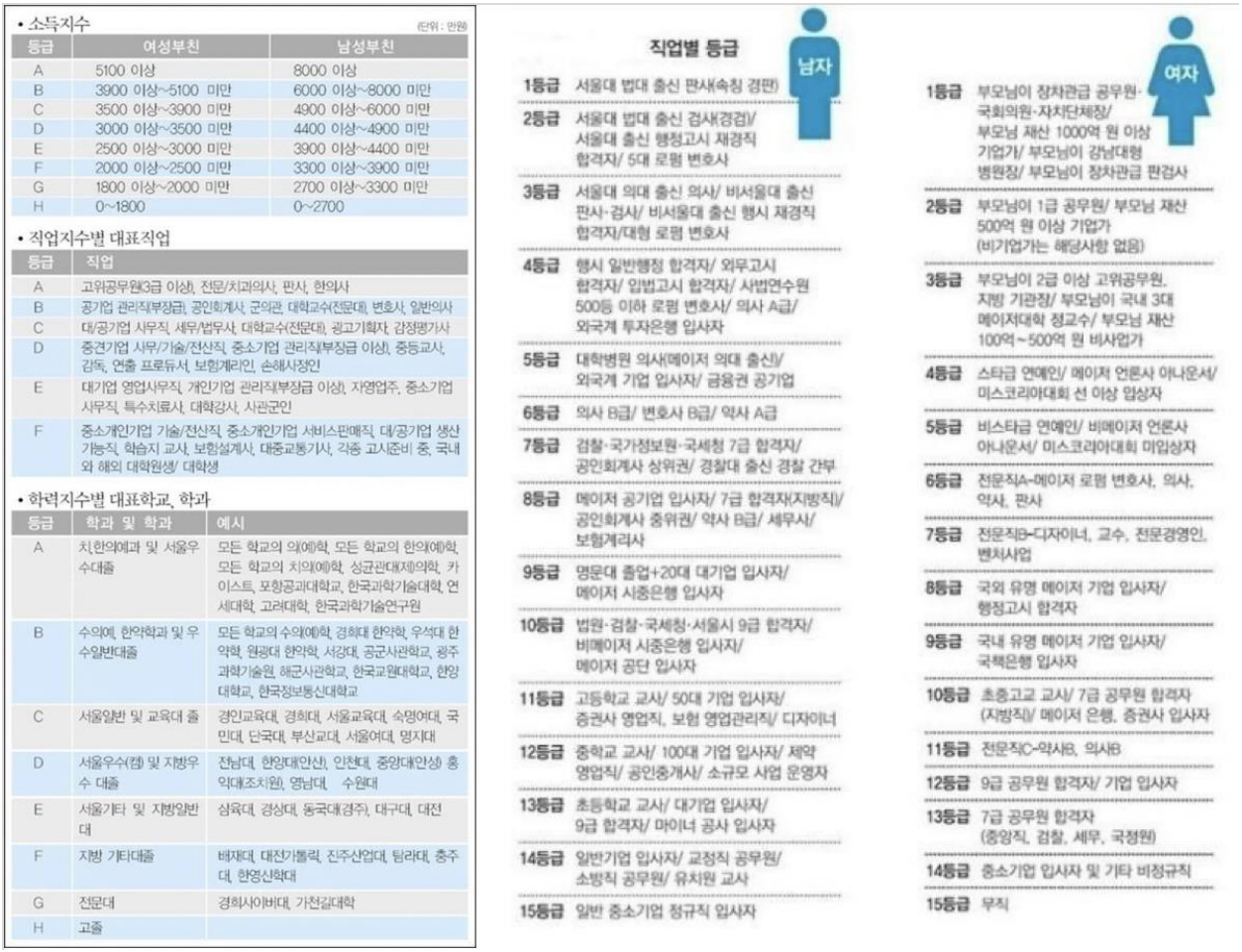
Alternatively, women with "good specs" such as extensive education and higher income will be required to pay more in order to join the dating service because marriage agencies believe that men prefer women with "worse specs" than themselves. Older women must also pay more than younger women with prices rising steeply after the age of 35. As of 2017 the average marriage age for South Korean women was 30.2, and for men 32.9. Whether or not these agencies are responding to or completely shaping the South Korean dating market is an open question beyond the scope of this research. However, I have gone into some depth in order to show that the commodification of intimacy creates and reinforces existing inequalities. New

technologies of intimate consumption, in this case online marriage agencies, make these inequalities more explicit.

One of the ways that online marriage agencies has made the unequal South Korean sexual field more explicit is the use of dating and marriage rating charts to divide their clients into groups, sometimes using a letter grade. Many of the "specs" on these charts are focused on income, job title, education, and parental class background. However, while one the purposes of the charts is to match South Korean singles with others who are from similar class backgrounds, they are also highly gendered. This can be seen in two of these leaked charts below that have been circulating the internet from unnamed matchmaking companies.

In these charts, men are ranked highly for their own achievements such as their income and job titles while women are ranked higher for their parent's achievements, usually the father's income. The charts are a reflection of the South Korean marriage marketplace where men are judged by their ability to achieve high incomes and women are judged based on their ability to adhere to what a "good wife" means, with her parent's class background and her educational achievements being used as a proxy. The following chart appeared in a 2016 news article about these spec ranking systems. Men's scores were weighted based 30% on their job, 25% on their education, 20% on their parent's income, 20% on how much money the man has in savings, and 5% on his appearances. Alternatively, women's scores were based 40% on their appearance, 20% on their parent's income, 20% on their job, 10% on their education, and 10% on how much money the woman has in savings (Park, 2016). These ranking systems vary from one matchmaking company to another and the charts are often kept a secret. However, the explicit nature of the existence of such ranking systems lays bare the discriminatory nature of the dating

and marriage marketplace in South Korea. This inequality takes place not just between men and women but also between men and women of different classes and ranks.



• 소득지수

등급	여성부친	남성부친
A	5100 이상	8000 이상
B	3900 이상~5100 미만	6000 이상~8000 미만
C	3500 이상~3900 미만	4900 이상~6000 미만
D	3000 이상~3500 미만	4400 이상~4900 미만
E	2500 이상~3000 미만	3900 이상~4400 미만
F	2000 이상~2500 미만	3300 이상~3900 미만
G	1800 이상~2000 미만	2700 이상~3300 미만
H	0~1800	0~2700

• 직업지수별 대표직업

등급	직업
A	고위공무원3급 이상), 전문/치과의사, 판사, 한의사
B	공기업 관리직(부장급), 공인회계사, 군의관, 대학교수(전문대), 변호사, 일반의사
C	대/공기업 사무직, 세무/법무사, 대학교수(전문대), 공고기획자, 감정평가사
D	중견기업 사무/기술/전산직, 중소기업 관리직부장급 이상), 중등교사, 감독, 연출 프로듀서, 보험계리인, 손해사정인
E	대기업 영업사무직, 개인기업 관리직(부장급 이상), 자영업주, 중소기업 사무직, 특수치료사, 대학강사, 사관군인
F	중소개인기업 기술/전산직, 중소개인기업 서비스판매직, 대/공기업 생산 기능직, 학습지 교사, 보험설계사, 대중교통기사, 각종 고시준비 중, 국내와 해외 대학원생/ 대학생

• 학력지수별 대표학교, 학과

등급	학과 및 학과	예시
A	치한의예과 및 서울우수대졸	모든 학교의 의(예)학, 모든 학교의 한의(예)학, 모든 학교의 치의(예)학, 성균관대제의학, 카이스트, 포항공과대학교, 한국과학기술대학, 연세대학, 고려대학, 한국과학기술연구원
B	수의예, 한약학과 및 우수일본대졸	모든 학교의 수의(예)학, 경희대 한약학, 우석대 한약학, 원광대 한약학, 서강대, 공군사관학교, 광주과학기술원, 해군사관학교, 한국교원대학교, 한양대학교, 한국정보통신대학교
C	서울일본 및 교육대 졸	경인교육대, 경희대, 서울교육대, 숙명여대, 국민대, 단국대, 부산교대, 서울여대, 명지대
D	서울우수(캠) 및 지방우수 대졸	전남대, 한양대안산), 인천대, 중앙대안성) 홍익대조치원), 영남대, 수원대
E	서울기타 및 지방일본대	삼육대, 경상대, 동국대경주), 대구대, 대전
F	지방 기타대졸	배재대, 대전기톨릭, 진주산업대, 탐라대, 충주대, 한영신학대
G	전문대	경희사이버대, 가천길대학
H	고졸	

직업별 등급

남자

1등급	서울대 법대 출신 판사(속칭 경판)
2등급	서울대 법대 출신 검사(경검)/ 서울대 출신 행정고시 재경직 합격자/ 5대 로펌 변호사
3등급	서울대 의대 출신 의사/ 비서울대 출신 판사·검사/ 비서울대 출신 행시 재경직 합격자/대형 로펌 변호사
4등급	행시 일반행정 합격자/ 외무고시 합격자/ 입법고시 합격자/ 사법연수원 500등 이하 로펌 변호사/ 의사 A급/ 외국계 투자은행 입사자
5등급	대학병원 의사(메이저 의대 출신)/ 외국계 기업 입사자/ 금융권 공기업
6등급	의사 B급/ 변호사 B급/ 약사 A급
7등급	검찰·국가정보원·국세청 7급 합격자/ 공인회계사 상위권/ 경찰대 출신 경찰 간부
8등급	메이저 공기업 입사자/ 7급 합격자(지방직)/ 공인회계사 중위권/ 약사 B급/ 세무사/ 보험계리사
9등급	명문대 졸업+20대 대기업 입사자/ 메이저 시중은행 입사자
10등급	법원·검찰·국세청·서울시 9급 합격자/ 비메이저 시중은행 입사자/ 메이저 공단 입사자
11등급	고등학교 교사/ 50대 기업 입사자/ 증권사 영업직, 보험 영업관리직/ 디자이너
12등급	중학교 교사/ 100대 기업 입사자/ 제약 영업직/ 공인중개사/ 소규모 사업 운영자
13등급	초등학교 교사/ 대기업 입사자/ 9급 합격자/ 마이너 공사 입사자
14등급	일반기업 입사자/ 교정직 공무원/ 소방직 공무원/ 유치원 교사
15등급	일반 중소기업 정규직 입사자

여자

1등급	부모님이 장차관급 공무원·국회의원·자치단체장/ 부모님 재산 1000억 원 이상 기업가/ 부모님이 강남대형 병원장/ 부모님이 장차관급 판검사
2등급	부모님이 1급 공무원/ 부모님 재산 500억 원 이상 기업가 (비기업가는 해당사항 없음)
3등급	부모님이 2급 이상 고위공무원, 지방 기관장/ 부모님이 국내 3대 메이저대학 정교수/ 부모님 재산 100억~500억 원 비사업가
4등급	스타급 연예인/ 메이저 언론사 아나운서/ 미스코리아대회 선 이상 입상자
5등급	비스타급 연예인/ 비메이저 언론사 아나운서/ 미스코리아대회 미입상자
6등급	전문직A-메이저 로펌 변호사, 의사, 약사, 판사
7등급	전문직B-디자이너, 교수, 전문경영인, 벤처사업
8등급	국외 유명 메이저 기업 입사자/ 행정고시 합격자
9등급	국내 유명 메이저 기업 입사자/ 국책은행 입사자
10등급	초중고교 교사/ 7급 공무원 합격자 (지방직)/ 메이저 은행, 증권사 입사자
11등급	전문직C-약사B, 의사B
12등급	9급 공무원 합격자/ 기업 입사자
13등급	7급 공무원 합격자 (중앙직, 검찰, 세무, 국정원)
14등급	중소기업 입사자 및 기타 비정규직
15등급	무직

Figure 10: Matchmaking Company Ranking Charts
Left chart, Top Section, Parent Income Index, Left Side: Women, Right Side: Men.
Left Chart, Middle Section, Job Index
Left Chart, Bottom Section, Education Index
Right Chart, Left Section, Man's job
Right Chart, Right Section, Women's Job

The discriminatory nature of these ranking systems is an open secret among South Korean singles. Although many South Korean singles are well aware that these ranking systems are partly a reflection of actual preferences within the South Korean sexual field, many people

shun the system entirely. Heidy, a 30-year-old a freelance writer and travel enthusiast explains her reasons for shunning online marriage agencies:

> Glayzer: Have you ever used an online matchmaking agency, like Duo?
> Heidy: No, no, no, no, no, no, no.
> Glayzer: You've never used it?
> Heidy: Usually those companies have grades for customers, and I knew that I was not going to get a good price (because I would not be graded high), so okay.
> Glayzer: I'm really curious about the grading. I want to join one, just to see what grade I would get… But why do you think your grade would be low?
> Heidy: Because, in case of a man, the grades can be… it's about their job and then their parents. But in the case of a woman, their parents are the most important and then their job and then their like, specialties, for what they studied and what is their job. So basically, in the case of a woman, it's gathered by family status. And my family is like… middle class, teachers and so… I kind of knew that like the first grade is like… if their father or mother was a government officer, like chief of the government officer or like enterprise or company owners, that's kind of how rich they are. And I know that I'm in the middle class, so those companies will not be the greatest option for me.
> Glayzer: Do you think those companies only get high-class people? Or are you afraid of being matched with another middle-class person? Do you want to be matched with a high-class person and you think the application won't do that?
> Heidy: Well, since I, in case of the application, I kind of do not like it, because I don't know."

Heidy's example illustrates how some singles are effectively excluded from certain sexual fields due to their pay-to-play commodification combined with hegemonic gender inequality. Besides retrenching male hegemonic power and gender inequality, these ranking systems also demonstrate how inequality between classes are also reproduced.

Figure 11: Weighted Spec Ranking Chart

Eleanor, a 30-year-old graduate student majoring in literature had recently used a couples' matching service called GaYeon (가연), the second most popular after Duo, or "Good Match" to help her find a suitable partner for dating or marriage. However, she stopped using their services shortly after her counseling appointment because she felt their service was "too commercial." Eleanor reported that the matching company charged women a higher fee than men in order to make a date.

> Eleanor: And they said women should pay more money because women are expecting social status. So, like upgrading.
> Glayzer: You have to pay more money to be in the company?
> Eleanor: Yea. To get matched with guys. Because women are expecting more, uh, higher like... upgrade social status.
> Glayzer: Oh. What do men want?
> Eleanor: They want only pretty women. That's it. It sucks!

Additionally, Joan found out that her ranking within the dating company, despite her excellent education, would be middling due to her having spent significant time abroad. She felt that the reason for this was South Korean cultural conservatism, that if a man were to report significant time spent abroad that it would actually raise his ranking within the matchmaking company, not lower it. I asked Joan, a 30-year-old woman software developer currently living in the US why her time spent abroad would lower her ranking with the matchmaking agencies.

> Joan: Because they didn't live with their parents for a while. That means they didn't get to take care of their parents, or being like, pure? How do you say that?
> Glayzer: So, they are worried about virginity?
> Joan: Exactly!

The idea that South Korean women become less desirable within the dating market after living abroad due to the exposure to foreign men was not a new concept to me. I have kept in touch with two South Korean women that I dated when I lived in Seoul while working as an English librarian in 2010. Though neither had ever spent much time traveling or living outside of South Korea, they both complained to me that South Korean men look down on them for having dated a foreigner. Both eventually began excluding the disclosure of their foreigner dating history to

new dating partners. However, it would seem that South Korean women who have traveled or spent significant amounts of time studying abroad would be incapable of such omissions and it becomes assumed that they have dated with foreign men. This puts South Korean women who go abroad at a significant disadvantage within the dating market despite the fact that they are likely to have traveled abroad in order to attend a university or improve their language skills, both of which could potentially vastly improve their earning power and job prospects upon their return to South Korea. It also disenfranchises heterosexual women who have used Tinder. With its connotations of being open to dating with foreigners, many South Korean women keep their use of the application a secret. These facts are likely contributing factors to my findings that South Korean women who have lived abroad sometimes swear off further dating with South Korean men. However, this is not the only reason as Grace, the 31-year-old ICU Nurse with experience living abroad describes her experience when meeting with a Duo counselor.

> Grace: Yes, I went to a counseling meeting with Duo and they wanted to match me with some guys but they wanted money. (laughing) They asked me for a lot of money!
> Glayzer: Oh, was the counseling free?
> Grace: Yes, that was free.
> Glayzer: And then how much did they want you to pay?
> Grace: 5,000,000 won ($5,000)!
> Glayzer: 5,000,000 won! (laughing) So, it's a bit like a sales pitch?
> Grace: Yeah but it depends on how many men you want to be matched with. It would give me a chance to meet several men depending on how much I paid. But I have enough friends that can introduce me to guys for dating for free. Duo is more for people who really want to get married.
> Glayzer: 5,000,000 is really expensive! If you pay more do you get to meet higher quality people.
> Grace: Yeah, I think so. I also heard that they charge women double, double (what they charge men)!
> …
> Glayzer: Do you know how you were rated? Do you know what your score, like... if you were an A person or a B person?
> Grace; I think they said I was average. I think at that time they said I was average or a little bit low because of my parents. Because they tell me that if my parents were lawyers or doctors, I would have had a high score.

While the majority of people in my surveys and interviews said that they had never used Duo or any other couples' matching service, many expressed either an interest in them or an interest in using them later in life when getting married might become a priority. Ara, a 27-year-

old woman working in finance explained flatly that she had never used Duo, “But I’ll do [it] when I get old, and get aged, but not married yet, I would apply.” I ask Joan about the cost of using such services in South Korea for finding a dating partner.

> Glayzer: Do you think it's mostly older people serious about getting married that pay these companies for their matching service or do you think there are casual daters too?
> Joan: Definitely not, because it's not cheap. It's pretty pricey apparently, so yeah but they work I just heard but what they work is like you're paying a lot actually like thousand dollars something for once and then date yes, they are assigning you three times good background level guys something like that so it's for serious marriage, I guess.

While women often had strong opinions about using couple matching companies to find a suitable marriage partner, if not necessarily a dating partner, men were far less likely to admit considering their use. In most of my interviews with South Korean men, the question of whether or not they would use a couple matching company such as Duo was dismissed out of hand. I have the same response entered multiple times in my notes, “No. Never.” When pressed, only a few men would elaborate on their reasoning for not considering this type of dating. These reasons tracked well with how women responded to the same question, with answers having to do with not being ready for marriage, high costs of membership, and a distaste for being classified into a graded dating system. However, after many such interviews I began to understand men’s curt responses to the question as a rejection of desperation to find love and a lack of desire to rush into marriage. Most of my male informants were in their early to late 20s and the national average age of first marriage in South Korea is currently hovering around 32 years old for men and 29 years old for women. As Joe, a 23-year-old man put it:

> Joe: (laughing) NO! (laughing) That’s for elders!
> Glayzer: How old are those people usually?
> Joe: Like, at least late 20s or early 30s because like that kind of thing usually is used by someone who is seriously seeking for marriage prospects, so yeah.

Only two of my male informants expressed any interest in using a matchmaking service such as Duo. One of them was Peter, the low-income male who I guessed to be in his late 30s but would

not disclose his exact age. Peter expressed a kind of curious bemusement about the prospect though he admitted that he would never pay for such a service and that he would likely be ranked rather lowly, if allowed to join such a service at all. The other informant was Elliot, the elite male in his early 30s actively looking to get married. He said that was probably because the service was free for him since he was a highly ranked male his fees would be waived. He went on dates with two different women that he was matched to by Duo. In each case he did not have to pay any fees, but the women paid about 300,000 won ($300) for the privilege. He also explained that in order to meet even higher-ranking men, with an A+ rating, women would have to pay 500,000 won ($500) per match. While neither meeting developed into long term commitments at the time when he was in his late 20s, he was considering using the service again because a friend of his had recently gotten married to a woman that they had met via Duo and he thought that his friend seemed very happy in his new marriage.

For Elliot, the use of Duo was not a sign of desperation to get married or a failure on his part to attract women he was interested in. In fact, he often bragged during the interview that it was extremely easy for him to have a relationship, for casual sex or committed and long-term, with many of the airline stewardesses that he worked with, all of which had been preselected for their jobs based partly on their physical attractiveness. In fact, he claimed that he used to do just that for a long time before becoming tired of being desired by the stewardesses just for his income and job title. However, he found that this same pattern was repeated while using Duo, with him even being allowed to meet and date women using the company and its resources for free. He complained further that one reason he stopped using the service was because his dates felt more like job interviews where his dating partner focused more on learning about his income and career goals more than on his personality, interests, or hobbies.

This demonstrates the power imbalance that men wield due to their systemically higher incomes than women but also the growing inequality of all of South Korean society. This example shows how the advent of online matchmakers and marriage agencies perpetuate both hegemonic male privilege within the South Korean sexual field and also inequality between men of different socioeconomic means. Economic inequality correlates in a direct way to systematic inequality in the search for intimacy. This is similar to other accounts where high status men are able to extract significantly more money from the bride's family during wedding payment negotiations because the higher status male feels entitled (Kendall, 1996).

The development of new technologies of intimate consumption such as dating applications and online marriage agencies should conceivably help to decrease gender inequality by lowering the costs of entry and expanding the individual's reach into the South Korean sexual field, dating marketplace, and marriage marketplace. However, South Korean singles, particularly women, strong preference for dating partners that have been socially vetted caused by high rates of domestic sexual and physical violence, South Korea's long history of using matchmakers to screen matches, and fears of being taken advantage of economically, has not allowed free dating apps to have their imagined emancipatory effects. Instead, women are systematically discriminated against on those platforms and in those sexual markets, mirroring the discrimination that exist in the South Korean labor market. Despite this systemic discrimination by matchmaking companies against women, women are overrepresented among their clientele and therefore are "in excess."

6.6. Participant Observation on Seoul's Dating Applications

Initially expecting dating applications to disrupt patriarchal gender and income inequality among heterosexual singles, I chose to focus on Tinder because it is both free and popular among the minority of singles who had tried online dating. Tinder was by far the most common dating application used by single South Koreans in both my interviews and surveys. I used the free version of Tinder extensively during my field research to find and interview informants. On several occasions, I attempted to register for other online dating applications such as I-um, Amanda, 1km, TingCup, Wapa, NorangNorang, Singpul, and NoonDate but was unable to because of their requirement of a citizen's registration number. However, I was able to collect data about these applications from informants who had used them and also from my South Korean research assistant who explored them. In her analysis of what she calls modern dating's "deritualization," the creation of a dating marketplace in which courtship does not follow well known and predetermined scripts and the relationship goals of other singles is unknowable and ambiguous, Eva Illouz (Illouz, 2019b) blames Tinder:

> Tinder now constitutes such a large part of the dating world that, for many young people, it is the dating world: an always-available, pocket-sized method for finding the person of your dreams—or, at the very least, a regret-free hookup. (Illouz, 2019:78)

Despite its ubiquity in other advanced economies and its relative popularity compared to other dating apps in South Korea, Tinder was not a large part of the dating world in Seoul. One often discussed reason is that South Korean singles prefer meeting someone through their existing immediate (meeting naturally) and extended (*sogaeting*) social networks. South Korean singles, especially women, worried about using online dating applications to search for a romantic partner for many of the same reasons that they preferred meeting singles through their existing friendship networks, prescreening to protect themselves from physical, sexual, emotional, and

economic exploitation. However, dating applications were viewed negatively by heterosexual South Korean singles for precisely because they are deritualized.

While using Tinder, I swiped right on every single profile I saw randomly shown until I reached my 50-swipe limit for the day. I did this every day for about six months. When someone else swiped right after viewing my profile, I would get a message saying that we "liked" each other and that we could then begin sending each other private messages. When I had my account setting's gender as a man, I had a match ratio of about 1 in 20 or perhaps even lower. Alternatively, when my account setting was female, my match ration skyrocketed to at least 1 in 2 and often higher. This illustrates men's and women's differing strategies on the platform to find dates. Women informants told me that they had to be cautious with whom they swiped right on because they had large numbers of matches and did not want to be inundated with conversations or perhaps sexually suggestive language or unsolicited photos, as I was occasionally when posing as a female. Meanwhile, it seems that most men were using a similar strategy as me, swiping right far more frequently in the search for a potential match. Further, the majority of men who swiped right on my profile did not read a single word of my profile explaining that I was a happily engaged man looking for people to interview. This was evidenced by my inbox that would be full of messages from straight men saying "yo, what's up gorgeous?" "what are you up to tonight baby?" "you look fun, want to meetup?" or any innumerable variation on this same theme[4]. This was all apparently in reference to my fiancé who was with me in all my photos whom these men thought was the owner of the profile. I responded to each and every one of their messages simply cut/pasting my profile information into the private message that was sent to me, giving them an additional chance to actually read it. Virtually all

[44] This was usually done in English but on occasion I also received such messages in their Korean language equivalent.

men stop responding to further messages or simply unmatched with me. The cruder or more sexually explicitly the original message to me, the less likely the man was to respond to my request to meet for an interview. On one occasion, after sending me a particularly lurid first message and responding with a cut/paste of my profile information, a man became upset with me for what he felt was an apparent deception. I was polite and pointed out that if he had read any of my profile he would not have been misinformed. [5]The following day my account was banned citing Tinder's user agreement, but I am unsure of what specific policy I am supposed to have violated. I emailed Tinder on many occasions for clarification and to get my account reinstated but I never received any replies.

Several women described similar experiences while using Tinder and also while using other dating applications. Karen, an unemployed 23-year-old woman studying to take the civil service examination explained that she joined Badoo just wanting to meet a new foreign pen pal for language exchange.

> Because they photoshopped it, too. So, I uploaded it and I got messages from any other person, but I didn't think it was a dating app. I thought it was just a friend-hunting app. So, I was just trying to find a foreign friend, regardless of gender. So I thought it was something like pen pal, so I did it but all the messages are from men and… And their behavior is something like *ssom (in-between friends and lovers)*. So, at that time I was dating my present boyfriend. And he knows that I use the application. I explained it I want to find a pen pal friend, someone regardless of sex. Man or woman who can, I can teach Korean and he can teach me English or his mother language. But Contrary to my purpose, I got a lot of weird calls. I just get so many "when do you want to see me?" I just deleted it.

This aggressiveness from men on dating applications discouraged many women from using them (Ansari & Klinenberg, 2016). They typically described their feelings when they received these messages as "awkward," "strange," or "uncomfortable." While this type of online dating behavior is nothing new or necessarily specific to South Korean dating, it does contribute

[5] This research methodology was IRB approved. Many Tinder users actively change their gender as they use the platform in order to be matched with a variety of people that they may be interested in.

to an already fraught dating landscape for South Korean women and contributes to existing fears of sexual, emotional, or physical exploitation.

Due to the aggressiveness of some men, and fears of sexual or physical violence and exploitation, only 6% of survey respondents reported using dating applications or online dating "often" to find a partner. 68% of those respondents reported never having used dating applications and about 25% reported "occasional" use. This is supported by the fact that more were more than twice as likely to report that they deployed the use of dating applications "often" or "occasionally." Despite the low level of use among my informants, studying dating applications, the South Korean singles that do use them, and for what reasons is still revealing.

One of the first men that I met in person from Tinder was Mathew, a 27-year-old male, recently hired at a large international trading company and with little income often decried the commodification of dating and matchmaking in South Korea. He described what he liked about using Tinder to meet South Korean women:

> When you meet someone uncommon. Someone totally new or (an) unknown person, then you can be more open. Like you. We don't have any connection so I can tell you everything. So, I like those atmospheres and those relationships, and she can recognize me much more sincerely. And I can do that as well so... I want to meet someone (from Tinder) in person.

Despite the shortcomings that the majority of my informants felt about online dating and dating applications, there were still some groups that regularly used apps to find suitable dating partners. My informants provided me with robust descriptions of their Tinder usage with one informant saying, "Tinder is a kind of DIY *sogaeting*," referencing one group of users who use the app due to a lack of social connections either from being out of work, not in school, or having just moved to a new geographic location. Other groups, such as LGBTQ users and sexual minorities, may have immense social networks to utilize in their search for a dating partner but this utilization could cause significant social risk. In this way, the perceived dangers of using

dating applications is safer than the risk of coming out to coworkers, friends, or family in South Korea's conservative social setting.

Penny, a 24-year-old woman I interviewed used an online dating website called Arangonk to find dating partners who enjoyed SM, or sadomasochism. At first, she had joined the website out of curiosity but soon found that she was using it to the exclusion of all other types of dating methods in order to locate partners due to her sexual preferences for SM. She felt that meeting men from internet website such as Arangonk was more dangerous than other types of dating methods but that she had little choice in that matter because of the social stigma that could be created if she were to, for example, tell her friends to arrange a blind date with someone that also enjoyed SM. In a similar way, almost all of my LGBT informants expressed these same feelings and anxieties about internet dating or dating applications. My informants guessed that only approximately 60% of the people on Grindr were native South Koreans. In fact, many of my gay male informants used Grindr, an LGBT specific dating app originally from the US, in order to meet foreigners whom, they believed would likely be totally outside of their current social circles. In this way, sexual minorities and members of the LGBT community must delicately balance their own safety when dating within their social circles, comparing it with danger they feel exists when dating outside of those circles.

Penny did use this type of dating when she was 21 years old. Her story about meeting this man demonstrates how South Korean singles have successfully adapted the use of the internet and online dating to South Korean cultural preferences for prescreen, socially connected dating partners.

> Penny: Dating applications? I don't really trust them.
> Glayzer: Don't trust them?
> Penny: Yea.
> Glayzer: Why don't you trust them?

Penny: Uh… first of all, the privacy issue. And… safety issue. I can't (be) assured by the unknown people.
Glayzer: Were you worried about that with the safety issue or anything meeting the men from Warcraft?
Penny: Uh… I didn't think about that.
Glayzer: Yea.
Penny: When I'm meeting the person in the Warcraft, he was playing with a bunch of his friends all with his off-line friends like classmates, and so I knew where he lived, and I knew where he's attending school. So, I thought, I thought I knew him at that moment of time. Maybe because I was young and he was young, too, so. I was quite naive but yea, in that moment of time, I thought I knew him.
Glayzer: I was curious because I met my fiancé on Tinder. Through the internet.
Penny: Oh, wow?
Glayzer: But I also played World of Warcraft for like three years, a long time and I've never met anybody. I never thought. Like "Oh, I wonder if this is a girl. Hey, how are you doing? You want to come over" or something like that.
Penny: Oh, when I first met him, I didn't meet him by one by one. It was like a group meeting. All the raid team together.
Glayzer: A guild meeting?
Penny: Yea, yea, yea. So, I thought that is, it can be safer, so, because it was a whole bunch of people altogether.

This type of use of the internet to expand existing social networks, creating a bigger pool of socially connected singles for potential dating, is one of the ways in which South Koreans are using the internet to subvert male hegemonic power in the form of hyper commodified dating rituals and expensive internet-based dating services. However, success stories using this method of dating were few and far between among my informants. Additionally, they were limited to a narrow range of interests such as computer gaming enthusiasts. More commonly but still not widespread, informants would casually mention social clubs or Meetup groups that they found online for a wide variety of activities such as hiking or English language book clubs, both of which I joined on several occasions. Much like "meeting naturally," one distinguishing feature of this type of group though is that dating is not the primary purpose of its existence. Thus, I do not consider it a direct comparison to dating apps, speed-dating, or other dating methods such as sogaeting.

According to my informants, South Korean singles avoid free dating applications such as Tinder because of their association with casual relationships, foreign user base, and fears of dating someone who is outside of your social circle, new technologies are being adopted by South Korean

youth to find intimate partners outside of traditional channels. This helps to explain why so many of my informants dismissed dating applications out of hand and holds them back from utilizing free dating applications to decommodify their searches for a dating partner. However, more research is needed to better understand how and why South Koreans use *PC Bangs* and games, where the primary objective is not actually dating, to find dates. Outside of these examples, South Korean online dating is extensively commodified.

6.7. Conclusions: Is Commodification on the Rise or Just More Explicit Due to the Use of the Internet as a Medium?

In this chapter I have argued that free dating applications have the potential to be subversive to existing male hegemonic power structures built on a foundation of economic inequality between men and women. I found that South Koreans, men and women, largely avoid these applications due to their deeply held fears of dating someone outside of their social networks that provide them with safety. A small number of South Korean singles do use the internet to meet new people via Meetup and hobby groups or online gaming but the primary purpose of these groups are not to find a dating partner. The LGTBQ community and members of sexual minorities, as well as those looking to date foreigners specifically, do utilize free dating applications such as Tinder to subvert heteronormative power. However, heterosexual South Korean singles who make up the vast majority of the South Korean sexual field have not been able to take advantage of the emancipatory power of the internet due to, in large part, its intensive commodification and retrenchment of heteronormative male hegemony.

My data suggest that the commodification of intimacy is not on the rise due to new technologies of intimate consumption such as the internet but that it is instead related to inequalities in other parts of society such as the labor and housing markets (Constable, 2009; Moon, 2005; Song, 2014). Implicit in the literature on the role of new technologies of intimate consumption is the assumption that their use will be taken up most forcefully by those who would exploit it to relieve their own discrimination. In other words, new technologies are often adopted by those with less power in society to subvert the existing power structure. The examples I have given in this chapter allow me to call this assumption into question. While the power of the internet to subvert, disrupt or even upend existing inequalities in society, it can also strengthen, reinforce, and reflect those same dynamics. In this case, I argue that these new technologies have, as of yet, not increased the commodification of intimacy in South Korea but made existing inequalities barer and more visible for scrutiny.

Researchers such as Eva Illouz have argued that one culprit in the shifting of gender equality within intimate relationships is the gradual deritualization of dating and marriage customs in advanced economies, mirroring the uncoupling of economic responsibilities, sexual relationships, and emotional intimacy (Illouz, 2019a, 2019b). However, here again I argue that the South Korean example demonstrates one society both resisting deritualization but also intimate equality between the genders. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7:

RITUALS OF ROMANCE IN SOUTH KOREA: QUESTIONING LOVE'S DE-RITUALIZATION

This chapter has been coauthored in coordination with Dr. Alex J. Nelson at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas being the second author. The vast majority of the fieldwork and data collection for this chapter were collected concurrently. However, a minority of the data and findings discussed were also drawn from each other's previous independent research projects as well.

Changes in status can be fraught with danger and uncertainty. One of the ways by which humans mitigate that uncertainty is through rituals, such as rites of passage, that signal intentions and meanings in culturally legible ways to the extended social group as well as the direct participants. Romantic relationships are no exception to the human need to make intentions discernable in ways that communicate adherence to the ethics and standards of the community, to one's partner and society. Marriages are often highly structured and ritualized events that officialize new family formations and the meanings ascribed to sexual behavior. However, in highly industrialized late modern societies, marriage is in decline and an increasing portion of romantic relationships occur outside of marriage, either as part of courtships that partners hope may culminate in marriage or as part of less future oriented pursuits of immediate sexual and emotional intimacy. Sociologists observing shifts in romantic relationships in late modern North America and Western Europe assert that pursuits of love, sex, and intimacy have become increasingly individualized and contingent, drawing less from social conventions and prescribed courtship rituals and other forms of social control via kin and community members (Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1993; Illouz, 1997, 2013, 2019a, 2019b). However, there has been limited research on the individualization of love and intimacy outside of Euro-American cultural contexts and thus little understanding of culturally specific and heterodox ways in which this process manifests cross-culturally. This chapter examines the

individualization of love in urban South Korea, particularly Eva Illouz's (2019b) contention that romantic relationships have become de-ritualized, transformed by ideologies of sexual freedom and the proliferation of internet dating apps that render the intentions of romantic partners largely illegible and women's desires for emotional intimacy and commitment to coincide with sexual intimacy frequently left unsatisfied.

In her latest monograph, *The End of Love,* Illouz (2019b) highlights the experiences of women from the U.S., Western Europe, and Israel, dating cultures increasingly dominated by smart phone applications and casual sexual relationships. Comparing their experiences to those of Victorian England and the United States in which literary accounts suggest that love and courtship were highly ritualized and explicit, Illouz asserts that contemporary romantic pursuits are failing to meet women's desires for emotional intimacy and commitment and leaving them largely confused as to the longer term intentions of their male romantic partners. She argues that despite the seemingly gender egalitarian logic of the culture of casual sex, which some feminists theorize as liberating women from stigma of a sexual double standard, casual sexual relationships appear to serve men's desire for sex without emotional entanglement while failing to meet women's needs for emotional intimacy. A satisfactory explanation for the existence of the sexually dimorphic desires Illouz describes is lacking in her account. However, I take seriously her assertion that late modern societies are experiencing a process of de-ritualization of their romantic lives and that this process, while liberating from certain sexist and patriarchal restrictions that once held hegemonic sway, have given rise to increased anxiety, uncertainty, and feelings of romantic dissatisfaction, particularly for women.

Illouz specifically identifies the 1970s as a turning point in the cultural construction of romantic and sexual relationships in the U.S. and Western Europe when pre-modern, highly

ritualized norms of courtship offered certainty to individuals determining how to navigate sexual fields. She asserts these norms were disrupted by the sexual revolution which 1.) "disentangled sexuality from kinship;" 2.) led to an increase in the number of sexual partners one would have on average in their lifetime due to heightened expectations of premarital sex and opportunities to date more partners before marriage, which in turn lead to the value of virginity to be replaced with the value of sexiness; 3.) the cultural logics governing romantic encounters divided into three distinct institutionalized discourses for "marriage markets, emotional experiences, and sexual practices" respectively rather than all three being subsumed under the premodern institution of courtship. And 4.) the shift of sexual morality from one of a thick normativity densely embedded in cultural norms and cosmologies, to a thin normativity governed only by the procedural morality of consent. In North America and Western Europe, there is ample evidence that these patterns of change are present, though their extent may be highly variable even within the societies specifically discussed. For example, Americans in evangelical Christian communities may not separate sexuality from kinship and retain a more coherent cultural cosmology of sexual, emotional, and matrimonial norms than those in secular cultural contexts much as commodified dating rituals arose earlier for the urban working class than for rural middle-class Americans in mid-20th century (Bailey, 1989; Pateman, 1988).

The logic on which Illouz builds her argument, that the increasing freedom of intimate relationships from social control, parents, and the community has led to the deterioration of romantic ritual life in ways that serve men's interests more than women's resonates with the work of other sociologists documenting the individualization of love (Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 1995). Similarly, Ellen Lamont (2020) documents the ways in which young heterosexual middle-class couples in the San Francisco bay area perpetuate gender inequality in

their courtships and marriages despite consciously espousing feminist gender egalitarian values. These accounts diverge from the predictions of Anthony Giddens (1993) who argued that the shift from a romantic love based in patriarchal courtship cultures to confluent love and pure relationships based in individually negotiated utilitarian interests between partners serves the interests of women over those of men, who have been slower to change as they cling to more traditional logics of love based in the patriarchal bargain of marriage and sexual double-standards. Ultimately, these scholars are not in disagreement over the direction in which the transformation of intimacy is directed but rather the extent to which gender equality is being realized through the individualization of love.

The individualization of love thesis has come to dominate sociological accounts of romantic relationships in late modernity, but little discussed beyond the euro-centric contexts in which the sociologists of love principally work. In Anthropology, studies of modernity and the rise of companionate marriage ideals in post-colonial societies have become a cottage industry (Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006; Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992). In many post-colonial societies companionate marriage has been established as a hegemonic ideal for generations. The creation of cultures of pre-marital romantic and sexual exploration, not exclusively guided towards eventual marriage, are also well documented in the ethnographic record. Illouz's problematization of the individualization of love and assertion that these changes produce sexual anomie and uncertainty for heterosexual women requires interrogation not only in the societies she studied but cross-culturally. I ask whether the historical and social correlates she ascribes these changes to predict similar outcomes elsewhere, or whether she is observing a culturally idiosyncratic transformation produced by the current permutation of Europe's evolving Judeo-Christian derived sexual fields rather than a product of the global social and economic

transformations associated with modernity. In this chapter I draw from extensive ethnographic field research into the transformation of romantic relationships in South Korea, a society that underwent modernization in a way often described as "condensed", developing from a "hermit kingdom" and one of the poorest nations in the world into the 13th largest economy and one of the most technologically advanced societies on the planet in a little over a century.

7.1. Findings

Like the Euro-American and Israeli singles in Illouz's study of modern courtship practices, South Korean singles deploy a wider range of strategies to search for an intimate dating partner than any generation before them. The speed at which South Korean dating culture has changed has kept pace with the equally breakneck pace at which the South Korean economy has climbed to ascendency with new rituals forming and transforming existing dating methods such as *sogaeting*, *meetings*, *hunting, matson, bungaeting* or "lightning dating," arranged marriages, marriage brokerage services, introduction services, and dating applications such as Tinder are just some of the ways in which informants had sought intimate matches. Past but not distant generations of South Korean singles were far more limited in their options when conducting their searches for marriage partners with South Korean women being virtually confined to the domestic homestead and South Korean men reliant on their families generational wealth, constrained in expressing agency in their families choice of bride. These facts might seem to support if not typify Illouz's characterization of deritualization, the coming apart of predictable, defined, relationship paths, narratives, and expectations that allows individuals to make sense of their search for intimacy with decreased anxiety and, she argues, greater gender equity during courtship. However, my case study of commodified dating rituals adds nuance to

our understanding of both causes and affects of deritualization. Below, I outline examples of deritualization but also "reritualization" among several kinds of South Korean courtship methods. Afterwards, I discuss the broader theoretical implications for these findings and also their implications for gender equality within intimate courtship.

7.1.1. First Dates and the Initiation of Romantic Relationships

South Korean singles navigate emergent and existing dating practices such as matchmakers, arranged marriages, parent-introductions, friend of friend blind-dates, group-dates, dating applications, lightning dating, and *hunting* strategically to optimize their chances of finding love and intimacy while minimizing the risk of being duped into financial, emotional, physical, or sexual exploitation. My informants were cognizant and warry of accidentally finding themselves on a date with someone whose intentions did not match their own. Some men and women wanted long term monogamous relationships, while others were looking for short term relationships with "no strings" and few of what Illouz calls "contractual" obligations. Due to high levels of domestic abuse and economic and social inequality, women fear being pressured into providing reciprocal sexual services while men fear *kkoch baem* or "beautiful snake," an attractive woman who uses their femininity to extract economic resources from unsuspecting men (See Chapter 5). While challenging, South Korean singles partially mitigate these ambiguities by searching for a dating partner utilizing a dating methodology that best aligns with their relationship goals.

Many of the South Korean singles I interviewed and surveyed expressed a desire to meet a partner "naturally," or *jayeonseuleobge baljeon*, developing an intimate relationship with someone that you came into contact with through school, work, or hobbies. Thus, meeting

naturally occurs only when the primary purpose of a social event is not searching for a dating partner such as through hobbies, work, or school. South Korean singles who were not actively attending a university though, often exhausted their pools of prescreened candidates in their immediate social networks and were often forced to seek partners through other methods. There are many different methods of searching for a dating partner in South Korea but for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on meeting naturally, *sogaeting*, *meeting*, *hunting*, matchmakers, *matson*, and dating applications. *Sogaeting* is a system of using existing extended social network to set up blind-dates that developed in urban areas during colonial economic development and became pervasive across the peninsula by the 1970s or 1980s. *Meeting* is a style of group-date where three to five male friends meet with the same number of female friends where many in the group are meeting for the first time. *Meetings* take place almost exclusively among university students but also sometimes occur at larger corporate offices. *Hunting* is a method for searching for a dating partner that may be familiar to many of us but that has its own particular name and emphasis in South Korean culture. It's rough equivalent in English would be "hitting on" or "picking up" someone you didn't know at a bar or public space, a rare practice on South Korea until after colonial liberation.

The use of dating applications and "lightning dating" are relatively novel with dozens of South Korean and foreign applications in use but Tinder was by far the most common among the informants. However, informants rarely utilize dating apps for fear of many of the same issues outlined above, sexual, emotional, economic, and physical abuse. Matchmakers and matchmaking companies such as Duo have lent this method of dating some legitimacy and safety in the last decade, yet even these supposedly vetted and background checked dating services did not appeal to informants who described only wanting to utilize them if, "there were no other

options and I was getting too old." Informants still feared that the company's profit motives may allow "risky" people into the dating pool while also worrying about being duped by the dating agencies themselves. *Matson* is a blind-date that is typically setup through your parent's social network, are very formal, and usually presumes that the goal of the date is eventual marriage. *Matson* shares some of the same stigmas as using a matchmaking service, being a "last option" and somewhat humiliating but informants were far more trusting of being able to find quality candidates vis a vis their parent's highly selective screening, although they are often less sexually attractive via this method.

This is not an exhaustive list of the many different methods of searching for a date deployed by single South Korean informants, nor does it take into account every variation in how each method is practiced or changed over time. What it does is illustrate there is no longer a singular narrative path that a relationship must follow in order to obtain romantic intimacy through courtship rituals. Although these paths of meeting differ, after the first meeting their paths largely converge once they transition from first meeting to cultivating and forming a relationship While this may seem to perfectly illustrate the deritualization of South Korean courtship, I argue that within these various methods of searching for a date are highly ritualized norms of symbolic behavior, legible to knowledgeable agents within the South Korean sexual field, indicating reritualization. I now examine *sogaeting* in more depth in order to make this argument clear.

7.1.2. *Sogaeting*

Among my informants and survey participants, I found a strong preference for, and the persistence of *sogaeting*. Jane, a 28-year-old woman working as a teaching assistant at a

university, was typical in that she preferred meeting people naturally through existing direct social connections but saw relying on friendship networks to find screened blind dates as desirable:

> I don't like meeting new people. Usually, you develop relationships with your friends, or ask them to introduce you to a friend they know. *Sogaeting*. Yes, I usually meet (new men) through *sogaeting* these days.

South Korean singles engage in high frequencies of *sogaeting* or blind-dating through friendship networks. Jane is representative of the informants in her characterization of *sogaeting* as well. Typically, a single person, male or female, desirous of a date would approach their friends and ask them to introduce them to somebody but just as often a friend of theirs may approach them with an offer of an introduction. This is in contrast to Kendall's (1996) observations where it used to only be acceptable for the man to ask for photos for prescreening purposes as but now there is no such gender gap in preliminary screening. *Sogaeting* translates loosely to "blind-date" but in technologically savvy and image obsessed South Korea potential dating candidates are regularly seen visually via smartphone photos and social media account before accepting an offer of a "blind-date." If the offer of a blind date is accepted by both dating parties, the mutual friend will share Kakao instant messaging contact information with them both. Archetypally, the man will make the first move by contacting the woman via Kakao or text messaging. He will also be the one to suggest a meeting place which is generally a restaurant, often an Italian restaurant. According to my informants, sometimes the mutual friend will meet the two there for a short time in order to facilitate a smooth introduction. After the meal the man will pay. If the they are still interested in the each other, one may suggest going to *i-cha* or 2nd round which is most often a café or bakery for dessert she is more likely to pay. However, there are varying attitudes regarding the gendered division of paying for dates, an aspect of dating that is becoming de-ritualized. Particularly successful dates may continue on to *sam-cha* (3rd round) and *sa-cha* (4th

round) for drinks at various pubs and bars. Should one party exert pressure for *skinship* or sexual intercourse, this too would reflect poorly on them in the conservative high stakes setting of *sogaeting*. The addition of the mutual friend in sogaeting diffuses responsibility for what happens on the date and in the relationship collectively rather than individually. In this way, sogaeting helps singles to keep socially responsible suitors within a flexible but highly structured ritualistic system with its own logics and discernable scripts.

Sogaeting first dates are highly formulaic in their ritualization. So much so that some people find them boring. This was the case for Maxine, a 29-year-old woman who often travels abroad and holds advanced degrees from elite South Korean universities working in finance:

> Glayzer: Do you like sogaeting?
> Maxine: No. (giggles) um, just meeting new… new person is, is very interesting. So I do it, but checking with them, it is very much the same story… Boring. They ask the same questions always.
> Glayzer: What do they ask?
> Maxine: What's your hobby … (laughs) What's your… what's your major… or what do your parents do? What's your family background? Boring.

This type of description of *sogaeting* was common among both male and female informants. The structure of the "getting to know each other" conversation is closely associated with South Korean "specs" that are used by marriage agencies to rank singles, and the contrived nature of the meeting are awkward and difficult to overcome to such an extent that the date itself becomes formulaic and boring even for someone, like Maxine, who likes meeting new people. Men in particular seemed to loathe these conversations because they felt that so much weight was put on their "specs" such as their jobs and their ability to embody breadwinner masculinity through their high income. They felt that women were unable to really get to know their true self due to this rather rigid series of questioning. Despite these common complaints, most people were willing to compromise some of the spontaneity of their dates in exchange for the screening process.

The persistence of *sogaeting* is notable too because so many informants described them as "awkward" due to the contrived social circumstances but they take part in them anyways for the benefits of having a vetted date. When asked about her dating method preferences, Elenore, a 30-year-old graduate student and fitness enthusiast explained:

> Because my friends know the person and it gives more security…I think (it's) mostly dating violence. Um… pressure, I don't know but it is more guaranteed. You know someone through your friend, because I trust my friend and they introduce the guy to me. And I feel more secure because I know my friend. And I know my friend will not betray me.

Jean, a 27-year-old office worker and self-described feminist expressed this same sentiment this way, "by meeting someone that is introduced by someone who's a friend that I trust…That gives me more power in a sense. There is less chance to, you know, come across meeting risky people, that's all." In this way, arranging a date via a friend, or sogaeting, women can gain some small amount of power, security, and not waste time with men who may have romantic intentions that differ from their own.

This was especially true for South Korean women, who felt more comfortable meeting people by an introduction through a friend. Karen a 24-year-old university graduate studying for their civil service exam discusses why she prefers sogaeting over other kinds of prescreened dating methods:

> Because we've already had someone to arrange for us in the middle. He knows the two persons, so he can think if they suit well or not. So it is more good than *meeting*. *Meeting* is quite random. They just two people are in here and 'we want to meet with guys that' and they upload on the community or ask the another friends, then they just match other two guys, so it is so… It's uncomfortable and almost always fails. It is not successful. Uh it is case by case, I think. But actually uh but mostly they just, they don't know well... each other... and some of my friends do *meeting* to make, just make some friends. Because my friends don't think that it will go well actually. So they think about it, 'it's ok. We can make some friends through the *meeting*.' So, it is quite light-hearted. So blind dates have a higher success rate, but meetings are like drinking with friends.

Here Karen has described how she prefers *sogaeting* because it is more likely that she can find a match for the type of relationship that she is looking for, which is a long-term monogamous courtship that will ideally lead to marriage. The type of relationship she is pursuing is matched to

the method of searching for a dating partner. For Karen, using *meeting*s to find an intimate partner is "unsuccessful" because this method is too "lighthearted" and not serious enough to match the type of courtship she wishes to pursue. Again, there is both the flexibility of a South Korean dating culture that can accommodate various agents with varied and multiplicitous desires. Karen likes *meetings* to "just make new friends," but also because it is rigid enough that participants can match their relationship goals to various other available dating methods that meet their needs.

Not only does selecting an appropriate dating method help to ensure a matching courtship script but it also impacts the ability to target demographic requirements such as education, class background, or even sexual attractiveness. I asked Elliot, a wealthy 32-year-old airline pilot if there were any barriers to him finding a high-quality date other than his busy work schedule:

> Actually, if I wanna have a blind date, my friend always introduces me to like, a medical doctor or dentist or lawyer—yeah something like that. My ex-girlfriend was a medical doctor as well…I prefer sogaeting because I see a lot of beautiful girls in most of my working time (stewardesses), you know. When working I see a lot of beautiful girls and I---soo, my standard is you know, getting higher and higher. So if I want to get a sogaeting partner, they show me a picture so I can choose, you know. I can choose. Yeah. I have more choice.

At the age of 32, Elliot is at the average age of marriage in South Korea and his high income, stable employment, and desirable travel benefits of his work make him an elite bachelor within the South Korean sexual field. He explained that he used to prefer *meeting* and casually dating the attractive female stewardesses that he worked with but as he aged decided that his desire for a courtship script where more importance is placed on commitment and marriage. In that script, he prioritized different attributes of the women he dated, looking for someone with a comparable socioeconomic status and job in addition to being physically attractive. Rather than having more casual flings with women he felt were attractive but beneath his status, he chose *sogaeting* as a way to fulfill these desires around his new preferences for that ritualized courtship script.

7.1.3. Rituals of Coupledom in Establishing Romantic Relationships

The world of romantic relationships depicted by Illouz is one of extreme ambiguity in which one is frequently uncertain of the nature of their relationship. In particular, Illouz asserts that the popularization of non-committed sexual relationships has left women guessing whether or not their partner is interested in cultivating emotional intimacy and pursuing a committed and exclusive relationship. Consequently, Illouz's female informants regularly found themselves in relationships based primarily in sexual intimacy and felt unable to discern the intentions and desires of their partners beyond their sexual relationship.

In South Korea terms exist for relationships of this nature, relationships with a sexual or romantic charge in which the pair's coupledom is in question. The term *ssom* for example, was used by informants to indicate a pair that has not established themselves to be in a relationship and is not clearly on the pathway to establishing a publicly acknowledged romantic relationship, but where in they also feel or express feelings that exceed the bounds of friendship and may involve forays into the sexual. Similarly, in "one night stands" and "friends with benefits" relationships, which borrow the English language verbiage to describe them, it is understood (by at least one partner), that though the pair has engaged in one or more sexual exchanges, they are not on a path to courtship or publicly recognized coupledom through the absence of the ritual enactments of coupledom. Illouz's work illustrates that while the cultural construction of these categories places them outside the bounds of courtship, that does not mean that from the perspective of one of the partners involved that these do not represent a settling for a relationship that falls short of their actual desires for commitment, recognition and emotional intimacy. However, while Illouz described such relationships as increasingly characterized the romantic

landscape of Europe and the U.S. Most narratives of romantic pursuits I recorded in South Korea followed clearer, and more ritualized courtship scripts.

7.1.4. Norms for Initiating a Second Date

As described in the previous section, the act of arranging an introduction for the purpose of dating, *sogaeting*, is an indication of an openness to forming a romantic relationship, albeit, an openness that may evaporate by the end of the date. Those who meet without introductions, such as those meeting in bars, classrooms, clubs or dating applications will likely have less certainty of the counter-part's intentions if invited to dinner or drinks than those introduced by an intermediary, as *sogaeting* introductions are singularly directed at matchmaking for the purpose of courtship. Regardless of how a pair meets, the social scripts for progressing towards coupledom remain the same. Agreeing to and attending the first meeting, whether made directly or through an intermediary, is the first step towards coupledom. Within a day or two of a *sogaeting* meeting, or first date (as the first meeting of the pair will be interpreted in retrospect, if not at the moment of its occurrence) the male partner (in a heterosexual pairing) is expected to show his interest by requesting a second meeting. The culturally normative nature of this prescription, and hence its ritual power, is illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

> Wonchul: Oh, first impression? good question! my first impression was quite good, but I had another appointment the next week after I met my (future) wife, with another girl, another blind date. and I expected more for the next week's blind date because my coworker told me the girl I would meet after meeting my wife was very... she went to "miss university" you know? There is Miss (South) Korea, Miss World that kind of event, she was very pretty and she was very nice, so I heard a lot of good comments about her so I didn't really contact my wife for two weeks after meeting her, even though the first impression was good, I didn't really contact her.
> Nelson: You were having higher expectations for the next blind date?
> Wonchul: Yeah but unfortunately, I didn't really meet the next woman, so I called her back, I started to call my wife, two weeks later. So, my wife deleted my number [laugh] because two weeks is quite a long time. After the first meeting the guy contacts, text messages or something, within a week or two weeks, so my wife deleted my phone number but anyway we managed to meet again. – Interview with Wonchul, 39-year-old male.

> Jieun: By the way, when I think about it now… (most people) make the second appointment right before they go back home. But we did so right before…. didn't we?
> Sangji: Yes
> Jieun: We decided to meet next time.
> Sangji: (when) we first met?
> Jieun: Most people suggest second date when they try to say goodbye. When I think….
> Sangji: I suggested (having a second date).
> Jieun: Yes. I think we did so at the time we parted (from the first date). In different space each other…. (inaudible)
> Sangji: Other people usually contact after they first met and other people usually try to phone message or call to make the next time promise. To meet again, but we made a plan to meet again during the first meeting.
> Nelson: Because you felt so confident?
> Jieun: There wasn't a moment we "push-and-pull" but we just seem to have liked (each other), right? – Interview with Jieun, 29-year old female, and her husband Sangji, 34-year-old male.

The first excerpt illustrates the upper limit of how long South Koreans expect to wait before making or receiving an invitation to continue meeting, while the second excerpt illustrates the lower limit. The culturally prescribed norm is to arrange the second date after the first date has ended but less than two weeks afterwards. These cases illustrate that exceptions to this rule abound but were notable in these individuals' relationship narratives precisely because they strayed from the norm. Unexpressed by these informants is the taken for granted norm that the male partner is expected to initiate the second date, a convention both cases adhered to.

The lower limit on when a second date ought to be initiated serves several purposes. Delaying the question until it can be asked remotely puts less pressure on the woman to accept and blunts the awkwardness of a rejection. The upper limit more simply reflects a signal of enthusiasm. If a partner is not eager enough to make contact for two weeks, it is assumed that their enthusiasm is lacking, and they have no intention of arranging a second date. This was largely true of Wonchul, who might not have initiated his second date with his wife had his other prospect not canceled their date weeks later. However, initiating or accepting an invitation to a second date is not necessarily a clear sign of interest, particularly in the case of matches made through *sogaeting*. Those introduced through an intermediary may choose to meet a partner they have little or no interest in a second time in order to not appear too flippant and to show they are

taking the effort of their matchmaking friend or family member seriously and avoiding damage to that relationship.

As illustrated by Wonchul's experience, the relationship between a pair on a first date is not presumed to be exclusive. Arranging for multiple blind dates simultaneously is common and is not in and of itself frowned upon. Because there is no presumption of sexual activity or even physical intimacy on a blind date, neither men nor women face much stigma for frequent blind dating. At worst they may acquire reputations within their social circles of being overly selective if they continually refuse to convert their blind dates into exclusive romantic relationships.

7.1.5. Establishing Exclusivity and Commitment in Romantic Relationships

In South Korea numerous social scripts exist for ritually demarcating exclusive romantic relationships from non-romantic and non-exclusive relationships in private and in public between opposite sex individuals. Generally, a pair are not considered a couple, or boyfriend and girlfriend, or as "having a relationship" until that status is mutually agreed upon. The male partner is expected to initiate this transition by asking their counterpart to form a relationship. Once the partner accepts, the couple will begin feeling increasingly comfortable privately and publicly reinforcing their coupledom through physical, visual and verbal displays of intimacy. Most forms of physical contact, such as hand holding, locking arms, touching the other person's face or hair, or feeding the other person, would be experienced as uncomfortable and undesirable between individuals of the opposite sex who had not yet established the exclusivity of their relationship. Engaging in these behaviors in public, particularly in front of family and friends, often requires even greater certainty of commitment. For example, among the informants, a majority expressed a preference not to engage in "*skinship*" (touching/public displays of

affection) in front of parents unless they were engaged. Even introducing one's partner to one's parents was often, though not always, seen as undesirable unless the couple is intending to marry. Thus, willingness to engage in public displays of intimacy serves as an indicator of exclusivity as well as commitment.

Coupledom can also be marked through consumptive practices. For example, the donning of couple items, clothing or accessories that either match exactly or share a common color or style "couple look." On the streets of Seoul, couples in matching or coordinated outfits, or wearing matching shoes or coats or carrying matching cell phone cases are frequent sights. Couples only purchase and wear such items once they have become exclusive and often purchase such items, either together or as a gift from one to the other to celebrate one of many anniversaries. Couple rings are a particularly popular 100-day anniversary gift. Couples may buy these rings, worn on the left ring finger, together or as a surprise gift. However, if the boyfriend buys the ring for the girlfriend it is considered to be a signal of his particular interest. The reverse could also be interpreted but was not reported among the informants.

Intimacy and exclusivity are also reinforced linguistically in Korean through the use of honorifics, tone of voice, and pet names. These linguistic markers of intimacy can be deployed in non-romantic, non-sexual relationships as well, such as among close friends of the same age. They are more common among same-sex peers than opposite sex individuals and generally mark a long-term involvement in which the non-romantic nature of the relationship is well established over a history of interactions. Observers may not easily discern whether these displays are romantic in nature or not in the absence of physical intimacy. Nonetheless, within the context of a couple's shared history of interactions, initiating these linguistic intimate forms can take on clear romantic connotations.

Figure 12: Couple's Set Outfits
A couple wearing "couple's set" outfit in Gangnam, Seoul.

Utterances in Korean are nearly always demarcated with honorific speech markers that denote the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. Strangers adopt polite speech markers towards each other while social superiors may adopt intimate linguistic markers with subordinates, such as senior classmates to junior classmates, parents to children and supervisors to supervisees. Close intimates, such as mothers and children and close friends of the same age may mutually adopt the intimate speech style, cultivating feelings of comfort and casualness, equality and familiarity. These styles are primarily demarcated through verb suffixes. As strangers and acquaintances use polite, honorific speech with one another, adoption of the intimate speech style is marked and must be negotiated. Men are generally expected to initiate

this shift and most commonly this occurs in romantic relationships following the establishment of their relationship's exclusivity.

South Korean couples also commonly heighten their voice tone with one another once in a relationship. A uniquely recognizable speech style involving this tonal change is called *Aegyo* and is associated with femininity and youth and conveys a cute petulance. *Aegyo* is typically, but not exclusively, deployed to make requests, or exert pressure when denied a request. Like pet names, such linguistic play reinforces the exclusivity, intimacy and uniqueness of the relationship through play that would be socially inappropriate with an acquaintance, non-intimate peer, or social superior.

These social scripts, or rituals of intimacy distinguish exclusive, romantic relationships from non-romantic and casual sexual relationships in ways that are culturally established and often readable to observers outside the pair-bond. These cultural sign-posts help convey internal states and intentions as well as broadcasting partner's state of coupledom to others. However, such sign-posts are mere cultural tools which can be used to mislead, such as when a partner conveys or demands exclusivity while pursuing non-monogamous romantic or sexual relationships covertly. Furthermore, although the meanings of these signposts are culturally constructed and thus widely legible, their deeply personal nature also lends them to idiosyncratic or individualized differences based in personal preferences and experiences. These idiosyncrasies, as well as the proliferation of opportunities and mediums for coupling outside of *sogaeting* complicate these cultural sign-posts, making them less culturally legible and demanding more individualized navigation and negotiation. I might interpret increasing recognition and acceptance for personal preferences that deviate from the cultural norm as contributing to the de-ritualization process in that the more idiosyncratic preferences muddy the

ritual waters, the less dependable these rituals become. However, I do not see a patriarchal pattern of such exceptions consistently privileging men's interests over women's in the ways Illouz describes in Europe and North America. None-the-less, these exceptions can be understood as contributing to the individualization of coupledom.

7.1.6. The Individualization of Coupledom

While the physical, commercial and linguistic displays of intimacy described above convey widely shared, culturally constructed meanings, their timing and meaning in the context of any particular relationship can also be highly idiosyncratic or individualized. For example, some informants expressed aversions to public displays of affection such as hand holding or couple look. Others had heterodoxical attitudes towards the use of honorifics, preferring to use the polite speech style regardless of the intimacy and exclusivity of their relationship even in cases, such as when there is a large age gap, where convention dictates differentiation. In some cases, these exceptions were purely idiosyncratic preferences described in terms of personal comfort. In other cases, they reflected ideologically grounded decisions, such as purposely using the polite speech level to reinforce feelings of respect and equality. Intimate relationships are a realm in which couples develop personalized rituals of coupledom that may be unique not only to the individual but to the couple itself and which may follow conventional logics or not.

These rituals of coupledom denote the special intimate relationships that couples form and communicate the couples' exclusive status and intention to continue seeing one another for some time into the future. Introducing a partner to one's parents, proposing, or talking about marriage also convey commitment and intentions to marry in highly legible ways which are largely private. However, not all romantic relationships are conceived of as leading to marriage,

not all partners are perceived as marriage material, and so there is room for ambiguity and misunderstanding in terms of the future of relationships. Discussions of marriage and formal proposals often bring such mismatches to light and may cause the relationship to dissolve if one partner is determined to marry in the near future. These relationships suffer not from an absence of ritual guide-posts to the nature of their relationship but rather from mismatches in their criteria and preferences for the timing of continuing through the ritual cycle of courtship marking coupledom and then marriage. In other words, the South Korean ritual cycle is largely coherent but also sufficiently flexible to provide ample room for exceptions. The ambiguity largely lies in those newer courtship pathways not derived from more traditional courtship patterns and disconnected from social networks where opportunities for deceit and mismatched initial expectations leave greater room for confusion and conflicting desires.

Linguistically, informants lacked the sheer volume of ambiguous relationship terminology relatively to American singles. In fact, the most common terms are Korean such as *yeonae* or *ssom* while more ambiguous terms such as sex partner or concubine are borrowed from English.

7.1.7. Gendered Courtship Initiation Rituals

The above rituals described for marking the progression of a relationship from "just dating," to an exclusive romantic relationship, to marriage reinforces particular gender roles, many of which are reminiscent of early post-Victorian era courtship practices in the United States (Bailey, 1989). For example, the male partner is expected to initiate progressions toward greater intimacy, exclusivity and commitment in the relationship: requesting the second date, proposing they become a couple, initiating the switch to the intimate speech level, initiating

skinship, proposing marriage, etc. The male is ideally the initiator while the female reserves the right to accept or reject each progression. However, rituals also permeate romantic relationships in other gendered forms other than those that initiate greater intimacy.

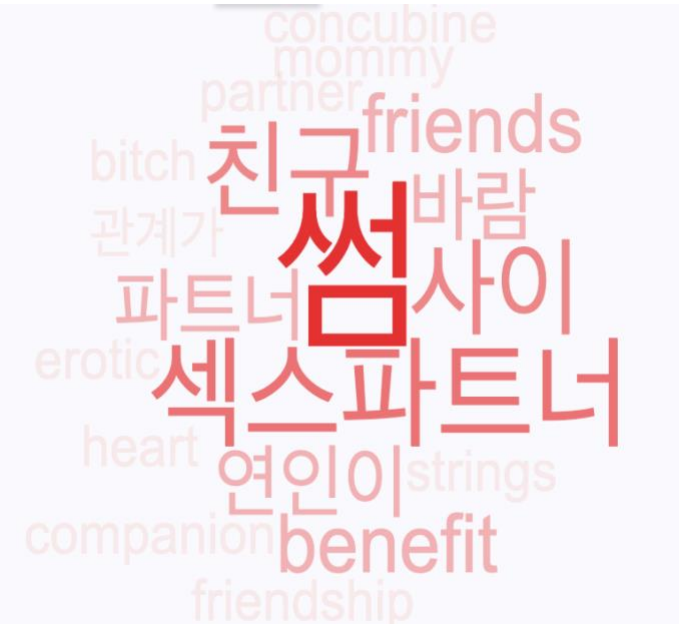


Figure 13: Non-Conventional Relationship Word Cloud
Word cloud generated by asking participants how they describe their non-conventional relationships.

Word Cloud Translations:

썸: Some, an idiom for a "fling" or a flirtatious relationship that may lead to dating one day.

사이: Between, as in a relationship that is something in "between" being friends and being love.

섹스파트너: Sex Partner

파트너: Partner

친구: Friend

바람: Wind, an idiom for cheating or an affair.

연인이: Lover

The norm of male initiation of relationship progress rituals are understood by my South Korean informants as reflecting women's desire not to put themselves in a position where their desire for their partner is greater than their partner's desire for them, which would place them in a position to be taken advantage of, or at least leave them emotionally vulnerable to deception and infidelity. South Korea's sexual double standard forces South Korean women to guard their sexuality, to be cautious in assuring their partner's commitment and interest matches their own. However, South Korean women's sexual prudence should also be interpreted as signaling of feminine respectability, of wanting to convey that one did not previously make oneself easily sexually accessible (from the perspective of the male partner) to other men and thereby potentially diminishing the value he places on her erotic capital. While men too have erotic capital, it is not diminished via having several sexual partners. Women protect and cultivate their erotic capital in numerous other ways as well, such as through applying makeup and skincare products, through clothing, diet and exercise.

Constructing an attractive femininity in the context or romantic relationships exceeds the cultivation and preservation of erotic capital. South Korean femininity is also cultivated through performances of positivity, submissiveness, modesty, and helplessness that men co-construct through performances of chivalry, bravado, assertiveness, competence, and skill. Women enact these complementary gender ideals by asking men to carry their handbags and shopping bags for them, to hold their umbrella, hold open doors, place a protective hand in front of them in sharp breaking vehicles, driving the woman to work or school in the morning or going further out of the man's way to shorten the woman's travel time, escorting the woman home, walking on the side of the side-walk closest to traffic, giving the woman the more inner seat in bars, cafes and restaurants, placing the man between her and fellow patrons, and paying the larger portion of the

monetary costs of dating. Such performances are largely taken for granted and become notable in their absence, such as a partner's failure to hold open a door or refusal to go out of their way. However, particularly costly examples can serve as romantic badges of honor, cherished memories, and seemingly hard to fake signs of care and commitment.

For some men, a woman's refusal to help co-construct a submissive femininity to his dominant masculinity renders them incomprehensible and undesirable, illustrating the role that gender complementarity plays in many individuals' experiences of romantic attraction. Youngshin, a 42-year old female divorcee, recounts:

> I remember three or four [*matson*] throughout my college and graduate studies. Less than once a year. I looked too smart. Too not interested in men, too independent. So, I remember this man. I think he was the nephew of my mom's friend. They were super rich. We were well off, they were super rich. The nephew was in medical school at SNU. He was one of the top students. I think he was a resident when I met him. He was a so-called "perfect man." He was handsome, well not too tall, so not perfect, but he was close to perfect. He was handsome, he was really well mannered, he had a lot of refined kind of things. But it didn't impress me, and I later realized that he was shocked that I was not impressed. It was not that I was looking down on him like: "okay, I do that too," but he loves classical music right? "Oh, yes I like classical music and I play cello." He was expecting like "Wow! Oh my God" kind of thing. (I: for you to fawn over him.) Yea, but I didn't do that because I mean whatever he does I do too. If he is smart, then I am smart. It was so hilarious! I think I was in the fourth year of my college. So, my mom's friend was his aunt. The first thing that his mother asked him about me he said, "I don't know, she must be a feminist." (laugh) So yeah that went well! -Young-shin, 42-years old female.

As Youngshin's experience illustrates, hypergamy is not just a cultural preference, it is part and parcel to the construction of complementary masculinities and femininities in which the man expects and is expected to be smarter, more accomplished, more capable, and the woman is expected to show appreciation, admiration, or even awe at well executed cultivation of masculine competence and breadwinning, an expectation that Youngshin violated during her *mat-seon* with her near "perfect man" by asserting that all of the abilities and interests he had cultivated to impress the opposite sex were competencies she shared in equal measure. As Youngshin mentioned at the beginning of the quote, her mother had expected and feared this outcome. Earlier in the interview Youngshin explained that her mother nearly destroyed her application to Seoul National University, insisting she go anywhere but there as it was the nation's top school

and made her look too smart for prospective suitors. Such concerns continue to weigh on parents as they guide their children's schooling and career choices, but there is a simultaneous decline in attitudes embracing compulsory matrimony and recognition of the growing necessity of dual-earner households that make more gender egalitarian attitudes and encouraging daughters to more fully realize their potential that may suggest a shift in feminine ideals. However, the persistence of a large gender-wage gap, the largest among OECD countries, reinforces the importance of hypergamy in South Korea, as men's incomes and family assets are likely to be greater determinants of post marital wealth than the women's. Economic gender inequality likewise contributes to the continued importance of gendered patterns of consumption within the courtship process, namely, the expectation that men pay the larger portion of the costs of dating.

7.1.8. Gendered Commodification of Romance Rituals

In the modern era, consumption has become the hegemonic mode for expressing romantic sentiment, cultivating love, and pursuing sexual intimacy (Bailey, 1989; Illouz, 1997; Mojola, 2014). As courtships extended in length, they also shifted location to public spaces, to *dabang* (tea houses) and later cafes, restaurants, theaters, and so forth. By paying for the costs of these activities men construct their identities as male breadwinners, their breadwinner masculinity, and by extension, their value as a prospective spouse, or at least temporary companion. It is widely perceived and reported that initially men paid the entire cost of entertainment for dates but that as more women began working outside the home, competed in the competitive market for top university degrees and took on career orientations outside of the domestic sphere, this gendering of commercial exchange inherent to dating has softened, become more balanced, though as yet still more the man's responsibility than the woman's.

Breadwinner Masculinity, based on a man's ability to provide financially for his family, is a strong component of traditional hegemonic ideals within South Korean courtship rituals (Baldacchino, 2008). Under this older regime, men were obliged to pay for all or nearly all of the costs associated with courtship and courtship rituals. In fact, men's ability and willingness to provide for a potential future wife and family are engendered in his willingness to give expensive gifts and pay for the costs of dates. This is especially true of the first date and early on in the courtship scripts of marriage-oriented dating methods such as *matson*. These purchases of commodities, meals, transportations, and hotel rooms acted as a barometer for how generous to his wife the man may behave as the sole breadwinner of the household once married, when the woman was typically expected to quit her job (Moon, 2005). Furthermore, these ritualized payments and expenditures acted as culturally recognizable sign-posts for the man to advertise his feelings toward his dating partner. As one 31-year-old woman respondent put it when asked what she felt when a man paid more for the cost of their date she explained: "I think their sincerity can be understood by how much money they invest (in order) to have me."

The purchase of commodities is one of several culturally acceptable ways in which South Korean men are encouraged to express their inner emotional feelings towards women (Kendall, 1996; Moon, 2005). However, breadwinner masculinity within consumer capitalist society often means that this method of emotional expression is valued over others. In exchange for the payment of ritual dating expenses and gift-giving, South Korean women were expected to exchange their erotic capital (the performance of feminine sexiness), emotional labor (in the form of practices such as *aegyo*) and perform a traditional role of female subservience in return. Joan and Grace both tell their stories of boyfriends pushing them to perform their South Korean female gender role in exchange for gifts and the payment of dating expenses.

> "If they (South Korean men) pay more (for the costs of dating) they think they are investing in a girl. I

> remember, I'm not a person who puts a lot of makeup on or whatever. I'm usually just living like normal, just clean face but one day, one ex-boyfriend bought me a makeup kit from The Face Shop. I remembered the brand name and he's like "if you're putting on makeup you will be even prettier please." I was like "thank you" and I got it. I still curious so I put some makeup on one day and he was really happy. But there was one day after that just coming back from a casual event, I didn't wear anything. It was just casual, and he said to me "why don't you wear makeup anymore again?" I said, "because I don't want to." "But I bought you." "But I don't want to wear in summer it's really warm today." "But I spent $60 for you." "But I don't want to." "Could you please wear makeup at least on our dating days." I didn't want to, but he was seriously pushy. A lot! I was like "okay, okay, I will consider later." I was like geez, but I feel really uncomfortable after that I kind of wanted to give it back to him but I already used one time and everything was open. – Joan

> The person who has more interest should pay (for the costs of dating) because they want to date right? (laughing) That's my opinion but in my country, South Korea, the woman who says that has really good sense, I think. In my country we need to prepare a lot. We (women) do surgery, wear makeup, and go to gym. So I think if the woman who really gets dressed and uses a lot of makeup, then fair enough, and if the boyfriend asked the girlfriend to do this, to be perfect and gorgeous, then yeah. I think many (South) Korean guys want to do that (pay for dates) for their girlfriends. So the girlfriends say, "if I do this, because I did this for you, you should pay more." And I think the (South) Korean guy should pay like that. It is kind of… that kind of girls need money. - Grace

However, the entrance of women into the public sphere of work and the state's reliance on the devaluation of South Korean labor to spur economic growth, staying competitive on the global market, has led to the erosion of the expectation that men should pay for all courtship expenses.

New ideals began supplanting this older gender system of patriarchal hegemony had been challenged by South Korean feminists and coming to a head during the #metoo movement following Donald Trump's election in 2016. Under this gender system, men and women were idealized to be totally equal in all aspects of society and all costs of courtship should be split evenly as a way to maintain equality within intimate relationships. Although, this model does not recognize the reality of the wider society in which dating couples exist is systemically unequal against women manifesting in the form of a with a huge gender pay gap, a low glass ceiling index, and discrimination with the rental housing market (Song, 2014). Opponents of this newly emerging gender system, sometimes labeled as *kimchinyeo*, argue that if women were to pay exactly fifty percent of their courtship costs then this would be actually recreating the gender inequalities of the past within modern intimate relationships.

Real life can not fit either dichotomy exactly, and there are few cases of either ideology

being expressed at the total expense of the other. Clashes between these two gender systems of breadwinner masculinity and absolute equality abound in particular during discussions of how to split the costs of dating rituals in both short- and long-term relationships. These clashes sometimes result in the dissolution of the romantic relationship but more often in a complex negotiation about a couple's ideals and realities the current social status of women in South Korean society. This makes the study of these negotiations especially fruitful in understanding current South Korean gender power dynamics and the creation of new rituals of courtship payment. Ara, a 28-year-old woman working at one of South Korea's major electronics manufacturers explained her experience *sogaeting* with a wealthier man whose courtship script was based around breadwinner masculinity.

> Ara: I *sogaeted* once, it was really bad. He was actually a doctor.
> Glayzer: Like a doctor? Or… with a Ph.D.? Medical doctor?
> Ara: Dentist, dentist. So, the one before, one before was really bad. And I decided to get married to right after that, so I asked my aunt to find someone else to get married right away. He was an ass hole. He asked me to show my bank account to him. And he directly told me that when we get married, I don't want you to uh, go to work and just stay at home and raise a child.
> Glayzer: He wanted you to be a housewife?
> Ara: Yea. And then… we always fought on that issue. And he just underestimated my social status, because I get paid lower than him. So, I was not really feeling good, and… I don't deal with it. In high-class, guys like, doctor or lawyer, they want their wife to be at home… Because they get paid a lot. They think their wife's money is not necessary for their home. But in the middle class, like workers and people like me, they just want their wife to be in the office and get paid.
> Glayzer: So, you want to marry, then, a middle-class guy, not an elite, elite guy?
> Ara: I'm still thinking. I'm still thinking about it.

Ara's story is illustrative of a not uncommon clash between competing gender ideologies as they adapt to changing social, political, and economic situations in South Korean society. Ara desired to remain working and be with a partner who treated her as an equal while her dating partner was looking for someone to conform to his notions of breadwinner masculinity where she would become a housewife and yet another symbol of his successes.

Today, South Korean men and women negotiate over dating expenses and tell us that they average a 60/40 that reflects an attempt to institute fairness into the intimate relationship by

recognizing their unequal social and economic capital within South Korean society. Furthermore, men and women do not fall neatly into the separate camps with women demanding adherence to the doctrine of absolute equality and men demanding female subordination for their higher economic contributions. A 21-year-old female survey respondent explained why she would not want to split the costs of dating evenly.

> I don't know because I've never done it. But I never want to do anything like a boyfriend friend who pays (only) half the money. If the ideal and reality are different, the reason is that men with vested interests ignore issues that do not benefit them, such as wage discrimination (against women), and argue the absurd logic that they should pay Dutch if they want to be equal.

Recognizing the socioeconomic realities of current South Korean society, this respondent instead takes a middle path between the two ideological poles described previously. As it turned out, the

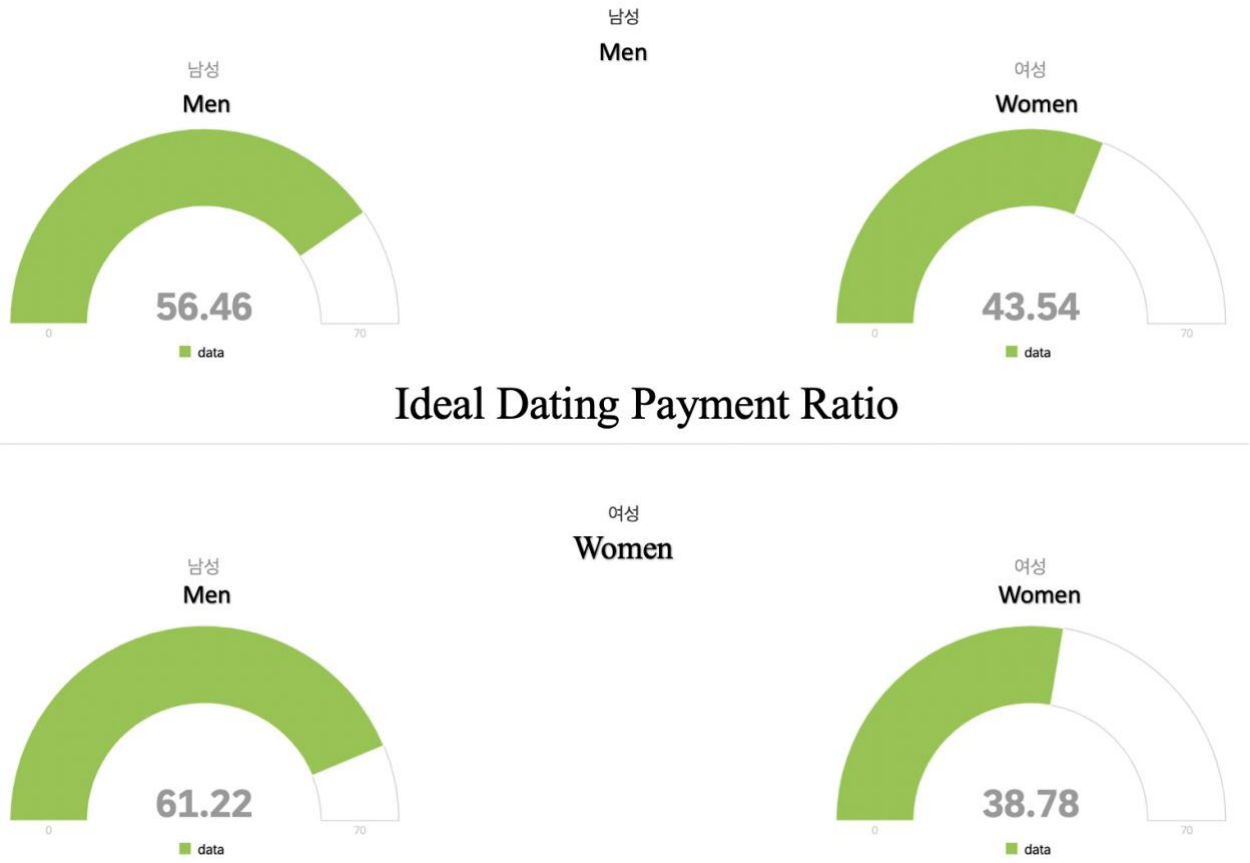


Figure 14: Reported Ideal Dating Payment Ratio Between Men and Women
Survey Questions:
What do you think is the ideal rate for a first date or blind date? (e.g. meals, movie viewing, cultural, coffee, etc. including desserts, alcohol, motels, etc.)

vast majority of my informants follow a very similar ritualized pattern of dating cost sharing with men averaging about 60% and women averaging about 40%. There was broad agreement among my informants that this ratio of payment, on average, between men and women was both fairly ideal and what actually took place on dates. There were caveats such as one woman who was working and whose male dating partner was still in university, “My first date was with a student and I was an office worker, so I paid half of it (the date).”

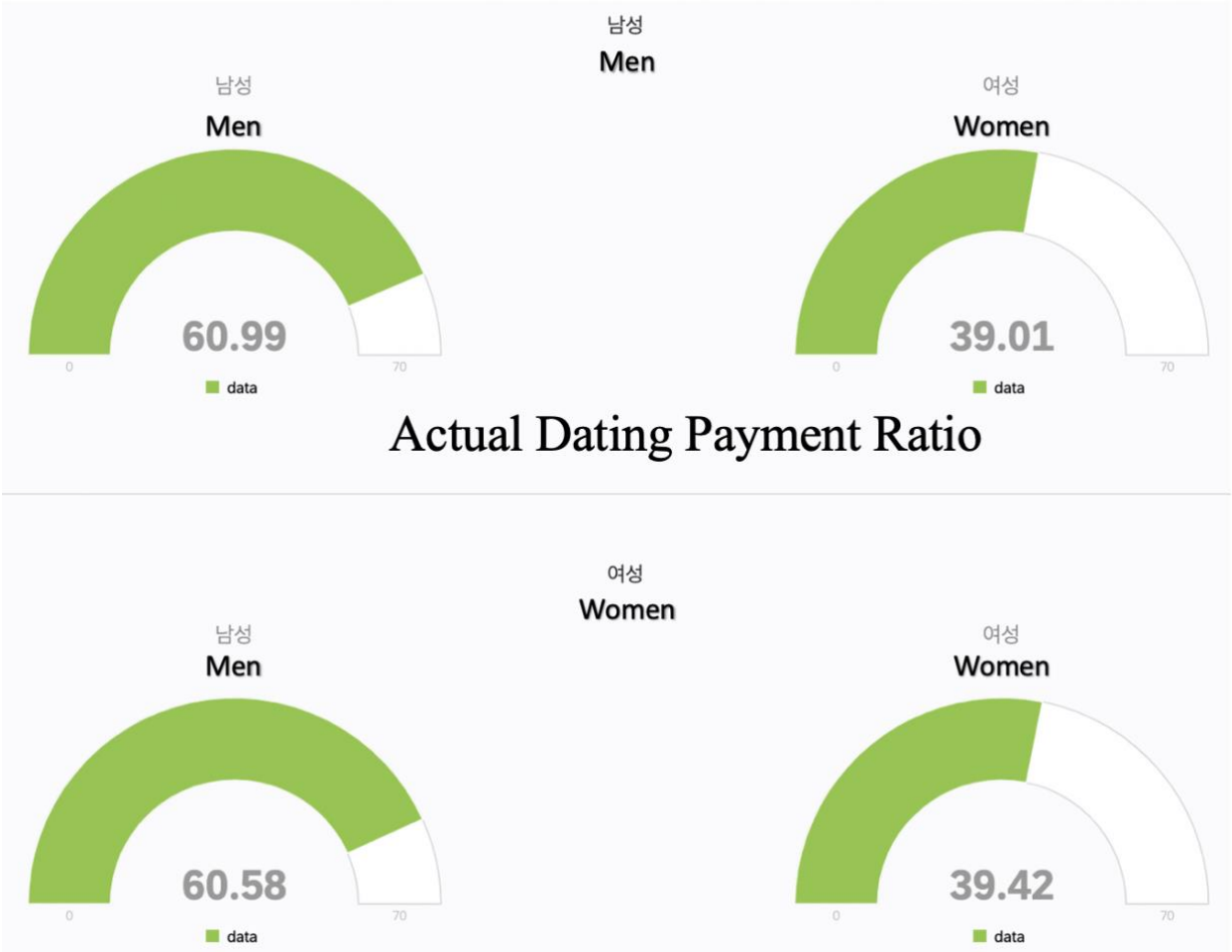


Figure 15: Reported Actual Dating Payment Ratio Between Men and Women
Survey Questions:
What percentage do you actually pay for a first date or blind date? (e.g. meals, movie viewing, cultural, coffee, etc. including desserts, alcohol, motels, etc.)

First dates and during the early phases of a relationship, some dating methods, such as *sogaeting*, place a heavier burden on men to pay for a higher portion of the dating expenses than other dating methods such as *hunting* or meeting naturally. This might be thought of as a source of ambiguity and uncertainty, but my data indicates broad agreement amongst my informants in terms of costs sharing expectations that are associated with specific ritual dating methods. Tyson, a 29-year-old pharmacist explains his feelings about cost sharing while sogaeting:

> I pay for just a meal. And then I hope (she pays for coffee) but sometimes the girl didn't buy it. Then I pay. I didn't ask, "it's your turn!" It's sooooo uncomfortable. If I say that, maybe my friend who introduced me to her will be very very mad. "Why did you do that?"

Tyson felt "so" uncomfortable asking women who he was on a date with to pay for any portion fearing that their mutual friend would be upset about it. This is confirmed by my survey data in which participants rated men as significantly more likely to pay a larger portion of the costs of dating when meeting someone for the first time through *sogaeting* compared to other methods such as "meeting naturally."

The standardization of cost sharing during ritualized dating methods demonstrates a reritualization that is adaptive to new emerging needs in a changing social and economic and sexual marketplace. Not a steadily eroding deritualized sexual field as described by Illouz. In this way, not only are the relationships scripted in the form of how to start a sogaeting relationship, asking for a second date, and establishing a relationship highly uniform and ritualized, but even the decision of who should pay for the costs of the date are established ahead of time by the ritual structure. Zelizer argues that to label a thing as a purchase, gift, bribe, or payment, is to make an argument about the relationship between the payer and the payee (Zelizer, 2007). Thus, I argue that the ritual structure of who will pay the initial costs of dating adds certainty to the definition of the relationship being established between the courting couple.

The breaking of the norm that the man should pay for the first sogaeting meal or *1-cha* carries legible significance too as a 21-year-old woman explain in a survey response "If you don't like the other person and I don't want to continue the relationship anymore, I pay for it all (of the date)." To be clear, men are expected to pay for the costs of the first *sogaeting* date even if the woman is not interested in them or vice versa but if the woman wants to be extra firm in her rejection she can also opt to pay for the date or "go Dutch" with a 50/50 split of costs. However, if *1-cha* did go well and *2-cha* is suggested by either party, it is interpreted positively if the woman pays for the, usually significantly lower, costs of the coffee, dessert, or drinks at *i-cha*. *sam-cha, sa-cha* and upwards are usually traded back and forth between the man and the woman furthering the ritualized nature of *sogaeting* payments. If things continue to go smoothly. Jackson, a 27 year-old low-income non-traditional male university student studying Chinese told me a story about the pressure to pay for the costs of sogaeting even though he was not interested in having a relationship with the woman due to the need to maintain a good relationship with their mutual friend and larger friendship network that may one day produce a different sogaeting match whom he may be more attracted to.

> Jackson: (laugh) She was not beauty. (laugh)
> Glayzer: She was not beautiful enough for you?
> Jackson: Yea. She was not attractive.
> Glayzer: Who did you ask for sogaeting from?
> Jackson: My friend's friend.
> Glayzer: While you were sogaeting who paid for the date?
> Jackson: Me.
> Glayzer: All of it? 100% of it?
> Jackson: I paid for the meal. And then she maybe pay for some coffee or dessert.
> Glayzer: So even after you meet the women on the first date and you know that she's not attractive enough and you won't see her again, you still go to the date and you still pay?
> Jackson: Yea. I should do that.
> Glayzer: Why? Why do you think that you should do that?
> Jackson: My friend's friend.
> Glayzer: You have some like social pressure? Or…
> Jackson: Yea. Friend's friend. She's my friend's friend, so He is my friend's friend so he shouldn't be sorry (for introducing me to her) So…
> Glayzer: Um-hum. Yeah, so, after the date, do you see that woman ever again? Because it's a friend's friend. Like at a party or something?
> Jackson: Sometimes ah yea, yea. One girl, we are still friends.

Glayzer: Oh, good!
Jackson: Just friends.
Glayzer: It's not weird or awkward? It's fine?
Jackson: Yea, fine.

I have examined the ritualization of South Korean *sogaeting* expense payments in some detail in order to demonstrate their standardization and intelligibility to culturally informed singles. However, other methods of dating contain similarly complex and rich norms and customs too that give their practitioners certainty over how to define their relationships with their courting partners. Some of these dating methods are novel and recent while others are older or draw from traditional court practices. However, levels of ritualism do not neatly map onto a dating methods relative novelty. In fact, what I find is that more recently popularized dating methods, [GA122] such as online dating applications, can be broken into further categories of apps that use highly structured introductions methods such as TingCup and 1km, Amanda, Noondate, and Between to more unstructured that create increased ambiguous introductions apps such as Tinder and Grindr.

Ambiguity and lack of ritual structure on the Tinder app caused uncertainty between these two men. One was "just looking for friends" while the other was looking for a dating partner. However, other apps, such as Noondate, are explicit in the responsibilities each participant has, which is limited in time (noon) and geographic distance (1km). Each user is given only two profiles to view per day, as opposed to the much higher number (50 or 100) allowed by Tinder users. Noondate further specifies that the cost of the lunch date should be split evenly. Candidates are screened by Noondate to ensure the accuracy of their demographic information they provided. These structural features add certainty to the courtship ritual in terms of expectations and cultural script for how the relationship will proceed and that participants are matched in terms of goals based on this dating method.

The ratio at which a courting couple pays for the costs of their courtship rituals is highly

dependent on which dating method they deploy in order to search for a dating partner. Some of the dating methods described are highly ritualized while others are less ritualized to a lesser extent, with participants able to choose their level of ambiguity that best matches their individual courtship goals. However, I found that, over time, most relationships eventually abandon the rules and norms of their original dating method and create a payment ratio that is idiosyncratic to the particular couple. A 23-year-old bisexual woman explained:

> The proportion of money I pay depends on the gender, age, occupation, etc. of my partner. Also, Dutch pay and dating accounts are in vogue these days, so girls usually pay 50:50 with their girlfriends, and they pay almost 60:40 with men.

This characterization of long-term dating payments is representative of what many informants told us but also succinct for two reasons. First is that ritual elements of payment in larger South Korean society such as gender, age, and occupation come to bear on the deciding of payments within intimate relationships demonstrating the individualization of this system based on the relative social statuses of the courting couple. Second, that the establishment of dating bank accounts, where the couple determine an ideal ratio of cost sharing and deposit that amount monthly into a joint account to which they both have access, reflects ritual certainty and an acknowledgment of South Korea's high gender income gap. While the negotiations over payment ratios often follow South Korean traditional hierarchies previously discussed built into language/address terminology, couples sometimes choose to go against these norms entirely depending on their own criteria. A 24-year-old woman office worker said, "because my first boyfriend was a student and I was an office worker, I paid half of it." In this way, the couple individualizes their payment ratios as their relationship progresses.

Older models of hegemonic masculine ideals, such as breadwinner masculinity where men should pay all of the costs of dates. Traditionally minded South Koreans believe that it's men's duty to pay for the costs of dates in exchange for sexiness and erotic desire. However, if

this ideal ever really existed in its purest form, has been slowly deritualized due to the development of a market economy in which women also work and demand greater autonomy and freedom from the domestic sphere. Newer more liberal constructions of masculinity and femininity are idealized to be totally equal in all aspects of society. Under this ideology all costs of courtship are split evenly as a way to maintain equality within intimate relationships. However, this model does not recognize that the wider society in which dating couples exist is systemically unequal with a huge gender pay gap. This means that if women were to pay exactly half of the costs of dating then this would be actually reintroducing the gender inequalities they seek to disrupt.

Neither model actually works out in reality because women have entered the income generating marketplace but do not earn as much money as men. Today, South Korean men and women negotiate over dating expenses and tell us that they average a 60/40 that reflects an attempt to institute fairness into the intimate relationship by recognizing their unequal social and economic capital within South Korean society. This demonstrates a reritualization that is adaptive to new emerging needs in a changing social and economic and sexual marketplace rather than a steadily eroding deritualizing sexual field as described by Illouz.

7.2. Discussion

The use of *sogaeting* as yet another among many different methods of dating creates increased complexity within the South Korean sexual field. The existence of this increased complexity may indeed be contributing to a muddled sexual and intimate narrative, making it more difficult for partners to identify exactly what kind of relationship they are engaged in. Are we a friend of a friend, are we dating, do I need to call them the next day even if I am unattracted

to them in order to respect our mutual friendship? However, I argue that this increase in complexity is not deritualization. The addition of a mutual friend itself adds intricacies and nuances to the courtship, let alone the equally socially complex decision of how to maintain one, both, or neither relationship nor in what capacities. However, it is exactly this interweaving of these overlapping friendships and romantic interests that women identify as key to driving the popularity of *sogaeting* in the first place. In this way, the persistence in popularity of *sogaeting* among South Korean singles, despite numerous other types of dating within a hyper-commodified dating marketplace represents reritualization. Capitalist economic development and the expansion of the consumer market have indeed created more complexity within the South Korean sexual field and contributed to the proliferation of dating methodologies and narratives, but within these various dating methods I found that these narratives are actually well defined and knowable. While stressful and complex, negotiations over who pays for the cost of a date has social precedent with culturally understood expectations and obligations. Further, this reritualization is a response to contemporary inequalities and social issues. Rather than the broad deritualization that Illouz describes as eroding traditional social obligations and relationships narratives that helped to maintain gender equality, an examination of *sogaeting* and other dating methods within the broader South Korean cultural context reveals that the expansion and diversification of courtship rituals alone does not necessarily indicate deritualization and the corrosion of gender equality within the sexual field. Indeed, the reritualized aspects of South Korean dating seem designed to counteract the effects of the intrusion of the market into the intimate relationship and to generate gender parity.

Similar gendered scripts and standardized relationship narratives exist for many of the other dating methods such as *hunting, meeting, matson,* and arranged marriages. According to

my survey respondents and informants, sexual scripts themselves are organized around the choice of dating methodology with sex occurring more frequently and more quickly with online dating than with other kinds of dates. Informants and survey respondents similarly indicated that in more "traditional" styles of dating such as *matson* and *sogaeting*, men were expected to pay a higher percentage of the costs associated with the courtship than women when the expected outcome or desired goal of the courtship ritual was marriage or a serious relationship. Further, respondents were asked what their "ideal" percentage of cost sharing would be on a date vs what they actually ended up paying and these two measures were almost always nearly the same. This indicates relative agreement as to the terms of cost sharing and mutual understanding based on the type and style of dating method. However, when the desired outcome of the courtship ritual was less serious, such as with lightning dating or *hunting*, the expectations of when sex would occur was sooner and the costs of the date were defrayed more evenly**.**

Illouz observes that in the post-industrial societies where her informants live, the market logics have seeped into decisions making processes within intimate relationships. The result was a slow deritualization of the traditional gender system causing increased uncertainty within intimate relationships as to the courtship script that was to be followed. However, I have found that within this ambiguity South Korean singles negotiate over the course of their relationships a dating expense ratio that creates fairness based on each partner's income if not necessarily equality demonstrating a reritualization of South Korean dating rituals. I have also demonstrated the ways in which South Koreans have resisted deritualization through individuation, relationship initiation, coupledom, language, body language, and other practices. I have also argued that some of these practices, such as *sogaeting* and the proliferation of other socially

screen dating styles, constitute a type of reritualization where South Koreans are actively pushing back against detritualization.

CHAPTER 8:

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have attempted to understand how the development of a consumer driven economy has affected gender inequality through the commodification of intimate relationships within courtship rituals. Economic development, technological adaptations, and women's entrance into the workplace have helped South Korean men and women demand the right to choose their own marriage partners for the sake of love rather than economic or utilitarian purposes. Unfortunately, as in other nations to undergo rapid industrialization, economic development has not benefited the South Koreans evenly. The unevenness of this inequality is similarly unequally distributed between various gendered and classes. The majority of men enjoy far greater earning power than women within the South Korean market and the gulf of inequality between the upper and lower classes continues to expand. One of the results I have found is that the ultra-competitive South Korean dating and marriage market has selected for a reversion to a reliance on South Korean singles' parents class status and economic clout. In this way, I call into question the assumption that economic development has consistent effects for women's ability to choose their own marriage partners and create more gender egalitarian intimate relationships.

Love is often idealized in the United States existing separately from the world of self-interest, economic benefit, or considerations of social status. The transition away from companionate marriage arranged by parents to "love marriages" in South has been mirrored by capitalist economic development and the ability of singles to insist on making the decision of whom they marry themselves. However, as I have demonstrated in this dissertation, this transition has not meant that decisions of who to date, marry, and love in South Korea is now decoupled from utilitarian considerations. This should not be a surprise, as the anthropological literature shows that courtship and marriage are almost never completely dissociated from

pragmatic issues and self-interest. What is surprising is the degree to which decisions about who to court and marry have transitioned away from parents and are now in the hands of individuals trapped within a large market. South Korean courtship rituals heavily mediated by the incessant exchange of commodities help to solidify young love. However, the necessity of these market exchanges to legitimate a relationship as culturally proper also raises barriers for low-income men to be able to afford an intimate relationship outside of hiring sex workers. Further, these high costs also leave many women as unequal partners within their relationships built on the ideology of a love that is given freely and equally. Also surprising is the ways in which inequality within the market is translated into inequality within intimate relationships but similarly, when looking to begin a new intimate relationship.

South Korean singles, men and women, have gained greater autonomy from their parents and families over the selection of their dating and marriage partners. However, in many respects documents throughout this dissertation, decisions about who to date and what is desirable in a romantic partner are now shaped by the South Korean dating and marriage marketplace, with its own logics and values, rather than that of the individual. Wealthy men that can best embody breadwinner masculinity wield considerable power within the South Korean dating marketplace, while low-income men are demasculate and oftentimes unable to afford the costs of romantic intimacy. Similarly, women able to approximate idealized femininity that is epitomized by their physical attractivity and sexual capital exchange those attributes in order to gain economic security and upward economic mobility, while women with unable to approximate this ideal find it difficult to find love or economic security. These are broad findings backed by extensive ethnographic research, but the data also reveals a great diversity of experiences. Not all low-income South Korean men remain single and unable to afford love. Similarly, not all women

who lack erotic capital in the South Korean sexual market face such bleak outcomes in their intimate lives. Additionally, not all women idealize high-income men and not all men idealize sexually attractive women.

Inequality, between men and women but also among them, begins when searching for an intimate partner. South Korean singles have a wide diversity of methods to deploy when searching for an intimate partner to court. Each of these dating methods, such as *hunting*, *sogaeting*, and dating applications, have advantages and disadvantages for singles depending on the type of relationship script they wish to pursue. A South Korean single looking for a relationship built on sex and with less emotional and financial commitment may prefer *hunting*, for example. However, among these various methods sogaeting stood out for its popularity among my informants despite the fact that many South Korean singles find it less than ideal. It's formality and traditional nature puts further pressure on South Korean men to pay for the costs of initial courtship, increasing the costs and raising higher the barrier to enter the sexual field for low income men. The preference for *sogaeting* was strongest among South Korean women who did not prefer this method for its increased economic benefit to themselves but for the increased sense of safety they felt having a mutual friend perform the introductions. This mutual friend serves as a kind safety net and background check on male dating partners who may seek to use their economic, physical, and social advantages to extract sexual favors. While not as popular as with South Korean women, men too shared a favorable view of *sogaeting* because for them, the mutual friend would also serve as a check against women who would use their sexual capital to extract economic resources from them, or in extreme cases, falsely accuse them of sexual misconduct in search of a cash payment. In short, the popularity and preference for *sogaeting* in many ways exacerbates inequalities of all kinds in South Korean dating culture in order to better

protect singles from the threat of abuse that has become possible due to inequality within the market. This demonstrates once again how inequality within the market in the form of the gender income gap, glass ceilings, and discrimination against women in the workplace, translates into inequality within the dating and marriage market.

Capitalist economic development and neoliberal market reforms have produced astounding benefits to many societies around the world. South Korea has often been held up as a prime example of these benefits having moved from one of the world's poorest nations to one of its richest in an astounding short amount of time. Part of the reason for this success has been South Korea's ability to climb the ladder of technological advancement and industrial production, leapfrogging other nations. The early adoption and investment in technologies such as semiconductors, mobile phones, and highspeed internet are examples of South Koreans willingness to emerging technology to overcome their disadvantages in the world system of production. However, despite South Korea's pride in, and reliance on, advanced mobile technologies surprisingly few of my informants reported utilizing the internet to search love and intimacy. This is particularly unexpected because the internet and mobile dating applications would seem to offer South Korean singles, men and women, to subvert the inequalities outlined above. Allowing singles to meet each other for free, use filters to screen dating partners for undesirable traits, setup cost sharing ratios in advance of dates, and meet singles from outside of their immediate social circles, South Korean women in particular could potentially disrupt the inequalities that exist in the sexual field. However, according to my informants this has not taken place. Instead, commodification of internet dating and mobile dating apps, combined with a strong preference for dating partners that are already imbedded within their existing social network has recreated the inequalities that exist in wider South Korean society. The adoption of

new technologies is often associated in the literature with the subversion of existing power hierarchies, especially the internet, but in the case of South Korean dating rituals it has actually served to reinforce existing hierarchies and make them more plainly visible. The ways in which new technologies are adopted and diffused vary due to cultural variation, historical accidents, and the unpredictable ways that people react to socioeconomic considerations. The adoption of new technologies of intimate consumption also varies in its affects on the culture in which is it situated.

In *The End of Love*, Eva Illouz (2019b) described the ways that dating cultures in the advanced economies of US, Western Europe, and Israel are becoming dominated by mobile dating applications and casual sexual relationships. Further, she argues that despite the ostensible gender egalitarian logic of the culture of casual sex without commitment or economic exchange, that this shift has served men's goals of sexual fulfilment without emotional or economic entanglement more so than women's needs for emotional intimacy. This assumption that late capitalist societies will necessarily befall a similar transformation in which courtship becomes de-ritualized leading to increased anxiety, uncertainty, and dissatisfaction is belied by my informants who hold similar views about their extensively ritualized courtships. In fact, I have argued that in the case of South Korean dating culture, singles have actively sought to reritualized dating and courtship in order to individuate their intimate relationship from the market. The historical and social correlates Illouz ascribes the changes she observed and uses to predict similar outcomes elsewhere are likely a culturally idiosyncratic transformation produced by the current permutation of Europe's evolving Judeo-Christian derived sexual fields rather than a product of the global social and economic transformations associated with modernity. The transformation of romantic relationships in South Korea, a society that underwent modernization

in a way often described as “condensed”, developing from a “hermit kingdom” and one of the poorest nations in the world into the 13th largest economy and one of the most technologically advanced societies on the planet in a little over a century. South Korean singles have largely resisted deritualization and actually ritualized novel, emergent methods of dating.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the commodification of intimacy does not always have even, predictable, or beneficial effects. Cultural variation, sociohistorical particularities, and random chance can often have important consequences on who the commodification of intimacy benefits and who it does not. One of the strengths of this research is that attempts to understand gender equality and commodification through time thanks to the important work of authors such as Nancy Abelmann, Laura Kendall, Seungsook Moon, and Nicole Constable. However, during my time in the field in 2016 and 2017 Donald Trump had become president of the United States of America and the #metoo movement reached South Korea. The increasing visibility and resistance to the commodification of intimacy combined with high youth unemployment and pressure to get married and have children in order to avoid a future economic crisis was palpable in all of my conversations and interviews. The younger South Korean singles that I spoke with were often the most vocal critics of commodification and many of them were fairly cognizant of the ways in which it negatively affected themselves or those around them. I also uncovered some evidence that Polanyi’s double-movement, or resistance to the intrusion of the market into the intimate sphere, is already taking place. Eva Illouz, Viviana Zelizer, and Ellen Lamont have pointed out the ways in which relationships have always been and continue to be commodified, which is true in South Korea as well. However, their work lacks the critical anthropological lens which allows for cross-cultural evaluation.

As the world continues to shrink due to globalization and the development of ever faster forms of communication, allowing for the similarly rapid flow of cultural ideas and values, anxieties and fears about the potential for the total commodification of all intimacy will sure remain with us. Future research on the commodification of intimacy should endeavor to make the local diversity of their field site a focal point in their analysis. I believe that by better understanding the specific sociohistorical context in which intimate commodification does or does not take place will better allow social scientists to understand and predict its outcomes.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

SURVEY INSTRUMENT 1

The survey instrument used during field research was written in Korean but has been translated to English below.

Korean Dating Culture

Commercialization of Personal Intimacy: Hello! You are invited to participate in a study on South Korean dating culture. The research is conducted by Edward Glayzer, a doctoral student researcher from the Department of Anthropology at Michigan State University and is directed by Professor Andrea Louie.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take a survey. The purpose of the survey is to collect information about your overall perceptions or experiences within South Korean dating culture. We will specifically ask questions about giving and receiving gifts, couples' anniversaries, and who pays for the date. This information will help researchers understand how the development of South Korea's consumer economy has affected gender equality through dating and the commercialization of private relationships in marriage consciousness. This study will also address how the income gap between men and women influences the expression of personal intimacy through the consumption of goods. The risks associated with your participation in interviews are nothing more known than what comes from expressing your thoughts and feelings in your daily life.

Your confidentiality is legally protected as far as possible. The questionnaire you fill out will be stored as a file on a password-protected computer in the chief researcher's office, and only those in charge of the research project will have access to the stored records. All personally

identifiable information from that record will be removed and stored in a separate file. The data will be stored for 10 years after project completion. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can refuse or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You also have the right to skip or not answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a participant in the study, if you would like to obtain information or make additional reports, or if you would like to make a complaint about this study, you can contact us (anonymously if you wish): Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824 in the United States. If you have any questions or concerns about scientific issues, research methods, etc. related to this research, or would like to report physical, psychological, social, financial or other damages, please contact the investigator: Edward Glayzer at 655 Auditorium Drive, East Lansing, MI 48824 or Kakao ID: eglayzer.

Thank you for taking your time to respond to the survey. This questionnaire contains questions about your opinions and attitudes about the material exchange that occurs when dating in Korea. The researcher asks you to answer each question in as much detail as possible. The amount and quality of information you provide will help researchers better understand how material exchanges are used in relationships.

Please answer all of the questions that apply to your current relationship. Questions that do not apply to you no longer need to be answered.

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What gender is the person you would like to date?

4. What is your job? If you are a student, what is your major?
5. Where do you currently live?
6. If you live in Seoul, in which district of Seoul do you live?
7. Who do you live with?
8. What is your personal monthly income? (Job, part-time job, pocket money, etc.)
9. What is the annual income for your entire household?
10. What names do you apply to your current relationship status?
11. Do you currently have a desire to date or being dating? What is the reason?
12. If there are obstacles (e.g. time, money, etc.) to your dating and what are they?
13. How do you usually meet people to date?
14. If you use a relationship service, what is it?
15. If you have ever used a related service, what was it like?
16. How do you usually share the costs of a date when you first date someone?
17. Are there any changes in the way you share these costs after you've been in a lasting relationship with that person (e.g., after dating)?

The following questions can be written based on past experiences if you are currently in a relationship with the present and past experiences, and if you are not currently in a relationship. Which of the following couples' anniversaries have you celebrated so far? Please make a rough estimate of how much money you (one person) will spend on each anniversary (including all the expenses you spend on the anniversary, such as gift expenses, meal expenses, cultural enjoyment expenses, etc.).

1. How do you feel overall about the number of couples' anniversaries in the Korean dating culture, or the resulting frequency of material exchange? Do you think there are too many or not enough? Why do you think so?
2. Do you personally feel that the number of couples' anniversaries or the resulting material exchange is financially burdensome? How do these anniversaries affect you?
3. Are you satisfied with the amount of material exchange (e.g., the amount of gifts) exchanged between you and the other party? What is the reason?
4. In your relationship, have you ever talked about the amount of gifts you give or receive, or about reducing or increasing the cost of dating?
5. Do you think the agreement you and the other party have made is fair? What is the reason?
6. Have you ever had a relationship with someone who differed significantly from your income? If so, how do you think the circumstances influenced you in deciding how much to spend on the gift for that person?
7. Many say that in Korean dating culture, it is customary for men to spend more money on dates or gifts than women. If this is true, why do you think men spend more? In your opinion, is this entirely due to the customary aspect of Korea, or is there any other reason?
8. Do you think positively or negatively about this custom?
9. If you and the other party promised to marry what material expenditures or exchanges were involved in the promise of marriage (e.g., engagement ceremony, meeting, etc.)? Who paid for it? How do you feel about the extent to which you have contributed to the process? Do you think the process was fair? What is the reason?

10. If you are married, how did you share the expenses for the wedding, home, marriage, wedding rings, etc.? Was there anything other than what was mentioned in the question? If so, who paid for it? How do you feel about the extent to which you have contributed to the process? Do you think the process was fair? What is the reason?

Conclusion If you are interested in survey questions related to Korean dating culture and would like to tell you more about it, please contact us (Kakao ID: eglayzer) to arrange an interview by contacting researcher Eddie Glayzer. Thank you.

APPENDIX B:

SURVEY INSTRUMENT 2

The survey instrument used during field research was written in Korean but has been translated to English below.

A Questionnaire About Exchanges Occurring on a Date or Before Marriage

Consent Form: Thank you for agreeing and participating in the "Date or Marriage Exchange Questionnaire." This research is conducted by Professor Andrea Louie and a PhD research student at Michigan State University in Anthropology, Edward Glayzer. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about your overall perception or experience with the Korean dating culture. The questionnaire will ask you questions about giving and receiving gifts between couples, anniversaries, and who pays for the date. The estimated time required for this survey is 20 to 30 minutes. The data collected through the survey will not be used for any other purpose other than the researcher's research paper writing. Data will be retained for 10 years after project completion, and personal information of survey participants will be protected as far as possible within the limits of legal protection. Participation in the survey is done with your voluntary consent. If you do not want to answer a specific question, you can skip the question or decline to respond, and you can stop the survey at any time. If you have any general questions about participating in this study's interview, please contact us at: Edward Glayzer at 655 Auditorium Drive, East Lansing, MI 48824 or Kakao ID: eglayzer

Instructions: Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. This questionnaire contains questions about your opinions and attitudes about the material exchange that occurs when dating in Korea. Please answer each question in as much detail as possible. The amount

and quality of the information you provide through the survey will help researchers understand how material exchange is used in dating.

1. What is your nationality?
2. When was your birth year?
3. What is your gender?
4. What gender is the person you would like to date?
5. What is your final level of education?
6. What is your job?
7. What is your major?
8. Where do you live?
9. In which city or district (in the case of a special city or metropolitan city) do you specifically reside? Or, if you live abroad, what country do you live in?
10. Who do you currently live with?
11. What is your personal monthly income? (Job, part-time job, pocket money, etc.)
12. What is the annual income for your entire household?
13. On average, how often did you date last year?
14. Please describe your relationship status.
15. Do you currently have a desire to date or be dating?
16. If there are obstacles to your dating, what are some of them?
17. How do you go about trying to meet people to date?
18. If you are currently in a relationship with someone, how did you meet that person?

19. Have you ever used dating or marriage related services (e.g. matchmaker, marriage company duo, applications, etc.) to find someone? What have you used?
20. Why or why not did you use or not use the related services?
21. How satisfied were you while using dating or marriage related services?
22. What is the most common percentage of your past or current dating expenses? (*Assuming the total is 100%)
    a. Male
    b. Female
        i. Why are you spending at the above rate? Please describe in detail what you think and how you feel about it.
23. When one party spends more money than the other on a date, do you think that the more paying party expects something in return (e.g. social status, sexual favors, personal satisfaction, etc.)? Why do you think so?
24. How do you feel about the number of couples' anniversaries in South Korean dating culture, or the frequency of material exchange situations that result?
25. Are you personally burdened by the various anniversaries? What is the burden?
26. Why do you feel that the frequency of your anniversary is appropriate?
27. Why do you feel that the frequency of your anniversary is insufficient?
28. Please answer the questions below based on both your present and past experiences. Which of the following anniversaries have you celebrated so far?
29. Please make a rough estimate of how much money you (one person) spends on each anniversary (including all the expenses you spend on the anniversary, such as gift costs, meals, cultural enjoyment costs, etc.).

a. Annual anniversary (ex. 1st anniversary) : _____

b. 100-Day anniversary (ex. 200 days) : _____

c. Month-based anniversary (ex. 6 months) : _____

d. birthdays : _____

e. Valentine's Day (2.14) : _____

f. White Day (3.14) : _____

g. Christmas (12.25) : _____

h. Pepero Day (11.11) : _____

i. New Year's Day (1.1) : _____

j. *Samgyeopsal* Day (3.3) : _____

k. Black Day (4.14) : _____

l. Rose Day (5.14) : _____

m. Kiss Day (6.14) : _____

n. Hug Day (12.14) : _____

o. Diary Day (1.14) : _____

p. Silver Day (7.14) : _____

q. Green Day (8.14) : _____

r. Music Day (9.14) : _____

s. Wine Day (10.14) : _____

t. Movie Day (11.14) : _____

u. Total : _____

30. How often do exchanged gifts other than the anniversaries mentioned in the preceding table?

31. When and why did you exchange them?
32. How much do you usually spend at these times?
33. Are you satisfied with the amount of material exchange (e.g., the amount of gifts) exchanged between you and the other party?
34. Why are you satisfied with the amount of material exchange?
35. Why are you not satisfied with the amount of material exchange?
36. When calculating the total costs you spent on dating above, what costs did you include?
37. In your relationship, have you ever talked about the amount of gifts you give or receive, or about reducing or increasing the cost of dating?
38. What was the reason for the discussion above, and what was the conclusion or decision you and the other person made?
39. Are you satisfied with the percentage of the cost that was ultimately incurred by you and the other person after the discussion (or not)?
40. Have you ever felt uncomfortable as a result of having a relationship with someone who differs significantly from your own income?
41. Did the significant difference in income from your partner affect your decision on how much to spend on the gift you give him? If so, how do you think it affected it?
42. Do you think that men or women are the more customary in South Korean dating culture to spend more money on dates or gifts?

a. From the above question, why do you think they spend more money? In your opinion, is this entirely due to the customary aspect of Korea, or is there any other reason?

b. From the above question, do you usually think positively or negatively about the customs that they pay more than women?

43. Have you ever been formally engaged? How much did you spend in the marriage decision process (*pre-marriage decision, engagement ceremony, meeting, etc.)?
44. How did you divide the total cost of the marriage decision (eg engagement ceremony, meeting, etc.)?
45. How do you feel about your overall contribution to the process? Do you think the process was fair? What is the reason?
46. Have you ever been married?
47. What was the total cost of your party in preparing for the wedding and subsequent marriage (e.g. wedding, home, coma, wedding rings, etc.)?
48. How did you share the total cost of your wedding and subsequent marriage preparations (e.g. wedding, home, coma, wedding rings, etc.)?
49. How do you feel about your overall contribution to the process? Do you think the process was fair? What is the reason?

Conclusion If you are interested in survey questions related to Korean dating culture and would like to tell you more about it, please contact us (Kakao ID: eglayzer) to arrange an interview by contacting researcher Eddie Glayzer. Thank you.

APPENDIX C:

SURVEY INSTRUMENT 3

The survey instrument used during field research was written in Korean but has been translated to English below.

Questionnaire on Terms for Defining Relationships

Thank you for agreeing and participating in the "Date or Marriage Exchange Questionnaire." This research is conducted by Professor Andrea Louie and a PhD research student at Michigan State University in Anthropology, Edward Glayzer. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about your overall perception or experience with the South Korean dating culture. The survey will ask questions related to various factors related to the dating culture. The estimated time required for this survey is 10 to 15 minutes. The data collected through the survey will not be used for any other purpose other than the researcher's research paper writing. Data will be retained for 10 years after project completion, and personal information of survey participants will be protected as far as possible within the limits of legal protection. Participation in the survey is done with your voluntary consent. If you do not want to answer a specific question, you can skip the question or decline to respond, and you can stop the survey at any time. If you have any general questions about participating in this study's interview, please contact us at: Edward Glayzer at 655 Auditorium Drive, East Lansing, MI 48824 or Kakao ID: eglayzer

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. This questionnaire contains questions about your opinions and attitudes about the Korean dating culture. Please answer each question in as much detail as possible. The quantity and quality of the information you provide

through the survey will be of great help to researchers in understanding South Korean dating culture from different angles.

1. What is your nationality?
2. When was your birth year?
3. What is your gender?
4. What gender is the person you would like to date?
5. Where do you live?
6. In which city or district (in the case of a special city or metropolitan city) do you specifically reside? Or, if you live abroad, what country do you live in?
7. What is your personal monthly income? (Job, part-time job, pocket money, etc.)
8. What is the annual income for your entire household?
9. What do you think would be the ideal percentage to cover the cost of a first or blind date? (e.g. meals, movie expenses, cultural expenses, desserts such as coffee, alcohol, motel, etc.)
    a. _____ male
    b. _____ female
10. What percentage of your first or blind date did you actually pay (E.g. meals, movie expenses, cultural expenses, desserts such as coffee, alcohol, motel, etc.)?
    a. _____ male
    b. _____ female
11. If your ideal and reality are different from the above question, why?

12. What do you think would be the ideal ratio to cover the cost of dating with a long-term partner (e.g., a lover, etc.)? (E.g. meals, movie expenses, cultural expenses, desserts such as coffee, alcohol, motel, etc.)
    a. _____ male
    b. _____ female
13. What is the primary rate at which you actually pay for a date with a long-term partner ? (e.g. meals, movie expenses, cultural expenses, desserts such as coffee, alcohol, motel, etc.)
    a. _____ male
    b. _____ female
14. If your ideal and reality are different from the above question, why?
15. How do you usually pay for dating with your partner?
16. If you use a date passbook, who gives the card to the cashier at checkout?
17. How do you usually pay when you go to restaurants and pubs or enjoy cultural life with a heterosexual friend (e.g. male or female) who is not in a romantic relationship?
18. What style of clothing do you usually wear on your first date or on a blind date?
19. When choosing clothes for your first date or blind date, do you have any body parts that are uncomfortable for you if they are shown?
20. When you go on your first date or blind date, do you feel uncomfortable if the person's attire exposes any body parts?
21. On the Seoul subway map, click on the 3 most frequent spots you go on for a date.

22. Where do you usually go on your first date? If you have a specific reason for going or not going anywhere, what is it?
23. What kind of restaurant do you usually go to on your first date?
24. How long until you become offended if your partner doesn't reply to your texts or KakaoTalk messages?
25. Have you ever had any ambiguous or unconventional relationships that are neither romantic nor friends (e.g., some, sex partner, sponsor, etc.)?
    a. How do you define that relationship? What name do these relationships have?
    b. In what ways was this relationship different from other conventional or typical relationships?
26. What qualities do you want from your partner or dating partner in a relationship you are unsure of whether or not to marry, and what are their levels of importance?
27. What qualities do you want from your partner in a marriage-minded relationship, and what are their importance?
28. If the qualities you value most in your dating and marriage partner are different, what do you think is the reason?
29. When do you start using *banmal* with a dating partner? From that time on, why did you use *banmal*?
30. In your experience, does the man or the woman usually like to try *skinship* first?
31. How long do you usually wait to kiss a new dating partner?

32. In your experience, does the man or the woman usually like to try to have sex first?
33. When you meet your partner naturally (unless you've met it for the purpose of dating), when are you usually having sex with your partner for the first time?
34. When you meet your partner on a blind date, when do you usually first have sex with your partner?
35. When you meet your partner through a *matson*, when are you usually having sex with your partner for the first time?
36. When you meet your partner through *hunting*, when do you usually first have sex with your partner?
37. When you meet your partner online, such as in a dating app, when are you usually having sex with your partner for the first time?
38. If you pay more or all costs of your first date or blind date, will you have a higher expectation or sense of empowerment for the other person than if both parties were equal? (E.g. the right to make sexual demands, initiatives in relationships, etc.)
    a. If you choose "Yes", what kind of expectations or feelings of rights do you have? Why do you feel that way?
    b. If you chose "No" or "Other", why?
39. If your partner pays more or all costs of the first date or blind date, do you feel a greater burden or obligation to the other person than if both parties were equal? (E.g., the obligation to respond to sexual demands, the burden of obeying the other party's will, etc.)

a. If you choose "Yes", what kind of burden or obligation do you have? Why do you feel that way?
b. If you chose "No" or "Other", why?

40. If you pay more or all dating costs than your partner, will you have a higher expectation or sense of empowerment for your partner than if both parties were equal? (E.g. the right to make sexual demands, initiatives in relationships, etc.)
    a. If you choose "Yes", what kind of expectations or feelings of rights do you have? Why do you feel that way?
    b. If you chose "No" or "Other", why?
41. If your lover pays more or all of the dating costs, do you feel a greater burden or obligation on the other than when both parties are equal? (E.g., the obligation to respond to sexual demands, the burden of obeying the other party's will, etc.)
    a. If you choose "Yes", what kind of burden or obligation do you have? Why do you feel that way?
    b. If you chose "No" or "Other", why?
    c. If you give your partner an expensive, thoughtful, or special gift, what expectations or feelings of rights do you have for your partner? (E.g. the right to make sexual demands, initiatives in relationships, etc.)
    d. If you choose "Yes", what kind of expectations or feelings of rights do you have? Why do you feel that way?
    e. If you chose "No" or "Other", why?

42. If your partner gives you an expensive, thoughtful, or special gift, what burden or obligation do you feel for the other person? (E.g., the obligation to respond to sexual demands, the burden of obeying the other party's will, etc.)
    a. If you choose "Yes", what kind of burden or obligation do you have? Why do you feel that way?
    b. If you chose "No" or "Other", why?
43. If you used the services of prostitution, how often do you do it?

Thank you for participating in the survey. We hope you found the survey interesting! Would you like to share your opinion in more detail through a 45-minute to 1-hour interview with researcher Eddie Glayzer? You can enjoy free refreshments and light meals provided by the researcher at your convenient location (e.g. cafes, study rooms, etc.). (Video interviews are also available if you are not in Seoul!)

Thank you! Please write down your preferred contact information (e.g. phone number, Kakao ID, email address, etc.) below and a researcher will contact you shortly.

If you are interested in the survey questions related to Korean dating culture and would like to tell you more about it, please contact us in parentheses (Kakao ID: eglayzer) to contact researcher Eddie Glayzer to arrange an interview. Thank you. Please proceed to the next page to complete the survey.

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