

# “Patriarchy is So Third World”: Korean Immigrant Women and “Migrating” White Western Masculinity

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*Previous studies have found that immigrant women prefer and fight to maintain gains in gender status brought by migration. However, few studies address how hegemonic ideals of white Western masculinity (e.g., as gender progressive, heroic) may also be an influence. In addition, women from U.S.-dominated countries engage masculinity ideologies both before and after they immigrate in a cross-border process. Using a case study of Korean immigrant women, this article addresses both the influence, and the women’s transnational engagement, of hegemonic ideologies of white American masculinity. The author conducted 26 in-depth interviews with first generation Korean immigrant women in Los Angeles and 22 supplementary interviews with women in Seoul, South Korea. This study finds that the women used hegemonic notions of white American masculinity to resist Korean patriarchy, especially co-ethnic men’s resistance to their gender empowerment in the United States. To be certain, the women’s subordination by racial/national inequalities fostered their derision of white American men, such as soldiers, in South Korea. Yet, the women’s racialized lens on gender relations tended to affirm their use of one form of hegemony—white American masculinity—to challenge another—Korean patriarchy. In light of these findings, future research on gender and immigrant women of color might consider analyzing racialized hierarchies of masculinity and their global–local and transnational contexts. Keywords: masculinity, gender strategy, whiteness, immigration, transnational.*

The study of the relationships between race,<sup>1</sup> gender, and class has become central to our sociological understanding of gender in recent years. Similarly, the area of men and masculinities has been impressively growing apace. Despite these two major trends, the field of masculinities has produced a small number of empirical studies on how race and masculinity intersect and how they do so in the context of globalization. For instance, an important area that integrates both racialized masculinity and globalization—Western masculinities of empire—has mostly been theoretical in orientation. Despite many descriptive studies of masculinities of empire, i.e., masculinity hierarchies created by imperialist nations (Connell 2005:43), we have few *empirical* studies of how these hierarchies affect nonwhite immigrants themselves. Yet, immigrants of color largely hail from countries that have been dominated by white Western (masculine) powers.

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1. I treat race as a socio-historical construction.

The scholarship on gender and migration has also not sufficiently analyzed the effects of hegemonic<sup>2</sup> white Western masculinity on immigrants of color. Although a number of studies have shown that women of color prefer and fight to maintain gains in gender status through migration to the United States, few studies address how idealizations of white masculinity, starting in the home country, may also influence the women's liberalization. Because, as the dominance of white masculinity depends on a subordinate nonwhite masculinity (e.g., as "patriarchal," less desirable), we should also examine how this masculinity hierarchy may influence women's views of, and resistance to, everyday ethnic patriarchy. Furthermore, the presence of hegemonic white masculinity, not just in the United States but in the U.S.-dominated home country, points to the cross-border *process* through which women forge gender ideologies<sup>3</sup> and strategies. Such a process, then, would point to women's understandings of masculinity before they come to the United States and the linkage of these ideologies to women's new gender arrangements that spring from U.S. immigrant life.

In light of the "global migration" of hegemonic white Western masculinities, this article pursues the following questions. Do women from U.S.-dominated (e.g., U.S.-occupied) countries subscribe to ideologies of white American men as heroic, gender egalitarian, hence, as ideal mates? If so, do the women use these ideologies, the subordinate masculinity of co-ethnic men, and gender gains in the United States through migration to critique co-ethnic men and patriarchy? What is the nature of this cross-border or transnational process? Finally, do some women seek out white American men as a "gender strategy," Arlie Hochschild's (1989) notion of "a plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play" (p. 15)?<sup>4</sup> In other words, are "cultural notions" of white masculinity central to Korean immigrant women's "plan of action" against Korean patriarchy?

To pursue these questions I employ a case study of Korean immigrant women in the United States. Korean women make a fitting case study in light of the United States' sixty-year military occupation of South Korea and pervasive cultural presence there. Korean women are also fitting in light of the dramatic shifts in their gender arrangements in the United States, as well as co-ethnic men's patterned resistance to the women's gains (Kim and Hurh 1988; Lim 1997; Min 1998; Park 2000). My primary data are open-ended, in-depth interviews with 26 Korean immigrant women of the first generation (first immigrant generation) in Los Angeles, California. To capture the transnational process or, for the purposes of this article, the process of cross-border imagining (Mahler and Pessar 2001) and social exchange (Parreñas 2001), I draw on supplementary interviews with women in Seoul, South Korea.<sup>5</sup>

To my knowledge no empirical study has yet pursued the question of how U.S. immigrant women of color craft gender ideologies and strategies vis-à-vis "migrating" white Western masculinity. In addition, few studies have coalesced the scholarship on the globalization of race and masculinity and the scholarship on gender, immigration, and transnationalism. In this way, this study moves beyond single-axis frameworks (*either gender or race*), U.S.-centered or macro-level-only perspectives, and the more common theoretical, rather than empirical, treatments of racialized masculinity in the masculinity literature.

2. By "hegemonic," I borrow from R.W. Connell's (1987:183–85) operationalization of it as belying the reality of most men, yet motivating large numbers of men to support it.

3. I define "ideology" as a group's set of sociopolitical beliefs through which it makes sense of the social world.

4. I thank Jennifer Hirsch for pushing me to see the way the women used culture and ideologies.

5. I do not attempt to ascertain whether South Korea is "more" patriarchal than the United States. The question itself elicits a false dichotomy, in part by abstracting itself from the inequalities between the two countries (see Mohanty 1991). Regardless, it stands to reason that both countries are patriarchal in different, though related, sociohistorical ways. For one, Korean patriarchy is more public, rigid, and overt in the name of Confucian collective "social harmony" and "duty" and one indelibly shaped by Korea's long-standing subjugation by outside powers. Unlike South Korean patriarchy, American patriarchy is non-Confucian and is fundamentally shaped by its superpower global status, by its more central intersections with race or racism, and by discourses of individualism. Moreover, Pyke and Johnson (2003) note that in the United States actual gender behavior is not as egalitarian as stated attitudes.

## Race and Masculinity in Globalized Context

Based on a social constructionist paradigm, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002) argues that race and gender are: “(1) relational concepts whose construction involves (2) representation and material relation and (3) in which power is a constitutive element” (p. 12–13). By relational, Glenn (2002) means that “race and gender categories (such as black in white, woman in man) are positioned, and therefore gain meaning in relation to each other” (p. 13). That is, masculinities can be variously racialized while racial groups can be variously gendered (e.g., masculinized, feminized, sexualized).

Race has been brought into masculinity studies by way of R.W. Connell’s (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinities. According to Connell, masculinity is hegemonic insofar as it belies the reality of most men, e.g., WASP, heterosexual, upper class, heroic, strong, athletic, and/or attractive. Yet “large numbers of men are motivated to support” the ideals of the “Bogarts” and the “Stallones” (pp. 183–85). In addition, hegemonic masculinities are “always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (pp. 183–86). Connell (2005) adds that hegemonic masculinities have globalized as part of a “world gender order,” a process that began with “the economic and political expansion of European states from the fifteenth century on and by the creation of colonial empires” (p. 39).<sup>6</sup> Yet Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) has described more than empirically researched the *whiteness* of these global masculinities of empire and has tended to focus more on heterosexual and upper class hegemonic masculinities in Western societies. To be sure, Connell (2005) and others (Fanon 1967; Mohanty 1991) have shown how imperialist white men have defined their masculinity as more superior and virile than the masculinity of the subordinated. For instance, European and U.S. imperialist projects in Asia prompted Orientalist ideologies of Asian men as weak, asexual, and traditional (Said 1979; also see Chen 1999; Eng 2001). Furthermore, in light of the variability of images and ideologies, imperialist white men often used their relations with white women to fashion themselves, in Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1991) words, as “self-disciplined protector[s] of women and morals” (pp. 16–17). Such a historical image of white men as better to women than “third world” men bodes well with the emergent ideal of the soft, sensitive, and gender egalitarian “new man” in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994). Asian men, however, have been derogated as patriarchal in addition to being feminized, neither of which makes them ideal types (Espiritu 1997). One manifestation of this white-dominated masculinity hierarchy in imperialist contexts has been Asian women’s marriages to mostly white soldiers (see Yuh 2002).

The literature on globalized masculinities thus underscores how globalization does not just entail colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism,<sup>7</sup> but also the flows of culture and ideas. In this vein, Connell (2005) identifies mass media as having globally disseminated the hegemonic gender orders and masculinities of north Atlantic countries. Patricia R. Pessar (2001) (also see Mahler and Pessar 2001) asserts the need for further examination of globalized imagery of gender:

[W]e require more research on how images, meanings, and values associated with gender, consumption, modernity, and the family circulate within the global cultural economy (c.f. Appadurai, 1990) and how these “ideoscapes” and “mediascapes” are interpreted and appropriated in varied sites by different household members in ways that either promote or constrain mobility (c.f. Mills 1997) (p. 582).

6. As one anonymous reviewer aptly points out, *multiple* hegemonic masculinities exist, not just a single hegemonic white Western masculinity. One example s/he provides is the heroic jihadist hegemonic masculinity. While I completely agree with the reviewer, this study’s focus on “race” as tied to the United States necessitates narrowing the lens onto white American masculinity’s racial and national dominance over Korean and Asian masculinity.

7. I thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding me that globalization also entails cross-border resistance movements like the Global Justice Movement.

Some studies have documented the importance of the gendered “images, meanings, and values” that she mentions. Karen Kelsky (2001), for instance, found that professional Japanese women drew heavily on ideologies and imagery to esteem white (usually American) men as the globe’s most progressive and desirable men. In a similar vein, Ji-Yeon Yuh (2002) found that a good number of Korean military brides did not marry white American soldiers *solely* to escape poverty or prostitution (some of the women did not endure either), but because of their idealization of them as “white prince charmings” (i.e., the ideal romantic mate) (Yuh 2002) and derision of Korean men as patriarchs.<sup>8</sup> In light of the power of cultural imagery, the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism has had to address Korean parents’ demands that American media be banned for fear of youth’s adoration of all things American (Washington Post 1986). These battles and debates span Asia (and beyond). In 2002, the Malaysian government banned a Toyota advertisement featuring Brad Pitt for fear of encouraging inferiority complexes (and likely Asian women’s lack of desire for Asian men) (BBC News 2002).

Despite the force of glorified white masculinity in both the home country and the United States, most studies do not see such glorifications as shaping women’s challenges to ethnic patriarchy in the United States (e.g., Chai 1987; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1993; Kim and Hurh 1988; Lim 1997; Min 1998; Park 2000; Zentgraf 2002). Yet, some empirical studies on the U.S. context have focused on how nonwhite immigrants construct masculinities and femininities vis-à-vis whiteness. For instance, in his empirical study Anthony S. Chen (1999) found that young Asian American men conformed to racial stereotypes of their masculinity as wanting vis-à-vis hegemonic white masculinity. Specific to women of color, Yen Le Espiritu (2003:chp. 7) revealed that Filipina Americans constructed their femininity as chaste while derogating white femininity as sexually immoral. In Karen D. Pyke and Denise L. Johnson’s (2003) study, young Korean and Vietnamese American women racially essentialized white femininity and Asian femininity as gender liberated and oppressive, respectively. Similarly, Cecilia Menjívar (1999) found that Guatemalan and Salvadoran female live-in domestics aspired for “Anglos” division of household labor that they witnessed on the job. Their husbands criticized them for aspiring to be “gringa[s]” (i.e., white women) and accused them of watching “too much TV” (Menjívar 1999:620). I draw on these findings to ascertain whether or not Korean women racially construct white masculinity as gender egalitarian and Korean or Asian masculinity as gender oppressive. Yet, I go beyond the United States to examine this racialized masculinity hierarchy within a global–local context of empire. Furthermore, I examine the *process* of the women’s responses by paying attention to how the women’s imaginings, exchanges, and experiences concerning gender draw transnationally on both the South Korean and U.S. societies.

### Gender in South Korean and Korean American Contexts

At the end of World War II, the United States divided the Korean peninsula with the then-Soviet Union, occupied the south militarily, and has dominated the country since. In response to U.S. domination, South Koreans have held a dualist view of American GIs as humane rescuers and as imperialist invaders. The positive viewpoint, that of humane rescuer, has long been promulgated by the South Korean state and has involved glorifying General Douglas MacArthur, the quintessence of hegemonic white masculinity. U.S. media saturation in the peninsula has helped this glorification. For instance, South Korea has become one of Hollywood’s largest and most profitable markets outside North America (Groves 1998) and tropes of heroic white masculinity abound in Hollywood texts. Perhaps not coincidentally,

8. Although military brides are central to Korean immigrant history, I examine women who have *not* married whites to capture the influence of global–local ideology and its transnational process on the women.

some of South Korea’s biggest box-office hits include *Ghost*, *Titanic*, and *The Gladiator*, all of which showcase heroic white male protagonists. Yet, as noted, South Koreans also have a long-standing history of anti-Americanism. Many see the U.S. soldiers as the low-class cogs of imperialists and as abusers of Korean women.

South Korean women engage these hegemonic and counter-hegemonic notions of white American masculinity in the context of Korean Confucian patriarchy. Confucian patriarchy was first adopted by the Chosun dynasty (1392–1910). Although the previous Shilla and Koryo dynasties accorded women more power and privileges, Chosun doctrine required a woman to abide by the “rule of three obediences”: subordination to (1) her father before marriage, (2) her husband after marriage, and (3) her son(s) once she is widowed (Cho 1988). Such a Chosun system of male family headship has persisted to the present day despite the countervailing demands of industrialization and of women’s movements (see Kim and Choi 1998; Palley 1994). South Korean activists and scholars have challenged Confucian patriarchy and its structural dimensions such as the mother-in-law tradition, which assures a woman’s subordination to her husband. The tradition requires women to be long-time scorned apprentices to their mothers-in-law and sacrificing domestic servants in order to “earn” their membership into the husband’s family. The attitudes of the larger female populace have seemed to follow suit, as one study found that a majority of South Korean women believed that a woman’s successful career was just as important as successful motherhood and wifehood (cited in Moon 1998). Despite these trends, the Korean Bureau of Statistics reveals that only about a quarter of married women in urban South Korea participate in the labor force (Min 1998).

In the U.S. context, Korean immigrants experience downward mobility despite their mostly college-educated, middle class, and professional origins. To compensate for downward mobility, usually both husband *and* wife must work. Studies generally conclude that immigrant women’s gains in gender status, such as through paid employment, are uneven (Chai 1987; Espiritu 1997; Kibria 1993; Menjivar 1999; Zentgraf 2002). One path is that women experience a double burden of making an income and a home (Kim and Hurh 1988; Min 1998; Yu and Phillips 1987; Zentgraf 2002). Another path is women’s satisfaction with, and empowerment from, paid employment in the United States, especially if they work independently of their husbands (Lim 1997; Min 1998; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Some women experience a combination of both (Park 1997).

In light of women’s gains in gender status, Korean men, like other immigrant men, tend to strengthen their male privilege. The men’s grip on Confucian patriarchy also reflects their need to compensate for their weaker ability to find work and culturally adjust than women, for their overall declassed status, and their direct bouts with racism and subordinate masculinity (Espiritu 1997; Min 1998; see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994). To be sure, some men adjust well to women’s increased economic contributions and decision making. But the backlash of those who do not often leads to divorce and/or domestic violence (Korea Times 10/26/93 as cited in Park 2000; see Song 1998). Although most Korean immigrant families remain intact, divorce rates escalate among Koreans after migrating to the United States (Park 2000).<sup>9</sup> Such heightened marital troubles in the United States, along with idealizations of white American men, likely contribute to Korean women’s increased endorsement of American-style companionate marriages (see Park 2000). That is, they have come to prefer companionate marriages over those driven by patriarchy, family honor, and/or economic need.

Against the contextual backdrops outlined above, this study examines how Korean immigrant women engage the global-local ideology of hegemonic white masculinity in their struggles with everyday ethnic patriarchy. Second, this study examines the *process* of

9. Park argues that rates may be very high as many divorces are not formally reported to the Korean Consulate.

the women's responses by paying attention to how the women link the South Korean and U.S. contexts in their exchanges, experiences, and imaginings concerning masculinity and patriarchy from a transnational vantage point.

## Method

This study draws primarily from in-depth, open-ended interviews with 26 first-generation Korean immigrant women in Los Angeles and secondarily from focus group and individual interviews with 22 women in Seoul, South Korea. The author interviewed the immigrant women between January and September 2001 and recruited them from various ethnic, civic, and social organizations, including churches and language schools, and from snowball sampling (these varied sites allowed for diverse subject recruitment). The sample was divided into two major subgroups of 17 "newcomers" (in the United States 5 years or less) and 9 "old-timers" (in the United States more than 5 years). "Newcomers" are better able to speak on pre-migration understandings, the relevance of these understandings in the U.S. context, and on intense transnational exchanges with kin and friends. "Old-timers," on the other hand, are typically best able to speak on immigrant life and its outcomes and on transnational exchanges and comparisons over time. To be clear, it is not my objective to systematically compare newcomers with old-timers in this study, but rather to provide contextual background for their comments.

Turning to the women's demographic characteristics, about half of the recent émigrés, or "newcomers," are younger than 40 (roughly 24 to 35) while the other half is middle-aged (between 38 and 76). Most of the "old-timer" immigrants are middle-aged and have been in the United States 10 to 26 years. All the women are heterosexual and 22 are married, all to Korean men (3 are widowed). Four of the women have never been married and expressed their active search for a mate, including white American ones. Nearly all the women are middle class (social class status was determined by parents' and informants' education, occupations, and income, and by informants' self-description). This class demographic reflects the middle class standing of most Koreans who have immigrated to the United States since 1965. Many of these women entered the paid workforce for the first time upon immigrating to the United States. In the sample, most are either wage or salary earners or small business proprietors independent of their husbands, with only some operating businesses jointly with their husbands (or having done so). Finally, none of the women are active in feminist movements, but many, as we shall see, have pro-women leanings.

In addition to collecting data in Los Angeles, I collected supplementary data in Seoul, South Korea. My purpose in Seoul was to ensure the reliability of recent immigrants' (newcomers') reports of their race-gender ideologies and experiences before coming to the United States. Although the recently-arrived immigrants likely reported their pre-migration notions accurately, I sought to gain greater insight into their views by going to Seoul myself. By conducting such a multi-site research design, I avoided a U.S.-centric, de-contextualized framework that privileged immigrants' lives in America. The multi-site framework also enabled me to better understand and identify both societies' influences on the women and the transnational connections the women made, literally and symbolically (see Espiritu 2003). The Seoul sample ( $n = 22$ ) is comprised of 16 female university students and young working professionals who were interviewed in four mixed-gender focus groups and in one open-ended, in-depth interview, and 6 middle-aged and older women who were interviewed informally, to capture a wider age spread.<sup>10</sup> Interviews took place between October and December 2000, and the entire sample ranged in age from 20 to 60 years (mean = 31 years). The focus group informants were recruited mostly by way of written announcements, discrete social networks, and by snowball sampling. The older women were recruited from snowball sampling and native

residents’ social networks. None of the women in Seoul were active in feminist movements, though one college student organized for North Koreans’ human rights.

The women were asked to discuss their pre- and post-migration understandings of white American men, masculinity, and the institution of marriage; their perceptions of the U.S. military and U.S. mass media and how they may have influenced the women’s understandings; their experiences with the Korean men in their lives (e.g., fathers, boyfriends, husbands) in both South Korea and the United States; and their employment experiences and household gender arrangements in both societies.

The author conducted all the Los Angeles interviews, ranging from 1.5 to 6 hours, and interviewed all but four informants in the Korean language. In Seoul, a trained research assistant conducted the focus groups (for which the author was present) and the in-depth interview. The Seoul-based interviews ranged from 1.5 hours (in-depth, informal interviews) to 4.5 hours (mostly focus groups). Both sets of data were transcribed, were multiply coded for spoken and unspoken themes via Atlas.ti software, and were analyzed in conjunction with ethnographic field notes.

### The “Race” to Modern Men

Most of the women put the importance of Confucian patriarchal marriage—with which they had been indoctrinated—on trial. Unlike the recent immigrant women (“newcomers”), the “old-timer” immigrants who had been in the United States since the 1970s and early ‘80s tended to solidify such thinking *after* immigrant life. In the 1970s there was less globalized imagery, less ease of transnational exchange, and less structural change from U.S. and Korean feminist movements. For example, Duckmo Paik<sup>11</sup> (56 years old, 1 year in the United States) aptly summed up the sentiments of middle-aged newcomers when she maligned South Korean patriarchy as outdated, especially as opposed to America’s gender system. She does so by drawing on Koreans’ common practice of conflating “America” and the modern “world”:

Duckmo: [L]ike the idea that women can’t do certain things but men can, that kind of thing has to go. That just seems like it totally doesn’t match with *the rest of the world*, but because we still have it, you see how much people from my generation and background still think that way—the women have lived really hard lives.

Interviewer: Where?

Duckmo: In Korea! *I never feel that in America* (emphases added).<sup>12</sup>

Not only did the women often conflate “America” and “the world” in their musings about gender, they also conflated America and whiteness.<sup>13</sup> Such a conflation should not be surprising given the United States’ racialization of its hegemonic identity as white (Lipsitz 1998). Indeed, the Korean term for whites, *miguk saram*, literally translates as “American person(s).”<sup>14</sup> Thus, when Koreans described “American marriages” or “American culture,” they meant *white* American marriages and culture, a common tendency among Asian American groups (Espiritu 2003; Tuan 1998).

10. Although I would have liked to have interviewed more middle-aged-plus women in Seoul, interviewing older strangers for research projects is not nearly as common an endeavor as it is in the United States, hence I had very limited access. But the views of the many middle-aged women who had migrated recently, as early as two months, speak well to pre-migration notions.

11. All names are pseudonyms.

12. So as not to reify researcher–informant inequalities and racial stereotypes and also for sake of clarity, the few narratives that were spoken in grammatically incorrect English were corrected.

13. For interpretations of whiteness see Lewis 2004.

14. There are distinct terms for black and other non-white Americans in the Korean language.

### *Influence of the U.S. Military*

With regard to the U.S. military, the women's reference point was whiteness despite the fact that black and other nonwhite soldiers have also been stationed in South Korea. The women expressed deep gratitude to the "American soldiers," i.e., white soldiers, for "helping our country" during the Korean Conflict. Women like middle-aged Eunhee Yi rhetorized, "What would we have done without them?" Twenty-nine-year-old Susan Um (6 months in the United States) more specifically discussed the attractiveness of white American soldiers by drawing on heroic "men-in-uniform" notions. Her view was shaped by her childhood growing up near a military base camp-town where her father owned a small store:

[W]hen my dad had the store, I thought wow, white men looked pretty good, and even the black men did too . . . the army men who walked by back and forth. So I wouldn't say that I felt that I definitely had to marry a Korean person. When I was little—at that time, I was in my first year of junior high school—I spoke the very basics of English with them . . . [E]ven at that point I didn't have any prejudice toward them whatsoever so when I was little, I used to dream about what it would be like if I married a white guy (laughs)!

In fact, one of the major reasons that Korean and Korean immigrant women like Susan could imagine marrying white men was because of the long history of military marriages between Korean (or other Asian) women and white men. These marriages have also signaled white men's desires for Korean women. Indeed, some of the Seoul informants remarked, "Korean women are the most attractive [East] Asian women" (not surprisingly, most of these women did not invoke white men's potential Orientalist exoticization of them [see Said 1979]). Moreover, Susan's desire for a white husband was also shaped by white masculinity's hegemonic position over nonwhite masculinities. Although Susan believed that she was positively depicting black GIs, she noted that "even" black men looked good but implied that they weren't her "dream" mate. She also implies the subordinate masculinity of Korean men by her disregard for South Koreans' patent expectations for endogamy and scorn for marriages with white American soldiers.

### *Popular Culture and Other Influences*

In addition to citing the heroic character of imperial American masculinity, the women often cited the "gender egalitarian" character of white masculinity propagated by Hollywood (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994). Because Hollywood and other media texts tend not to focus their storylines on white American men's far from equal rates of housework (see Ehrenreich 2002; Hochschild 1989), the women were largely unaware of such an unequal gender reality. It is not surprising, then, that the women's polarizations of white and Korean masculinities relied heavily on globalized cultural imagery of white men, both American and European. Even women in their 40s to 60s noted their continued idealization of white male icons like Jeremy Irons (the Britishman was named several times), Elvis Presley, and James Dean. Furthermore, some of the young Seoul informants claimed axiomatically that "white men [were] more attractive than Korean men" and named figures like Andrea Bocelli, Harrison Ford, and Keanu Reeves as highly desirable (not knowing Reeves was part Chinese). Immigrant women in the United States added the likes of Matt Damon and Hugh Grant to the pool. As a point of contrast, some Seoul women remarked that, unlike Korean women, Korean men even ranked on the very bottom of an *East Asian* aesthetic hierarchy (Japanese men earned best-looking honors).

As an example of how the women would link white men's attractiveness to their status as ideal mates, forty-seven-year-old Jungmi Jun, who had recently immigrated to the United States with her Korean husband, was a long-time fan of Jeremy Irons. She practically deified him with her remark: "He's charming (chuckles) . . . He looks just like a saint in that movie [*The Mission*]!" Her daughter, also an Irons fan and also married to a Korean man, quipped half-jokingly that her mother "didn't have a chance with him [Irons]." This suggests, even in



jest, that married women’s idealization of white male stars did not necessarily negate fantasies about partnering with them, perhaps suggesting a gender strategy of imagining the good life with ideal mates. Non-migrant women in Seoul also linked idealizations of white men to progressive gender norms. For instance, a student named Suheng Lim remarked, In a way, in Korean women’s perspective, the gender roles in the West seem more fair . . . So I’ve never been against international marriages.” Koreans’ equivalent for interracial marriage—international marriage—denotes white male–Korean female pairings unless otherwise stated. In this student’s case, then, white men represented “more fair” gender practices and arrangements.

As an example of how women’s idealizations translated into gender strategies, young Taebi Ra (25 years old, 6 months in the United States) recounted that she had mused over the possibility of a white husband while she was a college student in Seoul. She, like most of the women, considered a white mate in order to gain the gender reciprocity that she witnessed in American movies and that seemed unattainable within Korean marriages:

When I was a college student I once thought about a foreigner [white person] because, *as you know*, it’d be different from being with a Korean man. The white men share the household duties with their wives equally, they know how to love their wives. You know it’s different in Korea. Even though times have changed [South Korea has liberalized], I thought that it was worth thinking about, worth considering, at that time . . . because we see them [white men] that way in the movies . . . They take good care of their wives (emphasis added).

Taebi presents the common conception of white masculinity as more gender egalitarian (“share the household duties . . . equally”), which she then links to a proper expression of love (“know how to love their wives”). Her statement “as you know” renders this ideology a dictum, an ideology so powerful that she, like the others, was unfamiliar with white American men’s general avoidance of housework. Yet, Taebi’s romanticized view makes clear why she chooses the gender strategy that she does. Rather than marry a “traditional” Korean man in South Korea, she had recently moved to the United States to marry a Korean American of the 1.5 generation whom she met when he studied abroad in Seoul (“1.5” means U.S.-raised child immigrants). In her eyes, her husband’s “American” upbringing explained his more gender egalitarian ways. At the same time, he did not act “so white American” that “culture clashes” would erupt. For instance, he was relatively fluent in Korean and he practiced Korean cultural norms like filial piety.

Again, this link between globalized white masculinity and “the good married life” versus Korean masculinity and “the not-so-good-married-life” was not voiced by the young women alone. Fifty-seven-year-old Eulsoon An, an immigrant of eight months and recently widowed, spoke of her desire for Elvis during her youth in South Korea. Turning to the topic of marriage, she did not want to talk in-depth about her late Korean husband but she implied that the marriage was not ideal. She preferred that her second husband be white American, not Korean, in part because she thought, “It would be fun to share different cultures.” It is plausible that U.S. media’s glorification (near deification) of masculine icons like Elvis made marriage with white men seem more “fun.”

Though very few in number, some women were shaped not just by imagery, ideologies, and secondhand stories but by the personal encounters they had had with white men in South Korea. Old-timers who departed in the ‘70s to early ‘80s had fewer chances to interact with white American men in South Korea. Yet, newcomers reported some, though mostly superficial, meetings with businessmen, exchange students, language teachers, and the like (recall that American GIs are mostly restricted to camp-towns largely segregated from mainstream Korean society). Some of these women saw white men as “free spirited” and “liberal.” Middle-aged newcomer Minhi Kang (46 years old, 3 years in the United States), for instance, noted how encounters with her cousin’s white American husband in South Korea influenced her to “always [be] open to the idea” of intermarriage, even before marrying her Korean husband. Her cousin’s intermarriage had left a sting of envy:

- Minhi: I was so envious of her.  
 Interviewer: Why?  
 Minhi: I don't know why. Uh, the fact that a foreigner [white person] fell in love with a Korean woman and they got to live together here—it was all so fascinating to me.  
 Interviewer: Do you think you would prefer whites as a potential marriage partner, if you weren't married, that is?  
 Minhi: Yes, if I wasn't married, I'd consider whites.  
 Interviewer: Would you consider them as potential marriage partners just as much as you'd consider Koreans?  
 Minhi: Yes, yes!

What is interesting is that Minhi's envy is not rooted in anything specific or practical about her cousin's marriage, but in the fact that she herself did not live out the "fascinating" *story* (or fantasy) of being swept off her feet by a white American man and whisked off to the "land of milk and honey." Minhi's fascination with the fact that a white man would fall for a Korean woman also reveals a sense of racial and national inferiority. The thrill of overcoming that inferiority conjoined with the "white prince" ideal seems to guide her openness to marrying a white American. To be sure, some women resisted hegemonic white masculinity by stating that the white American men they met in South Korea were "not all attractive," were often "arrogant," and "glorified America."

### **I Told Them It's Better for Women Here": Transnationally Connecting Masculinity Ideology**

The above interpretation of Minhi's envy of her cousin's life with a "white prince charming" does not go far enough in explaining why she idealizes white men. Her idealization was also linked to her expressed dissatisfaction with being a housewife, an arrangement that continued in the United States given her family's arrival just three years prior. Minhi's aspiration to work in the future and to "accomplish more with [her] dancing" also seemed to shape her openness to marrying a white American. She felt she could be an income-earning and independent woman with a white husband.

In this way, Minhi serves as an example of how the women linked hegemonic white American masculinity to their economic empowerment in the United States, or aspirations for it. Not only was hegemonic white American masculinity characterized by an openness to women working, but it also rendered Korean men's backlash against their wives as "backwards." In other words, the women affirmed their economic empowerment in the United States, justified their "Americanization of gender," and challenged Korean men's intensified patriarchy by propping up hegemonic white masculinity as the touchstone for what Korean households and Korean men should be. The women thus undergo a transnational process of linking pre-migration masculinity ideologies and post-migration gender relations and experiences. The following narratives reveal the subtle and overt ways the women invoked white masculinity in their resistance narratives. For instance, Bokhi Park (single, 46 years old) left Seoul in 1981 to free herself from her "despotic" father and to pursue her education and career, both of which she achieved. In shuttling back and forth between Seoul and the United States every six months for the past decade to help her parents' business, she came to the conclusion that older-generation Korean men in both contexts clung to male privilege:

[Korean] [m]en can never change, because you know what? . . . They're the man, the king over there [South Korea], right? They do everything they want, right? . . . [H]ere they wanna [be king], but the woman changes. Usually the women never stay home, they go out. Women have jobs, they make their own money, so why should they have to obey all the time, which is unreasonable, right? That's why they [women] say, "Let's get a divorce."

In addition, she thought that young Korean American men enacted more culturally white American gender norms as opposed to Korean gender norms: “Young Korean American couples are all more Americanized, but the men who are my age or older never change, you know?” It is also not surprising that she placed much importance on finding a male peer that would allow her to pursue her new acupuncture business and to be her vocal self. She often looked to white American men to meet her needs and had had a serious relationship with one (a case I will revisit).

Heesu Noh (31 years old, 4 years in the United States), a young newcomer married to a Korean man, expressed the difficulties she was having with her husband’s intensified grip on “traditional Koreanness” in the United States, including his grip on certain Confucian patriarchal norms. In fact, before meeting her husband, she had almost married a white American man partly to escape Korean traditions like daughter-in-law burdens and partly to live out the “fairy tale” (another case I will revisit). Echoing one of the reasons she had originally sought out a white American boyfriend, she remarked:

In general . . . I think they [Korean men] should give up things that are too Korean in a way, things that are too traditional. My husband has this kind of traditional thinking. I mean . . . he tries to maintain Korean things, tries to make the Korean things stronger, so then I ask him, “Why doesn’t he go back to Korea, then? Why does he live here?” . . . My husband says that while he lives in the United States, he wants to Koreanize the Americans’ way of thinking . . . but I think the opposite, that you should be Americanized if you’re living here in America.”

She sees Korean Confucian traditions as antithetical to the white America she and her husband now live in and, hence, as displaced. She believes her husband should “Americanize.” That is, rather than remain culturally Korean, he should culturally whiten. After all, her desire for culturally white American gender norms had originally led her to a white boyfriend.

The women also revealed how their pre-migration idealizations of white masculinity had been transnationally affirmed by first-hand observations of white male behavior in the United States or by dating white men. For instance, before Mina Moon (38 years old) immigrated to the United States two years earlier, she had encountered white masculinity via exchanges with her girlfriends already living in the United States who had white male partners. Her pre-migrant imaginings were later confirmed by her direct observations in the United States:

When I observe the white men here, I notice that they’re so simple [easy-going] and they treat my friends really well. I have a friend who’s going to get married and, for instance, even if my friend’s fiancé [a white American] is really far from her somewhere, he’ll still take her places, then leave, wait until she’s done, and then pick her up (laughs); and he also does housework! Because getting Korean men to do that is so hard, you know? They [the white husbands] treat them so, so well.

With her pre-migrant idealization of white men, her post-migrant experiences, which affirmed this ideal, and her new full-time work at a Korean-owned dental office, Mina could not be content with Korean men’s refusal to do housework. Similarly, young skin care esthetician Audi Suh, a five-year immigrant and single woman, presumed that she would marry a Korean man given her mostly Korean social circles. Yet she was open to the idea of marrying a white American after observing two female cousins who “lived well” with their white husbands in the United States.

### *New Work Lives in Transnational Context*

To trace how the immigrant women often associated their “gender modernizing” (see Hirsch 2003) with having a nice white husband, it is important to first discuss how the women were transformed by their new status as paid workers in the United States. Fifty-one-year-old “old-timer” Sorah Pak (26 years in the United States) conveyed most eloquently her transformation. Proudly a registered nurse who sometimes helped in her Korean husband’s

picture framing business, she was insistent that she would never have been able to transcend middle class domestication in Seoul and have gained the “sense of achievement” that she did in the United States:

Yes, when I first got here, I just followed my husband here, and I raised my children here. And when I look at what’s going on in [South] Korea now, I think I made the right decision by coming here . . . I have a job here . . . Women need to be happy with their own lives, have this sense of achievement . . . in their lives. It’s not enough to just eat and spend the money the husband brings home.

In fact, Sorah denigrated gender conservative Koreans as “fresh off the boat” (FOB) and exempted herself from the label in light of her more (white) American, not Korean, womanhood. She quipped, “Yes, I can be considered ‘Korean American.’ I’m not an ‘F.O.B.’ anymore, as the kids say (laughs) . . . I have a completely different value system!” While Sorah still prized forms of Korean culture over American culture, like collectivism, her transnational lens of “there” and “here” secured her belief that Korean patriarchy nullified a woman’s sense of self. In this vein, she reported that she “would have married an ‘American’” if given the chance to do it again. Indeed, Sorah believed she would have accomplished much more with her career and avoided gender struggles with a “white prince charming.” She preferred a white husband even despite her view of her Korean husband as more “Americanized” than most.

In a similar vein, Miyung Shin linked her satisfaction with paid work to the more white American gender relations in her household. A young newcomer married to a Korean man, Miyung had become quite content with modern womanhood as a full-time worker at a Korean organization. She was so content with being “really busy” and needed at work and with not having to be a “slave” to her mother-in-law that she transnationally beckoned her friends to move to the United States. She stated, “I have told them [female kin, friends] to come over [to the United States] because . . . life is pretty simple here. I think it’s better for women.” Another key reason she thought American life was better for women was her Korean husband’s gradual emulation of white American masculinity. That is, in contrast to his behavior in South Korea, her husband “came home everyday after work” rather than perform the daily Korean corporate duty of drinking late into the night with male colleagues. He thus spent more quality time with her and “helped more with everyday housework.”

### *Personal Exchanges in Transnational Context*

These women’s views were further reinforced by the messages they received from South Korea affirming white American masculinity. For instance, at age thirty-eight, Mina was considered much past her nuptial prime in South Korea (usually mid-twenties). Yet, her tenacious elderly mother had sent trans-Pacific messages that a white son-in-law would be welcomed into the family:

- Mina: [W]hen my mom calls me from time to time, she says that Americans [whites] are acceptable too.
- Interviewer: Oh, white Americans? So she mentions them and doesn’t mention like other Asians or other . . . ?
- Mina: Yeah, since this is the United States, she says living my life with an American would be okay too.

Not only did the mother’s conception of America as a white country underpin her advice, but so did her acceptance of hegemonic white masculinity. Mina’s pre-migration views were thus affirmed to her not only by her direct observations in the United States but by her mother’s trans-Pacific counsel. In light of these mutually affirming influences it is not surprising that Mina seriously considered “marrying a white guy” to live “a better life for women.” Similarly, Sanghi Pike, a single, middle-aged newcomer of two months, was bombarded with questions from

her girlfriends across the ocean about whether or not she had met a “white prince charming” yet. Her girlfriends affirmed that the most interesting and noteworthy thing about America was getting to meet a nice white man, not a *Korean American man*.

To be certain, the women’s transnational lens, which compared Korean and white American masculinities and marriages, did not always point in the direction of maligning Korean or Asian men. For instance, Susan Um and Lucia Du, both young newcomers and housewives with Korean husbands, expressed surprise at old-timer immigrant men’s grip on Confucian male privilege. The women concluded in linear fashion that these immigrant men were “culturally frozen”<sup>15</sup> in the traditional period of the homeland they left years ago. In the meantime, contemporary South Korean men had “improved” alongside the homeland’s development. Yet, the women still attributed South Korean men’s liberalization of their gender norms to “Western” influence and immigrant men’s conservatism to “old Korean ways.”

### **“They Think They’re All That”: Resistance to Race-Nation-Gender Inequality**

The women did not always believe that white American men are the most ideal partners. For instance, HeeSu Noh and Bokhi Park, both of whom had seriously dated white American men and enjoyed the increased gender reciprocity in their relationships, came to see problems with the hegemonic ideology of the good life with “white prince charming.” For example, although thirty-one-year-old HeeSu, now married to a Korean immigrant, had once seriously considered marrying her ex-white boyfriend, cultural differences and barriers to emotional communication between them became insurmountable. These differences ultimately affirmed to her that a Korean mate would best suit her despite a probable loss in gender reciprocity. Long-time immigrant Bokhi Park had once seriously dated a white male whom she described as “Swiss American,” but things ended because, in her words, they “lacked understanding of each other’s backgrounds.” The failure of these relationships points to a disjuncture between the women’s image and their reality.<sup>16</sup>

Women who are newcomer immigrants and Seoul residents resisted the ideology of white male benevolent leadership that pervaded their home country more often than women who are old-timers. They maligned the white servicemen as “imperialist” occupiers. Moreover, the soldiers’ widely-publicized violence against Korean women fostered the women’s view of the U.S. military as not only racially and nationally oppressive but as *gender* oppressive. In this way, the women revealed their awareness of their oppression at the intersection of racial, national, and gender lines. In criticizing the U.S. occupation, then, the women aligned with Korean men in a common anti-U.S. project. To illustrate, Seoul university student Shinha Park remarked that unlike the handsome celebrities that the women in her focus group invoked, the following immediately came to mind in reference to “white American men”:

When I think of whites, I don’t think of people from movies or TV. I immediately think of the American GIs here [*migun*] . . . especially when I think of all the controversies with Korean women or when there are Korea–U.S. problems or things like that. I think: Oh, all they believe in is the power of their country. And I bet they’re nothing back in their country but here, they think they are all that. Though I’m sure not every single one of them is like that.

15. I am indebted to Kyeyoung Park for this phrase and concept.

16. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this point. As a related point, second-generation Korean American women’s outmarriage rates with whites and other groups are significantly higher than those of Korean immigrant women (Fong 2002), though the second generation is increasingly marrying other Asian Americans rather than whites (Lee and Fernandez 1998; Shinagawa and Pang 1996).

Taebi Ra who had been in the United States seven months to begin life with her Korean-American husband saw the foregoing view as widespread:

Koreans generally think badly of American [white] soldiers. Their basic perception of American soldiers is that they are uneducated people who come, live there for a while, take women, and then leave. And there are women who were totally deceived when they got married: the man lied that it was his first marriage when it was his third. Later, when he was killed in an accident, she found out that he hadn't reported their marriage and none of his divorces had cleared yet so she couldn't register her child's name . . . there are lots of those kinds of problems.

In addition to such problems, stories of white GIs insisting that their Korean wives be subservient in the "Korean way" militated against Taebi's "prince charming" ideal. In fact, one graduate student in Seoul remarked that she disliked the way American movies made "Asian women look docile." Women also cited experiences with "arrogant" civilian white men in both South Korea and the United States. In contrast to the newcomers and Seoul residents, however, old-timer immigrant women did not censure (white) American servicemen to the same extent. This difference likely reflects the more pro-American sensibilities of Koreans who immigrated in the 70s and 80s as well as their greater detachment from the military occupation in South Korea. The latter suggests that notions of white American masculinity rooted in the occupation of South Korea is not nearly as evident in U.S. society (Kim 2006).

In addition, the women's cultural resistance to American rule in both their home country and in the United States drew in part on their common criticism of white Americans' "sexual promiscuity." As Koreans' strong virginity-until-marriage ethos has been enforced in part to curb morally contaminating "Americanization," the women criticized both white men and women for their individualistic sexual liberties. For instance, in relaying what was positive about Korean culture, old-timer Haesun Go remarked: "Koreans are more conservative, more than Americans [whites]. American[s] are about freedom of their sex life, but Koreans are more conservative." Similarly, twenty-five-year-old Taebi appreciated Korean culture's more "sexual conservatism" in the face of whites' promiscuity: "I think Korea is a more moralistic society . . . I don't know whether I think that way because I'm more like that, but that's how I feel." In brief, the Korean women resisted white dominance by declaring parts of their culture "morally superior" (phrase from Espiritu 2003).

Yet, even with the foregoing challenges to white masculinity and whiteness generally, the women tended to perceive "low-life" white soldiers or gender-backwards white men as *exceptions* to, rather than rules of, otherwise hegemonic white American masculinity. The women consistently returned to this notion as explaining white Americans' more gender egalitarian marriages. The broader implications are suggestive, as the women's challenges to U.S. imperialism and whiteness did not wholly overturn their idealization of white American masculinity within marriage. In addition, these challenges did not lead the women to identify even the existence of mainstream patriarchy in the United States nor to impugn any type of gender inequality there.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study reveals that immigrant women of color critique ethnic men and patriarchy by drawing largely on what Connell (2005) deems globalized "masculinities of empire" and North American masculinities idealized in mass media (pp. 40, 43). Korean women's gender strategies, i.e., the ways they addressed Korean patriarchy (see Hochschild 1989), used the ideal of the gender progressive white American man as the bar against which they challenged Korean men as patriarchal, hence backwards in the "third world" sense. Guided by this masculinity hierarchy, women had sought, or were seeking at the time of their interviews, Korean men who enacted culturally white gender norms or white men themselves. In addition,

many immigrant women critiqued their Korean husbands for not being "American" enough despite living in modern white America. Many of these married women even longed for white American husbands, revealing the importance of the realm of imagining.

Taken together, these strategies reveal that the women were not calculating the costs and benefits of a more gender equal household, but that most truly believed in the hegemonic white masculinity ideal of gender progressiveness, romanticism, and open-mindedness given white men's history of marriage to Korean women. Indeed, the women's pursuit of white male partners noted above evinces their belief in the ideal. In addition, some of the middle-aged, married women's wistful moments of "If I had the chance to do it all over again . . ." revealed their conviction that they actually *could* have had a life with a white husband. In this way, the ideology of hegemonic white masculinity served as both a gender strategy and a gender ideal, with women interweaving and collapsing the two.

The second key finding points to the cross-border *process* of ideological development for the women. Drawing on both their experiences at home and their impressions of U.S. society, South Korean women often saw their pre-migration ideologies of hegemonic white masculinity as legitimating their new gender arrangements upon migrating to the United States. They considered these arrangements normative among white couples: a more fair division of labor and women's empowerment through income production. Hegemonic white masculinity thus guided the women's resistance to Korean men's backlash against their empowerment. Furthermore, the women's pre-U.S. imaginings were reinforced by observation of white men's "gender modernity" in U.S. society and by reinforcing messages they received from South Korean female kith and kin (phrase from Hirsch 2003). To be sure, the women's pre-migrant imaginings became more layered and contradictory upon moving to the United States. For instance, they realized that South Korean men could be more progressive than Korean immigrant men or that idealizations of white boyfriends did not always match reality. But more often than not, the women's perception of South Korea as patriarchal, their struggles with Korean immigrant men's backlash in the United States, and the power of hegemonic white masculinity in both contexts, typically reinforced the women's belief in "gender egalitarian" white masculinity.

The implications of the women's gender ideals and strategies are striking and provide considerations for future research. For instance, it is informative that the women's gender strategies depended just as much on imagined escape and indirect critique as on the realm of direct action and critique. Future research might seek to capture the unrealized and imagined dimensions of women's gender strategizing. It is also informative that the women resisted one form of hegemony, i.e., Korean patriarchy, by reinforcing other forms of hegemony, namely white American male dominance (see Espiritu 2003; Pyke and Johnson 2003). In other words, the women largely upheld white American men's hegemonic dominance by using it as the bar against which to denigrate South Korea as a nation-state as well as Korean or Asian men and masculinity. Such a limited form of resistance could reflect what Aihwa Ong (2001) considers the "deeply felt tension" between the notions of tradition and modernity with which non-Western women must constantly grapple (p. 114). The women's resistance could also reflect the larger difficulties women of color face as those who must "take sides" given the lack of societal acknowledgment of their intersectional positioning, i.e., their social position at the intersection of multiple lines of inequality (Collins 2000). Korean immigrant women's positioning at the intersections of gender, race, and nationality did not make for "magic bullet" resistance strategies.

Yet it was also the women's subordination by gender, race, and nationality that shaped their derision of white American soldiers. Despite most of the women's tendency to racially dichotomize white and Korean masculinity, some women also challenged the ideal. Drawing on tropes of American imperialism and racism, these women were most forceful in their critiques when they maligned American soldiers for their mistreatment of Korean women. Such

resistance against the soldiers proved limited, however, as these and other white men were treated mostly as exceptions to the gender-progressive rule of hegemonic white masculinity. In like fashion, Yuh's (2002) study found that even Korean military wives who had been abused in various ways by their white American husbands still made racialized comparisons between white American men as gender progressive and Korean men as patriarchal. To be clear, however, the women in the present study did not invoke the uneducated GI-type to resist Korean men's gender privilege, but instead used hegemonic notions of higher-status, gender progressive white men. The women were thus inspired by the hegemonic forms of white masculinity, not the subordinate forms of it (Connell 1987).<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the women's ethnic pride despite their disdain for Korean patriarchy revealed that gender did not wholly determine their subjectivities. As noted earlier, most of the women were proud of the parts of Korean culture outside of (though sometimes related to) Confucian marital patriarchy, e.g., Korean collectivism and Korean sexual morality. Most of the women's social circles and organizational activities were also ethnically Korean. In addition, several of the women who were single at emigration still chose Korean male partners in the United States despite all the aspersions they cast these men's way. The women thus placed a high value on ethno-national pride and commonality and were troubled by cultural differences with white American men despite some "shared" gender ideals. These factors point to the women's continued identification with Korean culture and with South Korea's movements on the world stage. In fact, their critiques of Confucian patriarchy seemed largely a prescription for the country to *move up* in the global order by Americanizing (modernizing, whitening) its gender relations and marital institutions.

One caveat is worth mentioning, however. Although the women expressed pro-Korean sentiments, especially in their challenges to white dominance in both societies, the vast majority of the women did not trace South Korea's liberalizing gender norms to *internal* Korean forces. That is, the women did not invoke Korean feminists' and scholars' claim that the "homeland's" liberalized gender norms could be traced to the Koryo and Shilla dynasties, which had valued and empowered women before the advent of Confucian patriarchy under Chosun. As the women interviewed for this study were not explicitly or actively feminist—though they were certainly pro-women—they by and large traced South Korea's changing gender norms to Western and American influences. To be sure, one graduate student in Seoul had lamented the rise of the Chosun dynasty and its Confucian patriarchy. But the vast majority of the women, especially immigrants, implied that white American gender norms had influenced South Korea's "progress" on the gender question. In light of the more pro-American sentiments among immigrants in general, the women's attribution of modern, progressive changes to the United States is not surprising. Although this study suggests that Korean feminists' and scholars' "internal" account of gendered changes has not penetrated South Korean mainstream discourse, the question is one that future research should certainly take up.<sup>18</sup>

What the present study revealed with more certainty is that the women redefined what it meant to be "Korean" along gender lines. And they used hegemonic white masculinity to do so, to question whether being Korean really necessitated Confucian patriarchy. In a twist of irony, then, it was the women's affirmation of the hegemonic white masculinity ideal—despite the racial, national, and gender inequalities rooted in that ideal—that served as their strategy of envisioning the hopeful and the possible of life without patriarchy.

17. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this point. In this vein, future research could look at how Korean and Korean immigrant men construct themselves vis-à-vis white masculinities and, in turn, how their subjectivities shape relations with co-ethnic women.

18. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for the discussion in this paragraph.



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