

**'Family Women:' Gender, Family and Identity among Korean-
Canadian Women**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on a series of interviews about social life that were conducted with eight Korean-Canadian women who migrated to Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It uses these interviews as the basis to discuss issues of identity formation, memory, migration, and narrative among these women. Whereas previous authors have identified ethnic institutions like the church and political organizations as primary sites of identity formation, this thesis identifies family as a key site for the negotiation of social identities. By focusing on the women's narrative patterns, it seeks to illustrate how family has often set the parameters for their post-migration social activities and provided them with a source of identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Text	1
Bibliography	42

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We always go to my husband's brother's house...It's a lot of work...Me and my husband's brother's sister are busy cooking and preparing all day...My mother-in-law helps a little bit, but not much, she's too old now...We also always go to church and then usually have a party at another church member's house...My mother-in-law likes going to the church parties, but my husband and children say it's boring...The Korean Community Center has a party every year, but we don't go there, too much talking...my husband says it's too much talking.¹

This quotation is drawn from more extensive interviews about social life that I conducted with eight Korean-Canadian women who migrated to Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These interviews form the basis for the following discussion of identity formation, memory and narrative among these women. Whereas previous authors have singled out ethnic institutions like the church and political organizations as primary sites of identity formation, I view family as a key site for the negotiation of social identities. Focusing on the church and political organization has often privileged men's construction of identity and assumed that such institutions acted as vital sites for the construction of women's identity as well. For the women migrants who are at the center of this study family provided the parameters for what they did on a day-to-day basis, the networks within which they interacted, and the memories they were likely to recall. These associations, networks and linkages were the sites in which these women negotiated their post-migration lives and oriented them in interactions with other groups and individuals. They were, as one woman put it, "family women."

The interviews themselves were crucial in the evolution of my thinking about identity and memory. Initially, my plan was to illustrate the effects that celebrating Christmas had on Korean-Canadian women's sense of self-identity. Coming from a country that did not traditionally celebrate Christmas, these women's memories of

¹ Mrs. Kim, personal interview, North Vancouver, 21 March 2002. In order to protect the privacy of this thesis' informants, all participants have been given pseudonyms.

Christmas, I judged, must be an act that brought the subject one step closer to the dominant norms of their new society. A study of how Korean-Canadians celebrated Christmas seemed the best way to demonstrate the effects of mass culture's homogenizing force. My erroneous presumptions and methodologies were many, but none so harmful than the practice of inscribing values onto my informants' recalled experiences and then reifying those values into a set of group attributes and identities. Ultimately, I arrived at the simplistic, and wrong, conclusion that Korean-Canadians strongly identify with a Canadian "norm." It was these mistakes that made me aware of how Korean-Canadian migrant women had formally been (mis)represented as part of a larger group of North American Koreans dependent on the community center or church for a source of identity. Authors who have previously studied Korean communities in the Americas have failed to point out that such claims often represent the aspirations and points of view of men. By contrast, in the narratives told to me by Korean-Canadian women, the testimonies suggested that the women have found culturally specific family networks to be key sites for emotional and social support, and sources of identification.

First arriving in the 1960s, Vancouver's Korean-Canadians divide the last 40 years of Korean immigration history into three distinct waves.² The first wave consisted of intellectuals, highly skilled white-collar professionals, and some semi-skilled blue-collar workers. The members of this group are distinguished as the "pioneer" generation of Korean-Canadians and numbered approximately 10 386 by 1975.³ According to Song:

Between 1975 and 1985, 15 249 Koreans entered Canada. The members of this second wave were largely admitted either as family relatives of the first group, or as independent skilled white and blue collar workers...The

² Marc Song, "The Vancouver Community" Reestablishing Status Within the Canadian Context, 1965-1997," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1997, pg. 20.

³ *Ibid.*, pg. 20.

final wave of Korean immigration started roughly in 1985, and still continues today. It is characterized by the arrival of investment Koreans and students.⁴

This study uses oral interviews to focus on a group of women who themselves claim to have been part of the second wave. By far the biggest occupational category of this segment of Vancouver's Korean-Canadian population today is retail trade. There may be over 500 corner stores owned or operated by Korean-Canadians in the Vancouver area. The few scholars who have done work on Korean-Canadians have usually noted how work in corner stores represents a loss of status for men and double burden for women, who are also usually expected to do most of the housework in addition to their duties at the store. We know little about how these women experienced their post-migration lives or the processes that affected their sense of identity.

Of the eight women whose narratives this thesis focuses on, 6 were part of family run corner stores. Another was a librarian and the last a teacher. To a lesser extent, this essay will also use narratives that were constructed with several male small store owners. Their stories have been included to allow for comparison, by placing women's narratives alongside those of males. The interview schedule was intended to be sensitive to the needs and privacy of the individuals. All of the interviews have been conducted at the informants' work site, often at the back of the family run store where some privacy could be had. The names of the informants have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals. Lastly, the interviews were conducted in both English and Korean, whichever language offered easier communication. As a result, many of the lengthy quotations that appear in this thesis have been translated from Korean to English. I have

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 21.

done my best to accurately translate these passages and present the women's stories as they were presented to me.

One of the largest obstacles facing the researcher interested in studying any issue involving Koreans in Canada is the scarcity of secondary resources.⁵ As Marc Song, a University of British Columbia graduate student, observed in his M.A. thesis, "The scholar interested in the Korean Canadian experience stands on uncultivated academic ground."⁶ Apart from statistics on occupational choices, the activities of the Vancouver Korean-Canadian Community Center⁷ and the proliferation of Christian churches⁸ seem to have attracted the greatest interest among researchers looking at these migrants' histories.⁹ Like the historical and sociological studies of Korean-American migrants,¹⁰ which have helped me to recognize some of the potential issues concerning identity formation, much of the work done on Korean-Canadian migrants argues that the maintenance of an ethnic identity and development of a community consciousness can be sustained through local institutions.

The difficulty with these arguments is not the focus they bring to the churches (there are, after all, at least 110 ethnic churches in Vancouver alone), it is, rather, with the

⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 5

⁷ See Robert Lee and Fritz Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants in British Columbia," in Josephine Naidoo and K. Victor Ujimoto (eds.) *Asian Canadians: Contemporary Issues*, Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 1986, pgs. 24-57.

⁸ See Marc Song, "The Vancouver Korean Community."

⁹ For a discussion of some of these issues see Robert Lee and Fritz Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants in British Columbia," in Josephine Naidoo and K. Victor Ujimoto (eds.) *Asian Canadians: Contemporary Issues*, Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 1986, pgs. 49-71; Seung Gyu Moon, "Adjustment Patterns Among Koreans in Canada," Yunshik Kim (ed.) *Korean Observer*, XX, pgs. 450-478; Marc Song, "The Vancouver Korean Community."

¹⁰ See, for example, Won Moo Hurh, *The Korean Americans*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998; Moon H. Jo, *Korean Immigrants and the Challenges of Adjustment*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999; Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, *Korean Immigrants in America: A structural Analysis of Ethnic Confinement and Adhesive Adaptation*, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1984; Young I. Song and Ailee Moon (eds.) *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*, London: Praeger, 1998.

vague and misleading suggestion that North American-Koreans rely on the churches to help them maintain a Korean identity. Fritz Lehmann and Robert J. Lee, for instance, argue that the establishment of the Korean United Church, formed in Vancouver in 1965, “was the key first step in the formation of a Korean Canadian community in the Vancouver area...In many ways the churches are the most important social organizations for the Korean community.”¹¹ Of the Vancouver Korean-Canadian Community Center, which was formed in 1967, the authors state, “Its purpose was to unite and assist the Koreans, and to promote consciousness and acceptance of the Korean identity to the people of Vancouver.”¹² Scholars of the Korean-American migrants attribute similar significances to the churches. Won Moo Hurh, for example, claims, “the Korean ethnic church has become the center of the Korean American community by providing not only spiritual (Christian) fellowship, but also ethnic fellowship, *cultural identity*, and social services”¹³(my italics added).

However, rather than approaching church participation within a context of identity maintenance, this attendance at church functions needs to be seen as part of broader processes of social change. Although exact numbers are unavailable, many Koreans who migrated to North America in the last 25 years converted to Christianity after they arrived. According to the 1993 census, practicing Christians in Korea accounted for about 25% of the total Korean population. Moon H. Jo observed that only about 35% of the Koreans who arrived in America for permanent settlement since 1965 were already Christians, however; 70% of that same group had become Christians after

¹¹ Fritz Lehmann and Robert J. Lee, “Korean Immigrants in British Columbia,” pg. 57.

¹² *Ibid.*, pg. 59.

¹³ Won Moo Hurh, *The Korean Americans*, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998, pg. 106.

living in America for 3 years or less.¹⁴ This observation, which means that close to 4 out of 10 Koreans became Christians after immigrating to America, seems to be equally true for the Korean-Canadian women interviewed. For many of these women, Christianity was a set of beliefs and practices acquired after settlement had occurred.

Especially for women, the motives to become involved with an ethnic church often came from within the family where kin encouraged other kin to convert and women's numerous stresses originated. Conversion itself often represented a willingness to support male kin's career interests and adapt to their involvement with the church. As such, the interviews conducted with Korean-Canadian women show that churches and other social institutions, rather than isolated sites where a supposedly immutable "Korean identity" has been created and maintained, have often reflected men's and women's roles produced elsewhere, especially in the family. Unlike most women living in Korea, where less pressure comes from husbands to become involved with churches, Korean-Canadian women, at least for some part of their post-migration lives, have made the church an important part of their lives.

The narratives of the eight Korean-Canadian women interviewed for this thesis show how identities can be affected by the change that often accompanies migration. To understand identity, I agree with cultural studies critic Stuart Hall when he states, "...we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices."¹⁵ Rather than being fixed or complete, these women's identities were altered by the roles they would often be encouraged to

¹⁴ Moon H. Jo, *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment*, pg. 67.

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage Publications, 1996, pg. 2.

assume, the kin that they would be involved with, and the change in the cultural resources that life in a new land and family would make available to them.

Many of these women found both pleasure and pain experiencing their roles and responsibilities. As such, aspects of their prescribed identities were sometimes accepted and other times resisted. While, at times, they stated that they often resented the pressure to accept an unwanted home centered status, they also said they found joy in performing their assigned tasks and roles. Here, Foucault's insights offer ways to think about the practices through which individuals inhabit subject-positions. In Foucault's later works, he formulated a theory of power that helped to show how identity was assigned from various positions, including from, what he called, the technologies of the self:

...[They] permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.¹⁶

The Korean-Canadian women being studied here were pressured from various points to think of the home as their "sphere" of influence --- including their own point of view. While many of the women I spoke with recalled arguments over housework they had had with their husbands, others stated they found value and happiness in their family roles.

These acts, expectations and roles that came to be defined through the home also affected women's so-called public experiences and orientations towards other groups and individuals. Recent poststructural analyses in historical inquiry have often over-stressed the situational aspect of identities to the extent that an identity has come to be seen as existing only in specific contexts. But, as I will show, both women's household and

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Martin, L., Gutman, H. and Hutton, P. (eds.) *Technologies of the Self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

public experiences were often motivated by their self-understandings as family women. My approach reminds us that, in a sense, uniforms and badges aren't only worn at work: identities are produced, reproduced, and experienced in a variety of fields. The roles that Korean-Canadian women were expected to perform in the home helped to determine the roles they performed outside of it as well. In both the home and public social gathering, for example, women recalled selflessly serving husbands, obliging the needs of in-laws and parents, or assuming responsibility for food preparation. In turn, the roles that they performed and the status that many of them acquired during their post-migration lives helped them articulate an identity they would use to fashion their lives.

Besides finding themselves in a new country, many migrant Korean-Canadian women also found themselves as part of a new family. Seven of the eight women that I interviewed had come to Canada as brides and married within the first two weeks of their arrival. Not only did many women come to Canada to get married, many came to meet their future husbands for the first time. Mrs. Kim, a corner store owner who arrived in Vancouver in 1978, described the process that brought her to Canada:

My father knew my husband's father in Korea. He suggested to my father that his son and I would be good together...He was already living in Canada at that time...I had never met him...We exchanged letters and he sent me a picture and one time my brother came to Canada to meet him.¹⁷

Mrs. Kim, like most of the other women that I spoke with, relied on kin social networks to find future husbands. Once the couple made a decision to marry, however, much of the financial responsibility to ensure the bride's safe journey shifted to the groom. Mrs. Kim remembered how her then fiancé sent her a plane ticket, picked her up at the airport, and prepared a separate bedroom in his newly rented apartment. It was quite

¹⁷ Mrs. Kim, personal interview, North Vancouver, 21 March 2002.

uncomfortable, the bride recalled, to suddenly be living in a new house and with a new man whom she had never met before. For most of the women with whom I spoke, their migratory passages were coloured with similar stories that marked a transition both from one family to another and from one set of roles to another. They came as single women to be married, leaving their homelands as daughters to become wives.

For these women, the post-migration ensuing marriage represented a dramatic change in their sense of family belonging. Somewhat anticlimactically, Mrs. Kim simply noted, "I had a new family."¹⁸ Physically she found herself in a new home surrounded by in-laws she had never met, and a husband she had barely known. These were the relationships that would most heavily influence her narrative patterns, help her achieve self-definition and a sense of group belonging.

Most of the women's memories were both concerned and connected with the experiences of the family. Subsequently, since the memories that one recalls are reflective of whom they see themselves to be, this pattern illustrates the group relationships and considerations that helped to form women's identities. Here, I find it useful to recall an argument from James Fentress and Chris Wickham who, in *Social Memory*, state, "much memory is attached to membership in social groups of one kind or another."¹⁹ While their work was most successful at illustrating how consciousness of larger religious or class narratives served to shape the memories of individual men, *Social Memory* is helpful in reminding us that the relationships one passes through affect their memories and those memories, in turn, function to support an identity. Mrs. Kim not only had a new family but a new set of material, social and symbolic resources that she

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, pg. iv.

used to sustain her sense of being a “family woman.” Yet simply because these women married soon after migrating does not fully explain why they identified predominantly with the experiences of kin and the values of other “family women.”

The women’s experiences and attitudes were informed by their accustomed social role. Traditionally, women in Korea have held a specific position in a society characterized by a “filial-piety centered Confucian collectivism.”²⁰ Both men’s and women’s roles have been clearly defined: the male patriarch was head of the household and his wife his obedient homemaker. Confucian philosophy taught that the social position of women was to be submissive first to their parents, and then after marriage to their husbands, in-laws, and eventually adult sons. While these roles seem to have become slightly less stringent in recent years, the hold of Confucianism still permeates the everyday approach to life of most Koreans.²¹

The responsibility women have for the care of their new families is underscored by the fact that, in South Korea, women are legally considered part of their husbands’ parents’ family. Mrs. Kim remembered how her mother was saddened and felt a sense of loss when her daughter’s name was taken off of their family registry and added to her fiancé’s family registry. When asked about her motives for migration and early migratory experiences, the salient issue for Mrs. Kim was the shift from one set of social allegiances to another. Mrs. Kim’s concern and sense of belonging to her own family had not necessarily diminished, but the acquisition of new social networks and responsibilities did reorient her social position and sense of self-identification. She was a married woman, soon also to be a mother of two girls, caretaker of the home, daughter-

²⁰ Won Moo Hurh, *The Korean Americans*, pg. 83.

²¹ Moon H. Jo, *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment*, pg. 102.

in-law for two demanding parents and, until they saved up enough money to buy a small store, wife of a janitor. It was through these roles that her status would be determined, and future social relationships in Canada would be negotiated.

Some women, like Mrs. Kim, found themselves immediately placed within a new family. For other women, the shift in family allegiances was mediated by the support that women's parents offered their daughters. Mrs. Song, the owner of a laundromat who arrived to Vancouver in 1975, recalled how her parents initially supported her with housing and access to a social network. Although her case may be considered rare, because most of these women came to Canada without any immediate family, it illustrates the increasing importance that men's social networks played:

My parents arrived in Canada in 1969...They had a house in Burnaby so I lived with them until I got married. I couldn't live with my husband until I got married, that's [the] Korean way...My father was president of the Vancouver Korean Community Center, so I used to go there on weekends [to] help him and meet people. I didn't know anybody except my parents, so it was fun...After I married I moved to North Vancouver to live with my husband and his family...I wasn't single any longer so I didn't go out much after that...I had a husband, kids, and husband's parents to worry about.²²

Mrs. Song's marriage marked the end of her involvement with the Community Center and the beginning of a new set of relationships. Although she and her husband continued to meet her parents until they passed away, considerations for family members found in her new home in North Vancouver imposed new restrictions and opportunities on her sociality and sense of identity.

The model presented here highlights the need to understand migrants' patterns of identity formation on a more culturally, historically, and gender specific level. As a source of support, and site for socialization, "family," this thesis reminds us, varies from

²² Mrs. Song, personal interview, North Vancouver, 27 February 2002.

case to case, and from one historical epoch to another. The Korean-Canadian women's position within their extended families has involved different processes of socialization and identification than the typical model of the nuclear family often used to understand North American women's experiences. In her work on memory with the Jiao speaking people of East Africa, social anthropologist Elizabeth Tonkin argues that in many Western sociology and psychology works, "A middle-brow, white nuclear group seems to be assumed, even though the empirical evidence of such groupings is small even in Britain or America."²³ Subsequently, suggests Tonkin, family models often involve a more diverse, and powerful, source of identification than the Western canon suggests.

At the same time, it should also be recognized that the process of family, perhaps of any group, identification is deeply gendered. As an example of the "settlement" stories that the women prefaced their social narratives with, Mrs. Kim's previous narrative gains greater resonance when compared to her husband's settlement story. Mr. Kim's narrative centered on the disappointment he felt having to work as a school custodian when he was trained in Korea as a construction worker. While his wife's story was concerned with the new family relationships she entered into, his own focused on who he became through the job he attained. "I came to Canada to make money in construction," he stated, "but I spent 4, maybe 5 years as a janitor...it was very difficult to be a janitor."²⁴

Feminist oral historians have pointed out that these gendered narrative patterns are often maintained as much by experience as by the speaking subject's internalization

²³ Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The social construction of oral history*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pg. 118.

²⁴ Mr. Kim, personal interview, North Vancouver, 21 March 2002.

of the categories through which male and female identities can “naturally” be discussed.²⁵ Narratives can often act as a genre whose conventions limit the speaker to what s/he can say if s/he is to convincingly build a certain identity. For many of the Korean-Canadian “family women” I interviewed, for instance, the women’s overvaluation of their experiences and concerns with family often restrained them from talking much about their jobs. Instead of using their work experiences they more often cited experiences with, or of, other kin members they had established relationships with through their husbands.

The narratives that the women constructed also reveal how they articulated their “family women” subjectivities. The point of articulation, or, rather, the way in which the women express their self-understood subjectivities, helps to reveal the pleasures and pains, and value, one gains through the process of identification, and influences how identities are performed.²⁶ The women’s narrative patterns suggest that, above all, they understood themselves to be responsible for the care of the family and were concerned with how they were performing their family roles. Some of them gained satisfaction, others anguish, in feeling that only by playing their family roles would they be offered the respect and praise of their kin. Consequently, the interests and desires of the women’s kin need to be seen as powerful agents – what Hall termed interpellators – in the processes of identification and subjectification.

Within the new families that these women often found themselves, a key element of the kin networks that supported them was elderly parents and in-laws. All of the women with whom I spoke mentioned, at least for some duration, that they lived in

²⁵ See, for example, Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses,” in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.) *Women’s Words*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

²⁶ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” pg. 6.

Canada with members of their extended family. Although eldest sons are often expected to care for their parents when they reach old age, the pattern among Korean-Canadians suggests that co-habitation is most heavily determined by the living conditions that children can provide. Five of the women lived at least 5 years with their husbands' parents; of those, two women actually lived with their biological parents and parents-in-law at the same time, and three lived with their own parents. The decision to live with parents was usually necessitated by a desire to give the elderly the best possible accommodation. While many elderly parents were often reluctant to relocate, if their child in Canada was an only-child, or if other children were unable to provide favorable living conditions, a lack of alternatives usually brought them to Canada.

Considering the importance of this issue, it is surprising that nothing has been written about the relationship between Korean-Canadian immigrants and their parents. The presence of elderly parents considerably alters the women's daily routine, obligations, and sense of self within and outside the family. Elderly Korean women often care for the children when the mother is required to spend long hours in the store. Elderly Korean men, on the other hand, when given the opportunity, will usually help in the assistance of the family business. In many cases, the relationship that develops between women and their parents or in-laws is one of mutual dependence. Elderly women's willingness to assume the role of primary care giver makes it possible for mothers to find employment. At the same time, the elders' lack of English skills, knowledge of the new land, and financial resources often force them to rely on the children for their daily routine.

For many Korean-Canadian women, the development of the relationship between themselves and the elders accompanied a shift, often unwanted, in their status within the family. Mrs. Lee, also a family small store owner, for example, explained, “When I lived with my family in Korea I didn’t have much to worry about...But now [since she has been living in Canada] I have to think first about my husband and my husband’s parents.”²⁷ Similarly, the narrative of Mrs. Kwang, an educator who came to Vancouver in 1985 after living four years in another major city in western Canada, which for the purpose of this thesis shall be called Calgary, illustrated the sense of loss in independence that resulted from co-habitation: “If I wanna go out I should take my mother-in-law, if I wanna cook something I should ask my mother-in-law...I should always ask my mother-in-law.”²⁸ Another woman, Mrs. Kim, drew parallels between her experiences and those of other Korean-Canadian women:

Life is very complicated for Korean women in Canada. We have to live with a lot of people who have power over us. Husband’s parents and husband’s brother and sister are big stress for women. I had a fight with my husband because his brother invited his mom and two sisters to live in Canada...but they ended [up] living with us.²⁹

For Mrs. Kim, the common obligations that she suggested women had to their kin illustrate how relations with in-laws provide women with a shared set of experiences and perceived statuses – often marked by a loss of independence - that they used to identify themselves.

²⁷Mrs. Lee, personal interview, North Vancouver, 2 April 2002.

²⁸Mrs. Kwang, personal interview, North Vancouver, 4 February 2002.

²⁹Mrs. Kim, personal interview.

As was the case with Mrs. Kim, when organizing household based events like Christmas, birthday parties, or more traditional Korean holidays like *Chusuk* or *Sul lal*,³⁰ in most families the elderly had to be considered. Often, the elderly parents' wishes came into direct conflict with the younger women's own needs and interests. In one case, this observation was revealed in two different people's memories of the same event. Mrs. Kim's account of her pre-migration Christmas experiences were consistent with the memories she recalled of Christmases spent in Canada. On her own volition, Mrs. Kim frequently added, "Korean Christmas and Canadian Christmas are the same."³¹ Mrs. Kim's mother, on the other hand, recalled a different set of pre-migration experiences. Mrs. Kim's mother insisted that most Koreans, regardless of their religion, did not celebrate Christmas in Korea as Canadians do.

The issue here is neither the search for truth nor the interviewees' perception of the authentic. Rather, I cite these varying accounts of the past to illustrate how, through memories, people struggle to fashion, and have fashioned, "functional" identities for themselves and the social groups to which they belong. In *Social Memory*, Wickham and Fentress show that memory functioned to support a certain individual's identity and subsequently, that this identity usually served to support a larger group identity. I would add that this process works both ways: identities also function to determine which memories are likely to be recalled. In other words, memory selection is often dependent on the identity one wishes to be represented. However, when one identifies with a group, another member's contradictory memories can present a threat to the meaning of one's personal identity that, ultimately, needs to be resolved.

³⁰ *Chusuk*, although quite different, is often referred to in English as Thanksgiving; *Sul lal* is Chinese New Year.

³¹ Mrs. Kim, personal interview.

The younger Mrs. Kim seemed to want to identify with a family that was eager to embrace aspects of Canadian culture, like Christmas. Consequently, perhaps to avoid being particularized as an anomaly, she maintained that she had always celebrated Christmas “as Canadians do.”³² Her mother, however, felt it important to maintain Korean “traditions,” and possibly for that reason, chose to remember her pre-migration involvement in Christmas activities the way she did, which was, as it were, not at all. Ultimately, after an interesting exchange of jarring, in which both women initially maintained their contradicting versions of past Christmases, Mrs. Kim seemed to accept her mother’s account. It shows how the family identity the elder Mrs. Kim wished to see prevail could, in a sense, help to erase Mrs. Kim’s. Perhaps next time she was asked, she would remember that, as a member of a traditional family, she had not much recollection of celebrating Christmas in Korea.

For most of the women, the processes of remembering Christmas magnify some of the generational and cultural tensions that existed within the home. These tensions often illustrated the struggles over identity formation that existed there. Elderly Koreans often want to allocate the family’s resources for “traditional” Korean holidays, showing little interest in celebrating a North American style Christmas replete with Christmas trees, house ornaments, and ritualistic dinner and gift-giving ceremonies. Children, on the contrary, have pressured the family to celebrate Christmas to its fullest. Caught somewhere in the middle, women have often had to mediate these interests. These tensions often highlight conflicting visions over the identity of one’s family. This issue was particularly poignant for Mrs. Kwang:

³² *ibid.*

My mother feels so sorry about not being able to celebrate Korean traditional holidays. Mother misses the atmosphere of Korean celebrations. My mother really enjoyed preparing for special occasions, even though she complained about it in Korea... There was conflict because my mother wanted to continue that tradition. Myself, I wanted to reduce my workload and be more practical. She didn't care much about Christmas, but my children wanted to celebrate Christmas and my friends too... I guess because of the environment and holidays... That's when we have time.³³

Tellingly, after Mrs. Kwang's father died, her mother lost interest in preparing for Korean traditional holidays and the family stopped celebrating events like *Chusuk* and *Sul lal*.

After my father died, recalled Mrs. Kwang, "I guess my mother didn't have anybody to please."³⁴

Mrs. Kwang's testimony and experience offer an avenue to look at how women's individual identities were implicated in the struggles to form a family identity. After having lived in Canada for over 20 years, Mrs. Kwang had found a job that she liked, spoke English fluently, and, by her own account, achieved success in Canada. Success and happiness, however, came only after she divorced her ethnic Korean husband who she came to Canada to marry, and then remarried a Canadian born man in Vancouver. According to her, she was part of a traditional family, living with a "traditional Korean man" who expected too much of his wife. What frustrated her most was his refusal to help out with any of the household duties when she was taking a professional development program at a Canadian university while holding a part time job. For Mr. Kwang, he intended his family to be ordered around the familiar patriarchal model. Yet

³³ Mrs. Kwang, personal interview.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Mrs. Kwang, a self-described “ambitious woman” who wanted a career, was not content to be a “family woman.”³⁵

The problems she had with her first husband also gave her an opportunity to speak about the roles that her mother and then mother-in-law assumed when they came to live with them in Calgary. They believed that the position of women in a properly ordered house was to selflessly care for their husbands. Mrs. Kwang recalled being pressured from her parents and parents-in-law to endure this role to keep their marriage healthy and their family intact. Not only did Mrs. Kwang criticize her extended family for holding on to “traditional” values, but she also lamented her female friends, whom she met through her husband, for their deference to the authority of their husbands and in-laws. The people that surrounded Mrs. Kwang in Calgary upheld the associated values and gender roles that “traditional” families prescribed for Korean women.

After Mrs. Kwang divorced her husband and left Calgary to live with her parents in Vancouver she quickly lost contact with her first husband, former in-laws, and group of friends she had had in Calgary. Once she arrived in Vancouver, her new husband helped her develop new friendships and relationships with his extended family and friends. As she had previously referenced the “traditional” values that her former friends and family in Calgary held, she referred to her new network of friends and family as being more “generous,” “independent,” and “free.”³⁶ She saw in them what she didn’t see in the people she had known while living in Calgary, and perhaps what she wanted to have for herself. While she was formerly a woman restricted by long standing cultural expectations, the attributes that she ascribed to her new family helped her fashion herself

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

as a modern and successful woman. Her husband was “successful,”³⁷ emotionally generous, freedom giving, and helped with the housework. Likewise, the two daughters they raised together, excelled in academics and sports. Her family’s attributes and success were intimately linked with her understanding of her own self-image.

Mrs. Kwang’s narrative offers insights into the ways which changes in group affiliation affect identities. The relationships that she entered into with her second marriage were more supportive of her “career woman” aspirations. These relationships, in a sense, instead of reflecting her “roots,” offered her “routes” to new possibilities and identities. With more free time, she began a hobby in painting, created a small math tutoring school and became more involved with occasions like Christmas and Thanksgiving with her Canadian born husband and in-laws. The new allegiances she formed with her second husband’s family helped her “acquire” an identity she found difficult to sustain with her first husband. Subsequently, the values and attributes that her second family helped her identify with illustrate how the process of identity formation is, as Stuart Hall says, “always in ‘process.’”³⁸ Identities are never fixed; rather, they are always in a process of becoming that is determined, in part, by the “material and symbolic resources required to sustain” them.³⁹ Family, as such, needs to be thought of as a site where such resources can be acquired and utilized to produce and sustain an identity in various contexts.

When one moves into a new social group, old habits and practices are often altered in a variety of linked sites. An important feature of Mrs. Kwang’s story, for instance, was her involvement with the church, which she felt, was part of the process

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” pg. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 2.

that attempted to position her as a “traditional Korean woman.” Until she divorced her first husband, she joined an ethnic Korean congregation for weekly prayer at a Protestant church in Calgary. But far from offering a respite from the demands that were placed on her in the home, Mrs. Kwang considered the church to be a site that reproduced the inequalities and stresses that she found there:

Whenever the church has a special event it's the women that prepare the food. Family rituals and special events at the church aren't holidays, they're workdays for women...I probably wouldn't have gone so much if my parents and parents-in-law didn't always go.⁴⁰

After Mrs. Kwang came to Vancouver and remarried, she never went to church again. Like her family, she had no need for the church.

Several important patterns emerge from Mrs. Kwang's and Mrs. Kim's stories. Firstly, and most generally, their church attendance was reflective of their family obligations and kin interests. Secondly, they felt that the hierarchical relationships and gender inequalities that existed within their homes were being reproduced within the church. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, their participation in the churches was dependent on their spousal relationships; they stopped going without the encouragement of their husbands. Likewise, social events centered in the home were usually developed through social networks that husbands offered.

The women's narratives usually began with accounts of how their husbands helped them meet other women with whom they could develop lasting relationships. Mrs. Lee, for example, recalled, “When I first got to Canada I didn't know anybody, not really even my fiancé...My only friend [after having been in Canada for a few years] was

⁴⁰ Mrs. Kwang, personal interview.

my husband's brother's wife."⁴¹ Similarly, Mrs. Kim remembered being invited to her husband's co-workers' Christmas party, an occasion that has led to a continuing friendship. Like all of the other women, their friends were introduced to them by their husbands. In most cases, the social networks men had established through their occupations and kin provided women the opportunity to meet other women. At least initially, it was through their husbands that friendships were made possible. Indeed, men's contacts have been more helpful than any other networks in helping Korean-Canadian women establish bonds.

But for these women, their husbands provided them with more than social networks; they provided a base and a sense of belonging. Moreover, the sense of identity generated by links with their husbands was an important determinant for future inclusion into the women's groups. Here, husbands often initially provided the people, themselves included, with whom women would enter into close relationships. For example, Mrs. Park, another family small store owner, explicitly stated how her husband's connections, interests and outlook helped to determine the friendships that she entered into: "My friends are my husband's friends... We share [the] same interests and pain." Mrs. Park went on further to describe how participation in past Christmas parties was part of a process of identity production: "I made most of my friends through my husband's family and co-workers... We are a very close group... We're all like family."⁴² Similarly, Mrs. Kim, albeit jokingly, said that she belonged to the "corner store club,"⁴³ recalling how all of her friends were part of a group of husband/wife, store owning tandems.

⁴¹ Mrs. Lee, personal interview.

⁴² Mrs. Park, personal interview, North Vancouver, 7 March 2002.

⁴³ Mrs. Kim, personal interview.

Both inside and outside of the home these women were responsible for organizing group activities and family gatherings. Their roles and social statuses overlapped from one site, like the home, to another site, like the church. In his work on masculinities, John Tosh presents a model to look at how gendered identities are reproduced in what he calls a “linked system.”⁴⁴ He urges historians to see how gendered identities are connected, produced, sustained, and performed in a number of critical sites. Here, the lines between “public” and “private” were blurred as the women often used their homes to support their husbands’ career interests, supposedly located apart from the home in the “public” arena. As family women they took the responsibility of preparing for, and inviting their husband’s business associates to household based dinners and parties, and even church social events.

Sometimes, women’s responsibilities and experiences as family women helped form the basis for inclusion in social events. Mrs. Kim, member of the corner-store club, for example, explained her organizing responsibilities in the following way:

Everybody on the North Shore meets together once a month. We usually have dinner and some drinks at one person’s house and then the next time at another person’s house...usually I have to make all the phone calls because my husband never wants to go out...His friends don’t go out very much either, they’re so tired I guess...Usually it’s a women’s party.⁴⁵

Another woman, Mrs. Park, made a similar comment, “Korean women have more time for social occasions, that’s why they go out more frequently.”⁴⁶ Mrs. Park was speaking about what she called a “circle,” a group of female friends that, like Mrs. Kim’s corner-

⁴⁴ John Tosh, “What should historians do with masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain,” in Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds.) *Gender and History in Western Europe*, London: Arnold, 1998, pg. 71.

⁴⁵ Mrs. Kim, personal interview.

⁴⁶ Mrs. Park, personal interview.

store club, met once a month. Ironically, while most of these women met each other through their husbands, they often met *without* their husbands.

The women's accounts of the social groups to which they belonged illustrate some of the principles for including and excluding Korean-Canadian women in social relationships. Women's patterns of social behavior were intimately connected with their kin, especially their husbands' contacts, and with their role as social organizer. Without their husbands and families, few of these women would likely have met. In turn, by illustrating the premises that women explained to be the basis for inclusion in these social groups – their common responsibilities, statuses, pleasures and pains - we see how family influenced and changed the women's sense of self.

Mrs. Young, also a small store owner who arrived to Canada in 1976, compared the social "circles" that she belonged to in Canada with the one she belonged to in Korea:

When I lived in Korea I was belonging to a meeting, like alumni stuff, with elementary school friends. We usually meet once a month and drink tea and sometimes just have lunch together. We also put some money together to give to other ladies like children's birthday, wedding, or death...In Canada I have no alumni friends to meet. So I do the same thing with the other Korean women that I meet...Anyways, once you become an *ajuma* (a married women), age doesn't matter anymore. *Seonbae*, *hoobae*, *dongchang*,⁴⁷ that doesn't matter much. We all just became friends⁴⁸

When living in Korea, most Koreans belong to some sort of alumni association. The basis for inclusion in these associations is not only having graduated in the same year, but also being the same age. Until Korean women become married, age is an important

⁴⁷ One's *seonbae* is their senior, a person who is given respect because s/he is at least one year older; conversely, one's *hoobae* is their junior, a person who they receive respect from because s/he is at least one year younger; one's *dongchang* is somebody who usually entered university in the same year and thus is also the same age. Typically in Korea, until one is married, intimate relationships are formed with one's *dongchang*.

⁴⁸ Mrs. Song, personal interview, North Vancouver, 7 March 2002.

marker that determines how women are to behave with one another. Only when unmarried women meet together, sharing the same age, do they meet as equals, able to form intimate relationships. As Won Moo Hurh says, "Having been a classmate with someone means you have a bosom friend who may actually be closer than some of your relatives."⁴⁹

In contrast to the age and alumni determinants that set the limits for Mrs. Young's socialization in Korea, being a married woman was the basis for inclusion in the Vancouver circles to which she belonged. Having a family not only provided these women with the opportunity to meet with each other, but it also dominated much of their discussions with one another. When asked what topics the women usually discussed, Mrs. Young said that their kin, husbands, and children were often the focus. Likewise, Mrs. Lee remembered how her friends were often busy comparing stories of their children's recent successes and failures. Other times, recalled Mrs. Kim, "We talked a lot about Korean women's problems in Canada, business, children, parents...things like that."⁵⁰ For Mrs. Song, her family's experiences gave her scope to make sense of her own experiences: "I guess my family has had a pretty good time in Canada, my children are good in school, they like it here...My husband likes it here too."⁵¹

Korean-Canadian women's participation in social circles provides a good opportunity to examine how self-understood identities, partially determined in one context, can be reproduced in another. The roles and relationships that these women had acquired from within the home helped to determine the conditions that would structure their social lives outside of their homes. On one level, the responsibility to organize local

⁴⁹ Won Moo Hurh, *The Korean Americans*, pg. 115.

⁵⁰ Mrs. Kim, personal interview.

⁵¹ Mrs. Song, personal interview.

social functions was an extension of the same responsibility they had to prepare for family rituals. On another level, the interests, aspirations, self-understandings, and characteristics of the women's family members often became their own. Mrs. Song, for example, explained, "Because Korean women usually sacrifice for their family...they take a lot of pride in what their family does, especially their husband's job. Because husband's job is our job... So it can be shame too."⁵²

Mrs. Song's narrative act of self-recognition raises difficult questions about issues surrounding identity and agency, primarily, who is the speaking subject? While Mrs. Song's role as family woman is partially determined and sustained by the position that others expect her to accept, both discursively and experientially, it is also partially determined by her willingness to assume those subject-positions. Citing Foucault's later work in *The Use of Pleasure*, Stuart Hall encourages scholars to approach identity in the following way:

...since the decentering of the subject is not the destruction of the subject, and since the 'centering' of discursive practice cannot work without the constitution of subjects, the theoretical work cannot be fully accomplished without complementing the account of discursive and disciplinary regulation with an account of the practices of subjective self-constitution.⁵³

Mrs. Song, for instance, was both conscious of the expectations others had of her and, to some degree, willing to perform the required roles.

If the women's narratives showed an awareness of how connections with family could influence their experiences and identity, being without family did the same. As contact through one's husband and family helped women establish relationships and a sense of belonging to a group, the absence of a husband and extended family could also

⁵² Mrs. Song, personal interview, North Vancouver, 27 February 2002.

⁵³ Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" pg. 13.

serve to prevent women from connecting with other Korean-Canadians. In the case of Mrs. Baek, we see how, without an extended family, she felt she did not share the common experiences, needs, and interests that brought other women together.

Unlike most Koreans who immigrated to Vancouver in the 1970s and 80s, Mrs. Baek, a language teacher, never did much to celebrate Christmas. The exception was her first two years in Vancouver, from 1974-1976, when she and her three children attended Christmas mass and the fellowship party that a member of the Korean Methodist Church had organized in her home. Two years later, after having found a suitable godfather for her children and become, “guilty for attending with no strong belief,”⁵⁴ Mrs. Baek and her three children stopped attending church. Since that time, Mrs. Baek has done nothing to celebrate Christmas. She has not attended any of the Korean-Canadian Community Center’s Christmas parties, nor has she participated in any Christmas house parties.

While most Korean-Canadians in Vancouver have gotten together with friends or family during the holiday season, Mrs. Baek has spent the last few Christmases alone – her husband is still working in Seoul and her children, now in their early 20s, always go out. “I feel like I lost everything during Christmas,” exclaimed Mrs. Baek, “my family, my friends, and my culture.”⁵⁵ When asked why she felt as if she had lost everything during Christmas, a holiday that non-Christians give little attention in South Korea, Mrs. Baek replied, “Because of the environment, Christmas [for Korean-Canadians] has become an important occasion to get together with friends and family, but for me it’s so lonely.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Mrs. Baek, personal interview, Vancouver, 15 November 2001.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

I cite this example to illustrate how disconnected from other Korean-Canadians Mrs. Baek felt during Christmas. She felt that she had nothing in common with other Korean-Canadians. With the exception of her 3 children, she had no family. "I'm not like other Korean-Canadian women," she frequently insisted, "We have different concerns, usually they have their family to take care of, my big concern is my job. Of course my children too, but they're old enough to take care of themselves."⁵⁷ Even though Mrs. Baek seemed to prioritize her working role, she still used notions of the family to distance herself from other Korean-Canadian women whom she suggested had only their family to be concerned about. Unlike her, they were "family women."

Being a family woman was also a way to mark the identities and experiences of other families. As family women, they saw themselves, and were often also seen by others, as belonging to a certain type of family. Notions of one's ethnicity, marital status, and social standing intersected to determine the type of family one was part of. To belong to the family of an investment Korean, for instance, was to belong to a group that enjoyed certain privileges and comforts. In turn, the perceived identity of families could be used to make general statements about the experiences and identities of individuals. Here, Said's *Orientalism* provides a useful framework for understanding how, even when using family as a category of analysis, the 'Other' is used as a necessary opposite to help construct the identity of one's own group.⁵⁸

Mrs. Lee, for instance, compared aspects of her family's perceived attributes with those of "investment Koreans" to describe her family's migratory experiences. Mrs. Lee, a small store owner who had never met her fiancé until she arrived in Vancouver in 1979,

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

juxtaposed her early migratory experience next to her husband and his family's penchant for travel:

I came here to marry, it was because of marriage. My husband came to Canada in 1975. He came to Canada because his older sister was already here. She graduated from Korea and then moved here to work as a nurse... Actually his father lived in Germany for many years, so he knew from his father how to live in a foreign country. So that made living in Canada easier... because we knew how to live in a foreign country. We don't have much money... we're not investment Koreans, but we're okay.⁵⁹

Perhaps the most striking feature of Mrs. Lee's narrative is her eagerness to account for her experiences by, both, attaching her memories to other people's history of living abroad and, in turn, distancing herself from investment Koreans. Mrs. Lee's account seems more like an interpretation of her husband's interpretation of his migration experiences. Although she actually had no previous experience of living abroad she explained that hers was a family that "knew how to live in a foreign country." She differentiated the self-conceptualization of her family's attributes from those of investment Koreans, who, presumably, relied on their wealth rather than hard work and know-how to survive in Canada.

Whether or not Mrs. Lee's family owed their relative success to their resourcefulness or experience, the identity that she fashioned for her family became a useful referent. Her individual experiences were constantly recalled by associating herself with a constellation of traits and characteristics that she attached to her family. With the use of the pronoun 'we,' she described how her family was 'hard working'⁶⁰ and 'busy.'⁶¹ Mrs. Lee explained that unlike many investment Koreans who, according to

⁵⁹ Mrs. Lee, personal interview, North Vancouver, 2 April 2002.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

her, paid expensive lawyers to become landed immigrants, her family, “did everything ourselves.”⁶² As a family that “knew how to live in a foreign country,” they had learned from their well-traveled kin how to survive by relying on a good work ethic.

On several other occasions, Mrs. Lee used representations of investment Koreans to help her construct a family identity. Again, Hall’s insights help us understand how the “Other” can be used as a referent to build an identity, “...it is only through the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed.”⁶³ She explained, for example, that while she and her husband were always busy working, more recent migrants somehow had it easier. Her husband had to deal with trying, unsuccessfully, to have an electrical engineering degree recognized. They also had to endure long periods of time when they could not return to Korea to visit friends or family. Most of the women felt that being able to return to Korea was an important luxury that they, because of a wide range of reasons, did not have. However, for Mrs. Lee, that was a hardship that she and her family, unlike investment Koreans, had learned to overcome.

For most of the women, their migratory traditions were important causal factors in their decision to move to Canada. Here, Mary Chamberlain’s oral history work on Barbadian migrants to Britain provides a useful way to see how migratory traditions and networks can provide the motives to resettle and become important components of one’s identity. In the narratives that Chamberlain constructed with her respondents, she found

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” pgs. 4-5.

that the migrants presented themselves as belonging to families that “love to travel.”⁶⁴ Instead of citing potential economic gain, improved living conditions, or greater freedom as motives for migration, Chamberlain’s informants pointed towards their family’s love of travel. But family for these migrants provided them with more than a source to construct an identity, it was also a vital social network of relationships that migrants looked towards for financial, social, and spiritual help. Chamberlain’s narrator’s “loyalty to and identity with the family” was sustained as much by lived experiences with the family as it was by an imagination of one’s ancestors’ attributes.

Like Chamberlain’s informants, the narratives that the Korean-Canadian women constructed rarely cited material gain as a motive for migration. At the same time, material and financial considerations were mentioned when the women discussed their family’s relationships with other families. Mrs. Lee, for instance, had not developed any close friendships with investment Koreans because, in her opinion, “Investment Koreans come to make money, they have different concerns and interests.” Instead, Mrs. Kim’s friendships were made with women who, she felt, shared her pleasures and pains as a mother, care giver for the elderly, and wife of a low to mid-income earning husband. It was these roles and experiences that structured the parameters of Mrs. Kim’s sociability, and it was within the home that she learned how to orient herself to other groups and individuals. This is what separated her from younger, often family-less, investment Koreans who had “different concerns and interests.”

Ironically, while family is often used as a metaphor for wider feelings of belonging, in this case, it could also function as the basis for exclusion. Having yet to

⁶⁴ Mary Chamberlain, “Family and Identity: Barbadian Migrants to Britain,” in Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes (eds.) *Migration and Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pg. 120.

assume the many roles that family had produced for women like Mrs. Kim, investment Koreans, these women may have thought, had yet to acquire the experiences or discursive labels that drew them together. It is hard to put an exact number on how many so-called investment Koreans are child-less, or living without extended families, but it seems that this perceived 'lack' was enough to mark them as different. For the women being looked at here, it was apparently important that they had achieved, what one woman called, "Korean woman's traditional role."

At the same time, the family should not simply be seen as a direct re-transmitter of Korean culture. Many women obliged the social ethic of filial-piety centered Confucian collectivism that encouraged them to put the needs and interests of the family before their own. In Korea, after a woman marries she seldom continues to remain employed outside of the household. Care for the family, often the extended family, is expected to take precedence over other endeavors. For Korean-Canadian women, while it may have been these expectations and concepts that they were forced to respond to, they were rarely embraced whole-scale. There was always a negotiation involved in which women considered their own desires, those of their kin, and the lives that non-Korean women were living as well. Some women were more accepting, others, like Mrs. Kwang who divorced her "traditional Korean husband," were not. Yet, whatever the outcome, it was the imposition of these roles to which they were forced to respond.

In contrast to the women's focus on the home and family, the men were more apt to discuss aspects of work that took place outside of the family. Men's narratives were characterized by the focus on individual agency and self-autonomous acts. Rather than commenting on the experiences of any of his family members, Mr. Choi, for example,

chose to focus solely on the accomplishments and titles he received through his participation in Vancouver's Korean Community Center. He responded in the following way when asked how his family celebrated Christmas in Canada:

Well...I was the co-founder of the Korean Community Center, I think that was in 1967. I guess there were only about 300 Korean families, less than, in Vancouver at that time so it was very useful for the Korean people who had nowhere else to go...We always had a big party for Christmas...In 1982 I founded the Korean Elders' Association. Every year at the Christmas parties we invite veterans who fought in the Korean War to come and celebrate Christmas with us...We sing the Korean and Canadian national song, sing some Christmas songs, have some nice food, and give some little presents to the veterans...Last year we had more than 400 people...Can you believe that we don't charge any fees? The Korean Community Center Christmas parties cost \$15, but the Elders Association parties are free...I don't know what's wrong with the current president of the Korean Community Center, when I was president we never had to charge fees.⁶⁵

Considering Mr. Choi's involvement with the Korean Community Center and Elders Association, it comes as no surprise that he should emphasize his political and organizational achievements. What is surprising is that he should make no mention of the experiences of his family, including his wife.

The other Korean-Canadian men that I interviewed also privileged their public institutional experiences. Mr. Cho, a small video store-owner who arrived in Vancouver in 1985, after living in Montreal for 3 years, expressed the disappointment he had with both the Korean Community Center and the ethnic churches:

I went to the Korean Center for 1 year, but I didn't want to pay the fees. They always want too much...I don't go to church either...There are too many churches in Vancouver, people try to attract you with titles like *chipsa* or *changno*, but then you're always busy...you do this, you do that. We have a special dinner with our friends during Christmas...that's about all.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Mr. Choi, personal interview, Vancouver, 19 October 2001.

⁶⁶ Mr. Cho, personal interview, North Vancouver, 20 October 2001.

The focuses of Mr. Choi's and Mr. Cho's dialogue illustrate the value that men place on their public experiences and roles. Although these men spent a considerable amount of time with their family, they chose to highlight their public actions.

One of the implications of these two men's narratives is that it shows how oral histories that make sweeping generalizations from the testimonies given by men often represent little more than men's values, aspirations, and experiences. This observation seems to be supported, indirectly, by other studies that have compared the narrative patterns of the sexes. In their study of American white suburban speech patterns, *Communication Between the Sexes*, for instance, sociologists Lea P. Stewart, Pamela J. Cooper, and Sheryl A. Friedley conclude: "Women traditionally talk to each other about personal and affiliative issues that reflect *who they are*; men traditionally talk about task and power issues that reflect *what they do*"⁶⁷(original italics). Questions of group identity have often, wrongfully, been framed around what John Tosh has termed, men's "public affirmations."⁶⁸ In *Social Memory*, for example, Fentress and Wickham show how consciousness of larger religious or class narratives serve to shape the memories of individual men. However, because women did not account for a large part of their work, women's identities were either represented as mirror images of the men that surround them or, more often, not at all. Consequently, the institutions that men have often used to fashion their identities have been thought of as having had the same importance for women. Yet, while both sexes, of course, frequented institutions like the church, they often did so for different reasons.

⁶⁷ Lea P. Stewart, Pamela J. Cooper, and Sheryl A. Friedley, *Communication Between the Sexes: Sex Differences and Sex-Role Stereotypes*, Arizona: Gorsuch Scarisbrick, 1986, pg. 100.

⁶⁸ John Tosh, "What Should Historians Do with Masculinity?" pgs. 184-7.

Korean men, as Marc Song has argued, often seek status through the church and community center by acquiring various job titles within the institutions' hierarchy. These titles are often gained to compensate for status and power lost because of the downward social mobility that many Korean-Canadian men seem to experience with their primary jobs. The two men's dialogues that we just saw suggested that the relationship they held in relation to these institutions was central to the formation of their social status and identity. One man felt that the Korean Community Center was central to the development of the "Korean Community," and took great pride in knowing that he was one of its founders. Another man used his contempt for the ethnic churches and Korean Community Center to distance himself from other Koreans who he felt were corrupt.

While some men may have used the ethnic institutions as an avenue to affirm their masculine identities, or, even, acquire a public identity, women often attended these institutions *because of* their family roles and responsibilities. In contrast to the men's narratives, for instance, the testimony of Mrs. Cho, a small store-owner who arrived to Vancouver in 1982, underscored some of the more poignant causes that may have persuaded Korean-Canadian women to go to church:

Guys can go golfing, smoke cigarettes, or drink alcohol to deal with stress, but for women, there's no choice, so they probably go to church to deal with their stress... We [Korean women] have to obey to man, husbands mother and father... my life is nothing... obey to, obey to, obey to, I obey to the man... When they grow up I obey to my son too... Because of that... when you go to church you can forget about those things.⁶⁹

In her case, the church seemed to act as a sort of safety valve, giving her an outlet to deal with a social status that she obviously was not happy to inhabit.

⁶⁹Mrs. Cho, personal interview, Vancouver, 15 February 2002.

More typically, memories of women's social outings focused on the experiences of their family. Mrs. Jo, who arrived as a fiancé in 1977, offers an example by recalling her participation in the weekend social events put on by the Korean Community Center.

Mrs. Jo fondly recalled her family's experiences:

At the time everybody met at the Korean Society Center when it was at Trout Lake. It was good in those days, because there weren't many Korean families in Vancouver at that time. Our family was always very happy to go... We taught the kids Korean because we didn't want them to forget their language... The men played *Baduk* and *Changi*.⁷⁰ My husband is very good at *Baduk* and *Changi*... The women just talked to one another... We had a lot of fun.⁷¹

Like Mrs. Jo, most of the women with whom I spoke were more likely to speak of their experiences in terms of the relationships with which they were involved. In her study of interwar migration to Paris from the French provinces, Bertaux-Wiame recognized how the narratives differed between the sexes, and offered some insights into how, and why, memories of migrant experiences were gendered. She found that women emphasized the significance of relationships, especially in the family, while men seemed eager to display a sense of autonomous agency:

From what men say about their work, it seems that it gave them the feeling of "who they were": a social identity ... Men seldom talk spontaneously about their family life – as if it was not really part of their life. Their life: men consider the life they have lived as their own; this is perhaps the key difference from women. Women do not insist on this. Self-conscious acts are not their main interest. Instead, they will talk at length about their relationships to such or such a person... Men will use the 'I' much more than women... Women preferred to use 'we' or 'one,' thus denoting the particular relationship which underlied this part of their life.⁷²

⁷⁰ *Baduk* is a game somewhat similar to chess; *Changi* is a game that involves throwing sticks and having them land in a certain way.

⁷¹ Mrs. Jo, personal interview, North Vancouver, 14 February 2002.

⁷² Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, "The Life History Approach to the Study of Internal Migration," pg. 29

Although she does not mention it, her study provides leads to begin thinking about how relations within the home structured and informed migrants' attitudes, value judgements, relations with other people, and, in turn, their identities.

What people say and how they (re)present their selves through language is obviously a critical marker of one's identity. Like those women interviewed by Bertaux-Wiame, Korean-Canadian women constantly used the collective 'we,' instead of 'I,' to refer to themselves and their experiences. She argues that this practice denoted "the particular relationship which underlied this part of their life: 'we' as 'my parents and us,' or as 'my husband and me,' or still as 'me and my children.'⁷³ It is from this premise that I would like to continue, and try to understand how the relationships one was involved with may have affected their identity.

Looking back at Mrs. Jo's dialogue, the most apparent feature of her narrative is the emphasis that she placed on her husband's and children's experiences. The value that she attributed to the weekly excursions was found not in her own experiences ("The women just talked to one another"), but in the benefit that it brought her family. As a result of her husband's and children's influence, Mrs. Jo acquired an awareness of family that helped her articulate and make sense of her own experience. The experiences of her family also functioned as a sort of prism through which she formed important value judgements. Even though the women "just talked to one another," Korean-Canadians, she tried to show by recalling her husband's skill at Korean traditional games and children's eagerness to learn Korean, were "proud of their culture." Consequently, she too was a "proud" Korean-Canadian.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pg. 26.

Another woman, Mrs. Song, gave the example of her children's Christmas experiences to explain how her own experiences were the same as other Canadian women. Likewise, Mrs. Kim cited her husband's father's experiences to explain how, unlike investment Koreans, she was a hardworking and resourceful woman who "knew how to live in a foreign country." Thus for these women, "we" denoted more than the family relationships they had entered into, it signified the social group whose perceived attributes and experiences they interacted with to fashion their identities.

One implication of these narratives is that they illustrate the fractions within the so-called "Korean Community." The important consequence of group fragmentation is that, as migration historian John Bodnar put it, "the real dynamic which explained immigrant adjustment was not simply at the nexus of immigrant and American culture, but it was at all the points where immigrant families met the challenges of capitalism and modernity: the homeland, the neighborhood, the school, the workplace, the church, the family, and the fraternal hall."⁷⁴ Bodnar's work synthesized a new interpretation of the immigrants as "transplanted" rather than "uprooted" peoples. But where he emphasized how ethnic institutions often provided migrants with support as well as a site to wage fractionalizing politics against each other, this thesis has emphasized the role the family has had in helping women form identities and orient themselves to the wider Korean-Canadian community and dominant society.

This thesis has shown how individual migrants often struggle with the labels of identification. Through the use of oral histories, by listening to the value statements and self-interpretations of status and identity, I suggest that the notion of 'ethnicity' or community may not be appealing or appropriate for some migrants, especially women,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. xvii.

who choose to identify themselves not strictly in terms of ethnicity or place of origin, but also at the level of the family.⁷⁵ I have illustrated, in ways that document-based histories often cannot, the complex inter-connections between migration, the development of migrant networks, and group and individual identities that are formed through considerations of the family.

This thesis has identified family models as an alternative, and primary, category of analysis with which to understand Korean-Canadian women's post-migration experiences. By examining the social life narratives of eight women, I have tried to illustrate how family has often provided women with a source of identity and the parameters for their social activities. This thesis has shown the family to be a powerful source of identity: first, as a social institution that assigned roles based on relationships between kin; and secondly, as a collectivity whose perceived attributes and experiences one interacted with to fashion their self-identity.

These family identities were enduring, deeply affecting how the women represented themselves and others. This approach has allowed us to view the home as a locus of social motivation and source of identity. These women used considerations of the family, their role as a "family woman," to explain their experiences and to differentiate their lives lived in Canada from others. At the same time, however, the women have shown that they have responded differently to the expectations that are made of "family women." Not all of the women interviewed here were content with the roles, statuses, and responsibilities that accompanied marriage and motherhood within the particular family that they, their husbands, in-laws, and later, children, helped to construct. Women sometimes resented the identities they were encouraged to assume

⁷⁵ Alistair Thomson, "Moving Stories," pg. 25.

and the roles that often awaited them after the migratory passage. The restrictions that family placed on the women sometimes far outweighed the opportunities and pleasures it provided them. Yet rather than passively accepting their roles and the power relations that existed between different kin, women often worked to improve their families and their lives within them. In an extreme case, Mrs. Kwang divorced her husband, and consequently her in-laws as well, who encouraged her to assume the identity that being a family woman often entailed.

Using family as a perspective to understand Korean-Canadian women's social lives has also allowed us to see how the processes of narrative construction and identity formation can be affected by gender, ethnicity, kin, and occupation. Men have constructed narratives in which their importance is directly linked to their public deeds. As a result, their memories are often centered on their political and occupational experiences. Despite extensive experiences in the "public sphere," women's narratives, on the other hand, often privileged their family affiliations and memories. This insight forces us to reconsider male biased group identities that are meant to represent men and women alike. It also forces us to rethink claims that institutions like ethnic churches and community centers – often patriarchal associations that restricted most positions to men – acted as vital sources of identity for women. In doing so, I have advocated the use of a theoretical framework that seeks to better understand how the processes of identification are produced and maintained, and understand how individuals interact with perceived group identities.

In the women's narratives, we see some of the material and symbolic resources they used to sustain their identities. The relationships in the family that women's social

identities were interdependent on supported the role they held both within and outside of the home. These relationships helped structure their daily lives and influence their value judgements, and determine how they oriented their selves to other groups and individuals. Whether in the capacity of housekeeper, caretaker of elderly parents, or small store operator, most of these women were family women; in the home and the business place they were producers and providers for the family. It was the family that they worked to help sustain, and its accomplishments, toils, and failures that gave them concern. It was the family that provided them with a sense of group belonging and identity and that served as a point of reference for them to distinguish themselves from other individuals and families.

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