

VOICES OF THE CAREER DELAYED: A STUDY OF OVERQUALIFIED AND  
UNDEREMPLOYED KOREAN MILLENNIAL WOMEN

by

JIYEA PARK

(Under the Direction of Juanita Johnson-Bailey)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the work identity and the underemployed experiences of Korean Millennial women. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?
2. How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?
3. What are underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?

Using a feminist methodology, qualitative feminist interviews were conducted with ten Korean Millennial women who self-identified as well-educated but underemployed. Snowball sampling was used for selecting participants and purposive sampling determined the final study participants. Interviews were conducted via phone; online chat was also used to establish rapport.

The data analysis revealed three significant conclusions: 1) the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment is influenced by the cultural construction of gender role expectations held in Korean society relative to women and their acceptable societal positions; 2) Korean Millennial women's job trajectories are portrayed as

existing encumbrances that are created and constantly shaped by gender-specific jobs; and 3) Korean Millennial women's job expectations develop in a state of instability, as the women actively attempt to bridge the societal gaps between what is considered acceptable for women in the job market and the jobs that they want to pursue.

This study has two major implications for the theory and practice in relation to the existing literature on Korean Millennial working women. The findings of the study illuminate the endemic issues about the systemic power structure and social cultural contexts including the patriarchal system, Confucianism, and gender stereotypes that are deeply rooted in Asia and Korea. The implications for practices address the importance of reforming policy on women's career and Human Resources Development (HRD) and future methodological approaches to fully utilize women's work abilities.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Education, Asian Feminism, Feminist Research Methodology, Gender Discrimination, Korean Millennial Women, Lifelong Learning, Patriarchal System, Qualitative Feminist Interview, Underemployment, Women's Career Development, Women's Human Resources Development

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JIYEA PARK

B.A., Soongsil University, Republic of Korea, 2014

M.Ed., Soongsil University, Republic of Korea, 2016

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by

JIYEA PARK

Major Professor: Juanita Johnson-Bailey  
Committee: Laura L. Bierema  
Maureen A. Flint

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott  
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2022

## DEDICATION

To the three most important people in my life: my parents Jinhee Yang, Youngsul Park, and my little brother Jihoun Park. Our FaceTime every Friday morning mentally supported me and has made my Ph.D. journey possible.

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## 감사의 글

“내가 하고자 하는 일을 하고 있을 때, 나는 비로소 살아있다는 걸 느낍니다.”

우리에게 일이란 무엇일까요? 살아서 숨 쉬게 하고, 나의 존재감을 느끼게 하며, 삶의 원동력이 되는 중요한 요소입니다. 제가 만난 고학력자들은 자신의 전공을 제대로 살리지 못하고 하향 취업을 하였음에도 불구하고, 자신이 사회에 조금이나마 기여하고 공헌할 수 있는, 사회에 이롭고 가치 있는 존재라고 생각하고 있습니다.

“일을 할 수 있어 감사합니다. 그러나, 전공을 제대로 살릴 수 있다면, 저는 지금 보다 훨씬 더 제 역량을 발휘할 수 있고 사회에 더욱 큰 보탬이 될 수 있을 거라 생각합니다.”

우리 모두는 자신들이 원하는 일을 할 수 있는 제도가 마련된 사회를 꿈꾸고 있습니다. 이 꿈을 실현하기 위해 저는 이제 한 발짝 더 나아가고자 합니다. 평생교육이 생활화되어 있는 사회, 소외된 사람들의 목소리에 귀 기울이는 사회, 그리고 교육이 일자리로 연결되는 사회, 그런 사회를 만드는 데 일조하고자 합니다.

이 한 편의 논문이 이러한 우리 모두의 소망을 싹 틔우는 소중한 자양분이 되기를 소망합니다.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of This Study**

Much is being written about Millennials because they are the largest generational segment in the world, surpassing the Baby Boomer Generation, and therefore Millennials have the potential to disproportionately influence society. The Millennials (also known as Gen Y) are people born between the 1980s and 2000s (Burstein, 2013; US Census Bureau, 2015). Millennials are hailed as “Digital Natives” (Prensky, 2001). The Millennial generation has lived in a pre-internet, pre-cellphone, pre-social network world. Goldman Sachs described the Millennial generation as the “connected” generation because 80 percent of Millennials have a mobile phone and 75 percent use social media to share their daily lives and knowledge/information (Sachs, 2015). The knowledge of this generation is acquired, shared, and created as an extension of their primary relationships and networks and is embedded in the connections that information technology provides (Balda & Mora, 2011). Millennials’ mindset is quite different from that of the previous generation. People in the Millennial generation value work-life balance, are entitled, optimistic, civic minded, enjoy close parental involvement, and are impatient, multitasking, and team oriented (DeVaney, 2015).

According to the reports from the Obama White House Archive *15 Economic Facts About Millennials* in 2014, more Millennials have a college degree than any other generation of young adults (Obama White House Archive, 2014). In the archive, Fact 4, *Millennials have invested in human capital more than previous generations*, points out that “in 2013, 47 percent

of 25 to 34-year-olds received a postsecondary degree (associates, bachelor's or graduate degree), and an additional 18 percent had completed some postsecondary education" (Obama White House Archive, 2014, p. 12). They are the best-educated generation in the USA. In 2016, the Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest living generation in the USA, with 75 million people (Fry, 2016; US Census Bureau, 2015). The Millennial generation became the main economically active population and major human resources in society compared to Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Z. Many literature reviews describe this generation as "want it all" and "want it now" in regard to rapid advancement and work/life balance, and not afraid to have new experience (Ng et al., 2010).

Even though Millennials are the most highly educated and culturally diverse generation compared to other generations, many have faced and are facing a slow job market and a lot of college loan debt (DeVaney, 2015). The Millennial generation encounters two opposite sides in their lives: they are digital natives, who have witnessed and participated in the rapidly changing digital world, and they have also experienced a long economic recession. This generation is the first generation to make less money than their parents. Also, this generation experiences a delay in marriage, a delay in starting a new job, and 23 percent of them even live with their parents (DeVaney, 2015), which rarely happened in earlier generations.

The primary research on the Millennial generation focuses on the USA to explain this generation's general characteristics (traits) and life backgrounds. The Millennial generation in the United States has many similarities to the Millennial generation in Korea, which will be the site for this study. For example, Millennials from both countries are well-educated, tech savvy, and face a slow job market. In the next section, I will provide an introduction to the Millennial generation in South Korea and their positions in the Korean job market.

### **The Millennial Generation in South Korea**

The Millennial generation in South Korea (hereafter called “Korea” for brevity), born between 1980 and the late 1990s, has had exceptional educational experiences, has great skills of digital devices/technologies, and has more cultural diversity compared to earlier generations (Eom, 2019; Kim, 2018). Like the Millennials in other countries, this generation in Korea is more familiar with technology than their parents’ generation, known as Baby Boomers, which in Korea is the generation born between 1955 and 1963. Due to Korean Baby Boomers’ high enthusiasm for education for their children, the college entrance rate in Korea hit a peak of 84 percent in 2008, when freshmen were born in 1989 (KESS, 2020). Although this generation is the best-educated generation in Korea, there is a high rate of overqualified human resources in the Korean job market due to the continued economic depression.

According to the *Economic Activity Population Survey-Young Generation in May 2019*, released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2019, it took an average of 10.8 months for Millennials to get a job after graduating from university (NSO, 2019b). One in ten Millennials had been searching for new employment for more than three years. Faced with Korea’s continued economic recession and difficulty in job seeking, when they searched for a new position, Millennials applied to other fields, in addition to applying for jobs that suited their aptitude and skills. In 2017, Incruit, an important job portal website in Korea, announced that in a survey of 1,337 job seekers in the Millennial generation applying for jobs in 2018, Millennials applied to an average of 12 new companies (Incrut, 2017). However, only 1.2 potential employers replied, and 10 percent of applicants got hired. Due to the continued economic depression after the financial crisis of 2007-2008, Korean Millennials were forced to accept job positions below their skill levels or to take part-time jobs.

## **Korean Millennial Women in the Korean Job Market**

Korean Millennial women face more difficulties in the Korean job market than Korean Millennial men (Kim, 2013; Min, 2008). In 2017, 75 percent of Korean Millennial women graduated university, compared to 65 percent of Korean Millennial men (Lee, 2019), yet in spite of their qualifications, among the Millennial generation, only 69 percent of women had a chance to have an optimal job trajectory compared to 81 percent of men, even though women's graduation rates were higher than men's (Lee, 2019). In a survey by Incruit, a well-known job board in Korea, 93 percent of 593 Millennial women job seekers answered that they had experienced both invisible and visible discrimination and a glass ceiling in the job market (Incrut, 2017; Kim & Park, 2016). Min (2008) emphasized that two big problems found in the women's labor market were the low wages of women compared to those of men workers and the increase in underemployed job positions for women.

When Korean Millennial women join the job market and the workforce, the low wages of women compared to those of men and the increase in underemployed job positions for women is complicated by significant overt inequalities and gender discrimination during their career trajectory. In Korean society, Korean Millennial women's lives are framed differently from those of Korean Millennial men. Young Korean women are expected to play women's traditional roles and are often asked about their marital status (Lee, 1996; Min, 2008). Kim (2013) asserted that Korean women are likely to be exposed to complex discriminations in the labor market, framed by various factors that exist in Korean society, such as women's traditional roles, culture, oppression, and sexual discrimination; thus, they have become a cheap workforce and have been marginalized in the Korean job market.

In 2018, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that, in Korea, the employment rate for women was 56.1 percent, which was below the average (59.3 percent) for all OECD countries, while the employment rate for men was 75.9 percent (OECD, 2018a). The Korea Labor Institute (KLI) (2018) announced that it was difficult for women working at jobs for which they were overqualified to change to a better job because of marriage and career break. More than 50 percent of Korean women who graduated from college in May 2019 worked in the service industries for the first job in their lives (NSO, 2019a). This research shows that Korean Millennial women experience job-mismatch in their job positions and find it hard to get out of underemployment once they enter the job market.

Marital status has also been demonstrated as a factor in Korean Millennial women's job trajectory. Unlike single women, marriage and childcare can undermine married women's careers and block them from having good quality jobs after marriage. The experience of a glass ceiling, sticky floor, and glass escalator can thus be different for single women and married women. According to McKinsey's report, *Women in the workplace 2019*, the "broken rung" is a bigger obstacle to women in the workplace than the glass ceiling, as it prevents women from reaching the top levels in their careers (Huang et al., 2019). The "broken rung" is a metaphor for the gap or discrimination between men and women in the workplace. The broken rung causes more women than men to get stuck at the entry level in their careers.

This broken rung was still holding women back from being promoted to the next higher position in 2020 (Coury et al., 2020). Fewer women obtained fewer promotion opportunities such as reaching to a managerial or an administrative position. Women experience double or triple oppression while looking for a job, due to their marital status and their having children and needing to juggle multiple roles simultaneously, both at home and at work. Establishing clear

evaluation criteria for promotion could be one possible way to fix the broken rung in the workplace (Cory et al., 2020). Women suffer from both invisible and visible sexual discrimination by Korea's patriarchal society, which has established various strict and confining rules and standards for women and has created great oppression in its framing of women's roles. Korean men, however, are never assigned these kinds of roles in their lives.

### **Problem Statement**

Although there are numerous studies and reports released by the National Statistics Office in Korea that have revealed the over-qualification and job-mismatch among the members of the Millennial generation, few of these studies focus specifically on Korean women in the Millennial generation. Kim (2013) and Kim and Oh (2019) studied income inequalities and gender gaps in the workplace in relation to women at work. Their research mostly focused on women in their 20s or did not mention the exact age range but showed the average age of women (37.1 years old). These studies did not focus on women in the Millennial generation, and the fundamental importance of underemployment among Korean Millennial women has never been examined.

There are studies that focus on marriage and the career break that explain what prevents well-educated young women from moving on to a better-quality job, but these studies do not disclose much about what makes Korean Millennial women experience underemployment in connection to Korean culture and facets of its patriarchal society, such as women being subjugated and trapped in a certain area (Choi, 2017; Choi & Lim, 2015; Min, 2008). This study is an attempt to answer the question of why well-educated Korean Millennial women are still struggling with oppressions, systemic issues, patriarchal systems, and visible and invisible discrimination in Korean society. In view of the social and cultural atmosphere, it is not

surprising that women, but not men, are subject to societal impediments such as the broken rung, the glass ceiling, and the glass escalator. Nor is it surprising that women, but not men, must choose between job and family at some point in their lives. Why do women feel guilty about their choice? Even though it was hard for me to search the articles that I mentioned previously, I would like to explore the systemic and cultural factors that cause the underemployment of Korean Millennial women.

The most recent research on underemployment in the Millennial generation was conducted in 2012 (Kim et al., 2012), but it only focused on panel studies held by KLIPS (Korean Labor & Income Panel Study). There have been studies that have attempted to explore women in underemployed job positions, but they were conducted more than 10 years ago (Eun & Park, 2002; Lee, 1996, 2002). Other research related to underemployment has rarely been connected to the topic of Korean Millennial women, their experiences in the job market and underemployment, or their work identity. Thus, after briefly outlining the background and nature of the patriarchal system, traditional culture, gender bias, and traditional gender roles in Korean society, this study will attempt to examine what makes well-educated young Korean women (Millennial generation) end up underemployed, exploring questions such as what their job trajectories look like, how they describe the experience of underemployment, and how they identify their work identity.

My research interest in the experiences of Korean Millennial women in underemployment began with my own personal experiences. In 2017, I entered underemployment with a master's degree and certification in my discipline, lifelong education. When I entered the Korean job market, while I was searching for job recruitment websites, engaging in countless job interviews, and working in an underemployed job position, I felt

sluggish and depressed. I experienced a “slump” when I realize that I was in a gender-specific job and my goals had been capped. The experience lasted only 15-months, but I still vividly remember how I felt at work and how this experience affected my life.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Over the past 20 years, feminist inquiries have raised fundamental challenges to how social science has analyzed women, men, and social life (Harding, 2004). Since women routinely experience gender inequality in many forms (such as in everyday life, language, media, traditional culture, and social phenomena), feminist researchers have paid attention to women participants’ emotions, lived experiences, and living environments, and have strived for the realization of emancipatory goals (Berg, 2007; Kirsch & Kirsch, 1999; McCall, 2005). Kirsch and Kirsch (1999) emphasized that research on women should be for women (or for social justice more generally), giving women a voice, providing opportunities for reciprocal learning, and empowering women to change their living conditions.

Based on this evidence, exploring Korean Millennial women’s experiences of working in underemployed job positions can be a meaningful resource for interpreting the complex discriminations they face in the job market and at work. The purpose of this study was to understand the work identity and the underemployment experiences of Korean Millennial women. The research questions were:

1. What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?
2. How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?
3. What are the underemployed Korean Millennial women’s expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?

### **Significance of the Study**

By exploring Korean Millennial women's experiences of underemployment through an analysis of their vivid experiences, this study will contribute theoretically and practically to the field of adult education and women's studies, especially women's career development. Moreover, this study will significantly contribute to academia by connecting Asian Feminism and Korean Millennial women. Surprisingly, the importance of Asian feminism is often noted but rarely studied in the vast literature on settings in Korea, especially for Korean women. This study will illuminate the patriarchal system and male-dominant society in Korea and examine how well-educated young Korean women are being treated in their career path and are being subjugated. I anticipate the findings of this study will disclose that Korean Millennial women are on the margins of the Korean job market and the workforce and present policy implications for women in the Korean job market and at the workplace.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 provided the background of the study and the overview of the gap in the research relative to Korean women in the Millennial generation who are underemployed. The problem of this study was discussed along with the purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand the work identity and the underemployment experiences of Korean Millennial women. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?
2. How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?
3. What are the underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?

This chapter reviews the literature that is relevant to the experiences of underemployed Korean Millennial women. The literature review provides a framework and is divided into three major areas: 1) Women in the Millennial generation; 2) Feminism, and 3) Underemployment. The components of the literature review represent several disciplines and fields. The main literature that comprises the literature review comes from population studies, and from the fields of career development, human resources, leadership development, the labor market, and economics. The major data bases searched for the literature review were the University of Georgia's GALILEO and ProQuest. In addition, Research Information Sharing Service (RISS; Korean website) and Google Scholar were also searched. These databases were valuable research engines that proved useful in collecting literature. I used a variety of key terms for this literature review such as "Millennial generation in South Korea," "Generation Y," "Korean Millennial women,"

“feminism,” “Asian feminism,” “underemployment,” “job-mismatch,” “gender-discriminatory labor,” and “educated women’s work behaviors” in my relevant research.

The first section reviews the unique traits of the Korean Millennial generation and, especially, Korean Millennial generation women’s lives. The second section reviews the history and the background of Asian feminism and explains how Asian feminism theory fits with the purpose of this study. The third section of the literature review focuses on underemployment and how underemployment affects the Millennial generation in Korea.

In this study, I used the term gender rather than sex. Sex is biological and determined by physical features, so it is like a label: male or female. Gender is more complex than sex. It is socially and culturally constructed, and every country or culture defines gender in different ways. In this study, I aim to reveal Korean Millennial women’s experiences under the patriarchal system and Confucianism, which still forces young Korean women to play traditional gender roles.

### **Overview of a Generation**

#### **Overview of a Generation in the U.S**

A generation is an identifiable group which shares a certain range of years of birth, significant events and histories at critical steps of development (Kupperschmidt, 2000). A generation can be defined and divided by age, period, and span of birth years (DeVaney, 2015; Fry, 2018, Howe & Strauss, 2007; Stewart et al., 2017).

DeVaney’s (2015) study highlighted several details of the different generations currently living in the United States. The silent generation, born between 1930 and 1945, experienced the Great Depression and World War II. The Baby Boomers, born between 1944 and 1964, were the next generation following the silent generation and had the Vietnam War as a major event.

Economic prosperity and the growth of the suburban middle class were the main early events in Baby Boomers' lives. Generation X (Gen X), born between 1965 and 1980, had the energy crisis as a major life event.

Millennials (Gen Y), born between 1981 and the late 90s, were born during globalism and the rise of the Internet age (digital natives). Generation Z (Gen Z) was born between the late 90s and the early 2010s; like Gen Y, they are known as a generation that is tech savvy and adventurous, and that enjoys challenges (Singh, 2014). Also, Gen Z members have a fully awakened knowledge of laws, regulations, and ethics.

**Table 2.1**

*Definitions of Generations*

<b>Commonly used name</b>	<b>Span of birth years</b>
Baby Boomers	1944 to 1964
Generation X (Gen X)	1965 to 1980
Millennials (Gen Y)	1981 to Late 1990s
Generation Z (Gen Z)	Late 1990s to 2010s

*Note.* Recreated table from DeVaney (2015), Singh (2014), and Stewart et al. (2017)

**Overview of a Generation in South Korea**

South Korea (hereafter called “Korea” for brevity) has a time period for generations that is different from that of the United States or other Western countries (Byon et al., 2011; Kim, 2006). Several researchers have categorized generations in Korea by commonly used names and have used span of birth years to delineate the generations (Kim, 2006; Park & Park, 2018).

Due to the long period of colonization under Japan and the Korean War, Korea shows different generation timelines than Western countries (Byon et al., 2011; Kim, 2006; Park, 2016). Korean Baby Boomers are divided into early Baby Boomers and late Baby Boomers. The late Baby Boomers (also known as Generation X) were raised in more prosperity than the early Baby Boomers (Park & Park, 2018). Early Baby Boomers, born after the Korean War (from 1950 to

1953), worked extremely hard and sacrificed for their families, rather than concentrating on their own lives. They were hard workers, who were highly valued, and who achieved authority in the organization (Lee & Yu, 2013; Park & Park, 2018).

**Table 2.2**

*Definitions of Generations in Korea*

<b>Commonly used name</b>	<b>Span of birth years</b>
Traditionalists	1925 to Early 1950s
Early Baby Boomers	1955 to Early 1960s
Late Baby Boomers (Generation X or Shinsedae <sup>1</sup> : The New Generation)	Late 1960s to Late 1970s
Millennials (Gen Y)	1980 to 1996
Generation Z (Gen Z)	Late 90s to 2010s

*Note.* Recreated table from Kim (2006), Park and Park (2018)

Early Baby Boomers tended to over-parent their children, the Millennial generation, born between 1980 and the late 1990s (Eom, 2019; Kim, 2006; Park & Park, 2018). Sometimes, the excessive caring from their parents' generation negatively affected the Millennial generation's ability to develop their ego-identity (Choi, 2015). Under the extremely close attention from their parents' generation, Korean Millennials show unique traits that distinguish them from other generations. One of the unique characteristics of Korean Millennials is their education level. This generation has had exceptional educational experiences and cultural diversity (Eom, 2019; Kim, 2018). The college entrance rate of freshmen born in 1989 hit a peak of 84 percent in 2008 (KESS, 2020); it was the highest college entrance rate in the history of Korean secondary education.

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<sup>1</sup> Shinsedae (신세대/新世代): "The new generation" in Korean (Park & Park, 2018).

## **The Well Educated Slow-Starters**

The Millennials are a well-educated generation; they are also the main workforce in Korea. In 2018, Millennials comprised 28.8 percent of Korea's population (14.9 million people) and they are about to outstrip the population of the Baby Boomers and Generation X (Kim, 2020). Although Millennials comprise the main workforce in Korea, they are overqualified in Korea's job market. Education is significantly important in Korea and Korean people place education on top of the family agenda. Lee and Smith (2011) pointed out that with the abolishment of the social class system after the Korean War in 1953 education opportunities were open to everyone encouraging people to believe that they can elevate their socioeconomic status.

One result has been that entering university has become mandatory for high school seniors right after they graduate. The education fever (*고학열/kyoyukyol*) has caused both higher levels of education and high competition among younger generations. The belief that a higher level of education would lead to social success has resulted in the majority applying for white-collar jobs after graduation. However, due to continued economic depressions (e.g., 1997 Asian financial crisis, financial crisis of 2007-2008), they have been forced to take part-time jobs or jobs below their education levels and skillsets. The Korean Millennials have had difficulty finding jobs commensurate with their degrees and there is a high rate of overqualified human resources in the Korean labor market. The Millennials are slow starters and experience career delay in Korean society, even though they are a well-educated generation.

### **Entering the Jungle: Korean Millennial Women in the Job Market**

The reason I used the term “jungle” is because Koreans often use “jungle” as a metaphor for a tough life, chaos, survival, and challenge. The job market is like “THE JUNGLE” to

Koreans, especially for Korean Millennial women. Just like Korean Millennial men, Korean Millennial women have had exceptional educational experiences and have rich cultural backgrounds. In 2008, when freshmen were born in 1989, 83.5 percent of Korean women entered university (KESS, 2020); this year marked the highest rates of college entrance in Korea. Despite their high level of education, the job market has presented a high and thick wall for Korean Millennial women.

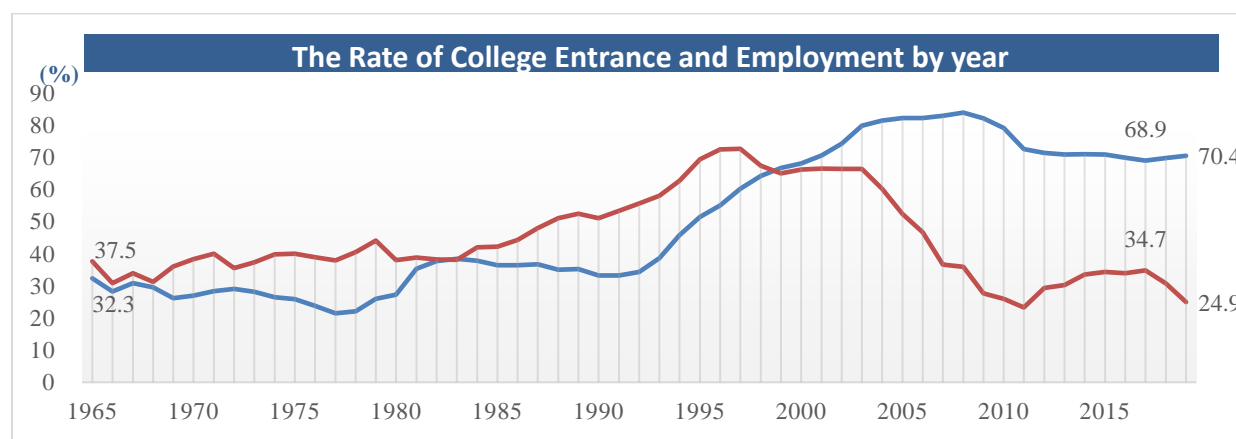
One of the distinctive traits of Millennial women compared to other generations is how they face the topic of marriage or pregnancy. Unlike the Baby Boomer generation (their mother's generation), there is a great variety of types of marital status among women in the Millennial generation, such as single, married, *bihon*<sup>2</sup>, single mother and more, since women in this generation are questioning if they should eventually get married. They may experience different statuses of being single, married woman, and married with a kid (or kids). Korean women live in a whole different world before and after marriage. In contrast to single women, marriage and parenting upset married women's careers and prevent them from moving forward to the next level in their career paths. A married woman typically repeats the route of Employment → Marriage → Resignation → Reemployment or Career Discontinuation (Cho & Lim, 2015; Lee, 2008; Park & Kim, 2003). The Millennial generation is the cohort that builds a career by actively engaging in social economy activities and working as an employer or an employee (from the mid-20s to early 40s). However, this generation faces the barrier of reality and experiences limited opportunities and obstacles to achieving their goals.

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<sup>2</sup> *비혼*; a neologism in Korea implies people who reject marriage and child-bearing

**Figure 2.1**

*The Rate of College Entrance and Employment by Year*



*Note.* Recreated table from KESS (Korean Educational Statistics Service) (2020)

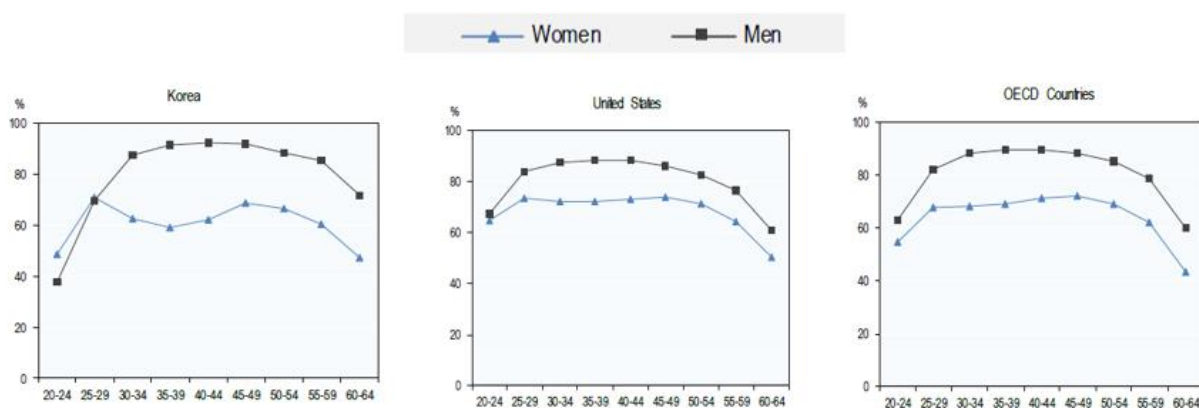
(Blue line: college entrance rates / Orange line: employment rates)

### **The Phenomenon of the “M” Curve in the Korean Job Market**

Several researchers (Choi, 2017; Lee, 2008; Park & Kim, 2003) have found that an M-curve is frequently seen in Korean women’s job market. The term M-curve refers to the shape of the letter “M” and it shows in graphs describing Korean women’s economic participation based on age group (Lee, 2008; OECD, 2019). Unlike other countries, the letter “M” kept showing in Korea especially in the age range between the late 20s and mid-30s, and the rising employment rate after their late 30s or early 40s (Lee, 2008; OECD, 2019; Shin & Seo, 2018). While the M-curve graph represents Korean women’s employment status, the inverse “U-shape” represents Korean men’s employment. Han (2012) stated that Korean men’s economic participation graph, which is an inverse “U” shape, shows a completely different shape than women’s graph.

**Figure 2.2**

*Age-employment Profiles by Gender in 2018 (the case of Korea, the USA, and OECD countries)*



*Note.* The figure was cited from OECD's (2019) report.

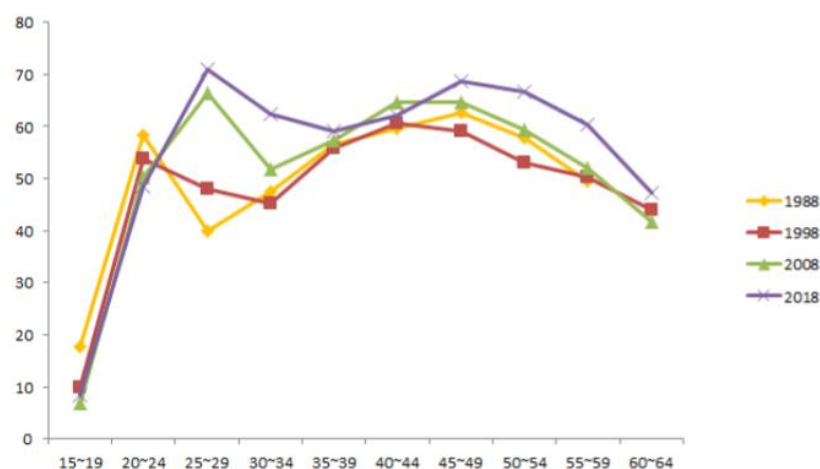
It was not difficult to find the M-curve in developed countries, such as Sweden or Finland, until the 1970s (Han, 2012), but the M-curve disappeared from the women's job market in advanced countries after the 1970s and it started to assume the inverse "U" shape (Jeon, 2019; Lee, 2008). Unfortunately, among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the M-curve pattern is still found in the labor market of Korean women (Han, 2012; Jeon, 2019; Lee, 2008; OECD, 2019; Park & Kim, 2003). Women's employment increase in their mid-20s because they actively seek jobs after graduation. However, their employment sharply declines in their late 20s to early 30s and increases after their mid-30s (exactly shaped as the letter "M") (Lee, 2008; Min, 2008; OECD, 2019; Park, 2001).

The M-curve pattern clearly demonstrates inequalities in employment and women's job trajectory whereas the inverse U-shape is a more regular trend in men's employment. Figure 2.3 is a graph of women's employment rate by age in Korea by four decades: 1988, 1998, 2008, and 2018; it clearly shows that the M-curve still exists in the women's labor market and that it has not changed much. This graph shows that many Korean Millennial women (age ranged from 24

to 40) leave the labor market or workforce for marriage, childbirth, and childcare, and then return to the labor market.

**Figure 2.3**

*Women's Employment Rate by Age in Korea (1988, 1998, 2008, 2018)*



*Note.* The figure was cited from Jeon's (2019) report and Jeon recreated the labor force statistics from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS).

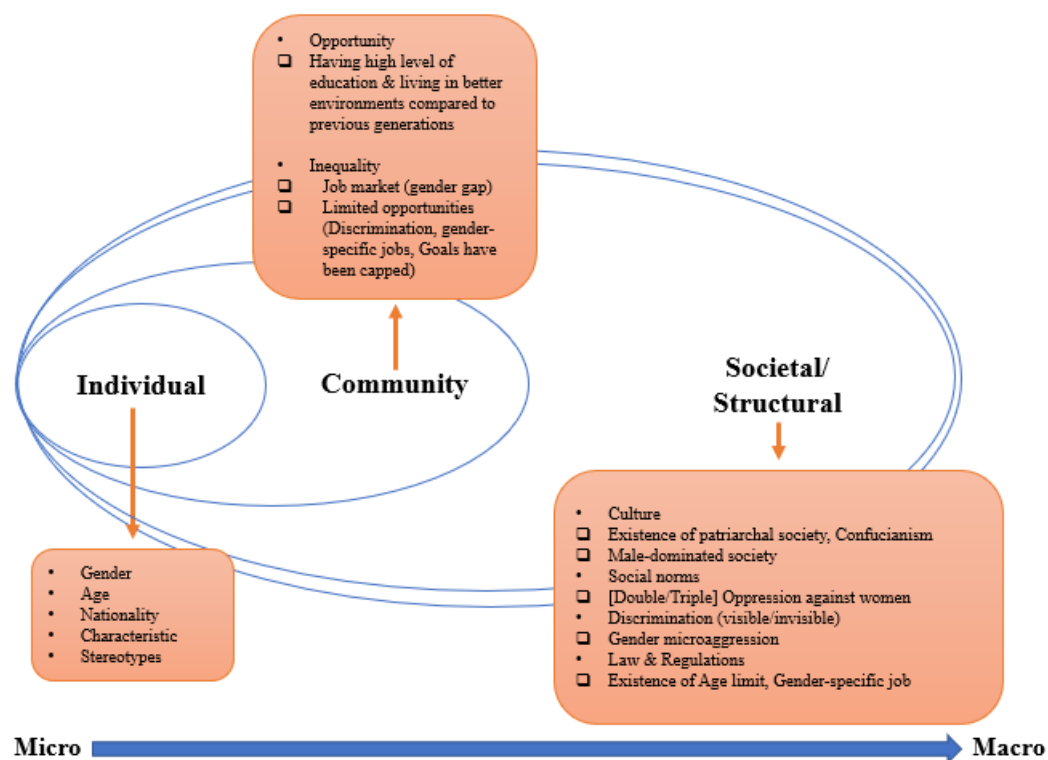
As noted, Korean women often face complex discriminations in the job market. The M-curve pattern hints at the situations they encounter. Min (2008) and Sidiropoulou (2015) articulated that the societal expectations for women (e.g., marriage, childbirth, childcare) have considerably influenced women's entrance into the job market and their rate of promotion in the workplace. To explain in more detail, systemic issues and societal expectations frame women's gender roles and do not provide equitable support for women and men in the workplace.

"Women's career patterns are complex because of social expectations for them to assume primary care giving and homemaking responsibility" (Opengart & Bierema, 2002, p. 45). In Lee's (1996) essay about the under-utilization of women's education in the Korean labor market, the author criticized those countless restrictions placed upon women that have prevailed in the

Korean labor market. Employers easily assume that married women have low work performance due to burden with house chores, so they limit the scope of work for women employees. These restrictions, mostly placed upon married women, affect educated women and selectively apply to “decent white-collar jobs” (Lee, 1996, p. 136). The oversupply of workers and the gendered labor market and work environment that over privileges men causes Korean women to enter underemployment by working pink-collar jobs<sup>3</sup> rather than white-collar jobs. Lee’s study is important to highlight at this point because it has been over 20 years since that study; however, there are still similar issues and findings of Korean women in the job market and in the workforce, which means things have not changed much.

**Figure 2.4**

*Three Levels of Millennial Women in Korea*



<sup>3</sup> The field historically considered to be women’s work or care-oriented field (e.g., nursing, social work, secretary, and etc)

## **The Obstacles of Korean Millennial Women's Resources Utilization at Work**

Korean Millennial women, the age group with high levels of education, experiencing single-life, marriage, childbirth, childcare, and reemployment, face a variety of barriers in their job trajectory and in the workplace. Several empirical studies, policy reports, and statistical analyses that criticize that young Korean women's goals are capped and they are trapped by society's expectations (Choi, 2017; Cooke, 2010; Kim, 2013; Min, 2008). These young women's personal goals are subjugated to the needs of their family members after marriage and they experience limited opportunities in their job trajectories.

### ***Gender Pay Gap***

Women's unequitable experiences in the job market are not only connected to gendered expectations, they also have material and economic effects. The gender pay gap is a great example of this (Jeon, 2019; Jung & Choi, 2004). In Jung and Choi's (2004) analysis of gender wage differentials and discriminations in Korea in the manufacturing and service industries, the authors used wage structure surveys held by the Ministry of Labor from 1997 to 2001. Their research revealed the existence of substantial wage differentials by gender. "Overall, full-time women workers earn approximately 60 percent of what men earn in Korea" (Jung & Choi, 2004, p. 570).

Moreover, they found women in industries with low knowledge intensity face considerable wage discrimination compared with women in knowledge-based industries. Their study showed the existence of significant gender wage gaps, especially in non-knowledge-intensive industries and occupations like sales or services. Their findings are similar to what Cooke (2010) and Min (2008) highlighted. Cooke (2010) also pointed out the gender wage gaps

in her study, saying employers hire more irregular women workers (e.g., temporary, or non-full-time position) than regular men workers to save more than 60 percent of wage costs.

Each of these studies was conducted over 10 years ago, and unfortunately, the situation has not changed much in recent years. Jeon (2019) pointed out that gender pay gaps continue to exist among full-time workers in OECD countries. In Jeon's (2019) report, she used *OECD Employment Database (2006, 2010, and 2016)* to highlight that Korea showed the highest gender pay gap, which was 36.7 percent in 2016, while the gender pay gap in the United States was 18.1 percent and the OECD average was 13.5 percent. According to the Ministry of Employment and Labor in Korea, the average wage for women in 2020 was 2,239,000 Won<sup>4</sup> (182,107 USD), while that for men was 3,306,000 Won (268,890 USD) (NSO, n.d.). Korea continues to have the highest gender pay gap among OECD countries with a gap of 34.1 percent compared to the OECD average of 12.8 percent<sup>5</sup> (NSO, n.d.; OECD, 2018b).

### ***Traditional Gender Roles and Stereotype of Women***

Prevalent thoughts of the traditional gender roles and the stereotype of women in Korea are the main reasons for the limited employment opportunities for women and for the fact that women are trapped in the same position or even move backward rather than forward. Scholars who explored Korean women at work pointed out that the phenomenon of the M-curve pattern is because young Korean women, who should be actively building their careers, generally are trapped in the social norms of traditional gender roles (Cho & Lim, 2015; Choi, 2017; Min, 2008). Even worse, due to the genderist and sexist society, young women face oppressions and the responsibilities of caring for and helping their families and are forced to make one of two big

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<sup>4</sup> The date of the exchange rate: April 15, 2022

<sup>5</sup> Data from OECD Employment Outlook 2018 (OECD, 2018b)

decisions after marriage: going back to work but not to the same positions or leaving their work (career interruption).

Due to the stereotype of women employees, women experience discriminations from the job interview to their occupations such as glass ceiling, glass cliff, sticky floor, and glass escalator (Triana, 2017). Glass ceiling, sticky floor, and glass escalator are often used as metaphors for the barriers women face in the job market and workplace. For example, a glass ceiling is an invisible but strong barrier that prevents women employees from moving to the top levels of employment such as manager or administrator (Inman, 1998; Triana, 2017). According to the economist's glass-ceiling index for 2019, out of 29 OECD countries, Korea ranked last in regard to working environment (Miller, 2021). Regardless of young women's educational backgrounds, the societal norms still expect them to decide between continuing their career and having a family. Sticky floor refers to a situation where women are stuck at the bottom of "distribution in pay" (Triana, 2017, p. 105) and are less likely to climb up the job rungs. The term sticky floor indicates "women tend to linger in the low-paying, low mobility jobs at the bottom of the employment pool" (Berheide, 1992, as cited in Triana, 2017, p. 105). It is a tragedy that outstanding women employees have small chances to jump higher than their present condition (climb the job ladder) because of the sticky floor and at the same time face income inequality.

The glass escalator is when men in traditionally women-dominated professions, like pink-collar jobs, are on the fast-track of getting promotions compared with their "equally qualified female peers" (Triana, 2017, p. 105). Christine Williams introduced the term glass escalator in her essay *The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions* in 1992. Williams's study (1992) showed that the preference for hiring men in pink-collar

occupations, such as nursing, elementary school teaching, librarianship, and men interviewees even was an advantage in hiring and promotions. On the contrary, Min's (2008) study showed women employed in male professions (e.g., simple repetitive work in manual industry (mechanical equipment)) experience high rates of low-wage work. The terms glass ceiling, sticky floor, and glass escalator indicate women's situation and what women face in the labor market and in the workplace. The phenomena of glass ceiling, sticky floor, and glass escalator clearly show the existence of systemic issues regarding gender, social customs, gender stereotyping, and the expectation of adhering to traditional gender roles.

No matter how much the life experiences, and education level of young Korean women have improved compared to those of the previous generation, the discrimination they face in reality is no different from that faced by women in earlier generations. Young Korean women are eager to seek out continuous development and pursue changes; however, the male-dominated society and male-dominated organizations are significant obstacles to Korean Millennial women seeking to fulfill their dreams. The prevalence of the expectation for women to fulfill traditional gender roles, the existence of gender stereotypes, and overt sexual discrimination against women increasingly causes job security to be uncertain. The issues create a vicious cycle in which competent or talented women continue to have limited opportunities due to their gender, instead of making limitless progress. The uncertainty of job security due to constant economic deprivation affects women more harshly than it affects men and prevents them from moving forward and accomplishing their goals. The workforce issues in Korea impact women, who encounter much more complicated issues than any other segments of the labor force, more than they impact men. To explore the problems of Korean Millennial women in the labor force, the next section will look at the issues through the frame of Asian feminism.

## **Feminism**

### **History of Feminism**

The term “feminism” comes from the Latin “femina” (Song, 2008). The Women’s Movement to advance women’s position and status was what feminism was called in the 19th century United States (Jaggar, 1983). Feminism, which grew out of the long struggle of women for gender equality, was mainly focused on women’s rights in the male-dominated society (Brinkmann, 2017). Jaggar (1983) noted the language used in the Women’s Movement changed from “rights” and “equality” to “oppression” and “liberation” in the late 1960s (p. 5). Feminists were fighting and challenging society for their liberation and were speaking out about their emancipation from the power structures and oppressions.

Western feminist history can be divided into three waves: (a) First Wave feminism, (b) Second Wave feminism, and (c) Third Wave feminism.

### ***First Wave Feminism***

*[Feminism] is about the opportunity to make your own decisions and living your life as you want to live it, not in a ways that society (men in particular) wants you to live*  
-LETTER TO THE Vancouver Sun, 1995- (LeGates, 2001, p. 197)

First Wave feminism took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although earlier feminist networks were temporary and roughly organized, during the 1850s and 1860s, the reformers in Europe and North America formed networks of more long-lived and advanced organizations (LeGates, 2001). “This development marks the beginning of what historians have called first-wave feminism” (LeGates, 2001, p. 197). LeGates (2001) highlighted that participants of First Wave feminism criticized education and cultures as being monopolized by men, women’s bodies as being subordinated by men, women’s low salaries, the drudgery of household chores, and women’s marginalization from politics. Due to women’s countless inequalities, the main goal for First Wave feminism was to promote equal rights for women,

obtain voting rights for women, and open the same opportunities to women that men had (Nicolson, 2010; Rampton, 2015).

“Liberal feminism is the first kind of feminism in the history of U.S. feminism” (Kim, 2008, p. 17). Liberal feminism has been growing since the 1800s in countries with active civil rights movements like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (Song, 2008). The term “human rights” and “freedom” became important in society, but these were not for everyone. Liberal feminism started from the idea that men and women are equal, and the world is not operating as such. Liberal feminism focuses on equality under the law that treats men and women equally (Preston & Ahrens, 2001). The activists for liberal feminism work within the system to fix prejudice, and give more power to women, equal suffrage, and the same access to education, employment, and government services as men have (Preston & Ahrens, 2001; Song, 2008). Preston and Ahrens (2001) described liberal feminism as a “platform for action” (p. 27). Liberal feminism activists accomplished women’s right to have equal pay for equal work (Kim, 2008; Preston & Ahrens, 2001). However, Song (2008) criticized the limitation of liberal feminism, which was heavily focused on middle-class white women and rarely examined the issues of other (different) classes, and the oppression and exploitation of women of color.

### ***Second Wave Feminism***

*Who among us remembered that there had been feminist movements in the past and that they had died? Nobody -ELISABETH SALVARESI, 1988- (LeGates, 2001, p. 327)*

As men went off to war during World War II (1939-1945), women worked in war-related industries (LeGates, 2001). Prior to World War II, women usually worked outside of the house in service positions such as secretaries, receptionists, or clerks. Although women worked in war-related industries during the war-era, they still earned less than men, and even worse, they were “expected to relinquish their jobs without protest after the war” (LeGetes, 2001, p. 329). In the

postwar era, many women who had worked outside of the house were relegated back to home again. Mass media popularized the ideal image of the family: the father as a breadwinner, the mother as homemaker, and two to four children (LeGates, 2001). Media showed the traditional role of women and described the house as the ideal space for women.

There are remarkable works done by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan and their works set Second Wave feminism off. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949. In this book, she revealed how extreme and universal the oppression of women was. She argued that “men are typically depicted as the generic kind of human being in most contexts, and women are seen in some ways as a deviant kind of human being” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 140). *The Second Sex* had a great impact on Second Wave feminism. The quote “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” was a formulation by Simone de Beauvoir that “distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired” (Butler, 1986, p. 35). Her work was crucial and laid the foundation for future feminists to establish the concept of the distinction between sex and gender.

Betty Friedan<sup>6</sup> (1921-2006) is known as one of the founders of the Second Wave feminism movement (Henderson, 2007). *The Feminine Mystique* written by Betty Friedan in 1963, “fueled the fire of a civil rights movement” (Lemert, 2006, p. 187). *The Feminine Mystique* began with a survey that she did for her cohort from Smith College’s 15<sup>th</sup> reunion (Henderson, 2007). She found that highly educated housewives were unhappy and frustrated with their lives, but they had difficulty articulating their feelings. Friedman called this “the problem that has no name” (Henderson, 2007, p. 164). Friedan first aimed to publish her study in

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<sup>6</sup> A founder and the first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966.

a magazine, but every magazine editor rejected her article. Therefore, she decided to write it as a book, *The Feminine Mystique*.

In almost every professional field, in business and in the arts and sciences, women are still treated as second-class citizens. It would be a great service to tell girls who plan to work in society to expect this subtle, uncomfortable discrimination--tell them not to be quiet, and hope it will go away, but fight it. A girl should not expect special privileges because of her sex, but neither should she "adjust" to prejudice and discrimination.

(Friedan, 2010, pp. 360-361)

LeGates (2001), mentioning scholarly works by radical feminist, pointed out the quote by Betty Friedan "the problem that has no name" was now named "patriarchy." "This (patriarchy) is difficult for women experiencing other oppressions, such as class or race, to identify with the unfolding women's movement" (LeGates, 2001, p. 358). While Friedan disclosed how educated and white housewives and mothers try to fit themselves into the image portrayed by mass media, she was criticized for omitting black and working-class women from her book (LeGates, 2001).

Due to social situations and major events, the Second Wave of Western feminism happened from the late 1960s through to the late 1980s (Rampton, 2015). "The late 1960s and early 1970s was a time when feminists began to rewrite U.S. history" (Nicholson, 2010, p. 1). After First Wave feminism, the women's movement was weakened. Even though women had the right to vote, just like men, women were still struggling with gender inequality, including income inequality, at home and at work. Therefore, Second Wave activists focused on the issues of equality and discrimination, and aimed to liberate women, emancipate women from patriarchal and oppressive cultures, and resolve the issue of gender inequality, focusing on women's rights,

and emphasizing power relations. The characteristic of the Second Wave was challenging the inequality and sexist power structures.

Feminist scholars called the Second Wave radical feminism (Nicholson, 2010). “Radical feminism meant breaking not only with leftist men but with Marxist ideology, which insisted on economic class as the main form of oppression” (LeGates, 2001, p. 358). Radical feminism emerged in the late 1960s (Song, 2008; Willis, 1984). Radical feminists of the late 60s were different from the feminists in earlier years. Radical feminists generally denied the idea that men and women are essentially different and supported de-gendering of the society, while earlier feminists had an argument of both sameness and difference to justify equal rights for women (Echols, 1989). Radical feminism was in line with Second Wave feminism, which aimed to fight social and cultural inequality more broadly, “including the more or less tacit assumptions about men and women that are built into society” (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 141). The famous slogan “the personal is political” was stated by Carol Hanisch to break free from older oppressive structures (Brinkmann, 2017; Rampton, 2015). Song (2008) said radical feminists criticized that patriarchy is the center of masculine domination which causes the oppression and subordination of women.

### ***Third Wave Feminism***

*I am not post-feminist. I am the Third Wave.*

*-Rebecca Walker, 1992- (Freedman, 2007, p. 6)*

Third Wave feminism started in the mid-90s and was responding to the insufficiency of Second Wave feminism. The Third Wave feminism activists criticized that the Second Wave still emphasized upper middle-class educated white women rather than women of color and different classes (Brinkmann, 2017). Third Wave feminism challenged the ideas of Second Wave feminism and it started to focus on diversity and intersections including race, ethnicity, religions, gender, and nationality (Snyder, 2008). Young women in the US in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century were

committed to expanding the movement to be more racially inclusive and sexually diverse. They highlighted women's empowerment rather than women's oppression by men (Freedman, 2007).

The term "Third Wave feminism" was first used by Rebecca Walker in her 1992 essay, where she said, "I am the Third Wave" (Snyder, 2008, p. 176) (Freedman, 2007; Gillis et al., 2004; Snyder, 2008). After Second Wave feminism was decentered, Third Wave feminism arose with a new discourse on gender relations: postmodern thinking, difference, deconstruction, and decentering (Brinkmaan, 2017; Mann & Huffman, 2005). "In the phase many constructs were destabilized, including the notions of universal womanhood, body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity" (Rampton, 2015, p.4). Third Wave feminism has diverse perspectives and distinct approaches to feminism (Mann & Huffman, 2005). According to Mann and Huffman's (2005, p. 56) study about Third Wave feminism, there are four major perspectives in Third Wave feminism: (a) intersectionality theory; (b) postmodernism and poststructuralism; (c) feminist postcolonial theory; (d) the agenda of young feminists.

"Third-Wavers want their own version of feminism that addresses their different societal contexts and the particular set of challenges they face" (Snyder, 2008, p. 178). Snyder (2008) said that under Third Wave feminism, young women face challenges from mass media and technology, and they consider themselves more tech savvy compared to their mothers' generations. Third Wave feminism is "bubbling over with tremendous voices" and political-economic activism (Karp & Stoller, 1999). The Third Wavers look at feminism through a much broader vision than previous women's movements and they focus not just on women's issues but also on gender issues, economic issues, and social justice (Heywood, 2006; Snyder, 2008).

## Types of Feminism

In this section, I will briefly introduce two types of feminism: Black feminism and post-colonial feminism, to provide readers with more opportunities to build up their knowledge of types of feminism before moving to Asian feminism.

### Black Feminism

Along with liberal feminism and radical feminism, Black feminism represents a major flow of the women's movement in African American women. During Second Wave feminism, Black women were often isolated from both Black men activists and White women activists, even though Black women also fought for liberation (Taylor, 1998). "In August 1973, a cadre of African American women founded the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO)" and over 200 women who attended the first conference of NBFO addressed the issues of employment, the Black women's movement, childcare, welfare, sexuality, and more (Taylor, 1998, p. 19). Black feminism aimed to challenge a system deeply rooted in economic exploitation, power, and white privilege. "It resisted a white feminism too often imposing a conceptual logic on Black women that distorted or misrepresented Black women's experience" (Brewer, 2020, p. 97).

The term "womanism" is inextricably linked to African American women. It clearly shows the history and everyday experiences of Black women. Alice Walker, American novelist, poet, and social activist, first coined the term "womanism" and categorized it as composed of four elements: (1) a Black feminist or feminist of color; (2) appreciates and prefers women's culture; (3) love of culture and self; and (4) womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (Walker, 1982, as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 26). In Alice Walker's (1982) essay *The Color Purple*, Walker used the character Celie to vividly describe how White women and Black men oppressed, forced, and exploited against a Black woman.

Many prominent Black feminists have criticized that the earlier feminist movement had been focused on middle-class White women and have brought up the topic of Black women's issues in their everyday lives (Collins, 2002; Hooks, 1981, Walker, 1982). Bell Hooks' (1981) essay *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism* sharply pointed out the effect of racism and sexism on Black women, feminist movements (e.g., women's suffrage), stereotypes of Black women, discrimination, and criticized how Black women had been portrayed by exploring Black women's life experiences in U.S. history.

*Black Feminist Thoughts: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins (2002), was written to help empower African American women and pointed out the Black women's perspectives and experiences in the U.S. "My goal of examining how knowledge can foster African American women's empowerment remains intact. What has changed, however, is my understanding of the meaning of empowerment and of the process needed for it to happen" (Collins, 2002, p. x). Collins discussed Black feminist thoughts from fiction, oral history, poetry, and music to highlight the unique standpoint of Black women positioned in intersecting systems of oppression. One of the key themes in this book underlying Black feminist thoughts is the concept of intersectionality. Black women are caught in the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and Black women cannot be treated separately from these burdens.

### ***Combahee River Collective***

The Combahee River Collective (CRC) was formed by a radical Black feminist organization in 1974. It introduced the terms "interlocking oppression" and "identity politics" from which the meaning of "intersectionality" originates (Taylor, 2017). "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to

struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Collective, 1977, p. 210). The aim of the CRC was the liberation (freedom) of Black women from racism, sexism, and class oppression. During the Second Wave of feminism, Black women were not in the center of the women’s movement, while White women were. Black women experienced different, more intense, and more complex kinds of oppression compared to White women or Black men (Taylor, 2017). CRC was the only way for Black women to acquire the solidarity to win their “struggles” (Taylor, 2017, p. 10).

### ***Intersectionality***

Many Black feminist researchers have argued that sexism, racism, and class oppression are inextricably tied together. Kimberlé William Crenshaw first coined the term intersectionality in her 1989 essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. She used the term to analyze legal discourse surrounding Black women’s identities such as race and gender discrimination cases (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) described intersectionality as “discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another” (p. 139). When an accident happens in an intersection, it could be caused by cars from any directions, not only from one direction. When we apply this metaphor to a real situation, a Black woman can be injured by a number of discriminations in her life such as sex, race, class, and even more. Crenshaw emphasized how Black men can use their male privilege to go against the system and enter into more spaces than Black women can.

In her 1991 essay *Mapping the Margin: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, Crenshaw presented three categories of intersectionality: structural

intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality is “the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender make our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of White women” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). Crenshaw (1991) observed women in women’s shelters located in Los Angeles and she found that women confronted multi-layered forms of domination. She emphasized that it is a fact that minority women suffer from multiple forms of subordination “coupled with institutional expectation” (p. 1251). Political intersectionality is when women of color are placed in at least two subordinate groups, and, paradoxically, “both feminist and antiracist politics have often helped to marginalize the issues of violence against women of color” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). Women of color experience racism that is different from what men of color experience and sexism is not always the same as in White women’s experiences. Crenshaw (1991) said representational intersectionality is “the cultural construction of women of color” (p. 1245) and “how women of color are represented in cultural imagery” (p. 1282). It concerns the production of images of women of color and focuses on images of women of color and debates about these (Carastathis, 2014).

While Crenshaw first introduced the term intersectionality in 1989, Angela Davis was the person who widely described the characteristics intersectionality. Angela Davis (1983) used a historical framework to articulate the identities of Black women and the intersection of race, gender, and class in her book *Women, Race, and Class* in 1983. By framing the history of writing how Whites and male supremacy created interlocking oppressions for people of color and how Black women are the individuals who are most affected and impacted, she criticized how history frames whiteness and maleness, and used history as a methodology to deconstruct the terms.

However, she also highlighted that many White women had faced interlocking oppressive situations and circumstances from their White male counterparts, just like Black women had.

**Intersectionality in Study.** After Crenshaw's and Davis's work on intersectionality, more and more feminist scholars started to use intersectionality in their own studies, with different intersectionality approaches. McCall (2005) reviewed a large number of studies that used the concept of intersectionality. She categorized it into three different approaches: (a) the anti-categorical, (b) intra-categorical, and (c) inter-categorical complexity approach. Each category is widely used in many disciplines to explore the interlocking oppressions in women's lives (Cheong, 2017; Clarke & McCall, 2013). On the contrary, Hancock (2007) had different approaches.

“Hancock (2007) advocates fluidity, while McCall (2005) argues for stabilization” (Walby et al., 2012, p. 231). In her essay, Hancock (2007) created a table to argue the conceptual differences among approaches to the study of race, gender, and class, and other different categories in political science. She noted a shift in political science from “unitary categories” to “multiple categories”, and, finally, to “intersectional categories” such as race, gender, and class (Hancock, 2007; Walby et al., 2012). Hancock emphasized the fluidity of the categories, under the presumption that “a category is either dominant (unitary) or equal to other categories (multiple and intersectional)” (Walby et al., 2012, p. 227).

### **Post-Colonial Feminism**

Post-colonial feminism theory is broad but mainly focuses on a semi-subordinate relationship that is not total independence after imperialism. Post-colonial feminism theory is used by a growing variety of fields of study and disciplines, such as politics, environmental studies, economic theories, sociology, and anthropology studies (Ashcroft et al., 2006). Mishra

(2013) described post-colonial feminism as “mainly identified with the works of feminists of once-colonized nations” (p. 131). Post-colonial feminism is related to marginalized women in post-colonial societies. Post-colonial feminists challenged the assumption that gender oppression was mainly from patriarchy and criticized the description of women in non-Western cultures as passive objects or voiceless victims while portraying Western women as empowered and modern (Mishra, 2013; Spivak, 1988). Post-colonial feminism is the combination of two different theories: post-colonialism, which is the articulation of the desire to escape from the economically and culturally subordinate relationship in colonialism and post-colonial feminism, in which women strive to vanquish gender inequality based on male dominance.

Post-colonial feminism largely articulates and criticizes women’s lives in the “third-world” such as Sati in India. A well-known theorist of post-colonial feminism is Gayatri C. Spivak, an Indian scholar and literary critic (Mishra, 2013; Spivak, 1988; Yoo, 2014). Spivak critiqued the Westernized perspective of feminism. The Western, European-descendent cultures have often been represented as logical, cultured, usual, and the norm, while the Eastern or non-Western are defined as illogical, strange, and mysterious. In her most popular essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* written in 1988, Spivak examined the possibilities to recover women’s voice that has been silenced for a long time (Lee, 2008; Mishra, 2013; Spivak, 1988). Spivak brought up Jacques Derrida’s theory of “deconstruction” to support her argument. She aimed to dismantle the oppression and eventually deconstruct the current patriarchal Western systems (Spivak, 1988). To Spivak, “the third-world”, “women”, “workers”, and “colonized people” were the most oppressed subalterns in the world. She focused on subalterns who are politically independent, but still economically and culturally in a colonial state and under patriarchal status.

Chandra Mohanty is another recognized feminist in the field of post-colonial feminism. She criticized that Western feminism devalues and others third-world women to empower themselves (Yoo, 2014). In her essay *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*, she criticized that Western feminism does not pay attention to the unique experiences of third-world women and regards all women from an ethnocentric point of view (Westernized) (Mishra, 2013; Yoo, 2014). Western feminism tended to regard all women as a homogeneous group without considering differences in race, experience, nationality, position, color, religion, and class. Mohanty emphasized that a woman suffers from double colonization, as a colonized subject and, from patriarchy, as a woman (Mishra, 2013; Mohanty, 1984). Spivak and Mohanty have several things in common such as that both are from India (which is described as third world) and they actively lead the issues of post-colonial feminism in Western society. Yoo (2014) said Spivak and Mohanty challenge racism, sexism, and imperialism, and set the stage for a new society.

Ultimately, the feminist movement's aim is to let women's voices be heard by the world, to emancipate women from oppressions, to challenge male-centered society and patriarchal systems, and to guarantee equal rights to women. Korean Millennial women in underemployment face similar issues in their lives and at work, and it is necessary to examine what has caused them to face such experiences. In the next section, I will introduce the background of Asian feminism and the Korean women's movement to support why I would like to look at the phenomenon of underemployed Korean Millennial women through an Asian feminist perspective.

## **Asian Feminism**

### **International Women's Day and the Beginning of Asian Feminism**

In 1977, The United Nations designated March 08 in every year International Women's Day. International Women's Day is for all women, both those in developed and those in developing countries; it celebrates all women's political, national, cultural, or economic differences and achievements (UN, 2020a). The world conference on women, held in Mexico in 1975 as part of International Women's Year, was the first international conference held by the United Nations that focused only on women's issues. Historically, International Women's Day was designated by the Socialist party back in 1909 and was celebrated on different days by different countries over the years (UN, 2020a). International Women's Day was officially recognized by the United Nations in 1977 as "United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace" (UN, 2020a, 2020b; UNESCO KOREA, 2020).

A national women's conference was held in four different locations since 1975, each with different conference titles: (a) World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 1975, (b) World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, in Copenhagen, 1980, (c) World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 1985, and (d) Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995 (UN Women, 2020). Throughout the international women's conferences, individuals or women's NGOs from different countries succeeded in creating effective strategies of a consensus on contentious issues and set a Global Platform for Action (Bunch & Fried, 1996; Timothy, 2005).

Unlike the previous UN women's conferences, the fourth conference in Beijing in 1995 was focused on human rights (Bunch & Fried, 1996; Maran, 1996). The fourth world conference

of Women in Beijing was the platform of affirmation of the human rights of women, specifically, human rights for education, health, and freedom from violence (Bunch & Fried, 1996). The women's conference in Beijing powerfully influenced many areas related to women including policy, culture, ethics, and economy. It also offered opportunities for women to challenge white straight-men's perspectives and it became a turning-point for the developmental history of women's studies in the world.

A year after the Beijing conference, there was the first conference of women's studies in the Asian Center for Women's Studies (ACWS) in Korea. The title was *The Patriarchy System in Asia and the Growth of Women's Consciousness* (ACWS, 2020; KCI, 2020). It was the start of Asian feminism in Asia countries, especially in Korea. ACWS aimed to build a network among women's studies practitioners in many different fields and to strengthen Asian women's solidarity by cooperating internationally (ACWS, 2020; Lee, 2008). "Asian feminism is rooted in human rights and gender equality, its development has taken different forms, with outcomes very different from those of the West" (Fung, 2000, p. 153).

On the web, in resources such as Google Scholar, the UGA e-library, ProQuest, or RISS, studies on "Asian feminism" or "Asian feminist theory" have heavily focused on Asian-American women and women in developing countries, including Southeast Asian women or Asian Muslim women. In this study, it is necessary to use Asian feminism to examine the interlocking oppressions experienced by Korean Millennial women powered by the dominant group in Korean society. This section will be helpful in exploring the history of Asian feminism, which has not widely or deeply focused on Korean women. Moreover, Asian feminism can articulate Korean women's experiences and criticize prevalent inequality issues concerning

Korean women. Asian feminism poses challenges in four major areas: (1) Western imperialism, (2) patriarchal system, (3) Confucianism, and (4) traditional gender roles.

### **Western Imperialism**

Asian feminism is neither regional feminism nor Western feminism, but rather it aims to be “both a critical reflection on existing western Feminism’s Euro-centric hierarchy and an alternative discourse that is critical of the ‘othering’ of Asian women” (Lee, 2014, p. 12). Asian feminism critiques how Western perspectives look at Asian women as passive, marginalized, and subordinate to the dominant groups. Chen (2007) criticized the literature in that Asian women are visible and invisible in Western feminist theory. She argued Asian women are invisible while middle-class White women stand for all women, including Black women, and for all women of color. Moreover, Western discourses frame Asians and Asian women as obedient to authority, yielding to others, and quiet (Arisaka, 2000; Chen, 2007). However, Asian feminism aims to make Asian women agents of change, highlighting the agency and subjectivity of Asian women (Lee, 2008; Lee, 2014). Lee (2014) emphasized that Asian feminism is an ongoing project, and it is a form of feminist praxis.

In Woan’s (2007) study, “White Sexual Imperialism, A Theory of Asian Feminist Jurisprudence”, the author offered a critique on how Western people see Asian women. Woan (2007) pointed out that White sexual imperialism during the war created “the hyper-sexualized stereotype of Asian women” (p. 275). The stereotype, which exaggerated the image of Asian women in pornography, especially, caused an Asian fetish syndrome. Asian women were portrayed in White men’s sexual fantasies as innocent, subjugated, and “existing solely to serve men and sexually consumed by them” (Woan, 2007, p. 279).

Woan (2007) mentioned that sexual violence against women functioned as “a fundamental tool of war” (p. 284), while sexual performance was highly prized as a combat performance among Western armies. The author criticized that Western societies often view Asian societies as less developed and uncivilized, which is highly biased based on Western imperialism. Like Chen (2007) said earlier, Asian women or diasporic Asian women encounter much higher risks of racial or sexual harassment than their White peers and Asian women’s dishonored experiences do not apply to White women’s experiences (Woan, 2007).

### **Patriarchal System and Confucianism**

“Culturally, a patriarchal tradition is deeply entrenched in the societies of China, Japan, and Korea” (Fung, 2000, p. 153). Asian feminism scholars emphasized that Asian women’s experiences of gender inequality and discrimination are based on patriarchal norms and Confucianism (Chang & Kim, 2005; Chen, 2007; Fung, 2000; Kim, 2010). “It was better to raise geese than girls” (Okiihiro, 1994, p. 64) was how Okiihiro described the margins of Asian culture dominated by a patriarchy and how the culture framed Chinese women back in 70s. The author criticized how the dominant ideology defined gender and gender relations and how those were presented to women as “virtues” like obedience to their husband, performance of household duties, or behaving as the ideal woman. Women’s virtue represents the regulated sex of women. The traditional cultures and virtues expected of Asian women caused the double or even triple feminization of Asian women.

Kim (2010) pointed out that general theories of patriarchy, such as the systems of Confucianism and Buddhism, underlie patriarchy in Korean society. Historically, Confucianism was the religion for men in the upper-class, who were literate (Na, 2009). Confucianism influences every single part of society in the East Asian countries including government,

education, and ethical values (Kim, 2017). The new philosophy of Confucianism underwent a tremendous change in Korean society (Na, 2009). The theory of “ukeum-jonyang”<sup>7</sup> (억음존양/抑陰尊陽) presented a theoretical ground for the oppression of women (Na, 2009). Yin and Yang was used in philosophy or cosmology to explain dualism or two opposing principles (like sun-moon or male-female), but the meaning was distorted in the Yi dynasty (1392~1910) as Yin (women/uneducated) should obey Yang (men/educated). In Confucianism, family and relationship centered ethics are highly valued, so it strengthens the patriarchal system and hierarchy, which is male-centered, while women are completely excluded from outside of the household. Kim (2017) pointed out that Confucianism is still deeply rooted in Korean society, even in the present time; the men’s network, and “closely-knit” social relations, is one of the biggest obstacles women face in trying to forge their own careers in business or politics.

Confucianism can be described as patriarchal, and it has been criticized as being sexist (Ryu, 2008). Confucianism influences every single part of society in the East Asia countries including government, education, ethical values, and politics, and it caused Korean women’s unequal access to education and oppression against Korean women (Kim, 2017). Then, are there any possible ways to deconstruct the patriarchal system and to emancipate women from social oppressions? Or is it just an ideal idea for Asian women? Kim (2017) pointed out that even in contemporary society, the men’s network, and “closely-knit” social relations, is one of the biggest obstacles for women to tap into their own careers in business or politics.

Chang and Kim (2005) discussed patriarchy and Confucianism in their book *Women’s Experiences and Feminist Practices in South Korea*. The authors defined Korean traditional

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<sup>7</sup> The oppression of yin (*eum*) (women/uneducated) and the encouragement of yang (men/power-structure/well-educated).

culture as patriarchal and Confucian and pointed out patriarchy and Confucianism in East Asian countries, including Korea, China, and Japan, caused a strict gender division of labor and gender-specific norms (Chang & Kim, 2005; Choi, 2017; Fung, 2000). Chang (1994) was a pioneer in the study of the gender division of labor in Korea. She highlighted that gender division of labor in Korea is a relatively new field to explore. She argued that segregation is at work, saying “segregation is an essential element in maintaining the ideology of male supremacy and female subservience” (Chang, 1994, p. 13). Under the patriarchal system, a woman is described as submissive and physically weak, which is totally framed by social norm.

### ***Women’s Movement in Asia***

The book, *Women’s Movements in Asia: Feminisms and Transnational Activism*, written by Roces and Edwards in 2010 is a comprehensive study of women’s activism across Asia (Roces & Edwards, 2010). Various international feminist scholars and experts have written an overview of the history of Asian feminism and women’s movements in twelve different countries such as the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Korea, India, Japan, Pakistan, and more. In this book, although there are stories about the women’s movement in twelve different countries, it is not difficult to find the term “patriarchy” in each country’s history of feminism. Through the book, Asian feminist scholars discuss how to deconstruct the patriarchal system and challenge patriarchy via the women’s movement. Women in different countries in Asia used their women’s movement to challenge their culture, old customs, and religion, by mobilizing women for specific campaigns at home (home country).

Basu (1997) focused on the women’s movement to explore Asian feminism. In Asia, middle class women formed the foundation (backbone) of an autonomous women’s movement while poor women were located in the forefront of social movements. Through the autonomous

women's movement, Asian women have challenged patriarchal systems and gender inequality. Women involved in the autonomous women's movement voluntarily created "hot lines" and "shelters" to protect women, the victims of the dominant group, and monitored prevalent violence such as rape. At the end of the study, Basu (1997) highlighted that "although there were enormous differences in women's movements across the globe such as women's movements in North America, Latin America or Africa, there were some common challenges and goals that the women's movements had to confront" (e.g., ways to combine the struggle for women's autonomy, ways to respond to the new chances and new problems caused by economic and cultural globalization) (p. 15).

### **Traditional Gender Roles**

Traditional gender roles have been a powerful influence in women's lives. Under the patriarchal systems and Confucianism, traditional gender roles have been fixed. Confucian culture is male-oriented, and it forces women to show moral subordination toward men. The ranges of virtues, attitudes, and behaviors are much more limited for women than for men and it causes traditional gender role stereotypes. In the traditional culture, Korean women rarely had moral autonomy because their roles were limited to being a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, and a good daughter-in-law (Kim, 2017). Even now, young Korean women are still struggling with traditional gender roles in various areas. It is their duty to make sacrifices for their families, take care of their household, and support their husbands and children.

Gender role stereotypes can easily be found in our daily lives, particularly, in mass media. Mass media depicts women as non-autonomous and dependent (Courtney & Whipple, 1974), and spreads the general beliefs of how women and men should behave in various situations (Nam et al., 2011). Nam and his co-authors (2011) critiqued Courtney and Whipple's

study, summarizing “specifically, women were shown in less varied occupational roles than men, and those limited roles tended to be low-status occupations” (p. 224). As Courtney and Whipple found in their study, gender stereotypes influenced women’s decision on whether or not to pursue a university degree. Shin (2015) said that the majority of women students tend to choose education and social work disciplines while there is a low application rate related to majors in such fields as computer science and technology. It is saying that gender gaps and gender stereotypes in selecting a major still exist, even though men and women students show similar performance in school. This phenomenon has a huge impact on women’s job trajectories. In addition, it will cause women to enter gender-specific jobs and deter women from entering various fields.

Kim and Hong’s (2016) study showed what makes women sports officials give up their work of refereeing in football. They pointed out football is regarded as a male-dominated sport and sexism is prevalent in the field of sports. It is difficult to find women referees in sports fields in Korea, as women referees face negative attitudes against them. They also experience the absence of a mentoring system for women as well as a lack of administrative and institutional support, and struggle with work-family conflicts, particularly pregnancy and childcare, which is the social norm for a woman. There are no places for women referees to work as officials in Korean football.

Asian feminist theory aims to challenge and criticize the oppressions against Asian women, and constantly attempt to examine traditional culture which is deeply rooted in the society. While Asian feminist theory has not widely or deeply focused on Korean women, Asian feminism can articulate Korean women’s experiences and criticize prevalent inequality issues concerning Korean women.

## Korean Feminism (K-Feminism)

In this section, I will briefly explain the history of the feminist movement that Korean women carried out through various historical events. There is very little literature review and research on the Korean women's movement or Korean feminism, but I will use a few studies to explain the history of the women's movement of Korean women. I aim to reveal how Confucianism has historically influenced Korean women and how Korean women have actualized the women's movement with a sense of purpose across time.

**Table 2.3**

*Timetable of the Women's Movement in Korea*

1392-1910	Yi dynasty
Late 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Under the Japanese colonial rule (First Wave movement)
1913	Songjuk-hoe
1919	Independence movement (March 1 <sup>st</sup> )
1927	Kun'u-hoe
August 15, 1945	Liberation day
1950-1953	Korean War
1960-1970	Rapid social/economic change
1975	International Women's Year
1980-1990	Minjung Movement (Second Wave movement)
1990~	Expanding women's movement

Note: This timetable is cited and recreated from Jung (2003), Kim (1995), and Kim (2009).

### *Isolated Country and Japanese Colonial Rule*

**Yi Dynasty.** “Until the nineteenth century, Korea under the Yi dynasty (조선/ Choson dynasty/朝鮮) (1392-1910) had been relatively isolated from the rest of the world, except China” (Kim, 1995, p. 120). The Yi dynasty was also called the “Hermit Kingdom” because Korea in the mid-19 century was isolated from the rest of the world and unknown (Strand, 2004). This

dynasty was severely weakened due to invasions by the neighboring countries of Japan, China (Qing dynasty), and Manchuria (Manchus). Strand (2004) said that the devastating invasions resulted in the Yi dynasty being closely connected/confederated with China, culturally and politically. Foreign ideas and new cultures were strictly rejected in the Yi dynasty, and the isolationist policy lasted until the late 19th century in Korea (Ryu, 2008). Due to the Yi dynasty's closed-door policy, except for China, Korean society was based on Confucianism, and Confucianism is still deeply entrenched in our culture, politics, school systems, philosophy, and lifestyle (Ryu, 2008). "In any case, Confucianism was a more rigorous, a less qualified, a less escapable political experience in Korea than in its Chinese homeland" (Yang & Henderson, 1959, p. 94).

How did Confucianism affect Korean women? Kim (1995) pointed out that "in a society entrenched in Confucian patriarchal ideolog, women's issues had rarely been considered appropriate for open discussion, let alone for being incorporated into national policy making" (p, 120). Confucian tradition and Korea's family-head system was not native Korean culture but was imported from China and became part of family custom in Korea during the Yi dynasty (Na, 2009). Confucianism influenced and changed Korean women's lifestyle a lot. Under Confucianism, Korean women struggled with oppression, the degradation of women, the patriarchal system, the expected obedience of women to men throughout their lives, gender segregation, and unequal treaty (stipulation) of divorce conditions (*Chilgojiak*<sup>8</sup> (칠거지악/七去之惡)) only applied to women (Kim, 1995).

Women were treated differently in the Koryo (918-1392) (고려/高麗), the era before the Yi dynasty, because the husband moved "into" the wife's house after marriage, however, in the

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<sup>8</sup> Seven evils for which a husband can rightfully expel his wife

Yi dynasty, after the introduction of Confucianism, women (wife) moved to men's (husband) house and did labor for the family (Jung, 2003; Na, 2009). Women became the being who was "moved" and had no power and right of initiative for their lives. The strict patriarchal system, gender discrimination and unequal treatment of Korean women forced women to focus on serving and adapting to the "given" life situation as a daughter, obedient wife, and sacrificial mother (Na, 2009).

**Japanese Colonial Rule (First Wave Movement).** "The initial experience of Korean women in politics evolved from the national liberation movement, not from a suffrage movement as in most Western countries" (Jung, 2003, p. 263). Jung (2003) pointed that the First Wave of Korean women's movement emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century under Japanese colonial rule. Because of the oppressive situation, the Korean women's movement had a strong sense of nationalism (Jung, 2003). In Kim's (2009) essay, *Should Feminism Transcend Nationalism? A Defense of Feminist Nationalism in South Korea*, the author mentioned women's secret underground organizations under the Japanese occupation: Songjuk-hoe (송죽회/松竹會) and Kun'u-hoe (근우회/勤友會).

Songjuk-hoe (Pine and Bamboo Association; 송죽회/松竹會) was the first women's underground network, was formed in 1913 (Cho, 1994; Katsiaficas, 2012; Kim, 2009). This organization was secretly formed in Pyongyang centered by women teachers, alumni, and students in Pyongyang Soongui Women's School (평양숭의여자학교/崇義女子高等學校) (Lee, 2015). Members of this network made an effort to spread independent thoughts to women across the country, so they provided various liberal arts opportunities to people such as history of East and West and bible study (Hwang, 2019). "The group sent their members throughout the thirteen provinces to instill patriotism in the minds of the people" (Lee, 1994, p. 328). But most

importantly, Songjuk-hoe aimed to support independent activists' families and funding (subsidize) (Lee, 2015). Women activists in Songjuk-hoe made and sold handicrafts to raise funds to support and accomplish their goals (Hwang, 2019). They also provided hiding places for people who had the important responsibility for performing secret missions and were involved in the March First Movement in 1919 (Cho, 1994).

Kun'u-hoe (근우회/勤友會) was the “best unified” women’s organization with the most rigorous structure, was formed in 1927 (Kim, 2009). Kun'u-hoe (also known as a patriotic organization) aimed to terminate gender discrimination, child marriage, prostitution, and the gender pay gap of Korean women and advocated reforming the old customs and policies such as choice in marriage, support for women farmers, freedom of making one’s voice and gathering (Katsiaficas, 2012). Kim and Kim (2010) pointed out that Kun'u-hoe supported rights for women, advocated a national independence movement from Japan, and revealed poor working conditions Korean women workers tolerated in their book chapter *Mapping a Hundred Years of Activism: Women’s Movements in Korea*. In order to spread the awareness of women’s emancipation in Korea, Kun'u-hoe provided lectures in many cities and night classes for Korean women (Lee, 2015). Kun'u-hoe had a significant role in challenging the male-dominated society, the patriarchal system, and in seeking to elevate women’s social status, achieve gender equality, promulgate the women’s movement, and enhancement women’s consciousness.

### ***Turmoil After War***

After liberation in 1945 from the long Japanese colonial rule, the division of Korea at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel occurred. The Soviet Union marked the occupation of the Northern part of Korea and the United States marked the occupation of the Southern part of Korea (Jung, 2003). On June 25, 1950, the Korean War (1950-1953) broke out when North Korea invaded South Korea

(across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel). Jung (2003) described women's movement politics in Korea from 1946 to 1961 as "a vacuum" (p. 263). After the Japanese colonial rule, the Republic of Korea was established in 1948 and a new constitution was introduced which guaranteed women and men equal rights in terms of women's basic rights, access to education and social activities (employment, workforce), and in marriage. This new law demonstrated that gender hierarchy was not only implicit in the cultural religious system but also explicit in the codified laws of the country. After the Korean War, the Korean women's movement expanded to include a broader range of Korean women and aimed to improve middle-class women's rights (e.g., focus on family law reform) (Jung, 2003).

After Syngman Rhee<sup>9</sup> resigned as president in 1960, there was a military coup d'état General Park Chung-hee led Korea (Katsiaficas, 2012). The military coup marked the end of democratic rule. The Park regime lasted until in 1979 (Jung, 2003), when he was assassinated by a close friend. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Korean government strove for rapid economic development by adopting new strategies like transforming from an agricultural to a manufacturing economy (Jung, 2003; Kim, 2009; Lee, 1994). Both Jung (2003) and Lee (1994) argued that the process of pursuing this dramatic economic policy exploited women workers and oppressed them.

"...exploited young female factory workers and idealized self-sacrificing women for the sake of the nation" (Lee, 1994, as cited in Kim, 2009, p. 111). Although Korean women in this period were first mobilized as a workforce in the Korean labor market, sadly, they became a cheap labor force (Jung, 2003; Lee, 1994). Under the Park regime, Korean women were forced to sacrifice themselves for the purpose of national development. They became the main targets

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<sup>9</sup> The founder and served as the first president of South Korea, from 1948 to 1960

for family planning projects such as “mobilized to propagate” (Jung, 2003, p. 264) and were sexually exploited as the Park regime encouraged the development of the sex industry for serving foreign soldiers and businessmen (e.g., sex tours and sexual services) (Ching & Louie, 1995).

In the early 1970s, according to Jung (2003), women’s group (largely affiliated with the Council of Korean Women’s Organizations (CKWO)) focused primarily on friendship and occupational benefits rather than on issues related to women’s rights and equality. “Only five groups worked for the improvement of women’s status” among 57 women’s groups (Jung, 2003, p. 264). Korean women activists during this period aimed to support and address women’s issues such as survival rights of (young) women factory workers, family law forms, the emancipation of women from the authoritarian regime, the exploitation of labor in the factory, marriage, tourism prostitutions, and patriarchal state policies (Jung, 2003, Kim, 2009).

Before and after the International Women’s Year was declared by the United Nations in 1975, many programs related to women emerged (Chang, 2008). In 1973, Pastor Kang Won-Yong founded the Korean Christian Academy (Jung, 2003). This academy played a significant role for Korean women in many ways, among which it provided a social education for women, raised the consciousness of women, and produce women activists and scholars (Chang, 2008; Jung, 2003). As Western theories of women’s issues were introduced in Korea from the late 1970s, in 1977, Ewha Womans University established the first Department of Women’s Studies in Korea, and this school and department became a significant place for feminist theory and activism (Jung, 2003).

### ***Minjung Movement (Second Wave Feminism)***

Since the state-led industrialization after the Korean War ended, Korea has gone through modernization and rapid economic growth. As many Korean women actively entered and

participated in the labor market, the 1980s can be described as a new and flourishing era of the women's movement (Cho, 1994, as cited in Kim, 2009, p. 112) More and more women suffered from labor exploitation (cheap labor) and sex-violence, so they started to break the silence and confront the issues related to women that were deeply entrenched in the Korean society. After Park Chung-Hee was assassinated in 1979, Chun Doo-Hwan began to serve as the president of Korea from 1980 (Katsiaficas, 2012). Jung (2003) described this as a period of "harsh repression" by the military regime in Korea (p. 265). Due to the chaotic state of affairs, Koreans were eager for democracy and national autonomy. "In the 1980s, the women's movement entered a new stage wherein the movement's development was wedded to the *minjung* movement" (Kim, 2009, p. 112).

Scholars have defined *minjung* (민중/民衆) slightly differently. Minns (2001) identified *minjung* as "people, but it has connotations of the popular will and of an oppressed community" (p. 183) and Well (1995, as cited in Kim, 2009) said *minjung* means "the value and the perspectives of the Korean masses, or those people of Korea who suffer significant oppression" (p. 112). People became *minjung* and raised *minjung* movements (민중운동/民衆運動) in order to accomplish liberation from oppression and power structures (e.g., military dictatorship). The origins of *minjung* feminism or *minjung* movement are rooted in young women factory workers' sufferance and struggle for *yo'song haebang* (여성해방/女性解放) or women's liberation (Ching & Louie, 1995). Cho (1994) described the women's movement in the 1980s as the Second Big Wave in Korea because women's participation of the movement in "public" was remarkably increased and because, stimulated by the women's movement for the liberation in the West, women's consciousness was raised.

Ching and Louie (1995) introduced two substages of minjung feminism: Yo’Kong Undong (여공운동/女工運動)-Factory Girl’s Movement and Gwangju Uprising (광주민주화운동/光州民主化運動). After the 1970s, with the beginning of industrialization, many women, including young girls, were recruited as factory workers to work in the textile, food, chemical, electronics, and wig industries, but they toiled and were exploited day and night (Chang, 1994; Ching & Louie, 1995). Young factory girls were jammed together in the factory dormitory “barracks” which were similar to “chicken coops” (Ching & Louie, 1995, p. 418), and they endured the lowest wages, sexual harassment, and fatigue (exhaustion from the notorious intensity of the work) to support their families and pay school tuition for their older and younger brothers (Spencer, 1988, as cited in Ching & Louie, 1995). They sacrificed since they were young and they were seen as “oppressed of the oppressed,” the core of the minjung (Ching & Louie, 1995, p. 417).

“The resulting autonomous minjung community, with its warm bonding among citizens and self-controlled order, demonstrated the beauty of human love that blossomed in the midst of fierce resistance” (Katsiaficas, 2012, p. 162). On May 18, 1980, Gwangju citizens fought for democracy and clashed with the illegal power of the new military group, Chun Doo-Hwan. The uprising and massacre lasted through May 27<sup>10</sup>. The Gwangju democratization movement catalyzed students, labor, religious, and the women’s minjung movement (Ching & Louie, 1995). According to Ching and Louie (1995), under the chaotic situation, Korean women organized study groups and women’s studies courses, and expanded women’s research institution. The group members were formed as-- women students and organizers from the labor movement in the 1970s and a group of professors from Ewha Womans University (Ching & Louie, 1995). The

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<sup>10</sup> According to the government, 200 citizens were killed, but the opposition said up to 2,000 died (Minns, 2001).

study group provided opportunities for women to discuss various topics such as “the history of Korean women’s organizations since the end of the nineteenth century; work and family from a feminist viewpoint; women’s literature; the relation between Korea’s division, the denial of human rights, and women’s oppression; and the connection between martial law and male domination” (Ching & Louie, 1995, p. 420).

“Women are the minjung of the minjung” (Katsiaficas, 2012, p. 428). The minjung movement, in which Korean women participate in a life and death struggle, means a lot to them. Through their actions and the movement, they faced countless challenges and broke the silence. They confronted the patriarchal system, hierarchy, male privilege, exploitation of women in the labor force (including young women), wage pay gaps, gender discrimination in the workplace, and, they empowered oppressed Korean women to fight for their human rights and raised the consciousness of women.

### ***Women’s Movement after the 1990s Until the Present***

After the chaotic state of affairs that existed until the late 1980s, there was a political shift from a military regime to a democracy in the early 1990s. According to Jung (2003), the women’s movement was influenced by the political shift, leading to “self-criticism within the women’s movement, especially the Korean Women’s Association United (KWAU)” (p. 271). During the transition, Korean women activists from the progressive women’s movement challenged the “prior ideological spirit” and opposed to the military government (Jung, 2003). Unlike the women’s movement in the 1970s and 1980s, the progressive women’s movement in the 1990s was more focused on women’s interests and gender equality, asserting that these can only be effectively accomplished by women’s autonomy (Jung, 2003).

Since the 1990s, the number of new, autonomous women's organizations expanded their interests to many different topics related to women's issues in the society such as sexual violence, sexual harassment, family (domestic) violence, sex trafficking (prostitution), comfort women, lifelong equal rights to work, motherhood protection, childcare, and other rights (e.g., consumer rights, lesbian rights) (Jung, 2003; Kim, 2009). The slogans of the progressive women's movement also affected the ability of women's voices to be heard by the world; "By securing motherhood protection, let's get lifelong equal employment rights" and "Open politics, everyday life politics" (Jung, 2003, p. 267).

The anti-sexual violence movement was a major agenda in the 1990s and a turning point for the women's movement. "The personal is the political" was a slogan for the anti-sexual violence movement. It clearly illustrated the seriousness of sexual violence in the 1990s (Jung, 2003, p. 273). The women's movement about the issues of sexual violence successfully called all people together, and "female sexuality and the body," which was neglected for a long time in the women's movement, became an issue in the 1990s (Jung, 2003).

The flows of the women's movement in Korea becomes wider and faster both online and offline after moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to the expansion of the internet and the prevalence of smartphones and personal computers, the women's movement took on a new aspect: personal rather than group. For example, the murder case in Gangnam Station 10<sup>th</sup> exit in 2016<sup>11</sup> was the beginning of a new wave of the women's movement. Many people gathered offline to mourn the victim by putting post-it messages and flowers near Gangnam Station 10<sup>th</sup> exit, and, at the same time, many people did a hashtag movement such as "#살아남았다 (*I survived*)" online (Lee,

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<sup>11</sup> On May 17, 2016, at 1 am, a 23-year-old woman was stabbed to death in a public restroom near Gangnam Station by a 34-year-old man. The murderer had never met the victim, but he committed a crime because he felt he had been ignored and belittled by women many times.

2016). In addition, Korean women rapidly changed society after the #MeToo Movement in South Korea in 2018 (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019). Following the MeToo movement, many young Korean women stood in solidarity with other Korean women against oppressions, social inequalities, corsets, and frames against women, and poor working conditions.

### **Feminism Outside of Asia**

The intersections between Asian feminism and Western feminism above demonstrate the same goals in women's movement and the history of feminism. Even though the two feminisms occurred in different places and time-periods, and among different races and cultures, they aimed to challenge the power structures, traditional patriarchal systems, and male-dominated society. Asian feminism and Western feminism provided open opportunities and emancipation for women in various fields, including education, work, and exploitation of labor. Although liberal feminism and radical feminism emerged a long time ago, women still face similar oppression and discrimination in the society even today. Women experience interlocking oppressions in their daily lives under the male-dominated society and are not guaranteed equal rights and employment. The abolishment of gender inequality in society that women activists and women's organizations in Korea are asking for is not different from what feminist throughout history have sought.

Some might wonder why only Asian feminism can be applied to this study, not Asian-American feminism. Technically, Asian feminism and Asian-American feminism have different foundations and target groups. First, Asian-Americans are either U.S. citizens or non-citizens who live in the United States. After the 1965 immigration act, not every Asian immigrant became a U.S. citizen, which means they are technically not Americans, so researchers started to subsume them as "Asian Americans" (Uba, 2003). The immigrants were from many different

countries in Asia including Korea, China, Vietnam, and India. Min (2006) pointed out that large Asian-American communities were heavily focused on the West Coast like California, Hawaii, and Washington, but they began to establish communities in New York areas, Washington DC, and Chicago. Asian-Americans are people who immigrated to the USA from Asian countries in the 1960s or who were born in the United States while their family is of Asian ancestry.

Second, Asian-American feminism is focused on Asian-American women's life stories dominated by White men or people of color in the USA. Many feminist scholars have written about Asian-American women's experiences of institutionalized racism (Kochiyama & Aguilar-San Juan, 1997; Yee, 2014), gender discrimination (Kochiyama & Aguilar-San Juan, 1997; Okihiro, 2014), and being stereotyped as a model minority (Paner, 2018; Woan, 2007).

Intersectionality demonstrates diverse connections between race, gender, and class that cause interlocking oppressions under Whites and male supremacy (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1983). Moreover, the term or the concept of intersectionality would apply in the American context, but not in the Korean context.

Since the target group for this study is Korean Millennial women, there are two requirements outlined in the recruitment letter for participation in this study: nationality should be Korean and women who have lived in Korea at least 15 years. My target group for the interview is Korean women who identify themselves as Korean and they will share their stories of underemployment in Korea. While there is no racial diversity and intersectionality on that basis, socioeconomic level (class), age, education level, or marital status can be used to address the issue of intersectionality in this study. I would like to explore how the Korean traditional culture and patriarchal system affect Korean Millennial women who work in underemployed job positions from an Asian feminist perspective. Since Korean nationality is the first requirement of

the participants, the concept of Asian-American feminism does not meet the requirement of this study.

From the perspective of Asian feminism, Asian women are treated differently from men and experience countless interlocking oppressions in society just because they are women. While Korean Millennial women live in a society where they can have a greater variety of cultural and life experiences compared to their mothers' generation, they are still socially and culturally forced to play traditional feminine roles. Among the various situations Korean Millennial women face in their lives, the biggest problem is that they are not able to have active career development in their young ages because they are tightly bound together by the traditional culture and traditional virtues. This causes a situation where competent Korean Millennial women (in)voluntarily choose underemployed job positions. The next section will examine more about how the patriarchal culture and male-centered society drive Korean Millennial women into underemployment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

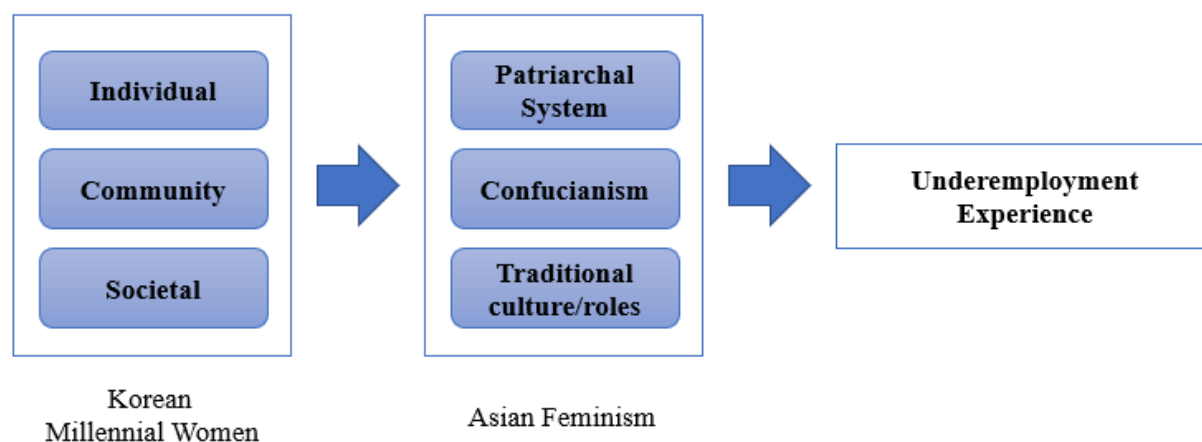
After exploring many kinds of feminist theories, for this theory study, I have chosen to Asian feminism to criticize how the patriarchal system, Confucianism, and traditional gender roles have trapped Korean Millennial women in underemployment. Asian feminist theory is the most appropriate theory to use to illustrate Korean women's oppressions and discriminations against them in the Korean job market. It indicates how I am drawing the theory in my study and will lead me as I collect and analyze the data that I use for my findings.

This study is guided by a theoretical frame that consists of Asian feminist theory to examine Korean Millennial women's experiences of underemployment. I first see the issues: disadvantageous to Korean Millennial women as occurring at three different levels; individual,

community, and societal, and expand these issues to the patriarchal system, Confucianism, and traditional culture/roles oppressive toward Korean Millennial women. Then, I connect the issues with their underemployment experiences to examine the main reason for the existence of the gender-specific job and underutilization of human resources. The theoretical framework that shapes this study is closely connected to each section to explain the major preceding literature.

**Figure 2.5**

*Theoretical Framework*



**Post-colonial Feminism in Korea**

Three factors in the category of Asian feminism in Korea were highly influenced by Korean post-colonial feminism. How does post-colonial feminism influence contemporary society in Korea? Post-colonial feminism has had a lot of exposure in third-world women's feminism such as in Middle East Asia but has rarely talked about women's stories in East Asian countries. Although post-colonial feminism mainly focuses on women in the third world, it is still possible to link the concept of post-colonial feminism to Korean women who are also victims of post-colonialism. Yoo (2014) emphasized that post-colonial feminism provides opportunities to explore the history and experiences of women in colonial periods and has implications for patriarchy all over the world. According to Yoo (2014), the problem Korean

Millennial women face in their everyday lives and in the job market can be explained in the context of post-colonial feminism.

As I briefly mentioned in the history of the women's movement in Korea, Korea suffered from colonial rule for 35 years before being liberated from Japan on August 15, 1945. During this 35-year colonial period, Koreans had the most painful times, as Japan launched unusual policies in Korea, unlike those launched by Western colonial countries. Japanese imperialists instituted a policy to obliterate Korean culture by aggressively pushing Koreans to assimilate to Japanese culture under the "Korea and Japan are one" policy. Japan started to eliminate the roots of Korea's national identity by ruling over values, traditions, and education systems (Kim & Kim, 2010). Although Korea was liberated from Japan after the end of World War II in 1945, whereas Korea was released from the institutional systems, it was not released from other parts of this policy. The biggest problem in contemporary Korea is that Korean women are still not totally independent of the customs, traditions, virtues, culture, political system, and ethics enforced during the Japanese colonial period. Korean women's oppression, especially in the male-dominated patriarchal society, became more severe, leading to the "double colonization" of Korean women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The traditional patriarchal system was severe in the Yi dynasty period (which was right before the Japanese colonial period) and in the Japanese colonial period (Chang & Kim, 2005). These two periods fixed the social norm for Korean women, forcing them to show appropriate attitudes and behaviors from the moment they were born. Korean women experience strict social norms and expectations regarding appropriate feminine behavior, which includes parenting responsibilities, taking care of a family, and prioritizing husband and children. Although young Korean women are highly educated, they struggle to join the labor market. They keep trying to

enter the labor force despite the glass ceiling and the male-dominated society, but they continue to face obstacles in Korean society such as deep-rooted gender inequality (NSO, 2019a).

### **Underemployment**

Underemployment happens when a person has higher skills, education level, job experience than the job requires (Feldman, 1996; Green & Henseke, 2016; Greenwood, 1999; Thompson, 2009). Feldman (1996) argued that underemployment has been widely ignored while unemployment has received much attention by many scholars. He pointed out that the rate of underemployment increases in direct proportion to the number of recent high school and college graduates. Feldman (1996) created five dimensions of underemployment: (1) a person has more formal education than the job requires, (2) a person involuntarily engages in a job outside of his own discipline, (3) a person has a higher-level of work skills or work experience than the job requires, (4) a person involuntarily works in a part-time job or temporary employment, (5) a person earns a wage that is 20 percent or less than their previous job (or earns less than other members of their cohort).

Many terms are used to refer to “underemployment” including inadequate employment, poverty wage employment, involuntary part-time employment, job mismatch, downgrading work, over education, and overqualified employment, among others (Kim, 2005; Kim et al., 2012; Maynard & Feldman, 2011). The concept of underemployment is not widely researched, and researchers disagree on how it should be conceptualized and measured (Allan et al., 2018; Greenwood, 1999; Hwang & Jeong, 2011; Kim et al., 2012).

According to Greenwood (1999), it took a long time to set the international guidelines of underemployment at the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS). They first examined the issues in 1925, adopted the concept in 1966, and revised some parts in 1982.

Greenwood (1999) emphasized the ICLS adopted the concept of underemployment to mean people who work or do not have a job but are willing to work and are available for better occupations. Allan and colleagues (2018) defined underemployment as occurring when people perceive that their work does not fully require their level of education, skills, or job experience. They gave an example of an architect who works in fast-food service, which is completely different from their previous job, after losing their regular job. They argued this type of underemployment is what is meant by overqualified, and they used it as the definition in their study.

**Table 2.4**

*Definitions of Underemployment*

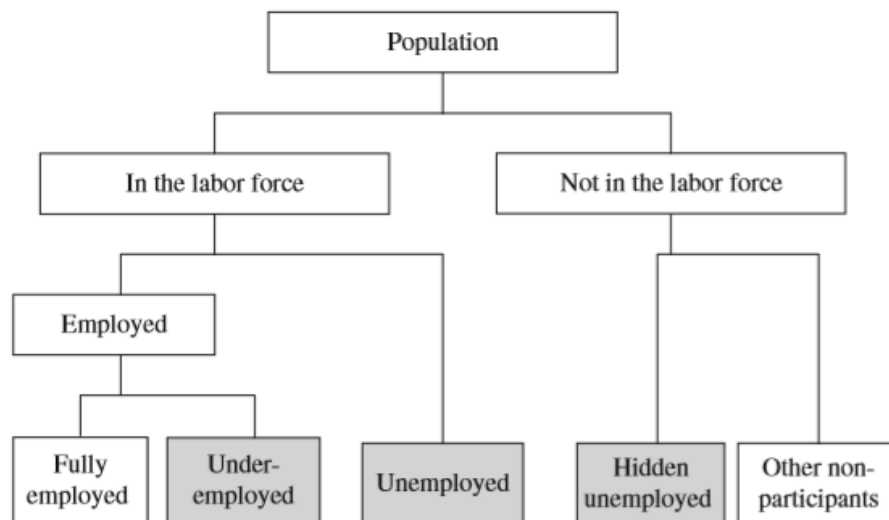
<b>Author</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Feldman, D. C. (1996)	Defined as inferior, lesser, or lower quality type of employment	Created five dimensions of underemployment
Greenwood, A. M. (1999)	Defined as people who work or do not have a job but are willing to work, and available for “better” occupations	ICLS set international guidelines of underemployment
Maynard, D. C., & Feldman, D. C. (2011)	Defined as time-related underemployment and inadequate employment situation	The 16 <sup>th</sup> ICLS identified underemployment into two types
Allan, B. A., Rolniak, J. R., & Bouchard, L. (2018)	Defined as people aware of and who perceive that their work does not fully require their education level, skills, or job experiences	An example is an architect who works in fast-food service (overqualified)

While Greenwood (1999) and Allan et al. (2018) noted how underemployment has been conceptualized, several Korean researchers measured underemployment (Hwang & Jeong, 2011;

Kim et al., 2012). Hwang and Jeong (2011) divided their measurement into two parts: objective assessment based on (a) average number of years of education for workers by occupation (+1 Standard Deviation), (b) the mode of education by profession, and (c) average wage by number of years of job experience and level of education, and subjective assessment based on qualitative interview or asking informants directly about the education level and skills needed to perform certain duties, and whether they were underemployed or not. Kim and coauthors (2012) set up an analysis model of underemployment among young employees that included the three variables of human capital, workplace, and job seeking, and control variables to measure what makes young people choose to be underemployed.

**Figure 2.6**

*An Expanded Labor Force Underutilization Framework*



*Note.* This figure was extracted from Maynard & Feldman, 2011, p. 15.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) categorized the area of employment and underemployment statistics based on the labor force framework in 1966. Figure 2.6 shows the conceptual framework for labor force underutilization in the economy. Underemployment is in the section “in the labor force population and employed;” this group is distinguished from the

unemployed and the hidden unemployed by participating in the workforce at least for some hours and receiving payment. In 1998, the 16<sup>th</sup> ICLS adopted this framework and identified two types of underemployment: time-related underemployment and inadequate employment situation (Feldman, 1996). In 2013, in the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS, many countries set the international standard of “labor underutilization” in order to measure the unemployed, underemployed, and hidden unemployed (Maynard & Feldman, 2011).

Several empirical studies found that perceived over qualification and over education in the workplace negatively impacts employees’ psychological health, resulting in such issues as life-dissatisfaction and job-boredom (Allan et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Steffy, 2017) as well as organizational effectiveness (Kang, 2010). Prause and Dooley (2011) highlighted how underemployment negatively impacts the mental health and well-being of young employees in the workplace because once they perceive they are overqualified workers, they exhibit alcohol abuse and criminal behavior. Underemployment is a big issue in any generation; however, this phenomenon has become a serious social problem in the job market, especially in the Millennial generation. Due to the prolonged economic recession that hit Korea, the number of jobs requiring a high level of education falls short of the number of Millennials who have that level of education.

As a result, many highly educated and talented Korean Millennials are finding themselves forced to take positions for which they are overqualified, and their over education has led to an imbalance in the job market in Korea. The participation in the underemployed labor force and the poor economic climate place them in vulnerable and deadly situations in the society. Confronted with that situation, they face the prospectus of the failure of launching career plans, career delays, and are unfortunately driven to join the ranks of the cheap workforce,

unfortunately. Before examining Korean Millennial women in underemployed positions, it would be good to briefly explain the recent issues of underemployment among the Korean Millennial generation.

### **Underemployment Among the Millennial Generation in Korea**

KLI (2018) highlighted that the lack of jobs for the highly educated leads to occupation mismatch and underemployment of the Millennial generation, which will affect them when they seek a new job. KLI (2018) also stated that employees who are underemployed in their first job have shown low rates of finding a fully employed job position in their next jobs and received a 27 percent lower wage than fully employed workers. This shows the dilemma Korean Millennials face. If they want to find a fully employed job position, they need to spend 10.8 months looking for a job, on average, or even longer (NSO, 2019b), and have a gap year on their resume, which does not give a good impression to future employers.

If they find a job that does not match their education levels or skills after graduating from school, they may earn money and add work experience on their resume; however, they will have fewer opportunities to move on to better occupations than the previous ones because future employers will most likely have the biased perception that underemployed workers are skilled at simple repetitive works and non-knowledge intensive tasks (Cooke, 2010; Min, 2008). Korean Millennials are stuck in the middle of the dilemma; 44.1 percent of the young generation was unemployed for more than one year in 2019 (NSO, 2019a). In 2019, the Bank of Korea (2019) announced that the younger generation of men had a higher underemployment rate than women (29.3 percent for men compared to 18.9 percent for women), but it is likely that the younger generation of women faced much higher barriers in their career trajectories and gave up finding a new job and were counted as unemployed. Through this experience, young Korean women face

sexism that comes from another way and their job trajectories are divided into two different parts: drop out of the job market and become unemployed or be underemployed and keep searching for a job.

Researchers in Korea who have studied underemployed young workers mostly have used the panel studies from Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) (Shin & Son, 2008), Graduates Occupational Mobility (GOM) (Nam & Jun, 2011), and the Korean Labor and Income Panel Study (KLIPS) (Kim et al., 2012). Based on the findings from many different panel studies, Millennials realized that they were underemployed when they had a higher education level. University graduates showed higher awareness of being underemployed than high school graduates (Kim et al., 2012; Nam & Jun, 2011). Kang's (2010) interviewees were hotel workers in the top ranked hotel in Korea. The findings showed that organizational effectiveness was highly influenced by the perception of over qualification and no growth in the workplace. Some 384 out of 390 workers had graduated from university and 30 workers had graduate degrees; 276 mainly worked in departments requiring a high degree of the spirit of service, such as sales, hotel support, serving in the hotel restaurant, and cooking. Kang (2010) pointed out only overeducated employees showed the high perception of job-mismatch and they suggested employers must provide work programs related to employees' potentials and skills, and well manage the human resources.

### **Underemployment of Korean Millennial Women**

Although Korean Millennial men and women both suffer from underemployment, the problem of Korean Millennial women's underemployment experience is far more complex than that of men. It is difficult for women in their late 20s to find a new job or change to a different job. They confront complex barriers in the labor market such as age, marital status, gender

discrimination, the cultural perception of what women's roles are, and are often paid lower wages compared to their male counterparts or cohorts (Kim & Kim, 2005; Min, 2008). In Min's (2008) study "who gets a good job" she argued the majority of women are working in "bad jobs" while only a small number of women have opportunities to work in "good jobs." Here, the term "good" and "bad" stand for working conditions (environment), the quality of the jobs, and the work hours. Korean women find themselves trapped in so called "gender-specific jobs" and are confronted with low wage occupations and underemployed job positions, poor work environments, and employment instability (Min, 2008).

Korean women experience high possibilities of working in underemployed occupations such as in the service or sales industries and are easily marginalized in the Korean labor market compared to Korean men. They become the cheap workforce in Korea and several empirical studies support the existence of gender-specific jobs: (a) gender wage differentials and discriminations (Cooke, 2010; Jeon, 2019; Jung & Choi, 2004), (b) the types of employment Korean women take in the job trajectory (Choi, 2017; Cooke, 2010; Min, 2008), and (c) how women's job quality changed after the global financial crisis in exploring Korean women's career path (Park, 2017).

### ***Existence of Gender-Specific Jobs***

Until the 1970s, low-educated young Korean women mainly worked in traditional manufacturing industries. However, after the 1980s, Korea's rapid economic growth needed women's talents and skills in different fields such as office work or manufacturing (Choi, 2017). Many Korean women actively participated in the labor market and had opportunities to work outside of the house. In the 1990s, married women were able to transfer to the workforce and well-educated Korean women were largely engaged in the job market (Choi, 2017; Min, 2008).

However, the majority of Korean women employees took irregular or temporary employment, marked by lower levels of pay and job insecurity (Choi, 2017; Cooke, 2010; Heo, 2013; Min, 2008).

In Cooke's (2010) study about women's participation in employment in four different countries in Asia, the author emphasized that women are expected to work harder than male employees to take leadership positions in the organizations. However, they are still perceived as "women" by employers and coworkers, not as "colleagues," even though they are in a higher position at work. Under the male-dominated society, women, even those in an important occupation at work, are still considered weak and subordinate. The gender role stereotypes cause double oppressions and discrimination toward women such that they barely survive in the male-centered organizations (militarized workplace) and they will leave the workplace after their maternity leave.

Unfortunately, Korean Millennial women put great efforts into proving they are more competitive than male employees. Heo's (2013) study on the occupational gender segregation in the labor market demonstrated that men have a large advantage over women in the gendered occupational structures and male-dominated jobs (e.g., technical services) underestimate women-dominated professional occupations (e.g., office work, sales jobs, service jobs). Park (2017) highlighted how the financial crisis impacted Korean women in the workforce and women's job quality, finding the economic crisis increased employment in low quality jobs (e.g., service industries, simple and repetitive jobs) and this change caused women employees to exit the labor market and enter the economically inactive population.

### *Trapped in Stereotype*

While Korean Millennial women endeavor to survive in the job market, they face another obstacle in their career paths: the career break. Korean Millennial women are a more highly educated group compared to women in earlier generations. However, women in the young generation are still struggling in the job market and face issues similar to those faced by the older generations. Outwardly, Korean Millennial women are actively participating in the workforce and the patriarchal system that was pervasive in Korean culture seems to have disappeared, but actually it has not. They are still suffering from an invisible and visible glass ceiling and discrimination in Korean society, which set up various strict and confined rules and standards for women to create much bigger oppression and to frame women's roles.

Marriage and childbirth are major factors influencing young women employees' job participation (Cooke, 2010; Min, 2008). These can cause career delayed among Korean Millennial women. Like the M-curve pattern, young Korean women aged between their late 20s and early 30s leave the job market, and they have a high possibility of not going back to the same (or a similar) level job when they try to re-enter the workforce in their mid-30s (Jeon, 2019; Lee, 2008; Min, 2008). Hwang (2004) found that married women (average age 30s) in Korea tend to re-enter the workforce mainly in part-time employment in such industries as the service industry and the sales industry. Korean Millennial women's reemployment is negatively impacted when they lower their competitiveness in the labor market and re-enter the workforce. Kim's (2015) finding, in her essay on the movement from/to part-time jobs among Korean women, showed that Korean women involuntarily chose part-time jobs, and they lowered their job satisfaction and job suitability when they had changes in their marital status. Married women tended to transfer their jobs from full-time to part-time to support their family members.

This societal issue is more apparent when women have a high level of education. Highly educated women have high expectations of returning to existing jobs and high-quality jobs after re-entering the workforce, but the number of jobs is limited, making them far more likely to find jobs that do not meet their expectations. In Korea, the percentage of underemployed women with masters or doctoral degrees is relatively high; specifically, 3.3 percent of women with graduate degrees were underemployed, whereas only 1 percent of men with graduate degrees were underemployed (KLI, 2018). Kang and his colleagues (2005) pointed out highly educated women tended to give up reemployment because the reality does not meet the expectations of getting a high-quality job. Several studies highlighted that well-educated woman became overqualified members of the workforce and they faced becoming a minority in the workforce (Cho & Lim, 2015; Choi, 2017; Chung, 1999). Recent studies on the underemployment of well-educated Korean women showed little difference from studies conducted in the 1990s.

**Table 2.5**

*Factors Influencing Korean Women's Underemployment*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
Marriage	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pregnancy/Childbirth	●	●	●	●	●	●
Discrimination of society/Employers	●	●	●	●		●
Male-dominated culture	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gender stereotype (Roles)	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gender-specific jobs (Non-knowledge intensive jobs)	●	●	●	●	●	●
Irregular employment (part-time job)	●	●	●	●		
Career interruption	●	●	●	●		●

*Note.* 1= Cho & Lim (2015); 2= Choi (2017); 3= Chung (1999); 4= Cooke (2010); 5= Lee (1996); 6= Min (2008)

The factor most often mentioned factor in Korean women's underemployment was the male-dominated organizational structure (Choi, 2017; Chung, 1999). Chung (1999) and Choi

(2017) have a time gap of 18 years between their two articles, but both pondered what makes young, well-educated, Korean women enter low quality jobs and give up entering the labor market. After interviewing college graduates (both men and women) in 1995, Chung (1999) pointed out the sexist labor market structure is the main problem preventing women from participating in the labor market. Women interviewees experienced gender discrimination while looking for a job and realized they would only be able to enter the job market if they hid their academic ability, skills, and job experience. Choi (2017) highlighted that the male-dominated culture at work prevents women from actively joining the workforce. This hierarchical organizational culture has criteria of skills and capacity for career development that are disadvantageous to women workers. Choi argued well-educated women will take full advantage of their skills and capacity in their careers when work-family compatibility is fully supported.

Cho and Lim's (2015) narrative inquiry with three highly educated women clearly showed how underemployment impacted their lives. The three interviewees described themselves after career interruption using such terms as "happy hell," "disconnection from the world," and "invisible." The participants commonly said that underemployment happens because of the lack of opportunities for women, especially after marriage or childbirth, and the prejudice against well-educated women in Korean society. They had no choice except to accept "gender-specific jobs" such as service or sales jobs (e.g., work as a janitor, a cleaner, or a telemarketer) which were not related to their previous careers. However, they kept trying to work even though they were underemployed because they believed that the length of service created better opportunities for them to get better job positions. To sum up, the male-dominated structure, stereotypes, and women's roles in Korean society prevent highly educated women from having career development and career advancement opportunities.

## Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2, I reviewed three key themes and connected them to elaborate how Korean Millennial women experience underemployment in Korea. First, I presented an overview of the Korean Millennial generation and their status in the Korean job market especially under the long-term economic recessions. Then, I narrowed down the key point for Korean Millennial women, who are well-educated, but who are still experiencing limited employment opportunities, subjugation, and capped goals have been capped for unexpected reasons. Next, I reviewed Asian feminism as a theory of this research and the concepts related to the theory. Asian feminism makes visible problems of the patriarchal system, the male-dominated society, and the traditional cultures, which oppresses Asian women, and how these problems frame Asian women. I also reviewed two concepts from Western feminism to show the intersections and overlaps between Asian feminism and Western feminism. Finally, I discussed how the existence of power and the patriarchal system cause the underemployment of Korean Millennial women, with a review of the definition of underemployment, factors, sexism and inequality issues in the job market, and the existence of gender-specific jobs.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the work identity and the underemployed experiences of Korean Millennial women. I interviewed Korean Millennial women who were previously or who were still underemployed to explore the answers to the research questions. These research questions guide this study:

1. What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?
2. How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?
3. What are the underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?

To examine the three research questions above, my study adopts feminist methodology and qualitative feminist interviews. These approaches helped me explore the issues Korean Millennial women face and listen to their voices as they tell me about their experiences as underemployed workers. In what follows, I provide a detailed description of my research design, feminist research, data collection (site and participant selection) procedure, and provide a discussion of the researcher's role and subjectivity in the qualitative feminist interview study.

#### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research design grounded in Asian feminism. Qualitative research aims to explore and understand what “individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 4), and is well suited for exploring new topics and for

discovering women's voices (Lee, 2018). Feminist qualitative researchers, including me, focus on learning and understanding the meaning of problems and issues that women face, and are also interested in critiquing and understanding how gender and gender role structure experience. To explore and understand Korean Millennial women's experience in the job market and underemployment in their career path, a feminist qualitative research design offers in-depth knowledge about the target group and the specific research topic. A feminist perspective also moves this analysis beyond the individual to critique and interrogate structures. In the following section, I broadly explored feminist methodological approaches to qualitative research before shifting to how these are taken up in my research study.

### **Feminist Research and Methodology**

Over the past 20 years, feminist inquiries have raised fundamental challenges to how social science has analyzed gender and social life (Harding, 2004). Women are described collectively as a marginalized group in a society dominated by men, which means women live in two different worlds, while men know only one world (Stanley & Wise, 2002). To fill in the gap in women's oppressed life in the male-dominated society, feminist researchers have explored the problems related to women or problems of a patriarchal society such as aims to accomplish social change and struggle to represent human diversity from multiple perspectives (Eichler, 1997). Feminist researchers have argued that traditional theories make it difficult to understand women's participation in society and traditional epistemologies reflect men's point of view (Harding, 2004; Jaggar, 2014; Lee, 2018).

### **Why Study Women**

Harding (2004) asserted that historically, women have been systematically excluded from being agents and knowers. Previously, women were marginalized in various fields such as

creating knowledge, social science, and science. One of the purposes of feminist research has been to understand women's worlds and to situate women as knowers. Harding (2004) argued that feminists claimed the voice of science is a masculine one and that history is written from men's point of view. Therefore, the feminists' main concern is to eradicate sexism from social science theory and practices and give more spaces for the inclusion of women (Stanley & Wise, 2002). Feminist researchers argued that since the majority of research works have been largely focused on men's language, men's perspective, and men's experiences (Harding, 2004; Lee, 2018), it is necessary to explore women's experiences and to examine social phenomena through a feminist lens with feminist methodology. As a feminist researcher, my role in this study focuses on women's voices and experiences easily neglected in history.

However, as pointed out by Harding (2004), answering the question of '*what is the distinctive feminist method*' is difficult, because method, methodology, and epistemological issues (e.g., traditional and feminist discourses) have been intertwined. Lee (2018) noted that each discipline has its own (main) method and methodology, so it is hard to set one specific feminist qualitative research method. However, feminist researchers share, as the purpose of feminist research, emphasis on challenging the gender hierarchy via an epistemological perspective.

### **Feminist Epistemology**

Feminist epistemology is a significant starting point in feminist research (Lee, 2018). Feminist epistemology emphasizes women's knowledge as an entry point for feminist research. Harding (1991) stated that feminist epistemology can be explained from three different perspectives: (1) feminist empiricist epistemology, (2) feminist standpoint epistemology, and (3)

feminist postmodern epistemology (Harding, 1991; Lee, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2004). In what follows I offer a brief discussion of each of these perspectives.

### ***Feminist Empiricist Epistemology***

Feminist empiricists highlighted that the women's movement creates opportunities for the achievement of social equality, and the social equality can reduce social prejudice (Harding & Nicholson, 1996; Lee & Lee, 2004). "Feminist empiricists argue that sexism and androcentrism<sup>12</sup> in science inquiry are entirely the consequence of badly done science" (Harding & Nicholson, 1996, p. 305). The sexist and androcentric distortion and academic norms can cause male-centered and social biases. Feminist empiricists criticized that androcentric biases could appear in the steps of data collection and data analysis, however, sexism and androcentrism "can be eliminated by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry" (Harding & Nicholson, 1996, p. 306).

For instance, in Okruhlik's (1994) study, *Gender and the Biological Sciences*, the author listed several case studies of biological sciences and criticized them using Harding's tripartite taxonomy of feminist epistemologies, including feminist empiricism, standpoint epistemologies, and feminist postmodernism. Through feminist empiricists' lens, the author stated "androcentric bias has gotten in the way of rigorous application of scientific method; but if the canons of science had been adhered to faithfully, episodes such as those above could have been avoided (Okruhlik, 1994, p. 31) because almost all the case studies the author listed were showing that men are strong, superior, perfect, and flawless, whereas women are weak, inferior, imperfect and flawed.

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<sup>12</sup> Dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests or a masculine point of view (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

### ***Feminist Standpoint Epistemology***

Feminist standpoint epistemology fundamentally challenges the male-centered knowledge system and society from a feminist standpoint (Lee, 2018). Feminist researchers employ the qualitative research method to have in-depth approaches to women's lives and experiences (Lee & Lee, 2004). However, these studies also question, whose experience? Whose knowledge? Women's actual experiences of their own actions are "incomprehensible and inexpressible within the distorted abstractions of men's conceptual schemes" (Harding & Nicholson, 1996, p. 309). Harding and Nicholson (1996) pointed out that women are isolated or alienated from their own experience due to the usage of the dominant conceptual systems. Lee (2018) argued that all knowledge is a social component, and the knowledge was constructed from power structures. Therefore, from the feminist standpoint, the standpoint theorists seek to understand women's value and women's activities from the perspective of women's experiences (Harding & Nicholson, 1996; Lee & Lee, 2004).

### ***Feminist Postmodern Epistemology***

Feminist postmodern epistemology "is critical of universalistic grand theories and rejects the existence of an authentic self" (Maynard, 1994, p. 19). Postmodernists focus on social relationships and social structures in the study rather than focusing on women's experiences, like feminist standpoint epistemology. Even though feminist postmodern epistemology had criticisms that it undermines important feminist works in significant ways, Harding argued that "feminist postmodernism has important contributions to make to feminist theory and politics" (Harding & Nicholson, 1996, p. 313). Haraway introduced the concept of "situated knowledge" in her essay in 1988, saying, "situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular" (p. 590). Haraway (1988) saw

this process as “partial knowledge” and highlighted the subject position should be considered significant.

A dichotomous way of thinking (e.g., male/female, culture/nature) had high possibilities to distort women’s knowledge. Therefore, in my understanding, the ultimate goal of feminist epistemology is to shift the pervasive male-centered knowledge or perspectives and let women make a decision by themselves through women’s point of view because traditional epistemology has marginalized the importance of knowledge that is highly related to women’s experiences and lives. While the three ways of feminist epistemology had different arguments and were presented from different perspectives, it is certain that the feminist epistemology evolved and was developed for a long time by many feminist researchers eager to reform the male-dominated system and give voices to women.

### **Feminist Methodology**

Jaggar (2014) pointed out quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches are used to accomplish the goals in feminist research. The purpose of my dissertation is to explore Korean Millennial women’s experience of underemployment. Previous empirical studies primarily used quantitative research methods (survey) to examine panel studies conducted by the Korean government (Kim, 2005; Kim, 2015; Kim et al., 2012). While reading these earlier quantitative studies of Korean Millennial underemployment, I had few opportunities to hear women’s voices telling of their lived experience. For example, Kim and his colleagues (2012) only focused on the numbers or percentages from panel studies held in the Korean Labor and Income Panel Study (KLIPS) to examine the main reason for younger generation’s decision to accept underemployment, and they did not focus on the participants’ voices or experiences about their stories in the job market. I was able to see the massive number of participants and the

general statistical figures, but I could not get what makes them work in underemployed occupations.

Also, most of the panel studies focused on both men and women in the Millennial generation, and it was difficult for me to find the exact data I was looking for. Specifically, I wanted to examine Korean Millennial women's rich experiences beyond the quantitative research method. Therefore, I decided to do feminist research to explore the issues they currently confront and center their voices and experiences as underemployed workers. This study offers an understanding of the stories behind the statistics - what makes women choose and stay in occupations where they are underemployed? How do women experience the patriarchal system and sexism during their job trajectory? Through interviewing with women, I extended their experiences in their lives, in their job trajectories, and at work, weaving issues of the patriarchal system, Confucianism, and traditional gender roles (social frames) and how they oppress young Korean women, viewing them through an Asian feminist perspective.

### **Qualitative Feminist Interview Study**

Qualitative research seeks to understand experience, explores ignored or marginalized populations (minorities), and helps one to delve in depth into complexities and processes (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Qualitative research designs help researchers emphasize life-worlds including emotions, motivations, meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects in individuals or groups' life (Berg, 2007). McCall (2005) suggested personal narratives to take the individual's experience and the social location embodied by the individual. Qualitative feminist interview studies focus on the complexity of power structures against gender, race, and class, and critically aim to reveal systemic inequality. Women's experience, like gender discrimination, structural inequality, and access to various levels, could be different from men's experience.

Women routinely face discrimination or systemic inequalities in many forms, such as via media, customs, social phenomena, traditional cultures, language, and more. Even though men experience discrimination in their lives, it is not in line with women's experience of discrimination. The history of discrimination and structural inequalities is not the same because the precondition of lived experiences is different between men and women.

Feminist researchers also pay attention to women participants' emotions, lived experiences, living environments, and their striving for the realization of emancipatory goals. Feminist scholars have emphasized that research on women should be for women (or for social justice more generally) giving women a voice, providing opportunities for reciprocal learning, and empowering women to change their living conditions (Kirsch & Kirsch, 1999). Therefore, in this study, I use qualitative feminist interviews to explore Korean Millennial women's experiences in their underemployed job positions.

### **Feminist Interview**

Feminist interviews arose from recognition of "studying and understanding women's lives were flawed" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 329). Doucet and Mauthner (2008) said feminist scholars noted that masculine bias permeated studies and feminist researchers began to capture the complexity of women's lives. Feminist researchers and scholars aimed to reveal the problems of traditional masculine characteristics not just in academia, but also in politics, economy, society, and culture. This remarkable research criticizes the previous research and lets people see the world from different perspectives. Feminist interviews are expected to confront knowledge, uncover the history of being excluded from the male-dominated society, and reveal the invisible discrimination and experience in women's lives. Women can be easily framed in

traditional roles by androcentrism and traditional cultures, and their voices and experiences can be removed from the society and cause another level of structural inequality.

In *Just Method*, Jaggar (2008) mentioned that knowledge is shaped by human purpose, values, and experiences. At this point, feminist researchers might have questions like “*what is experience?*” “*whose experience is it?*” or “*is that action done by oneself or formed by social structures (privileged groups)?*” “For him [Thomson] experience meant “social being”- the lived realities of social life, especially the affective domains of family and religion and the symbolic dimensions of expression” (Scott, 1991, p. 784). Like Scott (1991, 2008) said, women’s experiences are not created by oneself, but are created by various external factors that they face every day. If the experiences were performed by others, they should realize how to get authority of experiences in their lives. There are tensions between the privileged group and women’s lives.

### ***How to Deliver Women’s Voices?***

There are creative ways that feminist researchers have conducted interviews, including pictures, drawings, poems, and video materials to examine the informants’ experiences and describe their stories. When Lee (2018) interviewed women sex workers near military camp towns, she encountered a certain moment when she could not describe and narrate their experiences using the language created by the “majority of” men. She described the language as “scientific language” that had a logical framework which provides an understanding of and analyzes women’s experiences and their emotional excesses. Feminist researchers are not just giving the interviewees a voice, they also aim to break down the complex repressive structures; therefore, they should use various approaches to fully describe and narrate women’s experiences and provide their voices to the world.

## **Interviewing Women**

Historically, women's lives have been easily ignored, marginalized, and hidden compared to men's lives. "Women were in the family like jam in a doughnut-invisible but essential" (Evans, 1982, as cited in Cotterill, 1992, p. 594). Under the desperate situation, feminists aimed to challenge traditional concepts about women's roles in private and in public. By expressing women's life experiences, they aimed to allow the voices of women who were socially and politically marginalized/silenced to be heard (Cotterill, 1992). Women's stories are valuable and important; therefore, feminist researchers emphasize providing opportunities for reciprocal learning and empowering women to change their living conditions (Cotterill, 1992; Finch, 1984).

Interviewing women for their stories implies their positions are shifting from the margins to the center. When a woman interviews a woman, it is important for the researcher (a woman) to use categories that represent what women do, like take care of children or family, rather than using categories that reflect masculine activities or terms originated in the social science (Devault, 1987, as cited in Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Traditional research methods emphasize objectivity, efficiency, separateness, and distance... Let us consider as well connection and empathy as modes of knowing, and embrace them in our criteria and in our work. (Riger, 1990, as cited in Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 24)

The concept of feminist interviewing is different from the traditional male centered interviewing study because a feminist researcher listens to women interviewees' voices with their heart and care. Through the feminist interviewing, the feminist researcher can develop ideas, construct

meaning, and employ terms that say what the interviewees meant to express (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Several feminist researchers have suggested ways of doing successful interviews with women such as finding the best interview location (Finch, 1984; Tang, 2002), balancing the power (Cotterill, 1992; Tang, 2002), and sharing life stories and providing advice (Finch, 1984; Tang, 2002). The tips are closely related to establishing good rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. According to Finch (1984), she did an informal way of interviewing by conducting an interview at the interviewee's home to easily create rapport. Tang (2002) had a similar experience in that her respondents in the UK treated Tang differently compared with the time when they were interviewed at their offices.

While interviewing women, the interviewers might face the challenges of age, status, class, and race of the respondents (e.g., when a younger women interviewer interviews an older women interviewee). Tang (2002) realized both the interviewer's and the interviewee's perception of social, cultural, and personal differences affect the power-relationship in the interview. Guided by a feminist ethic, it is important for interviewers to have a non-hierarchical relationship and balanced power dynamics. Moreover, actively listening to interviewees' stories and sharing one's own helps build trust between the researcher and the informant. Women interviewees lack opportunities to share their private stories with others, even their families, so they have been all alone and felt isolated.

### **Data Collection**

In this section, I would like to explain the overall plans for data collection of this study. I first address site, participant selection, and criteria for recruitment. Then I move on to how I

prepared the interviews, the in-depth interview questions, and rapport building especially in the virtual space by using emoticons, and how I translated the interview data.

### **Participant Selection**

Starting from early Spring 2021, right after the prospective defense, I created a detailed timeline for data collection. Initially, I had planned to generate data in two different forms: individual and focus group interviews. However, I was in Athens for the Spring semester in early 2021 and the pandemic situation influenced the recruitment process. Many career development centers in Korea closed post-pandemic, and there were many restrictions to having a group activity in Korea. Therefore, I decided that the individual interview would be appropriate for this study.

For the interview, I was looking for women participants who can represent overqualified and underemployed Korean Millennial women in their job positions, which was very specific. Therefore, for the sampling, I first planned to use purposive sampling for this research. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique also called judgment sampling in which researchers can collect rich information from the participants (Etikan et al., 2016). Tongco (2007) summarized purposive sampling as “a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (p. 147).

Participant criteria were very specific because I anticipated my future participants would share their career trajectory experiences under the patriarchal system and traditional Korean culture. In order to find the most appropriate informants, I set up five main criteria for an interviewee: (a) Korean (and lived in Korea at least 15 years); (b) woman; (c) born 1980~1996 (Millennial generation; age group from mid 20s to early 40s); (d) have a college/university/or

graduate school degree (master/doctoral); and (e) currently or previously underemployed and job mismatch (e.g., architect works in fast-food service; overqualified and mismatching with one's previous job and major from university). The criteria might sound complicated and strict, but this was the first step to accomplish the solid interview. I was certain that people who met the five criteria could address the rich life experiences of living and working in Korea with the well-round knowledge of Korean culture.

In December 2020, I compiled a list of 30 Women's Career and Vocational Development Institutions in Korea on an Excel spreadsheet. Unlike collecting data on master's programs in previous research in 2015, I could not find the office email address of staff on any Websites, but instead used the open email address for the institutes. I first started to email a recruitment letter to more than 30 institutes in mid-February 2021. However, I did not receive any responses. One week after sending the email, I sent a reminder email to the institutes (30) and sent a recruitment letter to 30 new institutes. Even though some of them read my email, I did not receive any responses from them.

After the initial recruitment plan failed, I decided to use snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing informants suggest another informant for study (Tongco, 2007). "A random sample of individuals is drawn from a given finite population" (Goodman, 1961, p. 148). Snowball sampling is reminiscent of a rolling snowball in winter, because the sample may grow bigger, and enough data are collected to be useful for study. I had worked in Korea from 2014 and I was willing to use my own personal network to recruit more participants. Before adopting snowball sampling, I contacted an IRB and refined the sampling section from purposeful sampling to snowball sampling.

In early March 2021, I created two colorful fliers (jpg and pdf format) to share with my friends, family members, and co-workers (See Appendix B). Once they received the fliers, they started to actively share them with their friends via smart phone messenger. The reason I decided to adopt snowball sampling for my study is that I believed that my friends or people I know are mostly in the Millennial generation, so they could recruit more future participants for my study. While my friends, family members, and co-workers shared my fliers to their acquaintances, I posted fliers on my personal Blog, Instagram, and Georgia Tech Korean Student Association to recruit more people; *Title: Share your story*. Personally, Instagram worked very well. Many of my followers shared my post and Instagram story on their storyboard, so more and more people could see the recruitment fliers.

I got prompt responses from my friends and their friends after sharing the interview recruitment fliers. Their motivation for participation varied widely. When they had a conversation with my friends or read my friends' Instagram Story, they said "*OH MY! That's my story!*" and contacted me. Although I used snowball sampling for recruitment, purposive sampling was still necessary. In order to check if they were the right person for the interview, I did not go into the interview right away and made one more step: Google Survey. This is about the demographic questionnaire and part of the data collection. I asked basic questions about their work experience in underemployment (attached the URL and QR code on the fliers) and I received 20 responses from people who were interested in my study. Among the 20 women who responded to the link, two rejected the phone call interview because that was too much pressure for them (they suggested a written interview rather than a phone call interview), two did not respond to my message, and five were excluded because they did not meet the participant criteria

(e.g., the working years, nationality, and working experiences, the location of work). Thus, 10 women were selected for the final interview.

### **Preparing for Interviews**

In a previous setting, I had conducted a qualitative interview with my interviewees using several pictures of working in underemployment and she had reacted in a way that was more active than other participants, who were not shown such pictures. In this way, conducting creative qualitative feminist interviews is a good strategy to use to elicit ideas, data, and knowledge. While setting the interview format, I focused on the conversation we had before the in-depth interview. I wanted to get information on their life, family, educational, and vocational backgrounds, before they shared their stories. This process was a necessary step for me as an interviewer to understand their situation and to give me ideas for navigating the in-depth interview. Besides the creative strategy, I divided interview questions into two different parts: Part 1 (demographic factors) and Part 2 (interview).

Part 1 was demographic factors. This part consisted of multiple choice and short-answer questions. These questions were closed-questions and helped me to identify the interviewee's background. Part 2 was open-ended questions with four different sections: (1) life background, (2) experience of job market, (3) experience of working, and (4) decision making of resignation, and (5) about job (Sum up). "Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory" (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 18). Also, open-ended questions could be more appropriate to elicit sensitive information than closed-questions (Lewin, 2005). The interview format helped me to change my own perspective (perhaps biased perspective) of women's issues and women's experiences who had views that were different from my own. Moreover, through the in-depth interview, I expected to examine women's vivid

experiences of job trajectories, to answer the three research questions that evolved at the beginning of this study and to classify women's experiences to address issue of how to make women free from social structural oppression.

Before conducting the interviews with participants, I identified concise epistemological and ontological assumptions. For the epistemological assumptions, I explored "what kinds of knowledge should I possess about Korean Millennial women, underemployment, and their experiences in that situation?" and "how can I connect these to social problems?" For the ontological assumption, I asked "what does the presence or participation of women mean to the job market or the workplace in Korea?" Even though Korean Millennial women are highly educated, they are still confronting complicated oppressions in Korean society such as visible and invisible discrimination and gender microaggression. Through the interviews, I expected to discover what makes women experience inequalities in the career path, in the workplace, and in their daily lives while the Korean government highlights "change" and "reform" every year.

### **Rapport Building**

Because the time range of conducting interviews was from March 2021 to July 2021, I conducted interviews both in the U.S and in Korea. Under the circumstances and due to pandemic issues, I had to conduct phone interviews even though I greatly preferred to conduct traditional face-to-face interviews with interviewees. Interestingly, most of participants chose phone interview rather than video interview. They felt awkwardness and uncomfortable showing their face to a stranger (interviewer). I was concerned the awkwardness would negatively influence the actual interview, therefore, before the interview, I created a virtual space for each participant to build up intimacy and rapport, which had a positive impact on the individual interview.

Creating rapport is essential before moving forward to the interview. Feminist interviewing covers various topics, including housework, mothering, experiences of violence, sexual abuse, and harassment, and decisions related to abortion or childcare (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). I used a Korean messenger (카카오톡/KakaoTalk) to communicate with each participant using emoticons to blur the (in)visible distinction between us. Some of the interviewees were unapproachable because I was a complete stranger who wanted to collect their personal stories. Therefore, I approached them by sending emoticons to express my feelings in a much more friendly way. An emoticon is a pictorial representation of a facial expression using characters and I used both dynamic and static emoticons via KakaoTalk. The Millennial generation is known as being Tech-savvy, so it was the perfect way to express our feelings and build rapport by nonverbal communication before the interview. Women participants shared their personal stories which could be very sensitive and emotional. While sharing our personal stories, I found commonalities between us. Additionally, both of us could build up interactive empathy to take some time to reflect on and understand women's lives.

The day before the interview, I sent a friendly reminder to each participant. I briefly explained the interview process, time and date, interview questions, and things to prepare. After confirming the final schedule with my participant, I called them on time. I created an interview process script in order to avoid stammering. I shared the consent form first and asked permission to record the whole interview for data analysis. During the interview, I jotted down keywords on notes to be a good guideline for each interview during the coding process. Also, I wrote a short memo during the interview to create follow-up questions and wrote a reflexive memo right after the interview because it's the best moment to provide richer descriptions of my feelings, thoughts, and senses about the interview.

## Translation

Since the target group of the interview was Korean Millennial women, each interview was conducted in Korean. After the interview, I transcribed the interview in Korean first and used the data for my dissertation in English. I knew there would be a translation issue and concerns in using different languages in the interview and dissertation. Accurate translation is very important to deliver interviewees' experiences and messages into written words, so, I decided to use the back-translation strategy as a check on the translation of my research. Back translation is the comparison of the version in the original language with the version which is translated into the source language (Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004). "Sometimes the back-translated version was clearly different in meaning from the original version" (Brislin, 1970, p. 187).

To avoid the issue of inaccurate translation, in the translation process, I first translated the selected direct quotations by myself into English. Then, I sent them to my previous supervisor (professor in Korea) with whom I had worked from 2016 to 2021. She is a professor in Korea, and she did qualitative research in her dissertation. She has actively published many journal articles, both in Korean and in English, using quantitative and qualitative methodology; therefore, I expected that she could give great feedback on my analysis of the interview data and check the interpretation process. Once she checked and corrected the translation, I revised the translated data in English. Next, I sent it to another Korean woman fluent in English and Korean who completed their bachelor's and master's degrees in the USA. Then finally, I asked my personal editor who only speaks English to check the nuance or word choice of quotations for sentence flow. When the translations and back translations were completed, I compared the original and back translated the data and revised it for accuracy.

## Participant Profiles

The participants were 10 Korean Millennial women who self-identified as an underemployed woman. Their birth years ranged from 1980 to 1994. Out of the 10 participants, four were married (three participants had two children and one participant was planning for a child), four were single, and two were bihon. All participants of this study were purposefully selected using snowball sampling. In this section, I will briefly present how the interviews were conducted, demographic information for each participant, and each participant's narrative stories of entering the career path (job market in Korea) and working as an underemployed employee. Table 3.1 shows the 10 women interviewees' demographic profile including name (pseudonyms picked by each interviewee), year of birth, final degree achieved, marital status, underemployed career, years working in underemployment.

**Table 3.1**

### *Participant Demographic Profiles*

Name	Year of birth	Major	Final degree achieved	Marital status	Underemployed career	Years in underemployment <sup>13</sup>
Hyeri	1994	Hotel Management	M.Ed.	Single	Office worker (Small-sized firm)	2
Mina	1992	English & Political Science and Diplomacy	B. A.	Single	Office worker (Small-sized firm)	2
Yeoleum	1990	French & Spanish	B. A.	Single	Trading company (mid-sized firm)	5
Yeondoo	1989	Early Childhood Education	B. A.	Single	Fast-food restaurant & Art-class teacher	2.6
Jihye	1988	Music Education	M.Ed.	Married (2 kids)	Part-timer (Music teacher at secondary school)	4
Minji	1983	Biotechnology	M.Ed.	Married (2 kids)	Coordinator at hospital	1.6

<sup>13</sup> The years of being underemployed at the time of the interview. (*Note:* Although Runa only had 4 months of working experience in underemployment at the time of the interview, she shared the inside story of a career development center for women in Korea and the reality of a career break women in Korea. So, I chose Runa as the 9<sup>th</sup> interviewee).

**Table 3.1 (Continued)***Participant Demographic Profiles*

Jiyoung	1980	Early Childhood Education	M.Ed.	Married (2 kids)	Part-timer (bakery)	3
Hyeyoon	1994	Economics	B. A.	Bihon	Advertising company	1.7
Runa	1990	Journalism	B. A.	Bihon	Office worker & Trainer	0.4
Yeaji	1992	Art History	B. A.	Married (planning)	English teacher in English institute	2

*Note.* The interviewees are listed in order of interviewing and all names are pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

The data used in this chapter were collected from in-depth, semi-structured individual qualitative feminist interviews from March 2021 to July 2021. The interview consisted of nine closed-ended questions and 14 open-ended questions that explored participants' demographic factors, life background, experience of job market, experience of working, decision making of leaving the job, and about the job itself (See Appendix A). Through the qualitative feminist interview process, I considered the power dynamics and power relationship between interviewer (me) and interviewees. Since we all had different life backgrounds, age, status, and class, I tried to balance the power with the women participants, listen to their stories very carefully, and help them find the best interview location to accomplish the interview. All interviewees shared their lived experiences and private stories very frankly with many suggestions, pointing out current issues in the Korean job market and the workplace.

Each interview was expected to last between 40 minutes and 60 minutes, however, the actual interviews ranged from 40 minutes for the shortest to 100 minutes for the longest. Before the interview, I asked for permission to audio-record the whole interview process (questions and response). During the interview, I jotted down keywords in the fieldnotes. After the interview, I wrapped up the interview process by writing reflexive memos. Therefore, the data collection was

composed of audio-recording, fieldnotes, and reflexive memos throughout the interview research process. In what follows, I offer brief portraits of each participant and how they were recruited for this study. Because nine out of ten participants preferred phone interview (voice only), I was concerned our conversation might run off the track since we cannot see each other and catch nonverbal cues. Therefore, from the 7<sup>th</sup> participant onwards, I asked them to prepare paper and pen before the interview and draw the timeline during the interview. After the interview, we shared the timelines we drew and compared them through online chat.

### **Brief Introduction to the 10 Interviewees**

In this section, I will briefly introduce how I met each participant, how they chose their pseudonyms for the interview, and their voices on being underemployed to help readers understand their backgrounds, before we move on to the finding chapter.

**Hyeri.** My first interviewee, Hyeri, first contacted me when she saw recruitment fliers on her friend's Instagram story in early March 2021. My friend who shared my interviewee recruitment fliers on her story said, "*Jiyea, my friend is interested in your study and is it okay that I give her contact to you?*" I first contacted Hyeri on March 13, 2021, via Online Chat and she first asked me whether her experiences were those of being underemployed or not. I explained the purpose of the study and the interview in detail. After we chatted back and forth for two hours, she was very interested in my study and expressed the intention to participate in the interview. "*I would like to share my underemployed experiences to people and help your study.*" Because we were in a different time zone, we negotiated the best time for both of us. On March 14, 2021, we did an interview via phone call. Before the interview, I asked, "*What pseudonym would you like to be assigned for this interview?*" She paused a bit and picked the name Hyeri because this was the name most familiar to her.

Hyeri's highest degree was a master's degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management. She was currently working (her first career) in a small-sized company founded by her advisor from her master's program. Since her advisor specialized in tourism, Hyeri was working on rural development. She had been in her current job for two years, but she was not satisfied with her current working status. While we chatted via Online Chat before the interview, I told her, *"I think you are doing a major job at your work, why do you identify yourself as underemployed?"* and she responded, *"I identify myself as an underemployed because I am working in a small company and mis-matching with my personal interests and disciplines."*

**Mina.** My second interviewee, Mina, received the Google survey link from one of her friends in early March 2021. Upon reading the purpose of the study and a recruitment flyer, she decided to participate in the interview because she thought it was her story, too. I first contacted Mina via email on March 16, 2021, and we then had a conversation through Online Chat. I shared the interview questions, and she indicated her intention of participating in the interview. Mina said:

I was going to say only negative sides of my current workplace, but after reading the interview questions, I realized that I do not have to answer all the questions in negative ways. There are also positive sides of my workplace and I also feel a feeling of satisfaction while working here.

Mina wanted to share her underemployed experiences as soon as possible, so we conducted an interview via phone on March 22, 2021.

Before moving on to Part 2 of the interview, I asked her about a pseudonym. *"So, before we begin Part 2, may I ask you what name you want to use for this study?"* She sounded like she had not thought about her pseudonym. Mina paused a second and said, *"Hmm... (fake) name..."*

*What should I choose? Well... I will go for Mina. This is my friend's name!*" She chose the name of her friend and I assumed that it made her comfortable and lessened the tension during the interview.

Mina's current working status was as an office worker after she decided not to take the exams required to enter graduate school and become a foreign affairs official. For her bachelor's degree, she studied English and Political Science, and she had experience working as a contract worker in a public institution. Both in the job market and at work, she was never treated equally. She experienced micro- or even macro-aggression from her employers and colleagues, and it negatively impacted her job satisfaction and work performance. Under those circumstances, Mina showed resistance to the work because she faced gender role expectations, gender discriminations, and had to work without plans. *"To be honest, I do not have much pride or motivation to develop this company by giving my abilities and efforts."*

**Yeoleums.** My third interviewee, Yeloeum, contacted me on March 13, 2021 after checking the interview flyer on her Instagram story. A few minutes later she started Online chat and said *"Jiyea, I did not recognize it at first, but I think this is my story. I have experienced wage discrimination and I am underemployed now."* On March 14, 2021, I showed the interview questions to Yeoleum and, as she said earlier, she had several episodes of being underemployed and experiencing discriminations at work. We first set up the interview for late March, but for personal reasons we postponed the interview until April 1, 2021. Before the interview, we contacted via Online Chat, and we did a phone call interview for the final interview. Before asking the second part of the interview, I asked her about a pseudonym. She paused a bit and hesitated to choose between two names: Summer and Rose. *"I will go for Summer because I was born in summer days."* Summer fits her image because she is an extrovert and an active person. I

prefer using Korean names as pseudonyms, so we finalized her pseudonym as Yeoleum which means summer in Korean.

Yeoleum has a strong educational background and linguistic ability. She was born in Korea and resided abroad for her father's business since she was young. She attended international school where they only communicated in English and transferred to a French school from Grade 3. In Grade 9, she started to attend Korean school every weekend, so she was able to speak Korean (mother language), English, and French fluently. She returned to Korea for University, where she studied foreign languages. Students in her university generally chose a double major, and she chose Spanish for her second major. Since she could speak four different languages, when she was in the job market, she submitted her applications only to the department of overseas business. Yeoleum had challenging times while she was looking for a job. She submitted almost 30 applications and she was in the job market almost two years. After two years, when she could not get the job she wanted, she decided to enter any company she could get in. She was currently working in a mid-size trading company, with which employment, neither she nor her parents were satisfied.

**Yeondoo.** My fourth interviewee, Yeondoo first received a recruitment flyer in mid-March and Google survey link through Online Chat. In the process of sharing flyer and link, she thought this study was looking for her story. As soon as she realized that Yeondoo submitted a Google survey form and I contacted her through email and online chat on March 25, 2021. I still remember her passion for being an interviewee for this study, *“Hello, Jiyea. It’s my honor to be part of this interview study. I hope my experience of underemployment could help you with your meaningful study.”*

Yeondoo was very active and enthusiastic about doing the interview. I was surprised that she was already prepared with several personal stories to share for the interview. *“I read the interview questions all and I am ready for stories! When should we do the interview?”* Before we started Part 2, open-ended questions for in-depth interview, I asked her about a pseudonym. *“Oh, pseudonym? Hmm... Let me see... What about Yeondoo? Do you think it sounds like too much girly?”* In Korean, Yeondoo sounds very cute, and she kept asking me about the name. *“Please tell me if it’s too childish.”* But I liked this name because this pseudonym matched her voice and her character: very extroverted.

Yeondoo had completed all the courses in her master’s program, and she was getting ready to write her master’s thesis. She studied Early Childhood Education in both her undergraduate and her master’s programs. Unlike other interview participants, she worked at many part-time jobs at the same time to make a living and to pay for graduate school tuition. Yeondoo’s underemployment experiences happened as a part-timer in a fast-food restaurant and art-class. While she worked there for two years, she identified herself as an underemployed. Yeondoo decided to quit the part-time jobs after she completed all the courses in her master’s program. She said, *“I was exhausted in mind and body. I worked the overnight shift at the fast-food restaurant for two years and my health has been deteriorating for a while.”* Although doing three jobs was very intensive, she viewed the time as a chance to learn about life and learn how to change herself. *“Now I looked back on my own experiences of underemployment, I took encouragement from them. I learned how precious my life is and set up concrete life goals.”*

**Jihye.** My fifth interviewee, Jihye, saw the recruitment flyer on Mother’s Local Online Community ( *맘카페*<sup>14</sup>/*Mom Café*) in early April 2021. As soon as she realized that this study

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<sup>14</sup> Mom Café is an online community and platform for mothers to exchange their lives like childcare and daily life issues, education, local and national issues.

was looking for her story, Jihye submitted a Google Survey form and I contacted her with interview questions on April 14, 2021, via Online Chat. She was the first married interviewee for my study, and I was excited to listen to stories from a married woman. We conducted a phone interview on April 15, 2021. She gave prompt responses to my request to schedule the interview and actively engaged in the whole interview process. She said:

I saw your recruitment flyer on Mother's Local Online Community in the city I live now, and it said an interviewer is having trouble finding interviewees. I had a similar experience while I was collecting my data for my master's thesis. I could feel the difficulties, so I would love to help you if I can.

While she was reading the recruitment flyer on Online, she thought that it was about her story. She understood my agony of searching for an interviewee for data collection, so she decided to participate in the interview. Before the interview, she thought about her pseudonym. Jihye was a pseudonym chosen by herself. *"Our generation, in the late 1980s, used the name Jihye a lot for girls. I thought it would be funny to change my last name, so please change the first name."*

Jihye was currently a stay-at-home mother caring for her two children and for husband. She got her master's degree in Education, specifically in Music Education-Instrumental Music. Even though she was a well-educated woman, she identified herself as underemployed. *"I have worked countless part-time jobs since I was a freshman."* She realized that it was too hard to get a job related to her major right after graduating from university, so she decided to enter the master's program to pursue a teaching certificate. During the master's program, she obtained a teaching certificate (Level 2).

After surviving in the job market, she worked as a contract teacher at private secondary schools in Korea. Although she loved teaching students and she got recognition from her other

colleagues (teachers at schools), she could not renew her contract. Her marriage and pregnancy were the biggest obstacles to renewing her contract and she faced a career break. After she gave birth to her first child, she did not want to have a gap in her resume and career. It was challenging for her to go back to her previous job because of her marital status, so she chose to work as a part-time music teacher (90 minutes twice a week) for a year. The income was cut 1/8 compared to her previous job. Her employer wanted to renew her contract, but she had to leave the part-time music teacher position due to her husband's company moving to another city.

**Minji.** My sixth interviewee, Minji, also saw the recruitment flyer on Mother's Local Online Community (맘카페//*Mom Café*) in early April 2021 and she responded to the Google Survey form on April 10, 2021. I first contacted Minji on April 13, 2021, via Online Chat and I explained the purpose of this study in detail. At the end of our conversation, I shared the interview questions. *"I can first take a look and confirm the interview, but I am afraid of the time constraint... I am only available on lunch hours (from 12 pm to 1 pm) and late at night via Zoom."* I did not want to interrupt her precious lunch time at work and her evening time with her family. Moreover, we were in different time zones, so it was hard to adjust our interview schedule. So, I suggested, *"what about if we have an interview in mid-May? I will be in Korea, so we don't have to worry about our time zone."* I promised to contact her again in May when I visited Korea to collecting data.

On May 11, 2021, I sent her a friendly reminder of the interview, and thankfully she still expressed the intention of participating in the interview. Although we set up the final schedule for the interview, due to Minji's personal schedule, we had to change the plan. On May 15, 2021, finally, I was able to conduct the interview with Minji and I appreciated that she participated in the interview while she was doing her work. *"Jiyea, I am so sorry that my previous schedule is*

*not finished yet. I did not know this takes so long, but I will do this interview anyway because I already put the interview off.*” I promised her to conduct a concise, but a high-quality interview in a short time.

For the pseudonym, she picked the name Minji Kim, but did not mention the reason. One interesting thing I found was Minji changed the full name including the last name while other participants only changed their first name. At the beginning of the interview, she was worried about exposing personal information in public. *“I am wondering how much personal information is being released. I want someone will not notice me, if possible.”* Under the circumstances, I assumed that is why she picked the name, Minji, which is a very common name for girls in Korea, especially in the Millennial generation.

Minji described her childhood as very ordinary. *“I was a good girl and good daughter. I did not have any troubles with my family members, and I also graduated well-known schools in Korea.”* She recalled the moment when she could not understand “discrimination” in her career life/social life. She explained:

I am the eldest daughter in my family, and I have a younger sister. With my family, I grew up saying everything I wanted to say and actively expressing my opinions. But when I went into society for my career, there were a lot of restrictions and frames/stereotypes/roles on women. Those situations were hard to understand because I had no experience of discrimination between men and women when I was growing up. I even thought about what would it have been like to experience this (discrimination or sexism) in my childhood?

*“I can share my story of underemployment, employment discrimination, and sexism in the job market and at work”* was the additional comment from Minji on the Google Survey form.

She seemed to have many things to share for this interview. Minji was currently working as a coordinator at a small hospital near where she lives. She received a master's degree in Biotechnology, and she graduated from a first rank university in Korea. Although she had a successful career in a conglomerate for seven years, she had to leave right before her promotion. She received unfair treatment in the promotion process due to her pregnancy and childbirth. The department head told her to take three months of maternity leave or leave the job. She was very disappointed, but not surprised at this happening at all. So, she decided to quit the job and tried to re-enter the job market after living as a housewife for three years. Unfortunately, Minji faced employment discrimination due to her marital status. Nevertheless, she did not give up her career. She started to look for certifications and received a certificate of Hospital Coordinator. Her current job was her second career that she never thought about working at in the past. Although it was an unexpected career path, she described that it was the moment for her to think out of the box.

**Jiyoung.** My seventh interviewee, Jiyoung, was one of the participants in my pilot study back in Spring 2020. She identified herself as underemployed and indicated her intention to participate in the study. At the end of the pilot study, she was willing to help me with the actual data sample interview. On May 26, 2021, I contacted her for the interview, and I sent the interview questions via Online Chat. Among the interviewees, Jiyoung was the third married interviewee, and I was excited to listen for any updated news compared to the pilot study interview. Jiyoung was a working mom with two children, so nighttime was the best time for her. I sent her a reminder the day before the interview and we conducted the interview on May 31, 2021, at 8:30 pm.

When we were working on the pilot study, I set up a random English pseudonym for her, Emily. However, this time I wanted to use a Korean pseudonym. She said, *“I will use my real name as a pseudonym.”* She was okay with using her real name as a pseudonym for the study and she was the first person who did not worry about showing herself to others. I could feel her self-confidence and self-esteem, but I picked the name “Jiyoung” for her confidentiality.

Jiyoung was a master’s degree holder in Early Childhood Education, and she had a long time to pursue this degree. She had dynamic educational and vocational backgrounds. *“I had not thought about going to college or university until Grade 12.”* She studied in a girl’s vocational high school, and she remembered that she was not much interested in continuing to study. *“My mom wanted me to work as a banker because it was a steady job for a woman at that time. But I am an active and energetic person. I imagined myself working at a bank and I realized that it’s not for me.”* In Grade 12, she was interested in exploring computers, so she got a certificate in Office Information Management. Then, she decided to major in Computer Science in a college and got a job related to her major after graduation.

Although she built her career, Jiyoung identified herself as underemployed. She experienced underemployment four times and career discontinuation two times due to marriage and pregnancy. In 2006, she was married and pregnant with her first son. Before she launched her own business in 2010, she had experienced re-entering the job market several times. *“I was working in a playgroup (nursery school) as a part time worker because of my first son. I could not work for a whole day, so I worked for morning shift only when he was in a daycare center.”* For family reasons, she had to close her own business and re-entered the job market for living in her late 30s. Jiyoung described that it was completely different from when she was looking for a job when she was single. She chose a part-time job in the service industry, in a bakery. The job

had no relationships to her previous jobs and the disciplines she studied in her master's program, but she had no choice.

**Hyeyoon.** My eighth interviewee, Hyeyoon, is a friend of Runa (the #9 interviewee). On May 27, 2021, Runa sent me an Online Chat and said, *“hello, Ms. Park. Is it okay to share your interview questions to my friend, Hyeyoon? I think she could share her story for your study also.”* I was very surprised about how well snowball sampling worked among participants of the study. Runa gave me Hyeyoon's personal contact, and I immediately sent her a message.

She read the recruitment letter, flyer, interview questions, and submitted the Google survey form. It was late at night, but nothing could stop her passion and enthusiasm toward the study. I could feel that Hyeyoon was so ready to share her story and experience with me. She and I talked until the morning, and we finalized the interview schedule. Moreover, Hyeyoon was the first interviewee who felt comfortable doing a Zoom interview. On June 4, 2021, I sent her a friendly reminder with a Zoom link, and we met on June 5, 2021. Unfortunately, the Internet connection was unstable, so we switched the interview to a phone interview. After asking the first part of the interview, demographic factors, I asked her about a pseudonym for this study. *“Well, I have thought about it and please use the name Hyeyoon.”* The way of making her pseudonym was pretty interesting and creative. The pseudonym Hyeyoon was a combination of her multiple friends' names.

Hyeyoon had parents who supported and cared for her very much since she was young. *“I remember my parents were very supportive of me and they never rejected my opinions of learning new things. My mom had a passion for education, so she made me study a lot.”*

Growing up with supportive parents, she was able to pursue her dream of becoming a reporter

(journalist). *“I dreamed of giving informative news or information to readers (audiences) when I become a reporter, and I thought that’s what a good reporter does.”*

Hyeyoon was currently working in an advertising company. She studied in Economics as an undergraduate and she prepared for the journalist examinations from her junior year. Hyeyoon graduated from one of the women’s universities in Korea and her professor often said to the students, *“you need to add more lines on your resume than any men your age to get a job.”* In the job market, she faced unexpected situations as a woman applicant. She questioned the irony of the job recruitment process particularly the job interview. After she finally was able to get a job as a reporter, her dream which she had pursued for a long time, she was disappointed in what she was assigned, so she decided to leave after working there for 4 months. As soon as she gave up her a long-sought dream, she searched for a new job that was not related to her previous job, and she entered underemployment. She identified herself as *bihon* in the beginning of the interview. For her, work was very important in her life because she wanted to have self-accomplishment and contribute to Korean society.

**Runa.** My ninth interviewee, Runa, was one of the staff members who received my email to a women’s career center in Korea. Even though she worked for women applicants who seeking a new job, she identified herself as an underemployed employee. It took two months to conduct an interview with Runa due to our personal schedules. Runa submitted the Google survey form on April 13, 2021, but I checked the response on May 21, 2021. I contacted her immediately and, thankfully, she gave a prompt response.

I shared the interview questions with detailed explanation of the study, and she introduced her friend, Hyeyoon (the #8 interviewee) while she reviewed the interview questions. However, due to busy schedules for both of us, we lost contact for two weeks. I re-contacted her

on June 14, 2021, and Runa said she was about to contact me. *“Jiyea, I am so sorry for the late response. I am afraid of not finding the opportune time for the interview. What about doing a written interview?”* I understood her situation, but I explained the limitation of the written interview to Runa. Thankfully, she arranged her time on a weekend for the interview. On June 18, 2021, I sent her a reminder of the interview and things she needed to prepare for the interview. Her preferred pseudonym was Runa and she said, *“I would go for the name Runa.”*

Runa has a big family, including her parents, one older and one younger sister, and a younger brother. She is the second daughter among the four siblings. She recalled experiencing sexism and patriarchy when her family needed to make a big decision (e.g., experience of the Confucian culture: Give younger brother the power to make decisions for the family, not older sisters). However, her family was supportive of what she pursued for her future dream, that of becoming a news producer. She graduated with a degree in Journalism and worked in a broadcasting studio for 32 months. *“I always dreamed about becoming a news producer who has positive impacts on society. However, I was a contract worker and always eager to transition to a regular employee.”* Like Hyeyoon, Runa also identified herself as *bihon*. Runa wanted to use herself as a human resource in this society and make a good contribution for social values.

**Yeaji.** My tenth interviewee, Yeaji, received the recruitment flyer and Google Survey link from her friend. She thought this study was looking for her story since she was underemployed several times. *“I am also worried about continuing my career after marriage. I also looked over the interview questions, and I could answer most of them. This is looking for my story.”* Yeaji was comfortable with having a Zoom interview, so I sent her a friendly reminder a day before the interview date with the Zoom link. Yeaji was her preferred pseudonym during the interview. *“What about switching your name order? Yeaji from Jiyea. Yeaji Lee. I wanna keep*

*my last name though.*” We laughed a lot and I asked her the reason. She did not think about her new name for the interview, and my name popped up because my face and name were on the screen.

Yeaji remembers her relative on the paternal side had living abroad experiences from her grandfather’s generation. Yeaji’s father was a resident employee at a company in a country in Europe, where she attended International School. *“While we had family trips all over Europe, I had opportunities to visit art galleries and museums. Since I experienced magnificent pieces in person, I dreamed of becoming a curator one day working in an art museum.”* When she moved back to Korea for university, she chose Art History for her field of study. Her parents were very supportive of her decision. *“The reality was way tougher than I thought. There were many requirements to become a curator like strong educational background, certificates, and practical experiences.”* When she was in her senior year, she decided to spend one year thinking about her future career. When she worked as a staff member in various art exhibitions, she was always a contract worker because art exhibitions last only for three or four months.

Yeaji was currently working in the HR department of an English institute in Korea. Her job searching process was challenging and taking a long time. She first prepared for the civil service exam for three years because she wanted to have a stable life with job stability. Unfortunately, she had to change her plan, and she entered the job market in 2018, when she was in her late 20s. Due to her age, she had numerous questions about her future-plans such as marriage or family plan from interviewers, not a plan for herself. She was disappointed but hardly surprised because she expected this uncomfortable situation in her job preparation. In the interview, she opened her stories of what discriminations she faced in the job market from A to Z.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to answer the research questions of this study, the interviewees and I used Korean during the interview. The target group was Korean Millennial women, so they can vividly express the oppressions and social frames that they have faced in their lives, the job market, and at work in their mother language, which is Korean. It would be helpful for me and the interviewees and myself to build rapport and share our own experiences of being an underemployed worker in Korean. I was also able to reinterpret the participants' experiences and identity via interview in Korean.

For the interview transcripts, I used Amazon Transcribe, which supports various languages, including Korean. After the software completed transcribing the audio files, I revisited the files and corrected misspelled words, phrases, and sentences. Although Amazon Transcribe shows 90 percent accuracy when transcribing the voice of one person, it shows low accuracy when transcribing multiple voices. The audio files were transcribed into a Microsoft Word with line numbers, and I marked the time every 30 seconds to track the interview on the final transcript. Additionally, I marked my name as "IR" with bold font and marked each participant as "IE" so I could easily track the time and speaker in the process of coding.

I used the inductive coding approach for my data analysis to answer the three research questions of this study. The inductive approach is known as a bottom-up approach. Researchers inductively analyze data to build patterns, categories, and themes by organizing the data from the bottom up (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) described the inductive approach as researchers develop codes "directly" from the data and participants' words or quotes (phrases) are used to code the data. Then researchers who use the inductive approach view their studies with a theoretical lens, such as culture, ethnography, gendered, racial, or class

differences, and interpret what they see, hear, and understand from the data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The main purpose of the inductive approach is “to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). In the inductive approach, researchers list many initial codes at first and they categorize or create the codes repeatedly. Inductive coding is an iterative process that sounds somewhat complicated and complex, but it allows flexibility and further exploration. Similar to the researchers who use the inductive approach, I aimed to figure out women participants’ status under the male-dominated society and examine the issues through their experiences. Moreover, as I re-read the transcripts, I was able to identify the appropriate final theme as well as developing a feminist methodology and Asian feminism theory. Participants’ vivid experiences and voices under the patriarchal system and Confucian society clearly pointed out the systemic inequalities in Korea.

For the data analysis of this study, I used Reitz’s (2017) process of five-column analysis. When Reitz read a transcript, he noticed that the first-person reflections could provide a richer description to the inductive coding process through connection to one’s feelings, thinking, and senses. In order to convey both the quality and the texture of the data, Reitz recorded his thoughts and feelings in a personal journal right after every meeting, listened to the recordings no more than two days later, and transcribed the recordings no more than seven days after the interview. Then, Reitz finally formatted the data into five-columns. To summarize the five-column of analysis, Reitz (2017) said:

... to clarify again, the first column is the speaker, the second column the transcript, the third column my first-person reflections, the fourth column my brainstorm of themes, and my fifth column the final theme, which I felt to be most figural. (pp. 431-432)

**Table 3.2**

*Reitz's Five-Column Analysis*

<b>1 Speaker</b>	<b>2 Transcript</b>	<b>3 First-person reflections and memos</b>	<b>4 Initial themes</b>	<b>5 Final themes</b>
Specify the person speaking	Detail the script verbatim	Write down what was going on for the interviewer at each moment (using notes, journal, memos)	Summarizing, concluding, reducing, and constructing	Detail one key theme against each intervention

*Note.* Summarization of Reitz's (2017) Five-column analysis on (pp. 430-431).

As Reitz suggested, I set up an Excel Spreadsheet creating five-columns after reading each transcription. To Reitz's five-column analysis table, I added two more columns for coding the data. The first one was "line" so I could easily track back the data either on the coding book or on the transcription. The second one was "Text\_Eng" which let me easily compare the original data (written in Korean) and the translated data (written in English) (Nikander, 2008). While reading each transcription, I kept thinking about the problem statement, the purpose of this study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework, and how to make connections these with each participant's voice. I read through the women's stories (the raw interview data) with the relevance of these in my mind and wrote down the key reflections I had for the first-person reflection (the 5<sup>th</sup> column). At this point, I used short-notes, short memos, and reflexive notes I wrote right after each interview. These documents were significantly useful and helpful for the data analysis stage.

During the coding, I focused on the terms, quotes, and phrases that were frequently mentioned by the interview participants. In the sixth column, I listed the initial themes first. It was more like brainstorming themes than what Reitz highlighted, but the problem was I had way more initial codes than I expected. For example, in one interview transcript I had five initial themes like gender discrimination, gender expectations, social prejudice, gender role, and sexual harassment. It was my first reaction after reading the transcript and writing my first-person reflection.

The next step was how am I going to get a focused theme that represents each participant's voice? "Unlike a squirrel hoarding acorns for the winter, you should not keep collecting data for devouring later (Glesne, 2016, p. 150). Glesne (2016) suggested establishing boundaries to complete any works, so I reminded myself of the purpose of this study again and what women's experiences revealed. Therefore, I reread the transcripts repeatedly and applied the code again, and I started to rename, combine, or even create new codes based on the sample. For example, the five initial codes I extracted from the transcription and my first-person reflection memos were highly related to women as employees and how they were unfairly treated at work. As I realized this, I focused on the specific quotes, events, and stories in the transcription, and I finally got Focused Codes (the final key theme) called "being subjugated as a woman employee." Thus, the data are represented in six themes and eight categories.

Table 3.3

## Coding Process Sample

Person Speaking	line	Text_Kor	Text_Eng	First Person Reflection	Initial Codes	Focused Codes
#2-Mina	202-204	IE:저희 부서는 좀 영어를 많이 쓰는 부서라서 아무래도 여자 분들이 좀 더 외국어를 잘하는 경향이 있잖아요. 여성 직원이 조금 많은 편이긴 한데, 좀 아무래도 이어서 여자가 많다 보니까 부장님이 다음에는 남자를 뽑아야겠다 [32:00] 라는 식으로 말씀하시는 걸 들은적이 있어요. 정말...	Our department uses English a lot compared to other department in the company. Well, women tend to have better foreign language proficiency, so there are a lot of women employees in my department. But, since there are many women employees, I heard one day the department head said like "we should hire men employees for next time."	Her experience made me think about the relationship between work efficiency and gender. What was the purpose of her department head? Why did he say that? Women employees are in that department because they are highly proficient in English. Why did the department head not recognize their talents?	gender discrimination gender expectation gender role social prejudice sexual harassment	Being subjugated as a woman employee

**Table 3.3 (Continued)***Coding Process Sample*

#5-Jihye	422-454	IE:아무래도 내가 선택한 이 직장에서 나를 인정해준다, 아이들이 나를 인정해주고 또 저보다 상급인 선생님이 저를 인정해준다, 내가 하는 것에 대해서, [52:00] 그랬을 때 보람을 느꼈죠. 보람을 느꼈기 때문에...	The most satisfying moment at work? I think the moment I began to earn recognition as a teacher. Especially the job I chose? When young children (students) acknowledged me in this job I chose, and the teachers who were my superiors recognized me, I felt rewarded.	A feeling of self-accomplishment is very important for an individual. It's a good motivation and help them to have a good work performance in the future. Even though Jihye was underemployed and identified oneself as an underemployed woman, she had a good memory about her students and colleagues.	self-accomplishment motivation worthwhileness self-esteem achieve recognition	Feeling Valued
#6-Minji	437-438	IE:그러니까요. 죄책감 느끼죠, 당연히... 그니까 뭐 어쨌든 내가 죄책감은 안 느끼려면 다 포기하고 집에 있어야죠.	Of course, I feel guilty. So anyway, if I don't want to feel guilty, I have to give up everything and stay home.	Why does a married woman feel that she is guilty of neglecting her children? Can't they just follow their dream and keep their career regardless of their marital status?	gender role expectation sacrifice marital status career break sense of guilt role stereotype	Being subjugated as a woman employee

*Note.* Excerpt from the researcher's coding book.

### Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers study various materials, interpret observed and collected data and review their own arguments and contribute to academia with their new findings. The problem is, how can the researchers prove the research is trustworthy? "The problem of rigor in qualitative

research continues to arouse, beguile, and misdirect” (Sandelowski, 1993, p. 1). Qualitative research can have different findings in data interpretation depending on the prior knowledge and perspectives of the researchers and the method of interpretation. Trustworthiness is a necessary section to consider, and it is necessary to demonstrate the quality of the conduct and the results of the qualitative research. To ensure trustworthiness, I used several strategies, which consisted of thick description and member check (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Dallimore (2000) highlighted that validity in feminist research is hardly possible to measure in traditional ways, so feminist researchers may reshape the trustworthiness. Therefore, she suggested collaboration so both the feminist researcher and the participants have space and time to establish the trustworthiness of their work (research). The strategies I used are significant ways to reflect women interviewees’ lives and experiences, and researchers should interpret the meaning of the behavior and the structure. In the following section, I offer discussions around thick description and member check as ways to verify the trustworthiness of my work.

### **Thick Description**

Glifford Geertz first introduced the term “thick description” to provide a specific description of the context and the circumstances of the phenomena (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Geertz, 1973; Shin, 2018). “Thick description of the research process and findings is essential for a reader to clearly follow what was done” (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 90). In the section of participant profiles, I began with how I contacted each interview participant on virtual space via Online Chat, how we built up good rapport, presented detailed background stories of participants including personal, educational, and professional experiences, and why they ended up working in underemployment even though they were well-educated. Providing detailed information on the

participant profile is an example of establishing credibility. More detailed stories were addressed in the finding chapter.

The detailed description of the target group's voice tones, language usage, and words provided good evidence for the reliability and credibility of this study, and it explains how women have been positioned in male-centered social relations, so far. As a researcher and an interviewer of ten women, I was interested in delivering Korean Millennial women's voices and experiences in their specific positions especially in their job trajectories, at work, and even in their everyday lives. I particularly focused on the tone of their voice and their word choice to provide concrete details, conditions, and cultural or societal backgrounds to offer the depth of their narrative. The thick description in this study provides the specific circumstances to the readers, so they can understand the problems Korean Millennial women face and the traditional culture deeply rooted in Korean society. It will give more ideas of how the three major areas of Asian feminism I focused on in this study impact on Korean Millennial women's rights, gender equality, and roles by revealing the existing gender hierarchy, patriarchal system, Confucian culture, and traditional roles that oppress Korean women.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is another strategy to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). This is a technique for examining the credibility of the findings (Birt et al., 2016) and provides maximum reliability and validity. In the member-checking process, the researcher returns the data or findings to the informants to check for accuracy and words matching what they intended to deliver through the interview (Birt et al., 2016; Shenton, 2004). Member-checking refers to "the involvement of participants in the data analysis process, providing opportunities for them to read, comment on and contribute to the findings" (Curtin & Fossey,

2007, p. 92). It is a great tool to overcome biased understanding of the data and the member-checking process helps the researcher check the original findings with the interviewees.

As a researcher who employed qualitative feminist interview, I should be careful with interpretation and should spend time on member-checking. During the whole process of data collection, my biggest concern was how can I deliver their words and interpret the interview as what they meant? Devault (1990) pointed out the issues of “labeling” women’s experiences in his essay, *Talking and Listening from Women’s Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis*. He said, “when researchers write about women’s lives, we confront the dangers of mis-labeling that can result from the use of language that does not fit” (Devault, 1990, p. 110).

Therefore, I began member-checking after I completed transcribing the recordings and translating the direct quotations. I expected to complete the member-checking in a week, but the reality was completely unexpected. Like in the process of recruiting interview participants, I contacted each participant on Online Chat. I sent transcriptions (in pdf form) to 10 participants and whoever responded first said, “*wow, this is very impressive*” and “*how did you transcribe our long interview?*” Five women participants gave me prompt responses and confirmed the transcription was good to go. Some of them were concerned about disclosing their private information in public, so I did not mention the exact name on the finding chapter for confidentiality reasons. They did not raise any questions on the transcriptions, saying, “*please use my story from A to Z if it is necessary. I can’t wait to read your dissertation.*”

However, the other five women participants did not respond to my request for member checking, but I gave them the instruction of the interview at the beginning of the interview. During the interview, I told them they can tell me if they want to remove the information from the transcript anytime. Some of them stopped me during the interview and said, “*please do not*

*include this on your finding*” or *“please remove this part from the transcription.”* Although I did not get responses from them, they confirmed my interpretations informally. Similar to my methodological challenges during the member-checking, qualitative researchers also have highlighted that ethical and methodological challenges can be raised by member checking including “low response rates to invitations to engage in transcript validation, participant reluctance to provide honest feedback based on the perceived expertise of the researcher...” (Morse, 2015, as cited in Varpio et al, 2017, p. 47).

### **Standing in the Middle**

#### **Positionality**

During the interview I kept asking myself about my own positionality and my role. “Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to ‘the other.’ More importantly, these positions can shift” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). Positionality creates an individual’s own identity in terms of race, gender, and sexuality, and can be defined as the notion that personal values and space impact how one understands the world (Warf, n.d.). It is about recognizing one’s location and constantly thinking about how, why, when, where, what, and to whom I am going to talk about a particular issue. Patricia Hill Collins (1986) has identified the concept of the “outsider-within” status of African-American intellectuals in academic settings. Also, Sherif (2001) shared how the author balanced and negotiated insider and outsider status under the ambiguous boundaries in fieldwork in Cairo, Egypt.

Insiders have similar educational backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews if the group members belong to a similar social class and are of the same gender and have the same or a similar racial background (Collins, 1986). Insiders can prove they are real insiders because only they can “understand the fine-grained meanings of behavior, feelings and values... and decipher

the unwritten grammar of conduct and nuances of cultural idiom” (Merton, 1972, p. 15, as cited in Collins, 1986). Sherif (2001) highlighted that she had advantages in her insider position during her research in Cairo. She did not experience the common dilemmas of isolation that anthropologists often face because she was born in Cairo and lived there until she was nine years old.

On the other hand, Sherif (2001) described herself as a partial insider because she had a diverse background and never went back to the Middle East before she started her research in Cairo. She faced the realities of her ambiguous insider and outsider status during her fieldwork research, and she expressed that she was “naively convinced that this would be an easy research experience” (Sherif, 2001, p. 439). During the dissertation sample interview, I also had an outsider moment in which I could not fully make a connection to Jihye, Minji, and Jiyoung’s stories-the life of being an underemployed worker as a married woman. “Outsider within status is bound to generate tension, for people who become outsiders within are forever changed by their new status” (Collins, 1986, p. S29). As Collins and Sherif said in their studies, I took the moment of being an outsider as a chance to reexamine my own personal and cultural experiences and challenge the existing knowledges.

In this section, I would like to describe the issues of insiderness and outsiderness that I faced that arose simultaneously in the context of the qualitative feminist interviewing research.

### **Insider Status**

The term insider refers to a researcher who belongs to the same group as the interviewees. I was a relative insider due to the advantage of cultural understanding. It was easy for me to achieve rapport with interview participants for several reasons. I am Korean, I can speak Korean, I know Korean culture well because I have lived in Korea for 22 years, I have

worked as a Korean ambassador in Seoul for one year, and I am in the Millennial generation, born in 1991, which is the same generational group as the interview participants.

Moreover, I have an experience of being underemployed. I worked as a telemarketer in English institutes for 13 months from 2017 to 2018. Telemarketer was the underemployed occupation for me because it was simple repetitive work and required a high level of emotional labor. I majored in Lifelong Education for 6 years, but my master's degree was useless at work because all I did was memorize simple scripts and deliver the information to customers. It was selling the Online English programs to customers, not consulting them about their English plans. Since it was non-knowledge intensive work, and more than 70 percent of coworkers in the Customer Service (CS) department had only graduated from high school, I felt that I was wasting my talents, time, and level of education. In 2016, while I was job-searching, I applied to more than 10 companies, but I could not find a job that fit my academic background (e.g., able to speak three languages, lived in three different countries, and have a master's degree) and my talents. I know the process of the Korean job market, job interview, and how I changed from being underemployed. As an insider, I can access the research site and community and have a deeper understanding of participants' internal situations than outsiders would.

### **Outsider Status**

At the same time, I was an outsider as well. The outsider is the researcher who does not belong to the same group as the participants. I have had unique experiences which might be different from those of my interview participants. I have lived in Sichuan, China and attended American international school from the 7th to the 10th grade. I was educated in the American education system and experienced multiple cultures with people from different countries (e.g., China, the United States, Nepal, South Africa, Taiwan, France, Singapore, Japan, Pakistan, and

more). In 2012, during my junior year in university, I studied in the United States as an exchange student. Also, I left the job as a telemarketer in April 2018 and moved to the USA to pursue a PhD degree. While living outside of Korea, I have learned about the different cultures, lifestyles, and virtues of multiple countries since I was young. Moreover, I am single, so I have low possibility of understanding how married women encounter the visible or invisible walls in their lives, in the job market, and at work. In order to mitigate the outsidersness challenges, I prepared for some unexpected situations such as having trouble establishing rapport, asking personal questions, or understanding each other.

When Tang (2002) interviewed her peers-academic mothers in both China and the UK, she realized that both the interviewers' and the interviewees' perception of cultural, social, and personal differences had impacts on the power relationship in the interview. Her Chinese peers often regarded Tang as superior because she was pursuing a PhD (In YangZhou University there were no PhD holders among women academic staff members until the year she conducted the interview). Her interviewees often answered her questions by saying that their experience was not worth as much as Tang's because Tang was a PhD student. During the interview, Tang had the uncomfortable feeling of unequal academic status and she had to ask her questions very carefully, otherwise the interviewees might be too modest to disclose themselves.

During the interview, I faced a similar experience to that of Tang. Some of the women participants often said "wow" to my status. They were surprised at my previous underemployment experience and that I was currently studying in graduate school to pursue a doctoral degree. Several interviewees added a short comment when answering the questions, saying: "*(completed answering the question) .... I am so envious that you are no longer in underemployment and are pursuing a Ph.D. in the U.S. Wow...*" or "*... (completed answering*

*the question) Well, but I know you know more than me because you are studying for your Ph.D. and are an expert in this.*” I was very much surprised about their reactions and felt the power differences during the interview. When I faced this situation, I told them, *“for me, everyone is an expert on their own experiences, and you know more about yourself more than I do!”* Then they laughed but said nothing.

### **Balancing the Power and Positionality**

As a feminist researcher, is it possible to not be biased during the data collection? Sherif (2001) shared her experience of doing research in Cairo for 20 months. Even though she had the advantage of being an insider of Egyptian culture, she still struggled with an outsider position (e.g., issues of knowledge and identity). “Insiders have been accused of being inherently biased...” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). As an insider, I faced being more emotional than the interviewees many times. During the interview, I shared my stories about being underemployed and women participants were more open to share their life stories and their job trajectories. However, at the same time, I faced the moment of not fully understanding some participants’ job trajectories because it was a whole new field compared with what I had experienced in the past.

It was the moment of being an outsider, so I researched the backgrounds of the Korean job market and inequality issues at work to cover the lack of life experiences because it was impossible for me to know interviewees’ everyday world. Also, I intentionally had an open mind to understand my interviewees’ experiences and admit the differences. Through the qualitative feminist interview, I traced young Korean women’s positions in the male-dominated labor market, criticized the existence of gender-specific jobs, and challenged the existing knowledge and culture prevalent in Korean society.

Therefore, I balanced insider knowledge and outsider objectivity for this study. I believe my inside position made great intimacy and relationships with women interviewees and allowed them to have spaces to freely share stories as a Korean Millennial woman under the male-dominated society. My insider knowledge was helpful to uncover the facts and real issues of what they encounter in the labor market and experience in underemployment. My outsider position raised my curiosity about unfamiliar experiences, allowed me to ask provocative questions, and created a new perspective on the phenomena of interlocking oppressions in Korean society and Korean Millennial women in underemployment.

### **Chapter Summary**

In Chapter 3, I introduced this study as a feminist research study that adopted qualitative feminist interviewing as its method. I also reviewed the process of recruitment, sampling, and participants' profiles in the data collection part. In data analysis, I described what strategies and tools I used for transcriptions and the way of analyzing the data. For the concerns of trustworthiness and translation issues, I also explored the methods involved in the translation process. Lastly, I stated how I solved the problem of positionality and bias as a researcher. The interview questions, recruitment letter, recruitment fliers, and consent form are attached in Appendix A to C.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the work identity and the underemployed experiences of Korean Millennial women. I interviewed Korean Millennial women who were previously or who were still underemployed to explore the answers to the research questions.

These research questions guided this study:

1. What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?
2. How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?
3. What are underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?

This chapter consists of ten Korean Millennial women's responses to the interview guide that was formulated to explore the phenomenon of underemployment. Ten Korean Millennial women who identified themselves as underemployed were interviewed and documents were collected and analyzed for the study. The themes that emerged from the research data were organized around the three research questions. Reitz's (2017) five-column and key moment coding was used to derive findings from the qualitative feminist interviews and documents. Each interview was conducted and transcribed in Korean and partly translated into English.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of major themes that were constructed during the data analysis. The data represent three main findings that are associated with the three research

questions. Each finding is supported by the themes and categories found in the qualitative feminist interview data.

**Table 4.1**

*Overview of the Findings of the Study*

<b>Research Question 1</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>
What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?	Being subjugated as a woman employee	Gender role expectation
		Gender discrimination
	Women working in underemployment	Facing disorganized work environment
		Feeling valued
<b>Research Question 2</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?	Walking in darkness (Dealing with the unknown)	
	Searching for a solution to the gendered job market	
<b>Research Question 3</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
What are the underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?	Pursuing meaning through their work	
	Wanting good quality of life in jobs	

### **Job Experiences**

This first section discusses the themes revealed based on the first research question: what are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment? The answers to this first research question are based on how gender has affected the participants' treatment in the workplace, and personal experiences working in underemployment. Figure 4.1 is word clouds for the first research question, and it was generated from my initial coding process (the 6<sup>th</sup> column of the data analysis). In the initial coding, the most frequently mentioned keywords were gender role, discrimination, stereotype, bias,



had a sense of accomplishment. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the major themes and categories that emerged from the collected and analyzed data.

**Table 4.2**

*Job Experiences in Underemployment*

<b>Research Question 1</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	
What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?	Being subjugated as a woman employee	Gender role expectation	
		Gender discrimination	
	Women working in underemployment	Facing disorganized work environment	
		Feeling valued	Making valuable contributions

**Being Subjugated as a Woman Employee**

The first theme of the job experience, being subjugated as a woman employee, is related to gender and this theme was noted in the data for nine of the ten participants. During the time the participants were underemployed, they were treated differently in their workplaces because they were women. The gender matters they discussed can be categorized largely into two areas or subthemes: gender role expectation and gender discrimination.

***Gender Role Expectation***

The first category of the first theme was Gender Role Expectation. When the participants shared their job experiences in underemployment, they mostly started the conversation with how the gender role expectation caused them to be discriminated against. Due to the traditional feminine role expectation, they were asked to do tasks that male employees were never asked to do. To be more specific, women employees experienced unpleasant moments of gender stereotyping from their supervisor or fellow employees while working with them. Among the participants who had experienced gender role expectations at work, Yeoleum first related a memory of every Monday at her office:

We do not do this anymore, but all employees used to clean the office every Monday.

The team leader's and executive director's desks must be cleaned by women employees.

One day, a male employee cleaned their desks, and the executive director came and saw that. He immediately told the male employee to stop cleaning the desks and called women employees to come and clean the desks. So... one of my colleagues (woman) and I cleaned their desks...

This shocking experience happened in 2016. It is still hard for Yeoleum to understand why the executive director told women employees to clean their desks every Monday morning. Yeoleum assumes that people in higher positions like in the administrator's role have gender role stereotypes and expectations of women employees, and the old customs negatively impacted women employees, causing them to be unpleasantly treated. While cleaning the desks, Yeoluem and her colleague (woman) talked about how they were being unfairly treated in the organization. Besides cleaning on Mondays, women employees did all the tedious chores in the office, too. Yeoleum related:

I feel women employees are assigned extra works, like running errands, besides important projects. It could be a coincidence, but tedious chores are always assigned to women employees. For example, when our department wants to dine together after work, it seems the department head asks the youngest woman employee to collect all the orders for colleagues in the department. Then, she collects the orders during her work hours, and she calls the restaurant and places the orders. Is it because the youngest member in my department is always a woman? That's why?

As Yeoleum said, women employees are not treated like male employees at work. Men's roles at work do not include doing such extra errands. The department head could let male employees or staff do those chores, but, ironically, women employees are charged with that duty every time.

Another interviewee, Hyeri, shared the moment when her boss (her advisor in her master's program) judged her work performance by her appearance. She described:

I am small and not tall. So, um... I think my advisor assumed that I could not do such things as he requests. He maybe thought that I would not be able to work in very flexible ways for the project because I look so young and small. At first, he was worried about me a lot because almost of all his graduate assistants were men, but I completed the projects very well though!

Because Hyeri looked young and small (not tall), her boss often pointed out her appearance. The boss did not focus on Hyeri's talents, potentials, and work performance, but considered her appearance would have a negatively effect on the projects. Although her appearances had nothing to do with her work performance, her boss showed the implicit bias of gender role expectations.

Unlike Hyeri's experience of implicit bias of gender role expectations, Hyeyoon had the experience of the explicit bias of gender role expectations while she was talking with her male colleagues. Hyeyoon recalls:

There is a gender role that society expects from women, and I felt that people at my work hope to see from me as well. Since I am a woman, I need to have a better reaction and act womanly like smile and laugh more, but I am not that kind of person. Either male colleagues or senior workers sometimes say, "why does Hyeyoon show no reaction?"

This is very stressful though... Do you know the old saying “in one ear and out the other”? I do that all the time. I just ignore them...

Hyeyoon worked in a broadcasting station as a producer, but her colleagues and senior workers treated her more like a woman, than like a fellow employee. She entered the broadcasting station to seek her dream job, that of producer, but, for a long time, people around pushed her to act womanly, reflecting society’s definition of a woman’s role.

Mina and Yeaji also described the moment they were treated differently at work due to gender role expectations. They both had the experiences at work of making coffee for guests and cleaning up their leftovers. Although Mina’s position at work was not that of doing chores, she was always in charge of serving guests refreshments. She explains the moment as:

If there’s a guest in the office, I take charge of serving refreshments such as coffee or tea. After the guest leaves, I should clean that up. It’s always my responsibility, even though I have my own tasks to do at work. Sometimes senior workers ask me to serve refreshments, but I think there was no choice though... Because when you are in that situation, you have no choice, but to do it. So, sometimes I do it voluntarily...

Mina was the youngest woman employee at her office and because of her age and gender, she was expected to do tedious chores. She remembers it was always young women employees’ responsibility to serve refreshments and clean up leftovers. When that happened, she often questioned this at work, but it did not help at all.

Whereas Mina’s senior workers ordered her to serve refreshments for guests, Yeaji had experiences of serving coffee or tea at work, but it was a direct order from the guests (non-members, but high possibilities of becoming future members) of her English Institute. When Yeaji worked in the English Institute, she was assigned three different positions: carry out

customer service, manage customers, and teach English classes. Although her main role was that of English teacher, non-customers treated Yeaji as a secretary, whose duty was to serve refreshments while she managed customers in the lobby. She recalls the moment as:

Although this is an English education institute, there were no male employees but only woman employees because this job belongs to a service field. When non-members came to the institute for consultation with a consultant, I was the first person to greet them at the registration desk. Since there were only women employees working at the desk, people treated us like secretaries. But we were not... We were English teachers... Well, they ordered us to make and serve coffee or tea something like that...

Besides this role expectation, Yeaji also experienced a high level of emotional tension while managing members in the institute. She explained:

When I worked at the main desk, I also was in charge of responding to phone calls. But there were many men who asked for something strange and weird not related to English classes or consulting. Sometimes they were drunk... I felt that telemarketers would have a really hard time in the customer service field. Emotionally, it was an extremely tough experience at work. At some point, I wondered, "if I were a man, would they have asked me for something strange and consumed my emotions?"

Yeaji was an English teacher in the institute, but people who first saw her, did not treat her and her colleagues like English teachers, instead, they treated them like secretaries. Mina and Yeaji's experiences clearly demonstrated how gender role expectations at work trapped women employees and discouraged them. Yeaji's job experiences showed how people in Korean society see women, even in the workplace. People do not treat women employees as workers, instead,

for a long time, they have expected women to fit the traditional image and fulfil the traditional roles framed by society.

Gender role expectations for married woman are much harsher than for single women. When five participants shared the gender role expectations of senior workers or customers for women employees at their workplace, Minji and Jiyong shared their experiences of gender role expectations at home. Unlike the five participants, Minji and Jiyong were married women and they both experienced a career break due to marriage and pregnancy. They both shared that it's much harder for a married woman to have a job and care for their family members at the same time. Traditional gender role expectations still frame married women to become good housewives, mothers, and daughters-in-law, to stay at home taking care of their children and putting their husbands and families in first place.

Minji had a five-year career break after marriage and childbirth. As her children were growing up, she started to re-enter the job market. She highlighted that sacrifice is inevitable for a married woman to balance the working-mom life. She described her working-mom life as:

Well, I worked from home for the first year. After that, I worked in person (at hospital), so both parents (Minji and her husband) took care of the children. I got off work at 5 pm every day, so they can help me for two hours... You know what, in fact if a married woman tries to work, someone's sacrifice is inevitable. The government says they can support, or help married women, but it is impossible though. Because the government says that children can stay at the daycare center until 9 pm in the evening, they say there's no problem! There is even a menu for Saturday at the daycare center, but does the daycare center run on Saturday? No, it does not.

Minji sounded very sad while sharing her job experience as a married woman. Her story criticized how society framed Korean women after marriage and pregnancy, and implied the necessity of strengthening policy for family, women, and children in Korea. While Minji talked about her job experience and the moment of career break, I realized that these situations negatively impacted her emotions and self-esteem. *“When I experienced career break and kept failing to reenter the job market, I was very disappointed with the anachronism in Korea, and how it negatively impacted well-educated women in my generation.”* Because of the traditional gender role expectations, Minji had a sense of guilt as a working mom. Pursuing her dream, expanding her career path, and balancing work and life ended up making Minji feel guilty. *“Of course, I feel guilty. If I don’t want to feel guilty, I have to give up everything about me and stay home only.”*

Sadly, Minji was not the only one who felt a sense of guilt. Jiyoung also tried her best to continue her career and be a good mother at the same time, however, she still felt guilty living as a working mom. When Jiyoung worked two jobs at the same time while she pursued a master’s degree, her husband sometimes could not understand her hectic schedules; he also thought that she neglected her family. Jiyoung explained it as:

My husband understands me 50 percent only. To be honest, the reason he supports me (to do two jobs at the same time) is because I will get more salary if I build my career. On the other hand, he could not understand me because he thinks that I am neglecting house chores, my children, and family... Since I am working on many different roles and jobs, he thinks I am crazy.

Jiyoung also described her feeling when she heard, *“... neglecting house chores, children, and family”* from her husband:

I feel miserable and disappointed... because I know why... I know the reason... I know better than anyone else that my children and my family are being neglected because I am immersed in my jobs and schoolwork. I do feel it before my husband does. I have a sense of responsibility to do it and I know it more than anyone else, but my husband does not know it which is very disappointing... At that time, when I hear that, I cry alone and so on... but my thoughts of pursuing my career are unchanged. You know what? While there are women who endure like me, there are many women who stay at home because they could not endure the situation and oppressions.

Jiyoung's story clearly shows how Korean culture and traditional gender roles trap Korean women into feeling guilty while they are trying their best to balance their life between work and family.

As stated previously, participants' experiences revealed that the traditional gender role expectations negatively impact them at work. They were treated differently from male employees and were assigned tedious chores completely unrelated to their role in the company or their position at work. Participants were sometimes forced to act womanly (pressured to conform to feminized stereotypes) and were treated not as an employee (equal status), but as a woman. Even worse, the married women experienced oppressions from their workplace and from their families. For married women in Korean society, pursuing their career is extremely demanding due to the traditional role expectation of being a good wife and mother.

In the first category of the first theme, Gender Role Expectation, seven participants out of ten shared their stories of experiencing gender role expectations in their previous or current workplace. Yeoleum, Hyeri, Hyeyoon, Mina, and Yeaji had experienced gender role expectations from their male supervisors or customers at work and, due to the social atmosphere,

Minji and Jiyoung faced a career break. Even worse, two married women, Minji and Jiyoung, always had a sense of guilt living as a working mom even though they live fiercely in Korea.

### ***Gender Discrimination***

The second category of the first theme is Gender Discrimination. Besides gender role expectations, five participants out of ten also experienced gender discrimination at their workplaces. Interestingly, three participants who had gender role expectation issues also faced gender discrimination in their workplace. Participants readily provided examples of predominant gender discrimination they had at work such as limited opportunities, discontinuation of career, and existence of male-oriented organization culture. For a woman employee in a company, gender discrimination from male seniors or male colleagues is inevitable. Mina realized the existence of gender discrimination at her workplace when she heard male senior workers' conversation. She recalled:

It seems gender discrimination is disappearing a lot these days, but I think it does still exist. For example, our department uses English a lot compared to other departments in the company. In Korea, it is widely known that women are better language learners than men, so there are a lot of women colleagues in my department. But, since there are many women employees here, I heard one day the department head said, "we should hire male employees next time." That was not the first or last time I heard about it. When I heard the department head say, "hire male employees next time," I felt desperate. Even if there are many women applicants like me out there in the job market, the head has only one answer in his mind: hiring male employees. I felt really sorry for future women applicants and very unpleasant...

Mina pointed out the existence of various restrictions and discriminations at the workplace. She felt hopeless and that she had no future in the workplace when her department head declared his preference for hiring male employees rather than women employees. Mina also added another gender discrimination experiences at work which let her down:

What I am dissatisfied about with this company is the size and ability of senior workers and colleagues. This made me keep talking about gender discrimination. There is a department head in another department, and he prefers male employees. That's why when selecting new employees in that department, even if women applicants get better grades and job documents, male employees get the position because male employees are more convenient to handle and work with for male seniors. When I look at these male employees in the same position who receive the same income as me, they have less job experience and lower work performance than me. I just can't stop thinking, "am I in the same level as him? Did I pay university tuition to be treated like this?"

During the interview, Yeoleum pointed out how gender discrimination against women employees caused limited opportunities at work. Yeoleum worked at a trading company, so there were many opportunities for employees to go on business trips. However, supervisors only took male employees on business trips. *"When the department head (a man) goes on a business trip overseas, he goes there with male employees because it's more comfortable for them to work with male employees, that's why."*

While interviewing participants, they were asked, *"where do women employees go?"* According to participants, it's hard for them to see women employees in high level positions in the organization. Like Mina explained above, gender discrimination at work still exists and it's visible inside of the organization, making women employees feel uncomfortable. Mina said, *"no*

*matter how much the proportion of women employees increases, the proportion of male employees in managerial or administrator roles is still high. This is the reality. So, I think gender discrimination still exists at work.”*

Hyeyoon questioned where all the well-educated women are, saying:

I have changed jobs several times and I felt that there are many women employees in lower-level positions, but people in higher-level positions like managers and executives are mostly male employees. I do not know what process there is, but I wonder where did all the talented women employees go?

Hyeyoon was curious about why it was so difficult for women employees to advance to higher-level positions like administrator or executive roles in her previous and current organization. While Mina and Hyeyoon questioned well-educated young Korean women’s whereabouts, Jihye’s job experience could answer their questions. Jihye was a music teacher at secondary school as a contract worker, but she could not renew her contract for another year due to her pregnancy.

I was walking on eggshells ( *ㄴ뚱* / *Nunchi*) when I worked as a contract worker at school. It was difficult to take my annual vacation for my honeymoon during the semester, so I got married in April. I worked until Friday and got married on Saturday, the next day. I postponed my honeymoon until July because it was summer vacation. The school principal wanted to renew my contract because other teachers sent my letters of recommendation to him, and he liked my work performances, too. I was thrilled about the renewal, and I said, “I would love to! But I am pregnant.” And he responded immediately with, “Oh, then you cannot renew the contract!”

Jihye expected it, but it was still painful. She loved teaching students at school even though she was a contract worker. She built good rapport with her students because she treated and taught them sincerely. However, her career stopped due to harsh reality: marriage and pregnancy. Participants' job experiences and concerns are highly related to the M-curve pattern, glass ceiling, sticky floors, and broken rung those women employees often face at work.

Like other interviewees, Runa also faced power oppressions and explicit gender discrimination during conversations with her colleagues in her previous workplace. She recalls as:

There are only women employees in my current workplace, but in the past, when I worked at a broadcasting station, I worked with many male colleagues. But at that time, I felt exhausted just by working and talking with them. For example, because I am a woman, they did not hesitate to ask private questions like “when do you plan to get married?” Interestingly, I could feel the subtle differences of the purpose of the question depending on which gender is asked. So, I constantly thought, “what is the intention of this question?” and “why does he ask me like this?” I really do not want to talk with people who have no gender sensitivity. When I was at the broadcasting station, there was a reporter who sexually harassed me, and he was even married!! I was the only woman at that table, and he was talking to me for sure, but I could not say anything because I was too young (24 years old). Fortunately, one of the staff members (a man) intercepted, and cut the conversation, so I figured out what was going on, but I could not respond easily. It was hard... Now, I just openly point it out, but people still say, “you are way too sensitive.” They are the people who should mind their language... Sadly, nothing has changed yet.

Runa's experience of gender discrimination at her previous workplace clearly shows how power oppresses women employees at work and points out the importance, in Korea (or anywhere in the world), of developing gender sensitivity.

In the second category of the first theme, Gender Discrimination, five participants out of ten shared their stories of gender discrimination they had experienced in their workplaces. Regardless of their work ability and work performance, they faced limited opportunities and questioned the fairness of the promotion systems in Korean organizations. They often asked, "*where do women employees go?*" because it was hard for them to see women employees in high level positions at workplace.

### **Women Working in Underemployment**

This second theme of the job experience, Women Working in Underemployment, is related to their work experience in underemployment and this theme was marked in the data for eight of the ten participants. Participants' work experience as an underemployed worker can be categorized into two different categories or subthemes: facing a disorganized work environment and feeling valued.

#### ***Facing a Disorganized Work Environment.***

The first category of the second theme is Facing a Disorganized Work Environment. While participants talked about their job experience as an underemployed worker, they mostly described their workplace as a disorganized work environment. They were or are struggling with the ambiguous boundary between work role and role overload. The unstructured and disorganized work environment caused confusion and exacerbated the chaos for workers.

Yeloeum shared her job experience of working without a plan with her senior workers. She described the moment as, "*you can't believe that we work without any plans. It's very*

*unstructured. The system changes every time depending on who is in charge. I don't think this is good for employees who are actually doing all the works!*" Even though Yeloeum worked in a mid-size company, she faced unstructured working processes with her department head and co-workers. People in higher-level positions worked without any manuals and tended to follow other employees' working styles. Yeoluem was just an employee over there, so she had no choice to say "NO."

Unlike Yeloeum, three participants actively spoke out, criticizing the disorganized work process and work environment to their supervisors. Mina pointed out that she felt doubt when her seniors were incompetent. She recalled a moment in her previous department:

This is a small company, and it is still growing. Perhaps that is why many parts of the work systems have not been organized. One day, I suggested that we could use the way I did at my previous company as an example. Administrators at my company were surprised and said, *"what? Is there such a thing? I didn't know about that."* While explaining the whole process of working manuals, it was kind of... I could feel that I was working without any plans and in an unstructured workplace. To be honest, I had a lot to say, but I didn't...

Under the disorganized work environment, she had a feeling of helplessness because she could not imagine her future after working with this company. Mina kept thinking, *"what can I learn from them and in this company?"*

In addition, Hyeyoon and Runa shared their job experiences of role overload. The main problem they faced was that they were assigned too much work by their seniors without receiving any training but were nonetheless expected to take charge of new projects. In Hyeyoon's case, she criticized the absence of a middle manager at her organization, as this

absence of a middle manager caused employees to have a serious role overload. She described the moment as:

In here, new employees are entrusted with what middle managers must do. This is a small company, with a total of 20 workers, and it is a structure that requires a lot of work from employees like me who are in their first and second years of working. It is necessary to have a middle manager in the company, so if new employees work first, then they should be in charge of managing and directing in the middle, but there is no such process. I was stressed out by such an unstructured system here, so a week ago, I talked to my immediate supervisor (who worked five years in this organization). I told him that we have to have the proper division of labor in order to work efficiently. While talking about the need for the division of work, I emphasized that I want someone to finish something by a certain time because I can't finish everything if a lot of work comes in at the same time. I said something very basic, but according to my immediate supervisor, no one has ever questioned this process. After a while, things got a little better, but I was so surprised that the company was run in such a disorganized way.

Not only was Hyeyoon surprised at the reaction of her immediate supervisor, but she was also shocked that she was the first one to refer to the issue in public. She felt sorry that two new employees at her department could not say anything about the role and work overload and could not pose a problem in public. After Hyeyoon faced the disorganized work environment, she had a moment of feeling anxious about her future career. Hyeyoon sounded very sad when she said she could not picture her future while working at her current workplace, being underemployed. She said this was because of the unstructured work environment and the absence of middle managers. She felt anxious about her future after 1-2 years here, saying:

In fact, I really can't picture my future if I build up years of experience in this company. This company is a bit disorganized, the level of positions is not very clear, and there are more male employees at the executive level. So, I asked myself as, "could I move to another company after building up 1-2 years of experience?" Maybe I can search for a job for persons with experience, not apply as a new employee.

Like Hyeyoon, Runa had a similar issue at her current workplace. Runa was currently working at a women's career development center. At the center, women who were trying to re-enter the job market took classes to find a new job in the future. There were many projects that received government support. In Runa's case, she was assigned a four-month project, but she only had five-hours of project handover. She remembers that was the most stressful moment at work. She said:

Since this is an institute for the education of women who have had the experience of a career break, employees (trainers) should be put into the education fields immediately. But employees need someone to monitor them in the field. To be honest, there is no such backup in this organization. The project I am in charge of is a four-month project, and I have to take responsibility for it from A to Z. I did not have any job experience in this field, so I felt too much pressure to be responsible and lead the big project. So, I told the team leader, "there is no one to properly takeover the project and I am running out of time to understand the project. I think I can lead the project only if I guarantee one of the two." But the main problem is, all team members here are in charge of different projects, so there is no one to help me. But these days, there are people around me who back me up, so that's why I am still working here, not quitting. In fact, I can't quit my current job right now because other people will take over my projects and I am afraid of causing

work overload issues because of me. So, I am still considering whether I will be leaving the job or not, depending on when the project ends.

Runa sounded very exhausted and stressed-out due to the high workload and pressure in her current work. She also pointed out that the rigid organizational culture sometimes limits an employee's talents, work performance, and the development of the organization. Due to work overload in her organization, seniors or immediate supervisors were not supportive of new employees. She explained this in more detail, saying:

Of course, when a new employee joins a company, it is natural that s/he must take time to learn all the systems and working process. But they (seniors) wanted new employees to take care of their own tasks without helping them and saying, "why don't you know about this?" or "why don't you understand this?" The way they treated me was also cold. Also, the turnover rate was so high in this institute, so employees have a misconception of new employees, saying, "how long will s/he be able to work here?" So, at first, my team members gave me the cold shoulder, but after working for about a month, they started to treat me kindly. One of my colleagues told me later that she took care of me after seeing that I was a responsible person.

Runa's job experience showed that the heavy workload caused a rigid organizational culture. The rigid organizational culture caused high turnover rates, and the high turnover rates ended up negatively impacting employees, causing them to accumulate distrust and misconceptions about new employees. Runa added what makes her upset the most is the company's culture. She could feel the power structure against women applicants in the job market who desperately need a new job.

I think there's something wrong with this organization's culture. If it's an institute where you work for women with career breaks, I think the treatment of those women should be good. However, just because there are many women applicants with a career break out there (job market), the executives think, "there are many future applicants we can select from out there." It is hard to believe that it is an organizational culture where people think even if employees quit, there are many women applicants to replace them.

Under the disorganized environment that assigned heavy workloads and ambiguous boundaries of work roles, Runa also had a feeling of anxiety in her current job just like Hyeyoon felt at her workplace. As Runa described the unstructured work environment stated above, she could not picture her future. She described her anxious feeling as:

But the reality is... I always ask myself like, "can I endure all these difficulties here?" or "can I work here in the long run?" I also told my team leader in my department about my anxiety and concern. I cannot picture any of my future next year, but if I must work overtime every day to finish the project like this, I am not sure if I will be here next year.

Although Runa joined this women's career development institute to accomplish the goals of social value and social contribution, it is still hard for her to picture herself in the future.

Sometimes a disorganized work atmosphere has a detrimental effect on one's mental health and self-esteem. Hyeri and Hyeyoon described their job experiences as being continuously stressful and full of the unexpected. Hyeri was disappointed with people at executive levels while employees were struggling with a heavy workload. She felt furious rather than self-accomplished after completing her projects. To make matters worse, the company did not treat her as an employee who had received a master's degree. She always worked hard, but there was small reward and an imbalance of inputs and outputs. She said:

I was angry rather than feeling a sense of accomplishment. I did not like the attitude of people (especially in executive levels) in this company who left this much work to the employees and left it unattended... Anger comes, rather than accomplishment. That's why I identified myself as underemployed because I had a hard time doing all the laborious works, but I faced income inequality due to my age and other people in this organization. My self-esteem became so low... I ended up thinking, "should I have studied for a master's degree?"

Hyeri sounded sad and exhausted unlike at the beginning of the interview. Once she identified herself as underemployed, she started to regret her decision from A to Z. She ascribed her underemployment to her fault for not applying to the bigger companies and not studying hard enough. She even blamed herself for not being good enough and it negatively impacted on her self-esteem as well.

Even worse, the low quality of work ended up with Hyeyoon deciding to quit the job that she had dreamed about for a long time, that of a reporter. *"From high school to last year, I always wanted to become a good reporter one day."* In 2020, she entered one of the press companies located in Korea, but she quit after four months. She realized that the press company prioritized the quantity of the news more than the quality of the news. *"The employer of the press company pushed us to write puff pieces and to add provocative titles, so more people will click on our news. Well, you know this is because advertisement's impressions are directly related to profits..."* During her four months of working as a reporter, Hyeyoon was very disappointed with the reality of her company and her role, so she decided to leave her long-cherished dream.

As described in this section, the disorganized work environment caused participants many problems. Women employees under the disorganized work environments are caught in a vicious circle. Lack of support from seniors or coworkers, high turnover rates, rigid organizational cultures, heavy workload, and an ambiguous work boundary caused the women employees to have feelings of shame and self-blame. Under the circumstances, two participants felt anxious about their future career because it was hard for them to picture their future in their current job.

### *Feeling Valued*

The second category of the second theme is Feeling Valued. When the participants shared their job experiences as underemployed, they not only shared the negative memories, but they also shared good memories even in the underemployed job positions. When connecting with each participant in the process of recruiting interview participants, they identified themselves as underemployed women. They were not satisfied with their previous or current roles and company because they were in a job field that they had never thought about as their future jobs.

However, interestingly, when they read the interview questions and recalled their job experiences, seven participants said they had a moment of feeling valued in their underemployment. Through the interview, I found out they felt valued: when they made valuable contributions to the job and the moment reshaped their perspectives of the job itself. When the participants shared their moment of feeling valued, I was surprised at their positive memories in underemployment. This conversation revealed a new aspect of job experience in underemployment that had rarely been studied in previous research.

**Making Valuable Contributions.** Hyeri highlighted she felt societal value while working in her current workplace. She sought a place where she could accomplish social values

in her career path and that is why she was in her current job, even though she identified herself as underemployed. She worked for rural development, which is a big effort to improve the rural area where she is located. She described the moment of feeling valued as:

Passion or value in my work? Hmm... I think it could be social value. Since I work in rural areas and work for rural development, social value is the most satisfying thing at work. My main job is to consult and change villages through consulting to develop old rural areas, and to provide health education and wall paintings for elders. Also, I plan for new festivals to bring urban residents into rural areas. The district offices are all doing that. I think this is the most satisfying thing at work. Although I work in the same patterns, I do not think I am doing simple and repetitive work because we plan not just health for elders in the rural community, but also we invite instructors for education, or we collect questionnaires from nearby villages and submit such plans to provide statistics and welfare facilities. So, it's definitely not a simple task. Well, I also do repetitive works such as coding or making coffee, but I am also catching up on other tasks.

I still remember Hyeri's voice while responding to the question on the moment of feeling valued. Although she takes charge of projects in the same patterns most of the time, she said this is not a simple and repetitive work at all. Listening to the needs of elders in the rural area and creating new programs made Hyeri feel she was making valuable contributions to rural residents and society.

Interestingly, four participants had a moment of feeling valued when they got recognition from their employers or colleagues for showing good work performance. Mina said that the pandemic had a big impact on her projects. The company cancelled many in-person projects and proceeded with the projects virtually. Mina overcame all struggles to adopt new systems post-

pandemic and did a successful job for her project. She played a leading role, which was self-directed, and she had a feeling of self-accomplishment after showing a successful work performance. Mina described the moment as:

This related to one of the tasks I did last year. I converted almost all the projects I originally had to go abroad for virtual meetings last year due to the pandemic. Although there were many difficult issues while leading virtual meetings for my first time, I overcame all the difficulties and completed the project well. It was the most rewarding moment in my career.

Mina pointed out the solidarity and companionship with her colleagues made her feel valued in the workplace. Her colleagues are near Mina's age and in the Millennial generation, so they share similar interests. At work, Mina put a good relationship with colleagues as top priority and she is satisfied with it. She said:

I am generally doing well because my colleagues are similar in age and interests. To be honest, it's important to know what kinds of work you do with colleagues as a team, but it's also important to know who you work with. But I have a good companionship with my colleagues, so I feel I am blessed.

When Jihye was a contract music teacher at the secondary school, she had a moment of feeling valued by her students and her colleagues, too. The moment of achieving recognition for her work performance from her supervisors and students positively impacted her work motivation, job satisfaction, and sense of self-accomplishment. Jihye described the feeling as:

The most satisfying moment at work? I think the moment I began to earn recognition as a teacher! Especially, the job I chose. When students and teachers (colleagues/supervisor) recognize my work ability and work performance, I feel rewarded!

Even though Jihye identified herself as an underemployed woman and she was in an underemployed position during the interview, she was excited to share the moment of feeling valued.

Like Jihye, Minji also had a moment of feeling valued at her work and it positively impacted her self-esteem. When Minji first entered her recent job, she did not share about this with anyone (except her family members and one best friend). It was because she felt a sense of shame and desperation at her current situation of being underemployed. She said as:

I didn't tell people around me that I got a job recently. I just did not share this with anyone because I know that everyone will say something about the mismatch between my educational background and my current job. I graduated from the best university in Korea. That's why I cannot tell them... I just pretend that I am still at home and take care of my children. I just can't...

After Minji faced the moment of career break and many restrictions on re-entering the job market as a married woman, she had low self-esteem and low self-confidence. Interestingly, even though she worked in a field that she had never thought about before and identified herself as underemployed, she started to feel high self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-accomplishment. She described the moment of feeling valued:

I work as a coordinator in a small hospital near where I live, so I have a lot more work to do than I thought. I also play a role in explaining basic information to patients, and I could explain difficult medical terms to them because these are similar to what I mainly studied in the university and my previous work, which is very helpful. Also, when the doctor talks to patients, I am listening, too. So, I am expanding my knowledge at the same time. In the meantime, I am also thinking about my future by combining what I

learned at school and what I learned from work. In these processes, I feel that my self-esteem increases, and I gain my self-confidence back.

When Minji realized that she was playing an important role at work between the doctor and patient, she felt a sense of self-accomplishment. This moment positively influenced her job satisfaction as well.

Like Minji, Jiyoung shared the moment of feeling valued while she was underemployed. After a long career as a kindergarten principal, Jiyoung worked at a bakery. It was not her first time working in the service field, but she suffered from excessive physical labor. Except for the lunch hour (1 hour), the employees at the bakery cannot sit because there are no chairs for them. She recalled the labor at work as:

The physical labor part is the most laborious. Since I am in a service field, I must stand all day. I go to work at 7 am and get off at 5 pm, but I can't sit down except during lunch hour. Even if there are no customers at the bakery, I can't sit because there are no chairs for employees. There are chairs for customers only. I have to keep standing and responding. You know, a person in the service field cannot respond to customers while sitting on a chair. When I first worked at the bakery, my legs hurt so much. In the past, I used to be the kindergarten principal at a daycare center, and I was sitting all day because I was in the administrator's role. Also, I don't have time to sit down here because I am in charge of everything.

Jiyoung's role at the bakery sounded like that of an all-rounder. Although she was a manager, she did everything at work, without a division of labor. This might sound like Jiyoung was working in a disorganized work environment, but she was also making a good contribution to the bakery.

My position is that of a manager, I play the role almost of a general manager on behalf of the employer. I manage part-timers, make decisions about bread varieties, other goods, and sell them, too. Also, I give ideas about bread types and displays and discuss these with the owner. I do everything and play every role at the bakery.

As an all-rounder at the bakery for almost two years, she has a moment of feeling valued and rewarded. She said:

The most memorable experience at work was when customers remember me and visit the bakery again because of my service. They often said, “I stop by here when you are working”, “the bakery was not organized well without you.” and “I only come to this bakery because you are so kind.” I am very proud of myself when I hear compliment, and it makes me to work even harder.

Jiyoung’s work motivation came from customers’ compliments after the service and it was closely connected to her self-accomplishment, self-esteem, self-confidence, work performance, job satisfaction, and motivation for working. The laborious work intensity was compensated by warmhearted customers.

Runa also had a moment of feeling valued and contributing when her trainees learned a lot from the programs she launched. Runa felt rewarded when looking at her trainees’ self-development and this motivated Runa to show a good work performance for future projects. She described the moment as:

Even though the work is laborious, the most rewarding thing is to see the changes in the trainees I meet in the career development programs. I feel touched when I get feedback from women trainees who are in a situation of career discontinuation that I have helped their re-employment by running various educational programs. Even if my work is

arduous and sometimes makes me think of quitting, I feel rewarded and continue working (laughs).

Runa's job experience of making a valuable contribution to trainees positively influenced her work performance at her current job. Even though she described that her current job had many systemic issues like working without any plans or heavy workload for employees, she did the best she could to accomplish the program goals for the women trainees and help them enter the job market again. Runa was very responsible in her current job position; she explained the reason as:

I think I am doing my best at work right now. I am responsible for everything in the educational field, and when I get a complaint from trainees, I try to resolve the problem as much as possible. For example, if a computer does not work, I cannot fix it because I am not a computer (service) engineer or expert, but I can try to find a way to fix it (call the after-service engineer). In this way, I am learning many things that I did not know in a short time. These days, I am using all my energy on learning how to deal with unexpected situations in the educational field.

Like Runa, Yeaji also highlighted that she does her best in her current job in the Department of Human Resources Development (HRD) at an English Institute. Yeaji entered this company in her late 20s and she recently transferred from an instructor position to HRD. Entering this company was a chance to continue her career. Therefore, she has the maximum of work satisfaction even though she is swamped with work.

I am 100 percent showing my work performance here. It hasn't been long since I moved to this department, so I am trying to learn as much as I can because I have never used accounting programs or software for HRD. I am willing to work overtime if I don't

complete my work during working hours. In fact, senior workers say it is not common for an employee to transfer department like this. There was a vacancy due to maternal leave in this department, so I applied, and got this position. This is the opportunity for me, and I can say “I am so blessed” no matter how hard it is.

Since Yeaji is a newbie in her department, she wants to make a good contribution to her department and the company. The department transfer was a moment of thinking out of the box and reshaping the viewpoint on the underemployment.

**Reshaping the Perspective on Being Underemployed.** The moment of feeling valued caused the participants to reshape their perspective on being underemployed. Just as Yeaji regarded her new job and department transfer as a new opportunity in her career path, Minji and Yeondoo had a similar moment, and they described this moment as reshaping their perspective on being underemployed.

*“Of course, I think I have self-esteem and self-confidence back compared to myself in my long career break years.”* Minji started to think out of the box about her current job when she realized that she was actually taking charge of many roles at work. She said:

The thing I liked at my work was that I had a lot more work to do than I thought. And what I learned from my previous workplace also applied in my current job. It was amazing to feel that there was a connection, even if it’s not 100 percent matching. When I first worked here, I thought about what I could do here and didn’t have any expectations for this job. But now I am satisfied with it. You know, everyone says that those who cashier at the grocery market, do valet parking, and act as security guards at apartment complexes used to be outstanding in their fields.

Minji felt herself as a valuable human resource while working in her current job position and she found the meaning of work there. She looked on the bright side of her current role and explored the ways she could contribute more than she was assigned.

Like Minji, Yeondoo shared two big moments that reshaped her perspectives on underemployment. Yeondoo was surprised about the work environment at the fast-food restaurant. There were no restrictions on employees for age, gender, and marital status. The managers even preferred to hire married people because they thought married people had a high sense of responsibility for their work roles compared to single or young workers. She described it in detail as:

I was surprised about how the fast-food restaurant recruits people. There were no restrictions of gender (a man/a woman) and marital status (married/single/or others). I was really flabbergasted at first. The manager prefers working with people who are married because they have a greater sense of responsibility than singles. Or, even if a person is old but single, the fast-food restaurant did not put a limit on that. For example, younger people tend to quit very quickly and find other jobs if they don't like the work, while old or married people work more responsibly. One of my colleagues at work joined the team later than me. She was in her 40s and the company didn't care about her marital status. The company even considered promoting her to a high position.

Yeondoo felt rewarded when she learned new things from various experiences on the night shift at the fast-food restaurant. She remembered that she had a good relationship with her co-workers. While working as a night shift employee, she could feel solidarity and companionship with them. For Yeondoo, a good relationship with her coworkers had a decisive effect on her motivation and passion for making a good work performance. *“The most satisfying*

*moment at work? Of course, there is! So, I felt that passion and value a lot through other people who I worked with. During the night shift, we were able to cheer up each other up!"* She added words by saying:

Even though working at the fast-food restaurant did not match with my major in the university, I think the working experience indirectly helped me to learn a lot that I could not have learned from books or at school. For example, I learned a lot about human relationships and companionship with other employees at the night shift. At the night shift, we put on headphones. We had a conversation almost the whole time. [Chuckle]. I told you that there were three of us and they were younger than me. So, I learned a lot about generational differences, human relationships, communication skills, and more while talking. That's because the kitchen could be a dangerous place because of oil, fire, and tools. So, we built collaboration skills and companionship through conversation and showed the best teamwork.

Although the night shift at work was laborious for Yeondoo, she enjoyed the moment there, even assigned to do cleaning and cooking in the kitchen. She identified this job at the fast-food restaurant as mismatching with what she had done in the past, but she used this moment as an opportunity to create a space for strong teamwork.

Yeondoo pointed out that simple and repetitive work experiences at the fast-food restaurant were learning moments for her. At first, she was depressed at doing unskilled tasks at work, but she kept developing her work style to increase her work efficiency. Through the job experience, she learned how to be patient and prepared for her future career. Yeondoo said:

I was so distressed by tasks that were repeated every day. Everything was new to teach and learn at school, but at the fast-food restaurant, I was on auto-pilot all the time. When

I got orders from customers, I had to make hamburgers and clean up the kitchen. Since this was repeated for more than a year, I wanted to escape the life on a treadmill. It was just so painful. I thought about this every day, and I could not outline my future while working here. Of course, everyone else does repetitive work at their jobs, but I was so frustrated with my situation. So, I applied a new method such as creating a checklist or to-do list to check my daily routine at work. I tried so hard to refresh my work environment. Well, under this situation, I learned to be patient and had time to think about what I would like to do in my future.

As explained in this section, participants in underemployment had a moment of feeling valued even though they identified themselves as underemployed. Most participants felt valued when they received recognition for their accomplishments from their seniors, colleagues, and even their customers. Interestingly, this phenomenon helped restore their low self-esteem and low self-confidence while they were underemployed. Furthermore, their stories addressed remarkable findings of how underemployed women reshaped their perspectives on being underemployed after feeling valued and making a valuable contribution at work.

### **Summary**

The first section of this chapter disclosed the first research question: what are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment? Most participants were treated unfairly as women employees and were subjugated at their previous or current workplaces. Because of their gender, that of being a woman, they had unpleasant moments of role expectation, gender discrimination, and feeling anxiety about their future career at work and at home. Even worse, married women had a sense of guilt being a working mom, and they had harsh oppressions at work. Through the interview, most participants also revealed

the disorganized work environment, heavy workload, rigid organizational culture, and (in)visible power structure in the job market happens in jobs in which they are underemployed and these cause high turnover rates at work. This can be a vicious circle for them because they are going to be assigned heavy workloads by their supervisors with ambiguous job role boundaries again and again. Under the situation, two participants expressed that they felt anxious about their future career because they could not picture achieving it through their current job. Although they had unpleasant moments and faced an unexpected work environment in their underemployed jobs, most participants also had a moment of feeling valued when they received recognition from their employers or colleagues for showing good work performance. The compliment and sense of feeling valued positively impacted their self-esteem and two participants said the moment reshaped their perspective on being underemployed.

### **Job Trajectory**

This second section discusses the themes based on the second research question: how do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory? The answers to this second research question are based on their feelings while applying to job postings, how they faced oppressions and challenges in the job market, and what they are looking for under the situation of a gendered job market. Figure 4.2 is composed of word clouds for the second research question. The keywords were extracted from each participant's conversation in the initial coding process (the 6<sup>th</sup> column on the coding chart). The frequently mentioned keywords in the initial coding process were: depression, discrimination, limited, desperate, bias, sexism, negative, and reality, which clearly demonstrate what the ten participants went through in their job trajectories in Korean job market.



overview of the two major themes and categories that emerged from the collected and analyzed data.

**Table 4.3**

*Underemployed Korean Millennial Women's Stories of Their Job Trajectories*

Research Question 2	Themes	Categories
How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?	Walking in darkness (Dealing with the unknown)	
	Searching for a solution to the gendered job market	Intrinsic factors
		Extrinsic factors

### **Walking in Darkness (Dealing with the Unknown)**

The third theme, Walking in Darkness, was found across the data collected from all ten of the participants, and it is related to the job trajectory: their struggles and the moments of having a sense of shame for being a job seeker, and what caused them to enter the ranks of the underemployed. All participants described their job trajectory negatively, so I named their memories “walking in darkness.” Some participants shared their stories of the moment they could not stop wondering, “*where are the well-educated Korean women?*” Their stories highlighted the gendered situation in the recruitment process. They faced many restrictions and challenges related to sexism, gender and employment discrimination in the process of searching for a job. In this section, I will introduce each participant’s job trajectory experiences in the Korean job market.

**Hyeri’s Memory.** Hyeri described herself as a person who is good at making things with her hands. “*Because I love making things by my hands, so I attended barista and bakery classes in my high-school years.*” She remembers that her parents were very supportive of what she did for her educational journey. She described her parents as:

My parents were satisfied with my decisions if I am happy. And I am a good daughter who listens to them well. While I was in the job market, my parents wanted me to take more time and enter a good job (e.g., the size of company, guarantee good incomes, job security), but they did not say much even if it was an underemployed job because I was so anxious and mentally struggling during the job trajectory. They just wanted me to be happy. Oh, they liked one thing about the company: commuter times. It only takes five minutes on foot from my home.

When Hyeri was in the job market, she tended to limit her talents and ability because of the reality. She received a master's degree in hotel and restaurant management, and she was interested in the field related to café. For the master's thesis, she explored beverages in a convenience store. Sounds like a very interesting study, but she hesitated to expand her career to this field because:

Studying the convenience store is a hot trend in my field, but I could not jump into the job market with that thesis. I realized that my resume was not strong enough compared to other competitors in things like English efficiency, my career experiences, and academic background. I assumed that I was not qualified to apply for highly competitive jobs in my field...

Hyeri started her first career in a small company founded by her advisor from graduate school. Her advisor specialized in tourism and Hyeri's department was in charge of rural development. However, before she began working in her current job, she also did job searching for a short period of time:

I submitted my resume and job applications to several job postings applying for a school staff position, but employers tended to hire employees who graduated from a university

located in Seoul (capital city of Korea). I graduated from one of the local universities in Korea which makes me to feel that I am not fully qualified for such a position. Even worse, I did not get a contract worker position...so...

Hyeri's memory of her experience in the job market showed that she faced discrimination against her academic and regional backgrounds regardless of her academic degree. This caused her to underestimate her ability and make her own boundary drag her down.

**Mina's Memory.** *"Any good memories? To be honest, I don't think I have any..."* This was the first reaction when I asked Mina about what memories can she readily recall from her job search process. Mina sounded very exhausted and sad when she recalled her memories of her job trajectory. When she was in the university, Mina double majored in English and political science and diplomacy. After she graduated from the university, she prepared for exams for entering graduate school and becoming a foreign affair official. However, she felt anxious about the future while preparing for the exams. She said:

I was very anxious about my future while preparing for exams because I had no sense of belonging. Also, I did not want to have GAPS in my career. At that time, my goal was just to get a job anywhere, so I could feel the sense of belonging. Therefore, I ended up searching jobs in a hurry.

Mina described her job searching as a tough time. During the job search process, she had been unfairly treated when she changed a temporary position to a permanent position.

I thought I could get in because I already worked for a year as a contract worker, but I did not get that position. One day, one staff member in that department secretly shared with me the story behind the recruiting. The head of the department wanted to hire a man because the department was full of women employees.

Mina was shocked when she learned the true story behind the recruiting, but unfortunately this story was not just her story. In total, Mina submitted more than ten applications and received three positive calls from companies. Contrary to expectations, two companies were too small-scale to work at, so Mina picked the last one (her current job). Although she chose the current job on her own, she identified herself as an underemployed woman. She explained it as, *“the size of the company is small compared to my ability and educational background. Also, my colleagues don’t seem to be very competent, to be honest... I sometimes ask myself, so is this what you paid tuition for?”* The sense of belonging was a big part for Mina while she was job-seeking. In her job trajectory, she was anxious about her uncertain future career, and it was stressful for Mina.

While searching for a job, Mina felt implicit bias against her gender, and she often saw the mystery of the job process. She could not stop asking herself, *“where are the well educated Korean women?”* She described her feeling as:

This also happened when I was in the job market. I can’t generalize this, but usually women prepare harder than men in the same job market. Even though women applicants’ educational backgrounds, work experiences, and job documents are stronger than those of male applicants, I rarely saw these women get the interview opportunity (the final round of job searching) and get an offer. I have seen a lot of cases where men mostly passed the interview and got the job position. I experienced this irony in the job market and many of my friends experienced it, too. So, we all felt frustrated when we talked about the mystery of the job process... To put it simply, there are many male employees in high-level positions like managers or team leaders in the company, and I think they hire male applicants because they can work more comfortably with them than with women

applicants. And, as I said earlier, there are cases where male applicants are hired even though there are more women on the team.

Her description of the unfairness of the recruiting process, that women applicants' work performance, work experiences, cover letter, GPA, and additional job documents do not matter at all. Under this situation, Mina could not stop thinking, "*what if a male applicant with this background was in the job market?*"

**Yeoleum's Memory.** After Yeoleum graduated from university, she immediately entered the job market. As Yeoleum was quadrilingual (Fluent in Korean (Native Language), English, French, and Spanish), she applied to job positions related to the department of overseas business. She only applied to major companies in Korea and submitted more than 30 applications for two years. Unfortunately, she failed to make it through the document screening process (first round) and she did not know why she kept receiving rejection letters and what she should improve for the next job applications.

After a long period of job searching, Yeoleum decided to downgrade to job positions she had never thought about. She applied to any companies on a recruiting platform in Korea "Saramin" (사람인; Like LinkedIn), and luckily entered a mid-sized trading company, which is her current job. Although the company was a mid-sized firm, her parents were not pleased:

They were satisfied with the job field (trading company) itself, but were not satisfied with the company due to the name value... They expected me to enter a large company (conglomerate) because I graduated from a renowned university in Korea. I am working in a mid-sized company that has more than 100 employees, while my mom's friends' children are going into famous conglomerates, and I am not... So, they were disappointed

in me... and I was also disappointed when I saw their reactions. But I really had no choice though.

Yeoleum remembered the job-hunting process as a miserable and hopeless moment in her life. Her job searching continued after she entered her first job. As she identified herself as underemployed, she kept trying to move to another company, but it has already been four years now.

**Yeondoo's Memory.** After Yeondoo entered a master's program, she voluntarily entered underemployment. Her job trajectories during her master's program were unique compared to those of other participants. She worked as a kindergarten teacher until entering the master's program, but she had trouble balancing work and study. She described the main problem as time management. After Yeondoo quit her job in the kindergarten, she had an opportunity to work as a part-time instructor in a university. Although the time issue was solved, she faced a monetary problem. She described the moment as:

You can assume how much a part-time instructor earns. The salary was a lot less compared to my previous job as a kindergarten teacher. But I did not want to ask for help from my parents, so I started to look for another job.

When Yeondoo worked as a part-time instructor, she had a time conflict due to her decision to also work as a full-time employee. Therefore, she searched for a night shift job because she was available at night.

Well, it was hard to find a night shift job related to education. So, I found a job in the service field, which was in a fast-food restaurant (from 11 pm to 7 am). But I was also available 2-3 days in the daytime, so I also worked as a part-time art teacher for young kids.

These two jobs were mismatched with her disciplines and her previous work, but these were the best options for Yeondo at that moment. Yeondoo recalled the moment she realized she was underemployed. She described the time as,

I realized that I was applying for an underemployed job position, because of the interviewers' reactions at the job interview. They questioned my decision to apply for this position, because the jobs I applied for did not require a strong academic background...

Moreover, Yeondoo said that she would not apply for a night shift position at the fast-food restaurant if she worked at the counter. The store was located not far from her school, her previous workplace, and her house. She did not want to see people she knew while she was working there. She wanted to keep up her appearance as a teacher. As an underemployed woman, the mental agony negatively impacted her self-esteem and mood. She described the moment as:

In the case of the fast-food restaurant, I was a little worried about my age because there were many younger employees compared to those my age. Fortunately, I was relieved because there were people similar to my age (late 20s) or older than me. There were no age restrictions for employees. By the way, I don't think I would have applied if I had to work at the counter, instead of as an FD (like the floor manager). The FD is in charge of the kitchen, so I do not have to serve customers directly in the store. However, the store was near my house and my previous workplace, so if I run into someone I know, I have to explain why I am here and working in the kitchen... I do not want to lost face, so as a result, I applied to this night shift position because I don't have to see customers in person.

**Jihye's Memory.** After Jihye graduated from the master's program, where she majored in music education, specifically in instrumental music, she had trouble finding a job in the music field. Even though she had a teaching certificate, she was rejected by almost 95 percent of the job positions she applied for. *"I sent in more than 150 applications or even over 200 applications. I looked for a job for six months, and it was the most desperate moment in my life."* She described her job search process in detail as:

I don't have any happy or positive memories of the time. Yes, I can say all of them are negative memories. My master's program is a total of five semesters, so it was the summer after graduation. It was August, but there are not many job postings in the second half of the year. And since I majored in music education, I was searching for a music teacher position, but there were not many job opportunities. As you know, music and physical education are not very preferred in Korea, so, I found a job within 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) of where I live on the office of education webpage. But I did not have any work experience at the time, so I did not get any responses. So, I gradually expanded the job search radius. I went all the way to the end of Seoul, a long way from my house (not in Seoul), but it did not work out... I spent more than five months living like this. I was so miserable and could not stop thinking, "I am useless in this society."

Jihye's job trajectory was challenging because there were limited spots for her discipline. The chronic unemployment problem in Korea negatively impacted Jihye, who was ready to start her new career. Due to tough competition in the job market, she was a contract worker and a part-time worker at private secondary schools. Although she worked as a contract worker, she did not count this as an underemployed job position, she counted it as her best option. *"I could*

*not pass the teacher certification exam (임용고사; Level 1), so contract worker was the best option I had.”*

Even worse, Jihye faced the reality of the prejudice of the Korean job market against married women when she tried to re-enter the job market. She described the job trajectory as being completely different depending on one’s marital status. *“The job search is completely different after marriage. My job search has become tougher since I got married.”* Jihye could not renew her contract with her previous school due to her pregnancy, and it was impossible for her to get another teaching job while she was pregnant. Therefore, she voluntarily entered underemployment and became a part-time music teacher at a school. She described the moment in detail as:

I chose to get an underemployed job on my own because of the reality. I had a career as a temporary teacher (contract worker position) and received good teaching evaluations, so I had been scouted by another school in the past. There was a school looking for a new temporary teacher for three months, and I thought I could work for three months even though I was pregnant. So, I submitted the job application and went for an interview. But they already called the school where I had worked before and finished evaluation about me. One of the interviewers said, “I talked with your previous co-workers, and I heard you work well. But why didn’t you stay there and apply for the temporary teacher position here?” So, I said “I got pregnant and the reason I applied for this position is that I would rather work a three-month contract than a one-year contract.” Then, they said, “Oh, okay! We will contact you later!” and I haven’t heard anything back from them. I experienced a career break due to marriage and pregnancy, so what can I do? I had no choice, but to enter an underemployed job... So, I started to teach students after school

for 90 minutes (45 minutes for 1 section) twice per week. It was literally a part-time job because the wage was cut 1/8 compared to my previous job.

Jihye's last job search happened four years ago, and she worked as a part-timer for one year. Although she accepted the reality and worked as a part-timer, her job satisfaction was falling off. Jihye did her best to balance her work and family life, but she felt it was not easy. Due to the time limits of the music lesson, Jihye felt it was very difficult to help students to learn techniques in a short time. Additionally, she felt a sense of guilt at being a working mom for her family and her child. *"I felt that I am disqualified as a teacher and a mother."* Although Jihye did not want to have a career break after the marriage, she had no alternative, but to work as a part-timer. She wanted to keep building her work experiences even in her underemployed job position. Jihye said:

I asked my parents to take care of my child during his naptime and I went out to work. If my child doesn't sleep during naptime, I couldn't go to work, so I purposely tried to put him to sleep on time and went through a hard time doing that...All of this (working as a part-timer) was because I wanted to reduce the period of inactivity for my career.

Besides the sexism in the job market, she also criticized the employment discrimination at school. She said even in the contract worker position at school, people in the administrative position prefer male teachers because there are a lot of things like moving school supplies at school. She added:

Also, the proportion of men in an administrative position (e.g., vice-principal or principal) is higher than that of women, so a strong man's network exists at school. They normally take male teachers to drink, socialize, and assign things to do. Ironically, even

women teachers don't like to be swamped with schoolwork, so everyone at school prefers to hire male teachers.

Now, Jihye is in the middle of a career break. She is in her second pregnancy and is currently a housewife. When she faced the career break and became a housewife, she was emotionally vulnerable. She described the moment of having postpartum depression as:

You know, people say there are hormonal changes occurring after childbirth. I had a hard time because postpartum depression, pressure to get a job, and anxiety about the future came at the same time. Also, in the past, I was not stressed about spending money because I was engaged in economic activities. But we are not a dual-income household anymore, so if I use my card, my husband gets a text message from the card company. It was just a horrible moment and stressful again the more I recall about the situation. I used to live on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor and thought impulsively, "if I drop my child from here, will the baby hurt? I will regret what I did, right?" I was emotionally vulnerable due to postpartum depression... I cried a lot after the career break and childbirth...

Marriage, childbirth, and career break after marriage changed Jihye's entire life and her career path. She bravely shared her experience of having postpartum depression and I dare to say this is not only Jihye's story. She did her best to continue her career even after giving birth to a baby, but she had to give up and became a job discontinued woman.

**Minji's Memory.** Like Jihye, Minji also described her job trajectory as being completely different after marriage and childbirth. Minji got her master's degree in biotechnology and graduated from a first rank university in Korea. She was a well-educated woman and she worked in a big company related to her field for seven years. Although she showed good work performances with an excellent educational background, she had to quit the job due to

pregnancy. Although this was an important decision for Minji's career, no one was on her side. She still clearly remembers the moment she decided to leave the job:

I had a disadvantage in performance assessment at work because of pregnancy and decided to leave the job. At that time, I could not get promoted even though I received the highest score of the performance evaluation in my team. I was the assistant manager at that time, and I should have been promoted to chief manager in my department. I complained about the disadvantage to my team leader, and he said that if I go on maternity leave this year, I will be not at the company next year, as the team wants to promote an employee who will be at work in the next year (Minji was preparing for maternity leave and parental leave after childbirth<sup>15</sup>). He also gave me another option; come back within three months after having the baby. I worked there for seven years, so I felt betrayed and abandoned. I tried to take maternity and parental leave and return to work somehow, but I could not... There was no one to look after my first kid, and it was difficult to find a babysitter; and most of all, everyone had the anachronistic idea that the child should be raised by the mother... Everyone wanted my sacrifice and dedication...

Quitting her job and taking care of her child was much tougher than she thought. Her career break stopped everything for Minji, not just for her career, but also for herself. She felt she was disappearing while taking care of her family and child all day. After a three-year career break, Minji tried to find a position in a field which was related to that of her previous job. However, her job applications got rejected by headhunters. Minji said:

I found a job posting in the field I used to work for. It was a researcher position at a company in China. But the headhunter rejected my application because I was a woman

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<sup>15</sup> Normally, the maternity leave is 3 months, parental leave is 12 months.

with a family. I kept saying that I can work in China, but headhunters thought it was impossible for me to work overseas because I have a family. Also, they kept asking me to apply to other positions which were not related to my interests and fields. I wanted to apply for A position though, not B... I guess the headhunters cannot recommend a married woman with a family to the company... Thus, I could not apply. I thought I could get a new chance and start a new career. I remember the exact feeling of that moment. It was terrible and unpleasant. My educational background, my career, and my work ability was no longer evaluated. They only evaluated me as single or married, with or without children, and the gender. I was upset with the reality, the society, the situation, my status, and even my husband.

Minji felt high self-esteem and self-confidence from her work performance, but she could not accomplish any of these under the career break. Therefore, after the long career break and her child grew up a little, she tried to get a new job because she did not want to waste her career that she had worked at thus far.

**Jiyoung's Memory.** After Jiyoung re-entered the job market in her late 30s, she changed her job field, and it was her own choice to work at a bakery. The job position at the bakery did not have age limits for employees, and it was the best option for her at that moment.

After I quit my job as a principal at the daycare center and closed my own business, I could not just stay at home. So, I started to look for a job online. The bakery seemed easier than working at a restaurant kitchen. At first, I was half in doubt about recruiting an old person because I was looking for a job in my late 30s, but the manager at the bakery said there was no age limit. During the interview, I hesitated to say that I used to work as a daycare center principal. I was worried that maybe they would not hire me

because I worked as an administrator and was overqualified for the part-timer position.

So, I just said that I was a teacher in the past and they said, “you must be good at service, then.” During the interview, the interviewers really liked me a lot.

Jiyoung did not mention her working experience as an administrator when she applied for the part-timer position at the bakery. She had two children, and because of the financial burden, she needed this position, even though it was a mismatch with her educational background and work experience. Although she recognized that she would temporarily work as a part-timer at the bakery and it was her choice for her family, she could not tell her peers (friends and principals in the field) about her current job. Jiyoung described her feeling as:

I think there are levels in every job. If I started my career as an employee, I would have to apply for a higher position like manager for the next job. But if I go to a lower level, I think it is underemployed (downgraded). That’s why I started my career as a regular teacher at the beginning, and I even worked as a principal at a daycare center for a long time. In a way, I went up to the highest position in the field of the daycare center and kindergarten, but I was a little embarrassed that I closed my business and moved to a completely different field. I also did not show my recent conditions to people I knew. It was very uncomfortable for anyone to even ask after me... I did not want to share my pain with them. It was the best option I had at that time, but I was struggling with balancing myself and reality (family).

**Hyeyoon’s Memory.** With the pandemic, entering the job market was even more difficult for women applicants. After working as a reporter in the press company for four months, she quit the job in June 2020. It was the peak of COVID-19 in Korea and the job market was freezing. After quitting her job, she applied to more than 20 job positions and received two

responses. She assumed that the job market was highly affected by COVID-19 because her friends also said that it was extremely tough to get a job in 2020.

She identified herself as an underemployed woman because she changed her job field after leaving the press company. She had a feeling of doubt that she worked and studied so hard to pursue a dream, but she worked as a contract worker in a distribution center in the e-commerce industry for three months and now she was working in an advertising agency.

Hyeyoon said:

To be honest, I did not feel very good when I received an offer letter from my current job. After I gave up my career as a reporter that I had always dreamed of, I decided to compromise with reality. I kept thinking about what I should do in the future for six months, and the answer I got was to get a job where I could receive proper wages (Hyeyoon had set up the appropriate wage in her mind). Then, I got accepted to the company I am working for now. So, I do not have high expectations for my job and my position right now.

After Hyeyoon gave up looking for a job doing what she dreamed about since she was in high school, she started to compromise with reality and sought a job in which she was underemployed. She was desperate, and she had no choice. When Hyeyoon shared her stories of her job trajectory, she saw the gender imbalance and often questioned, “*where are women applicants?*” Hyeyoon talked about the experiences she had while preparing for the job interview. She described her job trajectory as being full of ironies:

In the case of journalist or press exams, there are so many women applicants. Literally A LOT. When you pass the document screening (first round), you have a chance to take the written exam (second round). Although the written exam is extremely difficult to pass,

there are still many women who pass the second round and come to the job interview (final round). You may see there are so many female applicants in the waiting room for their interview. For example, when I went to the interview, there were more women applicants than male applicants, but I saw more men passed the interview and got the position. I have seen and heard a lot of such ironic situations. I heard a lot that women applicants often get better grades when they score on the written exam, but I think it is more advantageous for male applicants since there are many men in the high positions in the field of journalism.

When she faced the oppressive experience in the job market, she recalled what her professor said back in the university when she prepared for the press entrance exam, *“you need to add more lines on your resume than any other men in your age to get a job”*. Hyeyoon said this could be guesswork, but she and her colleagues had already experienced many cases of such situations in their career trajectories. Ahead of the interview, applicants for the same press company gathered and prepared for 1-2 weeks. After the interview, they shared everything about the job interview, but Hyeyoon often saw that women applicants who had rich work experiences and answered well did not get the position.

**Runa’s Memory.** *“Well, memories in the job market? I almost have negative memories though...”* Runa recalled the memories of her job trajectory. She prepared for a journalism exam for three years (from 2016 to 2020) while she was working as a contract worker at several different jobs. *“I still remember how intense and how stressful the exam was... It was too competitive. Can you believe 800 applicants submitted for 3 spots? The competition rate was 300:1. I was just exhausted during the job trajectory.”* While Runa was in the job market in the

journalism and media fields, she applied for more than ten broadcast companies, and she applied for different positions like producer (PD) and reporter. She added the moments in detail as:

As my life cycle only goes around preparing for the examination, it was not easy to plan and lead my life in the direction I wanted. Above all, my self-esteem was greatly diminished while looking for a job. I kept preparing for the exam like that for three years, and I turned 30 years old. Three years of preparing for the exam was nerve-racking and as I continued to live as an examinee, I was mentally and physically exhausted. So, I stopped chasing the producer position that I have always dreamed of...

Runa said the chronic job seeking process and continuously receiving rejection letters negatively impacted her mental health. She kept having self-doubt, devaluing herself, and every moment of job searching became traumatic for Runa. She started thinking about a lot of things and she ended up blaming herself. She described the moment as:

When I passed the written exam and went to the interview (the final round), I talked about everything I had prepared. I also prepared four project proposals which were more than I had been assigned. So, I thought I would pass and get this position, but I failed. When it happened first, I was like, "this can happen. I thought it would be more hopeful next time!" But, at a certain point, I started to review everything from the moment I entered the interview and kept thinking about, "what was the problem?" I reflected on everything I said at the interview at that time. "Was this uncomfortable?" or "was there a problem with my background?" The job search process was a traumatic experience for me. It was a place where I really wanted to get in and work, so I think it was emotionally challenging.

She highlighted that she got used to being rejected. One day, she received three rejection text messages from three different companies in a row. Although she laughed at first and thought, “*oh, I failed again!*” later she became very depressed. She could not picture her future, and she felt her entire life was denied in the job market.

Runa had experiences in her job search that were similar to those Hyeyoon experienced in the job interview process. While she was preparing for a job interview for the position of producer, she kept thinking “*is it because I am a woman?*” a lot. When she went to the final interview, a total of eight interviewees were there. At that time, four people got the position out of the eight interviewees, six interviewees were women and two were men, but the gender ratio was 2:2 at the final round. Runa said:

One of them was a male applicant, a junior in my university. After the interview, I asked him how he did in the final interview, and he said he did not answer some interview questions properly, but he finally passed. So, I kept wondering, “how did he even get this position?”

Based on Runa’s personal experiences, she felt Korean society gave more chances and more flexibility to male applicants compared to female applicants. She highlighted the existence of social structural issues in the job market and at work, and how male-dominated systemic issues limited opportunities for women applicants. According to Runa, the written exam is one of the toughest parts of the journalism exam. More female applicants pass the written exam in general, but male applicants always show high rates of probability of acceptance for the final interview.

Besides Runa, other applicants who prepared for the journalism exam and the job interview with her also questioned “*where are the well-educated women?*” and the questioned

the mystery of the job process. Runa remembered one of her friends said, *“it is questionable why more men are finally selected when the proportion of women applicants who passed the written exam is much higher. I think it is a structural problem.”*

**Yeaji’s Memory.** Although Yeaji had worked at an art gallery as a contract worker from the time she was an undergraduate, she felt her status and work schedule was unstable. As she longed for a stable life, she prepared for a civil service examination for three years. She thought a position as a government officer can guarantee a stable life and her time with her family at night and weekends. However, it did not go as well as she planned, so she started to search for a new job from 2018 to the end of 2019. As Yeaji started to join the job market in her late 20s, she faced unpleasant situations. She described her job search in her late 20s as walking in a long dark tunnel. Yeaji described the moment as:

I mostly have unpleasant memories of when I was in job searching, especially of the job interview process. I had gaps in my CV for three to four years due to preparing for the exam and I was aware of the gaps. But the interviewers (both men and women) asked me more about my private stories than my work experience, educational background, and my contributions for this position. They frequently asked me such things as, “are you seeing anyone?” “when are you getting married?” or “are you planning to have children?” I was in the job market in my late 20s, so this was expected, but it still hurts...

After Yeaji faced unpleasant questions related to her privacy, she felt oppressions, employment discrimination, and social prejudice. She also shared the moment of sexual harassment in her job searching process. Yeaji said:

One of the jobs I applied for was a teaching and research assistant position at a university in Korea. It was a year contract position, and the job was to assist the professor. When I

went to the interview, the professor said, “I only hire women.” Only women applicants were selected in the document screening process (first round). He even said that while a woman interviewer was next to him. She did not say anything about that, but I could see her facial expression like expressing “he is doing that again...” At the interview, I felt, “oh, I should not go here even if I am hired.” Well, I got the acceptance letter, and I rejected the offer. I was frustrated when the professor contacted me personally through my personal contact and kept asking me, “did you receive any offer letters from other job positions?” “why did you reject the offer?” and “is it because of the wage?” It was an unpleasant and pathetic moment... I was in my mid-20s and had zero social experiences, so I thought “oh, there is a place like this...” and now I sometimes recall the moment and think “oh, that happened.”

As the period of job searching was getting longer and she faced unpleasant moments, Yeaji started to doubt herself and her educational background. She applied to more than 20 companies, but 80 percent were in the service industry or were contract worker positions. When she posted her CV and cover letter on online job searching platforms, headhunters contacted her. However, they always recommended limited fields and sometimes it was a mismatch with her discipline and work experiences. Usually when she got job offers from the service industry, she knew that her work experience and educational background were accepted only in this field. When Yeaji realized it indirectly, she was desperate and ashamed of herself. Yeaji said:

Jobs in the service industry I applied for usually have a lower salary compared with other types of occupations. I did not have much choice other than the service industry though. Even the headhunter recommended the service field, which didn't match with my major and dream.

In this section, ten participants shared their job trajectory stories in detail and how they entered the jobs at which they were underemployed. Although they were all from different life, educational, and work backgrounds, they had similar experiences in the job market and had similar questions while searching for a job. The third theme, *Walking in Darkness*, revealed their experiences of getting a job as women applicants in the job market. The ten participants submitted up to 200 applications among them. The job trajectory for married women re-entering the job market was harsh, and they tended to hide previous work experience and voluntarily enter the job fields of underemployment.

### **Searching for a Solution to the Gendered Job Market**

The fourth theme, *Searching for a Solution to the Gendered Job Market*, was a robust theme that was represented across seven of the ten participants, with two categories: intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. In their job searches, participants had considered many factors in order to get a job in the gendered job market. They contemplated future growth probability, safety, schedule, job satisfaction, future for the job or role, social role, flexibility, job stability, and annual income. These factors were divided according to whether they were single or married and with or without children.

#### ***Intrinsic Factors***

Mina, Yeondoo, Runa, and Yeaji were motivated by intrinsic factors such as self-accomplishment, job satisfaction, and future growth probability of job or role. They regarded these intrinsic factors as the motivation for them to actively engage in social economy activity in the gendered job market in Korea. In Mina's case, she put future growth potential as the top priority while searching for a job. *"So, when I have completed the contract worker position and*

*try to move on to the regular worker position, I consider the future growth potential of the job and myself. After that, I consider the stability and annual income, too.”*

When Yeondoo was applying for an underemployed job position, she had her own criteria for the job decision. She put herself and her priorities first and then searched for jobs. As she said, she had to work at night because she had another work schedule in the daytime, so she put safety and schedule as the top priorities. Yeondoo said:

Since I worked two or three part-time jobs a week, I avoided time conflicts with my other part-time schedules, and I wanted to work in a place other than a crime prone area, because I needed to consider a night shift job. Oh, I also sought for a job where I could be treated as a human.

Runa put the company’s vision and social role as the top priorities when she chose her job. An acquaintance recommended her current job (women’s career development institute) and the main reason she decided to work here was the company’s vision. She loved the purpose of establishing this company. Runa felt valued and that she contributed to female trainees who were currently facing career discontinuity by providing vocational education and introducing new job postings. *“I considered quitting the job and taking a career break; many women friends I know also worried about taking a career break. So, I joined the company because I wanted to help with something.”* She added:

If the job requires laborious tasks and gives less money anyway, I wanted to have a positive influence on society and do something that fits my beliefs and faith. So, I joined this company, but I did not know the reality... There were many disappointing parts even though I liked the company’s vision.

Like the other participants above, Yeaji (married, but no child yet) also put a feeling of satisfaction and self-accomplishment at work as top priorities while choosing her current job. She said she was willing to work overtime if she felt rewarded and a sense of achievement. Yeaji said:

I put self-satisfaction as the top priority when I was looking for a job. When I do something, I think the most important thing is to feel, “oh, I feel a sense of accomplishment here” and “I am so happy.” This is more important than money, you know. When I feel satisfied, even if I work overtime, it’s less mentally tiring... I could say “I’ve done this much today!”

Mina, Yeondoo, Runa, and Yeaji considered the vision, future, and potential first and invested their time on it. In other words, they were willing to invest their time and effort if they liked the job or if the job guaranteed future growth potential which comes from intrinsic motivation.

### ***Extrinsic Factors***

In contrast, Jihye, Minji, and Jiyoung had several things in common that set them apart from the other participants: (1) married, (2) with child (children), and (3) experienced career break due to marriage and pregnancy. In the job searching process, these three participants were motivated by extrinsic factors such as job stability, work schedule flexibility, social status, and salary rather than intrinsic motivation. The reasons they considered extrinsic factors in the job market were highly related to their positionality in Korea.

Jihye considered job stability, income, and flexible schedule in her job search. These extrinsic factors were essential for Jihye to maintain her positionality as a married woman employed outside the home. Jihye described this, focusing on the reality:

The job market is so tough these days, so I just found something I can do based on what I studied. Among many job options, there were after-school instructor and short-term teaching positions, but I wanted to work in a full-time position. Also, I wanted to work in a place where I can normally work for eight hours per day like other full-time workers and receive proper income as much as I worked for the company. Rather than choosing the top priority in the job searching, I considered a lot of things realistically.

As Jihye shared, she tended to compromise with the reality. She could have applied for a higher position and continued her career with her master's degree, but she faced several unexpected restrictions in the job search process like the prejudice of society against the married woman.

Flexible work environment and accessibility were top priorities for Minji when she was looking for a new job. She found a job where co-workers showed flexibility for married women's unexpected situations. Minji said:

I first thought about my children and set up the priorities of the job. So, I tried to find a job located as close to my children's kindergarten or daycare center as possible. What if my child is sick or the kindergarten closes early? I found a place where I can bring them to work and be considerate so that my children can be with me.

Although Minji identified herself as underemployed and she was paid much less than in her previous job, she chose her current job because of the flexible work environment. "Employer and co-workers understand my situation, so they allow me to take my children if it's necessary. Also, the work schedule is pretty flexible here, so as a working mom, this job is the best choice at this point." Minji is trying her best to survive in the gendered job market even though she compromised with the harsh reality. As a working mom, she reshaped her perspective of the job environment prioritizing one that guaranteed employees flexibility.

Like Jihye and Minji, Jiyoung also considered her children and her family first, before herself. When she was single, organizational culture and working environment were the top priorities of the job decision, but annual income and her children became the top priorities she considered for her new jobs after she got married. In 2019, she closed her own business and re-entered the job market in her late 30s. She first sought a job with a flexible work schedule. She had to think about her family and children, so she preferred part-time rather than full-time jobs. It was impossible for Jiyoung to work full time at that moment (in 2019). She described her decision in a quavering voice:

When I worked as a kindergarten principal, I was able to use my time freely. So, I was not too limited in time to take my children to school and pick them up, but after closing my own business, I was so worried about working in a full-time job. Who will hold an umbrella for my children when it suddenly rains? What can I do? So, I felt like I had to split my time to work, and since I had had a lot of part-time jobs in the service field, I thought a part-time job would be the best option for me at that moment. So, I chose the bakery job.

As explained in this section, the participants showed differences in the top priorities of their job decision making according to their marital status. However, whether they were single or married but without child(ren), they tended to have intrinsic factors and intrinsic motivations including self-accomplishment, job satisfaction, and future growth probability of the job or role as their top priority when they chose a job. In contrast, married women with children considered their children and family first, and then chose a job after considering extrinsic factors such as job stability, work schedule flexibility, social status, and annual salary. At this point, three

participants who sought extrinsic factors could not continue their previous careers or work related to the disciplines they learned from university and became underemployed.

### **Summary**

The second section of this chapter revealed the answers to the second question: how do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory? by providing ten participants' experience in the job market. The ten women were from different backgrounds, but they had similar job trajectory experiences in the job market and faced the same types of unexpected issues. In their job trajectory, they dealt with the unknown as they faced countless restrictions and challenges related to sexism and employment discrimination due to gender, age, and marital status, that they had not expected. After the interview, married women, especially those who gave birth to children, faced harsh restrictions in the job market, discontinuation of their careers, and one of the participants even concealed her administrator as an administrator in order to re-enter the job market.

While looking for a job, seven participants out of ten also shared their consideration of searching for a solution to the gendered job market. To be more specific, they pursued intrinsic and extrinsic factors to get rid of the existence of gender specific jobs. Four women considered future growth probability of the job or roles and self-accomplishment are the solution related to intrinsic factors, while three women proposed flexibility, job stability, and annual income for the solution related to extrinsic factors. For those three women, the major reason they focused on the extrinsic factors were due to their family and children, so they searched for part-time jobs rather than full-time jobs. Under the circumstances, they had low probability of applying for jobs related to their previous career or they became underemployed. The participants highlighted that

these two factors are the solution to the gendered job market in Korea and female employees have been trapped in lack of support for these suggested factors.

### Expectations of Good Quality Jobs

The last section discusses the themes based on the third research question: what are the underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs? At the end of the interview, the ten interviewees actively shared what kinds of meaning they pursue through work and their expectations of good quality jobs.

**Figure 4.3**

*Word Clouds of Expectations of Good Quality Jobs*



*Note.* The keywords most frequently mentioned in the initial coding.

Figure 4.3 is composed of word clouds for the last research question and contains the keywords most frequently mentioned in the initial coding process. The keywords were generated

from each participant's conversation, and I extracted the key points as initial codes. The ten participants' stories included their desire to work where they can have a work-life balance, value, and self-esteem rather than facing gender discrimination, bias, and a glass ceiling.

There were two themes that emerged from the data relative to the third question: Pursuing Meaning Through Their Work and Wanting Good Quality of Life in Jobs. Almost all of the participants said "*work makes me feel alive*" when they described the meaning of work in their own words. Although they were in underemployment, they never gave up on their careers and future dreams no matter what. Interestingly, all ten of the interviewees wanted to be self-oriented and have a work-life balance in their jobs (or for the future jobs). Table 4.4 provides an overview of the major themes and categories that emerged from the collected and analyzed data.

**Table 4.4**

*Overview of Expectations of Good Quality Jobs*

<b>Research Question 3</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>
What are the underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?	Pursuing meaning through their work	
	Wanting good quality of life in jobs	Intrinsic factors Extrinsic factors

### **Pursuing Meaning Through Their Work**

The fifth theme, Pursuing Meaning Through Their Work, is related to motivation and meaning. Before defining the expectations of good quality jobs, participants were asked to describe the meaning of work in their own words. Nine of the participants shared their own definition of pursuing meaning through their work. Six out of the ten participants used the same expressions in explaining the importance of work, saying, "*work makes me feel alive.*" They had a sense of self-accomplishment while working and felt rewarded when they saw the work

performance. This sense of self-accomplishment had positive impacts on the participants such as increasing their job satisfaction, self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of duty about their work.

Mina first said that she felt rewarded while working. Especially when her colleagues recognized her contribution, she felt a sense of self-accomplishment and had internal motivation to work harder on the next projects. Mina described the moment of feeling rewarded as, *“for me, I think work is to find one’s life worth living in this society. It was extremely hard to challenge a new project, but I achieved it successfully. The moment of achieving something in a self-directed way was unforgettable.”* Mina added that she tried extremely hard to have high self-esteem although she was currently underemployed. She wanted to contribute to society as a member of the Korean society, and self-accomplishment and self-esteem were her internal motivations to keep working at her workplace.

Yeondoo, Minji, Jiyoung, Runa, and Yeaji defined the meaning of work as the journey of finding the motivation of their lives. To the question of *“why do you work?”* or *“what made you work?”* they all responded, *“because I feel alive while working.”* Five participants said that work was important in their lives. Yeondoo said:

Work is important. For me, work is the driving force of my life. I don’t think of work as just labor because work gives me a sense of accomplishment. I keep trying to learn and develop something through work. Also, I feel self-satisfaction through the process. I feel alive while working. I am so happy when I feel that I belong to a community and have a positive impact on society while working. No matter how small the project was, I worked with a sense of ownership. So, I don’t think I suffered greatly even if I was under-employed.

Yeondoo was a very positive and optimistic person. Although she was underemployed, she still felt thankful to work as a member of society. Being a member of society made her feel alive, and this went beyond having a positive influence on society.

Minji said that her work was highly related to her self-esteem. Her previous experience of being disadvantaged in her performance assessment, experiencing employment discrimination, having a career break, and entering underemployment negatively impacted her self-esteem. She defined it this way:

For me, work equals self-esteem. I feel a high sense of accomplishment while working and I could feel my self-esteem increases. I feel like I have accumulated a lot of knowledge here at work and still do. There are things like the knowledge I learned while majoring in university and graduate school, and the work ability I gained while working at my previous company. When I work at this current workplace, I get immediate feedback from the doctor (employer), colleagues, and patients. That kind of thing came to me in a new way. Every time I consulted with patients as best as I could, I get recognized more and more for my contributions to people I meet at work, and I eventually feel a sense of accomplishment and high self-esteem.

Although Minji's current workplace is in a completely different field from what she did before having a career break, she became full of self-accomplishment and high self-esteem when she showed good work performance. Ultimately, her internal motivation directly connected to self-confidence, self-accomplishment, and self-actualization.

*"Work makes me feel alive!"* was the first thing Jiyoung said in answer to the question. Jiyoung had had countless part-time work experiences since she was young. She described herself as a dream-seeker. She was not afraid of new challenges and facing unexpected

situations. She had her own power deep inside from her heart to overcome the difficulties because she has a positive mind of her life and her own philosophies. Jiyoung said:

For me, work makes me feel alive. It may be a very formal answer, but I did not want to stay at home from morning till night. I know that I am not the type of person who can stay at home without a career. So even after I quit the kindergarten, I opened a daycare center on my own and I continued to learn as an administrator at that time. I kept looking for things that helped me run the daycare center and felt thrilled while constantly experiencing and learning new things. It's like experiencing new worlds. Through this process, I felt a sense of accomplishment, focused on self-development, and tried to learn something new by outlining my new future career.

To Jiyoung, work was not just labor done simply to maintain her livelihood. Work meant a lot to her, and she felt alive while she was into it. Working was a learning process for her and presented opportunities for her to prepare for her future career.

Runa said that work was important in her life because she wanted to make a great contribution to Korean society. While Runa was answering the demographic questions, she described herself as a *bihon*. Runa put social value as the top priority of her life, and this was the mainspring of her actions. She said:

For me, work is important in my life. Rather than getting married and having a family, I want to do something that I could contribute to people and this society through my job. Also, I was able to see the improvements of things that were social issues and I think I am doing something helpful as a member of the society.

In her current work, even though she identified herself as underemployed and swamped, with a heavy workload, she showed 100 percent of her work abilities at work because she wanted to change the social issues and problems what her trainees faced after their career break.

Like the other participants, Yeaji also defined the meaning of work as being able to feel a sense of accomplishment. She felt a sense of achievement in her work, and this was the biggest motivation for her to work in her current job. Yeaji said:

Working means a lot to me because I could feel a sense of accomplishment. In these days, I feel rewarded, so I spend all my energy at work. I feel happy while working.

There are many small tasks I do at work, but I can get feedback on my work performance immediately (e.g., manage and adjust teachers' schedule). So, whenever I complete a task, I am like, "alright, I completed this task! I nailed it!" I feel rewarded right away.

Yeaji highlighted the importance of communication with people around her. Communication with her husband was a good way for her to relieve stress and was emotionally supportive.

During conversation with her husband, she felt supported by her family and her self-esteem rose, as did her sense of self-accomplishment. She described the moment, saying:

After getting married, I spend more time having conversation with my husband when I am back home, and this helps a lot. Every evening, we share what we did at work and when I say, "I did this and this today," my husband compliments me. Then I feel a sense of accomplishment as I get that compliment from him. Thus, I would like to show good work performance to get a compliment again next time. Above all, I am happy and satisfied because I feel like I receive recognition from people around me.

While six participants defined work as being highly related to their inner motivation, three described works as being related to reality. Hyeri, Jihye, and Hyeyoon's definition of work

was more focused on their future career and financial or economic returns. Hyeri was confused about how to respond to this question at first because she thought the definition of the meaning of work depended on her current job. She also put self-satisfaction and self-accomplishment as the top consideration of her job decision, but she could not feel that in her current work. Due to her low job satisfaction, she considered her current work to be a transfer station for her future career. She said:

I think it is important depending on what you do. I don't really like or feel satisfied with the work I am currently doing. For me, working is more like what I do for looking after myself. We must learn and earn money in our lives. Now, I work at my current workplace because I need to make a living, but it's contradictory because I do not feel the job satisfaction or happiness that I said earlier. But in the future, I really want to work full of happiness and satisfaction. I would be very happy if I could do something I really like someday. But now I don't want to have a gap in my resume and career, and I have to maintain a living, so I am working in my current workplace. There are many things to learn from my current work and a lot of things to learn from here, but I did not think of working in this field when I was in the job market, so I have low job satisfaction.

Jihye's response was highly related to her future career and financial returns. She sought a feeling of being rewarded from external factors rather than internal factors. Jihye said:

For me, work is a process of finding economic and social rewards. Basic life should be included for sure, and I also should feel recognized by others. I think that way, I can feel internal satisfaction and feel rewarded. It makes me feel good when someone tells me, "you did a great job on your project" which is social recognition, but I think I will feel

ashamed if I don't get any support from economic aspects because it will have a big strike against my basic life. So, I think balancing is the key point here.

Interestingly, she wants to balance the physiological needs and sense of belongingness and feel the self-esteem<sup>16</sup>.

Like Jihye, Hyeyoon defined work as what she does to receive economic and financial rewards. Hyeyoon showed resistance to power while working, and she worked only on projects she was assigned to do and did no extra works. She added:

Work is... something that supports me financially, so that I can live my daily life. And I also hope my work-life balance is guaranteed. I do work as much as I get paid (salary). I think the responsibility for work goes up in direct proportion to how much I could earn.

After Hyeyoon saw her colleagues working overtime at night due to the heavy workload but receiving low reward, she decided not to show her full work performances at work. She tried to separate herself at work and outside of work so she could get more energy and motivation of life.

In this section, participants had time to think about the meaning of work and each had her own definition of work. Although they all had different backgrounds and perspectives, they had two main definitions of work. Six participants pursued social value, self-accomplishment, and self-actualization because they felt alive through their work, while three participants focused on maintaining a living and being rewarded because they separated themselves from the work. Each participant's responses of the first theme showed the characteristics of the Millennial generation well, such as seeking social value, meaningful motivation, rewards and value of labor, passion for learning new things, and placing oneself first rather than work.

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<sup>16</sup> Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: Physiological (food, water, warmth), safety (security), love and belonging (friends, intimate relationship), esteem (prestige and feeling of accomplishment), and self-actualization (achieving one's full potential) (McLeod, 2007, p. 2).

## **Wanting Good Quality of Life in Job**

The sixth theme, Wanting Good Quality of Life in the Job, emerged in the data for all ten of the women. This theme was split between the categories or subthemes, intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. After telling their own definition of work, all participants also told their expectations of good quality jobs in their own words. The responses were very subjective, and the participants' expectations of good quality jobs were divided into self-oriented and work-life balance.

### ***Intrinsic Factors***

The first category of the Wanting Good Quality of Life in the Job was intrinsic factors, and it was noted by four of the seven women. Hyeri, Yeondoo, Minji, and Yeondoo said that good quality jobs should have positive impacts on them, providing such as self-development, self-esteem, and self-contentment. Hyeri said that good quality jobs provide self-development opportunities. She loved to make up her appearance such as doing nail art and dyeing her hair, so she wanted to get a job where people understood and respected her tastes. She said:

My own value of life seems to be revealed here, but I want to have a job where I can take care of my appearance. I feel happy taking care of my appearance by doing nail art or dyeing my hair. But in the past, when I was in the restaurant and service business like bakery or cafe, I could not do such things because of hygiene issues. Since I could not do what I like, I no longer wanted to work in such fields anymore. My current job is related to the rural area, so there is no need to take care of my appearance... I don't have to put on makeup, but I wear comfortable clothes... That's why I rarely take care of my appearance under these circumstances...

Hyeri's response might sound like she was complaining about her current workplace, but she put self-satisfaction and self-development on the priority list in her life. She just wanted to work where she could be herself.

Yeondoo's expectation of a good quality job was one where there was a well-organized structure and where she could have self-development and feel self-esteem. Her previous job experiences made her think about the standard of good quality jobs. She said:

I think a good quality job is a place that is well-structured and where I can be respected. I think it is important to feel proud when I am in the organization. In a job that has a well-organized system and makes me feel proud, I can picture my future in more detail and be developed. My response may be relative, but in a way, feeling proud itself is a driving force that allows me to continue working in the job.

A workplace with a well-organized structure was important to Yeondoo and she wanted to work where she could fulfill her sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, which is highly related to internal motivation.

Minji also said that a good quality job was one where she could find self-satisfaction. She had worked in a big company until her career break, and afterwards she realized self-satisfaction and self-development were important. Minji said:

For me, self-satisfaction is the basic premise of a good quality job. Regardless of the high or low status in the society, I think having fun and feeling a sense of accomplishment are the most important things while working. The term "good" and "quality" are subjective, so everyone might think differently. It is really important to go to a reputable big company and be recognized by everyone, but I think self-satisfaction is the most important thing. At first, I thought the hospital I work at now was an underemployed job,

but I still think it is a good quality job for me because I am learning a lot here and growing up a lot mentally.

Jiyoung said a good quality job is one in which she could feel self-accomplishment and experience high job satisfaction. She thought all occupations were equally honorable. Her response to this question highlighted the importance of self-confidence and one's perspective toward the job itself. She said:

There is an old saying, "all jobs are equally honorable." I agree with 90 percent of this. I usually tell my children to seek what they want to do in the future and follow your dream rather than focusing on study only. All I want them to find is what makes them happy! Of course, the basic income should be premised on the job, but I think what I enjoy is a good quality job. Any jobs are hard and challenging, but the main point is how to deal with the stress and relieve the stress. Because the word "good" is subjective, everyone may have different definitions and expectations of good quality jobs, but I think it is important for people to think differently and deal with the stress according to their jobs.

Hyeri, Yeondoo, Minji, and Jiyoung described how much they wanted to work where they fully showed their work abilities and work performances, so they could feel self-development, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The four participants' desire for a good quality of life in the job clearly showed that good quality jobs are ones that are self-oriented.

### ***External Factors***

The second category that comprised the sixth theme, Wanting Good Quality of Life in the Job, was extrinsic factors and was mentioned by six of the ten women participants. Mina, Yeoleum, Jihye, Hyeyoon, Runa, and Yeaji sought a job where the work-life balance was guaranteed. Among the six participants, Mina shared her reason for why she was looking for a

work-life balance in the job. Mina had her own expectation of a good quality job. She highlighted that harmony was the key point in order to make a job a good quality job. Mina said, *“I expect good quality jobs to harmonize three things: sense of achievement, income equality, and work-life balance.”* Unfortunately, Mina’s current job was not harmonized at all. If she felt rewarded and had a sense of accomplishment, she faced a loss of balance between work and life. That was why she identified herself as underemployed and did not describe her current job as a good quality job.

The expectations of good quality jobs are subjective, and each participant had different responses to this question. Similar to Mina, Yeoleum wanted to work in a good quality job where she could have a work-life balance. For Yeoleum, the definition of work and life balance is a job with assured working hours and annual income, so she can completely separate herself from work. Yeoleum said:

For me, work is what I do for maintaining a living. So, I think a good quality job is what I am satisfied with. Then, people might think about a job which guarantees work-life balance or high job satisfaction (no complaints). Everyone has their own definition of work-life balance and has different life values. Some might want to get off work on time, and others may want to work in a reputable company with good pay. Or some people want to have a good relationship with their colleagues. It is all different, but among them, as I said earlier, getting off work on time and good pay are important for me.

Jihye also said that good quality jobs are ones which guarantee a work-life balance. Since Jihye was a married woman taking care of her husband and two children, she put her family as the top consideration in her life and while searching for a new job. She said:

For me, a good quality job is a place where a basic life and work-life balance is guaranteed. Here, the meaning of basic life is guaranteed physiological needs and safety needs such as food, clothing, and shelter (place to stay or live). Now, I am a mother of two children, so the time I spend with my family becomes very important. That is why work-life balance which guarantees a life at night is my answer for my expectations of a good quality job and this is going to be the best job for me.

Recently, Hyeyoon focused on herself in her personal life more than on herself at work. After she compromised with the reality, she tried to spend more time on self-development. While answering the question of her expectations of a good quality job, she immediately said three things: job security, rewards (financially), and companionship with co-workers. Hyeyoon said:

For me, a good quality job is a job that can guarantee job security and financial stability. Additionally, if I have good relationship with colleagues where I work? It would be wonderful! I still keep in touch with my colleagues from my previous workplace where I did my internship. With them, I still have reading circles even though my internship is over. In fact, I thought making friends at work affects the quality of work-life balance (in a negative way), but I realized that I need to maintain good relationships with colleagues to have a good affection for the company and gain driving force (motivation) for my own life, too.

The three things Hyeyoon highlighted made her feel maintaining a good work-life balance was highly necessary. While she was working as an intern and as a contract worker, she realized the importance of job security. Moreover, the relationship between Hyeyoon and her colleagues positively impacted her life at work and created a healthy work-life balance.

When Runa was asked to answer the question of her expectations of a good quality job, she pointed out the importance of people in the organization, especially the leader. She criticized the top-down hierarchical structure that still exists in Korean organizational culture and felt a work-life balance was hard to realize under such conditions. Runa said:

I think a good leader is needed in order to create a good quality job. In particular, the role of leaders is really important under the organizational culture with a top-down hierarchical structure and closed system like in Korean society. I think a leader who actively accepts the ideas and opinions of team members positively influences the organization's culture and work performance. However, in the job I am currently in, everything mismatches, so I identified myself as underemployed. The organization is too vertical (top-down, not horizontal), not autonomous, and there is a heavy workload for each employee while employees do not have the authority to decide on the work. I have been exposed to the media a lot about the ideal organizational structure and discussed this topic a lot with my friends and colleagues of my age. Contrary to what I thought, I am not working with a good leader right now, so it has a huge impact on my self-esteem. Even worse, as my self-esteem decreases, my job satisfaction is also decreasing...

In Runa's daily life, she had serious discussions about the ideal organizational structure with her friends. Every time they had a heated discussion, they realized the role of leader was crucial, especially in a closed-organizational culture.

Like other interviewees, Yeaji said a good quality job was one that guaranteed a work-life balance. Yeaji wanted to live in a life where she could spend some quality time with her family at night. She said:

Well, my expectation of good quality jobs... In general, it would be best for me to fulfill physiological needs and safety needs such as food, clothing, a place to live, but I think it is more important to fulfill the quality of life. For instance, everyone has different patterns of living. In my case, I want to work a certain amount of time and get off work after 6 pm, so I would like to live a life that balances work and life well. I want to spend some quality time with my family at night. I think it's a good quality job if one is able to improve the quality of life while working. Also, in our company, the work hours are very flexible because I can choose work hours like 9 am to 6 pm or 10 am to 7 pm. While utilizing the benefits of the company, I always think, "oh, I am working in a good quality job." In fact, the term "good" is not objective, but very subjective. Some people can define good quality jobs differently from me. Then that's a good quality job too, isn't it? For me, I think a job that can satisfy all my needs is a good quality job.

As explained in this section, each participant had their own expectations of what good quality jobs must have. Although the term "good" is subjective, their responses were divided into two main parts: self-oriented and work-life balance. Interestingly, six participants whose expectation of a good quality job was one in which there was a work-life balance considered intrinsic motivations (e.g., self-accomplishment, self-development) as the basic premise of their argument. The ten participants' responses showed the Korean Millennial's characteristics well, such as achievement-oriented, ambitious, having a passion for learning, and challenges the outdated hierarchical structure in Korea.

### **Summary**

The last section of this chapter demonstrated the last question: what are the underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations obtaining about good-quality jobs?

The majority of the participants stated that working made them feel alive because they experienced self-accomplishment, self-esteem, and self-actualization through their work. Three participants were highly focused on their future career and economic returns which is related to the reality and making a living. At the end of the interview, all ten participants shared their expectations obtaining good-quality jobs, pointing out intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. Four participants out of ten highlighted that a job where they could show their work abilities and work performance so they could feel self-development, self-accomplishment, self-satisfaction, and self-actualization at work was a good-quality job. The other six participants regarded self-oriented as important to work-life balance including harmony with colleagues, job stability, and financial rewards.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the major findings of this study in order to answer the three research questions. The chapter began by providing a brief introduction to the interview participants and how the researcher approached analyzing the collected data. The chapter then presented the word clouds to show the most frequently mentioned words generated from the conversation to establish the initial codes for each research question and the six main themes and numerous related categories were discussed in the findings in terms of answering each of the three research questions.

The first research question, What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?, was related to the job experiences of women, who undergo chronic underemployment. As a woman employee, each interviewee faced role expectation and gender discrimination from the department head and colleagues, and these caused them to feel anxious about their future career. Also, the participants had two big moments

while they were underemployed: facing a disorganized work environment and feeling valued. Although they identified themselves as underemployed, they had a moment of feeling valued, which reshaped their perspective on being underemployed.

The second research question, How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?, was related to women's job trajectories in the Korean job market. During the interview, all interviewees described the job trajectories as being like walking in darkness. It was a journey of dealing with the unknown. In the job market, some participants often wondered, "*where are the well-educated Korean women?*" as they faced the unfairness of the recruitment system in the Korean job market. The majority of the participants also highlighted the way they searched for a solution to the oppressions they encountered in the gendered job market, mentioning two main sub-themes: internal factors (e.g., self-satisfaction, future growth probability) and external factors (e.g., annual income).

The last research question, What are underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?, was related to what participants expected of obtaining good-quality jobs. Nine out of the ten defined the meaning of work in their own words. They stated two main reasons they work: it makes them feel alive and to maintain a living. They also explained what they meant by good quality of life in their jobs and what they were looking for in good-quality jobs. Participants' responses were divided into two main parts: self-oriented (intrinsic factors) and work-life balance (extrinsic factors). No matter what kinds of restrictions and barriers they faced, they never gave up on their career and kept working to achieve their goals.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the work identity and the underemployed experiences of Korean Millennial women. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women who are undergoing chronic underemployment?
2. How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory?
3. What are underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs?

Three major conclusions were drawn from this study in response to the research questions: 1)

The job experiences of Korean Millennial women undergoing chronic underemployment is influenced by the cultural construction of gender role expectations held in Korean society relative to women and their acceptable societal positions, 2) Korean Millennial women's job trajectories are portrayed as existing encumbrances that are created and constantly shaped by gender-specific jobs, and 3) Korean Millennial women's expectations fluctuate, as they actively attempt to bridge the societal gaps between what is acceptable for women in the job market and the jobs they want to pursue. In this final chapter, I addressed each major conclusion related to the research questions, while connecting them to the relevant literature. Then, I discuss implications, limitations, recommendations for future study, and present concluding remarks.

## Discussion of the Study

### Culturally Constructed Gender Role Expectations

One of the goals of this study was to understand the job experiences of Korean Millennial women working in underemployment. Through the in-depth interview using various open-ended interview questions, ten interviewees currently working in underemployment concretely depicted their job experiences. The first conclusion addresses the first research question: What are the job experiences of Korean Millennial women undergoing chronic underemployment? The first conclusion is that the ten women of this study who experienced underemployment were treated unfairly at work due to culturally constructed gendered role expectations held in Korean society relative to women and their acceptable societal positions.

Ten Korean Millennial women collectively shared their experiences of being underemployed who were treated differently from their fellow male employees and who were subjugated in their previous or current workplaces. Their job experiences indicate they suffered from societal gender oppressions at work. Their strong educational and professional backgrounds were negated by their gender. Trapped in traditional roles, they often faced unpleasant moments of gender role expectations and were subjected to sexist remarks from their male employers or colleagues at work. They were even assigned tedious chores at work such as greeting guests, cleaning up leftovers, or even cleaning male supervisors' desks. Regardless of work ability and performance, they were treated as women rather than as employees.

In listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts, regardless of their marital status, all the women mentioned the terms marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth when they described the biggest reasons for their career break and entering underemployment. All of the single women in this study were standing at a crossroads where they had to decide whether to keep their career or

compete to survive after the marriage. The married women all said it was very difficult to have a new job after marriage and it negatively impacted their future career, too. Three married women had a sense of guilt for neglecting their husbands and children while doing their best to maintain a work-life balance.

This finding resonates with the existing literature on traditional gender role expectations for women which originated in Confucianism that still negatively affect well-educated young Korean women in Korean society. Although women in the Millennial generation keep moving forward resisting the predominant power structure, Korean society is still deeply rooted in male-centered Confucian values that situate women within the family and accentuate familial relationships in which women are subjugated by men (Chang & Kim, 2005; Choi, 2017; Fung, 2000; Kim, 2017). For this reason, Korean women employees encounter a concrete ceiling while Western women face a glass ceiling. Highly educated Korean women are not able to pursue their dreams and face limited development possibilities due to the obstacles placed in the career path of women employees.

It was revealed in the research that a majority of the women felt valued despite working at underemployed jobs. Before the interview, they complained about their jobs and were ready to share negative work experiences of being underemployed. However, in deep dialogues, they started to recall positive memories of their working experiences. Contributing to social value was important for the participants and some of them reshaped their perspectives on being underemployed. This finding is consistent with research by Cho and Lim (2015) on three well-educated housewives' reemployment experiences in their temporary jobs after a career break. The authors used narrative inquiry to deliver the three housewives' experiences of career break, reentering the job market, and becoming underemployed. Although the three well-educated

women could not go back to their previous jobs or job fields after the interruption of their careers, it was a journey of finding themselves and getting free from home (family). The three participants did their best to maintain a work-life balance and sometimes suffered from standing in the middle, but they felt alive and their perspectives of being underemployed were reshaped because they were in the process of searching themselves.

Like in the above study, many of the women in this study highlighted the importance of having a good relationship with their fellow workers. Since they entered the underemployment in jobs that were a mismatch with their interests, previous careers, or disciplines, companionship was a good motivation for them to stay and give a good work performance in the challenging situations. Their experiences and the positive aspects of companionship highlight the importance of organizational culture and community building in the workplace. For these women, the people around them offered help and support for their not giving up their careers and keeping up with their work. The companionship continued even after leaving the job and some of the participants were willing to spend their personal hours with fellow workers through such activities as book club meetings, where they could share knowledge and intelligence.

The women in the study even felt a sense of comradeship with other women in virtual space. Especially, married women with children who have had career break experiences shared their life issues in online communities such as Mom Café (맘카페). They don't know each other at all, but they share and exchange information or opinions on childcare, education, daily life, family issues, anxiety about their career, and more. The online community for women is a space for them to share their ideas and expand the human networks they are isolated from by the Korean society. It is even helpful for women to gather information and make a meaning to share the experiences of the job market, at work, and in their everyday lives.

## **Social Structural Issues Oppressing Korean Women**

The next conclusion addresses the second research question: How do underemployed Korean Millennial women describe their job trajectory? The second conclusion is that Korean Millennial women's job trajectories are portrayed as existing encumbrances that is created and constantly shaped by gender-specific jobs.

The data aptly demonstrates this conclusion. The ten Korean Millennial women in this research study had excellent educational backgrounds and had outstanding educational achievements. Each participant had a strong support from their family members in the fulfillment of their desire to study and enter the workforce after graduation. However, some participants said that they faced unexpected situations and countless barriers while they were looking for jobs in the job market. Every time they failed to get a good quality job in a field they had pursued for a long time or realized they were overqualified for their current job, they felt a sense of shame, doubted themselves and even had severe depression that could seriously impacted their entire life. The women in this study described their job trajectories as dealing with the unknown and walking in darkness as they cannot see what is at the end of the lonely, unpleasant, and uneasy journey.

The ten Korean Millennial women's stories of underemployment reveal the male-oriented nature of Korean society. Within this patriarchal culture, most of the interviewees perceived that marriage and childbirth conflict with their career paths, and, in fact, married participants with children had the experience of being disadvantaged in receiving promotions and contract extensions due to pregnancy and childbirth. When they were looking for a new job after their mid 30s, women who had faced a career break became underemployed and found jobs in completely different fields compared to their previous career due to their age and restrictions

against them. The inconvenient truth corresponds to what participants often mentioned during the interview, “*where are the well-educated women?*” This finding resonates with the existing literature and OECD reports on the phenomenon of the M-curve pattern in regards to Korean women in the work force (Choi, 2017; Han, 2012; Jeon, 2019; Lee, 2008; Min, 2008; OECD, 2019; Park & Kim, 2003; Sidiropoulou, 2015).

Unlike the previous generation, the women in the Millennial generation place a high value on themselves and on their career. In this study, six out of the ten women were single and two out of the six single women were bion. They were focused more on their self-development and career-development than on marriage and childbirth. In 10 years, the M-curve may be a different pattern on the graph, as the Millennial generation no longer considers marriage, childbirth, or childcare essential. However, there is no guarantee that women’s participation in economic and social activities will increase, and that they will no longer be discriminated against in the job market. The findings of this study revealed that more research is needed at an individual level because women may give up entering the job market (unemployed) or may not have a good quality job, even though they are employed (underemployed).

This study found that many of the women working in underemployment were working in service fields. Under the male-controlled social structure, Korean women are often trapped in the male-dominated society and experience oppressive power structures that exploit women. “Patriarchy is defined as a social structure and system of customs where a male, superior in hierarchy, dominates, oppresses and exploits female” (Walby, 1990, as cited in Park, 2001, p. 43). Traditionally, under the patriarchal system, women’s role has been that of a domestic laborer working at home for all family members, while men’s role has been that of a breadwinner (Cho, 1994; Park, 2001).

In the gendered job market and male-dominated society, young women applicants tend to choose jobs one level below their abilities, stable jobs (e.g., teachers, government employees), or pink-collar jobs (e.g., nurse, beauty, social workers) as they compromise their future career due to the burden of playing multiple roles and due to their having low self-efficacy (Lim & An, 2016). In this study, many of the interviewees, especially married women with children, compromised their careers or downgraded their job categories and skills. They already knew it was almost impossible for them to get a good quality job in their late 20s and after career break, so some of them ended up limiting their development possibilities through such actions as not revealing their previous work experiences or lowering their expected salary in order to get a job in underemployment.

In this study, the ten Korean Millennial women were well-educated, and they showed a strong passion to join the workforce, unlike their mother's generation, because for them "working" was a tool they could use to change the Korean society. However, thwarting their ambition, they were forced to accept gender-specific jobs unrelated to their disciplines and that were mismatched with their previous job fields. Regardless of their age and marital status, they faced job segregation by gender in the job market. Even if they managed to find employment, it was often low-quality work or in positions where they worked as cheap labor. Some highly educated women even became temporary (non-regular) employees in the service industry.

This finding reflects a significant theme in the literature that traditional job segregation by gender still exists and has barely changed, even though there is a high demand for female labor (Cho, 1994). Cho (1994) pointed out that women employees in the car industry worked in "traditional" and dead-end "women's jobs" such as cleaning cars or sewing seat covers. There is a 27 year gap between Cho's work and this research, but both studies demonstrate that women

still face the same issues in the job market. Women's job performance has suffered, the possibility of development at work has been nullified, and the job market has barely changed.

Even so, the ten women in this study all mentioned the power of working and how much they learn from the work. The women in my study all faced unpleasant moments in the job market and at work, but they stoically ignore the discriminations and keep working. Their experience can be described as "cruel" optimism because they know that they will face countless restrictions and challenges outside of their home, but they never give up on their career and keep working towards their future, no matter what. For the women in my study, working was not just working. For them, establishing a solid career was a way to show their resistance to the society and to the power structures and a means to form the self-agency to accomplish their self-actualization.

### **Continuous Action of Bridging the Gap**

The next conclusion addresses the third research question: What are underemployed Korean Millennial women's expectations about obtaining good-quality jobs? The third conclusion is that Korean Millennial women's expectations fluctuate as the women actively attempt to bridge the societal gaps between what is acceptable for women in the job market and the jobs that they want to pursue.

Many scholars have demonstrated the unique characteristics of the Millennial generation. The Millennial generation (also known as Generation Y), born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, is tech-savvy (digital natives) because the members of the Millennial generation were born during the rise of the Internet age (Balda & Mora, 2011; DeVaney, 2015; Singh, 2014). The Millennials received close attention from their parents' generation, and they had exceptional educational and cultural experiences (Eom, 2019; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Kim, 2018).

Benefitting from the full material and emotional support of their parents, this generation grew up into adult who are confident about their future, team-oriented, seek a solid work-life balance, and value meaningful motivation (DeVaney, 2015; Eom, 2019; Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The ten women in this study showed the unique characteristics of the Millennial generation. Korean Millennial women, born between 1980 and 1994, grew up watching their mothers sacrifice everything for their families and received the full advantages of a good quality education and cultural diversity. They learned how to picture their future, designed their career paths, care about themselves, and how to accomplish self-actualization. In this way, the ten Korean Millennial women in my study continued to dream of making a new leap forward even if they entered underemployment. This is because they knew the importance of obtaining self-development and self-achievement from their work and it meant very much to them.

Interestingly, although the ten Korean Millennial women in this study came from different backgrounds, they each put themselves at the very center of their life. They tended to care both about themselves and others (surrounding people) rather than to self-sacrifice. As a result, even if they faced countless obstacles in the job market, at work, and in their daily lives, they tended to belong to somewhere. It was partly because they hated to see a gap in their career, but they also felt self-satisfaction or job-satisfaction when their achievements were recognized by people around them. Additionally, they felt self-actualized when they made a positive contribution to society. As Millennials consider “*work makes me feel alive,*” the low-quality and severe discriminations within the society must be a shocking experience, affecting their entire life, work identity and life-satisfaction.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

This study has two major implications for theory and practice in the literature on Korean Millennial women working in underemployment. The findings of this study using an Asian feminist perspective have implications for Korean women's career development as well as for policy makers and people working in women's career development centers or organizations.

#### **Implications for Theory**

The findings from this study make a significant contribution to academia by connecting Asian feminism and Korean Millennial women. The importance of Asian feminism is often noted in recent studies, but it is rarely applied in the vast literature on settings in Korea. Asian feminist theory is mostly used in studies on women in the Middle East (represented as third world), Southeast Asia, or China, but not Korea. There are relatively small numbers of qualitative research studies on underemployed Korean Millennial women's job trajectory experiences using Asian feminism.

Asian feminism focuses on the human rights, gender equality, and cultural stereotypes (e.g., Confucian virtues) of Asian women that are very different from those of the West (Chen, 2007; Fung, 2000). As an Asian feminist project specifically focused on Korean Millennial women, this study sought to address their experiences of being underemployed and explore career development with a focus on the impacts of socioeconomic level, age, education level, and marital status. Ten women's experiences under the patriarchal system, gender stereotypes, and restrictions related to gender bias in the Korean job market clearly illuminated the endemic issues regarding the systemic power structure in Korea and how young, well-educated, Korean women are being treated unfairly in their career path. Korean Millennial women's unique characteristics and cultural backgrounds compared to those of earlier generations is also

significant to this study on women that highlighted the power of the community and companionship with other Korean women.

The findings of this study support the literature on Korean women's underemployment experiences in social cultural contexts including Confucianism, the patriarchal system, and gender stereotypes that are deeply rooted in Korea. Kim (2010) pointed out that general theories of patriarchy, such as the systems of Confucianism and Buddhism, underlie patriarchy in Korean society. Asian feminism is the most appropriate theory to highlight oppressions Korean women experience their entire life. Unlike other feminist theories, Asian feminism looks at societal issues, culture, and systems from a critical point of view. One interesting finding in this study was that Korean Millennial women showed resistance to the power structure, establishing personal agency in the process. Traditionally, women's knowledge has been devalued and women have not been viewed as creators of knowledge, while men have. The findings of this study provide a stepping stone for women to confront the oppressions and traditional oppressions against women. Thus, this study will contribute to expand the exploration of Asian feminism and strengthen the basis of Korean feminism in academia.

The study of underemployed Korean Millennial women's work identity also has implications for current human resources development (HRD) theory. Scholars in HRD have addressed the necessity of connecting the feminist perspective into HRD research to change the social and political climate at the workplace for the "better" and grant women "equal" access to "power" (Howell et al., 2002, p. 124). In this study, women interviewees shared the moment of feeling valued and sometimes they showed 100% of their work performance in their jobs in underemployment because they considered their current job was not their final job, but only a job through which they can prepare for their next career. For them, a job was not just a job; they

aimed to make positive contributions to society and accomplish self-actualization, which was rarely studied in the vast literature on underemployed Korean women in the Millennial generation. Thus, these ten women's lived experiences and the meaning of work clearly foreground the significance of developing a feminist approach in HRD, underemployed women's career development, and women's human resources development.

### **Implications for Practice**

This section is divided into two parts: implications for practice for reforming policy on women's careers and HRD and methodological approaches for the future. As discussed in the fourth chapter, where the findings were presented, the ten women highlighted the necessity of reforming policy on women's career in the job market and at work in order to fully utilize women's work abilities.

#### ***Implications for Policy on Women's Careers and HRD***

The findings of this study have implications for policy makers who supplement and reform policy related to women's careers. Their role is significant for women to continue their career path regardless of marital status. If equality is to be achieved, policy makers need to provide equal opportunities in the job market and more options in job categories. Through this study, it was revealed that Korean Millennial women encountered several restrictions in the job market no matter their talent and their will. Various forms of welfare systems like work-life balance, maternity leave for both men and women, work from home, or flexible work need to be improved to reduce the underemployment situation for well-educated Korean Millennial women full of potentials and abilities.

The findings of this study also have implications for HRD practitioners in organizations who take part in the development and implementation of programs for women employees. In

order to minimize women's career discontinuation, HRD managers and employers should work towards withdrawing the restrictions placed upon women that are related to age and gender. To prevent women from experiencing low work efficacy and low self-esteem due to poor working environment and working without any plans, the HRD practitioners should supplement and develop the job assignment. "Where are the voices of the growing number of women workers who are temporary, part-time, and subcontracted, to say nothing of unpaid work?" was one of the questions after Howell and his colleagues' study (2002, p. 124). The question was addressed in 2002, but similar issues related to gender inequality and oppressive workplaces were found in the experiences of women interviewed almost 10 years later. In my study, ten Korean Millennial women have already answered the question above with their voices and lived experiences. Therefore, women's stories in this study will provide resources for HRD practitioners and policy makers to once again think about HRD goals and how to achieve equal employment in the organization or culture.

The HRD practitioners working with women employees can also launch programs related to gender sensitization to change the organizational culture. These programs can raise awareness about the danger of gender stereotypes and prevent gender-specific roles in the organization. At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the committees encouraged the implementation of a gender-blind perspective in all policies and programs (UN, 1996). Policy makers in Korea need to understand the nature of gender inequality and issues and expand policies, not only in theory, but also in practice. Korean Millennial women in this study highlighted that they were verbally abused by their male employers or male co-workers. In addition, they were subjugated to sexist words or comments that made them feel unpleasant. With that in mind, more and more organizations need to make gender-sensitive education

available to all employees and employers to improve the understanding of people from different backgrounds and to reduce the gender bias and discrimination in the organization, leading to mutual respect regardless of gender.

The findings of this study also have implications for counselors for university entrance and career development working with women. Shin (2015) pointed out how female students select their majors in Grade 12 and how that affects the job categories and entering the job market. Young girls' job selection is closely connected with their disciplines in college or university. Admission counselors need to guide young women to explore more opportunities (e.g., STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) while they are in high school. Then, young girls will have much broader perspectives of career development and choosing one's career options, and this process will be the starting point of getting rid of gender-specific jobs.

Additionally, career counseling and career development programs should be expanded to include women in college or university, especially in Korean situations. The findings of Lim and An (2016) clearly showed the importance of having a career development or career counseling center for women inside and outside of higher educational institutions. Young Korean women tend to have a low sense of self-efficacy due to the countless discriminations and barriers they face, which eventually caused them to compromise their career. This study also emphasizes the need for the continuous operation of career centers and the expansion of career-related programs for women students in college or university. Career motivation, career guidance, and various programs should be provided to increase self-efficacy for women students, who experience invisible or visible discrimination, even in institutions of higher education, where they train future leaders.

### *Implications for the Methodological Approach*

This study also had implications for the methodological approach of qualitative methodology, specifically feminist qualitative research. Previously, most studies focused on underemployment among the Millennial generation in Korea or Korean women in the labor market using quantitative research, literature reviews, or document analysis (Choi, 2017; Kong, 2020; Min, 2008; Shin, 2017; Yang, 2020). Those studies made some mention of the seriousness of the situation of women in the job market, but they only offered a surface sketch of Korean Millennial women's underemployed experiences using feminist qualitative research to listen to the voices of women who had been underrepresented in Korean society and the labor market for a long time.

This research employed both traditional and non-traditional interview. Due to many Covid and geographic restrictions during the data collection, the majority of the contact with participants occurred in online chats. I used static and dynamic emoticons in the chats in order to build rapport before the interview. Since I was of the Millennial generation, like the ten interviewees, I was very familiar with their characteristics. They started to respond with emoticons in their texts, and this helped the actual interview. Moreover, they preferred to do phone interview rather than video or face-to-face interview. "Collecting data on sensitive topics via phone may offer the sense of privacy and allow participants to speak more freely" (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018, p. 122). There are many studies about how to interview women and deal with sensitive topics with women participants (Cotterill, 1992; Finch, 1984; Padfield & Procter, 1996; Tang, 2002), but the authors strongly suggested building rapport and interviewing the women in person. The methodological strategies I used for this study helped the participants to recall their experiences and elicited their memories of working in

underemployment in Korean society and the meaning of the moment. This study also suggested new ways of approaching participants who are cautious about sharing their private stories in public, especially after the pandemic.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Research Suggestions**

Although this study successfully completed feminist qualitative interview with ten interviewees, the limitation in the methodological part is that nine out of the ten interviews were completed via phone. Although the women were able to express their feelings through phone interview to the interviewer, it was impossible to gauge non-verbal communication cues and facial expressions, which can be great sources to elicit new follow-up questions or responses. Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) said phone interviews have lack of visual cues “as well as loss of contextual understanding” because it is impossible for the interviewer to observe the interviewee (p. 122). Due to time and space limitation for both the interviewer and the interviewees in this study, I used new ways to approach the interview participants and it worked well. The online communication led us to create rapport and trust and the participants were able to share their private stories that they held deep inside since they viewed me as a listener rather than as a data collector. In the future study, I would like to conduct feminist qualitative interview in person. It would be interesting to see the new interactions or new findings after creating rapport offline and conducting interview in a place the interviewees felt was cozy.

In spite of the limitations, there are some suggestions for future studies on Korean Millennial women at work. Since many research scholars in the area of Korean women in the workforce haven't deeply explored Korean Millennial women in underemployment and their work identity, this research study provides a stepping-stone for developing an account of the issues of underutilization of Korean Millennial women, and the existence of societal and cultural

structure issues related to women in Korea. Based on the findings of this study, future study could focus on community building or mentoring programs for women employees in organizations. During the interview, many of the women interviewees mentioned the importance of companionship while they were underemployed, but there are no relevant empirical studies studying this. Mental support programs between co-workers seem necessary because women employees feel depressed and have low self-esteem once they realize they are overqualified for the job. The knowledge sharing community or mentorship in organizations will increase their self-leadership and self-esteem and will have an impact on their self-actualization.

This research could be expanded by using a variety of research methods such as case study, ethnography, auto-ethnography, oral history, focus-group interview, or content analysis. Since the ten Korean Millennial women in this study showed a varied range in their demographic profiles (e.g., year of birth, marital status, with or without children), future research could focus on gathering participants by specific criteria to elicit the meaning of certain topics that could only be found from that particular group. Using diverse research methods in future research can represent more diverse, vivid, and unique voices of Korean Millennial women for better understanding of their underemployment experiences, gender gaps, and how they bridge their career gaps.

### **Conclusion**

This research has been written with three purposes in mind: to explore underemployed Korean Millennial women's job experiences, to deliver their job trajectory stories, and to deliver their voices, thus bridging the gap in the job market. After in-depth interview with 10 Korean Millennial women, I explored the vivid experiences of Korean Millennial women's job trajectories, work experiences, and their work identities while working in underemployment. The

findings of this study revealed the unfair treatment of the women in their job trajectories, the existence of gender-specific jobs, and why the women keep working even though they are underemployed. These findings are consistent with previous research on the restrictions and discriminations Korean women face in the male-dominated Korean society. This research study is significant in that I highlight how well-educated Korean women in the Millennial generation experience becoming underemployed and the need to reform policies and systems for women's career development. In addition, I use Asian feminist theory as a theoretical framework and feminist methodology for qualitative research to consider the oppressions, restrictions, and poor working environments Korean Millennial women face and criticize women's limited opportunities and how society frames young women in Korea. This study also uncovered that Korean Millennial women feel a sense of accomplishment and a sense of solidarity and find value in the underemployment. These findings underscore the importance of considering the issue of the development of the careers of women in their late 20s and older, and the issues of power against women in Korea.

### **Concluding Remarks**

From March 2021 to July 2021, ten Korean Millennial women enthusiastically shared their life stories with me via phone call. They all expressed their intentions to voluntarily participate in the interview because they all wanted to contribute to the research. "You are studying an important topic" is the quote I heard the most before, during, and after the interview. Some of participants thanked me for the work and they stated they have high expectations of reading the final version of my dissertation. Their compliment confirmed that I am on the right track, and at the same time, I also feel a sense of responsibility for delivering their stories in public.

Korean women's career breaks may be a preordained path. So, women sometimes tend to limit their dreams and hopes. During the interview, three women interviewees who experienced career break due to marriage and pregnancy showed regret over giving up their careers. Therefore, it would be perfect if this study supported stopping career breaks and solved the problem of career delay issues among well-educated Korean Millennial women.

After completing all the interviews in the summer, I returned to the United States and started a new semester, Fall 2021. On August 31, I was preparing to go to class, and Runa, the ninth interviewee, texted me that she thought about me after reading a news article about female employees in the job market. At the same time, I was also reading similar news articles related to women in the job market, so we shared the news articles and chatted online for a while. We had an in-depth dialogue on the structure and problems of women employees in the Korean labor market. I felt the possibility that this study will not end with a one-time interview but may lead to solidarity among women who experienced and were concerned about the same issues.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the three major conclusions and findings of this study. First, Korean Millennial women's job experiences were influenced by the cultural construction of gender role expectations held in Korean society relative to women and their acceptable societal positions. Second, Korean Millennial women's job trajectories encounter encumbrances that are created and shaped by gender-specific jobs. Third, Korean Millennial women's expectations fluctuate, as the women actively attempt to bridge the societal gaps between what is acceptable for women in the job market and the jobs that they want to pursue. This chapter also presented implications for theory and practice, limitations of the study, future research suggestions and concluding remarks.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTION**

**PART 1: Demographic factors** 인구통계학적 요소

1. Please write your name: \_\_\_\_\_

귀하의 성함 (본명)을 기입해주세요

2. What year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

귀하가 태어나신 년도를 기입해주세요

2-1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

귀하의 만 나이를 알려주세요

3. What is your level of education attainment?

- ① High school graduate ② College (2-3 years) ③ University (4 years) ④ Master's degree  
⑤ Doctoral degree

귀하의 최종 학력 사항을 체크해주세요

- ① 고등학교 졸업 ② 2-3년제 대학교 졸업 ③ 4년제 대학교 졸업 ④ 석사 졸업  
⑤ 박사 졸업

4. Do you live alone or with your parents?

- ① Alone ② With parents ③ With family (Husband/Children) ④ others

귀하의 주거현황은 어떻게 되나요?

- ① 1인가구 (혼자산다) ② 부모님과 함께 ③ 가족과 함께 (배우자/아이들)  
④ 기타 (\_\_\_\_\_)

5. What is your marital status?

- ① Single ② Stay Single ③ Married ④ Divorced ⑤ Widowed

귀하의 결혼여부는 어떻게 되나요?

- ① 미혼 ② 비혼 ③ 기혼 ④ 이혼 ⑤ 사별

6. Do you have any dependents?

- ① Yes (How many?: \_\_\_\_\_) ② No

귀하는 자녀가 있으십니까?

- ① 네(몇 명인가요? \_\_\_\_\_) ② 아니오

7. Questions about the organization you are going to share today:

아래 질문들은 귀하가 공유하실 하향취업 이야기 속의 조직에 관한 질문입니다.

7-1. What kind of industry is the organization?

- ① Finance ② Service ③ Tourism ④ Health/Medical ⑤ Beauty ⑥ Cleaning / Janitor ⑦ Education ⑧ Sales ⑨ Culture / Art ⑩ Social worker ⑪ Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

어떤 직업군에 속했었나요?

- ① 금융 ② 서비스 ③ 관광 ④ 보건/의료 ⑤ 미용 ⑥ 청소/관리 ⑦ 교육 ⑧ 영업/판매 ⑨ 문화/예술 ⑩ 사회복지 ⑪ 기타 (\_\_\_\_\_)

7-2. How long have you worked in the organization? Please specify the total number of years and months worked. \_\_\_\_\_

재직 기간은 어떻게 되나요? 최대한 정확히 기입해주세요.

7-3. If you resigned, when did you resign from the organization? Please specify the year and month. \_\_\_\_\_

만약, 퇴사하셨다면 퇴사한 시기는 언제인가요? 연도와 월을 기입해주세요.

8. What is your current occupation status?

- ① Employed ② Unemployed

귀하의 현재 직업상태는 어떠한가요?

① 재직중 ② 무직

8-1. If you are unemployed now, what are you planning to do?

현재 무직이라면, 계획하고 있는 일은 무엇인가요? \_\_\_\_\_

8-2. What are doing now?

현재 하고 계신 일은 무엇인가요? \_\_\_\_\_

I will need to be assigned you a name in this study to mask your identity. You have an option.

What name would you like to be assigned? \_\_\_\_\_

연구를 진행하는 동안에는 가명을 사용할 예정입니다. 어떤 가명을 사용하시길

희망하십니까? (한국 이름 중에서 골라 적어주세요)

## **PART 2: Interview**

### **(Life background)**

1. Please share little about your personal background.

귀하의 삶의 배경은 어떻게 되시나요?

a. Can you tell me about your childhood?

귀하의 어린시절에 대해 말씀해주세요.

b. Can you tell me about your family background?

귀하의 가족배경에 대해 말씀해주세요.

c. How would you describe your family talking about your career or academics?

귀하의 가족이 귀하의 직업 또는 학업에 대해 어떤 시각으로 바라보고 있나요?

(긍정적시각 / 부정적시각 / 그 외)

c-1. Where did you complete the final degree? Was it in South Korea or outside of Korea?

귀하의 최종학력은 어디 국가에서 마치셨나요? 국내였나요 국외였나요?

c-1.1. [Follow up Q about career plan] What did you study for? What did you want to be?

추가 Q: 전공이 무엇이었나요? 그 때는 미래에 어떤 일을 하기를 희망했었나요?

**(Experience of job market)**

2. What memories can you readily recall from your job search process? What kind of jobs did you apply for?

귀하의 구직경험에 대해 말씀해주세요. 구직경험 당시에 잊지 못할 경험을 겪은 적이 있나요? (긍정적경험 / 부정적경험)

a. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Please tell me more about this episode.

귀하께서 \_\_\_\_\_를 말씀하셨는데 그 일화에 대해서 조금 더 자세하게 말씀해주실 수 있나요?

2-1. Tell me about the responses to the applications. How did you feel about the responses?

귀하의 구직경험 결과에 대해 말씀해주세요 (합격/탈락 경험). 그 결과에 대해 어떤 기분이 들었나요?

a. Talk more about your feelings. 당시의 느낌을 자세하게 말씀해주실 수 있나요?

2-2. What challenge, if any, you confronted while looking for a job?

귀하가 구직경험을 할 때 마주했던 어려웠던 점이 있었나요?

(성차별 / 고용차별 / 임금차별 등)

a. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Why that did you feel it was a challenge?

귀하께서 \_\_\_\_\_를 말씀하셨는데 왜 그 경험이 어려웠다고 느꼈나요?

3. Tell me about the job-matching with your education level/major and talents.

귀하의 전공-직무 일치 경험에 대해서 말씀해주세요. 귀하는 전공과 일치하는 업무를 하고 계신가요?

a. Please tell me more about the experience. 당시의 느낌을 자세하게 말씀해주실 수 있나요?

. Tell me what you felt during job-seeking process in South Korea.

국내에서 구직활동을 하셨을 때의 경험을 말씀해주세요.

a. What was the most satisfying thing during job-seeking process?

어떤 점이 구직경험을 하면서 가장 만족스러웠나요?

b. Please share what was the least satisfying thing during job-seeking process?

어떤 점이 구직경험을 하면서 가장 불만족스러웠나요 (힘들었나요)?

5. What was the top priority feature when you decided to work in the job position?

직장을 선택하실 당시, 최우선으로 생각하던 것이 있나요?

a. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Are you willing to work in this field even though you receive less salary?

귀하는 \_\_\_\_\_에 대해 말씀해주셨습니다. 귀하는 수입이 감소하더라도 이 직업 유형에 계속 종사할 생각이 있으신가요?

**(Experience of working)**

6. Have you ever felt like you have been treated differently in your workplace because you are a woman?

직장내에서 여성이라는 이유로 다르게 대우를 받은 경험이 있으신가요?

Describe how gender has affected your treatment in the workplace/Tell me about a time you have felt particularly aware of being a woman in your job.

성별이 직장에서 받는 대우에 미치는 영향을 설명해주세요.

a. How would you describe a fair arrangement of business at work?

귀하의 직장 내 업무배치는 남녀간 평등한가요?

b. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Explain more about it?

귀하는 \_\_\_\_\_에 대해 말씀하셨습니다. 조금 더 자세하게 설명해주실 수 있나요?

c. Tell me about the payment of business at work. If you received it less than male workers can you tell me more about it?

귀하의 수입에 대해 말씀해주세요. 만약에 남성직원들과 귀하의 수입이

다르다면, 그 부분에 대해서 자세하게 설명해주실 수 있나요?

d. How did 'gender' matter in your workplace?

“성별”이 직장에서 어떤 영향을 미치나요?

7. Tell me about the moments you liked about working in the company.

직장생활에서 마음에 들었던 부분을 말씀해주세요.

7-1. Tell me about what was the most satisfying thing at work?

가장 만족스러웠던 경험은 무엇이었나요?

a. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Can you share the story when you felt passion/value for your job?

귀하는 \_\_\_\_\_에 대해 말씀하셨습니다. 직장에서 열정을/가치를 느꼈던 부분에

대해 조금 더 자세하게 설명해주실 수 있나요?

7-2. Tell me about what was the least satisfying thing at work?

직장에서 가장 불만족스러웠던 경험을 공유해주실 수 있나요?

a. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Can you explain more the most thing you stressed out the most at work?

귀하는 \_\_\_\_\_에 대해 말씀하셨습니다. 어떤 부분에서 가장 스트레스를 받았는지 더 자세하게 설명해주실 수 있나요?

8. Describe how much you fully show your talents at work.

직장에서 귀하의 능력을 얼마나 많이 발휘하고 있는지 설명해주세요.

9. Tell me about how well did you get along with the co-workers?

직장에서 직장 동료들과 어떻게 지내는지 설명해주세요.

a. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Explain the episode of you had a meaningful time with them?

귀하는 \_\_\_\_\_에 대해 말씀하셨습니다. 직장 동료들과 겪은 값진 경험들을 더 자세하게 설명해주실 수 있나요?

b. You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Explain the episode of you had a trouble with them?

How did you solve the problem?

귀하는 \_\_\_\_\_에 대해 말씀하셨습니다. 직장 동료들과 겪은 트러블/갈등 경험을 더 자세하게 설명해주실 수 있나요? 그리고 그 갈등은 어떻게 해소하였나요?

**(Decision Making) – Only if you resigned the job (퇴사한 경우에만 답변)**

10. Why did you leave your job?

퇴사를 결정하게 된 이유는 무엇인가요?

10-1. What was the main reason to decide your job?

퇴사를 결정하게 된 결정적인 일이 있었나요?

10.2. What kind of considerations made you reluctant to leave the job?

퇴사를 결정하고도 주저하게 된 경험이 있다면 어떤 이유였나요?

10-3. How were people around you reacted about your decision (resignation)?

퇴사 결정에 대해서 주변인들의 반응은 어땠나요? (긍정적반응/부정적반응)

**(Sum up)-About job**

11. How do you describe yourself at work mismatch with your educational level and talents?

귀하는 교육레벨 및 능력과 부합하지 않는 직업/직무에 대해 어떻게 생각하시나요?

12. How would you define the “work”? 귀하에게 “일”이란 어떤 의미인가요?

13. What does “good quality job” mean to you? 귀하에게 “좋은 질의 직업”이란 무엇인가요?

14. What else you want to talk about underemployment issues in South Korea?

한국 여성의 하향취업 상황에 대한 귀하의 생각을 공유해주실 수 있나요?

**APPENDIX B**  
**RECRUITMENT LETTER**

**[Recruitment letter in English]**

Working Title: Career delayed: A study of underemployment of overqualified Korean Millennial women.

Hello, I am Jiyea Park, a doctoral student in Lifelong education, Leadership, and Organization Development program at University of Georgia. I am interested in Korean Millennial women's experiences in Korea's job market and underemployment. Based on research, 75% of women in South Korea graduated from the university while only 65% of men graduated in 2017. However, only 69% of women had a chance to participate in social activities while men's social participation hit 81%. More than 50% of women college graduates in May 2019 were assigned to work in the service industries for the first job in their lives (NSO, 2019a). Korean Millennial women are overqualified in their job positions and find it hard to get out of downgrading employment once they enter the assigned roles. Therefore, this study aims to understand the work identity and the unemployed experiences of Korean Millennial women.

The data will be collected with qualitative interviews. Please take a look the detail information for the interview to see if you meet the criteria:

1. Participants should be:

- Born in 1980~1996
- Gender: Female
- Nationality: Korean
- Worked more than six months / Quit or left a job (especially who had receiving lower wages experiences)
- Either single or married
- Has a college/university/or graduate school degree (master/doctoral)

2. The Interview schedule will:

- Take 45-60 minutes.
- Virtual interview or phone call interview

3. Confidentiality The researcher will:

- Replace all identifying information [names and places] in the transcript with pseudonyms.
- Record all the interviews
- Safely maintain recording and destroy them at the conclusion of the research (a period of no more than 3 years).

- Treat all information such as personal information collected during this research interview confidentially.

If you are willing to participate in this study please contact information: Jiyea Park (jiyea.park@uga.edu)

### [Recruitment letter in Korean]

제목: 밀레니얼세대 여성의 하향취업경험과 직업정체성 인식에 관한 연구

안녕하십니까,

저는 미국 조지아 대학교 (University of Georgia) 성인교육/HRD 전공 박사과정에 재학중인 박지예라고 합니다. 저는 현재 “밀레니얼세대 여성의 하향취업경험과 직업정체성 인식에 관한 연구”를 주제로 박사논문연구를 진행하고 있습니다. 본 연구는 기성 세대에 비해 높은 학력과 다양한 삶의 경험을 한 밀레니얼세대의 여성들이 하향취업을 겪으며 어떠한 경험을 마주하는지 심층적으로 이해하는데 목적이 있습니다. 또한, 밀레니얼세대의 여성들이 하향취업을 한 직장 안에서 직업정체성을 어떻게 인식하고 있는지를 탐색하고 그 의미를 탐구하여 하향취업의 상황에 놓여있는 밀레니얼세대 여성의 인적자원개발과 경력개발의 지원과 사회적 대안 마련에 보다 구체적이고 실질적인 자료를 제공하고자 합니다.

자료수집을 위해 연구자는 45 분정도 인터뷰를 진행할 것이고 면담내용은 녹음되어 연구 분석자료로 쓰일 것입니다. 면담 이후 연구에 필요한 경우, 전화, 이메일, 혹은 면담이 추가로 요청될 수 있습니다. 녹음된 내용과 모든 연구 자료들은 연구목적이 아닌 다른 것으로는 사용하지 않으며 연구가 마무리 되면 모든 정보는 폐기될 것입니다.

인터뷰 관련 상세 내용은 다음과 같습니다.

#### 1. 인터뷰 참여자 조건

- 1980~1996 출생자 (밀레니얼 세대)
- 성별: 여성
- 국적: 대한민국
- 최소 6 개월 이상 근무한 경험이 있고 퇴사한 경험이 있는 대한민국 밀레니얼세대 (임금차별 관련 경험이 있는 자)
- 미혼 또는 기혼인 여성
- 학위/석사/박사 학위 소지자

#### 2. 인터뷰일정

- 인터뷰 소요시간: 45 분~60 분

- 화상 인터뷰 또는 전화 인터뷰로 진행

### 3. 개인정보 보호 관련 사항

- 인터뷰 참여자의 모든 개인정보는 철저하게 보장되며 인터뷰 내용 중 지역명, 이름은 모두 가명으로 처리 됩니다.
- 모든 인터뷰는 녹음되며, 연구가 마무리 되고 3년 안에 모두 파기됩니다.

연구 중에라도 참여 의사를 거부할 수 있고, 철회 의사를 밝힌 경우 그때까지 수집된 자료는 바로 파기됩니다. 인터뷰 참여에 관련한 기타 사항은 아래 연락처로 연락주십시오.

연구담당자 연락처: 이메일 [jiyea.park@uga.edu 또는 [pjiyea0903@naver.com](mailto:pjiyea0903@naver.com)]

\*\* 연구 참여자 모집공고 설문: <https://forms.gle/qVkfrXi66uBQxp7S7> \*\*

[Recruitment fliers]

## 〈하향취업 경험 인터뷰 참가자를 찾습니다〉

안녕하세요,

저는 미국 조지아 대학교 (University of Georgia) 성인교육/HRD 전공 박사과정에 재학중인 박지에입니다.

저는 현재 "밀레니얼세대 여성의 하향취업경험과 직업정체성 인식에 관한 연구"를 주제로 박사논문연구를 진행하고 있습니다.

해당 인터뷰 대상은 〈하향취업을 경험한 한국의 밀레니얼 세대 여성〉입니다. 밀레니얼 세대는 1980-1996 출생자를 뜻하고, 하향취업이란 자신의 학력이나 기술, 경력보다 낮은 수준을 요구하는 일자리에 취업하는 일을 뜻합니다.

연구의 목적은 밀레니얼 세대의 여성이 하향취업을 한 경우 직장 안에서 (본인의) 직업 정체성을 어떻게 인식하고 있는지 탐색하고, 인터뷰 내용을 토대로 밀레니얼 세대 여성의 인적자원개발과 경력개발에 필요한 지원방안을 모색하는데 있습니다.

한국의 취업시장 또는 직장생활에서 성차별, 임금차별, 경력단절 등 어려움을 겪은 밀레니얼 세대 여성분들의 많은 연락 부탁드립니다. 또한, 주변 분들에게도 공고문과 안내문을 공유해 주시면 감사하겠습니다.

\*참여를 위하여 설문 (30초 정도)을 제출하시거나 이메일로 연락을 주시면 개별 연락 드리도록 하겠습니다.

박지에 드림.

연구담당자 박지에

연락처: 이메일[jiyea.park@uga.edu 또는 pjiyead0903@gmail.com]

질적연구 참여자모집

# 밀레니얼 세대 여성의 하향취업 경험과 직업정체성 인식에 관한 연구

본 심층 인터뷰는 밀레니얼 세대의 여성이 하향취업을 한 경우, 직장 안에서 (본인의) 직업 정체성을 어떻게 인식하고 있는지 탐색하는 것이 목적입니다. 인터뷰 내용을 토대로 밀레니얼 세대 여성의 인적자원개발과 경력개발에 필요한 지원방안을 모색하고자 하오니 많은 참여 부탁드립니다.

\*하향취업은 자신의 학력이나 기술, 경력보다 낮은 수준을 요구하는 일 자리에 취업하는 일

## • 연구대상

- 1980-1996 출생자 (밀레니얼 세대)
- 국적이 대한민국인 여성
- 최소 6개월 이상 근무한 경험 有/퇴사경험 有
- 한국의 취업시장/직장생활 내 성차별, 임금차별, 하향취업 경험 有
- 학사/석사/박사 학위 소지자

## • 연구기간

- 2021년 3월-2021년 7월

## • 연구절차

- 면접대상자로 선정될 경우 개별연락

## • 참여방법

- 이메일 또는 구글 설문지작성

## • 참여시혜택

- 소정의 사례지급



참여 설문지 QR 코드

연구담당자: 박지예 (UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA 성인교육/HRD 박사과정)

이메일: JIYEA.PARK@UGA.EDU / PJIYEA0903@GMAIL.COM

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONSENT FORM**

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**  
**CONSENT FORM**

[(Working title) Career delayed: A study of underemployment of overqualified Korean millennial women.]

**Researcher’s Statement**

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Principal Investigator:** Juanita Johnson-Bailey  
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy  
jjb@uga.edu

Jiyea Park  
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy  
jiyea.park@uga.edu

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand millennial Korean women’s experience in underemployment positions. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are the qualified participant to share your experiences of choosing the job positions and how you identify your work identity in the workplace. The information collected during this research study will be used for doctoral dissertation and possibly publication. All information from this interview will be treated confidentially.

**Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to allow researchers to ask your personal background such as life experiences before, during, and after underemployment. I am interested in listening your experiences in mismatching jobs compared to your talents and academic backgrounds. Your personal experiences will possibly provide information of women’s status in job market and their work identity at work in South Korea. The interview materials will be used to help represent the underemployed millennial Korean women and will help to build up good-quality job in the future.

**Risks and discomforts**

The interview questions are open-ended. The researchers do not anticipate any risks. Please consider how much personal or sensitive information you choose to share. Participants have the

right to participate in this study or to end their participation in this process at any point. All participants will be assigned pseudonyms.

### **Benefits**

During the interview, you will share your experiences in the Korean job market and working in underemployment in Korea. You may feel empowered by sharing information on problems of job market, gender inequalities at work, cultures, and socio-economic structures. The findings from this study may help organizations or institutions to improve their hierarchical cultures by providing information about how to prevent gender inequalities from job market and from the workplace. Through this study, companies in South Korea may learn more about gender equality and good quality jobs for Korean millennial women at work.

### **Incentives for participation**

Every participant in this interview will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card. It will be distributed via email. The researcher will bear expenses so the information will not be shared outside of the research records.

There may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research. However, I am certain that you will have a sense of duty while sharing your underemployment experiences. It is possible that you are the person who can point out the problems of underemployment, inequalities at work, cultures, and socio-economic structure. Also, you can suggest your expectations of good-quality job for future studies and future policies.

### **Audio/Video Recording**

All interviews will be recorded for findings of the research for archived after transcription. Audio recordings will be stored on Jiyea Park's iPhone or iPad and destroyed after 3 years.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I do not want to have this interview recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded.

### **Privacy/Confidentiality**

All personal information collected during this research interview will be treated confidentially. Your real name will be replaced with a nickname or pseudonyms. When the researcher reports findings (results), I will not include details of your company name or locations.

This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

### **Taking part is voluntary**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Feel free to reject the researcher's requests and withdraw your participation from this research at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

**If you have questions**

The main researcher conducting this study is Jiyea Park, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Jiyea Park at [jiyea.park@uga.edu](mailto:jiyea.park@uga.edu) or at 706-308-4999. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

By proceeding with the interview, you are agreeing to participate in the research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher                      Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher                      Signature                      Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return on to the researcher.