

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians:
The voices of the women struggling with ceaseless conflicts

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Women and Gender Studies

June, 2017, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: June 7, 2017

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Abstract

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Abstract: I explore how Korean religions affect South Korean lesbians' identities and lives by capturing the perspectives of Korean lesbians who are Presbyterian, Catholic and Buddhist through this study. This study aims to raise awareness of conflicts caused by the religions through testimonies provided in the lesbians' own voices and to find ways to unravel the conflicts and improve relationships at the intersection of lesbian identity, religion, family, and members of South Korean society. Therefore, this research centers on the first-person accounts and stories of religious Korean lesbians. Six South Korean religious lesbians were interviewed, and the women's stories were reconstructed as autobiographic narratives based on feminist standpoint theory to consider the importance of understanding each woman's self-perception as a religious lesbian in South Korea.

June 7, 2017.

Acknowledgements

I deeply appreciate the participants: J, Eunwoo, H, Ryeosu, Sujin, and Jihwon. They willingly shared their life stories of religious lesbians with me. I laughed a lot when they told me their stories which were full of witty expressions, and cried a lot as well when they poured out their other stories, which conveyed their anger and sadness. Thanks to them, I could take a long walk on an emotional road. I hope that this research can contribute to making their lives as lesbians be filled with more smiles than tears.

My supervisor, Dr. Michele Byers, encouraged me to be brave and confident of my work. Whenever I felt frustrated with or dubious about my research and language, her feedback and guidance enabled me to stand up and go forward. In addition, I had various opportunities to enjoy studying thanks to her help. I cannot express in words how much I appreciate her support. I also thank Dr. Val Marie Johnson, my thesis committee member. Her detailed feedback and thoughtful comments helped me to be on the right track.

I should mention my precious friends who have supported and encouraged me to walk my way: Tong, Jihae (Jung), Jeongjin, Hyunjung (Ann), Hyemin (Byeorang), Inhee (Sina), Jiwon, and Seonha. Their warm words make me not lose the confidence in my ability and not feel lonely even though all of us live here and there in the world.

And, my parents. How can I describe the depth of gratitude for their immeasurable love and support in a few sentences? I sincerely thank them for everything that they gave me. It enables me to be who I am. I love you, love you so much, mom and dad.

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Finally, thank you, God. Thank you for all opportunities including conducting this research. I strongly believe that you stand on the side of all sexual minorities, and in the end, you will lead all people to equal happiness.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

It happened in a corner of Seoul City Hall Square on June 28, 2015. Dancers were performing the traditional Korean fan dance in a sweat, and people around them were eagerly waving South Korean national flags in one hand and holding the signs in the other. It was the last day of the Korea Queer Culture Festival 2015: a parade day. Were the dancers and the flag wavers supporters of the festival? There is a funny story related to this scene. One of the foreign reporters who was there thought the people dancing were celebrating the festival, so, in the caption accompanying his photo of the dancers, he described them as Queer Culture supporters wearing traditional Korean costumes, dancing on the last day of the festival. However, he had to correct his caption later. Why? The signs in their hands said: “차별금지법은 동성애를 조장한다 [The Anti-Discrimination Act promotes homosexuality],” “동성애가 합법화되면 국가 기강 무너진다 [If homosexuality is legalized, our national discipline will collapse],” and “동성애 합법화되면 국가 안보 흔들린다 [If homosexuality is legalized, national security will be shaken].” The dancers were members of Korean Protestant Church associations and conservative NGOs; they were anti-gay activists, not LGBTQ rights supporters.

It is no longer uncommon to see people with the kinds of signs mentioned above in South Korean society. Since the 1990s, when discourses on sexual minorities first appeared in the South Korean public sphere, sexual minorities have been attacked by

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some conservative NGOs and the Korean Protestant Church members. One of their main arguments, that homosexuals can threaten national discipline and security, seems to make sexual minorities into a political scapegoat in South Korea. In fact, the Korean peninsula is the world's last Cold war frontier, and the South Korean government has confronted the Communist North Korean government since the Korean War in the 1950s. Kim points out with regard to what period that "as in the Cold War United States, where discourse targeting homosexuality as a national threat was common, people of nonnormative or perverse sexualities were rhetorically demonized either as a serious threat to the goals of anti-Communism or as an inferior cultural influence that might contaminate healthy national morality and culture" (Kim, 2015, p.458).

The anti-gay activists have become more visible since 2007 when the Anti-Discrimination Act (Appendix A) was tabled in the Korean National Assembly (Nayoung, 2015).¹ The Ministry of Justice's pre-announcement of legislation on the 2nd of October 2007 showed that the Act was intended to establish a comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of the following categories: gender, disability, medical history, age, country of origin, ethnicity, race, colour, language, place of birth,

¹ Nayoung is a Korean feminist activist of Network for Glocal Activism in South Korea. Network for Glocal Activism (<http://facebook.com/NGASF>) is one of the Korean NGOs opened in 2009 which focuses on local movements and making activist networks among local organizations to fight global sexism, the exploitation of labour, and the destruction of environment.

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appearance, marital status, pregnancy, family form, religion, political opinion, criminal record, sexual orientation, educational background, social class. The Act was considered necessary as democracy ripened in Korea and many South Korean people deemed securing equal freedoms for all citizens important. Nevertheless, right after the pre-announcement, the Act encountered extreme opposition from some because of the clause dealing with “anti-discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation.” The clause was subsequently eliminated due to the strong claims made by conservative groups from the Korean Protestant Church. Na (2014) points out that the groups “have closely cooperated with the National Prayer Breakfast Meeting and Kidok Sinuhoe [Christian United Fellowship] within the National Assembly to make their anti-homosexuality and anti-anti-discrimination position heard during the legislative process by utilizing their enormous financial resources” (p.369). The Act is still pending, while it waits for a vote in the legislature. Similarly, the Charter of Human Rights in Seoul that was tabled in 2014 is pending in the Seoul City Council. This Charter has a similar clause: “the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of sexual orientation,” and many organizations based in the Protestant Church have protested loudly against the Charter both inside and outside the Seoul City Hall and the Seoul City Council. For instance, a public hearing on the Charter in the Seoul City Hall Annex on November 20, 2014 was scuttled because anti-gay group members forced their way. Seoul Mayor Wonsoo Park and the Charter committee he selected had planned a public declaration on universal human rights, including rights for sexual minorities, on December 10, 2014, but canceled the

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declaration in the end due to pressure from conservative Christian groups (“Patriotic Christians,” 2014).

Three religious groups in Korea, to a greater or lesser extent, oppose homosexuality and homosexuals since, allegedly, their sexual orientation contradicts basic religious tenets. Unlike the Protestant Church, the Korean Catholic Church has not pronounced an official opinion on homosexuality, and Buddhism, the second of the three major religions in Korea, has never officially commented on homosexuality. I engaged in lesbian human rights activism for several years while living in Korea. While I volunteered in some lesbian rights movement groups, I witnessed many Korean Christian lesbians who were suffering because of the experience of living with conflicting identities, especially the conflict between their sexual orientation and their Christian faith. Some of them tried to maintain their religious ties even if they had to hide their homosexuality. These experiences offered a starting point for my research: why, I am asking, do Korean lesbians struggle to keep their religious beliefs and community ties despite problems this raises for them as lesbian subjects? Asking this question was the first step of my exploration of how Korean religions affect Korean lesbians’ identities/lives. To be specific, I wanted to capture the perspectives of Korean lesbians who were Presbyterian, Catholic and Buddhist by asking them the following questions: How do you experience/understand your religion’s viewpoint on women and homosexuality? How have you negotiated your experience as a lesbian within your religious community? How have you managed any discordance which has occurred in relation to your religious identity?

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1.1.1 Purpose of Research

Through this research, I hoped to discover the influence of three types of religious practice – Protestantism, Catholicism and Buddhism – on South Korean lesbians' lives; to raise awareness of conflicts caused by each of these religions through testimonies provided in the lesbians' own voices; to seek ways to unravel these conflicts and improve relationships at the intersection of lesbian identity, religion, family, and members of South Korean society.

In the early 90s, five persons who clearly identified themselves as lesbians embarked on a struggle to stand up for their human rights in public, with the establishment of the first Korean lesbian human rights organization 끼리끼리 [KiriKiri]² (The Lesbian Counseling Center, 2004). Since then, Korean lesbians' human rights activism has gradually developed in many ways; however, there are fewer studies on lesbians, lesbianism, and lesbian activism than studies of gay men and generalized queer groups in Korea. Literature in the area of the relationship between Korean lesbians and religion is particularly scarce.

The lack of studies of Korean lesbians and the invisibility of lesbian rights movements could be caused by various factors: the patriarchal Korean system combined with Confucian culture, sexism, tensions between mainstream Korean feminism and lesbianism or queer theory and lesbianism, the disagreement between gay human rights

² KiriKiri changed its name to the Lesbian Counseling Center in 2005.

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groups and lesbian groups, and so on. In this context, queer theory, particularly, plays double-edged roles. In South Korea, queer theory and the term queer started prevailing from universities around the mid 90s. It is obvious that the introduction of queer theory provided a new aspect with Korean sexual minority groups. Koh (2013) states:

The popularity of queer theory certainly helps academics and activists to discuss sexual behaviors and inclinations that do not conform to heterosexual regimes, especially when traditional terminology in non-Western countries do not offer the “proper” nominal ground to describe individuals with same-sex desires. (p.378)

Meanwhile, the comprehensive concept of “queer” is used to criticize lesbians for staying in a conventional way of thinking such as the gender binary. Nevertheless, “lesbian” in this thesis is importantly based on woman identity such as self-identified female homosexual because gender ambiguity that “queer” connotes overlooks Korean lesbians’ real issues in everyday life. Koh (2013) points out,

[T]he influence of queer theory in Korea can be said as having ambivalent consequences; [...] a skeptical approach towards, identity remains, especially from the perspective of self-proclaimed lesbians, and it remains less helpful for proceeding with identity politics. In undermining traditional notions of identity, one risks ignoring the real and persistent homophobia against which female homosexuals and bisexuals must fight. (p.386).

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In other words, Korean lesbians, as women, have experienced homophobia in mainstream feminist groups in Korean society, and at the same time, have gone through sexism and patriarchy in queer groups with male homosexuals. For instance, the lesbian organization KiriKiri was established after undergoing conflicts between lesbians and gay men in 초동회 [Chodonghoe], the first Korean lesbian and gay organization established in 1993. On the other hand, the Korean Women's Association United rejected the application of KiriKiri for membership of the organization in 2002 because KiriKiri was a lesbian group. I looked this through further in Chapter 2.

In this sense, one of my interviewees, Sujin, said “나는 레즈비언으로 정체화했고 현생에서는 그렇게 살기로 했죠. 퀴어로 나를 정체화하고 싶은 마음은 없어요. [I'm a self-identified lesbian, and I decided to live as a lesbian in this lifetime. I don't want to identify myself as a queer]” (interview, October 28, 2016). She thinks that the concept “queer” is too abstract, and issues of identity and sexual minority activism should be both diversified and specified, but not converged on “queer” (interview, October 28, 2016). Even though there are diverse perspectives on lesbian, queer and gender binary within sexual minority groups in South Korea, I agree with Sujin, and, in addition, I believe that studies of lesbian subjects are still needed considering that South Korean societal structure is still patriarchal, sexist, and heteronormative. Most importantly, people who call themselves lesbians do live in South Korea, and some of them dedicate themselves to lesbian human rights. Therefore, this thesis concentrates on lesbians and uses the term lesbian instead of queer.

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The reason I selected these three types of religious practice for this research is that Protestantism, Buddhism and Catholicism are the three major religious traditions in South Korea as of 2007, according to the National Statistical Office in Korea; the population of Korean religious lesbians showed a similar distribution rate to this (LIFL, 2004, 2005, 2006). To be exact, although Catholicism is one Christian denomination, I dealt with it separately from Protestantism in this thesis, considering the Korean Catholic Church has grown in a different way from the Protestant Church in South Korea. In addition to this, the surveys on the population of religious citizens in Korea usually classify Catholics independently from Protestants.

The Lesbian Institute for Lesbians³ (LIFL) conducted surveys titled *Research of actual condition of lesbians in South Korea*⁴ from 2004 to 2006. According to LIFL's first survey, religious Korean lesbians accounted for 52.4% of 561 Lesbians who lived in Seoul and Busan. 21.2% of religious lesbians answered that they were Protestants in

³ The LIFL was a NGO for Korean lesbians' human rights located in Seoul, South Korea. It was organized by activists from the Lesbian Counseling Center who wanted to conduct specialized research to further Korean lesbians' rights. The LIFL opened on October 31, 2003, and became the Institute for Documenting Lesbian Life in 2009 (<http://blog.daum.net/lesbian2013>).

⁴ The LIFL states that they used judgement or purposive sampling and quota sampling together among non-probability sampling as a sampling method. In terms of survey method, the respondents answered 57 questions categorized by 6 items (LIFL, 2004).

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2004; Buddhists and Catholics made up 19.4% and 9.6% of the surveyed lesbian population respectively; 2.1% of lesbians belonged to other religions and 47.6% answered that they were not religious (LIFL, 2004).

Although many forms of Christianity refuse homosexuality and regard homosexuals as sinners, Christian attitudes and approaches to homosexuality vary according to denomination and location. Among Protestant Churches, I focused on Presbyterianism because the Korean Presbyterian Church is much more visible than other denominations in public fights against homosexuality. Presbyterians are often shown not only in the media, such as interviewing with TV news and putting advertisements in newspapers, but also participating in demonstrations, holding the picket signs that say that homosexuality is a sin or a disease that needs to be cured.

The goal of my research was to capture the perspectives of Korean lesbians who are Presbyterian, Catholic and Buddhist; to document how they understand the views of their religious teachings and communities on women, lesbianism, and homosexuality; to ask how they have interpreted their experiences within their religious groups as lesbian and how they have managed the discordance among their conflicting identities.

1.1.2 Significance

Though various studies on homosexuality have been recently conducted in the Korean academy, and the number of advocates for homosexuals' rights seems to be increasing, there are only a few studies on the attitude of religious groups towards lesbianism that consider the distinct characteristics of Korean culture. The attempt to listen to lesbians'

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voices about the relationship between Korean religious groups and lesbian identity, especially including Buddhism, is rare despite the powerful influence of religion in many Korean lesbians' lives. That is why my study is both important and necessary.

Furthermore, most studies on homosexuality in Asian countries are focused on male homosexuality, and most of them have been conducted by Western researchers from a Western perspective. McLelland's *Is there a Japanese 'gay identity'?* (2000) is an illustrative example. McLelland, "a privileged white male" and "Western 'gay' researcher" (p.468), articulates that male homosexuality in Japan is often conflated by Japanese people with transsexuality and transgenderism, and it is rare to see the discussion of gay rights even in the Japanese gay media. According to McLelland's analysis, this implies that "same-sex desiring men in Japan" have difficulties developing "a politicized sense of 'gay identity'"; however, he emphasizes that this does not mean Japanese homosexuality lacks something that the West has, as some Western gay and lesbian theorists contend; this should be understood by "the local specificities in each situation," he says, quoting Jackson (p.469).

Religion occupies an important place in many individuals' lives; religious groups' negative stance on homosexuality can reinforce broader cultural systems of homophobia that lead to discrimination, oppression, and homosexuals' loss of self-respect. My lived experience suggests that in South Korean society, if lesbians believe in a certain religion, want to practice it, or take part in a religious community, these, in combination with Korean patriarchal culture, can make their lives a battlefield. South Korean lesbians often struggle to survive in a heterosexist culture, and, simultaneously, they are women who

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians live in the male-dominated society. Hence, this study is the first step in calling attention to the specific problems and issues faced by Korean lesbians who want to be a part of a particular religious community.

Focusing on each religious doctrine and its institution's view on women and sexuality, and the difference between Presbyterianism, Catholicism and Buddhism in Korean society demonstrates that the oppression by Korean religious institutions is constructed according to their interests. In this work, I offer impetus for a social movement to stop the violation of lesbian rights by religious groups. Through the creation of space for religious lesbians' voices, I offer a better understanding of these women and their concerns, and other religious and non-religious lesbians will be able to see themselves reflected in these women's words. Hopefully, this research will contribute to Korean lesbians' ability to seek their own solutions, which will, in turn, help unravel conflicts and improve their relationships with their religion, family, and society.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Usage of Terms in the South Korean context

While I proceeded with my research, I realized that there should be explanations of the Korean terms that are used in my thesis, even though the words may seem very simple, easy, and basic. For instance, as the key word of my thesis, lesbian, is an English word, some readers might wonder whether Koreans use the word in Korea, and if they do, when Koreans use the word lesbian, whether it has the same meaning as it does when

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people use the term in English speaking countries. Therefore, in this section, I look at some important terms for my research, focusing on how they are generally used in South Korea based on my more than 30 years of experience and observations as a South Korean citizen.

2.1.1 Homosexuality

The Korean word for homosexuality is 동성애 [dong-seong-ae], and Naver Korean dictionary defines it as “동성 간의 사랑 또는 동성에 대한 사랑” (“동성애”, n.d.). This can be translated into English as “love between persons of the same sex” or “love directed toward a person of the same sex.” 동성애자 [dong-seong-ae-ja], which is derived from 동성애 [dong-seong-ae], means homosexual. 동성애 [dong-seong-ae] and 동성애자 [dong-seong-ae-ja] are commonly used by South Koreans. Though both 동성애 [dong-seong-ae] and 동성애자 [dong-seong-ae-ja] do not have explicitly negative or positive meanings, South Korean people recognize the term homo [호모, ho-mo] as a demeaning word, and use it when they intend to insult a gay man.

2.1.2 Lesbian

Lesbian, the English word, is employed in Korea to refer to a female homosexual. There is a Korean term, 여성 동성애자 [yeo-seong-dong-seong-ae-ja]⁵ which means

⁵ It can be literally translated to female homosexual.

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lesbian as well, but 레즈비언 [le-jeu-bi-oen] or 레즈 [le-jeu] are more commonly used in everyday conversation among Koreans. Korean lesbians sometimes just call themselves ‘L’ in public, due to the fear of accidentally disclosing their sexual identities when they let the word fall out their mouths. The interviewees who identified themselves as lesbians also often used ‘L’ when they needed to mention the word lesbian.

2.1.3 Gay

In Korea, the word gay, means a male homosexual, much as it does in English. There is a Korean word, 남성 동성애자 [nam-seong-dong-seong-ae-ja]⁶, which means gay, but it is the English word 게이 [ge-i] that is generally used. Though gay can sometimes refer to a female homosexual as well as a male homosexual in English, when Koreans say 게이, its usage is usually confined to male homosexuals in Korea.

2.1.4 Anti-gay

When I mention ‘anti-gay’ in this research, it means anti-homosexual. Anti-homosexual in Korean is 반동성애의 [ban-dong-seong-ae-ui] or 반동성애자의[ban-dong-seong-ae-ja-ui] : 반 [ban] means anti, and 동성애 [dongseongae], 동성애자 [dongseongaeja] mean homosexuality and homosexual, respectively. 의 [ui] is a postposition which comes after a noun to make the noun an adjective. In other words,

⁶ It is a Korean word for male homosexual.

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anti-gay can mean anti-homosexuality or anti-homosexual in Korean.

Korean people usually understand the word ‘gay’ to refer to a male homosexual, but, at the same time, for Korean groups that fight against LGBTQ human rights, gay is the representative word for all kinds of sexual minorities. Conservative Christian groups, in particular, tend not to distinguish between gay, queer, and transgender people, and they appear not think about lesbians at all when they demonstrate against reflection of the LGBTQ rights movement such as the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Korea Queer Culture Festival. Therefore, I use the term anti-gay intentionally when I refer to the groups, activists, and activism that is anti-sexual minority.

2.1.5 Homophobia

Like the use of lesbian and gay, the English term, homophobia, is used in Korea like 호모포비아 [ho-mo-po-bi-a]. Both 동성애 공포증 [dong-seong-ae-gong-po-jeung] and 동성애 혐오증 [dong-seong-ae-hyeom-o-jeung], the words for homophobia in Korean are also used, and have the same meaning as the English term: “unreasoning fear of or antipathy toward homosexuals and homosexuality” (“homophobia”, n.d.).

2.1.6 Queer

Queer is written and pronounced 퀴어 [kyi-eo] in Korean, and it is widely used in South Korea in the same way as it is in English-spoken countries: “a person whose sexual orientation or gender identity falls outside the heterosexual mainstream or the gender binary” (“queer”, Dictionary.com, n.d.). This defines the term queer in a limited way, but

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I focus on the common usage among Korean people in their daily lives.

There is a Korean word, ㅇ이 반 [i-ban], that can be compared with the English term queer. ㅇ이 반 [iban] is a new word coined by the Korean LGBTQ community in the mid-1990s, “which is derived from the word *ilban* (‘normal’), has the dual meanings of being different and being a second choice” (Koh, 2013, p.393). ㅇ이 [i or yi] has two meanings in Korean: one is “different” and the other is “two” or “second.” Hence, ㅇ이 반 [iban] is a kind of sarcasm which says: I’m not normal [일 반 *ilban*], I’m different from you, so I’m a second-class citizen in this society, so what? ㅇ이 반 [iban] includes those who do not belong to the heterosexual mainstream, including LGBTQ people.

2.2 Literature review

Below, I explore work about lesbian identification in the South Korean context, and literature dealing with the three primary religions in Korea. First, I look through the early Western literature on lesbianism that offered a basis / model not only for Korean lesbian identity but also for how it continues to be theorized in the Korean academy. I then examine discussions of lesbian identification in the Korean lesbian rights movement. Later, I concentrate on the social dynamics of the three dominant religions in Korea. Korean Protestantism, Catholicism and Buddhism have played different roles in South Korean society throughout the development of Korean history, especially after Korea’s liberation from the rule of Japanese imperialism in 1945. This, more than anything else, has shaped each religious group’s attitude toward homosexuality.

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2.2.1 Lesbian identification

It is necessary that I begin with discourses of sexual identification, specifically lesbianism, as in this research I share lesbians' experiences with my readers. In other words, the question "what is lesbian?" is directly implicated in the meaning of lesbians' own stories. However, it is not a question one can answer simply or easily; especially, in the South Korean context, that is, a non-Western context, it becomes more complicated. Park (2008), a lecturer and gay rights activist in Korea, begins his work by saying:

In most academic writings about LGBTQ issues in Korean, I notice that theoretical concepts such as "identity" and "sexual minority" are imported from theoretical developments based on studies done in the West, while "Korea/Korean" refers simply to the realistic context that is awkwardly added to the theoretical concepts. (p.197)

He mentions that the mid-1990 in Korea is a particularly important period because new discourses and concepts from the West were absorbed, and queer theory "rapidly spread to become articulated with various other discourses, including feminism (which has been desperately seeking alliances with other theories of the oppressed)" (p.198). Since then, the Korean feminist scholars, activists, and LGBTQ human rights activists have been arguing about sexual identity in the Korean context, for example, the limits of using imported concepts.

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Meanwhile, lesbian identity has been differentiated between foregrounding of woman in lesbian feminism and homosexual in queer theory in Korean academic and lesbian activist circles. Kim (2007) states “레즈비언이 여성이라는 것을 다소간 자명하게 받아들이고, 여성 동성애에서 여성 쪽에 방점을 찍는 입장이 가능한데, 그 집약된 표현이 서구에서의 레즈비언여성주의이다. 한국의 레즈비언도 대체로 이 입장이다. [Western lesbian feminism obviously accepts that lesbian is woman, and emphasizes more woman than homosexual. Lesbians in Korea have generally taken a similar stand]” (p.307). However, she points out that Korean lesbianism has been studied mainly from feminist perspectives that focus on “universal woman,” and this results in a disregard for the complexity of lesbian identity.

Practitioners of lesbian politics in the North American context have defined “lesbian” as “woman-identified woman.” The U.S. based lesbian feminist group, Radicalesbians start their manifesto, *The Woman-Identified Woman* (1970), with this question:

What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society – perhaps then, but certainly later – cares to allow her. (p.1)

According to Radicalesbians (1970), we women can “find, reinforce, and validate our authentic selves” only when women are “available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support” (p.3) to our sisters, rejecting

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male-identified women and confronting the heterosexual structure that oppresses women. That is, a lesbian, as a woman-identified woman, is “the new woman” who can attack compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy. Radicalesbians reclaim the term lesbian from its earlier association with “pervert” or “sick” person, and link it to a positive collective social subject. U.S. poet and feminist theorist Adrienne Rich’s concept of a “lesbian continuum” is connected to the idea of a lesbian as a “woman-identified woman.” The lesbian continuum is a wide range of “women-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman.” This includes “the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” (1980, p.648-649).

Both concepts – “woman-identified woman” and “lesbian continuum”– are significant in light of the historical devaluing of women’s own experiences, intimacies and solidarities in Korean society. Furthermore, though these concepts were developed in the United States a half-century ago, they are still important to Korean lesbians who are struggling in a heteronormative, patriarchal society, because the concepts reestablish the lesbian as an agent of women’s liberation. Even in the context of the gay rights movement in Korea this usage is meaningful as Korean lesbians have also experienced sexism and patriarchy in the gay rights movement. 초동회 [Chodonghoe], the first Korean lesbian and gay organization established in 1993, was divided into the lesbian organization KiriKiri and the gay men’s community 친구사이 [Chingusai] after only two months due to conflicts between gay men and lesbians (Bong, 2009; Cho & KwonKim, 2011). Cho and KwonKim (2011) state that “the lesbians were frustrated by the gay men’s sexism;

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they also felt ‘powerless and inferior’ in a situation where gay projects were being privileged over lesbian ones” (p.211).

Despite their continued importance, “woman-identified woman” and “lesbian continuum” are broad concepts that disregard the differences between lesbians, and the concepts do little to address lesbians’ real adversities. In this context, Korean lesbian activist, LeeKim (2005) describes the Korean situation as follows:

With the popularity of sexuality politic discourse of the 90s, theories of sexuality were actively taken in by various fields of studies including Women’s Studies. After the mid 90s, as western sexuality political discourses represented by Foucault were introduced, discourse of homosexuality became popular in [South Korean] colleges [...] Sexuality in the Western post-modern, post-structural, psychoanalytic feminisms that they had embraced in their college years endowed ‘radicalism’ to Korean feminists. Some of them are lured into the realm of ‘practice’ by this ‘radicalism’. However, the ‘lesbian’ of Western theory was not a ‘reality’ to them, but remained simply a symbol of radicalism. Therefore, [Korean feminists] were not interested in real oppression or discrimination experienced by lesbians in Korea. (“The inflow of Western sexual discourse” para.1, and “Where has all the lesbians gone to?” para.2, <http://blog.daum.net/parkkimsoojin2013/140>)

Thus, 한국레즈비언권리운동연대 [the Korea Lesbian Rights Movement United]

stresses the importance of South Korean lesbian rights movement independent of both the

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gay rights movement and a feminist movement, and clarifies the concept of “lesbian” as referring to a female homosexual subject who opposes both heterosexism and patriarchy in Korean society (Cho, 2008).

As members of a heteronormative society, Korean lesbians may find it difficult to acknowledge their sexual identities publicly, never mind being the subjects of a fight against their sexist, patriarchal society. In this sense, ParkKim (2014), a Korean lesbian activist, describes a homosexual as “a person who believes s/he experienced, experiences, or will be able to experience the desire to share emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual communion with someone of the same sex; s/he identifies her/himself as a homosexual on her/his own” (p.35). In addition, she defines a lesbian as “a female homosexual who identifies as a lesbian for herself” (p.50). Many Korean lesbian human rights activists agree with this definition, and have used it in introducing lesbianism to the public. Although this definition constructs “lesbian” in a limited way, it is necessary to emphasize two key points: who can identify/name one’s sexual identity and what factors should be considered in identifying/naming it. In South Korean society, homosexuality is directly linked to sex/intercourse, and lesbians as well as gay men are regarded as people who focus on sexual relationships. That is why ParkKim stresses “communion” rather than sex. Additionally, many Korean people judge others’ identities based on what they themselves see or feel, regardless of the other person’s experience, story, and choice. For instance, even though a woman may have dated other women, if she does not consider herself a lesbian, or even if she rejects being labeled as belonging to any sexual identity category, then in this framework she is not a lesbian. Even if the person concerned is

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dating a woman now, if she does not identify herself as a lesbian, she is not one. This example is very simplified – if she denies her sexual identity because of homophobia, for instance, this should be discussed differently – but in terms of subjectivity, it is clear that sexual identity is each individual's own realm where only the individual can define it.

2.2.2 Three Religions in Korea

Presbyterianism

The Korean Protestant Church has had a strong influence on various aspects of Korean society: politics, economy, culture, and so on. The development of the Korean Protestant Church is interrelated with contemporary Korean history, arising after Korea achieved colonial independence from the Japanese in 1945. Kang (2005) points out that Protestantism in Korea was used to secure the legitimacy of the South Korean Government at that time. The Korean Peninsula was divided into South Korea and North Korea, with South Korea falling under the purview of the U.S. Military and North Korea under the Soviet Union and China. This division was not desired by the Korean public, who wanted a united Korean government. Thus, the first President of South Korea, Seungman Lee, needed powerful groups of supporters to establish his government: one of these was the Korean Protestant Church. According to Nayoung (2015), the Korean Protestant Church was the optimal group for Lee – who himself was Protestant – because Korean Protestants were oppressed under Japanese imperialism for the 36 years of occupation, and had come to South Korea from North Korea to fight against the forces of communism, who had also oppressed them since 1945. In addition, at that time the U.S.

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Military Government supported the Protestant Church groups to strengthen U.S influence on the Korean Peninsula. For instance, the U.S. Military Government placed American missionaries in South Korea in key political positions, and selected Korean Protestants for public office on a large scale (Nayoung, 2015). During this period, the Korean Protestant Church formed its identity as a founder of the South Korean government on the will of God and guardian of South Korea against communism.

The importance of these histories becomes visible when anti-gay activist groups associated with the Presbyterian Church and conservative NGOs contend that homosexuals threaten national security. These groups coined a neologism ‘종북게이 [Jongbuk gay]’, which can be translated into the slogan “pro-North Korean gays” in English, under the following absurd logic: sexual minorities and their supporters are progressives; progressives are anti-patriots; anti-patriots are followers of North Korea. In the end their argument is that sexual minorities and their supporters are supporters of North Korea who threaten South Korean society (Kim, 2015). Hence, as a guardian for faith, the South Korean people and the nation, the Protestant Church should prevent the spread of homosexuality, and cure homosexuals.

Catholicism

Compared with the Protestant Church in Korea, the Korean Catholic Church has followed another path. Interestingly, the image of the Catholic Church in Korean society is rather progressive, whereas Roman Catholicism is generally regarded as conservative in other parts of the world. This difference also results from the relationship between the

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Korean Catholic Church and contemporary Korean history.

The Korean Catholic Church has generally been considered a guardian of human rights or an advocate for Korean democracy. Koh (2016) explains why the Korean Catholic Church could obtain such a status, even though it was institutionally insignificant until the early 1960s. Most important, he points out, are its social justice and human rights activities. The activities started with the labour movement initiated by the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (Young Christian Workers) of Korea, a Catholic youth organization that stood with workers when conflict between employers and workers in the Simdo Textile Company occurred in 1968. Their activities developed in relation to the pro-democracy movement, during the autocratic regimes of former presidents, Junghee Park and his successor Doohwan Jeon (from 1962 to 1979 and from 1980 to 1988). During this time, the late Cardinal Stephen Souhwan Kim played a very important role as a leader in Korean society as well as in the Korean Catholic Church. Kim is highly esteemed by the Korean public as a spiritual leader “who always topped surveys of the most influential religious figures and pushed up the number of Korean Catholics from 800,000 to 5.2 million during his tenure as the Archbishop of Seoul Diocese between 1968 and 1998” (“We thank you,” 2009).

Lee (2011) investigates Cardinal Kim’s role in the democratization of Korea. Kim emphasizes the social participation of the Church; thus, he stood against former military dictators when they tried to seize or extend their illegitimate power in Korea. For example, during the Gwangju Democratization Movement, which was a civil uprising against a military junta in May 1980, protesters hid in Myeongdong Catholic Cathedral to

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avoid brutal suppression. When the police arrived in front of the Cathedral to haul them away, Kim, along with priests and nuns, resisted and kept the police from entering, saying: “If you want to hurt people, walk over me first. After walking over me, there will be priests. When you walk over the priests, there will be nuns. Can you hurt all of these people?” Kim’s efforts made the Korean Catholic Church an intermediary in various conflicts in Korean society, and created an image of Catholicism not as a religion of the powerful, but as one that supported the powerless.

Buddhism

Korean Buddhist orders tend not to mention homosexuality explicitly. The causes for this can be found in the general features of Buddhism: first, Buddhism traditionally values restraint in all kinds of desire; thus purity of sexual life, regardless of sexual orientation, is one of the virtues that Buddhists pursue (Heo, 2008). Second, Buddhism focuses on the individual practice of asceticism and transcendence of reality. Furthermore, the distinct stance of Buddhism concerning homosexuality and homosexuals seems to lead the Korean Buddhist orders not to comment publically, due to their more or less passive attitude towards social participation.

There are two main branches in Buddhism – Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism – and various local denominations fall under these two. Korean Buddhism is classified as Mahayana Buddhism, which advocates salvation for all people. Therefore, as seen from the perspective of the main doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism, Korean Buddhism can neither ignore social suffering nor be indifferent to social reality. Lee

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(2010) shows the tradition of Buddhist social participation in Korea in his paper “The Change of Modern Korean Buddhist Social Participation Thought.” According to Lee, the social participation movement in Korean Buddhism existed before modern times, but it underwent hardships after the liberation in 1945 and almost disappeared until the 1990s. New Buddhist civil movements, which appeared in the 90s, developed into a popular Buddhist movement. Nonetheless, many Koreans, including Buddhists, regard Korean Buddhism as passive in terms of social participation or official statements on controversial issues in society.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Theory and Methodology

This research centers on the first person accounts of religious Korean lesbians. I conducted many in-depth interviews, not only face to face but also by E-mail, phone, and online messenger. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using narrative inquiry, specifically an autobiographical narrative method, as a lens. All of the women’s stories were interpreted using feminist standpoint theory to consider the importance of each woman’s self-perception as a religious lesbian in South Korea. Therefore, in this section I examine feminist standpoint theory and narrative inquiry.

3.1.1 Feminist standpoint theory

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Korean religious lesbians are women, homosexuals, and Koreans; they are also daughters, sisters and members of particular religious communities. All of these identities and their intersections, generate different experiences, lives, and values. These differences can lead each lesbian to understand and practice her religious faith differently. The need to recognize the social locations of the interviewees was the basis for choosing feminist standpoint theory, because it “retains elements of Marxist historical materialism for its central premise: knowledge develops in a complicated and contradictory way from lived experiences and social historical context” (Naples & Gurr, 2014, p.25). Feminist standpoint theory helped me understand each Korean religious lesbian as belonging to more than one category / social location. Sprague (2005) states:

A standpoint is not the spontaneous thinking of a person or a category of people. Rather, it is the combination of resources available within a specific context from which an understanding might be constructed... In feminist standpoint theory, epistemic privilege is often accorded to the standpoint of women, who are themselves diverse in location in systems organizing race, class, nation, and other major relations of social domination. (p.41)

Feminist standpoint theorists argue for the importance of an alternative to the concept of objectivity in research—one that stems from women’s lived experience—while criticizing existing Westernized and androcentric systems of objectivity used in traditional structure of knowledge production. Harding (1991, 1995) suggests “strong objectivity” as an

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alternative that “draws on standpoint epistemologies to provide a kind of method for maximizing our objectivity to block ‘might makes right’ in the sciences. Maximizing objectivity is not identical to maximizing neutrality, as conventional understandings have assumed” (1995, p.334). That is, knowledge based on women’s experience enables them to reach a less distorted understanding of their lives.

Feminist standpoint theory has met with criticisms which suggest the theory sticks to a primary focus on “woman,” understood as referring reductively to white women in the West (Cho, 2009). Black women’s standpoint offers a different point of view. Black women have been marginalized within white-dominated forms of feminism, as well as oppressed by male-dominated, patriarchal culture. The standpoint of Black women provides white-feminism/feminists with an important opportunity for self-reflection, and encourages all feminists to pay attention to intersectionality. Collins (2000) asserts:

Intersectional paradigms make two important contributions to understanding the connections between knowledge and empowerment. For one, they stimulate new interpretations of African-American women’s experiences. [...] For example, African-American women’s confinement to domestic work revealed how race and gender influenced Black women’s social class experiences. Similarly, the sexual politics of Black womanhood that shaped Black women’s experiences with pornography, prostitution, and rape relied upon racist, sexist, and heterosexist ideologies to construct Black women’s sexualities as deviant. Not only do intersectional paradigms prove useful in explaining U.S. Black women’s

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experiences, such paradigms suggest that intersecting oppressions also shape the experiences of other groups as well (p.244).

Like African-American women in the U.S., religious Korean lesbians have complex problems of marginalization in South Korean society, including in the field of feminist research, the South Korean feminist movement, and gay rights movements. In addition, while Korean lesbians need to focus on human rights issues, they also have to recognize and respect the differences among themselves such as class, disability, as well as their difference from other women like heterosexuals. In doing so, Korean lesbians can find solidarity with feminists, women with disabilities, and other minority groups to fight against shared the repressive realities.

3.1.2 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a relatively new qualitative methodology in the social sciences, and it is defined in various ways. Chase (2005) states:

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (p.651).

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Brochmeier and Carbaugh (2001) claim that narrative “is the most powerful mode of persuasion” (p. 41) and that “every culture of which we know has been a story-telling culture” (p. 42). This is why I chose narrative inquiry for my thesis research. I conducted qualitative, in-depth interviews, and I approached the interviews from a narrative inquiry perspective. I agree that, “narrative is a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Bruner, 1986; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Hinchman and Hinchman, 2001; Laslett, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Chase, 2005, p.656). That is, each person’s story can convey not only meaningful experiences from their life but also their social context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mention this relationship, between personal and social meanings, with respect to narrative inquiry:

Over the years, we learned to keep the topics of both personal and social justification before us. Even as we write this, we realize that we may not, for any given inquiry, think these matters through to the satisfaction of others, but we do know their importance, and try to continually address both. For narrative inquirers, it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others. (p.122)

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The lens of narrative researcher is important; I performed a double duty as the narrator of the research project who facilitates the construction of a coherent story from others' narratives, and I narrated my own story into this research. Chase (2005) states:

Breaking from traditional social science practice, narrative researchers are likely to use the first person when presenting their work, thereby emphasizing their own narrative action. As narrators, then, researchers develop meaning out of, and some sense of order in, the material they studied; they develop their own voice(s) as they construct others' voices and realities; they narrate 'results' in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures, and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences. (p.657)

As a feminist researcher, I considered myself a subject who narrated my research, and, simultaneously, regarded my interviewees as subjects not objects; therefore, I wanted my interviewees to have authority over their own stories. This is connected to my self-disclosure during the research process, which led both interviewer and interviewee to form empathic relationships, and encouraged the interviewees to feel there was equity between themselves and me, the researcher, when they talked about themselves during the interviews. To encourage this reciprocity, I decided to play a double role: I analyzed and reconstructed the interviewees' lives based on their stories – and this was, in part, an act of interpretation; at the same time, I told my story to the interviewees.

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Narrative inquiry as an auto-ethnographic approach was very useful for my research. In this approach, Chase (2005) articulates, “researchers also turn the analytic lens on themselves and their interactions with others, but here researchers write, interpret, and/or perform their own narratives about culturally significant experiences” (p.660). As a South Korean woman like my interviewees, this approach led me to catch the local distinctiveness of the reality in South Korea. In this sense, the auto-ethnographic approach is also connected to using “I.” Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue:

We need to be prepared to write “I” as we make the transition from field texts to research texts. As we write “I,” we need to convey a sense of social significance. We need to make sure that when we say “I,” we know that “I” is connecting with “they.” (p.122)

As you will see, I use “I” instead of “researcher” throughout this thesis. I believe that this shows the importance of my subjectivity within the context of my research, as well as marking my insider status and relationship with my interviewees.

Finally, I employ an autobiographic narrative method. Bruner (2001) points out that “autobiography (like the novel) involves not only the construction of self, but also a construction of one’s culture” (p.35). While reading interview transcripts repeatedly, I found that each interviewee’s narrative not only described her own perspective on her life and religion but also portrayed the time and culture which affected her perspective. Thus, though I organized the interviewees’ stories into four themes, each section under the four

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themes consists of the women's own narratives, verbatim, without interruption. Freeman (2001) argues that "on some level, narrative is itself the source of the self's identity" (p. 296). As a result, these autobiographical narratives enable me, and thus the reader, to capture the full range of experiences in these women's lives.

3.2 Designing the Research

This research attends to Korean lesbians' experiences as gathered through interviews. Anderson and Jack (1991) stress that "oral interviews are particularly valuable for uncovering women's perspectives" (p.11). I conducted interviews not only face to face but also by E-mail, phone, and online messenger. Whenever follow-up questions were required, I utilized E-mail, phone and online messenger due to the difficulty of meeting in person. Those virtual interviews are not different from face-to-face oral interviews in terms of their purpose, as all kind of interviews certainly share the points that researchers should be mindful of: "whose story the interview is asked to tell, who interprets the story, and with what theoretical frameworks" (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p.11). Nonetheless, the absence of instant reactions, including facial expressions and body language, was a drawback of the virtual interviews. As Anderson (1991) points out, interviewees can convey their stories and meaning by a pause, an expression, and body language, not through words alone. Thus, I tried to be a sensitive interviewer to understand each interviewee's way of talking, her emotional reactions, and the flow of the conversation.

3.2.1 Case Selection

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Six South Korean religious lesbians were interviewed, and the interviews are the major focus of this research. The interviewees were selected based on two criteria: sexual orientation and religious affiliation. They are lesbians who live or have lived in Korea, and each lesbian believes in a different religion: Presbyterianism, Catholicism, or Buddhism. In terms of religion, I focused on the interviewees' religious affiliation according to their statement. These two dimensions, their similarities and differences, are fundamental to my research.

Participant Characteristics

J, a 34-year-old Korean professional, who identifies as lesbian, is a Presbyterian. All of her family members are Presbyterians, and Presbyterianism is her birth religion. She was born in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, and lived there until 2010. She moved to the United States in 2011. J and I graduated from the same university in Seoul, and we have been friends for 14 years. I interviewed her through E-mail, phone, and online messenger.

Eunwoo, a self-identified lesbian, was also born a Presbyterian in Seoul in 1983, and has lived there since. She graduated from a university with an MA in physical education in Seoul and works for a sports centre established by feminists. I got to know her about 10 years ago when I volunteered at the Lesbian Counseling Center in Seoul. She was a member and volunteer of the Lesbian Counseling Center. I originally interviewed her in Seoul; follow-up interviews were conducted by E-mail and online messenger.

Ryeosu, a 29-year-old musician, is a Korean Catholic lesbian. She was born in Ulsan,

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which is a medium-sized city in the southern part of Korea. Ryeosu moved to Seoul while she was an undergraduate student. She is a former member and volunteer of the Lesbian Counseling Center, and we got to know each other through the Lesbian Counseling Centre, and have been friends for 10 years. I interviewed her in Seoul, and used E-mail and online messenger to ask follow-up questions.

H also self-identifies as a Catholic lesbian. She was born in Seoul in 1981, and has lived there most of her life except for several years in Busan, the second biggest city in South Korea. H graduated from a university in Seoul and actively participated in the lesbian rights movements as a member of the Lesbian Counseling Centre, especially while she was an undergraduate. E-mail and online messenger interviews were conducted prior to the oral interview in Seoul.

Sujin is a 41-year-old Buddhist who identifies as a lesbian. She was born in Seoul, and has lived there her whole life. She received her Master's degree by writing a thesis on the reality of South Korean lesbian rights. Sujin is considered one of the most important lesbian activists in South Korea. I first met her in early 2001 at the Lesbian Counseling Center which was KiriKiri at that time; she was working there as an administrator. Sujin was interviewed in person twice, and E-mail, phone, and online interviews were conducted between those interviews as well.

Jihwon, a self-identified lesbian and professional, was born in 1982 in Seoul where she has lived for 34 years. Though she had gone to Presbyterian Church for a long time, Jihwon decided to become a Buddhist in 2005. She graduated from a university in Seoul. I have known her since 2002 through the Lesbian Counseling Center. I interviewed her in

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Seoul and conducted follow-up interviews by E-mail.

J, H and Sujin are my close friends, and Eunwoo, Ryeosu and Jihwon are former members of the Lesbian Counseling Center where I volunteered. That is, I have known all six interviewees for more than 10 years; we share memories of personal experiences and social and political events for the past decade to a greater or lesser degree.

3.2.2 Data Collection

Interview Process and Protocols

Each face-to-face interview was conducted in Korean for between two and five hours, and I met some of the interviewees more than once. Interviews were audio-recorded, and I took notes during the interview. Participants had breaks whenever they needed them. The interviewees were informed that they could use a pseudonym to protect their identity, and were offered a consent form in both Korean and English (Appendix B). Interview questions (Appendix C) were sent to the interviewees in advance.

The interview consisted of three parts. Before the first section of the interview was conducted, a demographic inquiry was done via survey. All interviewees were given the same questions in the first section of the three interviews; however, each developed differently based on their religion: there was a Presbyterian version, a Catholic version, and, finally, a Buddhist version. I did not ask the questions in order, and let the conversation flow as each interviewee led.

Questions in the first section asked each of the religious lesbians about the process of identifying their sexual orientation and how it has affected their lives; the interviewees

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were asked about their religious affiliation in the second section. This section included questions about when the interviewee accepted religion into her life and why, whether she goes to church or temple regularly, if she is engaged in church/temple groups, how often she attends and has contact with people in the group, if she is “out” there or not and why, etc. In the last section, I asked them to discuss the relationship between their sexual orientation and religious life, and if the relationship has led to experiences of inner or outer conflict. In addition, I provided them the opportunity to add any comments they wanted to about their experiences that I might have overlooked in my questions.

Apart from those interviews, I sent the completed narratives that I assembled based on their interviews to the participants. Each participant was asked about her narrative: their feelings and opinions about translation, the evaluation of the format, and suggestions to improve the quality of the narratives. All of the participants did not ask to make any changes, but they stressed that it was an interesting experience for them to read their own stories in another language. Additionally, each woman mentioned that their narratives brought back memories and strong feelings such as sadness.

Documents

Other documents were collected for this research, and were used to further my understanding of the interviewees’ narratives when I analyzed the interviews. For instance, Eunwoo brought her journals and letters, which were written while she participated in the Discipleship Training School (DTS) program. The DTS program by Youth With A Mission (YWAM) consists of 12-week courses on Christianity and a

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mission trip for another 12 weeks. Because I had to return the original documents, I took photos of the journals and letters for data analysis after looking through them. I also kept a reflective journal after each interview and interview notes during the interviews to record my feelings and observations as well as participants' particular expressions and reactions.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

The primary aim of the data analysis, at the first level, was to choose the best way to represent each woman's voice using narrative inquiry. Going through the transcribing and translating process, I compared the six women's stories, and found similarities, differences, and intersections among them. This enabled me to identify three themes—self-identification, coming-out, and the relationship with family—as the backdrop from which to look deeply into the main theme: the relationship between lesbian identity and religion. The data were reconstructed as autobiographical narratives. In other words, I re-organized the transcripts according to the themes I identified, but did not make any changes to what each participant said. Then, the narratives were interpreted using feminist standpoint theory as discussed in the previous section.

Transcription

Face-to-face and phone interviews were audio-recorded, and I transcribed them using MS word. Transcribing was time-consuming, but it was a basic part of my research process. Silverman (1993) includes transcribing work in “research activities” because

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researchers become more familiar with their participants' stories by listening to the audio-recorded data. Because I listened to the audio files repeatedly, transcribing provided me with time to become familiar with the lesbians' stories and the way each woman told her story. At the same time, it was the first step in translating each interviewee's story from Korean into English.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, including chatting with interviewees during the interviews, as well as my questions. This was useful to remind me of not only the flow of the interview but also the context why she described her story in a certain way.

Translation

Since this study focused on South Korean lesbians, use of the Korean language was inevitable—even though I knew I would be writing my thesis in English. This called for the exact translation into English in order to convey the nuance as well as the meaning of each interview and document. Van Nes et al. (2010) highlight the importance of translation in qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative research is considered valid when the distance between the meanings as experienced by the participants and the meanings as interpreted in the findings is as close as possible (Polkinghorne 2007). We would like to go one step further, and hold that the findings should be communicated in such a way that the reader of the publication understands the meaning as it was expressed in the findings, originating from data in the source language. (p.314)

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Though I strove to translate all of the interviews as closely as possible, translation left me two dimensions to deliberate on: it is impossible to translate from Korean to English perfectly. This is due, first, to the characteristics that each language has and the differences in each cultural context. Second, in the case of interviews, it is unclear whether I can fully account for my translation choices, particularly when the interviewees do not have a good command of English. In a way, it seems like “good” translation depends on the researcher’s conscience; however, it is an inextricable problem linked to insider researchers and it requires clearer standards so that research can dedicate itself to participants.

On the other hand, I could take advantage of the difficulties in translation and interpretation as the priority of my research was giving voice to the Korean lesbians and listening to their voices. Temple and Young (2004) point out, “The researcher/translator role offers the researcher significant opportunities for close attention to cross cultural meanings and interpretations and potentially brings the researcher up close to the problems of meaning equivalence within the research process” (p.168). In other words, while I struggled to render Korean narratives into English, I came to concentrate more on what the participants were saying, what specific expressions each woman used to connote something, and how their words could be interpreted in the Korean context. Consequently, this led me to stay with their original narratives longer and allowed me to have enough time to analyze the narratives with prudence.

I selected three ways not to lose the original Korean meaning and participants’

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intentions: first, throughout this thesis, when I cited Korean references which were not published in English, I put the original Korean sentences first and provided an English translation. This is the same with interviews in some cases where I felt it was difficult to find the equivalent in English with specific Korean words, phrases, and idioms. Second, I asked two Koreans who have a good command of English to review my translation. However, I never showed the transcription in the form of a full paragraph to protect the interviewees' identities, and any identifiable information was erased. Lastly, after the final translation was completed, I did "back translation" of the English versions into Korean to ensure that the cultural meanings did not disappear.

3.3 Limitations

Since I decided on the main topic for my thesis, I deliberated for a long time on how to select interviewees. I focused on seeking lesbians who had pondered the relationship between lesbian sexuality and religious faith. They might be perfect participants for this research, but I should point out that all these South Korean lesbians in this study are well-educated and abled women of middle-class families. All of them graduated from university, and some of them received Master's degrees. Additionally, all of them are from big cities in South Korea. They have participated in lesbian human rights movement through KiriKiri where I first met all of them. These basic backgrounds of the participants implicate that this research could miss the intersectionality with women of working class, with disabilities, and so forth.

As to religion in Korea, I had some difficulty in setting the range of history I should

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians cover in this study. Considering that all three religions I discuss in this study were imported, I needed to explore the history of these three religions in South Korea, but the massive materials made me worry that they could distract this research from the main topic. I chose to deal with the most recent fifty years because that period was most crucial to look through for the influence of each religion in Korean society since Korea's independence from Japan in 1945.

CHAPTER 4

One of the challenges was deciding how to narrate the participants' stories and how to interweave one narrative with the others. Choosing between the first person and the third person voice was not easy either. I wanted to be both a subject of my research and narrator of the interviewees' stories, but, at the same time, I did not want to cover their voices with my own. I intended to show each lesbian's difficulty; however, I did not want to fit her life to my existing assumptions about the relationship between religion and lesbian identity. I also wished to actively utilize feminist standpoint theory and narrative inquiry. Considering each of these, finally I made the decision to employ an autobiographic method.

This chapter, research findings, consists of two parts: part one contains the participants' self-narratives on self-identification, coming out, and family, and part two presents these women's narratives on their religion, religious faith, and religious practices. The names are pseudonyms, which the participants chose, except for that of

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Sujin, who did not want to use pseudonyms. These narratives are followed by a summary.

I divided the participants' narratives into two parts because the first part, showing the lesbian identity formation process, offers the reader the background to understand how the relationship between each lesbian and her religion is formed. I gave titles 'A long journey of conflicts surrounding their identity' and 'A long journey of conflicts between their identity and religion,' to each part respectively, because I found that self-identification, coming-out, relationships with family, and religious faith were still ongoing processes for all of the women. I begin with J's journey.

4.1 Findings Part One: A long journey of conflicts surrounding lesbian identity

4.1.1 Self-identification

J: I'm raising a child named J

I began to consider my sexual identity by the time I graduated from elementary school. Becoming a teenager, I dreamed I got married to a woman. I felt strange because many friends of mine told me they married the boys who they liked in their dreams... Then, my feelings turned to serious worries. I entered a girls' junior high school and I found I had an unrequited love for my classmate. Having never heard about this kind of love, I was very embarrassed and couldn't acknowledge that emotion for myself. I was so anxious and felt pain. So, as I suffered from the thought I was abnormal, I never could focus on the girl whom I liked.

I was assailed by emotional insecurity throughout junior high and high school days. And then I barely managed to accept my lesbian identity when I first dated a girl after

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spending a year at university. I thought I would have to be in a one-sided relationship all my life, but the girl who I liked said she also liked me! I started dating her, and I felt good and comfortable. It was the first time I could accept who I was. I'm not such a disgusting person and I can be loved! It was like the creation of the world. But, unfortunately the girl, who got married to a guy 5 years ago, severed contact with me after our breakup. Then, I had a hard time, as my hatred for myself, which I had overcome thanks to her, surged through me again. Indeed, I needed to achieve independence for myself. My dependence on the other came back to haunt me.

Coming to the U.S. offered me a second chance to accept my sexual identity. Before coming to the U.S., I suffered insanely because I was looking for work and an L. In conservative and self-conscious Korean society, job seeking was too much for me, and, additionally, I always had an L in my mind. This was like putting the broken pieces of a puzzle together. Seeking a job is making myself a person who society wants, so my lesbian identity was burdensome. But it was also difficult to abandon my lesbian identity and only think about a job. In the end, I got a job, but my social life at work turned out to be rough. There's too much attention paid to others in Korean culture. The attention is focused on checking others' backgrounds; it's not from thoughtfulness for others. No matter how I tried, I couldn't solve this problem, so I escaped to the U.S. That helped me get myself sorted out to some degree, especially with regard to what I had experienced as an L in Korea. As I was back to being a student in the U.S., I could spend time alone. Of course, I spent much time alone while I was looking for a job in Korea, but the quality of time was totally different. In Korea, if a person in between jobs spends time getting

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herself sorted, every eye would be bent on her with a distorted view. Compared with that, in the US, which has different culture from Korea, I felt better even though I was just a student and didn't work at a famous company. That made me, a person who is very self-conscious, focus on myself quite comfortably. In the meantime, I could look back on my relationships. I thought of them thousands of times, with thoughts like these: 'I was pathetic at that time', 'it was her fault then', 'I fondly remember it', and so on. Then, finally, I began to look at myself softly rather than to tell myself off for all kinds of things. This is who I am, and that is who I am, too. I like women; I disappointed the woman who I loved; and I wore my breakup like a cheap suit. All these 'I's are who I am. I reached this point and could release myself a little bit. Of course, even now, I don't feel clear. Anyway, the bottom line is that I acknowledged that I loved a woman only after undergoing countless mental hardships.

My sexual identity has affected my self-esteem a lot. As I have told you over and over, I always felt uneasy. For me elementary, junior high, and high school, all of my school days confirmed I couldn't be liked by a person whom I liked. I was stressed because I was not a boy and was not good at anything. I felt disillusioned with myself in my childhood. Now that I think of it, I don't know why I tortured myself so much at that time. Anyway, I was a person with low self-esteem. I wanted to improve my self-esteem through family or by having a girlfriend while I lived in Korea. My logic was like this: I can't love myself, so you saying, "I love you" to me, should explain why I have to love myself... I probably made my precious people tired. But I have been getting over this since I came to the U.S. As there's nobody around me, I needed to take care of myself. I

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looked after myself as if I were a little kid. I started asking very basic questions of myself, such as: ‘How do I feel in the morning?’, ‘What do I want to eat?’, and so on. I began to raise a child whose name is I. I think my self-esteem now is at the level of a junior high school girl. I found out it was important to communicate with myself and to care for myself. I didn’t and couldn’t do either in Korea. I even very often told myself that I would rather die. I just bothered myself. What we call self-esteem literally means to respect myself, right? To respect someone, it is necessary to have a conversation with her. I did it for the first time when I came to the U.S.

Eunwoo Park: I was lonely

As I was an alien being at school, other girls looked at me strangely, felt afraid of me, hated me, or liked me because of my weirdness. Their attitude towards me might have been caused by my appearance. I was very fat then. And...perhaps I seemed to be very strict, difficult or profound because I was in a world of my own, asking ‘who am I?’ and so forth. So, I seriously agonized over what kind of group I should mingle with. You know, a peer group is super important for teenagers.

My question ‘who am I?’ included ‘who do I like?’ I got the answer to that question clearly when I was in the 8th grade. I was very surprised by the fact I could date someone, and very pleased with the possibility. However, the girl who I dated then, she did not identify herself as a lesbian. Actually, she started dating me while she was dating a boy. Unlike her, at the time, I knew for sure I was an L. As I had a secret crush on a girl for several years, I thought ‘this is not merely ordinary emotion,’ and then I identified myself

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as a lesbian. But I guessed, as there were very few lesbians in the world, it would be hard to meet those people. Because of this, I felt lonely all the time, and the feeling made me cling to my girlfriend too much.

H: I was like a flower in a conservatory

I dated boys, but, in retrospect, I have some memories which could be read in a different way. For example, when I was in junior high school, there was a girl, two years younger than me, who I really liked even though she didn't know me. The girl looked perfectly a butch; she had short hair, maybe that's because she was a member of the school archery team, and slender, overall, she just had pretty-boy good looks. I was a big fan of hers. When she came out to the schoolyard to exercise, I almost screamed in front of the classroom window and called my friends saying: "She is running!" The funny thing is that I never felt anything strange or uncomfortable, and even among my friends, nobody said: "you're a girl, but why do you like her so much?"

I never thought about my sexual identity until I graduated from high school. I started thinking of it after entering university when I was eighteen years old. In fact, back then I crushed on someone who was a woman. Meanwhile, I joined the Women's Committee, which was a feminist activist group at my university. I met diverse feminist activists while I was active in the group, and there were many lesbians among them. Besides, every week we held feminism seminars on various topics including identity, sexuality, etc., and the seminars gave me the chance to think about myself. It was short, so to speak. I mean, compared to others who agonized over their sexual identity since their childhood,

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I thought of it for a short time, and acknowledged my identity easily and positively. At first, I considered myself as bisexual, but before long, I concluded: ‘I like a girl not a boy.’

I can say, as an L, I was surrounded by a blessed circumstance, and I was like a flower in a conservatory [온실 속의 화초]⁷ in terms of my process of self-identification. When I began to awake to sexual identity, I saw lots of L couples around me. At the same time, thanks to the feminist activist group, I could participate in the seminars, and had access to various types of information, including about sexual identity, from my seniors. You know, an 18-year-old girl, she is just a baby. To a baby girl who just started her first year at the university, seniors [선배, Seon-bae]⁸ usually look great, and all their words seem true. Plus, those great seniors are Ls! Hahaha. So I didn’t have any reason to suspect, deny, or reject, whatever. The most important thing was the space, a women’s university. Frankly, there were homophobes at my university as well; nevertheless, it had its special atmosphere. The biggest one is that the university is a mecca of Women’s Studies in Asia, and it is based on liberation theology even though it’s a Christian school.

⁷ ‘A flower in a conservatory [온실 속의 화초]’ is a Korean idiom for a person who has led a sheltered life.

⁸ 선배 [seon-bae] does not only mean a fourth-year student in Korean but also means who enters any kind of institutions and companies before me regardless of which year s/he is in.

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I entered a space where all kinds of these things mingled with one another. I think the year was 2000, and it also fit in well with the other environments surrounding me. Since the 90s, the discourse on sexuality has been activated, and the atmosphere was the same in 2000. Additionally, I majored in philosophy. The Department of Philosophy was a small and unusual group at the university, so we called ourselves a minority. Besides, it had many lesbian students. If I had chosen to study business management, my story would have been different. That department has a totally different feeling. I could say happily and comfortably, “I’m a lesbian” because I was in a philosophy department. In short, the stream of the times, the university itself, and the spaces or groups I chose at the university gave me a good foundation for my happy self-identification.

So, I recognized my lesbian identity in a very positive way. This was one thing that helped me boost my self-esteem, actually. How? It led me to be able to think like, “I’m different from them, so I love myself so much.” Literally, pride. I sometimes ask myself, “If I did not identify as a lesbian, would I care about the human rights of people with disabilities? Of course I would, but would I care about it sincerely like now? Or would I contemplate animal rights?” and so on. You know, the connection with other minorities. If I were not a lesbian, I would miss lots of important things. I’m sure I would try to see them, though. This is also related to all aspects of my life: I majored in philosophy, I’ve worked for a local station, and I’ve worked as a video journalist. That is, I’ve experienced many kinds of minority positions in the major groups even though I always belonged to the so-called mainstream. And the biggest one, I’m a woman, plus I’m an L. Well, I... I’m sure my lesbian identity instilled in me a sense of pride, especially with regards to the

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fact I can see and be sensitive to other minorities in various groups. Nonetheless, I can't deny it also affects my depression.

Ryeosu: I'm a special one

When I was 12 years old, I was a fan of H.O.T, a Korean boy band. I visited a popular chat website at that time to meet other fans like me. Strangely, whenever I entered chat rooms and said hello, I was kicked out. I didn't know the reason at all. Later, a kind girl explained this and that, and I learned that those chat rooms were made for role-play. Each girl in the chat room took the role of one boy who she liked from H.O.T, and played a couple with another girl. Now I think it was not just play, though. Anyway, then, for the first time, I heard the words, top and bottom. The kind girl asked me: "Are you a top or a bottom?" and I answered I didn't know what top and bottom meant. Then she asked me again if I read a certain kind of fanfic. She said that in that fanfic, Woohyuk Jang was a top and Tony Ahn was a bottom. In fact, I hadn't read the fanfic, but I didn't want to say, "I don't know," again. So, I told her I was a top. I think this was the first step I took to having a butch identity... Haha. I don't know why, maybe I preferred Woohyuk to Tony at the time? After that, I read the fanfic she mentioned, and then I decided to be a top.⁹

Back then, it was difficult for me to differentiate the role-play from the concept of

⁹ Though top does not mean butch, in this case, Ryeosu wanted to explain where and when her butch identity began through her personal experience in a teenage role-play community.

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lesbian or ㅇ|뻥 [iban]¹⁰. Maybe this was because I loved the boy band, because I was easy-going, or because I was born to like girls. I don't know the reason exactly, but I accepted such things naturally. I never considered the behavior or emotion – like a man loves and dates another man, or a woman loves and dates another woman – strange. I just accepted it. I used to make a joke about my identification: “I can't abandon my butch identity because I identified myself as a butch first before lesbian!” Well, this is not a joke, in fact. Anyway, I thought of myself as a top first and then lesbian.

I wasn't worried about my identity. It could seem like an unusual case. I enjoyed a lot of the role-playing on the chat site, and used to meet a girl online and date her offline. Shortly after that, I got to know a friend, a self-identified lesbian, and, following her, I joined a lesbian group that was not about role-playing. I met a girl who I seriously loved there, even though the relationship didn't last long. I think, after that, I clearly identified myself as a lesbian instead of a top.

I came to see myself as a special person who was different from others when I recognized my lesbian identity in my youth. At that time, I had a strong desire to be unique. So, I was proud of myself, and I am. Though it is not easy to live as a lesbian, I met good people because I'm a lesbian, and I got many things thanks to my lesbian identity. I can say those aspects of myself make my self-esteem higher.

¹⁰ㅇ|뻥 [iban] is a word coined by the Korean LGBTQ community in the mid-1990s, “which is derived from the word *ilban* (“normal”), has the dual meanings of being different and being a second choice” (Koh, 2013, p.393).

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Sujin: I'm not abnormal, finally

I began to think about homosexuality in the 8th grade, when I realized my classmate and I loved each other. I was, in a word, in damned circumstances. In my early-20s, when I met other lesbians around my age through lesbian communities on the Internet, I found out some of them had shared their concerns about sexual identity with their friends, or had even met self-identified lesbian friends at their schools. In my case, this was not true at all. Though I started to agonize over my identity in the 8th grade, I had never met a single lesbian until I was twenty years old. I was in a terrible environment; I couldn't get any proper information; I didn't have a single friend, no, I didn't have even a person who I could share my concerns with. It was terrible. The thought that I was the only one on this earth and that I was abnormal troubled me. At that time, I was so young, just a teenaged little girl who was immature and delicate. It was a heavy load for me to bear. I was so distressed that I attempted suicide twice in my school days. I denied who I was, detested myself, and tortured myself throughout my teenage years. In the past, my lesbian identity destroyed me. Such experiences in my youth kept me from accepting my lesbian identity for a long time.

However, when I joined a lesbian human rights groups in my mid-20s, I was able to empower myself to accept my lesbian identity joyfully and positively. Through studies and experiences, I learned and realized I am not abnormal but the societal structure is; the structure which discriminates against homosexuals based on the dichotomy of 'normal' and 'abnormal,' is abnormal.

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*Jihwon: I wanted to be a fabulous unni*¹¹

I had never thought about sexual identity. Until I was in high school, I had never heard of such things as Women's Studies, and even after entering the university, because I kept going to church, I didn't have a chance to think about it. But, at the end of my first year of university, I came across a website Unninet¹². While I was in and out of the website, I read others' posts, and then, 'Oh, now I see,' I said. On the site, there were many self-identified lesbians. I crushed on a girl secretly at that time, but didn't realize what my feeling was until I read the Unninet posts. I thought, 'Yes, I am like them.'

After that, I got to know and joined KiriKiri. Of course, I couldn't decide to join right after I realized my identity. I went to the door and came back, and went to the door and came back again the following week... because I had never seen lesbians except myself until then. That is, the first lesbian I met was an activist in KiriKiri. As I had seen lesbians on their posts on the internet, well... I was sort of scared. I remember I felt relieved when I saw the activist at the KiriKiri.

¹¹ Unni [un-ni, 언니] simply means an older sister in Korean, but the word is often used conveying special meaning such as sisterhood and women's solidarity in Korean feminist activism.

¹² Unninet (<http://www.unninetnetwork.net>) is a feminist cultural activism NGO in South Korea. It was established as an internet server for feminists and feminist sympathizers in 2004.

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After accepting my lesbian identity, I felt a little depressed, but I didn't think about what it meant, what kind of hardships I would have in society, and so on. In retrospect, I think I had no sense of my own reality. If I had contemplated it, I might have hidden my L identity. Back then I wanted to acknowledge it with a pure heart. Besides, I eagerly wanted to be a good feminist like the people I saw on the Unninet site. Among Ls, there are many lesbian activists who argue that we should separate lesbian activism from feminism. It is true there have been some cases where lesbian activists were hurt by feminist activists or scholars. However, in my case, I recognized my sexual identity through feminism first, so I always longed to be active with the fabulous 언니들[un-ni-deul, sisters].

Summary A

This section presents the process through which each woman I interviewed came to identify herself as a lesbian. J, Eunwoo, Ryeosu and Sujin recognized their sexual identity and identified themselves as lesbians in their early teens, between the ages of 11 and 13. H and Jihwon identified when they entered university at the age of 18. For all the participants, these experiences occurred between the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Their experiences of lesbian identification have similarities, which can be separated into two groups. First, J, Eunwoo, and Sujin point out a lack of information as one of the reasons for their experience of mental hardships. When they became aware of being different from others, they were afraid that they might be abnormal and the only person who identified in this way. On the other hand, H, Ryeosu, and Jihwon accepted their

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lesbian identity without difficulties. H and Ryeosu's lesbian pride was based on their self-awareness of being different from others. In contrast with J, Eunwoo, and Sujin, H and Ryeosu could access information about their lesbian identities as they already belonged to supportive communities. In case of Jihwon, she realized she was a lesbian through a feminist website; that is, she also did not have a problem in terms of accessing information. Moreover, Jihwon's desire to be a good feminist activist was linked to her positive perception of being a lesbian.

H's and Ryeosu's narratives contain some interesting points to think about. H mentions the distinction of the space, her university, the time when she recognized her identity, and her other social locations as a minority in Korean society. She regards all of them as meaningful factors which influenced her lesbian identity formation and pride. Meanwhile, Ryeosu went through a quite different identification process from the other women; she started thinking of her sexual identity based on the experience of joyful role-plays with her peer group.

4.1.2 Coming out

J: Bullied or prejudiced

In Korean society, coming-out meant I could get blindsided. So, I usually came out or considered coming out to people whom I could trust, or who I wanted to be closer to. Unfortunately, I eventually had bad coming out experiences much more than good ones. I was bullied in high school, and at the university, after I came out to several people. Some of them were seriously worried that I might love them. I usually got into trouble or

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians experienced prejudice. Now, I don't and won't come out unless I am in LGBTQ-friendly spaces.

Eunwoo: Lesbian only

Well, almost all the people who I mingle with and many friends of mine are Ls. As I am getting older, it is hard to meet new people. Fortunately, I don't have any trouble in my current work place due to my sexual identity. The place started with feminism, anyway.

H: I was always prepared, but in other ways

I only came out to people close to me, I mean, my close friends, feminist activists, and members of the KiriKiri.

I felt very tired when I was at work. You know, the response scenario of many Ls. The scenario of answers to the question "Do you have a boyfriend?" I always was prepared. It's annoying. I made an imaginary guy in detail, like how old he was, what he did, etc. When I wasn't dating anybody, I could say I wasn't, but even so, you know, the conversation wouldn't end. If I said: "I don't have a boyfriend," they responded, "I'll set you up on a blind date." Sometimes, some of the people who were curious about whether I had a boyfriend asked me out. That's why I had an imaginary guy. It was tiring.

Reoysu: No coming out anymore

When I was a teenager, I came out to all my close friends. In fact, because all of them

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were lesbians or bisexuals, coming out didn't matter. I didn't make any plan to come out to heterosexual friends, rather, I came out to them in some situations that I couldn't participate in because of my lesbian identity. For example, talking about pregnancy, giving birth, and boyfriends. While I felt uncomfortable not telling them, if there was any chance at that moment, I just did. Looking back, I didn't come out to anyone with a specific plan.

Since my early-20s, I haven't come out to anyone except in some cases like meeting with lesbian activists or people I got to know through lesbian communities online. Not to any friends or any co-workers. Nobody. Actually, I haven't had such heterosexual friends or co-workers who I wanted to be close to since then. Recently, I have thought of coming out to a colleague at work. It was just a thought like, 'If I get to be friends with her, I could come out to her. Perhaps.' Come to think of it, I might be a person who doesn't know how to come out...

Sujin: I should teach those stupid people there

I did not want to come out to my parents until the end of my life. However, they became the first people who got to know I was a lesbian. I was outed when I was twenty-five years old. At that time, my ex-girlfriend's parents told my parents. Since then, it doesn't matter whether others know or not as my parents, whom I never wanted to talk to about my homosexuality, became the very first people to be told the fact. So, I've come out right and left except in front of cameras.

I think one of the reasons is that I was an activist. If I were not active in lesbian rights

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organizations, I wouldn't do it like that. But I was active, and while I participated in the lesbian rights movement, I studied, learned, and looked through various references related to LGBTQ people. In doing so, I recognized, "This society is problematic, not me. This society is sick and it needs to be cured, not me." This boosted my confidence and gave me a kind of pride. It was not a so-called happy pride, though. I thought I should do so. I mean, as I was an activist, I could not allow myself to hide my identity or to shrink back.

And, you know, I had lived in hiding for around 10 years, from 13 to 23 years old. It was such a terrible incident that my parents got to know; on the other hand, the incident opened a door. It has two aspects: insanely terrible but it also gave me a new opportunity. That is, I became a person who didn't have to tell a lie. So, even though it was obvious that I would be in trouble, I came out freely thinking, 'I don't care whatever you say about me.' I just did it. I felt a sense of freedom. Though I felt stress at the same time, I was so happy to speak. Let's say, if I die of five kinds of cancer, I thought one of the causes would be that I couldn't speak out. I felt like after that, at least one cause disappeared. So, I think I came out even in cases where I didn't have to. Because it is just good to me, and not just because of the sense of responsibility as an activist.

However, even though my parents know, it doesn't mean my circumstances in Korean society are changed, right? So, I already know. As I already knew what would happen after coming out, I was and am not that surprised no matter what happens. Nonetheless, experiencing people's rude reactions is very... I've been coping with all things, but was overwhelmed by indescribable feelings as well. Though I already anticipated, it was disgusting, and I've experienced those feelings over and over. I concluded that it was

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impossible for me to get immunity against those reactions. But, I've lived without immunity. Because I came out of the closet, and I think it is right, I should endure all of it. Though I feel very stressed, I decided to think, 'well, they are stupid, so I have to teach them.'

Jihwon: No thank you

I plucked up courage to come out to 6 people in a club in university. Now I regret it bitterly. After coming out, they asked me strange questions like why don't I get married, and it seemed that they did so on purpose. I don't think they forgot what I said. Except for one or two, they were rude. So, I often think I did wrong. I haven't come out to others besides those 6 people and the members of KiriKiri. At first, in my early-20s, by the time I joined KiriKiri, I thought coming-out was an essential thing which I should do with courage; I even made a kind of my own manual on how to come out in my mind. But, as I told you, I experienced the kind of people who talked nonsense, and it made me not come out to anyone else. And then, I couldn't do it because almost all the new people I met later were colleagues at work. I didn't do it, and haven't thought of doing it at all since then.

Summary B

All six of the lesbians I interviewed have experiences of coming out, but their disclosure was usually confined to close friends or other lesbians. This is due to bad memories from previous coming out experiences, fear of insecurity or lack of trust,

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especially when they are at work. All of them affirm that they will not come out in public in the future. However, Sujin tells a different story about her coming out process. She is the only out-lesbian among the participants though she did not originally come out of her own will – she was outed. Even though a sense of responsibility as a lesbian rights activist and a personal feeling of freedom enabled her to keep coming out in public, she still suffers from people's reactions.

4.1.3 Family

J: I want my mom to be happy

I told my mom about my lesbian identity when I was a junior high student, but she's been ignoring it since then. I don't want to be angry or convince her anymore. It may be because I'm not dating anyone now, but above all, I don't want to burden my mom, who is getting old, with my identity. I want her to be happy. To daddy, I've never thought of coming out to him. I don't know whether he already knows or not. He usually asks me only about work. Well, nowadays, he talks to me about marriage. I remember I talked about sexual identity with my older brother just once when I was at university, but after that, we've never tried to talk about it with each other, and he's never asked me again.

I have an aunt who lives in the U.S., and she and her husband warmly support me and my identity. She even introduced me to a lesbian, who is the daughter of her friend. Indeed, my aunt and uncle are very supportive. But, because of it, I emailed my aunt to emphasize I don't have any desire to come out to my family in Korea. I was afraid that she might try to tell them about my identity and convince them aggressively. If relatives

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get involved... You know the Korean family culture. I feel very scared that the social position and good reputation of my parents could be damaged because of me, and, if so, I would feel guilty.

I don't want to come out to my family at all. I can't imagine. They will never understand me. Mom will give me a sad look saying, "you don't know yourself," actually she did that before, and my dad will get angry, irritated, and it will hurt his pride enough to harm his health. Considering his personality, it could actually happen. My brother, he won't care whatever I am, but he does not want to be damaged by me. My family members, they are just ordinary people who can't imagine a homosexual's life, and they see homosexuality as a sin from the Christian perspective. Since I came to the U.S., I've found that there are some Christian denominations which have a mature understanding of homosexuality, but my family just go to a conservative, typical Korean church.

Eunwoo: Angry but sorry

When my parents found out about my lesbian identity, all hell broke loose. I was in the 12th grade. Since then, my mom forced me to be prayed over by the Deaconess who she brought home; she cried a lot, came to school, and threatened the girlfriend I had at that time. My mom resorted to sharp remarks to the girl like, "you want to get a sense of stability through my daughter because your parents are divorced." I hated all of their behavior, so I tried to hurt myself and attempted suicide. I was in deathly agony. My mom even met with the girl's mom and said harsh things about the girl... I was just going crazy at the time.

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I felt humiliated... I mean I felt humiliated and couldn't stand it that my parents felt ashamed of me. I had a grudge against them, but, at the same time, I felt sorry that my mom and dad prayed for me, got depressed because of me, and so on. Meanwhile, mom poured vicious words out at me. One day, she even choked me saying, "you'd better die." I have nightmares about my mom, even now.

Last year, when I took sick leave and stayed away from work for a while, I spent time with mom. She said while praying for my 'problems' – mom still can't say the word – in a prayer room one day, she heard "there's nothing you can do. It's just your daughter's destiny." Then, she thought all she could do was only praying. As time goes by, for about 10 years, her feelings may have been changed. These days, my parents don't talk about my identity. Besides, as I achieved financial independence from them, they are not as influential in my life as they used to be. I think a sort of peacemaking mood is being created among us.

My younger sister is the only one that supports me among my family members. The funny thing is that she is also a devout Christian. I often think 'What kind of Christian is she?' Hahaha. She has never condemned me for my identity from the Christian perspective. She seems to worry, but hasn't said anything bad. I guess it's because she loves and trusts me so much. I sent a letter to her when she was in high school. I wrote in the letter, 'I'm dating someone, but she is a girl. I think I've been this kind of person since I was a little kid. I always wanted to tell you about this. Despite that, I love you so much, anyway,' and so on. And then, my sister wrote me back saying, 'I cried a lot reading your letter on my way to school. I'm so sorry I didn't help you at all while you've

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been suffering. I love you so much and bless both you and your girlfriend.’ When I got the letter, I felt like I found a haven. I could survive in my home thanks to her.

H: I want to remain a good daughter

My family... I’ve never considered coming out to my family. In fact, thinking of family, it weighs on my mind at all times. I have never shared my thoughts or opinions about lesbian rights or feminism with my family members. I didn’t talk about those topics at all when I am with my family. This makes me feel guilty. You know, I see myself as a feminist and lesbian rights activist, and I want to keep doing something for women’s and lesbians’ human rights. So, I feel guilty, like, ‘while I do not say anything even to my family, is it right to speak out in public?’ This weighs heavily on my mind, especially in relation to coming-out. Nevertheless, I don’t want to come out to my parents until the end. I know, that’s because I don’t want to go through a hard time with my parents.

A long time ago, maybe when I was around 20 years old? One day, I was getting ready to go out, and my mom was surfing the Internet in my room. Then, suddenly, she asked me, “Are you dating a girl?” while she was just focusing on the monitor. I felt my heart freeze. I answered her, “What are you talking about?” pretending to get angry, and then, I dashed from home. At that time, I was actually dating a girl, so I was afraid she might have sensed it. That was the first and the last time mom asked me something related to homosexuality. I remember she sounded like just her usual self, though I couldn’t see her face. Thinking of it, I’m still wondering, if I had answered yes back then, what would she have said? Nonetheless, I don’t want to tell them. I would be like a sinner

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without any sin. That's unfair. Moreover, as my mom and dad are always proud of me, I don't want to disappoint them or make them worry. It's a different matter, no matter how much I have a happy pride in my identity. Though my parents are just like friends to me, they are just ordinary Korean people. For example, these days, they are worried about my marriage. Whenever I tell them I don't want to marry, my parents say, "showing your happily married life to your parents is one way to be filial," or, "going with the flow as others do can lead to a peaceful life." It is certain my coming-out will trouble them. I don't want it.

Ryeosu: She knows, but she doesn't know

When I was thirteen, my mom was sick in bed for several days after she read my diary secretly, because I wrote about what happened with my first love. After being in bed for a while, mom seated me at the table in the kitchen, and finally brought up the issue. She said to me, "it's a sin. You will be in trouble if your dad finds out." Such things. I quarreled with her, crying for about an hour and half. I didn't have any information on homosexuality, so I couldn't refute her argument. Though I thought she was wrong, I came to feel guilty anyway because of her words. I had committed a sin as a Christian. Before that, I had had pride as a homosexual, the argument with her led me to lose it. Since then, we've never touched on my sexual identity. Just once, when either Seokchun

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Hong or Risu Ha¹³ was on TV, she spoke ill of them. The funny thing is that when she had seen either of them on TV before she got to know my lesbian identity, she had told me we should understand them. I remember it for sure. Even though it was just a short sentence, I remember because I'm a lesbian. When I heard her words at that time, I vaguely thought it might be OK to come out to my mom. The thought turned out not to be OK, though. Now, everything related to homosexuality is like a taboo between us. Rather, mom usually says to me "Don't date that kind of guy," or "Why don't you get married to a rich man?"

Oh, I once took my partner to my cousin's wedding. Of course, I just introduced her as a friend to my mom, but I could notice mom was very embarrassed. No matter how hard I tried to talk to mom, she just went around to other tables with a face of complicated feelings. She caught a glance at my text conversation with my partner, and there was her name followed by many hearts. After that, mom stopped talking about marriage or boyfriends. She just asks me sometimes if I still live with her. The question seems to have another meaning. I think she pretends not to know, but she knows. Haha.

Sujin: Sorry and thank you

Thinking it was only I myself who should bear such a heavy burden, I didn't want to come out to my parents. Even for me, it was too harsh to accept it in the past. So I was

¹³ Seokchun Hong and Risu Ha are Korean celebrities who are an outed gay man and a transgender woman respectively.

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worried about whether my parents would also have to carry the heavy burden on their shoulders. Nevertheless, they got to know, and they considered me crazy at first. I heard go and see a doctor, and I was even beaten by my dad. Their reactions led me to become desperate. I made a mess, and went nuts shouting, "I'm not crazy!" I think my parents boggled at my flipping out. Haha. Since then, they have kept their mouths shut. However, later, my mom slowly began studying homosexuality piece by piece, and gradually acknowledged my identity. That's why I thank my mom sincerely and always do my best to be a good daughter for her.

My younger sister told me it's disgusting or dirty at first, but as time goes by she may feel sorry. She began to treat me warmly in a different way. She even reached the point where she could have a chat with me about my dating or partner. Now, all my family members know I live with my partner, and acknowledge our relationship. I'm very happy for this, and thank my family so much. Though my partner's family doesn't know I even exist, it's fortune enough that my family respects our relationship. Nonetheless, as I still feel sorry for my parents, I want to show them that I'm doing well and I always try to do good for them.

Jihwon: Never ever

I won't be able to come out to my family in my lifetime. My parents, they don't know the concept of homosexuality. They even misunderstand same-sex marriage as same-

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surname marriage.¹⁴ My brother, a conservative Christian, says Seokchun Hong must be visited with divine punishment when Hong sometimes appears on TV. If I come out to these people, it will cause quite a stir and conflicts, and that's entirely to be expected. I will not do it.

Summary C

All of the participants had in common that they did not want their families, especially parents, to know about their sexual identity. Nonetheless, J's and Ryeosu's mothers are aware that their daughters are lesbians, and Eunwoo's and Sujin's parents also know their daughters' sexual identities. In the case of H, her parents do not know that she is a lesbian, but, because of this, H feels a conflict between her activist identity and her personal desire to hide. Cases of being outed to their family members illustrate a range of hardships that the participants endured or might endure: disregard, rage, violence, etc. The hardships largely stem from the negative perception of homosexuality which the family members already have, their religious faiths, and Korean family culture. As a matter of fact, the main reason that these women do not want to tell their parents is feeling sorry for not being a good daughter as well as fear of rejection or argument. I discuss these in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ 동성 결혼 [dong-seong-gyeol-hon] is a Korean word for same-sex marriage, but 동성 [dongseong] is a homonym of same-sex and same-surname, such as Kim and Kim, in Korean.

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4.2 Findings Part Two: A long journey of conflicts between lesbian identity and religion

4.2.1 Presbyterian

J: Feeling like a child who disappoints her parents

I had gone to my minister for advice about my sexual identity. When I told him I liked girls not boys, he asked me whether I had a girlfriend or not at that time. I answered no, and then he said it was fine as long as I didn't have any relationships with girls. But, after that, he preached a sermon that homosexuals shall go to hell. Despite that, I used to go to church for counseling when I felt my life was full of hard knocks. During counseling, if I broached the subject, the counselor ended up concluding everything would go better when my sexual identity changed, and God would guide my life.

Most Korean people are very nosy about others in many ways, and, as a lesbian, it is really burdensome to me. That's why, as soon as the worship was over, I came home. I didn't want to go through the process of denying my identity, even just to have conversations with people in the church. I think a church should be a place to share our hearts with each other, but, in my case, I can't expect anything like that. From the perspective of the Korean Presbyterian Church, homosexuals are not just people to be objected to, but convicted.

Whenever I heard 'homosexuals are supposed to go to hell' in church, I blamed God. I was eager to talk to God about my difficulties and the sadness that I had to go through because I'm a lesbian, to share my joys and sorrows as a lesbian with God, and to get

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God's advice on how to overcome all of these things in everyday life. However, God seemed to want me to change. Even when I prayed to God, I couldn't express my feelings freely but just asked over and over whether God acknowledged my existence or not. That led me to blame God, but I was afraid that I could get punished if I showed my resentment while praying. I began not to want to go to church due to this. In this respect, I am very thankful for the progressive church where I go here in the U.S.; here I can start talking to God again. While praying, I tell him everything: what makes me sad now, difficulties I have in my daily life, whether I'm happy or not, and so on. Whatever I say, no matter how frankly I talk to God, he consoles me. God is no longer the one who storms at me, "You little one, I told you that you should change!"

When I met lesbians around my age, lesbian couples, and lesbians who adopted kids at the church here, I felt a sense of kinship and had a desire to mingle with people for the first time. Coming out here feels like an ordinary introduction. Thanks to that, I also can talk about myself comfortably, and enjoy coffee breaks after Sunday worship, unlike at the church in Korea. I envy other people, thinking they have experienced this kind of joy since their childhood. However, to be honest, I still question whether God sees something wrong with me and my sexual identity or not. Even though Jesus says the most important commandment is 'Love your neighbors as yourself' in the New Testament, there are also other phrases condemning homosexuals. I'm still wondering if God really wants me to change into a heterosexual. In this sense, it isn't easy to look at myself positively in the church. It's like... a child who disappoints her parents. I have some feeling that God supports my 'love,' but it is not 100-percent certain. Maybe it's because I was harassed

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for a long time by the church while I was in Korea. You know, in the church where I used to go in Korea, homosexuals are targets of reformation as lots of Christians there believe in the literal meaning of the Bible.

Even though it was burdensome for me to go to church in Korea, I've never thought of converting from Christianity to another faith or of giving up my faith. I was raised in a Christian home, and it is natural to say prayers whenever good things happen. Besides, I don't think I can do everything by myself. All kinds of worries and thoughts are connected to my religious faith. So I keep my faith even though I've heard ridiculous things so many times in church. A child who had quarrels with her parents would refuse to talk to her parents, but she would not want her parents to disappear.

I have plenty of unpleasant memories of being a lesbian in church in Korea. During sermons, I was always afraid of being told off by God, and blamed him for not understanding me. I couldn't concentrate on the sermon no matter how moving it was. Last year, visiting my family in Korea, I found a progressive church that acknowledges homosexuality and homosexuals. I attended twice, and it was so impressive that I thought: 'Ah, if I had found this church earlier, I wouldn't have left Korea.' I even felt deeply grateful that a church accepted me like that without any prejudice. I hope there will be more churches like it. I hope other teenage lesbians who are suffering, as I did at their age, can overcome hardships and smile again with the help of those churches.

Eunwoo Park: I don't need that kind of church anymore

A church has never been a safe place for me; it's been a place of duty to me. Both

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school and church, they overwhelmed me. I never felt I could be redeemed, healed or experience joyfulness; instead, I always felt I should protect myself in order to survive. It was a feeling like I was going to be told off once more.

I've gone to church along with my parents since I was a baby. Of course, I went to Sunday school, and had to join group activities at the church. You know, there are Sunday school and youth group teachers. As my parents have been very active in their church, everyone knows them, and that means the teachers knew I was their daughter. It was very burdensome. There were some things that were always listed together: homosexuality, drugs, abortion, etc. Homosexuality was mentioned together with those other, negative things during sermons. Whenever I heard such things, I wanted to run away from the church. The church where I went with my parents was one of the biggest churches in Seoul, so if I came back home right after Sunday service, I could stand it at some degree. However, my parents forced me to join various groups, and I had to be connected to others in those groups. It was a great discomfort.

My mom and dad were ashamed of me. It is one hundred percent certain that Christianity led them to see me that way. I suffered from the fact my parents felt humiliated because of me. So, frankly speaking, one reason why I participated in the DTS program¹⁵ was that I wanted to be cured if my sexual identity was caused by something

¹⁵ The Discipleship Training School (DTS) program is run by Youth With A Mission (YWAM). It consists of 12-week courses on Christianity and mission trip for another 12 weeks.

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wrong or if it was a real disease. The biggest reason was my mom's threat, though. Mom said that if I did not participate in the program, she would tell my girlfriend's parents about our relationship. I hated it. Anyway, I can say the DTS program was a kind of game changer for my mom, dad, and myself in Christianity. While I was in the program, the principal took me aside and asked some questions about me such as if I had a girlfriend, if I did how far did I go with her... I just went mad and thought, 'I should say I'm cured.' I was even convinced at the end. At that time, I even ended up thinking, 'Yes, I was crazy, then. God gave me this chance to help other Christian homosexuals believe they also can be cured.'

I never dreamed of my life without Christianity, as I grew up in a devoted Christian home. I thought: 'I'd rather give up going to church than deny I'm a Christian.' But I reproached God bitterly. God was the only one I could blame because I didn't choose this, my sexual identity. Religion, for me, Christianity strongly influenced me such as establishing my identity and personality. I think it is similar to Pierre Bourdieu's concept, *Habitus*. I was a Christian since I was in my mom's womb, so almost all of my memories in childhood are full of the church. I usually met people at the church, and when I went to church, I had to dress up. Mom read me the Bible instead of storybooks, and let me listen to gospel music. Every day, from morning to night, was full of spiritual conversations at home. Mom and Dad started every morning by talking about their dreams. They discussed what messages God gave them through the dreams. Almost all the pictures hung on their walls and the books on their shelves were about Christianity. As all our relatives were also Christians, I never experienced the Korean traditional worship for

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ancestors. I had been surrounded by those [Christian] things since long before I formed my own values. Such circumstances had negative effects on me. For example, the firm exclusion of other religions and the habit of judging others based on their religions, and seeing them as heresy. I took it for granted because my parents had taught me to do so. Besides, there was a sense of superiority and a middle-class way of life in my home. This might be one of the elements which made up my self. I think, in this way, there has always been a particular 'I'—the first daughter from a middle-class Christian family. This 'I' will exist inside me until I die.

Now, I fully acknowledge that I'm a lesbian, and I don't feel guilty as I did before. Rather, I am thankful for my sexual identity in some ways. I had wondered why I, my soul, chose this for a long time. Looking back, if I wasn't a homosexual, I would live just like my parents. I would live like them with stubborn and conservative Christianity and without any sensitivity to others. Moreover, I would never know about feminism and would have a very narrow view of society. I learned lots of things because I'm a lesbian, so I really appreciate it. Actually, religion didn't help me at all in this sense. Rather, it was a huge obstacle. I regarded myself as a sinner, so I thought I should die. But now I understand both, two different groups.

I have often thought about the distinctiveness of the Korean Protestant Church. In my opinion, since Protestantism arrived in Korea, it combined with Korean folk beliefs like faith for blessings. Such faith for blessings is based on acknowledgement of human limitations. What I mean is human's self-deprecations, like saying 'I'm nothing,' 'I'm a weak being,' and so forth. That's why people want deities or absolute beings, isn't it?

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Also, people are afraid or anxious that they can be punished if they do anything those beings dislike. This kind of fear and anxiety has been exploited by the conservative Korean Protestant churches, which say: “you shall go to hell if you don’t come to church.” The churches use the punishment by God as a weapon. It’s a threat.

Furthermore, traditional Korean culture has a Confucian background. I don’t mean Confucianism itself is wrong, but some ideas, like that men are superior to women, come from the Confucian background that still strongly dominates the Korean Churches. Think about the power of a pastor in a church. Most of the pastors in the churches in Korea are men, and they usually stress that women should obey men. Even the Bible speaks of the birthright of the eldest son or something special about the eldest. This meshes with Confucian ideas very well, so it is emphasized in Korean churches. I think discrimination against women, the justification of it, using the Bible to justify discrimination in the Korean Church, stems from Korean society at large. However, when all of the things I mentioned show their faces in the name of the Church, its powerful influence on people’s ways of thinking in the church can’t be compared with others’, even any laws or conventions. It’s pernicious. The funny thing is that people in the Church and other anti-gay organizations lack imagination when it comes to lesbians. They seem not to consider L at all. They usually shout about how anal sex causes AIDS, aiming their words at gay men. They seem to regard lesbians as not being that threatening compared to gay men.

I think the key to practicing one’s religion is focusing on one’s innermost self, but the Korean Church doesn’t create that kind of environment. Especially big conservative Presbyterian churches like the one I used to go to, people can’t do it there. Even so, I

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don't want to go to progressive and open-minded churches, either. I was curious about them once, but... well, I feel like I have qualms about joining any communities related to religion. I've already experienced enough. The gifts I got from Christianity are how to pray, the ability to believe in something invisible, and the belief that the invisible power which created the world is love. But, at the same time, I learned those gifts couldn't be unwrapped in the church. I just want to practice my faith in my own way, such as praying by myself and reading books instead of going to church. I don't need religious communities anymore.

Summary A

There are several similarities in J's and Eunwoo's experiences as Presbyterians. Both were born Presbyterians and went through a depressed adolescence before accepting their sexual identity alongside their religious faith. J's anxiety deepened when she tried to solve the problem of her sexual identity through her religion, Presbyterianism, and it seems to have a continuous influence on her mind. The content of sermons and the Bible made J doubtful about whether her lesbian identity was accepted by God, and she seemed to have difficulty seeing herself positively. This was an ongoing suspicion, even after she began to go to a LGBTQ friendly, progressive church in the US. Eunwoo once was brainwashed by the DTS program into thinking that she was crazy and needed to be cured. Eunwoo recognizes that her family background – conservative, Presbyterian, middle class – has affected her entire identity formation, including her sexual identity in a negative way; however, in the end, she acknowledged her lesbian identity with pride

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thanks to other resources such as feminism. Furthermore, she stresses that her lesbian identity helped her extricate herself from the negative values which Presbyterianism and her parents planted in her mind.

As for participation in group-activities in the church, J did not take part in any kind of group activities, and never wanted to do so while she lived in Korea. She wanted to avoid all religious communities due to her sexual identity. J felt that mingling with people in the church compelled her to pretend that she was a heterosexual to keep her Presbyterian status in a Korean Presbyterian church. In the case of Eunwoo, she had to belong to some groups at the church because of her parents even though she always felt disquiet. Now, Eunwoo does not have any desire to be a member of a religious community, even a progressive one. Nevertheless, both of them have never thought of giving up their faith.

J and Eunwoo also point out the characteristics of Korean culture that made them uncomfortable at church. J avoided any other social activities in the church except Sunday services because of the excessive interest of others, which she saw as distinctively Korean. Eunwoo thinks that the Korean cultural background, such as faith for blessings and Confucianism, combined with Presbyterianism, have contributed to the negative church system in Korea.

4.2.2 Catholic

H: They stand on the side of those who are in need

The relatives on my mom's side are Presbyterians, so I went to church along with my mom and grandma in my childhood, a Presbyterian church. My mom didn't force me to

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go to church at all, though. When I was in high school, I participated in a daily prayer meeting at my school. It was a kind of small student group reading the Bible and praying together for about 10 to 15 minutes every morning. I even became a leader of the group in the 12th grade. I know it sounds funny. Many of my close friends teased me when I told them this. Hahaha. After entering university, as I joined the Women's committee and my eyes opened to feminism, I found out that the structure of the Presbyterian Church was ridiculous. Since then, I quit going to church. Besides, as you know, there were lots of crazy Christian students, the members of several Christian clubs, at my university. Witnessing lots of nonsense campaigns and events by them, I totally turned my back on Presbyterianism.

However, several years later, I became fascinated with Catholicism. I visited the Myeondong Cathedral with my friend who went to mass. I fell in love with the atmosphere of the mass. So, I began attending a catechism course for newcomers who prepare for baptism, and the instructor, a priest, was also a person who converted to Catholicism from Presbyterianism. Anyway, I was satisfied with what they said. It was different from what I had heard from the Presbyterian Church, and I thought teachings of the Catholic Church was closer to what Jesus says. Of course, there are several things I never agreed with. For example, I was pro-choice at that time, and still am. But I filtered out those things for myself. The more important point was that I could rethink God, Jesus, and the most essential lessons of the Bible. The main theme of the New Testament is: love each other, and share what you have with others who don't have it. The Catholic Church focuses on these things, whereas the Presbyterian Church cries out you can't be

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saved unless you believe in God. In a broad sense, Catholic teaching goes along with my values. Think about this: why are we fighting for lesbians', women's and other minorities' human rights? Because, in the end, we all want to lead a life of happiness all together. For me, the Catholic lesson about love is another expression of this sentiment.

My godmother is also a lesbian, and the friend who took me to mass knows I'm an L since I came out to her before. However, I've never talked about it to people who I got to know at the church. No matter how open-minded the Korean Catholic Church is, that is a different thing. I didn't do any activities at the church except going to mass. I wanted to join some young adult groups for volunteering, choirs, and so on, but it was not easy, considering my sexual identity. Let's say I became a member of a certain group at the church, and I made friends there and one day, I said, "In fact, I'm a lesbian," to one of them. To the person who I got to know at the church. Well, it's hard to guess. I don't think they would definitely kick me out like the Presbyterians would. But... even so, I'm not sure they would definitely be supportive, either. I think it depends on each individual, though. The very core of the matter won't be their Catholic faith but the fact they are Korean people who were born and grew up in Korea. Nevertheless, I have a sort of vague belief that it would be better in the Catholic community. I know this is a wild guess. There's still hope, however. Fortunately, in Korea, there are many young priests and seminaries keep producing young priests consistently. I have met some young priests who have different views on sexual minorities than the priests from older generations.

God I know and Jesus I learned, they always stand on the side of those who are in need, those who have difficulties, and those who are minorities. I'm proud of my religion

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in this sense. I can introduce it to others confidently. Problems are caused by people, not by God. Well, this kind of confidence may be connected to my personality to some degree. I basically love myself, and it made me sure that anything I believe is right. This affects my thoughts on identity as well as on religion. Anyway, it is fortunate that Pope Francis appeared in the Catholic Church. His appearance is an important chance to change the problems or wrongs of the Catholic Church. He will give Catholics the opportunity to rethink lesbians, gay men, and any other sexual minorities, and to change Catholic perspectives on them.

Ryeosu: "Who said it's a sin?"

When I went to confess, I cried for a while before saying a word. After my tears had run their course, I told the priest I was a lesbian. He looked very embarrassed, but just said "I will pray for you, and let's pray together." Around 6 months later, I confessed again that I was a lesbian. The priest asked me, "Who said it's a sin?" with a smile. I was embarrassed at that time, and then answered, "My mom..." At that moment, I realized, 'Ah, mom said, not God.' Slipping a very small and cute tangerine into my hand, the priest told me it was not a sin at all to love someone. Though I didn't tell my mom about this, I have been free from guilt since then. I was thirteen.

I've attended Catholic Church for a long time, and I enthusiastically participated in many group activities in the church until I was a teenager. But I don't think those facts interfered in my identifying as a lesbian. If my religion or God had told me I was wrong, I could have a sense of guilt. However, I didn't feel guilty at all at that time. I once felt a

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sense of disquiet about my sexual orientation, but I don't think it was caused by my religion. For instance, my mom. As I told you before, she said it's a sin, mentioning the Bible, and this had a negative effect on me and my pride then. You see, it resulted from others, other people. Oh, I remember a student catechism book I read when I was in either elementary or junior high school. It said homosexuality is a sin placing it in line with adultery. It was the first and the last time I heard that kind of statement at the church. I just got angry and thought it was wrong. That's all. God doesn't say I'm a sinner. Moreover, after Pope Francis was elected, I began to see my lesbian identity more positively.

It is hard for me to think about my life without religion. I don't know, but I've never thought about it even when I didn't go to church for several years. Indeed, I believe in God. Though I haven't given up my faith due to my identity, I considered converting to Buddhism for a while when my mom said homosexuals were sinners. I don't know exactly why Buddhism. I guess it felt friendly to me, as I had many friends who were lesbians and Buddhists at that time. Besides, I liked, and still like, Buddhist temples as they are usually located in the quiet and deep mountains which make people peaceful. But, it was just one time anyway. You know, after having conversations with the priest, I got myself sorted clearly.

Despite that, I hesitate to join any group in the church now. I'm a little bit afraid of relationships as I might be tired because of them. Recently, I'm thinking about lies, telling a lie. I concluded that there's no white lie and no small lie. Lies are just lies. They would nibble on me and hurt me eventually. Lesbians want to come out of the closet

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because of this, don't they? So, if I participate in any church group activities, I won't come out at the beginning, but in the end, I would want to come out so as not to tell a lie... I'm afraid of losing people after that. There could be lots of cases, like I might be kicked out; even if everyone supports me, one nun or priest might hate me. Well, I've discussed myself too much.

I think the Korean Catholic Church doesn't know well, or isn't even aware of, the existence of lesbians. Well, lesbians are sort of sidelined beings, maybe? In this respect, some people say the Catholic Church is worse than the Presbyterian Church, because, from their perspective, the Catholic Church ignores their existence altogether. I know what they mean, but, nowadays, I guess the Catholic Church considers homosexuals as the same children of God as heterosexuals, so it doesn't feel any necessity to be especially aware of lesbians. I hope so. I hope the existence of lesbian Catholics can be blended into the other identities in the church just as they are. I believe this will be realized earlier than we think if the recent atmosphere of the Catholic Church keeps going.

I can say for certain that God created me as a lesbian. Many Catholic homosexuals may think so. I'm sure God allows me to lead my life in this way. Otherwise, I couldn't have met my good friends, couldn't have gotten such good memories, and couldn't have met my lovely partner. When I started dating her, I thought God sent her to me. My religion, Catholicism, is love itself. If loving someone is considered wrong, I think that results from people's misinterpretation. I believe Catholicism enables me to love someone sincerely.

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Summary B

Catholic H and Ryeosu are sure that God never sees lesbians as wrong, whereas Presbyterian J and Eunwoo have suffered from hearing that homosexuals are sinners who go to hell. Ryeosu's confession experience obviously reveals the disparity between their experiences. Both Ryeosu and J experienced counsel from their clergy about their sexual orientation, but the responses of the priest and the minister were very different. Ryeosu was told by her priest that it was not a sin and she could be released from a sense of guilt. H, who was once a Presbyterian, chose to become a Catholic as she feels confidence that the Catholic tenets are in accordance with her values, specifically her thoughts on lesbian human rights activism. H can even "filter out" some teachings she cannot agree with, such as the pro-life stand of Catholicism, while she focuses on the main lesson of Jesus: love each other. Ryeosu also shows her strong belief in Catholic teachings. Both women expect that Pope Francis will lead the Catholic Church to further change its attitude toward sexual minorities.

However, in terms of participation in group activities at the church, both H and Ryeosu express negative feelings. Even though H wanted to join some groups for volunteering, choirs, etc., she did not engage in any activities at the church beyond mass. Fear of other members' reactions to her sexual identity was the biggest factor in this decision. Ryeosu echoes this; she does not want to have to hide her sexual identity, and this inhibits her from participating in group activities. Though Ryeosu is sure that God does not see her as a sinner, she assumes that her coming-out will create problems in terms of her participation in religious groups.

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4.2.3 Buddhist

Sujin: It's okay as long as you aren't suffering

It was ten years ago that I became interested in Buddhism. At that time, I had been suffering from severe depression caused by being outed when I was 25 years old. While I was looking for information to overcome my depression, I came across the *Diamond Sutra*! I was very shocked to read it. I can say the impact of *Diamond Sutra* was superior to that of Karl Marx's books or Michel Foucault's. According to *Diamond Sutra*, Buddha taught that all kinds of dichotomies, such as right and wrong, you and me, nature and reason, etc., cannot exist. This includes 'normal and abnormal,' right? Buddhism was telling me I needed to throw away Western ways of thinking drenched in such dichotomies, and escape from useless suffering. For me, Buddhism is a philosophy of liberation. A liberation philosophy for me who is a lesbian.

The Catholic Church and the Protestant Church oppress homosexuals using their doctrines as a weapon. People in homosexual communities argue that we should interpret or translate the Bible again, and many have been trying to do it. But it's just our wish. What am I talking about? Unfortunately, it is literally written in the Bible though they don't mention lesbians at all. You know the phrase, two men cannot lie on the bed, blah, blah, blah. It means they have reason. They have the obvious written grounds to oppress and oppose homosexuality. This is like a game we can't win. Then how about Buddhism? Buddhist doctrines, as far as I know, never say to people to throw a stone at homosexuals. The teachings of Buddhism focus on what is wrong with any kind of dichotomy such as

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good and evil, homosexuality and heterosexuality, etc. Buddhism denies any definition or separation. It emphasizes that everything is empty, and emptiness can be filled with anything or cannot be filled with anything, so everything is changing, and there's nothing that always stays the same. From this worldview, we can't say something is wrong. At a moment when an argument like 'this is the only right thing!' is said, it is already not a Buddhist thought anymore. I think this is the core of Buddhist teachings. So, there's no grounds on which to oppress homosexuals. Then, what if a monk persecutes a homosexual? He's not worth talking with because he doesn't follow the teachings as a Buddhist. That is, we can say to him, "You studied Buddhism in the wrong way." In this case, the doctrine can be the grounds to criticize his homophobia. In terms of lesbians, I think Buddhism will tell me to feel and experience it as it is. Considering its tenets, yes, it will say so. However, the culture which has been created by people, the Korean Buddhist culture, this is another matter.

Korean Buddhism, the Korean Buddhist Order, or culture, is as rotten as the Korean Christian Church. Well, this is caused by humans not by doctrines. The temple culture in this conservative Korean society, of course, has been affected by Korean values. For instance, exploiting the traditional faith for blessings; if you want to achieve something, you should donate some money to put a huge gold statue of the Buddha in our temple. Furthermore, the Buddhist culture is super male-dominated and conservative. Have you ever watched programs on the Buddhist TV channel? It's disgusting. Almost all programs are teeming with male monks. And, you know, almost every year, monks yell and fight with each other for the position of the executive chief of the Korean Buddhist Jogye

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Order. Power struggles among them. These kinds of troubles show how Korean society is based on patriarchy and pariah capitalism. I mean the various problems of the Korean Church or the Buddhist Order are not just their own. Rather, they are problems crossing all social lines in this country.

I don't have any desire to join Buddhist communities in such a rotten culture. Moreover, if I work on group activities with my partner, there will be tons of uncomfortable situations. Considering the characteristics of Korean society and the conservative atmosphere of Korean temples, I'm sure many people will pay attention to us, two single women who are near their 40s. Such interest will irritate me horribly, and it will make me tell a lie. I'd rather say "I got divorced" than "I'm a lesbian," so as not to cause problems. What a black comedy! However, this is about Korean people not Buddhism or Buddhist teachings, unlike Christianity. You know, the Christian doctrine teaches its believers that homosexuals are sinners. If I am blamed for my lesbian identity by other Buddhists in the temple, I will confront them as I have done as an activist outside the temple. That kind of argument? You know, it's just a routine that I go through in my lifetime. But I don't have to fight against Buddha and the teachings of Buddhism. This is the biggest difference from Christianity.

Buddhism, I can say, it is quite cold. You know, self-discipline is very important for Buddhists. My peace of mind means world peace in Buddhism. According to Buddha, when I reach the state of nirvana through his teachings, I should say good-bye to Buddha. He compared himself to a raft; once you cross a river on a raft, you should abandon the raft. Buddha said to people not to stick to the raft and not to believe in it. Besides, from

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the Buddhist worldview, as there is a reason for everything, a problem can't and doesn't have to be solved artificially. Therefore, we don't need to compel something and intervene in something. We don't need to be frustrated or excited. Why? Because everything happens according to the laws of the universe. They happen as they are supposed to. Isn't this cold? So, Buddhism doesn't care about propagation. Buddhism teaches not to judge whether a person's choice is right or wrong, and not to interfere. It's like let the person go on her way. Let's say if someone wants a divorce, it tells her to do as she wants. Do you want a divorce? Can you be relieved of worry if you do so? Then, do it. Buddhism doesn't shout out the reasons she shouldn't get divorced, that is, it doesn't make her feel guilty. Christian doctrines lay a guilt trip on Christians consistently. Buddhism doesn't. It highlights that it's okay as long as you aren't suffering. That's all.

On the other hand, because of its doctrines, as I mentioned, homosexuality or heterosexuality can't take center stage in Buddhism. In fact, it may be safely said that there haven't been any discussions of homosexuality in the Korean Buddhist Order. It has never been interested in lesbians or homosexuals until lately. However, I feel encouraged because nowadays I can see discussions of homosexuals' human rights have started, little by little, to be visible in the Buddhist community. I know they are just at the basic stage and belated, but I'm thankful for even a small step. I'd like to play a role in making it bigger.

Jihwon: It sets me free. I hope you can find it as well.

I used to go to a Catholic church in my childhood, as my parents were Catholics. They

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were not that pious, so I wasn't compelled to go to church. In fact, I began going to Presbyterian church when I was in junior high thanks to a teacher in my school. My younger brother has been a Presbyterian since I took him to the church back then. So, my parents are Catholics, my younger brother is a Presbyterian, and I'm a Buddhist. My family don't know I'm a Buddhist because it's like 'how dare you!' for them. They don't care whether I go to Presbyterian church or Catholic church, but Buddhism, well... Especially for my brother, he can't ever imagine such a thing. That's why I just tell them I don't want to practice any religion right now. While my parents don't take it seriously, my brother has been nagging me to go to church. He is a sort of a "church boy." Anyway, I think my family members are all religious, even though we are followers of different faiths. We relate to each other in this way.

I considered myself a Christian for quite a long time even though I didn't go to church anymore. While I was looking for a job, I joined a small group called 'Overcoming depression through the *Diamond Sutra*,' which my friend in the KiriKiri organized. At that time, I was interested in overcoming depression rather than the *Diamond Sutra*. But basically, I was interested in various religions anyway. Back then, I was stressed enough to have stomach cramps due to job seeking. I got angry at everyone and everything. But after reading and studying the *Diamond Sutra* in the group, at one point I felt a sense of freedom. It was great. I thought, 'I've been pursuing this kind of feeling through religion! Christianity couldn't make me feel this kind of liberation so far.' I decided to convert to Buddhism. Well, even though I converted to Buddhism, there's not any special change in the way I practice. I mean I don't go to the Buddhist temple often, but I accepted

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Buddhism by focusing on the Buddhist teachings.

After I got a job and started life as a member of society, I came to contemplate my sexual identity more than before. I shrank into myself as I couldn't be outspoken. I have a strong desire to be candid, so living a reality where I always have to lie is suffocating. This is one of the worldly passions that Buddha mentioned for me. So, I need Buddhism. It teaches me how to discipline myself to escape from the anguish. However, at the same time, I sometimes go to the Catholic church. I believe this world is running to set human beings free, and for me, what we call religion is a view of the world which liberates me from everything, whatever the religion is. From this perspective, I can't understand some conservative Protestants who argue so-and-so is Satan or so-and-so should be punished. Well, from the point of view of those kind of people, it could be a profane behavior that I go to church one day and go to the Buddhist temple the other day, right? But, I do not think so. I like spirituality itself in a way. You know, spirituality is mentioned in Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism. All of them pursue spirituality, don't they? Nevertheless, I call myself a Buddhist because I chose it as I like its quiet and peace, and I like its emphasis on self-discipline. Freedom of religion is very important to me. I can't feel free living as a lesbian, but in terms of religion, it is completely based on my choice without any interference if I'm religious or not, and, if I am, I don't have to explain or even mention it. I want to enjoy this freedom as I want.

Well, there could be monks who think in a patriarchal way, and Korean Buddhism itself can be seen as very patriarchal as it is mixed with traditional Korean culture. But I think its doctrines are very open-minded. There's nothing to which we cannot say, 'why

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not?’ The Protestant Church and the Catholic Church ban abortion, and they have written commandments like don’t commit adultery. And the Bible. Sodom and Gomorrah. Unlike them, Buddhism, Buddhist teachings or scriptures, are not interested in sexuality. So, they are not interested in homosexuals or sexual minorities. You know, asceticism and self-discipline are crucial to Buddhism. I think Buddhists can be free because of this characteristic. I’ve never thought I couldn’t go to temple because something made me uncomfortable. In contrast, thinking about communities in the temple gives me pressure. You know, people could interfere in my life when they become closer to me. If they are around my age, even more so. So I won’t join any groups though I’m interested in group activities in the temple and long for communities as I feel a little bit lonely sometimes.

I’m not sure, but someday, when I get older, I may be able to take part in lesbian rights movements in Korean Buddhism or with Buddhism. I feel sincerely sorry every time I see Christian lesbians who are suffering because of their faith. There are lesbians who even kill themselves because of it. I think that is a pseudo-religion. I certainly think a religion which oppresses people or asserts someone is guilty is false. I hope lesbians can be released from that kind of religion and find their true god who sets them free. I really hope so.

Summary C

In comparison with Christians, Sujin’s and Jihwon’s narratives show another aspect of the effect of religion on lesbians’ lives. Sujin had been depressed because of the experience being outed, even after she willingly acknowledged her identity. According to

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her, she “found” Buddhism, and it helped her to overcome her depression. At this point, Buddhism is differentiated from Presbyterianism and Catholicism. For instance, Presbyterian J had a sense of disquiet since she thought her religion clashed with her sexual identity, but Sujin says that she could be free from her negative feelings thanks to her religion. Sujin compares Buddhism to Christianity with respect to the oppression of homosexuals; according to her reading, Buddhism does not have any grounds in its doctrines and teachings to support discrimination against homosexuals, whereas Christianity does. Jihwon describes Buddhism in a similar way. Jihwon first joined in a Buddhist scripture study group to relieve her depression, and became fascinated with Buddhism as it led her to a sense of freedom. She used to go to a Catholic church in her childhood, and then went to a Presbyterian church until her first year at university. Jihwon did not get the kind of emancipatory feeling from Christianity that she found in Buddhism. For her, freedom is a very important issue in her life.

On the other hand, regardless of how Sujin interprets Buddhism, she does not have any desire to be engaged in religious communities. She criticizes the corruption and graft in the Korean Buddhist Order and the male-dominated atmosphere in almost all temples. In addition, she rejects being a member of temple communities, anticipating troubles with other people. Sujin’s anticipation is grounded in her experience of the characteristics of Korean society, and reinforces J’s thought that Korean people are too attentive to others. Jihwon’s narrative shows similar worries to Sujin’s. Jihwon cannot easily take part in the Buddhist community, even though she longs for engagement in religious groups.

CHAPTER 5

As I mentioned in the introduction, the starting point of this research is the question: Why do South Korean lesbians keep their religious faith even though they have to endure the ceaseless denial of their existence as lesbians? This simple question expanded to encompass how the Korean lesbians in this study understand and accept their religions' perspectives on homosexuality and lesbianism, how their religions impact on their lives and sexual identity formation, and why their religions are so meaningful that they would struggle to manage any conflicts caused by their religions. Thus, this research has used the first-person accounts to illustrate the experiences of religious lesbians by examining the relationship between their sexual identities and their religions.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the six participants' autobiographic narratives. First, I explore how their experiences have influenced their processes of self-identification. This may be considered the background to my research on lesbians and religion; since these processes and social factors interrelate and this interrelation influences lesbians' self-esteem, I needed to look each participant's journey to lesbian identification. Their narratives relating to how they came to recognize their lesbian identity and/or how they came to acknowledge they were lesbians vary, but there is a shared theme among them: the process was influenced by not only internal factors such as self-perception—of, for example, being different—but also external or social factors such as religion, others' attitudes—including that of family members—towards homosexuality, and the social environment surrounding them. Those factors played crucial roles in the

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way my participants learned to see themselves. Second, I looked at the different contributing factors to the participants' perceptions of their sexual identities and self-esteem according to their affiliation with the three religions discussed here, Korean Presbyterianism, Korean Catholicism, and Korean Buddhism. I looked, in particular, at similarities and differences, which can be found with these women in the South Korean context.

5.1 Discussion Part One: I am a lesbian in a heterosexual world

5.1.1 Self-perception of being different and acknowledgement of self

No matter when the participants started to think about their lesbian identities, their self-identification process began with an awareness of their being different from others. However, the participants did not face this feeling of difference in the same way. J, who had quite an early awakening to being different, says that she was anxious thinking she was abnormal. Sujin also suffered when she noticed her difference from others; she even tried to commit suicide. Sujin adds that because she thought she was the only one, feeling different overwhelmed her. Eunwoo echoes this; she thought the number of lesbians was very small, and the thought made her always feel lonely. On the other hand, other participants like H, Ryeosu, and Jihwon reacted to their difference in a positive way. In H's narrative, she stresses that she loved herself because of this difference. Ryeosu also expresses her pride based on her perception of the difference between herself and others. In the case of Jihwon, her desire to be an active feminist facilitated her self-acceptance without difficulties.

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Clinical psychologist Cass (1979) suggests a six-stage model of homosexual identity formation and adoption based on her empirical study and interpersonal congruency theory: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Though this model is old and Cass herself points out that the formation process differs from person to person, the participants' narratives discussed in Chapter 4 can be interpreted using this model to some degree. In fact, each participant's self-perception reflects the stages described in the identity formation model in multiple ways, especially the first stage.

All participants asked themselves whether they were lesbians or not when they recognized that their emotions and behaviors towards women were different from other girls. This is the beginning of the first stage, identity confusion. According to Cass (1979):

As a result of this incongruency, P[erson] experiences confusion and turmoil, and is forced to ask the question 'If my behavior may be called homosexual, does this mean that I am homosexual?' P arrives at a self-identity *potentially* that of a homosexual. Since this is at odds with the previous view of self as nonhomosexual and heterosexual, P begins to experience doubts. 'Who am I?' is the burning question. Feelings of personal alienation are paramount. (p.223)

At this stage, the participants in my study took steps to resolve their confusion and turmoil. One of the resolutions described was trying to find further information. J,

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Eunwoo, Sujin wanted to contact other lesbians who could share their experiences with them instead of learning through books or other references, but, unfortunately, this was frustrating for them. As Sujin describes, they were “in a terrible environment.” They could neither obtain any correct information nor meet a person whom they could ask for advice. In contrast, H shows that her circumstances were very dissimilar to Eunwoo and Sujin’s. Her self-discovery of being different from others happened relatively late—at the age of eighteen—but this is not the determining factor that made her experience unique. The key point is that H was already surrounded by the information and people whom Eunwoo and Sujin so eagerly wanted to find, even before she posed any questions about her sexual identity. She state: “I was surrounded by a blessed circumstance, and like a flower in a conservatory [온실 속의 화초, a Korean idiom for a person who has led a sheltered life] in terms of the process of self-identification.” Though H also felt confused at first, before long, her confusion was resolved. Ryeosu’s early identification process was also quite different from that of the other women. She began the process with joyful role-playing within her peer group. In other words, she joined a supportive community first, *then* realized her feelings distinguished her from other non-lesbian girls. Jihwon’s case is similar to Ryeosu’s in this sense. Jihwon encountered the information about lesbianism when she visited a feminist website, and from that information she inferred the meaning of her feelings for a particular woman and her sexual identity.

An important point to note here is that J, Eunwoo, and Sujin—who lacked information or supportive people who had information—wrestled with many adversities on the road to acknowledging their lesbian identities. By comparison, H, Ryeosu, and

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Jihwon underwent hardships in the struggle to come to terms with identities for a short while, but never suffered from the feeling of being different. With these women, the right information or community support is shown to be the determining factor in the positive development of lesbian self-identification. Lesbians are also brought up in and socialized by a society in which they are misread as heterosexuals. That is to say, the images of homosexuals that they hold, and the inappropriate information they acquire easily about homosexuality or lesbian sexuality, are negatively biased. The junior high and high school curriculum plays a crucial role in reinforcing these ideas. Kwon Kim and Cho (2011) describe, based on their study of the Korean gay and lesbian movement:

[A]ccording to one text book, ‘with the growth of AIDS, homosexuality, prostitution, sexual violence, drugs, etc., the collapse of sexual morals is causing social problems.’ Another text book stated, ‘Love and sex between members of the same sex are responsible for a number of side-effects including AIDS.’ (p.215)

Somewhere between 1989 and 1994, when J, Eunwoo and Sujin were faced with their differences and began to agonize over their sexual identities, each of them was a junior high student. Junior high school students in South Korea spend at least eight hours a day at school; and high school students spend more than eight hours there. What they learned and heard every day had a strong influence on their negative self-perception of lesbianism and led them to fear their own emerging self-identification. Eunwoo actually mentions that at school she always tried to protect herself. While Ryeosu enjoyed role-playing and

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started awakening to her sexual identity when she was in junior high school, this happened after the year 2000 when the Internet became widely available. She found the role-playing group discussed earlier by Internet surfing, and self-identified with members of that group. These examples clearly show that lack of appropriate information puts lesbians at a disadvantage and inhibits them from stepping further to acknowledge their lesbian identities.

The environment that surrounded H and Ryeosu at the time they started the lesbian identification process allowed them to almost skip most of the turmoil experienced by the other women during the first stage. They seemed to jump right into the second stage, identity comparison, which required them to deal with social alienation. Cass (1979) argues that a person at this stage adopts several approaches to resolving feelings of alienation; and if s/he can handle it in a positive way, the reaction to being different occurs like this:

There are those who find 'being different' exciting, out of the ordinary, as adding something special or extra to their lives. [...] [T]he felt difference between themselves and others is given a positive evaluation. (p.226)

H says that she has been proud of being a lesbian since she first became aware of her difference, and highlights that being different—a lesbian in a heterosexual world—helps her connect to other minorities such as people with disabilities. She identifies the foundation of this positive perception of her sexual identity as her university, the place

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where she first encountered her lesbian identity. The Women's University (WU) has a kind of not so secret reputation for its high population of lesbian students, which ensures that there continue to be many lesbians there, in comparison with other women's universities in South Korea. Though there is not any research related to this, some people speculate about the reason, pointing out WU's unique open-minded academic tradition as the first institution for women's higher education in South Korea, and the starting point of Asian Women's Studies and the Korean women's human rights movements. On the other hand, H also acknowledges her multifaceted positions in society as having affected her lesbian identity. She says,

This is also related to all aspects of my life: I majored in philosophy, I've worked for a local station, and I've worked as a video journalist. That is, I've experienced many kinds of minority positions in the major groups even though I always belonged to the so-called main stream. And the biggest one, I'm a woman, plus I'm an L. Well, I... I'm sure my lesbian identity instilled in me a sense of pride, especially in regards to the fact I can see and be sensitive to other minorities in various groups. Nonetheless, I can't deny it also affects my depression.

H clearly said her lesbian identity without any difficulties, and happily acknowledges being different. However, at the same time her consistent experiences of being a minority have had a negative effect on her.

Based on the information provided in the previous chapter, Ryeosu's experience of

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the lesbian identification process started differently from that of the other participants. She identified herself as a lesbian through role-playing games she engaged in with her peer group at the age of thirteen. Not all of those who participated in the role-playing games identified themselves as lesbians. After a participatory observation, Ryu (2010) states in her Master's thesis, *A study on "Gender in situation" and lesbian butch as gender queer*, "이들에게 '연애'는 레즈비언으로 정체화하는 하나의 과정이라기보다는 즐겁고, 재미있는 놀이 문화의 하나로 여겨졌다. [For these teenage girls, 'dating' is regarded as a kind of recreation with fun rather than a process of lesbian identification.] (p.7)". However, for Ryeosu, the game played both roles: having fun and becoming a lesbian. As such, her experience exemplifies that this kind of entertainment can function as an educational opportunity to ponder sexual identity without suffering and prejudice.

5.1.2 Building relationships with others: Conflicts between identities

Building relationships with family and with other people in Korean society is presented by the interviewees as intervening in the process of lesbian identification in many ways. The coming-out experience, in particular, is shown to have influenced the participants' acknowledgement of their lesbian identities and understanding of others as lesbians. In other words, through the coming-out experience, the participants confirmed that their sexual identities were seen in a negative way, which made them stay in the closet. Though all participants have "come out," the range of people to whom they came out was limited to their close friends or other lesbians. The main reasons for this is fear of

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risk to the self after disclosing and uncertainty of other's reactions. No matter how they think of themselves, five of the lesbians in this study claim that they will not come out in public in the future even though hiding themselves creates stress. Professor at Harvard Law School, Rubenstein (1994) contends that this type of silencing plays as a key role in the oppression of lesbians and gay men at both the personal and societal level. He explains:

The oppression of silence is possible because sexual orientation is not, like race or gender, visually identifiable: individuals must take on a lesbian/gay identity through some speech or speech act known as 'coming out'. Because taking on a lesbian/gay identity involves coming out, society can oppress gay people most directly simply by ensuring that such expressions are silenced. (p.283)

Looking back on her experiences, J says that coming out meant she could get blindsided. She was bullied and heard unpleasant remarks when she came out; and those experiences hurt her self-esteem. On the other hand, her mother, the only family member that J told about her lesbian identity, ignored the fact that J is a lesbian. Jihwon had a similar experience to J's; after she came out to her close friends, they pretended not to remember and asked her about marriage¹⁶. Rubenstein's (1994) description resonates with the experiences they described:

¹⁶ Same-sex marriage is not legalized in South Korea.

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A nearly universal ‘coming out’ experience for lesbians and gay men is that after they tell their family, or straight friends, that they are gay, no one – no one – ever, ever, mentions it again. Ever. Or, a typical family reaction is, ‘That’s fine, dear, I just don’t want to know about it.’ Our life, our love, a central aspect of our identity, is something people closest to us in the world ‘just don’t want to know about.’
(p.283)

Thus, these women would rather remain silent because if they do not reveal their lesbian identities, they can at least avoid conflicts with others or the kind of damage inflicted by others Rubenstein describes. Even Sujin, the only out-lesbian among the participants, still suffers from other people’s reactions, even though a sense of responsibility as a lesbian rights activist and a personal feeling of freedom have enabled her to keep coming out. Eventually, lesbians get hurt whether they come out or not: coming out makes lesbians into objects to be attacked, but not coming out deprives them of the opportunity to be public subjects.

With regard to family, there is a noticeable point that every participant shared: feeling sorry or guilty. J worried that her parents’ good reputation could be harmed if her lesbian identity was revealed, and H mentioned that she would not come out to her parents as she wanted them to see her as a daughter to be proud of. Sujin also does not want to tell her parents that she is a lesbian because that would put a heavy burden on them. While Eunwoo was angry at her parents’ reaction to her lesbian identity and felt humiliated that

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her parents were ashamed of her, she still feels sorry that she makes her parents suffer.

The Korean family system and culture are traditionally based on Confucianism and reinforces feeling sorry and guilty, not only at the personal level, but also at the societal level. Na (2014)¹⁷ illustrates this in her work:

When discussing LGBTI rights in South Korea, it is more often the idea of one's duty to the nation as a *kungmin* [국민, national subject or citizen] that takes precedence over any claims of what is natural or the biblical order of creation. The stigma against LGBTI people in South Korea is twofold: (1) the stigma against the so-called unfilial person who fails to continue the family line and (2) the stigma against the disloyal *kungmin* who fails to perform his or her duty as national subject. This stigmatization operates perhaps more powerfully against men, who assume the main duty as an heir to produce the next generation in a patrilineal family, but women also face reproach when they do not or cannot participate in childbirth – the female counterpart to the male duty of military service. (p.360)

In South Korea, every citizen's birth is registered, and the registered citizens are included in the identity registration system. The identity registration system in Korea is called the Family Relations Register [가족관계등록제], which is based on the institution of family.

¹⁷ Youngjung Na is a researcher with the Korean Society of Law and Policy on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

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In other words, individual identity verification as a Korean citizen is available only when a person can form a legal family through a legal heterosexual marriage. This system, which “emphasizes gender hierarchy, duty, and family over personal priorities and preferences” (Bong, 2008, p.88), plays a role in the oppression and stigmatization of sexual minorities, including lesbians. A lesbian daughter whose existence is deemed as disgraceful, is blamed again because she cannot perform her duty, reproduction, within a heterosexual family unit. The lesbians who participate in this research would be willing to oppose and fight against the Korean family system and the nonsense concept of reproductive duty for the nation. But when the concept of filial duty at the personal level arises, lesbians become guilt-ridden. For instance, H’s parents often say that “showing your happy marriage life to your parents is one way to be filial.” H, who does not want to disappoint her parents, feels like “a sinner without any sin” whenever she is told these kinds of things. As she mentioned in her narrative, this is hard to overcome even though, as a lesbian, she feels pride in herself. Identity, as a family member, especially as a daughter, seems to be hard to negotiate with lesbian identity within traditional Korean family and national culture, which stresses obedience to parents and priority of family as a group over the individual.

5.2 Discussion Part Two: I am a religious lesbian in a heterosexual, religious world

Every participant’s relationship with religion is unique because of the characteristics of each religion, as well as each lesbian’s faith formation process and circumstances. Nonetheless, some common ground was found and resonates across their narratives on

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religion. All the participants stressed that what troubles their lesbian identity in religious communities is related to people in those communities rather than religious faith itself; this was seen to be the results of a combination of Korean tradition, culture, and politics. On the other hand, the participants' narratives revealed a significant point that has caused me to rethink the starting question of this research: why do Korean lesbians struggle to keep their religious beliefs and community ties despite the problems these raise for them as lesbian subjects? As can be seen in chapter 4, the participants do not just endure the situation in the religious groups where their existence is denied. While the lesbians in this study have all struggled in the maintenance of their religious faiths, they are also all actively seeking resolution even though it has taken, and continues to take, a long time and much pain.

In this section, I look at how each participant views her religion, religious faith and religious group, and then the relationship between each religion and lesbian sexuality in the South Korean context.

5.2.1 Lesbians and the Korean Presbyterian Church

Both J and Eunwoo were born Presbyterian and went through an adolescent depression before accepting their sexual identities alongside their religious faiths. Due to sermons and the Bible, J has doubted whether her lesbian identity is accepted by God, and has had difficulty seeing herself positively until now. Eunwoo explained that she had a deep grudge against God due to the tension between her lesbian and Christian identities. While she was in the DTS program—in which she participated under parental pressure—

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she even was brainwashed into thinking that she was crazy and needed to be cured.

Though their experiences are very poignant, these women's suffering in the Presbyterian Church will likely come as no surprise to other South Koreans. In fact, the trigger for this research is the overt homophobia of the Korean Protestant Church. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, the main group of anti-gay activism in Korea is the Protestant Church, particularly the Presbyterian Church. Though the opposition to homosexuality on biblical grounds by Christianity has a long history all over the world, Korean anti-gay Protestant Church groups are distinct in the way they combine homophobia with perceptions of national insecurity.

The anti-gay activism of groups associated with the Protestant Church and conservative NGOs such as 한국기독교총연합회 [The Christian Council of Korea], 한국장로교총연합회 [Korean Federation of Presbyterian Churches], 건강한 사회를 위한 국민연대 [People's Solidarity for a Healthy Society], and 바른 성문화를 위한 국민연합 [Coalition for Moral Sexuality] in Korea has grown rapidly since 2007, when the Anti-Discrimination Act was tabled. Both groups are getting more aggressive. Na (2014) explains:

The conservative Christian Community lies at the heart of [this] opposition, actively advancing its anti-gay agenda and opposing state protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Much of the Christian hostility toward LGBTI rights is based on theological grounds, but as conservative Christians

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increasingly gain political power, they have also deployed a secular rhetoric of defending security and protecting social and moral conventions. (p.358)

Their ‘중북게이 [Jongbuk gay]’ argument, which I dealt with in the literature review chapter, is politically effective though their logic is not logical at all. It works because the Korean War ended with the armistice in 1953, not a peace treaty, leaving the Koreans technically in a state of war. Today, anti-gay activists use the Jongbuk gay argument regularly to justify their hostility towards LGBTQ people. The signs described in the opening section of this study, such as those which state: “If homosexuality is legalized, national security will be shaken,” result from this claim. The Jongbuk gay argument plays an influential role in the oppression of homosexuals, along with the Bible verse: “With a male you shall not lie the lying down of a woman” (Leviticus 18:22).

Eunwoo thinks that aspects of Korean cultures such as Confucianism, combined with Presbyterianism, have contributed to the negative church system in Korea. Shin (2016) explains this:

교회가 지속적으로 성장하고 또한 제도화 논의가 본격화 되면서 여성의 권리와 입지는 점점 축소되거나 소외되고 말았다. 그 결과 교회 운영에 있어 실질적인 영향력 행사를 못하게 되었다. 여기에는 여전히 여성을 순응적, 헌신적이며 양보와 인내심의 존재로 바라보는 유교사상이 저변에 깔려있다. 즉, 한국 유교 문화는 기독교와 결합하여 여성을 창조적으로

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발전시키고 이끄는 종교의 주체가 아닌 객체로 머물도록 그 근거를 마련하게 되었던 것이다. (p.31)

[As the [Protestant] Church continued to grow, women's rights within the Church gradually lost ground. As a result, women cannot exercise actual influence on the Church's overall operations. Confucianism, which still regards women as obedient and devoted beings, with patience, is underlying this. In other words, the Korean Confucian culture combining with Protestantism established a basis upon which to marginalize women and make women remain as objects within the Church. (p.31)]

The male-dominated Confucian background of Korean society meshed with the patriarchal roots of Christianity, allowing the discrimination against women within the Korean Protestant Church to be seen as justified. I link this marginalization of women to the way lesbians are overlooked in Korea. The main target of anti-gay activism is gay men. For instance, one of the most often seen phrases on the signs of anti-gay activists is, "Anal sex is not human rights!" The Bible also does not mention relationships between women, as women were not seen as subjects by its authors.

As for participation in church group activities in the church, J avoided all kinds of religious communities while she lived in Korea. J felt that mingling with people in the church compelled her to pretend she was a heterosexual in order to keep her status. Eunwoo had to belong to some groups at the church because of her parents, even though she always felt disquiet. Because of this, Eunwoo says that she no longer has any desire to be a member of a religious community, even one associated with a progressive church.

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This tendency not to get involved in church activities does not seem to come from the faith or doctrines themselves, but, rather, from the characteristics of members of the Korean community whose excessive interest in others is seen as an expression of intimacy.

To sum up, the cause of the Presbyterian lesbians' inner conflicts is not just confined to Presbyterianism itself. It is linked to the political situation in South Korea, the Confucian background of the country, the community-oriented culture, and the patriarchy of the Presbyterian Church. It is obvious that these social factors are connected to hardships the participants experienced and the ways in which they experienced the self-identification process.

5.2.2 Lesbians and the Korean Catholic Church

Whereas Presbyterians J and Eunwoo suffered from being told that homosexuals are sinners who go to hell, Catholic H and Ryeosu were sure that God never said lesbianism is wrong. When Ryeosu went to confess that she was a lesbian, her priest said that it was not a sin. H chose to be a Catholic, as she felt confidence that the Catholic tenets were in accordance with her values, specifically her thoughts on lesbian human rights activism. She focuses on the main lesson of Jesus: Love each other. Ryeosu expresses her strong belief in this set of values.

Though these lesbians are satisfied with their religion, discourses on homosexuality in Korean Catholicism are in line with the magisterial teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Woo (2013) illustrates the teaching of the magisterium, saying: "homosexuality

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is ‘essentially disordered’ because it completely excludes the mutual complement and the delivering of life of human sexuality” (p.163). That is to say, like the Korean Presbyterian Church, the Korean Catholic Church does not accept homosexuality. However, the difference is that the Korean Catholic Church does not overtly or officially express a negative position on homosexuals and other sexual minorities. So it does not oppose the magisterial tenets, but in everyday practice it is more generous, embracing of its lesbian congregants.

On the other hand, the magisterial teaching “distinguishes surmountable homosexual orientation from insurmountable orientation. The magisterium says that in the case of insurmountable homosexual orientation, just having a tendency of homosexual orientation, can’t be condemned” (Woo, 2013, p.163). This differentiation is linked to the difference between the magisterial teaching on homosexuality and the definition of homosexuality/homosexuals to pastoral concern for homosexuals as people. Choi (2015) discusses the pastoral concerns raised in the recent documents of the Catholic Bishops Conferences, the *Instrumentum Laboris* (Latin for working instrument, a type of Vatican official document) and *Lineamenta* (an introduction and outline of the subject for discussion), asking for a reconsideration of the meaning of pastoral care for both the Korean Catholic Church and Korean homosexuals. The magisterial teaching itself was not changed, but the document mentions that, “the Church should respect persons with a homosexual inclination and take care of them with delicacy” (p.144). Even though this does not mean that participants of Catholicism understands or accepts homosexuality and

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homosexuals, or that the Korean Catholic Church is ready to take a stand for homosexuals' human rights, this expression of respect is quite encouraging.

H and Ryeosu's trust in Catholicism could come from the Catholic Church's historical image as a guardian of human rights in the Korean democratization process. Furthermore, both women expect that Pope Francis will lead the Catholic Church to change its attitude toward sexual minorities. Pope Francis has often spoken of homosexual Christians, saying, for example, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge? The catechism of the Catholic Church explains this very well. It says they should not be marginalised because of this [orientation] but that they must be integrated into society" ("Pope Francis signals ...", 2013). He has also said, "We Christians have to apologise for so many things, not just for this [treatment of gay people], but we must ask for forgiveness, not just apologise; forgiveness. Lord, it is a word we forget so often" ("Pope Francis says ...", 2016). Conservative Catholics have criticized him for his comments, but Pope Francis is respected by many sexual minorities, including H and Ryeosu.

Still, both H and Ryeosu seem to be pessimistic about getting involved in group activities in the church. Due to uncertainty about other believers' reactions to her sexual identity, H has not engaged in any activities at the church except mass, even though she has wanted to join some groups for volunteering, choirs, etc. Ryeosu echoes this; she does not want to conceal her sexual identity, and this inhibits her from participating in group activities. Though Ryeosu does not believe that God regards her as a sinner, and has much confidence in the teachings of Catholicism, she assumes that her coming-out will

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bring about problems in participating in religious groups. Both Ryeosu and J's anticipation of troubles in religious group activities are similar to the Presbyterian participants' thoughts on joining groups in their church. In the end, this is about members of the church, that is, other believers who share their Korean cultural background.

5.2.3 Lesbians and the Korean Buddhist Order

For the lesbians of this study, Buddhism is differentiated from Presbyterianism and Catholicism. Sujin and Jihwon say that they were released from their negative feelings about lesbianism thanks to Buddhist teachings, whereas Presbyterian J and Eunwoo had a sense of disquiet since they thought their religious values clashed with their lesbian identities. Sujin's and Jihwon's narratives show another aspect of the effect of religion on lesbians' lives in Korea. Throughout her narrative, Sujin compares Buddhism to Christianity with respect to the oppression of homosexuals; Buddhism does not discriminate against homosexuals in its doctrines and teachings while Christianity does. Jihwon used to go to a Catholic church in her childhood, and then went to a Presbyterian church until her first year of university. She had not gotten the kind of emancipatory feeling from Christianity she found in Buddhism. For her, freedom of religion is a very important issue as she lives as a lesbian who cannot be free in society.

As Sujin and Jihwon understand Buddhism, its tenets and teachings do not contain any hostility towards homosexuality. However, historically, local Buddhist denominations have expressed different views on sexual minorities. For example, Japanese Buddhism was largely generous to homosexuals and even encouraged same-sex

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relationship between 1400s and 1600s, while Buddhism in India stood resolutely against homosexuality (Heo, 2008). In spite of this, Heo (2008) explains that the historical attitude of Buddhism toward homosexuality can be considered neutral, as what is important, from a Buddhist perspective, is not the choice between heterosexuality and homosexuality but the choice between sexuality and celibacy. He adds that Buddhism has criticized homosexuality because it violates the religious precept against enjoying sex itself, not because of having sex with a person of the same sex. In the meantime, these discourses on homosexuality in Buddhism imply its limits: they connect homosexuality with sex or sexual relationships, and confine homosexuality to male-homosexuality. In fact, Heo (2008) points out that Buddhist historical debates on homosexuality are limited to mentioning relationships among monks and between monks and the laity (laymen).

In terms of social activities within Buddhist groups, Sujin does not have any desire to be engaged in religious communities for the reason of corruption and graft in the Korean Buddhist Order and the male-dominated Buddhist temple culture. Ok (2013) points out, “despite that the Buddhist doctrine itself fundamentally equals male and female, the Law of the Order, in reality, puts a limit on the participation of Bhikkunis (Buddhist nuns) in its management and thoroughly marginalizes lay women within the Order” (“The feministic study” ... , para. 2). The Law of the Order is a guideline for lay people’s Buddhist practices, was established by the Korean Buddhist Order. That is, it is a product of Korean male Buddhists, including both monks and laymen, and this suggests that the Law reflects Korean patriarchal culture. In addition, Sujin rejects being a member of temple communities, anticipating troubles with other people regarding her sexual identity.

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Jihwon's narrative shows that her worries are similar to Sujin's. Jihwon says that even though she longs to engage in religious groups, she cannot easily decide to take part in them. Sujin and Jihwon's reluctance comes from their experiences of Korean society, and correlates with J's feeling that Korean people tend to pay too much attention to others' lives. Though the ways each participant came to this conclusion are many, it appears repeatedly in all participants' narratives, regardless of their different perceptions/experiences of religion.

5.3 Discussion Part Three: The journey is not over yet

Yukwoodang, a gay human rights activist, hanged himself at the office of the Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea on April 23rd, 2003. He left a long note, which said in part “소돔과 고모라 운운하는 가식적인 기독교인들에게 무언가 깨달음을 준다면(...) 죽는 게 아깝지 않다” (“케이 인권운동가 ‘육우당’ 숨지다,” 2016). [I think it would be well worth my death if it can bring the hypocritical Christians commenting on Sodom and Gomorrah to their senses” (“The death of gay activist Yukwoodang,” 2016).] Yukwoodang was a self-identified gay man and a devout Catholic. I attended the rally in his memory at that time. As a Christian who did not go to church, I was outraged as well as sad to see a 19-year-old activist's death caused by his religion. At the same time, I felt genuinely sorry that he did not give up his religious faith instead of his life. At the time I had been volunteering at the Lesbian Counseling Center in Seoul, South Korea for several years. I had witnessed many homosexuals, especially lesbians, who had a hard time reconciling their lesbian identity and their religious, usually Christian, faith. I felt

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frustrated by what the conservative Protestant churches did to LGBTQ people, and I could not understand lesbians' patience in enduring such hardships.

About 10 years later, I met six religious lesbians and listened to their stories. At the beginning of this research, I still questioned why Korean lesbians struggle to keep their religious beliefs and community ties in spite of the problems this raises for them as lesbian subjects. To be honest, I simply thought that if a religion or a religious faith hurt a person's dignity, the faith should be thrown away. I clearly agreed that we should fight against any type of discrimination in and by religious groups, but at personal level I hoped that many lesbians could escape from their sufferings all at once by leaving religion behind. In a way, I deemed them passive if they stayed. However, the narratives of the participants discussed here reveal a significant point, which forced me to reconsider my earlier position on lesbian identity and the abandonment of religion. After conducting this research, it has become clear that these women are not simply staying, inactively, in religious institutions in which their existence is denied; these women are actively seeking solutions to this denial. Therefore, in this section, I argue that even though the narratives presented here illustrate six women's experience of suffering and hardship in the process of forming positive lesbian identities while practicing their religious faiths, the narratives also show these lesbians are creating and searching for solutions. Each of them has tried to make breakthroughs in the conflicts between identity and religion by making choices and negotiations.

J, who suffered from the sermons she heard about homosexuality in church, still has mixed feelings about God – whether God admits her existence as a lesbian – and this

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leads her to have a sense of guilt. Eunwoo went through a harsh adolescence due to her contact with Presbyterianism. For her, the link between lesbian identity and her religious family is crucial. Eunwoo recognizes that her family background – conservative Presbyterian and middle class – affected her entire identity formation, including her ability to accept her sexual identity, in a negative way. Nevertheless, she, like J, has never thought of giving up her faith.

J compares her relationship with her faith to having parents: “A child who had quarrels with parents would refuse to talk to her parents, but she would not want her parents to disappear.” Thus, instead of abandoning her faith, J chose to move out of the country and began to attend an LGBTQ-friendly church in the US. J says that after doing this she could speak to God again and could even enjoy mingling with people at her new church. She has found a place for herself where her sexual identity can be in harmony with her religious faith.

In Eunwoo’s case, while she has kept ties with Presbyterianism, she also sought alternative routes to find balance between her lesbian identity and Christian faith. In the end, other resources, like feminism, helped her acknowledge her lesbian identity with pride. Moreover, she decided to practice her faith in her own way. Eunwoo said,

The gifts I got from Christianity are how to pray, the ability to believe in something invisible, and the belief that the invisible power which created the world is love. But at the same time, I learned those gifts couldn’t be unwrapped in the church. I just want to practice my faith through my own way such as praying by myself and

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reading related books instead of going to church.

She highlights that her lesbian identity finally led her to escape from the negative values that Presbyterianism and her parents planted in her mind.

On the other hand, H decided to abandon Presbyterianism, and, several years later, converted to Catholicism. Though she was very clear that Catholicism and its teachings still stood on the side of oppressing sexual minorities, she chose to see and follow its core lesson: love each other. Based on this choice, she is satisfied with her religion and strongly trusts that Catholicism will change its attitude in the near future. Another Catholic lesbian, Ryeosu, shows a similar way of thinking about her religion. Her Catholic faith started with her answer 'yes' when her mother asked her if Ryeosu wanted to go to the Catholic Church in childhood. She never had any difficulties related to her lesbian identity in that church. However, she once was worried that God regarded lesbians as sinners:

I once felt a sense of disquiet about my sexual orientation, but I don't think it was caused by my religion. For instance, my mom. As I told you before, she said it's a sin mentioning the Bible, and it had a negative effect on me and my pride then. You see, it resulted from others, other people.

When Ryeosu went to confess that she was a lesbian, her priest said that it was not a sin. After confession, Ryeosu clearly concluded that the thoughts, such as homosexuals were

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sinner, came from people not God, therefore, she did not have to care about them. Based on this conclusion, Ryeosu judged that she could remain a lesbian and a Catholic.

Sujin found Buddhism when she was trying to overcome depression, and accepted actively and with confidence that Buddhism never defines her as abnormal. Like H, Sujin made a personal decision to follow Buddhist teachings. However, she drew a distinct line between Buddhist teachings and the culture in the Korean Buddhist temple:

Korean Buddhism, the Korean Buddhist Order, or culture, is rotten as much as the Korean Christian Church. Well, this is caused by humans, not by the doctrines. The temple culture in this conservative Korean society, of course, has been affected by the Korean thoughts in general. [...] I mean the various problems of the Korean Church or the Buddhist Order are not just their own. Rather, they are the problems crossing all social lines in this country.

Therefore, in terms of practice, she negotiated a focus on self-discipline in the Buddha's teachings.

In Jihwon's case, she chose to be a Buddhist after she had explored religions – Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Buddhism. She valued a religion that could make a person feel a sense of freedom:

[Buddhism] teaches me how to discipline myself to escape from [my] anguish.

However, at the same time, I sometimes go to the Catholic church. I believe this

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world is running to set human beings free, and for me, what we call religion is a view of the world which liberates me from everything, whatever the religion is.

From this perspective, I can't understand how some conservative Protestants can insist so-and-so is Satan or so-and-so should be punished.

Thus, she is still crossing the borders between religions, seeking her own sense of freedom in both her lesbian identity and religious faith.

These six lesbians present their subjectivities and mobility as religious lesbians: on the one hand, some of the participants have tried to find new denominations of churches or ways to practice their faiths. On the other hand, other participants converted to other religions after exploring several options. Even though those explorations are not the final solution—as lesbian still face oppression within each religious group, community and institution—their ability to make choices implies that lesbians will not willingly stay marginalized and oppressed in their religions and religious groups.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the influence of Protestantism, Catholicism and Buddhism on South Korean lesbians' lives through the narratives provided by six religious lesbians using feminist standpoint theory. In doing so, I intended to raise awareness of conflicts caused by each of these religions and to find ways to unravel the

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conflicts and improve relationships at the intersection of lesbian identity, religion, and family in South Korean society. In this section, I deal with the key findings that have emerged from this study and ask how these findings can contribute to generating possible solutions for the conflicts between South Korean lesbians and religious groups. What is obvious from the findings is that the personal and social identities of the religious lesbians cannot be separated from one another.

First, the participants in this study identify themselves as lesbians based on their feelings and experiences. Their self-identification exemplifies ParkKim's (2014) definition of lesbian: "a woman who believes she experienced, experiences, or will be able to experience the desire to share emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual communion with someone of the same sex; she identifies herself as a homosexual on her own" (p.35).

However, the lesbians who lacked information or supportive people wrestled with many adversities before they acknowledged their lesbian identities. Though all participants became to think about their lesbian identities with an awareness of being different from others, each participant did not face this feeling of difference in the same way. The determining factors for how each participant's perception was shaped included whether she could access helpful information about homosexuality and supportive groups. Moreover, the environment that surrounded each woman at the time she began her lesbian identification process was also crucial in determining whether she saw herself in a positive way.

It is true that the lesbians included in this study are all educated, able, middle-class,

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and ethno-racially Koreans from big cities. Thus, their experiences cannot fully represent those of women from other classes, from medium-sized cities or rural areas, or lesbians with disabilities. This means that future research needs to expand the range of participants to avoid marginalizing already marginalized lesbians. Moreover, although I clearly focused on lesbians' stories in this study, there are other women who think of themselves as non-heterosexuals, who were not included here. It is unlikely that those women's experiences in religious groups would be the same as those of the women in this study.

Second, the building of relationships with others intervened in the process of lesbian identification in many ways. The coming-out experience in particular affected the participants' acknowledgement of their lesbian identities. Regardless of whether they think of themselves in a positive or negative way today, five lesbians of this study—all but Sujin—claim that they will not come out in public in the future even though they feel stressed from hiding themselves. Rubenstein (1994) argues that this is the result of the oppression lesbians experienced through silencing. The participants' felt their lesbian identities would be damaged whether they came out or not: coming out made them into objects to be attacked, and not coming out deprives them of the opportunity to be public subjects.

In terms of the family, all participants mentioned feeling sorry or guilty. The Korean family system and national culture is based on Confucianism, which reinforced the lesbians' feelings of obligation towards their families, and especially their parents. A daughter's identity is hard to negotiate with a lesbian identity within a traditional Korean family culture which stresses obedience to parents and prioritizes family as a group over

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the individual. This helps to explain why the concepts of “woman-identified woman” and “lesbian continuum” are still important for Korean lesbians today. As the narratives in this study show, the heteronormative and patriarchal system in South Korean society negatively affects lesbians’ lives. In this sense, the concepts that reestablish lesbianism as an agent of women’s liberation from compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy are needed to unravel the lesbians’ conflicts between lesbians’ sexual identities and their family relations.

As I mentioned in the introduction of this research, it is hard to find studies on the attitudes of religion groups towards lesbianism which consider the distinct characteristics of Korea. Almost all the studies of homosexuality in Asian countries are focused on male homosexuality, and most of the research has been conducted by Western researchers from a Western perspective. Thus, the findings in this research can be thought of as a starting point from which to develop research projects in the future.

Third, every participant’s relationship to religion is different. It depended on the characteristics of each religion, each lesbian’s faith formation process, and other circumstances. Despite that, common ground was found between all the narratives. All the participants shared one common concern: they anticipated being in trouble with other believers if they came out, even though they believe in different religions and understand their religious teachings in dissimilar ways. All the participants mentioned that their inner conflicts about their lesbian identities in relation to their religious communities, were caused by people rather than their religious faith itself; they felt that this was a result of the particular combination of Korean tradition, culture, and politics.

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Considering the history of these three religions in South Korea, potential future studies could be extended to examine the experience of lesbians from the period in which each religion was introduced. For instance, Buddhism was first introduced to Korea in 372, therefore, if a historical study of lesbianism and Korean Buddhism was conducted, it would be a groundbreaking piece of research dealing with the relationship between sexual identity and religion across a long period of history. In the case of Christianity, both Catholicism and Protestantism, they arrived in Korea from the West around 1500. This can be connected to the influence of imperialism on religions and sexuality in the Korean context.

The last key finding is that all of the participants did not simply stay in religious groups in which their existence was denied, but actively sought solutions for themselves. It is certain that the lesbians' narratives present six women's experience of suffering and hardship in the process of forming positive lesbian identities and practicing their religious faiths. However, they also reveal each woman's search for their own solutions. Each of them tried to find ways to unravel conflicts between their sexual identities and religions by making choices and negotiations: searching for new religious denominations, ways to practice their faiths, and converting to other religions after exploring diverse denominations and religions. In other words, in struggling to keep their faiths as lesbian, they have used their own power, or agency, to resist the oppression and discrimination.

In light of these findings, building religious communities, such as through LGBTQ churches, may be an alternative for lesbians in Korea. It is possible that this could be the first step in unraveling conflicts; new religious spaces would provide venues where

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lesbians could practice their faiths without interference. At the same time, these spaces could function as the base camps where lesbians could gather with other people to strategize ways forward in the lesbian human rights movement within each religious group.

Such resolution would be a bridge to more final solutions for the tensions between sexual identity and religion in Korea. For instance, J's anxiety about her religion, Presbyterianism, kept going even after she began to go to an LGBTQ-friendly, progressive church in the U.S. That is, the Christian doctrines against homosexuality continue to have an influence on her mind. In the case of Buddhism, the Buddhist teachings per se do not have any grounds to oppress homosexuals, but what is still needed is a process to eliminate way in which Korean tradition, culture, and politics influences religions.

Narrative inquiry suited this study, which involved a small number of participants. Narrative is a useful way to deep understand the Korean lesbians of this study: their feelings, actions, circumstances and the consequences of them over time (Bruner et al., 2005). Using an autobiographic narrative method, I was able to present not only the women's own perspectives on their lives and religions, but also to reflect upon the ways in which their particular context affected the participants' perspectives. After reading her autobiographic narrative, Eunwoo mentions, “읽으면서 지나간 시간들이 주마등처럼 스쳐지나가는 느낌? 논문을 통해 얘기하고 싶은 것들이 생애사 서술을 통해 잘 드러날 거란 생각이 들어. [It feels like a phantasmagoria. Many memories of the past

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came and went while I was reading it. I think this kind of life history narrative can show well the things you want to talk about through the thesis.]”

As a feminist researcher, I wanted to be a subject who narrated my research and to avoid making the participants into objects rather than subjects. Freeman (2001) argues that “on some level, narrative is itself the source of the self’s identity” (p. 296). In this sense, autobiographical narrative inquiry enabled the participants, and me, to be active subjects of this research.

6.2 Final comments from the participants

Last year, visiting my family in Korea, I found a progressive church that understands homosexuality and homosexuals. I attended there twice, and it was so impressive that I thought ‘Ah, if I had found this church earlier, I wouldn’t have left Korea’. I even felt deeply grateful that a church accepted me like that without any prejudice. I hope there will be more churches like it. (J, interview, January 9, 2015).

The gifts I got from Christianity are how to pray, the ability to believe in something invisible, and the belief that the invisible power which created the world is love. But at the same time, I learned those gifts couldn’t be unwrapped in the church. I just want to practice my faith through my own way such as praying by myself and reading related books instead of going to church. I don’t need religious communities anymore. (Eunwoo, interview, December 20, 2015).

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The main theme of the New Testament is only one: love each other, and share what you have with others who don't have. [...] In a broad sense, the Catholic teaching gets along with my values. Think about this. Why are we fighting for lesbians', women's and other minorities' human rights? Because, in the end, we want to lead a life of happiness all together. For me, the Catholic lesson about love is another expression of this, be equally happy together. (H, interview, September 28, 2016).

I can say for certain God created me as a lesbian. Many Catholic homosexuals may think so. I'm sure God allows me to lead my life in this way. Otherwise, I couldn't meet my good friends, couldn't get such good memories, and couldn't meet my lovely partner. When I started dating her, I thought God sent her to me. My religion, Catholicism is love itself. If loving someone is considered as a wrong behaviour, I think that results from people's misinterpretation. I believe Catholicism enables me to love someone sincerely. (Ryeosu, interview, January 8, 2015).

According to *Diamond Sutra*, Buddha taught that all kinds of dichotomy, such as right and wrong, you and me, nature and reason, etc., cannot exist. This includes 'normal and abnormal', right? Buddhism was telling me I needed to throw away the Western way of thought drenched with such a dichotomy, and escape from the

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useless suffering. For me, Buddhism is a philosophy of liberation. A liberation philosophy for me who is a lesbian. (Sujin, interview, December 21, 2015).

[W]hen I get older, I may be able to take part in lesbian rights movements in Korean Buddhism or with Buddhism. I feel sincerely sorry every time I see Christian lesbians who are suffering from their faith. There are lesbians who even kill themselves because of it. I think that is the very pseudo-religion. I certainly think a religion which oppresses people or asserts someone is guilty is false. I hope lesbians can be released from that kind of religion and find their true god who sets them free. I really hope so. (Jihwon, December 27, 2015).

While I worked on this research, I followed the participants' long journeys along the path of becoming lesbians and surviving as religious lesbians in South Korea. I cried when reading J's description of her suffering in the Korean Presbyterian church and Eunwoo's experience of being choked by her mother. I also smiled when I listened to H and Ryeosu's voices saying with confidence that Catholicism would change. At the same time, I felt fascinated by Buddhism, feeling Sujin and Jihwon's sense of liberation. All the participants described adversities they face living as lesbians, although their situations were diverse. Unfortunately, their hardships seem as though they will not end as long as they want to keep their religious faiths alongside their sexual identities. However, as the final excerpts from their narratives show, they are not frustrated and they are not exhausted. They believe in the genuine teachings of the religion they have chosen to

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians follow, and I believe that those beliefs can be a powerful motivation and means of supporting their ongoing journey to confront any “pseudo” religions that oppress Korean lesbians.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

차별금지법 법무부 입법예고안(2007년 초안)

The pre-announcement of legislation of Anti-discrimination Act (Draft, 2007)

- 제안이유

「헌법」의 평등이념에 따라 성별, 장애, 병력, 나이, 출신국가, 출신민족, 인종, 피부색, 언어, 출신지역, 용모 등 신체조건, 혼인여부, 임신 또는 출산, 가족형태 및 가족상황, 종교, 사상 또는 정치적 의견, 범죄전력, 보호처분, **성적지향 (sexual orientation)**, 학력, 사회적 신분 등을 이유로 한 정치적·경제적·사회적·문화적 생활의 모든 영역에 있어서 합리적인 이유 없는 차별을 금지하고 예방하며 불합리한 차별로 인한 피해자에 대한 구제조치를 규정한 기본법을 제정함으로써, 헌법 및 국제 인권규범의 이념을 실현하고 전반적인 인권 향상과 사회적 약자·소수자의 인권보호를 도모함과 아울러 궁극적으로 사회통합과 국가발전에 기여할 수 있도록 하기 위함.

- 주요내용

가. 차별의 금지(Prohibition of discrimination)

(1) 합리적인 이유 없이 성별, 장애, 병력, 나이, 출신국가, 출신민족, 인종, 피부색, 언어, 출신 지역, 용모 등 신체조건, 혼인여부, 임신 또는 출산, 가족형태 및 가족상황, 종교, 사상 또는 정치적 의견, 범죄 및 보호처분 전력, **성적지향 (sexual orientation)**, 학력, 사회적 신분 등을 이유로 고용, 재화·용역 등의 공급이나 이용, 교육기관의 교육 및 직업훈련, 법령과 정책의 집행에 있어서 개인이나 집단을 분리·구별·제한·배제하거나 불리하게 대우하는 행위를 차별로 규정하고 이를 금지함.

(2) 외견상 중립적인 기준을 적용하였으나 그에 따라 특정 집단이나 개인에게 정당한 사유 없이 불리한 결과가 초래된 이른바 간접차별을 차별로 간주하고 이를 금지함.

(3) 성별, 장애, 인종, 출신국가, 출신민족, 피부색, 성적지향을 이유로 한 괴롭힘을 차별로 간주하고 이를 금지함.

(4) 특정 개인이나 집단에 대한 분리·구별·제한·배제나 불리한 대우를 표시하거나 조장하는 광고 행위를 차별로 간주하고 이를 금지함.

(5) 특정 직무나 사업 수행의 성질상 불가피한 경우와 현존하는 차별을 해소하기 위하여 특정한 개인이나 집단을 잠정적으로 우대하는 행위 및 이를 내용으로 하는 법령의 제·개정 및 정책의 수립·집행은 예외로 함.

나. 차별시정기본계획의 수립

(1) 대통령은 차별시정기본계획을 5년 마다 수립하여 시행하여야 함.

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(2) 국가인권위원회는 차별시정기본계획 권고안을 마련하여 차별시정기본계획 시행 1년 이전까지 대통령에게 제출하여야 함.

(3) 중앙행정기관의 장, 특별시장·광역시장·도지사·특별자치도지사·시장·군수·구청장(자치구에 한한다) 및 시·도교육감은 차별시정기본계획에 따른 연도별 세부시행계획을 수립하고 이에 필요한 행정 및 재정상 조치를 취하여야 함.

다. 국가 및 지방자치단체의 책임

(1) 국가 및 지방자치단체는 이 법에 반하는 기존의 법령, 조례와 규칙, 각종 제도 및 정책을 조사·연구하여 이 법의 취지에 부합하도록 시정하여야 함.

(2) 국가 및 지방자치단체는 이를 위하여 사전에 국가인권위원회의 의견을 들어야 함.

라. 고용상의 차별금지

(1) 성별 등을 이유로 한 모집·채용의 기회를 배제 또는 제한, 이를 표현한 모집·채용 광고, 성별 등을 기준으로 한 평가, 특정 직무의 성질상 불가피하지 않은 채용 이전의 건강진단 또는 건강진단 자료제출 요구를 금지함.

(2) 성별 등을 이유로 한 임금 및 금품의 차등지급이나 호봉의 차등산정을 금지함.

(3) 성별 등을 이유로 한 교육·훈련에서의 배제·구별, 직무와 무관한 교육·훈련 강요를 금지함.

(4) 성별 등을 이유로 한 특정 직무나 직군 배제 또는 편중 배치, 특정 보직 배제, 근무지 부당변경을 금지함.

(5) 성별 등을 이유로 한 승진 배제나 승진조건·절차의 차등 적용을 금지함.

(6) 성별 등을 이유로 한 해고 등 불이익 처분을 금지함.

마. 재화·용역 등의 공급이나 이용상의 차별금지

(1) 성별 등을 이유로 한 금융기관의 대출, 신용카드 발급, 보험가입, 기타 금융서비스의 공급·이용에 있어서의 불리한 대우나 제한을 금지함.

(2) 성별 등을 이유로 한 교통수단의 이용 제한·거부, 상업시설의 사용·임대·매매 거부를 금지함.

(3) 성별 등을 이유로 한 토지 또는 주거시설의 공급·이용에서의 배제·제한을 금지함.

(4) 성별 등을 이유로 한 진료 거부 또는 조건부 진료행위를 금지함.

(5) 성별 등을 이유로 한 문화·체육·오락 기타 재화·용역의 공급·이용에 있어서 배제·제한을 금지함.

바. 교육기관의 교육·직업훈련상의 차별금지

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- (1) 성별 등을 이유로 한 교육기관에의 지원·입학·편입 제한·금지 또는 교육활동에 대한 차등지원이나 불이익을 금지함.
- (2) 성별 등을 이유로 한 전학·자퇴 강요나 퇴학조치 등 불이익 처분을 금지함.
- (3) 성별 등에 대한 차별을 포함한 교육목표·교육내용·생활지도 기준, 성별 등에 따른 교육내용 및 교과과정의 차등 편성, 성별 등을 이유로 특정 개인이나 집단에 대한 혐오와 편견을 포함한 교육내용이나 교육을 금지함.

사. 차별예방을 위한 조치

- (1) 국가 및 지방자치단체는 성별 등을 이유로 한 참정권 행사와 행정서비스 이용에 있어서 차별의 예방을 위해 필요한 서비스 제공 등의 조치를 하여야 함.
- (2) 수사 및 재판 관련 기관은 성별 등을 이유로 수사·재판 절차에서 차별을 받지 않도록 하여야 함.
- (3) 사용자는 과도한 부담이나 현저히 곤란한 사정이 없는 한 장애인 및 특정 신체조건을 가진 자가 근로조건에서 차별받지 않도록 편의를 제공해야 함.
- (4) 교육기관의 장은 과도한 부담이나 현저히 곤란한 사정이 없는 한 피교육자가 동등한 교육을 받을 수 있도록 편의를 제공해야 함.

아. 국가인권위원회에 대한 진정

차별의 피해자 또는 그 사실을 알고 있는 사람이나 단체는 국가인권위원회에 진정을 제기할 수 있고, 그에 따른 조사와 구제에 관한 사항은 「국가인권위원회법」에 의함.

자. 법원의 구제조치

- (1) 법원은 차별에 관한 소송 제기 전 또는 소송 제기 중에 피해자의 신청으로 차별이 소명되는 경우 본안 판결 전까지 차별의 중지 등 적절한 임시조치를 명할 수 있음.
- (2) 법원은 피해자의 청구에 따라 차별의 중지, 임금 기타 근로조건의 개선, 그 시정을 위한 적극적 조치 및 손해배상 등의 판결을 할 수 있음.

차. 손해배상 및 입증책임

- (1) 이 법의 규정을 위반하여 타인에게 손해를 가한 자는 그 피해자에 대하여 손해배상의 책임이 있음.
- (2) 고의 또는 과실의 입증책임은 차별행위자가 부담함.
- (3) 차별행위 피해자가 재산상 손해를 입증할 수 없는 경우 차별행위자가 차별행위로 인하여 얻는 재산상 이익을 피해자가 입은 재산상 손해로 추정함.
- (4) 차별행위 피해자가 입은 재산상 손해액을 입증하기 위한 필요 사실을 입증하는 것이 성질상 곤란한 경우 변론전체의 취지와 증거조사의 결과를 기초로 하여 상당한 손해액을 인정할 수 있음.

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(5) 차별이 있었다는 사실의 입증책임은 차별을 받았다고 주장하는 자가, 이 법에서 금지한 차별이 아니라거나 정당한 사유가 있었다는 점의 입증책임은 차별을 받았다고 주장하는 자의 상대방이 부담함.

카. 사용자의 정보공개 의무

고용 관련 차별의 피해를 받았다고 주장하는 자는 사용자에게 그 기준 등에 대하여 문서로 정보공개를 청구할 수 있고, 사용자는 정당한 사유가 없는 한 청구를 받은 때로부터 30 일 이내에 그 내역을 문서로 공개하여야 함.

타. 불이익 조치의 금지 및 벌칙

- (1) 이 법에서 정한 구제절차의 준비 및 진행 과정에서 위원회에 진정, 진술, 증언, 자료 등의 제출 또는 답변을 이유로 한 사용자, 교육기관의 장의 차별을 받았다고 주장하는 자 및 그 관계자에 대한 해고, 전보, 징계, 퇴학 그 밖에 신분이나 처우와 관련하여 불이익 조치를 금지하고 이를 무효로 함.
- (2) 불이익 조치 금지를 위반한 경우 2년 이하의 징역 또는 1천만원 이하의 벌금에 처함.

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Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (English)

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians:
The voices of the women struggling with ceaseless conflicts
SMU REB # 16-112 (SMU REB File Number)

Hyunjoo Faustina Woo
Women and Gender Studies
Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3
Phone: 902-817-1916; Email address: ralefe2011@gmail.com

Dear _____:

Hello, I am Hyunjoo Faustina Woo, and I am doing a Master's degree in Women and Gender Studies at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Canada. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Michele Byers. You are invited to participate in a research project that will examine how religious Korean lesbians experience the relationship between their religion and sexual identities. I would like to interview you, and to audio record that interview. The following information is offered to help you make the decision of whether you would like to participate or not. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

1. Purpose: This research aims to capture the perspectives of Korean lesbians who are Presbyterian, Catholic and Buddhist: How they experience/understand their religion's viewpoint on women and homosexuality; how they have negotiated their experiences as lesbians within their religious groups; how they managed any discordance which occurred as a result of their homosexuality in relation to their religious identity.

2. Population of interest / Eligibility of criteria:

- Religious (Presbyterian, Catholic or Buddhist) women who identify as lesbians
- Korean citizens who live or have lived in Korea

3. Request: Oral interview

- When and where: TBA
- Hours: 2 to 3 hours (can be conducted longer and more than once if needed)

4. Potential benefits: You can have the chance to learn about yourself while you are interviewed by concentrating on your experiences and memories related to your religion

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and sexual orientation. Ultimately, this research will be a starting point from which Korea lesbians can begin to seek solutions to unravel conflicts and improve their internal and external relationships with religion, family, and society.

5. Potential risks: As this research focuses on individual's experiences, the interview might bring up bad memories or remind you of on-going problems in the present. This means that you may feel sad, uncomfortable, embarrassed or upset while you are talking about yourself. As a researcher, I will do my best, to create a comfortable atmosphere, such as providing a private space, not compelling answers, and sharing my own experiences with you. You will be guided by your own comfort, and should not feel compelled to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. The researcher can also connect you with several counseling organizations if you need further support.

6. Confidentiality

- You can provide a pseudonym to ensure that your identity is not disclosed.
- The researcher will keep the original recorded file, interview transcripts in both forms of MS word files and Xeroxed copies for five years, and then, all of them will be destroyed.
- The entire content of the original recorded file and transcripts will never be disclosed publicly.

7. Withdrawal: You may walk out of the study at any time. When you decide to withdraw your participation from this research, the researcher will ask you whether you wish to destroy all of the interview data or retain them. Then, the researcher will deal with your data according to your request. There is no disadvantage from withdrawal.

8. Language: Your answers will be translated into English by the researcher. Translated transcripts will be provided on request.

9. Opportunity to ask questions: You can ask any questions about this research.

Hyunjoo Faustina WooLee (Researcher)

- Master's Candidate in Women and Gender Studies, Saint Mary's University
- E-mail: ralefe00@naver.com, relefe2011@gmail.com
- Phone: 1 (902) 817-1916, 82 (10) 2313-8109

Michele Byers (Supervisor)

- Sociology and Criminology, Women and Gender Studies, Saint Mary's University
- E-mail: Michele.byers@smu.ca

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians

- Phone: 1 (902) 420-5869

10. Certification: The Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or 1 (902) 420-5728.

11. Signature of Agreement:

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I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.

I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Participant

Signature : _____

Name (Printed) : _____

Date : _____ (Day/Month/Year)

Principal Investigator

Signature : _____

Name (Printed) : _____

Date : _____ (Day/Month/Year)

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians

인터뷰 요청 및 동의서 (한국어, Korean)

The stories of Korean religious lesbians:

The voices of the women struggling with ceaseless conflicts

SMU REB # 16-112 (SMU REB File Number)

우이현주 (Hyunjoo Faustina Woo)

Women and Gender Studies

Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3

Phone: 902-817-1916; Email address: ralefe2011@gmail.com

안녕하십니까? 저는 세인트 메리 대학교(Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada) 여성학과 대학원(MA Program in Women and Gender Studies)에서 석사 과정을 진행 중인 우이현주라고 합니다. 현재 석사 학위 논문 연구를 위해 미셸 바이어스 (Dr. Michele Byers) 교수의 지도 아래 인터뷰를 진행하고 있습니다. 연구 주제는 ‘한국의 3대 종교 (불교, 개신교, 천주교)가 한국인 레즈비언에게 끼치는 영향’이며 귀하께 인터뷰를 요청드리고자 이와 같은 양식을 준비하였습니다. 연구 논문의 내용 및 인터뷰에 관한 정보는 아래와 같습니다. 읽어 보시고 참여 여부를 결정해 주셨으면 합니다. 의문점이 있으시면 언제든지 연락하여 주십시오.

1. 목적: 본 논문은 종교를 가진 한국인 레즈비언이 자신의 종교와 자신과의 관계를 어떻게 바라보고 있는지 직접 들어보고 한국 사회 내에서의 종교가 레즈비언 개인에게 어떤 영향을 끼치고 있는지 연구하고자 합니다. 인터뷰를 통해 각 레즈비언이 자신의 종교가 가진 여성관과 동성애자에 대한 태도, 종교 활동 중에 겪은 자신의 경험, 그리고 성 정체성으로 인한 종교, 가족, 사회와의 갈등을 어떻게 해석하고 조정해 나가고 있는지 알아볼 예정입니다.

2. 피연구자의 요건:

- 스스로를 레즈비언으로 정체화한 여성이고,
- 종교를 가진 사람 (불교, 개신교-장로교, 천주교)이며,
- 한국 국적자로서 한국에 거주하고 있거나 거주 경험이 있는 사람

3. 요청 사항: 대면 인터뷰

- 일정 및 장소: 추후 협의
- 예상 시간: 2-3 시간(필요시 더 길어질 수 있으며, 추가 인터뷰 요청이 있을 수 있음)

4. 기밀 유지에 관한 사항:

The stories of South Korean religious lesbians

- 신원의 보장을 위해 가명 사용이 가능합니다.
- 보내주신 답변의 원본은 컴퓨터 파일과 더불어 출력본 또한 연구자가 보관할 예정입니다.
- 답변 원본 전체는 일체 공개하지 않습니다.
- 귀하의 인터뷰는 본 연구 이외의 다른 용도로 쓰이지 않습니다.

5. 참여 철회: 피연구자는 자신이 원할 때 언제든지 참여 결정을 취소할 수 있습니다. 인터뷰 이후 참여 철회를 하실 경우 인터뷰 자료의 보관 및 파기는 피연구자의 요청에 따를 예정입니다.

6. 인터뷰 내용 일체는 연구자가 영어로 번역한 뒤 연구에 사용할 예정입니다. 요청시 번역본을 보내드리겠습니다.

7. 문의:

우이현주(Hyunjoo Faustina WooLee, 연구자)

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미셸 바이어스 (Dr. Michele Byers, 지도 교수)

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8. 본 연구는 세인트 메리 대학교 연구 윤리 위원회 (The Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board)의 검토를 거쳤습니다. 인터뷰에 관한 윤리적 문제, 피연구자로서 귀하의 권리에 대해 문의 사항이 있으시면 위원회로 메일 (ethics@smu.ca)이나 전화 (1 (902) 420-5728)로 연락 주십시오.

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9. 동의 및 서명:

The stories of Korean religious lesbians:
The voices of the women struggling with ceaseless conflicts

저는 이 연구에 관해 충분히 이해하고 인터뷰 요청을 수락하며, 논문을 위한 제 답변의 사용 및 보관에 동의합니다. 또한 연구와 관련하여 불이익이 발생할 경우 연구자에게 법적 책임을 묻지 않을 것입니다.

저는 저의 자발적인 의사로 이 연구에 참여합니다. 그러나 제가 원할 경우 어떤 조건없이 이 결정을 철회할 수 있습니다.

저는 참여 결정 전 연구자에게 이 연구에 관해 질문할 기회를 가졌고, 이후 충분한 시간을 두고 참여를 결정하였습니다.

참여자

성명 : _____

서명 : _____

날짜 : _____ (년/월/일)

연구자

성명 : _____

서명 : _____

날짜 : _____ (년/월/일)

본 인터뷰 요청 및 동의서를 잘 보관하여 주십시오.

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Appendix C
Interview Protocol I (English)

Name (Pseudonym):

Age:

Residence:

Years living in Korea:

Date:

1. Questions about Sexual orientation

- a. When did you start thinking of your sexual orientation? Was there any special departure point?
- b. Can you describe your journey to self-identify as a lesbian?
- c. Do you think that the fact you are a lesbian influences your building of self-esteem? If so, what effect has it had?
- d. Have you ever come out? If you have, whom did you speak to? Why did you speak to them? Was there any reason you could or could not make a decision to come out?

2. Questions about Religion and Participation in religious activity

- a. What religion do you believe in?
- b. How long have you believed in it?
- c. Why did you choose it? Did your family members affect your choice? Do you and your family believe in the same religion?
- d. Do you go to church or a temple regularly? If so, where is it? (e.g. near your residence) How often do you go there?
- e. Do you participate in the group activities besides religious rituals? What kind of activities do you participate in? Why or Why not?

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3. Questions about Religion and Sexual orientation

- a. Have you come out in the church or the temple you attend? Or, have you ever talked about your sexual orientation with the people who believe in the same religion? If you haven't, why not? If you have, can you describe the experience? How did you feel at that time?
- b. Have you ever felt uncomfortable between your sexual orientation and your religion? Or, have you ever thought about giving up your belief due to the sense of discomfort? What made you to feel so?
- c. Have you ever thought that your religion is helpful to accept your sexual orientation or vice versa? Can you tell me the reason?
- d. In your opinion, what perspective on women, sexual minorities and lesbians does your religion have? Why do you think so?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add or share about your sexual orientation and religion?

인터뷰 질문지 I (한국어, Korean)

성명(가명):

나이: (만)

거주지:

한국 거주 했수:

날짜:

1. 정체성

- a. 성 정체성에 대한 고민을 시작한 시기는 언제부터였습니까? 혹시 어떠한 계기가 있었습니까?

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- b. 고민을 시작하고 나서 스스로 레즈비언임을 받아들이기까지의 경험을 듣고 싶습니다.
- c. 귀하의 성 정체성이 귀하의 자아 존중감 형성에 끼친 특별한 영향이 있습니까? 있다면 어떤 영향이었나요?
- d. 정체화 이후 커밍 아웃을 한 경험이 있으십니까? 있다면 누구에게 하셨나요? 그 분(들)에게 커밍 아웃을 할 수 있었던 이유, 혹은 커밍 아웃을 하기로 결심한 이유가 있습니까? 있다면 무엇입니까?

2. 종교와 종교 활동

- a. 귀하의 종교는 무엇입니까?
- b. 언제부터 그 종교를 가지게 되었나요?
- c. 그 종교를 선택한 특별한 이유가 있습니까? 종교 선택에 있어 귀하의 가족이 영향을 끼쳤나요? 귀하와 귀하의 가족은 같은 종교를 가지고 있습니까?
- d. 종교 활동을 위해 정기적으로 가는 곳이 있습니까? (교회, 성당, 절 등) 있다면 주로 어디로 가고(예. 집 근처), 얼마나 자주 가십니까?
- e. 그 곳에서 주된 종교 의례 외에 활동하는 그룹이 있습니까? 있다면 어떤 그룹에서 활동하시는지요? 없다면 왜 하지 않으시는지요?

3. 종교와 정체성

- a. 귀하가 종교 활동을 하는 곳에서 커밍 아웃을 하셨나요? 혹은 같은 종교를 가진 사람들에게 커밍 아웃한 경험이 있습니까? 없다면 왜 하지 않으셨나요? 있다면 당시의 경험과 느낌을 들려 주세요.
- b. 귀하의 성 정체성으로 인해 종교 활동을 하는 것에 불편함을 느끼신 적이 있습니까? (혹은 그러한 이유로 종교 활동을 포기하신 적이 있습니까?) 있다면 왜 그렇게 느끼셨나요?

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- c. 귀하의 종교가 귀하의 성 정체성을 긍정하는데 도움 혹은 방해가 된다고 느끼신 적이 있습니까? 있다면 그 이유는 무엇인지요?
 - d. 귀하의 종교는 ‘여성’과 ‘성소수자’ 그리고 ‘레즈비언’을 어떻게 바라보고 있다고 생각하시나요? 왜 그렇게 생각하시는지요?
4. 귀하의 정체성 및 종교와 관련하여 덧붙이고 싶은 말씀이 있으십니까?

Interview Protocol II (English)

1. Have you participated in oral interviews or written interviews before this research?
 - a. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of interviews?
 - b. If you have experience with oral interviews, what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of oral interviews?
2. Were the questions easy to understand? If not, what difficulties did you find?
3. Was there any problem to answer the questions? If so, what kind of problems did you have?
4. Judging from the follow up questions, do you think the interviewer understood your answers completely? If not, can you tell the reason?
5. If this interview were conducted as a oral/written interview, how would you like it?
6. Please give me any comments or suggestions on this interview.

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인터뷰 형식에 대한 질문 (인터뷰 질문지 II, 한국어, Korean)

1. 본 인터뷰 이전 대면 인터뷰 혹은 서면 인터뷰에 참여하신 경험이 있습니까?
있다면 어떤 형식이었습니까?
 - a. 각 인터뷰 형식의 장점과 단점은 무엇이라고 생각하십니까?
 - b. 대면 인터뷰의 경험이 있으시다면 대면 인터뷰의 장점과 단점은 무엇이라고 생각하십니까?
2. 질문들은 이해하기 쉬웠습니까? 그렇지 않았다면 이유는 무엇이었는지요?
3. 답변을 하시면서 어려움은 없었습니까? 어려움이 있으셨다면 어떤 점이었습니까?
4. 추가 질문으로 미루어 보아 연구자 (우이현주) 가 귀하의 답변을 잘 이해한 것 같습니까? 그렇지 않다면 어떤 점에서 그렇게 느끼셨습니까?
5. 본 인터뷰가 대면/서면 인터뷰로 진행되었다면 귀하께서 대답하시기에 어떠했을 것 같습니까? 그렇게 생각하시는 이유는요?
6. 마지막으로, 본 인터뷰가 보완해야 할 점이 있다면 말씀해 주십시오.