

**NARRATIVE CASE STUDY:
UNHEARD LIFE STORY OF A SENIOR GAY KOREAN MAN**

by

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Abstract

Research exploring the experiences of senior gay Asian men who grew up in Asian culture has not been conducted yet even though they are supposed to have unique needs and challenges different from those in Western culture. The present study examines how one older gay Korean man constructed his life through Korea's historical events and rapid social and cultural changes. In order to understand the unheard life story, in-depth interviews with one senior gay Korean man living in Seoul, South Korea were conducted and the narrative was interpreted and analyzed by a holistic-content approach.

The findings of this study reflect on the man's unique way, acquired through his life experiences, of balancing a homosexual life and a heterosexual life, especially between his personal desire and family responsibility. In the two disparate worlds, the gentleman pursued true love and adapted himself to changing of patriarchal values as well as aging instead of insisting on the time-honoured cultural heritage. The senior man faced challenges and changes in his later life with a positive attitude and wisdom he acquired through experiences in his early life.

The findings derived from this study reinforce the social constructionist perspective that sexual identity is fluid, and prove that the notion of binary opposition from the white model is not well applicable to the notion of fluidity of sexuality in Asian culture. The understanding from this study suggests developing online services guaranteeing

confidentiality for senior gay Korean men and approaching the minority group's challenges on family level rather than individual level. These suggestions can be applied to senior gay men who grew up under Confucianism and patriarchy.

Preface

All procedures of this research was carried out with adherence to the guidelines and ethical grounds for research involving human subjects presented by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Approval was granted under the certificate number H06-03965 by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

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**“No one can do everything, but everyone can do something
and
if everyone can do something then we can change the world”**

Gerhard Zeiler

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In recent decades, researchers and professionals have become more interested in understanding the sexual life of seniors. Particularly in Western culture, it is recognized that people have sexual needs in their later life and can enjoy sex as long as their physical condition allows. Studies have found that the level of sexual satisfaction has strong influence on seniors' life satisfaction (Gott & Hinchliff, 2003).

In Asian culture, on the other hand, seniors are still expected to be dignified, rise above sexual needs and to abstain from sex (Oh, 2002; Yoo, 2007). One Korean film about the love affair of an elderly couple who are in their 70's was banned because it contained a sex scene with the couple which the Korea Media Rating Board ruled might corrupt public morals (Lee, 2002). Thus, although Korean society is beginning to understand that it is normal to retain sexual interest and engage in sexual activity in later years because of the influence of Western culture which is sexually more open, prejudice against, and misconceptions about, sexuality in late adulthood still prevails.

One of the misconceptions about seniors' sexuality in Korea is related to sexual diversity. Research about Korean seniors' sexuality is limited to the study of heterosexuality. Thus, although some studies assert that sound and appropriate sexual activities are important to

heterosexual seniors' mental health and quality of life, they never mention sexual minorities such as gay males, lesbians, bisexuals or transgendered individuals. While Korean society - under the influence of modern mass media including easy access to foreign cultures through the Internet - is rapidly changing in terms of cultural and sexual diversity, non-heterosexual Korean seniors are still an invisible minority and their existence is ignored.

It is not surprising that homosexuality, irrespective of age, has been ignored in both popular and academic discourses in South Korea. Even though a few studies have been conducted about same-sex sexuality in South Korea (Baek, 2004; Kim & Kwon, 2004; Kong et al., 2002; Kwon & Kim, 1999; Jung, 2001; Seo, 2001; Yeu, 2004), they have mainly dealt with the topic from a religious, medical or moral standpoint rather than aiming to explain and understand gay people's experiences (Kim & Kwon, 2004; Kong et al., 2002; Kwon & Kim, 1999). Furthermore, samples were drawn from youth or adults under sixty (Baek, 2004; Kim & Kwon, 2004; Kong et al, 2002).

Although no census data of the gay population in South Korea exists yet, Kwon and Kim (1999) estimated that "*tongsôngaeja*", which means gay in Korean, are about 100,000 or about 0.2% of the total population of South Korea. Since about 10% of the total South Korea population is over the age of 65 (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2005), this means that about 10,000 Korean seniors are probably non-heterosexual. Since the elderly population in South Korea is rapidly increasing, it is expected that South Korea will become an aged society in 2018, in which the number of people aged 65 or older

exceeds 14 percent of the total population (Chun, 2009). The number of elderly gays and lesbians will thus also increase. So far, however, no research has been conducted on elderly Korean gays.

Much research into gay seniors has been carried out in North America and Europe. Looking into the lives of older gay people in Western societies, studies have illuminated the advantages and disadvantages of growing old as gay and lesbian people (Berger, 1982, 1996; Berger & Kelly, 2001; Brotman, Ryan, & Cormier, 2003; Butler, 2004; D'Augelli, Grossman & O'Connell, 2001; Heaphy, Yip, & Thompson, 2004; Herdt & Vries, 2004; Köth, 2001; McDougall, 1993; Pugh, 2002, 2005). While older gay people face challenges of discrimination (Berger & Kelly, 2001; Herdt & Vries, 2004; Köth, 2001; McDougall, 1993; Pugh, 2002), lack of suitable medical or social services (Berger, 1982; Butler, 2004, Pugh, 2005), legal problems for same-sex couples (Berger, 1982; Berger & Kelly, 2001; Butler, 2004), and deficiency of family support (Brotman, Ryan, & Cormier, 2003; Heaphy, Yip, & Thompson, 2004; Köth, 2001; Pugh, 2002), these are in addition to the physical, emotional, social and financial challenges heterosexual people experience in their later years. Some research suggests that older gay men learn to overcome such difficulties with the coping skills obtained through the acceptance of their sexual identity, flexibility of gender roles and a well-developed social network of choice (Butler, 2004; Friend, 1980; Wahler & Gabbay, 1997).

To some degree the findings may be similar to those faced by elderly Korean gay men. However, it is also possible that these individuals may have different interpretations and

meanings as a result of their different culture, historical events and social system than gay seniors in the other countries. These men have grown up in a conservative and patriarchal society based on Confucianism, lived through the Korean War, attended compulsory military service, and experienced radical social changes with the spread of the Internet, and so might be expected to have unique experiences and challenges.

It is not difficult to presume that the minority group is in jeopardy of discrimination in favour of the majority on the basis of sexual orientation and age. However, any social work services for the safe and satisfied later life of the minority seniors have not yet developed in South Korea. Understanding the lives of a sexual minority of Korean seniors and assessing their needs will be the first step to help them address ageism as well as homonegativity and enjoy healthy and satisfying lives. However, information on older Korean gays is still a missing part of the picture of the social welfare for seniors in South Korea. It is meaningful and necessary to study the lived experiences of elder Korean gay men so as to make up the missing area. The findings from this research should help Korean social workers, service providers and policy makers in the area of gerontology become more aware of the minority, and sensitive to develop proper services meeting their needs. This study provides insight into the lives of elderly gay men who grew up in a non-western culture to those in Canadian multicultural societies as well as other northeastern Asian countries which have similar cultural background to South Korea.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of senior gay Korean men regarding their sexual identity and aging, and to examine how South Korea's historical events, social system and culture may have influenced their lives as gay men. As Friend (1991) asserted in his theory of older lesbian and gay people's successful aging, each gay man creates individual meaning out of messages about homosexuality within the context of social norms. While some gay men internalize negative images of homosexuality, many of them develop skills for managing their lives which facilitate their adjustment to the aging process. Older gay Korean men would be expected to have established their own ways in which they have lived as non-heterosexual in South Korea and to have made efforts to have their later lives meaningful.

The specific research question addressed was:

How has a senior gay Korean man constructed his life in Korea's historical, social and cultural contexts?

This research focuses only on men's experiences in South Korea. Wahler and Gabbay (1997) indicated that "joining lesbians and gay men under one umbrella of research on homosexuality has the effect of diluting our understanding of each and trivializing the experience of both". Moreover, there are unique aspects related to gender in Korean culture. Specifically, Korean gay men's lives would be more influenced by their culture built on Confucianism (Sohng & Icard, 1996) and by compulsory military service which is an exclusively male environment that could provide an opportunity to realize their

sexual preference or encounter the first same-sex relationship (Kwon & Kim, 1999). Practically speaking, elder gay men may be more easily accessed than elder lesbians through the Internet or gay communities because of the male dominant culture in South Korea.

The following chapter will provide a literature review on factors which influence older gay men's sexual identity and aging, and how they respond to them. Chapter three will deal with the research method employed for this research. In chapter four, one older gay Korean man's life story will be described and then it will be interpreted to find and identify themes in chapter five. Lastly, recommendations for social work practice in relation to the findings and suggestions for future research are presented in the last chapter.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In the absence of studies of older gay men and the paucity of research on gay men in Asian countries including South Korea (Baek, 2004; Jang, 2001; Kim & Kwon, 2004; Kimmel & Yi, 2004; Kong et al., 2002; Kwon & Kim, 1999; Poon, 2004; Seo, 2001), it may be necessary for a better understanding about the older Korean gay man's experiences to refer to studies conducted in Western societies. As gay communities in North American or European countries have been established longer than in Asian countries, those communities may already have encountered similar issues to those being currently faced in South Korea.

To provide basic knowledge of the older gay man's life and the culture in which Korean gay men have grown old, this chapter will give an overview of homosexual identity formation and Korean socio-cultural characteristics relevant to homosexuality such as familism, gender segregation rooted in Confucianism, obligatory military service and Korean gay culture in general. At the end of the chapter, advantages and disadvantage of growing old as gay men will be discussed.

2.1 Gay Identity Formation

According to American Psychological Association (2010), sexual orientation refers to “an enduring pattern of attraction, behavior, emotion, identity, and social contacts” but it

is not necessary that sexual behaviour always accords with sexual orientation. Some people engage in sexual behaviour with partners of their own sex, but do not identify themselves as gay or lesbian or bisexual. In the same manner, even though some men and women engage in sexual behaviour with the other sex partner, they do not think themselves to be heterosexual (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Homosexual orientation is defined as a person's "erotic attraction to, and interest in forming romantic relationships with, members of one's own gender" (Rathus, Nevid, Fichner-Rathus, Herold, & McKenzie, 2007). However, the term homosexuality still continues to be associated with negative stereotype and mental illness, hence, talking about lesbian and gay men is generally preferred to the term homosexual. There are differences, however, in meaning. Specifically, while the terms heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual imply both identity and behaviour, the terms lesbian or gay refer to only identities (American Psychological Association, 2010). This identity is one of the most important aspects of self-concepts for gay men because it determines how they behave and interact with others. As gay identity is considered to develop by degrees, arising out of the complex interplay between internal drives and needs, and interpersonal socio-systemic interaction and feedback, it is important to examine how an individual viewed these factors and how she/he personally experiences them (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Wahler & Gabbay, 1997).

Several investigators have developed various models of homosexual identity formation. These suggest a number of different stages through which a gay person comes to define

himself as gay and adopts homosexuality as a way of life (Alderson, 2003; Cass, 1990; Coleman, 1982; Plummer, 1975; Ponce, 1978; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000; Sophie, 1985/6; Troiden, 1998). Even though the models have similar patterns of progress, the rate of progression through the stages is different for different individuals. Generally, the process begins when people become aware that they are somewhat different from their same-sex age mates, and is completed when they develop a full sense of self as homosexual and integrate this with all of their other aspects (Cass, 1990). However, the process of homosexual identity formation is not linear or step-by-step. Instead, it is a back-and-forth and up-and-down process and each stage can overlap and recur in different ways for different people (Troiden, 1998).

Troiden (1998) developed an ideal-typical model of homosexual identity formation that consists of four stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption and commitment. Troiden synthesized and elaborated on several investigators' theoretical models to explain the formation of homosexual identity. These include the works of writers such as Plummer (1975), Ponce (1978) and Cass (1979, 1984), who developed early stage models, as well as his own earlier work (Troiden, 1977, 1979, 1993), to describe how people identify with and admit to being homosexual.

In this model, the first stage, sensitization, occurs before puberty and is characterized by generalized feeling of being different from same-sex peers. Social experiences in childhood sensitize future gay men to subsequent self-definition as homosexual. In this stage, gay males feel odd and have perceptions of being different from same-sex peers.

They recognize an interest in other boys or males and femininity in themselves, but do not recognize these as relevant to gay identity. When eventually adopting gay identity, gay men reinterpret the childhood events as indication of homosexual potential.

The second stage, identity confusion, begins with gay males' reflection on the idea that their feelings or behaviors could be regarded as homosexual. This reflection typically happens during adolescence. At this time gay men begin to question their heterosexual identity as they begin to develop perceptions of themselves as homosexual. Even though several factors such as altered perception of self, the experience of heterosexual and homosexual arousal and behavior, ignorance, and inaccurate knowledge about homosexuals and homosexuality can influence this identity confusion, the stigma related to homosexuality strongly contributes to inner turmoil because it discourages adolescent males from discussing their sexual confusion with peer groups or families. The stigma causes problems for young gay men with guilt, secrecy and difficulty meeting other gay men (Plummer, 1975).

To deal with the identity confusion, gay men adopt one or more strategies such as denial, repair, avoidance, redefinition, and acceptance. Gay males using denial disclaim the homosexual component while those employing repair attempt to eradicate homosexual feelings and behaviors. By avoidance, young gay males may inhibit their behaviors or interests associated with being homosexual, limit their same-sex experience and exposure to information about homosexuality, take an anti-homosexual posture with immersion in heterosexual activities, or take escape by using chemical substances. Redefinition

includes a “special-case strategy” in which homosexual experience is seen as an isolated case, bisexual or temporary-identity or a “situational strategy” by which gay men put the responsibility for homosexual activity or feelings on the situation or other people rather than on themselves. With acceptance, gay males acknowledge that their behavior, feelings or fantasies may be homosexual.

Defining the self as homosexual and presenting the self to other homosexuals occurs in the third stage of homosexual identity formation and is termed identity assumption. It typically occurs during or after late adolescence. Gay males arrive at homosexual self-definition through social contacts with other homosexuals. Cass (1979) emphasized that the quality of a person’s initial contacts with homosexuals is extremely important. If initial contacts are negative, gay men resist accepting themselves as homosexual through the strategies of denial, repair, being bisexual or temporary identity redefinition mentioned earlier. If the experience is positive on the other hand, it will provide gay males with a basis for re-examining and re-evaluating their own ideas about homosexuality and facilitate homosexual identity formation.

Gay males are faced with social stigma attached to homosexuality and its management once they adopt homosexual identity. To avoid the stigma, gay males utilize several strategies depending on the level of homosexual definition they are at. These include capitulation, minstrelization (Levine, 1987, cited in Troiden, 1988), passing, or group alignment (Humphreys, 1972, cited in Troiden, 1988). Gay men who capitulate abstain from homosexual activities to avoid being stigmatized, but it may cause them self-hatred

and despair. In minstrelization, gay men express their homosexuality by highly stereotyped, gender-inappropriate fashions. While capitulation is used by gay men who have internalized a stigmatizing view of homosexuality, passing is utilized by those who accept themselves as homosexual but hide their sexual preferences and behaviors from heterosexuals (Berger, 1982). Although passing is the most common type of stigma-evasion strategy, it can cost the person low self-esteem, powerlessness, sense of guilt over being different, isolation, fear of detection, and high level of anxiety about homosexual relationship, possible mental illness, loss of support from family and discrimination against sexual minorities (Schope, 2004; McDougall, 1993; Berger, 1982). By group alignment, gay men actively involve themselves in the gay community through which they get social and emotional support. By the end of the identity assumption stage, gay men begin to accept themselves as homosexual.

The last stage of homosexual identity formation is a commitment by which gay men adopt homosexuality as a way of life and feel comfortable with the homosexual identity and role. Internally, gay men consider homosexual identity as a valid and essential identity, and are satisfied with their self-definition as homosexual. Externally, gay males enter same-sex love relationships and disclose their homosexual identity to heterosexual audiences ranging from friends, family and/or co-workers.

Coming out happens through the third and the last stage. “Coming out” or “coming out of the closet” is a term used to describe the process in which gay men or lesbians identify and accept their sexual orientation (Brotman, Ryan & Cormier, 2003; Rathus et al., 2007).

Coming out has two types of prolonged process: coming out to oneself and coming out to others. The former may occur when gay men or lesbians recognize and accept their gay sexual orientation as a gradual process or as a sudden awakening. The latter is declaring one's orientation to the world. While some individuals inform any people related to them, others may tell only one or a few select people but not their family members. Rathus et al. (2007) stated that "coming out can create a sense of pride in one's orientation and foster the ability to form emotionally and sexually satisfying relationships with gay male or lesbian partners" (p 251). On the other hand, disclosing one's sexual identity to others likely increases the chance of becoming the victim of prejudice, discrimination or violence (Wills & Crawford, 2000)

As stigma management strategies, gay men in the commitment stage employ blending or converting. Gay men who blend behave in a gender-appropriate manner and neither reveal nor deny their homosexual identity to others, while those who convert do so by confronting homosexual stigma through informing the public about the realities of the gay community and contributing to social changes. Commitment to a homosexual identity is a matter of degree which may vary across time and place.

While these stage development models have some appeal, they are also criticized because the models such as Plummer's (1975), Cass's (1979, 1984) and Troiden's (1993, 1998) stage models are based on white gay men and over-generalized to other minority gays from diverse classes, ethnics or religions (Dworkin, 2000). Cox and Gallois (1996) suggested that this is a problem because these developmental models do not sufficiently

consider social factors in explaining gay identity acquisition. They advanced a non-stage model of gay identity formation called “social identity theory”, which considers the “social influences in the development of self-concept and the derivation of positive self-esteem contingent upon it” (p. 10). The social identity theory is composed of two underlying processes: “self-categorization, from which we develop a number of social identities, and the process of social comparison, which aims at the enhancement of self-esteem” (p. 10). According to the theory, once gay men and lesbians socially self-categorizes as homosexual, they are motivated to compare favourably to others and perceive the homosexual group in a positive way.

Along these same lines, Alderson (2003) has proposed an ecological model of gay male identity that incorporates social and environmental influences as well as psychological influences that lead to a gay self-definition. He emphasized that environmental factors such as parents and family, culture and church, peers, and society affect individuals’ identity achievement. In his study about Chinese-American gay men and lesbians, Chan (1995) suggested that cultural background plays a major role in determining how a gay man integrates sexuality into his sense of identity. Irvine (1995) indicated that culture shapes and constructs sexuality on the level of what we believe to be sexual, what we know as the rules for being sexual such as when, with whom and how, and even what we feel as sexual. Therefore, in the situation of older Korean gay men, understanding Korean society and culture in which these men grew up is prerequisite for grasping how they formed their gay identity and found their unique way to connect with both the gay and straight worlds.

2.2 Korean Society and Its Culture

The Korean social system is based on the family combined with the kinship (Mente, 1998). In a family system, the family is the basic and most important element of the society and has a strong influence over personal priorities and preferences. The position of each family member is arranged in a hierarchical order with the father as the paramount authority (Choi, 2002). With the emphasis on duty and obligation to parents, the utmost priority is given to filial piety for which children should show their parents respect and return unlimited devotion for the care they received from their parents. Men, especially the first sons, are charged with the obligation of carrying on the family line by marriage (Mente, 1998). Marriage is a union of families rather than individuals in Korea and personal preference or love is often subordinated to family interests. If Korean men remain single after a certain age, their kin members will push them to get married or think they have physical or mental problems. Many Korean gay men decide to get married to avoid suspicion of being homosexual or to meet the expectation of their family. In Pikulthong's research (2002), Korean gay men who participated in the survey responded that the marriage issue was the most difficult part of living as homosexual in South Korea. Korean family norms prevent gay men from developing a self-identified homosexual lifestyle of being independent of marriage by emphasis on duty, obligation and family over personal priority and desire (Sohng & Icard, 1996).

If Western culture is described as the "guilt culture", Eastern culture can be termed the "shame culture" (Choi & Choi, 1994). In familism, because each family member is viewed not as an individual but as a representative of her/his family, individualistic

thinking and actions are unacceptable. If a child fails to display filial piety or misconducts herself/himself, it can cause other family members to feel loss of face which has serious negative impact on the individual's entire family and community as well as on the individual (Kimmel & Yi, 2004). As Korean society still has a conservative attitude toward sexuality and considers homosexuality to be obscene and immoral, men who recognize that they have strong erotic attraction to persons of the same-sex are worried that this can make their family lose face (Pikulthong, 2002). Consequently, gay men may decide to live a heterosexual life style for the sake of their family and kin (Yeu, 2004).

One of the areas on which Confucianism influenced Korean society is patriarchy which is the most powerful value system in the Korean society (Kim & Davis, 2003). In a Korean traditional family, a father is assumed to have personal responsibility for his family (Shin & Kim, 1994). As it is accepted in the Korean culture that the father exercises absolute authority over his family members, they should obey him without question in all things (De Mente, 1998). However, the father is required to make efforts to preserve harmony among his family members and family solidarity (Lee, 2003). If a family member disobeys the order of her/his father or is considered to disturb their harmony, the father can inflict punishment or even dismiss the member from home.

To understand homosexuality in contemporary Korea, it is necessary to comprehend how Confucianism has provided Korean people with ethical and moral norms and is still the main influence on Korean thought/psychology. One of the features of Confucianism

relevant for understanding older Korean gay men is gender segregation (Abelmann, 1997; Sohng & Icard, 1996). As males are considered to be more valuable than females in Confucian culture, Korean men and women were segregated from a young age, and socialized primarily with their same-sex peers. This creates a male/male bonded society and social interaction continues to take place in largely same-sex, gender-segregated groups. In their research about Korean gay men living in U.S., Sohng and Icard (1996) discovered that same sex friendship is more developed and cultivated in Korean culture than it is in Western society, and it is considered as a natural and deep interpersonal relationship (Sohng & Icard, 1996). Hugging or holding hands between two same sex friends in public can be presumed to be a kind of friendship and rarely suspected to be a homosexual relationship. Even after getting married, Korean gay men can keep or have same-sex relationships under the disguise of friendship.

Obligatory military service may provide a particularly important opportunity to realize same-sex sexual preference or have same-sex sexual relationships. Many Korean gay men, even heterosexual men, reported that they experienced sexual relationships with another man in the army (Kwon & Kim, 1999). In an atmosphere requiring men to live, sleep, and take baths together for about two years, it might be reasonable for Korean gay men to direct their affections toward other soldiers. No matter how serious the relationships were or whether they were considered gay men, such experiences might make Korean gay men perceive that they were somehow different from other men. They could realize or confirm their interest in same-sex relationships, or conversely, might assist them in trying to change their inclination from the same sex to the opposite sex by

training in the masculine culture.

Homosexuality has been a taboo issue in Korea even until a decade ago and has not had any social recognition (Sohng & Icard, 1996). Some suggest that homosexuals are not seen as representing a group that could exercise the power to effect social changes and have been totally ignored in Korean society (Seo, 2001). According to Seo, Korea's present gay subculture began in 1980's. At that time gays referred to themselves as *pogal* which is "the backward reading of the word *Kalbo*, the most vulgar term for a prostitute in Korea" (Seo, 2001, p. 69). *Pogal*, however, was used by Korean gays when they depreciated themselves rather than resisted heteronormativity of the main culture.

Following the term *pogal*, the term *iban* was used to indicate gay men. *Iban* "corresponds to the word *ilban*, which means universal or dominant and is used to refer to heterosexuals (Seo, 2001, p. 69). The homophonous word *ilban* can also be used to mean "first class," *Iban* can likewise be used to mean "second class" in relationship to the dominant first class, heterosexuals (Seo, 2001, p. 69). Although the English words "homo" or "gay" have been also used to refer to homosexuals, "homo" is often used by heterosexuals as a term of insult. The most common term for homosexuals in Korea is now *tongsôngyônaeja* which means "same sex lover" and indicates a tendency to see homosexuality in term of various erotic desires (Seo, 2001).

With access to the Internet, the Korean gay community has had an explosive expansion and growth in the past few decades. The recent blossoming of online gay culture may have an enormous effect on the growth of Korean gay community because it is still

underground and places for gay men are very limited and secret (Seo, 2001). The Internet allows Korean gay men to access a larger gay community and to explore that culture and share their experiences or opinions in the anonymous cyber space (Shernoff, 2008; Pikulthong, 2002). Currently, more than 95% of households in South Korea are connected to high-speed Internet (Yoo, 2008). About 20% of Korean seniors over sixty use the Internet (Korean Agency for Digital Opportunity & Promotion, 2009), while 28% of Canadian seniors over sixty five can utilize it (Statistics Canada, 2006). Although the senior internet users are currently not a large portion of the population, considering the percentage of Internet users in fifties in Korea and Canada (48.9% and about 45% respectively), it is expected that senior Internet users will increase. By way of the Internet, therefore, Korean gay men can realize the existence of the gay community, learn about gay culture and make relationships with other gay men with less worry about exposure to the public. The Internet is an alternate and anonymous way to connect with a gay community and fulfill the need for Korean gay men to meet other men.

2.3 Heterosexism/Homophobia and Ageism/Gerontophobia

Growing older as gay men in a heterosexual dominant environment, older gay seniors might have to experience varying forms of heterosexism and homophobia. Heterosexism is defined as “the ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationships, or community” (Herek, 1995). Homophobia is referred to as “any belief system which supports negative myths and stereotypes about homosexual people. The belief system includes justification of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the use of language or slang which is

offensive to gay people, and any system which does not value homosexual lifestyles equally with heterosexual lifestyles” (Morin and Garfinkle, 1978). Although heterosexism is often used as a synonym for homophobia, the former describes a cultural ideology manifested in society’s institutions while the latter is referred to individual attitudes and actions deriving from the ideology (Herek, 2004).

The negative impact of heterosexism and homophobia has influence on the physical and mental health of sexual minorities throughout their life span (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Meyer, 2001). The various forms of psychological distress associated with discrimination against LGBT include social isolation/loneliness, low self-esteem, demoralization, guilt and suicide (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne & Martin, 2001; Meyer, 1995). In many countries which do not legally recognize same-sex marriage, LGBT continue to experience barriers to healthy aging in the form of discriminatory policies related to social security, pension plan, supportive housing, health care and long-term care as well as religious structures (Cahill & South, 2002). Brotman, Ryan and Cormier (2003) stated that homophobia and heterosexism are even more common in elder care systems than within the health care system generally, therefore many gay and lesbian seniors avoid accessing the services in the system due to fear of being victimized or discriminated against. They suggest that old gay seniors often keep their sexual orientation hidden as a strategy of survival because of the fear (Brotman et al., 2003).

Although homophobia is more common among heterosexuals, gay people can also be homophobic (Rathus et al., 2007). Since heterosexuals usually hold strong beliefs

regarding the gender roles, gay and lesbian individuals may internalize society's rejection of the homosexual. A type of self-hatred is often presented by gay people because they know that they are different from heterosexuals at an early age (McDougall, 1993). According to Kaufman and Raphael (1996), many "preliberation gay and lesbian elders", who were born and raised prior to the era of gay liberation, internalized the discriminatory attitudes because of very hostile environments prior to development of gay liberation movement. Empirical studies have found higher rates of depression, stress, addictions and suicide for those LGBT elders who never challenged internalized, extremely negative heterosexist beliefs (Bradford, Ryan & Rothblum, 1994; Brotman et al., 2003; Gillow & Davis, 1987). This internalized self-hatred can develop into self-destructive behaviours (McDougall, 1993).

As gay men get older, they have to confront ageism as well as heterosexism. Ageism is defined as "an alteration in feeling, belief or behaviour in response to an individual's or group's perceived chronological age (Levy and Banaji, 2002, p. 50). In other words, ageism is discrimination based on age which impacts on institutional and personal actions toward old people. Ageism also generates 'gerontophobia' which is "the irrational fear of aging and the elderly" (Friend, 1991, p. 111). Ageism crosses diverse subgroups such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion (Neussel, 1982). Older gay men face many myths and stereotypes related to ageism which includes "loneliness, isolation, sexlessness, poor psychological adjustment and functioning, fearful anxiousness, sadness and depression, and sexual predation on the gay young men who reject their company and exclude them from a gay culture" (Wahler & Gabbay, 1997, p.

8). Berger and Kelly (2001), however, found that the myths and stereotypes about old gay men were not true and arisen from lack of understanding. Specifically, they found that many old gay men reported that they experienced age discrimination much more frequently than sexual orientation discrimination because they did not open their sexual identity yet. Although the gay men hid that they were gay to avoid harassment by heterosexism, they could not avert the age-related discrimination.

Many researchers have maintained that older gay men are more able to cope with life crisis and develop crisis competence (Berger, 1982; Friend, 1980; Kooden, 1997; Pope & Schulz, 1991). Brotman et al. (2003) reported that developing resilience through facing the discrimination has helped many gay and lesbian seniors become expert in dealing with adversity, adjusting to changes in later life, and learning how to take care of themselves. Berger and Kelly (2001) explained how the challenges and hardships that gay people experienced could make it easier for them to adjust to aging process by the following metaphor:

Traditionally, doctors advise allergic people to avoid all allergens. But recent medical evidence indicated that allergens – that is, challenges to our immune system – are a necessary part of our biology; they serve to “tweak” our immune systems, keeping them in optimal condition. Unchallenged and unused, our immune systems, like our muscles, will atrophy. Thus, what seemed at first to be a disadvantage is in fact an advantage (p. 63).

Considering the ‘allergens’ as the challenges the gay people face and overcome during

their lifetime such as low self-esteem, discrimination, and oppression, they could make the sexual minority strengthen rather than weaken (Berger & Kelly, 2001).

The experiences gay men face in their later lives will be interpreted as having different meanings according to individuals and their cultures. However, Wahler & Gabbay (1997) reported that recent research of older gay men had mostly studied about white, middle/upper class, well educated, urban dwelling men who participate in the gay community. Therefore, it is problematic to apply knowledge about gay people based on the research to those who have different social backgrounds and culture. For example, Koreans might be more influenced by their parents or relatives when they make important decisions in their early adulthood such as career, marriage or living area compared to Canadians because, generally speaking, Koreans stay longer with their parents in the original family and are more dependent on them than Canadians (Yoon, 1994). For this reason, when studying Korean gay people, it might be more important to understand their lives by examining it within the context of their family-centred culture.

It is meaningful for better understanding of sexual minorities in diverse societies and cultures to explore the experiences they have had. However, research on LGBT's experiences in Asian socio-cultural context has rarely been conducted and even the studies that have been done are generally are limited to young or middle-aged generations, or those who live in Western society. There is still a lack of research that has studied Asian gay seniors who grew up and still live in Asian countries. Therefore, this study explores experiences of an older gay Korean man regarding the formation of his

sexual identity and his aging experience through Korea's culture, historical events and social changes. To achieve this purpose, I employed the narrative case study method which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 What Is Narrative Case Study?

Narrative research is about understanding the text and stories people use to shape their lives and conceptualize the way in which they develop a structure of meaning and beliefs (O'Connor, Phinney & Hulko, 2010). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) defined narrative research as

any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview of a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality (p. 2-3).

Narrative inquiry allows research participants to provide accounts of their lives and experiences which can provide evidence about the everyday lives of respondents and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Elliott, 2005). The main method of narrative research is gathering stories from interviewees as data and reading, analyzing, and interpreting them to explore the world the story tellers have constructed through their own interpretation on their past actions. Not only the voice of the narrator and the theoretical framework, but also researcher's self-awareness of decision process of

drawing conclusions is the main component of narrative research (Lieblich et al., 1998). Lieblich et al. (1998) pointed out that “the listener or reader of a life story enters an interactive process with the narrative and becomes sensitive to its narrator’s voice and meanings” (p. 10).

The case study is, a complimentary approach to narrative research, is the in-depth study of a specific case which may be an individual, a group, or an entire community. Stake (1995) referred the case study as

The study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (p. xi)... Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case (p.4).

A common goal is to reconstruct and analyze a case that has previously been inaccessible, or in rare or unique circumstance from a sociological perspective to explore complex social phenomena still under question or to better understand an object that has not yet fully comprehended (Hamel, 1993). The benefit of the case study method lies in its ability to open the way for discoveries (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1999).

Narrative case study is one of many forms of case studies. Narrative case study can be defined as the intensive examination of a single unit based on stories told for the purpose of understanding and learning, and used to explain the data (Nora, 2008; Gilgun, 1994).

Brandell and Varkas (2001) stated that:

The narrative case study permits the researcher to “capture” exceedingly complex case situations, allowing for a considerable degree of detail and richness of understanding (p.298).

As a study of meaning making, the narrative case study provides introductory information that might otherwise be hardly accessible (Brandell & Varkas, 2004). It is worth conducting as the descriptive information can reveal new understanding of human nature and it stimulates much further research (Yin, 2003b).

3.2 Why Is the Narrative Study Appropriate?

There are two reasons that the narrative case study approach is particularly relevant for studying an older gay Korean man’s life in the light of his sexual identity and aging: academic reasons and practical reasons. Academically, narrative research focuses on the flow of life events and their meaning. Therefore, it helps to look into participants’ lives, cultures and social worlds (Lieblich et al., 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). By studying and interpreting self-narratives, the researcher can access not only the individual identity and its systems of meaning but also the story teller’s culture and social world. Verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality are also used to represent the character or lifestyle of specific subgroups in society which frequently are discriminated-against minorities whose narratives express their unheard voices. In their case study using narrative and discourse analyses, O’Connor et al. (2010) mentioned that “the personal story reflects the beliefs, ideas and messages to which one has been exposed as one has interacted with one’s

familial, political, social, economic, spiritual and cultural milieus... The analysis of the texts of personal narratives makes visible not only the individual's experience but also helps to contextualize that experience within a broader socio-cultural context" (p.32).

Similarly, Lieblich et al. (1998) suggested that:

People create stories out of the building blocks of their life histories and culture, and at the same time, these stories construct their lives, provide them with meanings and goals, and tie them to their culture (p. 168).

The aim of the present study was to understand the life of an older Korean gay man living as a sexual minority in a conservative culture. This is a hard-to-reach, marginalized population about whose experiences we know very little. Through the data collected as a story that has never been asked for nor listened to, we can gain some understanding of how one individual struggled with and adjusted to his sexual identity, and accepted it as a part of himself. This man's unique story, which is not only his narrative but also his own interpretation of his experiences and their meaning beyond it, can tell us how he shaped his life within a particular socio-cultural context that has clear ideas about the meaning of being gay. It helps examine how one individual's personal life has been influenced by historical events, social changes and culture.

For practical reasons, this research is presented a unique and rarely accessible case which has never been studied before. The single-case design is justifiable when the case represents an unusual or rare case, or a representative or typical case, or when the case

serves a revelatory purpose (Yin, 2003). Talking about sexuality in South Korea, especially about gay sexuality, is still sensitive and risky. It could result in exposure, a kind of “coming out,” for participants that might get them into trouble with their family, career and reputation they have built up over sixty years. Therefore, their greatest concern is the issue of confidentiality and this makes those with this experience hesitate to participate in research. Further complicating this is the concern that many Korean researchers and professionals themselves feel uncomfortable asking questions about sexuality, especially to seniors, because it is considered impolite or inappropriate to talk with them about the issue (Lee, 1995).

3.3 Recruitment

I posted an advertisement for this study on websites for Korean gay men and emailed an invitation letter to the members of one of the websites who are over sixty. I got responses from four Korean older gay men who were interested in my study. The first man was willing to talk about his life as a gay person but refused to have the interviews recorded. The second respondent requested to meet at a secret place. When the gay man asked me to meet in a gay theatre, I needed to consider his intention. I declined it as this would violate the interview rules by which interviews should be conducted in safe places. The third man I talked with on the phone showed his interest in my research, but refused to meet in person. He suggested having interviews by e-mail, but because of a question about the interviewee’s credibility, I decided against this. Only the last man agreed to have recorded, in-person interviews. He suggested to me that he would try to find potential participants by chatting with other gay seniors in the Internet but no further

potential participants were identified through this. So, practically speaking, I had only one participant who was willing to share his story. However, he provided me with a special chance of listening to a rare and unrevealed story and understanding a minority still living in secrecy.

3.4 How Was This Narrative Case Study Conducted?

I met the research participant four times over one year: One informal meeting and three interviews. As he wanted to check my reliability before deciding to participate in this study, we met at a coffee shop for the first time. During the meeting, I introduced myself and explained the purpose and procedures of the study. He briefly talked about himself and why he became interested in participating in this study. Since it was not a formal interview and I did not have his consent yet, I did not audio-tape this interview. This informal meeting resulted in the participant agreeing to participate in the study, so the next step was to schedule the first formal interview.

The first interview was held at my house as the interviewee thought it was the best place for privacy. Before the interview, I assured confidentiality and asked the participant to sign a consent form. The interview continued almost two hours in which I broadly asked about his personal history based on an interview guide (see Appendix B). The interview guide is focused on two major experiences in the informant's life: Experience with being gay and growing old. Instead of using structured questions, I just followed the informant's story within the guideline because "interviewees are likely spontaneously to provide narratives in the context of interviews about their experiences, unless the

structure of the interview itself or the questioning style of the interviewer suppresses such stories” (Elliott, 2005, pp. 28-29). Before the second interview, I e-mailed the interviewee a transcript of the first interview and asked for feedback on it. He requested to remove some parts mentioned about his wife from the transcript.

In the second interview, also held at my home and lasting two hours, I asked about missing parts in the first interview such as life in the army and changes that happened to him after learning about the Internet. I also clarified what was obscure for me at the first interview. While the first interview focused primarily on the past, the second focused more on the present and future.

The last interview as follow-up was held one year after the second interview. I was curious as to what changes had happened in the informant’s life after our meetings. It was at the interviewee’s house upon his agreement and lasted one hour through which he talked about how he had continued to make efforts to enrich his life and his new relationship with a man.

All five hours of the three interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. After each interview, field notes were made to make up what audio-tapes could not catch such as the informant’s facial expression, gestures and general attitude as well as our conversation after the tape recorder was turned off. The field notes including the memo about the informal meeting were useful reminders of the interview scene, especially when the data were reanalyzed after long time.

3.5 Data Analysis

Lieblich et al. (1998) suggested four approaches for analyzing and interpreting narrative or life stories research: Holistic-content perspective, holistic analysis of form, categorical-content perspective and categorical-form analysis. Among them I employed the holistic-content perspective which takes into consideration the complete life story of the individual and focuses on its content. This approach, which is proposed as contextualizing strategies by Maxwell (1996), is preferred when the aim of study is to explore a person as a whole by concentrating on the explicit content of narrative and by getting to the implicit content through asking about the meaning of the story.

To surface new meanings about the case, I applied the instruction of Lieblich et al. (1998) for reading content in a holistic manner (p. 62-63). First of all, I listened to the interview audiotapes and read the transcriptions several times with an open mind until I found a specific pattern in the entire story. I paid special attention to aspects of the life story which had at first seemed to be so unique that I needed to read them and think of their meaning several times to make more sense (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) mentioned that

The page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis, the right ambiance, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward (p. 73).

At this point I put down on paper my initial and global impressions of the case as well as unusual features and contradictions in the story.

After describing the overall impression, I concentrated on themes that present the uniqueness of the life story. Stake (1995) called the process ‘searching for correspondence’:

Keeping in mind that it is the case we are trying to understand, we analyze episodes or text materials with a sense of correspondence.... For more important episodes or passages of text, we must take more time, looking them over again and again, reflecting, triangulating, being skeptical about the first impressions and simple meanings. (p. 78)

To identify themes found in the story, I marked various themes by using colored highlighters and read each color separately and repeatedly until having clear understanding of each theme and finding its relationships or contradictions. I tried to cite as many extracts from the transcription as possible to help readers catch what I understood.

3.6 Trustworthiness

The narrative approach advocates pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity (Bloor & Wood, 2006), therefore, there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text. Reliability and external validity are not applicable to narrative research because they are not consistent with its aim. The aim of narrative research is particularization, not generalization, emphasizing uniqueness that might be applied to knowledge of others different from the case as well as understanding of the case itself (Stake, 1995).

For internal validity I employed an audit trail, peer debriefing and thick and rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I provided all transcription of the interviews and findings I obtained from data analysis to a Korean ex-colleague who has an MSW, has conducted many qualitative research studies of her own and who conducted the audit trail through her own analyses. For confidentiality, any personally identifying information was removed from the data before it was sent out. She provided me with useful feedback on the interpretation, pointed out biases and flaws in my logic from a female's point of view as well as that of a qualitative researcher. To keep balance of thinking, it was helpful for me to get feedback from a person of a different background than me. As a man, especially I was curious what women thought about the participant's life story.

For peer debriefing, I asked one Canadian gay male who is in his sixties and has a Ph.D. in Social Psychology to review the drafts of findings from my data and research process. Although he grew up in Western culture during the "Stone-Wall" period and had lived as heterosexual until middle age, he could share his opinion about my findings and challenge my assumptions.

For accuracy of translation from Korean into English, I asked a Korean-Canadian Social Worker who is proficient in both languages and has experience with qualitative research to check whether quotations from the transcription in Korean were correctly translated into English.

Chapter 4

Mr. Jung's Life History as an Older Gay Korean Man

This chapter presents the life history of the research participant, Mr. Jung in order to facilitate understanding of his narrative presented in the next chapter. Mr. Jung began his story from his first awareness of his same-sex attraction and first encounter with a gay man. During the three interviews, however, he shared his story according to major components of his life such as his family of origin, his wife and children, childhood as an orphan, compulsory army service, gay men with whom he had had relationships, and current life rather than chronological order. To avoid confusion, Mr. Jung's life story is arranged and displayed in chronological order in this chapter. Through this chapter, it can be viewed as an overview of how Mr. Jung's life was interwoven with South Korea's historical events and culture.

4.1 Childhood and Adolescence

Mr. Jung, a 69 year-old gay Korean man, was born in Japan, where his father had moved for work, in 1940. As the youngest son among two sons and two daughters in his family, Mr. Jung was beloved by his family members. When Mr. Jung was five years old, he moved to Korea with his family; this move occurred just after Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945. After returning to Korea, his father was killed by neighbours because they misunderstood and assumed that his father was a pro-Japan collaborator. Mr. Jung's mother devoted her life to her children after his father passed away. However, his mother

was killed by a stray bullet during the Korean War when he was ten-year-old. Mr. Jung was sent to an orphanage separated from his siblings and spent most his teens there while his siblings were scattered to his relatives' houses.

4.2 Early Adulthood

After leaving the orphanage when he was 18 years old, Mr. Jung had a hard time making a living working as an errand boy for households and as a helper in local shops. While working during the day, Mr. Jung attended night school because his mother had always emphasized that men should study and that learning is more important than making money. After graduating from high school, Mr. Jung moved to his brother's house to help him with his shop.

Not long after moving in with his brother, Mr. Jung joined the army in order to fulfill 26 months of compulsory military service. After discharge from army service, Mr. Jung entered university and studied drama and cinema. While studying in university, Mr. Jung lived with a roommate who was an office worker. Since the roommate paid for almost all living expenses, Mr. Jung did household chores for him such as cooking, cleaning and doing laundry. Mr. Jung felt their relationship looked as if they were a couple and he liked being in such a relationship even though he knew his roommate was not gay.

At the time of Mr. Jung's graduation from university when he was in his mid twenties, he heard from his friends a rumour about a theatre which was a kind of secret meeting place for gay men. Prompted by curiosity, Mr. Jung went to the theatre and met a gay man

there. He had sex with him out of curiosity and this was his first sexual relationship with a man. After the first encounter with a gay man, Mr. Jung went to the theatre again and met two more men through whom he got information on gay life which included knowledge about popular meeting places, gay sex, language and signs and signals used in the gay community. Despite his interest in gay issues, Mr. Jung got married to his current wife when he was 35 years old due to pressure from his oldest brother and social expectations even though he did not wish to be married.

4.3 Middle Age

Mr. Jung's married life was not very happy. Not long after being married, Mr. Jung realized that his wife and he were dissimilar in their characteristics and their relationship grew worse. Under a lot of strain, he had sex with her from a mere sense of duty and they had two sons. He thought about divorce several times but kept the marriage together for the sake of their children.

Mr. Jung ran a small store at a public market. After a dispute with his wife over money for the business, Mr. Jung left their house and lived separately from his family for three years. During that time, he lived in a prayer house and entered a seminary to study theology. However, he found that he could not stop having an interest in men even with religious faith.

Mr. Jung moved to China for a new business when he was in his forties, and met a Chinese man of Korean descent there. For eight months Mr. Jung lived together with this

man fulfilling his wish of sharing his life with his gay lover. However, his happiness did not last long because his partner died of pneumonia.

After the death of his partner, Mr. Jung returned to his family in South Korea in despair. While living with his family, Mr. Jung secretly had long-term relationships with several men he met at clubs or on the internet. One of them lasted for seven years and Mr. Jung was emotionally and sexually satisfied with him. However, they decided to stop meeting because they were both married and had children.

4.4 Old Age and Recent Life

Mr. Jung learned how to use a computer when he was sixty years old. This is now his most important means of connecting with the gay community. Mr. Jung often visited Korean web sites for senior gays to chat with others and learn about trends in the community. Mr. Jung's gay life was completely a secret and none of his family members know about it.

Mr. Jung's older son studied and worked in Australia for several years, and recently came back to Korea to get married. The younger son immigrated to the U.S.A. after getting married to a Korean-American a few years ago. When I met Mr. Jung one year after we had the second interview, he was about to send his older son and his wife to the U.S.A. for immigration. Mr. Jung was asked to go with them, but he refused it. Rather, Mr. Jung decided to enjoy life without fear of disclosing his sexual orientation. Recently,

Mr. Jung started dating a man in his fifties by exchanging e-mails and phone calls. Mr. Jung expected that they would meet in person sooner or later.

Chapter 5

Findings

5.1 Global Impression

The general impression across Mr. Jung's story is "love" or "affection" which is called "정[jeong,情]" in Korean. Mr. Jung's life consists of two kinds of affections, namely affection for his same-sex lovers and affection for his family members. Mr. Jung began his narrative with a story of his first affection for a same sex person in his childhood.

Was I eight year-old or seven? I suppose that it was this [my first attraction to a man]. One policeman who called my mother as a sister and me as a nephew often visited my house. I liked him very much, especially when he wore a hat. I am not sure the feeling toward him was this [same sex love] or just one of stimulation and excitement. One night, he slept together with me and my brother in the same room. I was really excited and happy about it. While we were sleeping under the same blanket, his foot accidentally touched me which I really liked. I assume the feeling was a kind of this [same sex love]

Mr. Jung's romantic connections continued with diverse men such as his roommate in an orphanage, his roommate while studying at the university, and the Korean-Chinese man he met in China. Mr. Jung's good feeling toward men started "without reason" and grew to "curious" and "wishful", and finally became "desirous".

I just liked the policeman so much without any reason ... The guy [I met at the gay theatre] said to me “let’s have fun”. Interesting thing for me was I could grasp the meaning and it made me curious about it [having fun with a man], even though I had never heard such words before ...

Even I prayed [for not thinking about same-sex love], I could not stop thinking of it and wished to love deeply each other [with a man]. I had always had such a wish as if you feel hungry when you do not eat enough of what you want ... I can’t fully explain in words how much it makes me happy to have a same-sex relationship. I will keep the relationship even if I am threatened to give it up at the point of the sword.

However, when Mr. Jung realized that he was attracted to men in his childhood, he became instinctively aware that he should hide these feelings. Mr. Jung decided to pretend to be heterosexual for fear that it could put him at a disadvantage in his social life to be different from the majority. Although Mr. Jung could hide his sexual preference from others, especially his family, he could not hide it from himself. It caused him to feel “emotionally sick”. After growing up, Mr. Jung was worried that he had a mental illness because he was different from others.

Even though I had never heard about it [being gay], it came into my mind that it [I am attracted to men] should not become known to anyone and I should keep it secret ... I thought if I were known as gay, there would be nothing good but just an obstacle [in my social life]. It is the reality of our [Korean gays’] life, isn’t it?

[I thought] I had an illness. It was an illness in the mind, therefore it was a mental disorder. While I dared not talk with anyone about my homosexuality, what I could do was hide my gayness from others. Although I had never heard about homosexuality, I inscribed it in my mind that I must let no one know about my sexual preference. So, I was distressed about it being unable to share with others.

Through meeting other gay men and studying theology, however, Mr. Jung was encouraged to accept his sexual orientation and believed that homosexuality was not a mental illness but a natural disposition given from God.

I can talk about same-sex love today because I have accumulated knowledge and experiences of it through meeting other gay men.

This [homosexuality] was given from God or Creator, if it is called by common word, since I was born. I could feel comfortable in my mind [by the idea].

The other central figure in Mr. Jung's story, on the other hand, is love for his family. Mr. Jung's story is full of concern for and devotion to his family members such as yearning for the parents he lost when he was young, respect for his oldest brother who he considers as his father, and parental love for his two sons in spite of their indifference to him.

Even now when I say grace, I think of my father and mother. He passed away early and she, after undergoing all sorts of hardships, was killed by a stray bullet while selling liquor on the street. It [their sacrifice] was all for their children. As I know it, I should not forget about it [his parents' love] in my mind.

My oldest brother is five years older than me. As I have patriarchal attitude and no parent is alive, I treat my brother and sister-in-law as a head of my family.

The tragic irony was that the two different kinds of love could not be compatible in Mr. Jung's life. Mr. Jung's care for family members made him feel obliged to be a good brother and father and it meant that he had to give up satisfying a personal desire to live a gay life in Korean society. The reason Mr. Jung decided to get married even though he did not want it demonstrates the priority of his commitment to his family.

I was not interested in marriage with a woman. It might be because my sexual orientation was this way [gay]. It would be right. One day, my oldest brother with whom I ran a business together said he would immigrate to U.S.A. ... He wanted me to get married soon because he would be worried about me if he left without making me married. As I was 35 years-old at that time, I was distressed about marriage with a woman. I delayed deciding my mind and hesitated to get married because I was not into it. However, as someone arranged a marriage match, finally ... [I did] (regretting nuance).

Mr. Jung was not attracted to women and therefore, he was indifferent to marriage with the opposite sex. However, so that his oldest brother, who was like a father to Mr. Jung, could leave without worrying about him, he decided to get married despite reluctance to do so. Due to the unwanted marriage, Mr. Jung several times felt like divorcing his wife because of conflicts with her and his desire to live with a man, but he decided to keep on with his marriage not to give his children the same loneliness he experienced.

As I devoted myself to my children so much and did not yield to anyone with respect to love for children, I could not divorce my wife. I sacrificed myself for my children. Everything for the children ... because I lost both my parents when I was young. Anyone who does not have such an experience cannot understand the sorrow and longing for parents.

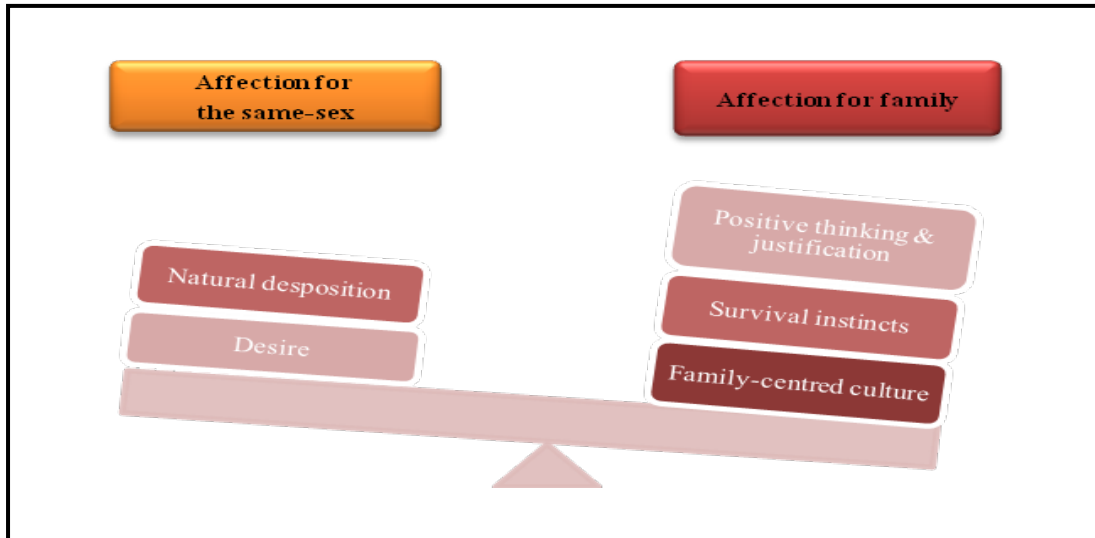


Figure 5.1 Major Findings

In many situations in which Mr. Jung had to choose between two different loves which could not be allowed to coexist in Korean society, he thought “living there [in Korea] was really difficult for those who had sexual identity as gay because its people [Koreans] looked on gays with a jaundiced eye”, he embraced family rather than personal desire. It might be because Mr. Jung had grown up in a family-centred culture, and therefore was used to patriarchy.

(I think) I fit well within a patriarchal society. My opinion is that patriarchy is still necessary for modern families ... children enter into their father’s mind and the

father can read his children's thoughts ... the family should play the role of fence for its members.

Another reason Mr. Jung put his family ahead of his gay lovers might be his survival instincts reinforced from childhood. Surviving at all costs might be the most important thing for Mr. Jung who became an orphan during the Korean War and went through a difficult childhood to make a living for himself. Mr. Jung might have been safest by choosing what he was “supposed” to be rather than what he would “like” to be.

People would think it could be my flaw if I lived alone without getting married ... It [men living alone without getting married] was not easy at that time. It was the only way in which I could survive. Could you understand it?

Under such distress for which Mr. Jung “could not open and ask help from others”, he developed ways in which he could manage his “double life” of living as a heterosexual and a homosexual, that is to think positively and to justify what he had chosen rather than to regret what he had given up. After realizing that he could not change his sexual orientation, Mr. Jung justified that he did not have to choose only one life style in terms of black and white, but rather harmonize both of them carefully. The following metaphor shows well how Mr. Jung could attain such enlightenment:

It might be difficult for drivers at the beginning who are used to driving on the right side of the road to drive a car the steering wheel of which is on the left side. However, they can soon become used to the left-sided steering wheel and then they can drive with the steering wheel on either side. [I think] it is the same in

accepting two different values which do not seem to be compatible. As our mind is boundless, we can absorb anything regardless of right and wrong. We try to pursue rightness and to minimize wrong, though.

It would be like driving on the left side for Mr. Jung who learnt only heterosexual life style was normal and allowable to accept another life style. The idea of harmonizing different values, which is essential philosophy of Buddhism as well as Confucianism, might imply how Mr. Jung has lived and will live as a gay individual in the conservative society in his later life.

In accordance with his decision to have a personal double life, Mr. Jung's openness and acceptance is applied to his attitude towards the gay community. Mr. Jung proposed that the gay community should claim its right while observing social rules. It could explain why Mr. Jung still adjusts himself to the mainstream as well as being eager to live as a gay man.

5.2 Major Themes

Throughout the general impression on Mr. Jung's narrative, I recognized three special themes which represent his life values and attitude toward relationships with others. The themes consciously or unconsciously influenced on the directions of Mr. Jung's life so as to make his life unique in a sexually conservative and closed society. The three themes, being loving, holding patriarchal attitudes and adjusting to changes in later life, might be useful lenses to understand Mr. Jung's life. Figure 5.2 presents a summary of these.

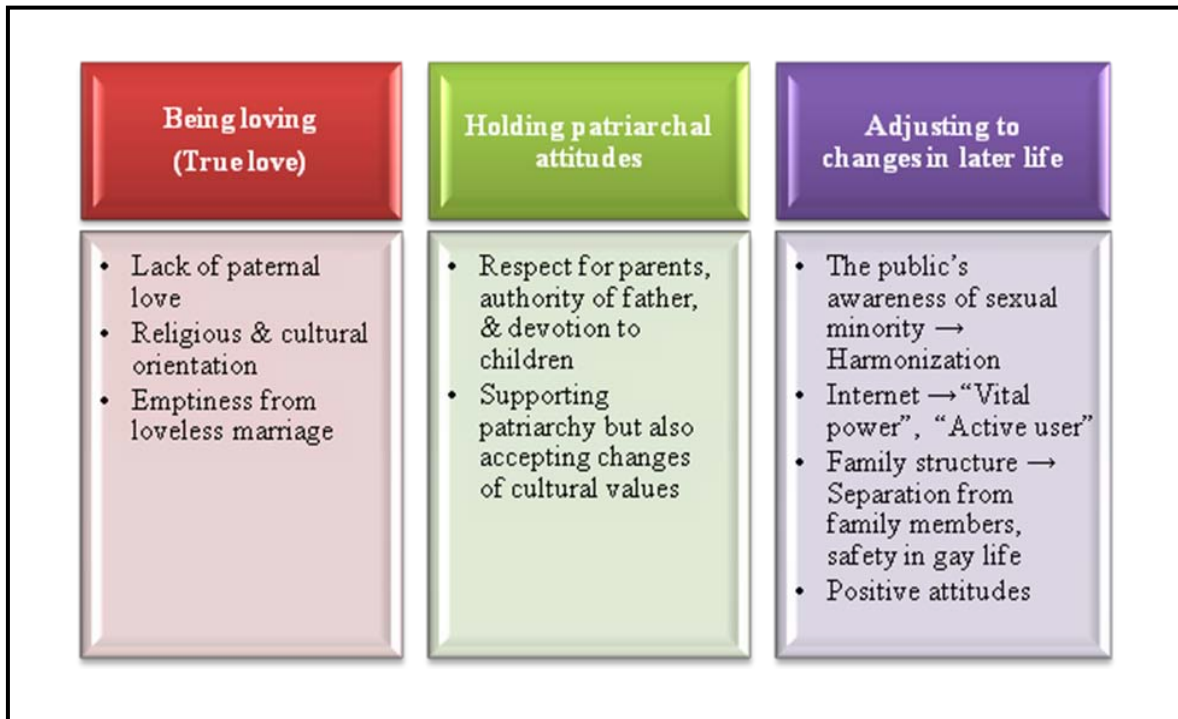


Figure 5.2 Major Themes

5.2.1 Being Loving

Do “love lasting a millennium”, not like instant food, with true mind, moral sense and ethical judgment. I mean, regardless of what people say, to love one person as long as black hairs turn gray.

Throughout the three interviews, Mr. Jung spent much time talking about two kinds of love: sexual intercourse for sensual pleasures and true love from the soul. Mr. Jung emphasized true love from the bottom of one’s heart and illustrated its value from his experiences with diverse men. Mr. Jung stressed that he has pursued pleasures of true love, not physical senses.

As I am susceptible and warm-hearted, I have sacrificed myself and devoted everything to men I loved. How wonderful it is if two of us have the same mind! ... Really, if you give all the rest of your life and soul to one person, you will treat him like your life, won't you? It is more valuable than millions of dollars to have such a kind of relationship.

Mr. Jung believed that sexual intercourse based on true love is beautiful and desirable, but that based on only sexual desire is just like animal behavior. To Mr. Jung, sex is just a means to express his passion of love toward his partner, not an aim to achieve in itself. Therefore, he did not consider relationships with women or one-night stands with men as love due to absence of true emotion.

It would be like adding luster to what is already beautiful to have sex along with true love and passion. In other words, sexual pleasure following emotional love. It would be for animals to have sexual intercourse led by only sexual desire without love.

To tell the truth, I got married without mind but thinking that things will turn out one way or the other. Since I was young and in my days, I had sex with my wife and got children. However, I did not do that with true love.

[I wondered] how it was to have sex with a woman? I did not have sexual experience with women until I became a university student. As I thought at that time that I need to have the experience, I went to Seoul station (an unlicensed prostitute quarters) ... So, I slept there for the experience.

There are several possible reasons Mr. Jung considers true love with men as the most valuable thing in his life. First, lack of a paternal love might play a role. As Mr. Jung lost his father in the early childhood, he might unconsciously crave for a father's touch and pursue it through relationships with other men. Not to fault the myth of homosexuality being due to the distant father, I asked Mr. Jung about my presumption. Mr. Jung responded that "I preferred being nestled in my mother's arms rather than being together with my father. It was little bit uncomfortable for me to be cuddled by father." Nevertheless, he remembered his father as "being careful and honest" and still so missed him that he "thought of him whenever saying grace". As previously noted, Mr. Jung could not divorce because he did not want his children to suffer from the same emotional distress he went through due to the loss of both parents in his childhood. It could suggest just how much his father's absence affected him.

I lost both my parents when I was young. Anyone who does not have such an experience cannot understand the sorrow and longing for parents ... I have a deep-rooted longing for parents' love.

Another reason might be Mr. Jung's religious and cultural orientation. Mr. Jung is a Christian based on the Puritanism who studied theology and grew up in Confucian culture which disciplines against pursuing physical pleasure. Instead, they emphasize sincerity, morality and spirit. It would make Mr. Jung consider physical sex without true emotion as sin and to strive to become a person of strict moral principles.

[My opinion is] Christians should not be hypocritical ... It [Having sex only for physical pleasure] is sin in the Bible. It really commits a sin in Christianity. Having sex is uniting two souls as one. Bring two bodies together means everything of life including mind becomes one. Therefore, it is a sin to turn back on the relationship just after having fun because it is same as throwing soul away, isn't it?

Generally speaking, morals are needed to establish order in society. It would greatly disturb public order to have sex with anyone you want.

The emptiness from loveless marriage might be the last reason why Mr. Jung thinks the true emotion of love is valuable in his life. Mr. Jung realized that he and his wife were dissimilar in character after just being married because they did not have enough time to know each other before marriage. Although Mr. Jung had sex with his wife from a mere sense of duty and kept the marriage for his children, he could not feel “passion” for the relationship and “emotionally satisfied”. However, Mr. Jung could feel “alive” even without sex when he met a man with whom he could share his innermost feelings and express all of his emotions. Through his own experience, Mr. Jung could recognize that “sensual pleasure does not come from the first but only follows true love.”

I have had a relationship for seven years with a man who was a public servant. I really appreciated him. I could express all of my emotions to him. Even though we now just keep in touch due to decline in physical health, our relationship was really so awesome that I thought he was sent to me by God. What I can surely tell you is that a same-sex relationship could be much better than a heterosexual relationship if two parts are congenial with each other. People like me would be hardly satisfied with women even if they try for 100 times. They can be gratified with only men.

5.2.2 Holding Patriarchal Attitudes

[I think] patriarchy is a substantial means to preserve the order in a family ... I fit well within a patriarchal society. My opinion is that patriarchy has still been necessary for modern families ... children endeavor to enter into their father's mind and the father can read his children's thoughts ... the family should play the role of fence which strongly binds its members together.

Mr. Jung indicated that he grew up in a conservative culture based on patriarchy and still stood up for it. Although he lost his parents early, he was dutiful to his mother-in-law and respected his oldest brother as his father. It was a matter of course for Mr. Jung to take care of old parents.

In the past when I was young, we devoutly waited on our parents. I took care of even my mother-in-law at home until she passed away. Nowadays, children look after their parents only if their circumstance permits, and if not, they send them to nursing homes. It is the same as abandoning their parents to ask the nursing home to take care of them.

As a father, Mr. Jung desired to keep the order in the family and made efforts to be a responsible head of the family. The meaning of patriarchy for Mr. Jung is respect for parents, authority of a father and devotion to children.

[I think] patriarchy is a frame of one family and strict discipline. Although it should not be misused, if children misbehave, a father should educate his children to

behave well by scolding severely. He will also need to train them to comply with what even they do not want to do if he thinks it is right.

As patriarchy could be established only based on heterosexualism and familism, Mr. Jung put his concern for family first and tried to keep a heterosexual life style, favouring peace for his family as well as his safety in the heterosexual society.

My family appeared as to be living in perfect harmony because I behaved like a fine gentleman and my wife was regularly going to church. I lived a double life. At that time, I had no other choice. I had to live like that to survive.

However, Mr. Jung had to admit that he could not expect the typical respect for the head of a family. Despite Mr. Jung's efforts to pretend to be heterosexual and to look like a harmonized family, his marital relationship got worse and he could not completely disregard his desire for gay life. It forced Mr. Jung to be away from his family for some period of his life. Therefore, it caused a weakening of his position as a father in his family because the authority of the father requires devotion and responsibility to his family. Mr. Jung could get what he wished in the gay life by leaving the family, but lost what he could gain as a father in it.

We[my wife and I] did not get along well with each other. Furthermore, I could not stop thinking of same-sex love even though I prayed [not to think of it]. I wished to live with a true lover even if other conditions were poor. Such a desire was always in my mind, wasn't it? ... At that time when I was in my mid-forties, I went to China and met one Chinese man of Korean descent there with whom I lived very happily

as a couple. I could feel what I was eager for. However, he died so I came back to Korea.

When coming back home after a long absence, Mr. Jung could not expect the ideal treatment of a head of a family from his family members. Mr. Jung was a hero of his children when they were young, but now he needs to curry favor with his sons and daughters-in-law even though he is disappointed with their indifference in him and the lack of communication.

My oldest son said that he wrote down my name when he was asked to choose the person he had the highest regard at school (gratifyingly smiled). Was it when he was a middle school student? He said that I was the most respectable person for him at that time, but not anymore now.

My children do not have conversation with their father. As I was disappointed with my sons, I tested them. I showed no indication of me being around at home for one week by staying in my room when my sons go out and come back home. They did not look for me, even their father! I have to say "How are you?" first to them to create a pleasant atmosphere at home ... Even though I have been going to see a doctor for one month because I am sick, my sons did not recognize it. They did not know why I was eating gruel, uh? ... My family lives in such a way.

My older son advised me that I need to win the favor of my daughter-in-law. Although I thought at the bottom of my heart why I should bother myself to do it, I tried to understand it. Even the daughter-in-law has not called me for over 20 days with the reason that she has to study for an examination.

Mr. Jung got angry when his wife cared for only their children and ignored him, but he could not speak of it because he admitted that he could not take responsibility to support well his family.

I accept a responsibility [for financial difficulty in the family] because I cannot make money now because of being sick, and have no saved money. As we make a living by son's support, my wife puts my sons first in importance. She cooks only what my son likes and gives me just left over. As I know that I am ignored, I cannot be fond of her.

The change of cultural values in Korean society might be one more reason Mr. Jung could not expect patriarchal respect from his family. The conspicuous trend toward nuclear families and a low birth rate in Korean society has brought on a change in the family relationship from hierarchic to horizontal. Seniors who have no economic power or who are unhealthy are hardly treated with respect in the family where capitalistic and individualistic values come first. "Confucian disciplines are not considered valuable anymore." Mr. Jung indicated that "Patriarchy was appraised beneficial in the past, but now, it means just obstinate."

As Mr. Jung's motto, "live wisely", clearly expresses, sound judgment was reflected in his competence in dealing with challenges he faced in a rapidly changing society.

Although Mr. Jung believed that patriarchy is still necessary, instead of regretting the loss of privilege of patriarchy and insisting on the old principles, he tried to understand

the reason for traditional values and adjust himself to the new trend as the way in which he had lived so far to achieve a matured life.

5.2.3 Adjusting to Changes in Later Life

By passing through life, we [aging people] could obtain wisdom of age and realize real value of life but they [young people] do not have it. They have only skin ... thin skin. Their idea is shallow. How can they understand the real same-sex relationship with having seen little of the world? Therefore, they are easily driven by a passing emotion. It is not complete because there are only basic instincts. As they do not know beyond their own experience, they cannot understand the gay culture in later life which is more profound.

Mr. Jung has gone through many challenges and changes in his life. Some were related to Mr. Jung's personal life such as accepting his gay identity, getting married, and meeting various gay men. Others were caused by Korea's historical or social turmoil regardless of his choice such as loss of parents during the Korean War, life in Korean Army camp and change of traditional values. In his later life, Mr. Jung experienced new changes he could not expect when he was young and adjusted to them by his own way, that is, change in awareness of sexual minority in Korean society, development of the Internet and change of family structure with aging.

One of the big changes Mr. Jung recognized in a decade is awakening of the public on sexual diversity. The 'coming out' of famous Korean entertainers prompted an issue

about sexual minorities, and the public became awakened to their existence and open to the sensitive topic. Mr. Jung thought the coming out of gay people is “not bad and they contribute to Korean gay community” because “it makes the distance between straight people and gay people close.” Mr. Jung believed “the more the public come in contact with information on homosexuality, the more they are open to the minority group.”

However, Mr. Jung has never thought about coming out to family or friends.

I do not think coming out is wrong but I do not have such a mind while I live here [in Korea]. Just do not want it. I do not want myself to be known as gay because there is nothing good about it in Korean society. It [known as gay] can be an obstacle to the social life. It is too early at the present age.

Although Mr. Jung indicated that a biased view-point on gay people of the public is the main reason why he did not want to come out, one latent reason for his hidden life might be his internalized homophobia. Mr. Jung has been to a gay bar for experience but felt uncomfortable because of sexually ‘disordered’ culture in the place as well as the risk of unwanted exposure of his sexual identity.

I have been to a gay bar three times. Whenever I went there, I felt uncomfortable. The proprietress was a man whose appearance and attitude were exactly like a woman. Disgusting! Even though it was not common, I am little bit awkward about gay culture.

Mr. Jung's sense of value is well reflected in his idea of the way in which gay culture should go along with the current mainstream culture based on heterosexism because he thinks culture "is created by exchanging ideas, emotions and values among people". Mr. Jung believes that a gay community needs to spread its culture out slowly and step by step until the mainstream opens their mind to accept diversity rather than to make society confused or collapsed by radical movements.

When television was introduced to Korea, a crowd watched the new equipment with curiosity on the street. How wondrous it was! However, who can wonder at TV? People become insensible to any new thing or idea once it becomes common or is spread widely. [Perceptions about gay] should be changed through the same way. Gay culture should not instigate social disorder while integrating with the existing culture, and if it leads to great confusion in a society, it will become big trouble for gays. The social rules must be respected to maintain the society in order, right? [My opinion is that] any newcomer or thing should not give rise to confusion by collapsing the existing rules. I disagree with it [gay culture collapses the existing culture by the radical gay movements].

Mr. Jung's idea is, to a large extent, based on the social value of the traditional Korean society which can be summarized as "everyone belongs to a family; if the family is in order, society will be in order, and then the nation will be in order." (Lee, 2003, p.287)

What brought on another change in Mr. Jung's later gay life is development of the Internet. While he learned about gay culture and found partners by in-person meeting with other gay men at off-line sites such as a gay theatre in the past, now Mr. Jung "does

not need to go to such a place because of websites for Korean gays”. Mr. Jung often visits Korean gay websites, especially one for over middle-age to chat, make friends or get new information on the gay community. The place where Mr. Jung met his current boyfriend the first time was the online chat room of the website. Although it was a challenge for Mr. Jung to learn computing skills when over sixty, expanding social networking through the Internet is now the main “vital power” for his later life.

When I log in the website for over sixty and wait in the chatting room, other members send me messages. I met the guy from Jin-Joo (Mr. Jung’s new boy friend) at the same site by chatting. It does not take a long time for me to realize whether the chatting partner is sincere or not because I focus on trust, not sex. If the partner is not fit with me, I decline to chat with him with excuse that I am busy now. However, the guy from Jin-Joo was different from other men, so we chatted and have kept it over two months. I can feel alive by waiting for it [meeting the guy in the chat room].

Mr. Jung did not remain a passive user, but actively worked for gay community sites which made him find himself worthy as an elder of the gay community through providing younger gay people with advice or counseling. Mr. Jung could participate in this research by getting the recruitment advertising for it through the Internet and believed that it was the way in which he “contributes much to the development of Korean gay community”.

One of Korean gay websites is called 'Pastors and those who love them'. I wrote several articles and posted them at the site to give advice to married gay men and cheer them up. Nobody except me wrote so many articles there.

The last change Mr. Jung needs to adjust to in his later life was accompanied with his aging and changing of his family structure. While Mr. Jung left his family in his middle age, his family members were going to leave him in his later life because his two sons immigrated to the U.S.A. When the older son suggested Mr. Jung and his wife to move together, his wife agreed with it. However, Mr. Jung declined because he “did not want to live in a foreign country where he is unable to communicate due to a language barrier and just be a burden on his children”. Although Mr. Jung was worried about being alone and the loss of support, he could “bravely” make the decision because he had self-confidence that he could get over any difficulties as he did in his past.

I had plenty of hardships at that time [during the Korean War] like other war orphans. Through the hardships, however, I became broad-minded and widely thinking so that I could have accepted everything to some extent and never thought “How could I do?” I am reassured by myself and not worried even though a solution is not found easily. I think it is the benefit of my adversity to become brave and wise.

Furthermore, for Mr. Jung as a gay man, being separated from the family might mean safety in his gay life. Mr. Jung could meet other gay men without worrying about detection by family members and did not need to choose between his gay life and

heterosexual life anymore. Living alone could be a chance to try again to get what he wished.

Feeling of being loving and loved, and longing for him makes me feel alive. [I think] that is it [changes happened to me after meeting my new boy friend]. If he is with me forever, I cannot be happier ... Even if you have hundreds and thousands of millions, you cannot solve your loneliness with money.

As Mr. Jung was supported by his children as well as the government, he could barely manage to get along with only the government support after his family left. Although Mr. Jung tried to get a job, it was not easy because of his old age.

I can work even at my old age because my spirit is alive, but it is too difficult to find a job. I have applied for a job at a district office, but they left me out due to my age.

When Mr. Jung was treated unfairly because of his age in the following episode, he stood against the discrimination and achieved what he wanted rather than abandon what he planned and become a victim of ageism.

I applied for a computer course subsidized by the government. However, the receptionist at the institution did not want to take my application because I was over sixty. I challenged him saying, "Where is this about the restriction on age in the guideline?" He said the government preferred young applicants to those of the old although there was no limitation on age. So, I persuaded him that if he accepted my application, the government wouldn't refuse me. Finally, I obtained admission and became famous in the institute (laugh). When graduating from the course, I got

a testimonial as I had never been late to or absent from class even though my computer skill might be the worst in the class.

The limited income restricted Mr. Jung's social life. When Mr. Jung needed to meet friends, he honestly told them first "I do not have money today, do you mind it?" or "avoided making meetings" which he considered as "upright way of life" so emphasized by his parents. Instead, Mr. Jung "surfs the internet, goes to the Japanese Cultural Centre to read newspapers and books, and watches TV debates or educational programs on TV at home" to keep himself active. Mr. Jung's positive attitude toward challenges and rationalization acquired by managing his life has become the basis of his eagerness and sound judgment which could be an asset to him in adapting to changes in his old age.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

6.1 Implications for Practice and the Future

Mr. Jung's life story has demonstrated how a Korean man recognized and accepted his gay identity and managed his gay life within the culturally conservative society. Mr. Jung showed how an individual gay man made decisions between personal desire and social or family expectation, and how he adjusted to the choices. The findings of this study have implications for issues which ought to be discussed concerning the future practice of social work.

Mr. Jung grew up and aged in a culturally different society from that in Western countries. However, the way in which Mr. Jung defended himself against suspicion of his sexual identity was not much different from those in Western societies until the 1969 Stonewall Riots in terms of the heterosexual dominant society of which the culture based on heterosexism: hiding their sexual orientation and pretending to be heterosexual by getting married, having children and ignoring their desire for same-sex partners for the safety of their social as well as private lives (Berger & Kelly, 2001; Brown et al., 1997; Berger, 1996).

Mr. Jung's view of gay identity, however, was different from those in societies based on individualism. While three older Canadian gay men in Köth's narrative study (2001)

dealt with their sexuality on an individual level, Mr. Jung considered it in relation to his family. Laurent (2005) explained this by “Asian values” which emphasizes family and social harmony. The idea is supported by Kong et al. (2002) who stated that one of the factors that strongly affects Korean gay men’s quality of life is family bonds. According to Kim et al. (2004), Korean seniors consider a good relationship with family as a part of a successful life.

Although older gay men in North America get support from an alternative family such as friendship family and fictive kin which is culturally well accepted in the society (Brotman et al., 2003; Dorfman et al., 1995; Heaphy et al., 2004; Wahler & Gabbay, 1997), Koreans attach importance to the ties of blood. More than society’s stigma to gay people, Korean gay men fear the anxiety and stress resulting from the breaking of their familial bond (Seo, 2001). It meant Mr. Jung could neither leave his family nor expect support from its members therefore he got only limited support from his family as well as the gay community. When going through emotionally painful and mentally distressing experiences, Mr. Jung could not ask for help from anyone except himself. Mr. Jung’s negative feelings regarding experiences related to his sexual identity, such as guilt for being different, anxiety about disclosure, regret for decisions in the past, uncertainty about the precarious double life and sorrow for losing his same sex partner, were never properly treated but rather ignored or just remained unconscious. According to D’Augelli et al. (2001), gay men who lived under tension and stress caused by juggling between two lives, heterosexual and homosexual, are strongly susceptible to depression and suicide attempts. As Mr. Jung was schooled in adversity in childhood and had a strong

religious faith, fortunately, he was not discouraged in these difficult situations. However, in the last stages of life when he needs to look back on his past to evaluate and integrate his life as a whole, Mr. Jung's feelings which are not fully resolved yet need to be dealt with in order to achieve successful aging (Kolb, 2004). Not only Mr. Jung but also other Korean older gay men who are in a similar situation as him might get benefit from proper services through which they can be encouraged to face the feelings related to their sexual identity that might not have been treated yet.

To respond to the needs of Korean older gay men, developing online services and building social networking in the Internet will be effective because confidentiality is the utmost concern for the population. Mr. Jung avoided going gay sites as well as opening himself to other gay men until he trusted them. Mr. Jung thought "it was still risky and nothing good yet to be out in Korea". No matter how the service for Korean older gay men is useful, if it cannot secure them from confidentiality, no one wants to use the service. It will be able to work for the group to open web sites operated by social service agencies and provide services the private websites cannot supply such as professional counseling, medical advice or information on available community resources for them by man-to-man online chatting or exchange e-mails because they can access the service anonymously as well as without limitations of time and geographic area.

To develop such services, training of qualified social workers should be a precedent. Köth (2001) suggested that practitioners should consciously commit to review their own homophobia, respect for privacy and confidentiality and the need to withhold disclosure,

accept same-sex sexual orientation as a positive outcome of development, recognize that there is diversity among sexual minorities, treat identified family as family, and acknowledge that not all problems are associated with being gay or old.

To add to Köth's suggestions, Mr. Jung's story implies that social workers who work with Korean older gay men need to be elastic to sexual identity. The social constructionist perspective posits that sexual identity is fluid and can be changed according to individual and social interaction (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Laurent (2005) asserted that the notion of "the clear-cut categories (gay, lesbian, etc.) and binary opposition (home- vs. hetero-)" so-called 'white model' is not well applicable to 'fluidity of sexuality' in Asian cultures" (pp. 212-213). Most of Asian countries are tolerant of homosexuality as long as it remains invisible and does not threaten family ties and social harmony, which can be possible only through "secrecy, a double life, or pretending not to know" (Laurent, 2005, p. 213). For example, "coming out" is considered as the barometer of successful homosexual identity formation by the "white model" as I discussed in the literature review. In Asia, however, coming out is not often considered to be necessary at an individual level but rather bring more problems than real freedom (Laurent, 2005). Like Mr. Jung, many Korean gay men would never think of coming out in front of their families because of strong psychological family bond existing between parents and children (Seo, 2005). Even though Mr. Jung identified himself as gay, he preferred to remain in his heterosexual relationship and invisibility because it is more acceptable to Koreans who are "tolerant regarding homosexuality as long as it does not

interfere with marriage, family and procreation” (Laurent, 2005, p. 205). Mr. Jung’s case supports the findings of Laurent’s study (2005):

In Asian cultures, one’s identity relates predominantly to one’s position in the extended family. Moreover, sexuality may play a relatively insignificant role in the construction of individual identity in general. That Asian guys often marry and have children shows the enormous elasticity that their sexual identity encompasses... Fluidity of sexuality in Asia does not really match the Western approach in terms of homo/hetero as essentialist categories which have a right to exist (p. 213).

Therefore, when working with Korean gay men, especially seniors who are used to the Korea’s specific form of Confucianism and patriarchy, social workers should consider “fluidity of sexuality” in Korean culture which is not well explained by the Western concept of homo/hetero (Laurent, 2005).

Canadian social workers who work with older gay men who immigrated late in their life from South Korea or other Asian countries influenced by Confucianism need to understand the significantly different meaning of family in these men’s lives. Failure to understand older Asian gay men within the specific circumstances can cause misunderstanding of their sexual orientation and/or provide inappropriate services. Although Mr. Jung refused to live with his son in a foreign country, among Korean senior immigrants in Canada, there may be gay men who moved with their family in their middle age or followed their children after retirement. To provide the population with

proper services similar to those for gay men born in Canada, social service providers need to be interested in this minority and develop culturally sensitive services for them. For example, the approach to the minority group by case work service which is more confidential will be more effective than by group work. Service providers should respect senior gay Asian men's choice of keeping the heterosexual life style while possessing gay life.

In his theory, Erik Erikson (1993) stated that "the acceptance of one's one" is important in later adulthood because it means the senior is "ready to defend the dignity of her/his own life style" against all kinds of threats. While working as a social worker with seniors, I could realize how much it was important for their mental health to integrate their past into their current life without denial or regret. It is reasonable for me coming from the same minority as the Korean gay men to assume that it is not an easy task for them to accept their past as their own life without regret because they should hide their sexual orientation. For no more regret in their life, it might be necessary that we recognize their existence and understand them by studying about their life and needs. With the findings from the studies, effective social services and policy for the minority can be developed.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

The present study has inevitable limitations as a narrative case research. Firstly, it delivers only one story of an older gay Korean man. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is limited. Other gay Korean men in their later years who have different socio-economic demographics such as religion, education or residential area might provide

other unique stories. This could be especially true for the experiences of those who are not in heterosexual partnerships or do not have children. This distinction could be important considering how the obligation of marriage and children affected Mr. Jung's life. His thoughts and experience may not necessarily represent the experiences of all elderly Korean gay men. As Yin (2003) mentioned, however, the case study allows understanding of complex social phenomena or rare cases. The present study has its own importance as a first step by the fact that no such research about gay Korean seniors has yet to have been conducted.

Secondly, this study focuses on only older gay males' experiences. Accordingly, it does not contain the voices of gay females' or other age groups. In a male dominant society, the lesbian seniors' experiences and challenges might be distinguished from those of males, but Wahler & Gabbay (1997) indicated that including lesbians and gay men under one umbrella of research on "homosexuals" has the effect of diluting our understanding of each and trivializing the experience of both. As a male researcher, I would have had limits on access and understanding of the females' lives as well.

Young gay males and middle aged gay men might bring their own unique stories because they have gone through their life stages in different eras than the older generation. Due to the active cultural interchange between the East and the West and the rapid change of the traditional values in South Korea with the wide spread access to the Internet, gay youth would be more open to sexual minority issues and form their sexual identity through different strategies than those who have lived in a more closed society. The middle aged

gay men straddle the other two eras and so could also tell us their own personal stories related to their changes in major life crises as well as sexuality.

The third limitation of the study is related to the paucity of research on gay Korean men in general and a total absence of inquiry in particular about older gay Korean men. Due to this lack of a previously existing literature, it was difficult to gather general information on the group and drawing a design for this study. I realized through the literature available in North America, especially the works of Berger (1996) and Köth (2001), that the situation of older gay men in the Western society during the 1950's and 1960's was similar to recent years in Korea, so I was able to form general ideas about them. However, if accurate information and knowledge from research on the gay sexual minority conducted in South Korea had been available, it might have been possible to conduct and analyze research with more effective methods as well as less personal biases. These limitations can be resolved with future studies because a single-case design will always be vulnerable if a researcher tries to put 'all eggs in one basket' (Yin, 2003).

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Appendix A



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Consent Form

Exploring Experiences of Older Gay Korean Men

Principal Investigator: Deborah O'Connor, Ph.D., RSW
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Phone: 1-604-XXX-XXXX

Co-Investigator(s): Shin-Young Kim, BA, MSW student
School of Social Work and Family Studies (SWFS)
Phone: 1-778-XXX-XXXX / 82-XX-XXXX-XXXX

Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to explore elder gay Korean men's experiences related to their sexual identity and aging. Under Korea's specific historical events, social changes, and culture, elder gay Korean men may have many different stories. This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for the master's degree in Social Work.

Study Procedures:

Participation in this research would involve two face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 1½ to 2 hours with the co-investigator with the possibility of a follow-up interview with your permission. The interviews would take place in a private office at Graduate School of Social Welfare of Hallym University in Seoul which is designated for the interviews and your convenient times between January and March of 2007. In the interviews, questions will be asked regarding your experience(s) as being gay and aging. Prior to the first interview, you will receive a list of questions related to the research topic in order that you can have enough time to think about your experiences. The interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed with identifying information removed. Your name will be changed to pseudonyms at the time of transcribing. You will have an opportunity to review the transcription and to provide feedback.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw

from the project at anytime. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw any information you do not wish included in this study. Data obtained from you will be stored in a secure location separate from any personally identifying information and will be destroyed five years after the work is presented to the department or published unless you give permission for it to be used in related research.

Contact for Information about the Study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Shin-Young Kim, the co-investigator, at 778-XXX-XXXX (Canada), 010-XXXX-XXXX (Korea), or XXXXX@hotmail.com or his research professor, Deborah O'Connor at 604-XXX-XXXX (Canada).

Contact for Concerns about the Rights of Research Subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-XXX-XXXX (Canada).

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at anytime without jeopardy to your everyday life.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Subject

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Exploring Experiences of Older Gay Korean Men

1. Experiences with Being Gay

I am interested in your experiences as a gay man from the first realization of your sexual orientation to current life.

- Would you tell me about your first realization of your sexual orientation?
- Tell me about your experiences with living as being gay in Korea.
 - Aspect of Korea's historical events
 - Aspect of Korea's social changes
 - Aspect of Korean culture

2. Experiences with Growing Old

I would like to know about your aging experiences as a gay Korean man.

- Tell me about your experiences with getting old as a gay man in Korean society.
- Would you tell me about your understanding of growing old successfully?

3. Unheard Stories

I would like to hear any stories about your sexual identity and aging in your past, present and future life you want to tell others as well as me.

- Do you have any stories? If yes, would you tell me the stories?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell or ask me? Thank you for allowing me to interview you!