

Globalized Queer: Interracial Intimacy in the Korean Gay Community

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Research Significance

This project is an endeavor to document the voices of one of the Asian queer communities. Due to the multifaceted institutional oppression of the Korean queer community ranging from religion to legal system, sexual minorities in Korea find it difficult to project their voice in society. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the community are vibrant, as exemplified by the developing pink economy in the country. In the face of various kinds of pressure, gay members attempt to lead a life that can accommodate their non-heteronormative sexual desires. The process of establishing their sexual citizenship should not be deemed as merely an act of resistance. Instead, using Manalansan's words (2003), "it is about struggling to create scripts that will enable them to survive" (2003:121). This project seeks to record and preserve the scripts of these Korean gay men, who practice interracial intimacy. Their pathway to forging a specific type of homosexual citizenship reveals many details regarding the ethnic and class tensions at work in this post-colonial transnational arena, which can hopefully provide more ethnographic resources for those who find Asian Queer studies intriguing.

Research Questions

1. How do interracial relationships empower or constrain gay men in Korea?
2. In what ways are interracial desires of Korean gay men shaped by the scattered hegemonies of Korea's history?
3. How do the interracial gay couples negotiate the racial differences in the relationships?

METHODOLOGY

Participant observation is of paramount significance in this research. I solicited ethnographic data through fieldwork which lasted for fourteen weeks. I found my informants through various dating applications and found new ones through the connections of the existing informants. My major informants included eight Koreans and seven Caucasians. I also conducted rapport talks with over thirty Koreans and Caucasians to learn about their dating experiences. The major

field sites were pink areas such as gay bars and gay clubs in Homo Hill in Itaewon, in which more foreigners frequent, as well as Jongno 3 ga, where local Korean gay men love to mingle. I also paid two visits to gay saunas. I primarily communicated with my informants in English and occasionally we texted in order to make ourselves clearer.¹ The backgrounds of my Korean informants are considerably diverse in terms of class, including university student, corporate executive, cosmetic specialist, and pilot, with the ages ranging from nineteen to forty three. In the meantime, the Caucasian informants are predominantly on average over thirty-years-old, and range from middle-class to upper-middle class, whose educational backgrounds are respectively graduate students, professor, fashion designer, chef working in a high-end restaurant, consultant, and business owner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationalism and Sexuality

In her discussion as to the queerness in the Republic of Ireland, Kathryn Conrad (2001) stressed that homosexuality constitutes an exceptionally imminent threat to the fixity of the national identity because of the very instability and specific historical contingency embedded in homosexuality, such as demonization of homosexuality by Orthodox Catholicism prevailing during European colonial era (Conrad, 2001). She further incorporated the idea of class into the discussion of nationalism, maintaining that the threat presented by the homosexual community on national identity is also associated with class, particularly the bourgeoisie class. According to Conrad (2001), “homosexuality does not fit neatly within the discourse of bourgeois nationalism since it threatens the reproduction of the heterosexual familist (familial) narrative of the Nation/State” (2001:125). The inherent incompatibility of homosexuality and nationalism mentioned by Conrad serves as a point of departure. In the post-colonial era, South Korea regimes, authoritarian and democratic alike, have been resorting to various decolonizing apparatus to buttress their authority (Park, 2010). Considering how nationalistic Korean society is, Conrad’s remarks prompt a discussion into why a significant number of Korean gay men struggle with their sexuality.

¹ It should be noted that their at least efficient command of English to a certain extent reflects their relatively high education levels.

The intersection between ethnicity and sexuality is the very nexus in which lies both the opportunity as well as challenge for Korean male homosexuals who date foreigners to establish their sexual citizenship – as a well-informed cosmopolitan queer member or/and a hypersexual body serving foreigners. Before delving into transnational nature of interracial intimacy, conceptualizing sexuality as ethnic and nationalistic can shed light on the politics of the two intertwining entities. Joane Nagel(2000) coined the term “ethnosexual frontiers” for the subject:

“Ethnic boundaries are also sexual boundaries - erotic intersections where people make intimate connections across ethnic, racial, or national borders. The borderlands ... are “ethnosexual frontiers” that are surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic “others””.

(Nagel, 2000:113)

The above comment points to the importance of sexuality on creating the national identity. While boundaries are drawn for national citizens, these boundaries are simultaneously imbued with sexual meanings. A rigid set of sexual mores are upheld to perpetuate certain ideals for being a decent citizen who contributes to the country. Kraft-Ebing laid the yardstick of being a civilized man, which is to be able to contain his sexual urge especially when there is an altruistic demand from society (Binnie, 2004: 16-17). Binnie stated that homosexual, especially gay, have long been depicted as “Others of civilization” of which the insatiable promiscuity menaces social order (2004). This underlying stereotype of promiscuity imposed on gay men renders them as outcasts in the construction of a morally sound, civilized, and progressive nation.

For those homosexuals who are patriotic or nationalistic, however marginalized, they possess their own logic to make sense of the two seemingly conflicting ideas, nationalism and same sex desire. For instance, Katja Kahlina’s (2011) interviews with some nationalistic male homosexuals in Croatia revealed that they adopted the discourse of privacy and religion to reconcile their same sex desire with nationalism through confining sex to private sphere and regarding same sex desire as god given (Kahlina, 2011). Borrowing Kahlina’s point of

departure, this project also attempts to figure out how Korean gay men manage these mixed feelings.

Contextualizing Sexual Citizenship

Discussion of sexual citizenship has mostly been revolving around the right-based paradigms. Diane Richardson (2000) conceptualized sexual citizenship as a “system of rights” with the categorization of conduct-based, identity-based, and relationship-based sexual rights (Richardson, 2000). She argued that the latter two forms of rights are usually predicated on the conduct-based rights because the legal sanction and social ethos often regard sexual acts as the basis of sexual identity. In Korean military, which enforces mandatory conscription, Article 92-6 in the 1962 Military Criminal Act is often cited to prosecute servicemen who practice same-sex act, be it consensual or forced, while consensual same sex behavior among civilians is not criminalized (Asia News Monitor, 2017).

Youngshik Bong (2008) pinpointed that, despite the agenda of political liberalization of Korea since 1987, the pace of gay rights movement has never paralleled that of democratization, and sexual minorities are not publicly recognized as a “legitimate minority group” that can benefit from the human rights movement due to their lack of political resources and representation (Bong, 2008). As a matter of fact, the latest presidential campaign in 2017 did stir up discussion on sexual minorities in society. In spite of the swinging position on gay rights of the current President Moon Jae-in during and after the campaign, debates on topics such as banning discrimination, abolishing criminalization against same-sex act in military, and same sex marriage were brought up during the presidential campaign (Kim, 2017). In spite of the rigid resistance from the religious party, citizens especially the younger generation are expressing a larger extent of tolerance to the sexual minorities.

In addition to the legal aspect of sexual citizenship, this project aims at betraying how Korean gay men negotiate their gayness in Korea from the cultural, social, and political aspects. Vera Mackie (2017) urged us to provincialize the understanding of sexual citizenship and recognized that the very idea first flourished in the Anglophone capitalist democratic regimes such as America, Britain, Canada, and Australia as a product of historical contingency which carries local specificities (Mackie, 2017:143-144). It is of significance for a researcher to bear in mind

that the agenda of sexual minorities movement and sexual citizenship cannot be directly translated from the western countries to Asian regions. For instance, Manalansan's study on Filipino gay men who migrated to the U.S. shows the concurrent dual processes of 'self-making' and 'being-made' of citizenship (Kong, 2012). Korean gay men are de facto exploring different practices and generating understanding of selfhood that make compatible their gayness and Korean-ness. I attempt to illuminate on the subject through revealing the dynamics of interracial relationship.

Identity Politics

In spite of the differences in the political agenda forwarded by feminism and queer activism, queer theorists' concerns about sexuality and gender grow specifically out of feminist intellectual and political movements (Turner, 2000). This project seeks to betray the complexity of human experiences, which is often flattened by categorization of identities. The belief that categorizing identity at times silences the needs of some individuals in certain communities is predicated on Judith Butler's feminist critique of identity politics. It questions "women" as the subject of feminism for it may exclude those who fail to conform to the normative requirements of the subject and overlook the differences in needs among women having various intersectionalities such as race and class (Butler, 2003). Also, Butlerian critique regards identity categorizations as regulatory apparatus to securing a base of heteronormativity (Kahlina, 2011). The categorical term "Asian" in Asian Queer Studies can be an effective tool when it comes to movements fighting for collective rights because of the feeling of solidarity it musters among Asians. Yet, there also lies in the threat of overlooking the variances of features of different Asian queer communities. For example, "Asian gay men" can often be stereotypically associated with a boyish, feminine, and delicate image. People easily overlook the differences among Hong Kong gay men, Taiwan gay men, or Korean gay men. Travis Kong's (2012) work titled *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Mamba, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy* offered an overview of the dynamics of homosexual community in Hong Kong and some of their stories in China as well as Britain. It provides a detailed description as to the niche of Caucasian men in the Hong Kong gay circle, which is buttressed by colonialism. I use the dynamics in Hong Kong gay circle as a comparison to Korea's because of their socioeconomic similarities.

The extent to which a gay man places his emphasis on being homosexual is pivotal to comprehending how he prioritizes or organizes his various identities. Wayne Brekhus offered an excellent theoretical framework for deciphering the importance of gayness for individual gay men in terms of three types of grammar – verb, adjective, and noun (2003). Some men can treat homosexual practices as merely something they “do”, without associating homosexuality with selfhood. The statement of “I am gay”, in which the word “gay” serves as an adjective, indicates that this person regards homosexuality as one of the attributes constituting his identity, but not the dominating one. Anyone who claims himself as “a gay” (noun) fully embraces his gay identity as the cornerstone of the sense of self and leads his life based on the homosexual identity. Brekhus’s framework of gay identity can be an apparatus to evaluate the construction of sexual identity among Korean gay men.

It is of paramount importance to recognize heteronormativity in Korea exerts great influence on the lives of Koreans. Steven Seidman suggested that we should problematize the binary structure of ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’ which privileges the former as the organizing rationale of our sociopolitical system (Javid, 2018: 83). Heteronormativity compels people of non-normative sexualities to fit in a world that ignores and oppresses their existence. Conformity to the heteronormative world pervaded with hegemonic masculinity is commonly found in the Korean gay community. Not only my informants adopted a range of tactics to blend into the heteronormative social circle, they also internalized sets of heteronormative ideals which urged them to question their sexual desires.

In 2003, Lisa Duggan devised the term “homonormativity” to describe queer politics aligning with hegemonic heteronormativity in order to seize individual freedom at the expense of redistributive justice and resistance to other forms of structural violence such as racism, ableism, and classism (Varela, Dhawan & Engel, 2011: 19). Her conceptualization of the alliance of sexual minorities with heteronormative regimes echoes with the ethnographic data solicited, which commonly reveals the capitalistic and classist nature in the contemporary gay community in Korea.

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CHAPTER ONE _ Transnational Love

This chapter discusses the meaning of interracial intimacy, including interracial affairs and interracial sex, between Korean men and white men to Korean gay men. The common discourses as to why local Korean gay men desire white men are that they want to escape from the conservative heteronormative Korean society, and their affection for white men is informed by cultural imperialism. I argue that the above discourses are overgeneralizing in a sense that they do not take into account the intrinsic dynamics of local gay circle. The ethnographic data solicited suggest that such a desire grows out of the aversion to the possessiveness among partners in the local gay culture.

Transnationalism and Gay Culture

Transnationalism runs through interracial intimacy. While the transnational nature of the relationship is imbued with power differentials arisen from various attributes, it is also the exact idea that gay people are fond of because of the empowerment one could attain from it. Dennis Altman named the worldwide proliferation of new identities among sexual minorities in the 90s “global queering” as it transcended national boundaries (Jackson, 2009: 357). As a matter of fact, queer movement never ceases. Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer (2017:49) borrowed Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined community” to elucidate how homosexual individuals forge alliances, on a global basis, with others having attraction to the same sex for solidarity and security, which go beyond the scope of their families and local communities. However, this reductionist approach to understanding the transnationalism embedded in interracial intimacy could blind us to the fact that there have always been asymmetries in terms of power between the West and Asia.

This project adopts the lexicon transnationalism in lieu of globalization. Hannerz, Ong, Grewal, and Kaplan all emphasized the need of doing a transnational instead of a globalization study since the term “transnational” can pinpoint the asymmetries embedded in globalizing process (Kong, 2012). Ara Wilson (2006) adopted the framework of “an import-export calculus” to describe the establishment of Asian queer subjectivities in which Asia imports what the Western exports including the America-inflected Western modes of sexuality or the Western-

based systems of modernity such as capitalism. In Asian queer studies, scholars such as Martin, Jackson, McLelland, and Yue have been proposing multifarious models to comprehend the development of Asian queer knowledge, namely “global homogenization”, “local essentialism”, and “queer hybridization model” (2008:6). They respectively refer to the following, i. overwhelming Westernization all around the globe inducing appropriation or resistance from the “non-West”, ii. traditional cultures serving as the blueprint of local sexual identities, and iii. both Western and non-Western sexual cultures mutually transform each other to produce new meanings during their transnational encounters.

Wilson’s theory of “import-export calculus” can be subsumed to the model of “global homogenization” and it offers a convincing argument of the relationship between the Orient and the Occident which echoes post-colonialism and culturalism imperialism. Yet, in the epoch in which some robust and developed Asian economies such as Shanghai, Japan, and South Korea have been challenging the Western dominance in the international stage, the “queer hybridization model” can better highlight the ever-changing power relationships displayed by transnational interactions. It sheds light on the “political economy of sexuality” (Kong, 2016). In other words, it is of tremendous importance to heed the mutual transformation of ideologies happened in the interracial intimacy between Korean men and white men, for it can reveal the essence of transnational encounters – manufacturing (re-manufacturing) of meanings.

Re-imagination of Hierarchies

Michael: I am really frustrated.

Interviewer: Why?

Michael: I haven’t got laid since I arrived in Korea on Wednesday.

(This conversation was on Saturday.)

Interviewer: Ar... That’s only three days...

Michael: I know. But I could easily find at least 3 different boys every day in Hong Kong.

Michael was a 30-year-old American fashion designer working for an international fashion giant in New York. He was on a business trip in Asia and visited Hong Kong and Seoul in tandem. Being a masculine “otter” (the term to describe a gay man with a hairy and athletic physique), he found himself being fawned over by *bottoms* (gay men who assume the receptive

role during intercourse) in Hong Kong and, to his dismay, was taken aback by the fact that it was much more difficult to seek sex partners on gay applications in Seoul. Jacob, one of my closest Korean informants, was not surprised when he learnt about Michael's experience. He estimated that less than ten percent of the local gay community would opt for Itaewon as a venue of night life, which is a night area famous for having an international clientele, during weekends because they are uninterested in, if not apathetic to, foreigners. Michael was not an exceptional case to feel a sudden plunge in popularity in the homosexual settings in Seoul when he travelled in Asia. Most of my white informants unanimously reported similar patterns.

Michael and many others' stories revealed a stark contrast of the dynamics in the gay communities between Hong Kong and Seoul. Despite the prevailing Western cultural imperialism and post-colonialism in the Asia, it is imperative to investigate their distinctive historical contexts with a view to shedding light on the differences in the popularity of white men. Kong conducted detailed ethnographic fieldwork in Hong Kong for years which depicted the perception of local gay men on white men during both the colonial and the post-colonial era. Caucasian men, who are called *Gwailo* in Cantonese, are vehemently adored by a large group of local Chinese gay men, who are derogatorily labelled as Potato Queen. The former carries the connotation of modernity and sophistication, hence the interracial intimacy signifies potential social mobility and entry into the Western World (Kong, 2012). Also noteworthy is that despite the dwindling of the once untouchable supreme position of the *Gwailo*, they still take up a special niche in the globalized, Western-dominated "market", easily earning affection and sexual favors offered by the local gay men (Kong, 2012). This historical context can shed light on the apex position Michael assumed in the sexual hierarchy of Hong Kong gay circle.

In the context of Korea, the popularity of white men in the local gay community can be analyzed using the national paradigm. Pete, one of my Korean informants who is a 40-year-old corporate senior manager, associated Koreans' - especially males- prevailing repulsion to white guys with the fact that American military troops station in Korea. Su-hwan Lim mentioned that, after the Korean War, the Korean government's sturdy nationalistic agenda transitioned into a compromise of its national sovereignty with the U.S. liberal intervention,² the penetrative

²"Liberal intervention" here refers to the fact that the U.S. intervention is buttressed with the belief of liberalism, instead of regarding the nature of these intervention as liberal.

nature of which led to the enduring conflicts of ideologies between nationalism and liberalism (2013:133,135). In spite of the compromise made by the authority, the public still holds a certain degree of skepticism, distrust, and repugnance for the idea of having the U.S. military stationed in the sovereignty of Korea.

The unwelcomed foreign military stationary in South Korea also highlights a significant feature of Korean nationalism, the ethnic homogeneity. Hyun-jung Lee commented that threats from North Korea have been politically utilized to mobilize nationalism, which ultimately propounds an exclusionary rationale that aligns “nation” with “ethnicity” (2016: 239-240). The ethnic singularity in the gay community in Seoul is an extension from the ethnic homogeneity in Korean nationalism, which results in the low popularity of white men in the gay community.³ Therefore, I argue that the small degree of the affection for white men among the local gay Koreans is a result from the ethnic homogeneity embedded in nationalism.⁴

Underneath the nationalistic repulsion lies a general negative impression of the U.S. soldiers especially in the night-life area. Pete stated that the reputation of the American soldiers in Homo Hill (a district in Itaewon in which gay, lesbian, and transgender bars and clubs are situated) as well as other parts in Itaewon is tainted because of the sexual aggressiveness portrayed and the past cases of sexual assaults, including rape, committed by the U.S. soldiers.⁵ As a matter of fact, 30 out of 1455 American soldiers committed crime were rapes from 2007 to June 2017, according to the national police of Korea (Hakem, 2017). Social activist Park Kyung-soo, director of the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops in Korea, has been calling for revisions to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which defines the legal status of American troops in foreign countries such as South Korea, Iraq, and Japan, because it unjustly protects the U.S. soldiers, especially in light of the rise of the crimes, including sex crimes, they committed (Glionna, 2011).

³ More in-depth discussion of the ethnic singularity in the local gay community can be found in Chapter 2. Noted that racism and xenophobia are also induced by this ethnic singularity.

⁴ As for the detailed elucidation of the intersection of sexual desires and nationalism, please refer to Chapter 2.

⁵ Nevertheless, Pete’s perspective is only part of the picture as foreigners definitely have their unique appeal in Homo Hill.

My informant Pete's opinion on white men in Homo Hill represents one of the mainstream voices in the local gay community. It echoes with a popular view among the average local Koreans that they are actually more concerned about American soldiers than North Korean regime, as claimed by activist Park (Glionna, 2011). Beside the abovementioned ethnic homogeneity, the insecurity of Korean gay men is another reason for the low popularity of white men. This insecurity is directed at the sexual aggressiveness of the white men that the local gay men perceive.

In sum, the Korean gay community exhibited ethnic dynamics distinctive from other Asian developed regions such as Hong Kong. The ethnic homogeneity in Korean nationalism is at work in the hierarchization of males of different ethnicities, rendering white men less favorable. The analysis of the favorability of white men in this session only renders the question "Why does interracial relationship appeal to some Korean gay men?" even more intriguing.

Fault in My Ex

Jacob, a 38-year-old middle class Korean beauty and cosmetics specialist, was reminiscing about his relationship with his American boyfriend at a café near Dongdaemun History and Culture Park. He was twenty-two years old when he was in the relationship, which ended with an amicable breakup. He emphasized how much he benefitted from this relationship. When I asked what the differences between this relationship and the relationships with Koreans were, he responded immediately "Koreans are fxcking possessive.". He went on elaborating how his Korean boyfriends displayed a common trait of being possessive over him, attempting to exert the minutest control of every aspect of his life. One of his Korean boyfriends whom Jacob regarded as "going too far" and "mentally wrong" was discussed more elaborately. Besides the permission of his boyfriend (hereafter as X) being needed for Jacob to meet up with his friends and colleagues, there was an episode considered as too extreme that eventually led to the breakup. "He also wanted to be possessed." There was a time that Jacob did not ask whom X was meeting with in the middle of the night. Afterwards, X lashed out at Jacob for not caring about X's life and feelings, and "not loving him enough".

The level of interference as well as mental pressure was particularly suffocating for Jacob.

Being a gay couple in Korea, to a certain extent, implies living under the pressure of being discovered by straight friends and families, their mental burden is usually heavier than that of heterosexual couples. Illouz (1997) propounded that sense of selfhood and religious sublimation in Victorian Era centered on love (1997:29). This historical perception of love gives rise to the prevailing association of love with selfhood. As a result, people in modern era usually seek comfort, support, and completion of selfhood in a romantic relationship. Not only was X's compulsion to possess ironically perceived as a kind of violation of Jacob's selfhood, his longing to be possessed was also hysterical and overwhelming for Jacob. "I think it's because Korean gay men are really open about sex, so they are scared that they will lose their partner. It's so hard to find a partner here," said Jacob. Jacob further imputed the prevailing possessiveness among Korean partners to the robust casual sex culture in the local gay community, rendering cheating highly possible. The atmosphere of sexual liberation conflicts the monogamous ideal such as devotion in the Korean gay community.⁶ Jacob also attributed the possessiveness to the fact that it is particularly difficult for local gays to find a partner, considering how closeted and discreet they need to be in such a hostile environment against sexual minorities. All these factors ultimately pave the way to possessive relationships. In comparison, Jacob referred his relationship with the white boyfriend as "trustful" and "relaxing", ascribing the sense of comfort to "his open-minded personality and attitude".

Another informant, Derick, a senior student in Seoul National University majoring in a European language, expressed similar opinions when trying to compare his experiences dating his current Caucasian-British boyfriend and Korean ex-boyfriends. Derick stated that he experienced a constriction of private space due to his boyfriend. It was interesting to look into the meaning of private space offered by Derick, which supposedly comprised of his relationship as well. It could possibly cast light on the weight of a relationship to a local gay man, hence I probed deeper into the definition of private space. "He did not let me have my own time and I felt somewhat limited in other parts of my life.", he indirectly answered. Borrowing Brekhus's notion of "gay identity as grammar" mentioned in literature review (2003), Derick's refusal to letting his relationship outweigh other parts of his life can be interpreted as "I am gay (adj.)". He accepted his homosexual identity and performed its script

⁶ Monogamous ideal here does not necessarily infer a completely closed relationship. Many informants revealed that they are open to have sex with another person as long as his partner participates, i.e. threesome or orgy. It will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

within a comfort zone. Yet, he did not prioritize this unique facet of selfhood over the others as he recognized the need to “have other parts of my (his) life”, which could be of equal or even more importance comparing with his relationship.⁷

Other than the possessive nature of their relationships with Koreans, both Jacob and Derick mentioned how they learn about leading a gay life from their white boyfriends. Despite the fact that none of them indicated they found white men particularly appealing in terms of physical attribute, they were attracted to the disposition and attitude towards life of their western boyfriends. Derick expressed how he felt comfortable hanging out with his liberal white boyfriend. On the other hand, noted that Jacob dated his first white boyfriend in 2001, Koreans were considerably more conservative towards homosexuals at the period. “I learnt how to deal with my gayness from my boyfriend (hereafter as Y). He taught me that it is important to have conversations and share emotions than to be sexually involved in maintaining a relationship. I also like the fact that he was confident of himself, mainly because he did not face discrimination in his world (as a gay man).” said Jacob.

Jacob’s discourse reveals that Y served as a mentor on his road to be a gay man. Intriguing is that Y acted as an imparter of knowledge for Jacob who found his budding same sex desire confusing. This process signifies a transnational transferal of scripts for gay men. In other words, Jacob found that the relationship was empowering in a sense that his acquired knowledge of a western gay man to deal with his own confusions. It helped Jacob make sense of his gay identity. On another note, Y, whom Jacob depicted as a gay man not subject to discrimination and having positive outlook, carried certain qualities desired by Jacob. The positivity and confidence of Y were exactly what Jacob was in lack of. Social ethos including acceptance towards homosexuals in their growing environment clearly have certain impacts on their contrasting characteristics. In such setting, Korean gay men gained knowledge from their foreign boyfriends as to how to face their gayness and strike a balance between sex and love in a same-sex relationship,⁸ leading a satisfactory life as a gay man.

⁷ We will revisit Brekhus’s notion in the following chapters.

⁸ Despite the fulfilment of emotional needs, Jacob did not belittle the sexual satisfaction from the relationship, which further set this relationship apart from others with Korean boyfriends. This will be further mentioned in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

South Korea display unique dynamics of the interracial encounters in the gay community. With a view to deciphering the reasons for the cold response received by white men on various gay occasions, we shall realize that their identity of white expats induces mixed feelings of the local gay men in the very first place. These mixed emotions are informed by nationalism, Eurocentric-neocolonialism, and cultural imperialism. What is interesting is that America has a special role to play in shaping the ethnic homogeneity of nationalism in Korea. It has largely to do with its military stationing inside Korean's sovereignty, which provokes a kind of historical national sentiment against foreign colonizers. The sociopolitical context contributes to the low popularity of white men in Korean gay circle.

Nevertheless, the challenges faced by local gay men come not only from the nationalist Korean society, but also surprisingly from the Korean gay community itself. The minority who favor white men shared common uncomfortable experiences dating Korean men. Their repulsion of the Korean boyfriends' possessive behavior and mentality strongly contrasted with their appreciation for their white boyfriends' easygoing disposition. Their repugnance to the possessiveness exhibited by Korean partners can be construed as a driving force for these gay men to seek a comfortable relationship with foreign boyfriends. It should also be noted that the vibrant sex culture and the mental burden being sexual minority often complicate the monogamous ideals in Korean society, which strained. My informants were empowered by their interracial relationships in a sense that they borrowed "the script" to lead a comfortable gay life from their white partners. This transnational transferal of "script of gay life" helped forging homosexual identity for these Korean gay men dating white men.

CHAPTER TWO _ Ambivalence and Pleasure

This chapter discusses the shaping of same sex desires of Korean men who are involved in interracial intimacy. Hegemonic masculinity is buttressed by the traditional Korean culture and the mandatory military conscription. The intersection of masculinity and sexuality often manifests as a conflictual context for my Korean informants. Submissiveness is regarded as a form of sexual pleasure for Koreans who assume the submissive role during intercourse. However, being submissive, especially to foreign men, is morally problematic especially when one allows this deviant sexual desire to override his responsibilities in real life. Here the moral judgement is informed by nationalism. I argue that the notion of submissiveness induces a sense of ambivalence in those Korean gay men who favor foreigners, complicating their sexual expressiveness and sexual expectations.

Brotherhood

Harry, a nineteen-year-old Korean engineering student in Incheon, was dating a white professor who worked in a university in Seoul. Harry, unlike his fellow Korean gay men, intentionally distanced himself from his fellow Korean gay men when it came to sex. I first approached Harry through the gay application Grindr and he invited me to have a threesome with his boyfriend in the capital. I successfully talked him into having a coffee with me, which allowed me to befriend him. When asked about his sexual apathy to other Koreans, he responded “I would feel strange having sex with Koreans as if I would be having sex with my brothers.” He further stated that he would not have texted me on Grindr had I not been a foreigner.

Both Harry and Anson (an informant who was referred to me through Derick) stated they found Caucasian tops more physically attractive. “The westerners are sexier.⁹ They’ve got sexier eyes and bigger penises!” commented Harry. However, for those Korean informants who didn’t practice BDSM, including both tops and bottoms, they did recognize westerners having bigger penises, yet stressed that this attribute is not what makes them sexually superior or more attractive. “On average white guys have bigger penis, at least in my experience. But I found hot handsome Asians hot and handsome too,” said Derick. Noteworthy is that Korean informants practicing BDSM laid larger emphasis on the size of penis, which made westerners more attractive to them while those who did not fancy BDSM showed accord less importance to penis size. This may due to that a bigger penis signifies better a larger extent of domination.

Nonetheless, Harry’s statement of Koreans resembling his brothers’ casts light on the strong bonding shared by Korean men. This sense of male solidarity and connectedness has Korean ethnic nationalism as its basis. Carole Pateman coined the term “national brotherhood”,¹⁰ viewing male sexual desire on the national scale as men allocating access to female sexuality among themselves (Maxwell, 2005). Alexander Maxwell further explicated the concept as follows, “male patriots show friendship and camaraderie to each other: the national

⁹ I asked a follow up question as to whom are considered as westerner and found that Harry was referring to Caucasian men. He later expressed his repulsion to having sexual relationship with black or brown guys, which echoed some other Korean gay men.

¹⁰ Patemen’s theory of “national brotherhood” was originally written in the Oedipal fashion, which involves young adult males overthrowing their fathers and seizing access to women.

brotherhood remains fraternal both in its solidarity and in its masculinity.” (2015:540). Harry’s impression of his Korean compatriots being brothers, who are inappropriate sexual partners, stems from the solidarity among Korean males. The term “male” alone is not enough to indicate the solidarity of Korean brotherhood, which is a product interwoven with masculinity and nationalism as explained in follows.

The Necessity to “Man Up”

During the coffee break, while Harry was inviting me to assume a submissive role along with him in the prospective BDSM threesome session,¹¹ I took the chance to delve into his perception of being a bottom (a role receiving penetration during intercourse). Intriguingly, Harry offered me a piece of advice. “Do not act like a girl outside, Bro! Just only in front of your white man,” said Harry. Harry associated submissiveness with femininity and clearly expressed refusal for public display of his submissive, “feminine” side. Harry actually echoed other Korean bottoms when they addressed their sexual submissiveness. Derick, the student from Seoul National University, stated that although he enjoyed being submissive while having sex, he disagreed with the phrase of “being feminized”. “I just enjoyed being bottom,” said Derick.

On the other hand, Jacob, the cosmetics specialist, also informed me of his tactics to integrate into the social circle of straight males, including drinking a lot together, joining sports activities, and frequently straight bars with friends. As a matter of fact, I accompanied Jacob and his straight friends to clubbing for a few times. Besides binge drinking, I spotted Jacob making out with girls on the dance floor. Later he revealed that he did it not because he was tipsy but just to make his “straightness” more convincing; and reassured me that he was “completely gay”. Being well educated, he explained to me that the social burden imposed on Korean men arises from patriarchy. More importantly, “Being a man in Korea is hard. There is only one form of stereotype for Korean men to fit in. Nowadays many young gay boys are confused with their gender roles to be honest.” stressed Jacob. I reckoned what he meant by “one form of stereotype” refers to hegemonic masculinity. It is interesting to interpret Jacob’s comment from the perspective of homogeneity of Korean males. Korean feminist Hae-joang Cho Han proposed

¹¹ BDSM connotes bondage, discipline, domination/submission, and sadomasochism.

that nationalism in Korea gives rise to a social system privileging patriarchal families instead of individuals, which diminishes individuality of every citizen (Lee, 2016). Nationalism fortifies a set of gendered social expectations of Korean men, which induces, in Jacob's words, "only one form of stereotype".

While both Harry and Derick displayed their repulsion to be associated with femininity in public or even in private, Jacob put on a heterosexual façade on certain social occasions. All these feelings and practices conform to, as well as perpetuate hegemonic masculinity hailed in the Korean society. Mandatory military conscription definitely contributes to upholding hegemonic masculinity, which in return is conducive to maintaining the entire conscription system. "Militarized masculinity" serves to infuse a sense of nationalistic ethos into able-bodied males, who occupy a privileged position over females, the handicapped, and conscientious objectors in the national hierarchy (Finer, 1975).¹² The fact that neo-Confucianism of the Chosŏn dynasty is embedded in the Korean military enterprise further lays emphasis on gender hierarchy and duty (Bong, 2008:88). Unlike some countries enforcing conscription on both males and females, the exclusion of females from the conscription process in South Korea buttresses the hegemonic masculine traits in the military (Tikhonov, 2009:1), which results in reinforcing hegemonic masculinity on the social level, provided that conscription is mandatory nationwide.

In addition, females are accorded secondary importance or considered as minor actors in the discussion of defending the nation. Maxwell suggested that a female who has a sexual relationship with a national male assists the later in national work (2015: 540). Besides reproduction, women land the role of performing child rearing. The subordinating position of females in the national course also undermines the value of femininity in the hegemonic masculine culture. Harry and Derick's intension to distance themselves from femininity, as well as Jacob's tactics to "man up", highlight how hegemonic masculinity is deeply entrenched in the minds of these gay men and affect how they negotiate their gender expression.

Pleasure of Submissiveness

¹² Conscientious objectors refer to those who are unwilling to perform military service based on conscience, freedom of religion, or freedom of thought.

Among my Korean informants, six of them were bottoms. Three of them practiced BDSM. Harry was one of them. Anson, who is a schoolmate of Derick, is also a fanatic of BDSM. He vividly described how he felt when he was submissive to his foreign boyfriend.

Anson: I love being a puppy to my man. Sometimes he punished me harshly and sometimes he “spooned” me.¹³ Being a slave is exciting cuz you never know how he will treat you.

Interviewer: That sounds pretty fun! So what do you enjoy more, gentle or rough?

Anson: Ar... I like the feeling of not knowing what’s gonna happen. I enjoy being controlled and being used to satisfy my master. It just feels right.

Interviewer: So you like being controlled, or let’s say dominated. Why is it this way?

Anson: I am not sure either. Just that I feel “freed” during the process, even when I was tied up. I don’t need to think and just go with the rhythm set by my master.

Interviewer: What do you mean by “freed”?

Anson: You know what I mean David! I’ve told you how tiring and hard my life is. It’s good to get screwed a few times a week. Haha.

In an attempt to delineate why his sexual desires encompassed being dominated, it is pivotal to situate his sexual desires in the larger socioeconomic context of South Korea. Despite his satisfying relationship with his Australian boyfriend, he found it necessary to conceal this relationship in front of his family. Being the eldest son in a Korean family, Anson stated the responsibilities he needed to shoulder, such as being a role model for younger siblings and prospective financial responsibility for the family. His parents pinned high hopes on him due to the fact that he studied in the best university in the country. Anson’s social role as a well-educated male youngster heaped pressure on him.

Of paramount importance is to recognize that the abovementioned social pressure for generating merits is much gender- and class-based. Matthew Leyshon McGuire, who studied Korean young gay men, argued that their discussion on work and achievement embedded the complex of parent-child relationships and coupledness in a broader context of socioeconomics. (2016: 167). The encumbrances upon Anson were closely knitted to the fact that he lives in a

¹³ “Spooning” means one cuddling the other from behind on bed.

neo-Confucian society in which the eldest son should be extremely capable. This society also expects highly of youngsters who excel in academics, with which usually comes a better prospect. Anson was well aware of his social status and the expectations that come along. And that he raised “how tiring and hard my life is” in the discussion of sex insinuated a connection between the two topics.

I attempt to associate Anson’s sexual desire for being dominated with his encumbered sense of selfhood by adopting the theory of a social psychologist, Roy Baumeister. Baumeister (1991) suggested that masochism contradicts one’s identity and masochists are often socially privileged and therefore carry the heaviest burdens of selfhood, who try to seek a moment of escape through masochism. Anson’s emphasis on pleasure in being a masochist originated from being controlled and not needing to think. Anson was experimenting with a position of having less responsibilities and autonomy, which was not his reality as discussed. Anson’s experience can also be deciphered from anthropological perspective. Anthropologist Janice Boddy studied Zâr cult in a Muslim village in North Sudan. During the trance (possession by spirits), local women who are suppressed in daily life can experience “a transcendental excursion into otherness” and their “culturally overdetermined self may be felicitously repositioned, perhaps transcended” (Boddy, 2014: 349-350). While the Muslim women explored otherness, an empowered sense of selfhood, through the trance, I argued that Anson acquired the otherness of submissiveness that was opposite to this social role in actuality, and concomitantly treated this as a gateway to shedding off his encumbrances in real life.

To further investigate the appeal of BDSM practice to Anson and other informants, one must recognize the fundamental political nature of BDSM as a form of resistance. Parchev and Langdrige (2017: 195-196) argued that BDSM practitioners promote a radical erotic discourse confronting the hegemonic discourse of sexuality and allow themselves space for survival through adopting a security mechanism. Gayle Rubin (2011:170-178) described hegemonic hierarchal structure of sexuality as the superiority of genital sexuality, reducing sex to an objective-oriented activity, i.e. reproduction, and the confinement of sex to the private sphere. Being homosexual and involving in BDSM practices is two forms of social deviance per se, hence imposing double marginalization upon my three informants. The meaning of political resistance imbued in BDSM practices should by no means be diminished.

A Shameful Desire

“I am afraid to be outed. Being a bottom is bad. Having a foreign boyfriend is worse.”

Johnson, a 22-year-old barista

“There’s nothing wrong to enjoy being bottom. I felt bad about it before. My boyfriend helped me accept who I really am.”

Anson, a 21-year-old student

All seven of my Korean informants who assumed the submissive role agreed that their bottom role in an interracial relationship made them feel more insecure as a gay man in Korean society.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, while having a foreign Caucasian boyfriend may connote superiority in terms of socioeconomic class in the gay circles of mainland China and Hong Kong (Kong, 2012), the same for Koreans may invoke stigmatization. Yangbogal 양보갈, in which Yang 양 means western whereas bogal 보갈 means prostitutes, is a derogatory term used to label those local gay men who have a foreign boyfriend. The ground for condemnation is that one allows his national body to be exploited by a foreigner.

A gay bar called Soho in Homo Hill in Itaewon is famous for having foreigners. The 38-year-old Jacob who had 18 years of clubbing experiences informed me that in the bygone days his gay friends would judge those who went to Soho alone behind their back since they were usually regarded as “horny guys seeking for bigger, western cocks”. Apparently, embedded in this disparagement is the internalized perception of Asian men being feminized and hence assuming bottom role, which is an orientalist historical remnant perpetuated by mainstream media (Han, 2008). Jacob said that this implication on single Korean clubbers to Soho has been toned down but still exists. My ethnographic data corroborated Jacob’s narrative. On Friday and Saturday nights, Soho’s international clientele included off-duty U.S. soldiers, native-speaker English teachers, foreigners on business trips, exchange students, and tourists.

¹⁴ Cases of Korean tops having intimate relationship with foreigners and how they are perceived will be discussed in the following.

Scattering among them were one to two small groups of Koreans. In fact, I observed that Koreans tended to be quite exclusive among themselves, which means they are not particularly interested in talking to foreigners, in Soho and Queen.^{15,16} More Koreans, alone or in group, were usually found in Queen while more Caucasians were present in Soho. Interesting to notice is that there were always fewer Korean men alone inside Soho than that in Queen, substantiating Jacob's point. I could recognize these single Koreans in Soho after four to five visits, hinting that they were the frequent, if not the only few, Korean visitors to frequent Soho by themselves. The aforementioned ethnographic data demonstrates how nationalism subtly pervaded the Korean gay community, which exerts pressure upon those who desire sex with foreign tops.

Stigmatization at local gay men being submissive to foreigners induces a feeling of insecurity in my Korean submissive informants, to a certain extent urging them to self-check their desires for foreigners. My Caucasian informant George was on a business trip when I met him in Seoul. The 42-year-old Californian travelled to Shanghai and Seoul for work at least six times a year. Not only did he share his own interesting experiences dating local Koreans boys, but he also provided pseudo-psychoanalysis of the boys he dealt with.

Korean boys are extremely fickle. They often called off a (sex) date at the last minute. There was a boy who said he could not come just twenty minutes before the date because he had to hit the gym. I think they prioritize their daily routine such as family, school, work, gym over sex. But they can be super needy and horny on bed. Just that they tend to be very shy and taciturn afterwards, as if they are ashamed. I think their regimented life seriously contrasted their private vehement sexual side.

George, 42-year-old businessman

¹⁵ Noted that "foreigners" here refers to all non-Korean-like persons. I have seen Filipinos, Americans, Hong Kongers, mainland Chinese, Canadians, Cambodian, Dominican among others rejected by Koreans when they tried to make a conversation. I learnt about their nationalities because I approached them a while after they got rejected by the Koreans.

¹⁶ Queen is a neighboring gay bar of similar style. While there was 70 percent American pop and 30 percent K-pop in Queen, surprisingly Soho played only 40 percent U.S. pop and 60 percent K-pop.

The capricious attitude of Korean bottoms was not only pinpointed by George, but also at least three other foreign informants who experienced last-minute cancellation of the meeting by the Korean bottoms. George's description of Korean boys is especially valuable because it contains some detailed depiction of the Koreans' reactions during the sex date. These important details revealing the complex inside the Koreans' minds would probably not be articulated as clearly by my Korean informants because it would be embarrassing to delineate such private matters to others.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the fact that four of my white informants shared similar experiences of dates being called off at the last minute does suggest that those Korean bottoms experienced some internal struggles before these sex dates. George has learned a wealth of reasons of these last-minute cancellations from them and he concluded that it was their "regimented life" standing in the way of the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

The "regimented life" of the Korean boys should not be reduced to be merely understood as a busy and rigid everyday routine. Instead, the emphasis placed on the quotidian duties reflects their sense of responsibility to perform what should be done in face of sexual temptation. As suggested in the above, their sexual desires for being submissive to foreigners are not considered as morally just in the nationalistic culture. In stark contrast, their duties of school, family, and work are the yardsticks for being a responsible citizen with a promising prospect, which are morally superior. Not only do social norms impose limitations on sexual expressiveness, deeply entrenched understanding of inappropriate behavior also provokes shame or fear when one faces choices about sexuality and desires (Hull, 2008: 133). As a result, their duties became obstacles on their way to pursue sexual pleasure. Moreover, of heavy significance is to recognize these submissive bottoms desiring foreign sex partners were socialized to regard their desires as inappropriate, eventually inducing shame and fear in themselves.

Also essential is to look into how Korean tops who are interested in white bottoms managed their feelings. Pete, the 40 years old corporate manager, who elucidated how U.S. soldiers had blemished reputation in Itaewon in the previous chapter, found white bottoms usually physically fitter than Asians. "A white (bottom) is not that different from a Korean (bottom).

¹⁷ However, I do recognize the limitations of George's narratives, for example, his sex partners' reaction may not be the same as my Korean informants'.

Maybe they are more energetic,” said Pete. Another Korean top named Patrick was 33 years old. He worked in the customer service department in a corporate. He was planning to migrate to Canada because he enjoyed the two-year experiences of working holiday there. Despite the opinion of Korean bottoms making him feel more masculine, Patrick was genuinely fond of white bottoms.¹⁸ When asked how it felt having intercourse with white bottoms, he giggled and replied, “it feels good if he is good.” The way Patrick easily rendered it as a simple issue of physical pleasure indicates that he did not experience any insecurity or shamefulness dominating foreign bottoms. In other words, the term Yangbogal 양보갈 (western prostitute) mainly targets the local submissive gay men.

Conclusion

The intersection of masculinity and sexuality for Korean gay men involved in interracial intimacy is intrinsically conflictual. Hegemonic masculinity still suffuses in the gay community due to the neo-Confucianism and mandatory military system, which urges gay men to conform and distance themselves from femininity. They employed tactics to perform as a straight man so as to integrate into the mainstream society.

Submissiveness was presented as a source of pleasure by my informants who practiced BDSM. Many of them are well educated young people. From their discourse, it is revealed that being dominated serves as a channel of disencumbering deeply burdened selfhood and experiencing otherness. However, being submissive to foreigners summons moral judgment even in the gay community, which inflicts a sense of shame and fear in the informants. How they struggled whether to date the foreigners or not suggests that there are other duties in life serving as obstacles to actualizing their sexual desires. I argue that the desire for submissiveness eventually engenders a sense of ambivalence in the Korean gay men, which entangles their sexual wellbeing.

¹⁸ Patrick has already settled in British Columbia, Canada, by the time this thesis is being drafted.

CHAPTER THREE _ Interracial Intimacy

This chapter discusses how Koreans and Caucasians negotiate their racial differences in their interracial relationships. With a view to comprehending the power dynamics set by interraciality of the relationship, merely paying attention to racial differences does not suffice. The intersection of race and class must be taken into account to shed light on the specificity of the Korean-White gay couples. The notions of love provided by both Korean and Caucasian informants strongly inform how they manage these relationships. Whether the relationship is perceived as temporary or not could become a critical factor to Koreans. Finally, I borrowed Amy Steinbugler's (2012) theoretical framework of racework to elucidate how the couples perceive and negotiate the racial variances and stratification that come along. I argue that the local gay community, instead of the general Korean public, is what necessitates racework of the interracial couples in the first place.

Configuring a Power Web

I attempt to unravel the power dynamics of the interracial couples by delineating the intersectionality of their different attributes, namely race, age, and class. Notable is that all six major Caucasian informants, among others whom I have conducted rapport chats, are from middle class to upper middle class, including professor, high-ranking consultant, chef working for upscale restaurants, and fashion designer, all of whom are over thirty years¹⁹. I also met various Caucasian students who are either exchange students or full time graduate students. I did solicit many of their opinions on their affairs with the local, which were usually hook-ups instead of long term relationships probably due to their temporary stay in Korea. In the

¹⁹ Except for some U.S. soldiers that I met with.

following, I will present several encounters that may highlight some commonalities of certain white gay men.

Case 1

I went to a gay sauna in Itaewon with my Australian-born Pakistani friend. In the sauna, a young Korean was talking with a middle-aged white guy, who later revealed that he has a wife and possesses a property in Yeuido (a major financial district in Seoul). When I was making a conversation with both of them, the white guy shoved his genital and said, "You Asians don't have this size, right?". He was doing this in an attempt to invite me to have sex with them. Both my friend and I felt offended at the moment and walked away.

Anson, a 21-year-old student

Case 2

The Caucasian boyfriend of Harry, the nineteen-year-old Incheon student who practices BDSM, is a thirty-three-year-old science professor in a university in Seoul. When I approached him in Seoul, he informed me that, "that Korean boy (Harry) is not my boyfriend. Gosh! They are so clingy.". He later pointed out that Harry was just his sex partner.

The author

Case 3

I had lunch with Glenn, a forty years old chef. Glenn was incessantly talking about his achievements ranging from having five restaurants in both America and Korea to preparing meals for certain Democrat superstars. I just kept nodding and smiling to whatever he said. The only good thing was that he paid the bill.

The author

In all the above cases, the Caucasians assumed a dominating position in the power web. Both Case 1 and Case 3 recorded how certain Caucasians respectively patronized Anson and I in a condescending fashion. I recognize that the Caucasian men might have probably treated me similarly to how they did with other Korean boys because of my young Asian appearance, rendering my situated knowledge valid in the discussion of the racial stratification. On the other hand, case 2 shows how the professor and Harry perceived their relationship in different ways, revealing that they aspired for different things. Nonetheless, the fact that the professor, to a certain extent, objectified Harry as a sexual object deeply contrasted with Harry's devotion to his relationship. These cases exhibit how the wealthier white men can easily patronize the

young and financially insecure Koreans due to their economic success and prevailing perception of being more sexually capable.

However, Korean gay men who are involved in interracial relationships should not be over-generalized as the powerless subordinated. As a matter of fact, the solidarity among Korean gay members are a means of shelter for those who “retreat” from an interracial relationship. Three out of six of my Caucasian informants told me how their Korean boyfriends suddenly blocked their *Kaokao* (a popular communication application in Korea) and disappeared from their lives. What is interesting is that a Hong Konger studying in Korea shared a similar experience of his Korean boyfriend suddenly vanishing. His Korean boyfriend surfaced from the nowhere few weeks later and texted the Hong Konger apologizing and expressing he was “stressed and confused at the time”, which drove him to block the Hong Kong boyfriend’s *Kaokao* contact. It is found that not only white men, but also other foreigners experienced Korean boyfriends suddenly disappearing. These experiences often took them off guard. A 45-year-old Canadian professor, whose relationship lasted for a year and a half, expressed that he was deeply saddened when his Korean boyfriend vanished.

I asked my Korean informants whether they have heard of these incidents happening among Korean couples and they said no. Then I further asked whether they have done this to any their Korean boyfriends. None of them confessed. Not until a week later when Jacob was tipsy in a bar did he say that he did block one of his white boyfriend several years ago after the relationship lasted for six months. Surprisingly, he found the relationship satisfying and the reason he blocked the boyfriend was that “there’s no future”. He wanted to end the relationship but he didn’t know how to open up for the dialogue. After he blocked his boyfriend, his Korean friends accompanied and consoled him in the following weeks by taking him to *Sulbeongae* 술번개 in gay bars in Jongno-3-ga. It is a drinking session combined with some games. For local gay men, they organize these drinking sessions by recruiting people on gay applications. A single men or a small group of two to four would join the drinking session of fifteen to twenty people for the night so as to make friends and chill out.²⁰ While the Koreans

²⁰ These *Sulbeongae* are always only in Korean. A German friend of mine who speaks fluent Korean once took me there and joined a *Sulbeongae* together.

have a network of friends to support them and easily find new boyfriends, it is the expats who feel left out, sad, and extremely confused as it is always difficult to find another Korean partner.

Notions of Love

My taste and attitude of life is changing so I'm not into the sexual thing anymore. I wanna meet someone to have a conversation, share vision and life.

Jacob, 38-year-old

The temporality of the interracial relationships concerns many Koreans. Their desire for a stable, long term relationship is deeply informed by the heterosexual monogamous ideals in Korean society. During the colonial era, some educated Koreans in the urban area utilized the expansion of Japanese Civil Code as a means to reform familial traditions such as child marriage and concubinage, concurrently buttressing the conjugal, monogamous ideals of relationship as a sign of advancement (Lim, 2016: 475-476). Despite the fact that homosexual marriage is yet to be legalized in South Korea, local gay men do expect a mutually devoted relationship with a planning for the future. In fact, among my informants, there were two couples who migrated to Germany and Hong Kong and have been having stable relationships. For the couple who got married and resided in Germany, they had been carefully planning for being together. For instance, the German partner applied for working holiday in Korea so as to stay with his boyfriend and learn Korean. The Korean partner later moved to Berlin to work as a translator and learn German. They had been dating in both countries for four years and eventually married each other last summer at the age below thirty.

The Hong Kong couple, on the other hand, did not marry each other. However, they have been cohabiting for sixteen years. The fifty-three years old British consultant, Nick, with his forty-three years old Korean pilot boyfriend, Mike, led a considerably comfortable life in a house in Hong Kong that they purchased eight years ago. Nick held high regard for the interracial relationship.

Maybe because our mother languages are different, we don't need to talk incessantly. We don't really talk much when we are sober, which both of us really feel comfortable with. We did have a discussion on this. But don't be mistaken. We are very close. We tend to pay extra attention

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to the tactile messages of each other. For example, when we meet our British friends for a drink, I tend to notice whether he feels being included in the conversation since he is not a native English speaker and the same goes to me when I drink with his Korean friends.

Nick, 53-year-old

For Nick and Mike, interraciality serves as an enhancement of their relationship. Both of them appreciate the fact that they don't speak very often to each other, which offers larger room of privacy for both. At the same time, they heed the racial and language variances between them and acknowledge the need to take care of these differences. Interraciality performs as a buffer of their relationship, striking a balance between connectedness and privacy. It also encourages them to provide extra care for each other's feelings, which strengthens the bonding.

The Essential Racework

Racework is a term coined by Amy Steinbugler referring to the quotidian actions and tactics employed by individuals to manage close interpersonal relationships across contours of racial stratification (2012). She further adopted the concepts of exclusionary boundary work and inclusionary boundary work, which respectively refer to i. *erecting symbolic boundaries, such as middle-class status and racial pride, to counter stereotypes targeting interracial intimacy,* and ii. *downplaying the differences between interracial relationships and those of same-race.* In the following, I attempt to adopt these tools to illuminate on the ranges of racework undergoing among my informants.

To commence with exclusionary boundary work, middle-class status is most often employed by my informants to counter stereotypes. As a heterosexual Korean male classmate told me, the contemporary Korean society regards class (money) as a source of masculinity. Interracial couples resort to their middle-class or upper middle-class status to summon respect and shore up their social status among their peers.

Secondly, many Korean men dating white guys are still staunch patriots and take pride in Korean culture. The Korean pilot Mike frequently visited Seoul with Nick. Mike was not reserved to show that he is proud to be Korean. “I am proud of our historical and cultural traits. And I am very blessed with a partner who appreciate my culture as well. I think I was kinda anxious about our cultural differences at the very beginning of the relationship. But it just kept getting better,” commented Mike. Mike’s fervent racial pride shields him from the deep-seated stigma of “potato queen”.

As for the inclusionary boundary work, many of Korean informants emphasized that there is not much difference between them and Korean couples. Aware of the stigma of Yangbogal 양보갈, the informants realized many of their Korean gay friends thought they were dating white guys because of their bigger genitals. Nevertheless, they repeatedly expressed that sex is not the reason for them to date white guys. They laid the focus on how the relationships are loving and caring which is no difference to same-race couples, maybe even better in terms of relationship ideals, as stated in Chapter 1.

The abovementioned boundary work allows the interracial couples to maintain the relationships. It should be emphasized that the pressure on the interracial couples mostly come from the local gay community in lieu of the general public. “To be honest, if we walk down the street, it’s not two gay guys but just two friends. But if I was accompanied by a Filipino or Cambodian partner, people would assume that it’s gay, if not sugar daddy/sugar son thing,” said Nick. That Korea is a developed country with a strong economy actually provides a “natural camouflage” for the couples from the judgment of non-normative sexuality. In other words, the interraciality is not an issue for the couples when they are in the public because it is Korean-White. In fact, it may also contribute to clouding their sexuality and providing them disguise as friends. On the other hand, interraciality matters more in the local gay community because of the heavily loaded stigmatization of interracial intimacy. And when the couples visit the gay bar district, their interraciality would be prominent. Thus, the pressure exerted on the interraciality originates more from the local gay circle than the general public.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses how interracial couples manage the racial differences in an attempt to maintain the relationships and counter the stereotypes on interracial intimacy. The intersection of race and class is focused in the discussion of racial stratification in the chapter. While some well-off Caucasians did wield more power especially they are dating young Koreans/Asians, the power arisen from the solidarity of the Korean gay men should not be underestimated. The social support from other gay friends is always in place should the Koreans decide to end their relationship while the white expats are often shown to be taken off guard and isolated, particularly when the relationship is ended without prior notice. The notion of love of Koreans resembles that of the heterosexual monogamous ideals of romance, which influences the dynamics of many temporary interracial relationships. In the end of the chapter, I delve into the racework conducted by the informants. I argue that the pressure to practice racework for the interracial couples is exerted by the local gay community instead of the general public because the gay community highly stigmatizes interracial intimacy.

CONCLUSION

Interracial intimacy in Korean gay community is not as common as it is in neighboring Asian regions because of how local Koreans perceive foreigners. In order to situate Korean gay men's repulsion to foreigners in a larger historical context, the colonial past of Korea must be taken into account. Nationalistic sentiments of grief over losing sovereign integrity diffuse to the local homosexual community, reinforcing the ethnic nationalism in the circle. Nevertheless, it is found that those aspiring for the interracial relationship shared common experiences of ex-Korean partners being over-possessive of themselves. The tendency of being possessive of one's partner in the local gay circle is shaped by the heterosexual monogamous ideals such as ownership of one's body which is deep-seated in Korean society. The repugnance to this kind of possessiveness eventually drives some Koreans to explore relationships with foreigners.

Underneath the interracial relationships lies a conflictual intersection of masculinity and sexuality. While homosexuality still runs counter to the hegemonic masculinity upheld by nationwide military structure and neo-Confucianism in Korea, those gay men who sexually assume the submissive role in the interracial setting often face bigger challenges than other gay men. Being dominated is construed as a means to release the encumbered selfhood, which is

constituted by overwhelming social expectations and responsibilities, by my informants who are young university men with a promising future. However, this sexual desire conflicts their social prestige as a male, which induces moral judgment for oneself. The interraciality deepens this feeling of ambivalence due to it being stigmatized as a pure sexual quest betraying one's nationality. The desire for submissiveness eventually provokes a sense of ambivalence in the Korean gay men.

The discussion of interraciality should involve the consideration of class as racial stratification often manifests in the form of intersection of race and class instead of race alone. For the Caucasians involved in interracial intimacy with Koreans, they are predominantly middle-class and upper middle-class professionals. Their Korean partners show a wider range of backgrounds ranging from undergraduate students and baristas to pilots and consultants. Power differentials among the couples increases with the differences on their socioeconomic status, with Caucasians usually being the dominant. However, one should not underestimate the resistance of the Koreans who have solid social support from their friends when they choose to end the relationships abruptly, often leaving the white expats isolated. The theoretical framework of racework is utilized to analyze the negotiation of racial differences in the interracial relationship. Due to the stigmatization of interracial couples in the gay circle, the pressure to manage their racial differences in public is usually from the gay community in lieu of the public.

Interracial intimacy in the Korean gay community is a field that is often untouched in Asian Queer Studies. This project aims at describing some emic perspectives of the interracial homosexual couples in Korea and hence attracting attention towards the subject. Due to the limited time and resources the author had, many emic perspectives were left out such as those who are not repulsive towards Caucasians as well as submissive Caucasians. Nonetheless, this project to a certain extent narrates the voice of a certain group of Korean gay men who are struggling to negotiate their Koreaness as well as gayness. It is hoped that more discussion on this matter can take place in the future.

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