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Master's Thesis

Feminism, Love, and Ambition:

Young Women Who Live Without Men in Contemporary South Korea

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Abstract

Beginning since its national border was forcefully opened (1876) by Japanese and Western imperial powers during late years of the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910), the nation has faced many changes to how people imagined gender and sexuality. After the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) ended, the Korean peninsula was absorbed into Cold War powerplays, and torn into two Koreas. During the Korean War (1950-1953) that triggered the split of North and South Korea, the male-only conscription (1951-present) first appeared and has continued. With half of its population educated in the military, militarized cultures have become the rudimentary foundations in social orders of Korea, evident in numerous organizations from schools to workplaces. Men sharing military experiences also generated homosocial and militarized bonding between men, shaping their masculinities. Not only the conscription, but also a government-led implementation of a specific family model shaped gendered landscapes of Korea. During military dictatorships (1961-1987), the government had promoted a heteropatriarchal nuclear family model. Such history still defines how a "normal" family looks like nowadays. Intense economic developments led by the dictators planted a seed for a neoliberal sense which later fully bloomed in contemporary days; the sense today is used to justify the exclusion of the underprivileged, including women under the name of a fair meritocracy. Inside these complicated layers of gendered social orders, women in South Korea have reacted and resisted in diverse ways. In this thesis, I specifically focus on the reactions and resistances of the 4B women (2017-present) who identify their feminist selves based on lifetime vows not to engage with men either sexually or romantically: no to dating men, no to having sex with men, no to marrying men, and no to giving birth with men. These four "No"s are essential steps for them to dismantle the patriarchy and liberate women from male-led oppressions, including gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, work-family imbalance for women, and many others. I argue that 4B women are making their own social orders to understand and change these painfully gendered realities. I answer two research questions in every chapter: Why do these women choose these lifetime vows? How do they live such lives? First, I argue that 4B women problematize how the society dehumanizes, excludes, and exploits women. Based on such analytical frameworks, I argue that 4B women identify heteronormativity and gender roles as key powers that sustain patriarchy. With such a worldview, they employ counter strategy to create alternative lives where they live without men. Here, I view patriarchy as an intersectional system that exercises powerful legitimacy and validity in numerous countries, including South Korea. When 4B women embarked on their journeys without men, they unlearn whatever notions of 'love' and 'ambition' they learned and relearn the new definitions. I offer detailed ethnographic records through multi-sited ethnography with multiple methodologies to depict how the 4B women have formed certain feminist perspectives and how they enmesh those perspectives in their lives.

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Introduction

Prologue

Ji-Yeon and I went inside a small, local restaurant that serves *hwe,* a Korean dish of raw fish. Soon, the owner served *hwe* with sauces and vegetable leaves from a large tray. We smiled, excited to eat. On the left side of our table, there was a big television. The TV's volume was set on loud, so our conversation was constantly disrupted by its noise. At one point, we gave up talking to each other and watched TV along with other customers. In less than ten minutes, we were bombarded by the news of numerous femicides: one killed by her ex-male partner, one killed by her ex-husband, and an elderly woman killed herself as a means of exiting abject poverty. We were already used to such news, but nevertheless were sad.

Later during the interview, I asked Ji-Yeon how she would refute people arguing that she is generalizing men in Korean society. She replied with the fastest speed I had ever heard from her:

> I want to ask that person: Do you really live in Korea? Do you watch the news? Just before we arrived at this interview room, we saw three consecutive news stories about three women being murdered or dying. We are living in a country where three women lost their lives in that short time when we were eating, so telling me that it is a generalization does not make any sense. And males are absolute majority who commits femicides. Now, who is committing a fallacy of logic?

Even after I came back to Oslo, as Ji-Yeon and I could be easily bombarded by depressing news, it was only one touch on my phone that could bring me back to a bizarre and exhausting quilt of incidents that were newly developing every day in Korea: a candidate of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family cheerfully saying she would abolish the ministry (J.-H. Kim 2023), budgets for gender equality policy in government ministries cut in half (S.-J. Oh 2023), a teenager killing herself after a man lied that he was looking for a part-time worker in a study-café but lured her into a brothel where he works, saying he should "test" her and then raped her (Hyeon 2023), a famous artist who supplied drugged women to important guests in his club for sex recently being released from jail after serving a questionably short sentence (Suacillo 2023), and the president arguing that the feminism wrongfully accuses men as potential perpetrators and that the young Korean generation has not experienced structural gender inequalities (Gunia 2022). Needless to say, one of his family

members privately conversed how money can silence #MeToo victims (H.-A. Lee 2022). I sat down, in the library in Oslo, again digesting some indigestible facts. Then I saw my informant's Instagram post written in rage, citing the news that a man who murdered a woman by ripping out her internal organs by pushing in his arm into her vagina was only sentenced to four years in jail (H.-G. Moon 2018).

Feminist Movements

Until the mid-1980s, women's movements were deemed less urgent than other agendas such as "national liberation" from Japanese colonization, "modernization, re-unification, and democratization" (Jung 2017, 1). Women were active in social movements but were part of the militarized organization instead of voicing their unique perspectives. For instance, a female activist who participated in the student movements for democracy and against military dictatorships in her young age reflected how she believed feminist students were "selfish individualists who lack a sense of community" who bring "private issues to the organizations and causing unnecessary troubles" (Kwon 2005, 155–205).

Feminist movements became active in the 1990s, focusing on combatting domestic and sexual violence (Jung 2017). The movements orbited around the feminist NGOs, which still are influential today. Feminist movements successfully obtained legal status in the 1990s, developing their cooperative relationship with the government thanks to several progressive cabinets (Kwon-Kim et al. 2017, chap. 1). Several progressive governments in Korea from "mid-1990s to 2007" ignited state-feminism in which feminist NGOs' "reliance on state funding became routine" (Jung 2017, 126). The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MGEF) have also worked in projects regarding gender and feminism, supporting single mothers or victims from domestic and sexual violence (J. H. J. Han and Chun 2014, 246, cited in J. S. Kim 2021, 79). Feminist movements in the 1990s also "directly oppose[d] the Confucian patriarchal symbolic system," such as abolishing *hoju jedo,* organizing the festival that celebrates menstruation, protesting against the Miss Korea pageant for its sexual objectification of women, and exhibiting a womb-related artwork in the middle of Chongmyo, a Korean shrine from "Yi dynasty (1392-1910)" that symbolizes Confucian, "patriarchal system" (Joo-hyun Cho 2005, 252).

Women's rights organizations, activists, and feminists have problematized the nation's *hoju jaedo* since the 1950s (H. Yang 2002, 88); *Hoju jedo,* introduced in the Korean peninsula in 1915 during

Japanese colonial rule (Seoul Foundation of Women and Family n.d.; H.-K. Shin 2005; S.-Y. Kim 2005), was completely abolished in 2008. The law indicated that only male could be the leader of the household. The abolishment was a milestone in Korean feminist history; feminists showed how "private" issues, such as families, households, and kinship, could be interpreted as something "public" (Sun-Hye Kim 2021). The abolishment reflected women's desires to change "authoritative, hierarchical, and patriarchal value into a democratic and equal one" (KWAU 2017, 49).

From 1990s to 2000s, new social actors called "young feminists" emerged. They were women who were not necessarily related to NGOs. While the feminist NGOs focused on bargaining with the state (S. Kim and Kim 2014) for laws and policies, "young feminists" performed feminist activisms on a daily basis in schools, workplaces, organizations, and in PC communities (Kwon-Kim et al. 2017, chap. 1). They were "extreme" feminists at their time: some deliberately smoked to protest against the stigma imposed on female smokers (ibid); some forced their boyfriends to have a vasectomy, believing both genders should be responsible for contraception (ibid); and some stormed out of classrooms when virginity was mentioned as the utmost value of women (ibid). In PC communities, "young feminists" debated about gender and sexuality because those communities were perfect space to experiment with "no hierarchical culture and with gender-free language" (ibid). However, feminist PC communities soon became weakened partially by intensified capitalism that geared women to become consumers of the culture rather than producers, and partially by male PC users' trolling languages that impeded healthy debates (ibid). In this context, the re-emergence of online feminisms in the mid-2010s is interesting.

Popular online feminisms re-emerged by the birth of *Megalia*, the online community of "feminist digital users" who "troll...male users, attacking the prevalent misogynistic culture in digital space" (E. Jeong 2020, 8). In 2015, online male users cyber-bullied Korean female tourists in Hong Kong after hearing that they had disobeyed the Hong Kong government's request to test if they had Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), the disease that various Asian states were combatting at the moment. The incident showed homosocial online culture operating with misogyny, producing discourses that generalize Korean women as inferior and selfish. Since "using the language of persuasion [to men]" was not working (Yun 2022), users of *Megalia* chose a different strategy: they copied the pre-existing misogynistic writings from online, reversed the position of males and females in the original writings, and re-posted them online. Only when those "misandric" writings appeared, the public started to take interest in the history and existence of online and offline misogyny.

The pre-existing misogyny that online feminists reacted to should be understood in the contexts of post-feminism (McRobbie 2004; Ortner 2014), a global trend in which people believe that feminism is no longer needed since "gender equality is achieved." In Korea, while women experienced the most severe mass layoffs during the financial crisis in the 1990s, the narrative of fathers who needed sympathy rose in the media like a trope, concealing the pain that female workers experienced (T.-S. Choi 2018, 165–68). The male-only conscription that started during military dictatorship regimes has been full of injustice, such as political and economic elites receiving exemptions. In contrast, others had to join the service no matter how much they hated to. Whenever such an injustice received attention, the military and government pursued a populist solution instead of a structural approach: they designed the extra-point system where serving in the military gives males a meaningful advantage when applying for civil servant jobs to satisfy men (ibid 189-230). Women were already being hired less by private companies than men, so many women prepared for civil servant exams (ibid). When the Supreme Court of Korea ruled in favor of several women and disabled men questioning the validity of such a discriminative point system, the misogynistic backlash exploded (E.-K. Bae 2000). Historically, women were misogynistically imagined as someone who "comfortably" stays at home while the wounded patriarchs work hard outside, and someone who greedily takes away the rightful compensation that men should receive by working hard in the military.

In 2016, a woman was killed by a man in the bathroom near Gangnam station, and the man confessed to the police that he killed her because women had ignored him throughout his life. This incident mobilized women to problematize misogyny and femicide (N.-Y. Lee 2016). The Escape-the-Corset movement, in which all of my informants were participants, started around 2016 and aims to liberate women from fixated notions of femininity, such as excessive grooming and plastic surgeries becoming so normative that it almost feels like a must (Yun 2022). Short hair and bare skin with no makeup are the common features of women participating in this movement. "Korea has the world's highest rate of cosmetic surgery per capita" (Bicker 2018), and the streets are filled with advertisements "telling them they need to be thin with dewy pale skin, a flawless complexion, and the perfect oval face" (Bicker 2018). The Escape-the-Corset movement also problematizes those idealized standards of looks being the must for the survival of women: One of the biggest Korean online website for jobseekers and employers asked 926 companies how important they valued the job seekers' appearance (T.-H. Lee 2019); female job seekers were four times influential than males in terms of their looks affecting whether they would be hired (ibid).

4B Movement

The 4B movement emerged in 2017 in line with the history of Megalia (2015), Gangnam station femicide (2016), and the Escape-the-Corset movement (2016-present). "4B" stands for four lifetime vows that women who identify with them must stick to, each pronounced "bihon," "bichulsan," "biyeonae," and "bisekseu" (Lee and Jeong 2020, 633). Each means saying no to marrying men, giving birth with men, dating men, and having sex with men. All informants told me that they joined the 4B to "dismantle" or/and "escape" patriarchy.

4B women tend to learn about feminisms by themselves instead of depending on institutions, such as women's studies courses at universities (M.-J. Kim 2020, 5). They debate in online spaces, meet up with each other for small feminist study groups, and maintain solidarity among themselves through (ir)regular hangouts. Because the 4B movement emerged from online discussions and the members learn about feminisms through online spaces, 4B women are categorized as online feminists (J. Park 2022; E. Jeong 2020). Due to the label, some researchers think they solely depend on online sources. However, from my fieldwork, I learned that 4B women used online spaces only as a starting point to learn about feminism, then embarked on an "offline" journey to learn more about feminism: reading feminist books or forming small study groups. Since they desire to learn feminism without risking the backlash (M. -J. Kim, 2020) such as antifeminists harassing them, and since they often feel that women's studies professors were "too slow in catching up" with what was currently happening, they prefer making a closed online community as a camp base, then conversing feminisms online and offline.

To understand 4B women's unyielding stance, one should know the gendered landscapes of Korean society that motivated them. I considered my informants' movements as reaction(s) to the time and space that they experienced as women. I categorized gendered landscapes they problematized into three groups, using abstract analytical frameworks. Below, I analyzed repeated patterns of gendered power relations my informants problematized: dehumanization, exclusion, and exploitation of women.

Power is an important topic in anthropology. Power can be "the ability to enforce one's own will on other's behaviour" (Weber 1978, quoted in Eriksen 2015, 196), a "a productive network which runs through the whole social body" that motivates people to voluntarily embody rather than feeling

forced or repressed (Foucault 1980, 119), or a "structural power" of "obeying of norms and implicit rules" (Eriksen 2015, 196).

Here, I use "power" in an oppressive notion, but not in how it completely prohibits resistance. Power, whether in a form of misogyny, sexual discrimination, or gender norms, was something that confined the 4B women from being themselves and from making the society that they wanted. Although I agree that binarily positioning "subordination and subversion" may be too simple (Mahmood 2005, 14), that agency should not be confined in "resisting the dominating and subjectivating modes of power" (ibid), and that "resistance" might have received obsessive scholarly attention (Abu-Lughod 1990), I think the discussion of power and agency would differ according to the contexts of each anthropological investigation. In the contexts of the current gendered landscapes of Korea and the 4B women's perception of how Korean society is for women, and how *ideally* society should be, the idea of power in the framework of oppression and resistance still remains relevant to understanding their movement.

Analytical Frameworks

Here, I connect ethnographic data I gathered from the fieldwork and the relevant literature research to come up with the basic analytical frameworks that could categorize types of gendered landscapes, or power relations, that the 4B women problematize about Korea.

Dehumanization

Many informants told me that they joined the 4B movement because "they wanted to live as a human." What did they mean by wanting to live as a human, while they already exist as a human? Their arguments contain their ideal perceptions about what it means to live as a human and how contemporary Korean society does not match their expectations.

I have already known Ji-Won years before my fieldwork started. As my fieldwork started, I was invited to her house. The house symbolized her long struggle to find a refuge from her family's domestic abuse. Ji-Won once adamantly said she joined the 4B movement to "live as a human." Although the degree varied, eight out of twenty informants disclosed that they were the victims of domestic violence by their parents or male kins. One informant proposed her own theory to me about 4B women: "We [4B women] are here because we are hurt from our original families. We realized

something was wrong from this patriarchal family model. That's why we get each other."

Cohabiting with her mother and grandfather was difficult for Ji-Won due to their hateful comments and attitudes against her being feminist, having a short hair, and a romantic female partner. One day, when she was still living with them, her mother, in a full rage, taunted her as if she would beat Ji-Won. Ji-Won instantly felt she could be harmed. She ran to her room, desperately slamming the door. The doorknob was missing, so she had to push on the door with all her force. Both her mother and grandfather tried to push the door to open. They soon started spraying a bug killer into a hole in the door where the doorknob was supposed to be. Ji-Won told them to stop, but they did not. The spray filled half of her room's floor, making it too slippery for her to keep pushing the door shut. She also worried about being poisoned from inhaling a substantial amount of spray. She called the police.

Thanks to the 4B movement, she decided to move away from her family. The movement helped her realize that she should appreciate herself more. "I intended to live with them even if I continue get abused because I wanted to save money," she said. "But after 4B, I realized I am worthy and precious. I realized I should not sacrifice my mental and physical health for money…" Now we sat in her small house on the northside of Seoul. She pays her rent by juggling multiple part-time jobs and applying for government aid as a beneficiary of national basic livelihood. The house was old and small. The wall was not thick enough to silence the sounds of motorcycles and dogs barking in town. Wooden structures and the veranda showed their age. But nothing bothered her. Her independence was the sweetest victory.

I interpreted her journey of moving out from her original family home derived by her desire to "live as a human." In feminist perspective, one should see "peace as a condition of social justice and equality" that can offer "life-affirming" conditions (B. A. Reardon 2015, 65–66). Domestic abuse seems far from "life-affirming" where the victim must constantly live under extreme anxiety. Ji-Won's relationship with her mother became more unstable after she moved out, since her mother was unhappy with her decision. I noticed that violence from her mother and grandfather was rooted in their frustration that Ji-Won did not fit into their ideal concept of daughter and a woman. They were seeing her not as a holistic human being, but rather as an embodiment of gender roles in relation to them.

Her grandfather had intentionally removed Ji-Won's doorknob. He did not like Ji-Won's room being private: "I was so happy that I move out because finally I have my own space. Before, I didn't have

this freedom. Whenever I buy a new doorknob to fill the hole, my grandfather would pluck it out again." She constantly experienced unequal power relations with her elder kins, living under their surveillance, a classic form of power (Foucault 1995). Such control is impossible without them (un)consciously rendering Ji-Won as *theirs*, instead of as an independent human being.

Patriarchal thinking tends to treat offspring as parents' possession (T.-S. Choi 2018). Such a tendency is hard to explain without gender roles. Parents in Korea, when facing economic difficulties, sometimes first kill their offspring and then commit suicide, believing that children cannot survive without them. Started in the 1950s (H.-K. Kim 2017), such incidents still happen today (Y.-J. Yoon and Shim 2023; Cheon 2022). Anthropologist Lee Hyeon-Jung argues that such actions show how a nuclear-family-based society does not share but imposes full responsibility of childrearing on individual parents, leading parents to believe it is responsible to kill their children if they can no longer take care of them (H.-J. Lee 2012); strongly imposed gender roles are critical here, too. Fathers, responsible for financially supporting and maintaining his family as it is, and mothers, responsible for nurturing children with the utmost devotion and sacrifice, might be in abject despair when they think they have failed in their duties. When they thought their gender roles were not fulfilled and their families are beyond repair, they kill their children and themselves (ibid).

Gender roles are imposed not only on parents but also on daughters and sons. There is an old saying in Korea that daughters are bedrocks of the household economy: many women in our informants' mother's generation, born in 60s or early 70s to a lower class, were discouraged by their parents from going to universities but encouraged to choose working to bring money to their parents (J.-Y. Park 2023). According to anthropologist Kim Hyun Mee, the Westernized modernization process led by dictator Park Chung Hee, who ruled Korea from 1963 to 1979, actively incorporated Confucian patriarchal ideology to discipline people, rendering the "state as father or husband, the corporation as first son, and society as mother or wife and factory workers as filial daughters," mobilizing large numbers of single women to manufacturing labor in the sacred name of saving the nation from poverty (H. M. Kim 2005, 184). While young women worked hard in masculinized workplaces that neglected the needs of female workers, they did not enjoy the authority of breadwinners unlike men since such recognition would disrupt the gendered hierarchy needed to collectivize the nation (ibid). Today, parents invest in their daughters' education the same as their sons (G.-G. Nam and Kim 2005); however, sons are still more treasured in a family, shown in a significant preference for sons over daughters in childbirth even in 2005 (ibid).

Other than being treated like the family's possession, Ji-Won also had to lie to her mother to be the daughter whom her mother wanted her to be. "What do you mean?" I asked. She said, "aren't there too much to list? … the best version would be a daughter who didn't move out, therefore who does not spend any money, but receive scholarship from schools for grades, who does not hang out with her friends too much, who does not drink…" In her remark are the historical context in Korean society that forced daughters to be silent, diligent, and contributing to the (household) economy. Her mother also does not approve of her having a girlfriend, throwing homophobic slurs at her. Similarly, her grandfather, with whom she maintains affection for even after his abuse, constantly reminds her that he will never help her if she marries a woman. Her dehumanization occurred through her family's domestic abuse as a means to flatten her from a holistic human being into their ideal set of gender roles.

Dan-Bi, an engineering student in Seoul, told me similar episodes of her family using domestic abuse against her to dehumanize her into mere gender roles. During her high school years, she cut her hair short, declared that she would not marry men, and came out that she had a girlfriend—all which made her mother furious. When her mother saw her short hair, she evicted her from their house, yelling that she looked like a man. When her mother discovered a lesbian-themed book on Dan-Bi's desk, she threw the book at her daughter, cursing. Before she knew about feminism, Dan-Bi was a quiet girl, who "did what was told." She took care of her younger siblings as the eldest daughter and dreamed of becoming a wife and mother like her own mother. Her mother once begged her, "please come back as you were—a nice daughter." Her mother would force Dan-Bi to come home to eat dinner with her family every day, setting curfew at 6 PM, and limiting her allowance to minimum since Dan-Bi would only "eat and get fat." "…I had to ask very cautiously for more money because sometimes I couldn't even buy books for study," she said. "…I was blocked all the chances to hang out with my friends..."

Even today, Dan-Bi lives a life of tiring negotiation. While she lives in Seoul and her mother in a remote town, Dan-Bi is forced by her mother to regularly travel faraway back to her hometown to help on her mother's farm. "…She is a hair stylist. She is doing that farm work for her extra income because she wants to. I don't get why she keeps forcing me to work there." Dan-Bi could finally leave home to study in Seoul by promising her mother that she would help her farm regularly in return of getting the permission to leave the hometown. Dan-Bi had to and is still expected to perform as an ideal daughter who: (1) saves money for her family, (2) stays fit for marriage, and (3) devotes herself to family work.

Yeong-Ah, an engineering researcher in her late twenties, had to constantly listen to her father complaining, such as “I come home from hard work, but none of my *daughters* act cute or nice or even smile at me.” Rather than letting Yeong-Ah be herself, a girl who does not know how to “act cute,” her father expressed anger about her personality because her personality did not match the gender role he and the society expected. Yeong-Ah also spent time with her mother, ignoring her father’s order not to meet her. When found out, her father would beat her. When his gender role of being an absolute authority in the family and being responsible for keeping a family as it is, i.e., not divorced, was not realized, he would deflect such anger to the most vulnerable. She was required to perform a gender role of a cute daughter who cheers her father up and obeys his order. She was abused when she could not perform such a gender role or when her own father could not perform his gender role.

Dan-Bi, Yeong-Ah, and Ji-Won all experienced how being put into gender roles could be dehumanizing. Only by living as a feminist, short-haired woman, and who loves woman, could they be fully alive. Such identities clash with the society’s patriarchal values expected of women. Patriarchy, a system of gendered power relations that affect numerous parts of society (Ortner 2022) requires the performance of certain gender roles to operate. 4B women problematized such contexts, declaring they do not want to perform those (dehumanizing) gender roles.

Exclusion

My informants also problematized how women are excluded in the society in numerous ways. Yeon-Su, a student of medicine in Seoul, mentioned that being excluded from power politics at school was the first incident that motivated her to enter the 4B lifestyle. As an ambitious student who successfully balances her study and extracurricular activities at the university, one day, she ran for the president position on the students’ graduation committee. There were only two teams running: The one for which she was the leader with her acquaintance as a vice leader, and the other which had one member who was infamous for regularly buying sex from women and another was a member of *Ilbe*, an extremely misogynistic, extreme-rightist website in Korea. Therefore, she thought she was more qualified. However, she lost the election. Before the campaign officially began, she was invited to a dinner by one of the opponents. She recalled the moment with frustration and disgust, having tough time to hide her bitter, and angry smile.

> He proposed that he and I should form a team: him as a leader, me as a co-leader … Actually, there was no woman ever selected as a leader in our school. Because of drinking culture … So, he told me that since this job requires drinking with men, travelling to other towns, and etc., and that since he served in the military—he has a huge pride that he served in military—older than me, has a car, and is a man, blah blah blah ... So, he was beating around the bush that he was a better candidate because he was a man. He said it was heartbreaking for him to suggest me this stuff but said that there was nothing we could do because this was the way it was at our school. At that time, it was before the election, so I ignored his suggestion. He was only suggesting to team up with me because, I thought, he had a hard time looking for a vice leader candidate willing to work with him… But seeing that I lost the election… I was so angry because I felt like the result proved he was right.

Her episode illustrates the gender bias that excludes women from obtaining political power. It reveals how men also actively participate in maintaining the status quo rather than fixing it. However, a few men having gender bias about women neither explains how her school had never had a female student president nor why the students chose men as their leaders even if they gave her competing team a bad reputation for their questionable gender-sensitivity. While the students judged their misogyny, they treated those traits as irrelevant when evaluating who should be the leaders. Not only Yeon-Su, but many other informants told me how people in their schools or workplace automatically think males would be better leaders than females. Yeong-Ji, who majored in social sciences and now works in a feminist NGO, mentioned that numerous female candidates ran for student campaigns at her university, but so far, no woman has won. “People would say stuff like ‘Still, men are better leaders’.” She also observed how the authority of the leader of a student club at her university, who raped his clubmate, would still be protected. “He worked hard for human rights issues. Therefore, many people argued he could never rape… and some said even if he did, his guilt should be leniently treated considering his history of human right activism…I felt like exploding—what does that have to do with his rape?” As Yeon-Su experienced, students at Young-Ji’s school acted as if how he treated the woman was irrelevant when assessing his qualification as a leader.

Such exclusion of women in politics and the strong tendency to over-protect men’s power not only happens at schools but also in the national assembly. In 2023, around 19% of parliament were women (L. Yoon 2023), ranking 121th out of 186 countries (Jin 2023). Around only 16.7 % of ministers are women (Jin 2023). I argue that such underrepresentation is a sign of the exclusion of women from obtaining substantial power to make impactful decisions for society.

Yeon-Su is an aspiring woman who has succeeded in getting into medical school, an extremely competitive major to be accepted to in Korea. Like her, many Korean women excel at education.

From 2013, women's enrolment rate in higher education institutions has outpaced that of men, and in 2020, it was 71.3 %, surpassing men by 5% (Hyunsoo Yang 2021). In March 2023, more women than men were admitted to law school (S.-A. Lee 2023). Education has been open to women for quite a while. The first women's school was established in 1886 (M. Lee 1998, 3:15). However, "enormous discrepancy between educational achievement and employment rate among college-educated women in Korea" exists, showing that the cause is "not simply a matter of economics but of cultural politics" (H. M. Kim 2005, 200). The gender bias that men are better leaders goes along with the bias that men are also better workers.

Such cultural politics could be traced back into the 1960s when the heteropatriarchal family model was promoted during military dictatorships, a fantasy of "normal" family consisting stay-home mom and working dad, while such single-earner-model is only feasible for a few middle class household (Y. Kim 2007). During the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, numerous women were fired instead of men to "salvage" the financial crisis in Korea since companies deemed women to be a less essential labor force compared to men (T.-S. Choi 2018); companies thought women could be supported by their husbands (ibid). Again, the assumption about heteropatriarchal gender roles plays key roles in excluding women.

Even today, women earn less than men, with the pay gap ranking highest among OECD countries (BBC News Korea 2022). Many companies still favor male applicants over females, and some have secretively faked female applicants' scores to drop them and hire men instead (H. Lee 2022; M.-J. Lee 2018; Y.-J. Lee 2018; S.-H. Jeong 2019; *BBC News Korea* 2019); These companies include prominent banks and public companies, where both female and male graduates would do anything to be hired. Such bias affects employers' decisions. More than 100 cases of gender-discrimination in hiring were reported within three months, from September to December of 2018 (J. Yoon 2020, 5). Employers avoided hiring women, concerned that they would marry and give birth later (ibid). Even if women do not tend to leave work, employers often hold prejudice that eventually they would, and the employers often assume that giving maternity leave is a waste of money, even if the workers come back.

While Korea legally prohibits any gender-related discrimination at work through a law called the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-family Balance Assistance Act, women are often not promoted when competing against men because employers think "it is natural to give more chance to male breadwinner than women who are not married" (*BBC News Korea* 2022). Married women are

not treated better, however: Women who apply for maternity leave experience disadvantages in promotions, are threatened to have their leave rescinded, find their desks gone when they return, are moved to a lower rank, or are simply fired (S.-W. Kim 2021; M.-J. Kim 2021). Korean government legally protects 52 weeks of paid paternity leave for fathers, and it is the longest paid leave for fathers among OECD countries, even longer than that of Norway (H.-M. Kim 2023); however, only 20 % of submitted leaves are from men, leaving majority of the childrearing responsibilities to women (ibid). Defeated by the impossibility of juggling work and family, in 2019, 1,690,000 married women left their career (H. Bae and Kim 2020, 99). The number consists 19.2% of the whole population of married women.

Not only the gender bias and patriarchal belief, but also militarized culture confines the role of women. Militarized culture of workplaces in Korea propels women to *voluntarily* quit their jobs, "even in the absence of child-related obligations" (Um 2023, 1688). Companies normalize the culture of blindly obeying one's superior and welcoming new employees through bootcamp training (Um 2023); male-exclusive networking is when important decisions about work are happening, and those networking involves male-exclusive activities such as "drinking, smoking, and buying sex" (ibid, 1684); companies also encourage overworking and sacrificing employee's life outside of work (ibid, 1686). Men learned everything they should have learned from the military, such as obeying the superior and being able to catch nonverbal sings from their male superiors (ibid, 1683). Therefore, men excel at work; In contrast, women are excluded since they are not invited to male-exclusive networking and cannot read the militarized culture as fluently as their male peers (ibid). The closest inclusion that the female employees experienced when they were invited to emulate hostesses' behaviors at brothels or karaoke rooms for their male superiors, "talking to him, laughing at his jokes, and pouring drinks for him" (Um 2023, 1686). For them, the female peers are not their colleagues, but "women."

Women can never become a full citizen when the militarization is at the core of the nation's citizenship (S. Moon 2005a); such militarized citizenship also comes with romanticized gender roles, the roles that confine women's possibilities, such as men gloriously protecting the nation and their women, including their mothers and girlfriends (S. Moon 2005b). Thus, women are again narrowly situated only *in relation to* men. Korea also promoted strong, masculinized male bodies as ideal workforce during the military dictatorships such as through universal physical education in public schools (Tikhonov 2009). In a world where women are neither an ideal worker, nor a solider, nor a citizen, women are often left with no choice but to prove their relevance to the society through their

gendered role in relation to men, like one female activist of militarized student movements did. She proudly washed the male members' underwear and cooked large quantities of food for them, securing the "popular" position in the movement (Kwon 2005, 155–205).

Korean society has constantly sent the message that women are not welcomed in labor markets, the workplace, the military, student elections, and politics, and even in grassroots or student movements. They are also never a full citizen. In various ways, women are marginalized and excluded from having substantial political or economic power, often finding themselves only left with their relations with men.

Exploitation

Many informants also told me that they became 4B women to avoid "exploitation." According to their worldview, women are exploited mainly in regard to their sexuality. Ji-Yeon, in her early twenties, recently moved to Seoul from a distant province and has worked various jobs such as a part-time photographer at a local studio and now as a part-time designer at a firm.

Lying on the floor of my room, Ji-Yeon answered, looking at the ceiling. "…since I know men exploit women and that I have numerously seen them exploiting women…when I later understood the contexts of their exploitation, I thought I should also do 4B." She gave me an example of exploitations:

> …I dated both women and men, but mainly I learned from observing straight friends who have boyfriends… men wanted to have sex with them, then left them as soon as their goal was achieved. Not only that…regardless of having sex or not, when a couple starts dating, at my high school years, I noticed how boys were proud of having girlfriends and got recognition from other boys like getting an honorary medal, while girls ended up being rumored to be a slut. If you genuinely love your girl, and, obviously, if you know that male culture of slut-shaming girls, you shouldn't tell others that you have a girlfriend, even though you want to get recognized by other boys. Isn't it?

In later interviews, she mentioned that if men genuinely loved women, they should proudly declare themselves as feminist allies. Her point, I thought, was valid, seeing extreme backlash in Korea where women labelled as feminist lost their jobs.

One of her straight friends, always feeling lonely, constantly seeks love from others. Therefore, men find her to be an "easy target" since she gives "everything" including her heart and gifts: "She told

me dating stories, and it has a pattern. Men slowly persuade her to agree having sex with them, then later, they ask her if it is OK not to use condom. Constantly." Why? I asked. She answered,

> Because of their (men's) satisfaction. It's just that: they feel like getting a condom is a hassle; they want to save money; and having sex with no condom gives them better feels. But let's be honest, it is a plain exploitation. If he really loves her—OK, I keep repeating my words—if he really loves her, then he should use contraception. She was a high school student. *A high school student*. She has no financial capability to raise the baby. And what about the sexually transmitted diseases (STD)? And the emotions… they wanted to have sex with her, so they were very gentle and romantic to her at first, as if they could give everything... But then they changed their attitude abruptly when their sexual curiosity was achieved … you know what I mean? You wanted a toy so bad; you bought it; and then time passes, you end up not playing with it, so you dump it. Boys were doing that kind of thing. Yeah, that kind of way, exactly. But then she already gave her heart to them, right? So, she cannot give them up easily. So, she acts super low to make them stay.

Ji-Yeon told me that observing exploitative aspects of her friends' dating histories was more than enough to learn the lesson. Specifically, she illustrated how men exploited her friend by using her vulnerability. Men achieved their goal of having sex through constant pushing, without giving what her friend wanted, long-lasting emotional intimacy. Such pushing itself has exploitative aspect since the men prioritize their desire in certain way (ex. intercourse with no condom) over women's health (ex. STD or pregnancy). Ji-Yeon pointed out the reciprocal inequality in this exploitative romantic relationship. While one can say Ji-Yeon's friend had a meaningful experience of agapeic love of itself, anthropologists found that "the ideal that acts of love are given unconditionally, as free gifts, does not reflect the lived experiences of most ethnographic subjects" (Nelson 2021, 1015). In Ji-Yeon's friend's case, the receiver (boyfriends) did not seem to be much bothered of "losing power" due to their inability to reciprocate to the selfless giver (Ji-Yeon's friend) (Mauss 2002); rather, the giver loses power, giving hearts and minds without the expected gift in return (emotional intimacy). In this unequal relationship, Ji-Yeon observed how her friend lost her sense of self and lowered herself to win the men back. Seeing women often positioned as the constant 'giver' with no meaningful reward, even risking their health, in heterosexual romantic relationships contributed Ji-Yeon to think that men exploit women.

In fact, some men's preference not to use condom with women in Korea has been publicized through several newspaper articles (S.-G. Han 2019; Seong 2016). Researchers found out that the more conservative a male college student' perception about gender role is, the more he would refuse using condoms (Jun and Geon 2016, 3400). Being in a certain gender role in patriarchal social order makes women more vulnerable to power relations in terms of sexuality. Rich ruminates about the unequal

power relations in heterosexuality (A. C. Rich 2003), and Przybylo problematizes the naturalized necessity of sexuality (Przybylo 2019). If men exploit women by a means of sexuality, what is such a big deal not to engage with men sexually? To achieve the radical liberation of women, 4B women believe sexual ties between women and men must be minimized.

Similarly, finding out a video of her having sex with her boyfriend on the internet made her determined not to postpone joining 4B. The video was taken without her knowledge and was found by her new boyfriend. At that time, Yeong-Ji thanked him for finding the video, but later, she realized that he had to type in a very specific phrase to search for this kind of "revenge porn." Her boyfriend was also part of this massive male structure of exploiting women and consuming these unconsented videos for pleasure. This experience led Yeong-Ji to learn about homosocial culture that orbits around female sexuality.

She turned out not to be alone. Soranet, a website established in 1999, was a sexually exploitative community, a place where not only were spy-cam porn from female bathrooms uploaded but the site was more of a rape cartel, where two to three posts were uploaded every day, seeking males who wanted to rape drugged women they had prepared, or where photo of women's bodies distorted, taken by male rapists were regularly shared (Jang 2020); the website had 1,210,000 members, and 460,000 videos exploiting kids and children were also uploaded (K.-S. Lee 2017). Korea has a shameful pattern of giving lenient sentence to perpetrators of gender-based violence. Not surprisingly, the website's owner was sentenced to only four years of imprisonment.
I define Young-Ji's case as sexual exploitation because uploading such a video online causes a great fiscal benefit to the uploader. Even if he did not receive monetary benefits, he could have obtained a sense of community and authority as a distinguished person who could bring such "high-quality" materials. "Nth room case," a gender-based crime where men in their late teens and early twenties enslaved numerous minor girls through an app called Telegram, forcing them to perform various "slave missions" such as slitting their arm and putting dangerous objects into their vagina, threatening the victims that their sexual photos would be released if they did not obey. Here, the male uploaders and leaders were revered and exalted in their own group chat for enslaving the women, and such recognition was worth pursuing by these men (Souza 2020; Yoo 2020; Joohee Kim and Chang 2021). Soranet also mobilized male users with competitions, giving them more points to those who uploaded more videos (K.-S. Lee 2017). I argue that males in the Nth room case, the Soranet case, and in Yeong-Ji's "revenge porn" story all benefited either fiscally or socially, fulfilling their specific desire, at the cost of the human rights of women.

Hee-Su disclosed that the sexual assault she suffered from her male kin and her disappointment in the repetitive attitude from her ex-boyfriends sexually objectifying her led her to join 4B. Her brothers exploited her body since she was a kid by realizing their sexual desires, and the whole family, including her mother, did not protect her even if they knew everything. For them, Hee-Su said, protecting the appearance of a nuclear-family was more important than saving her life. She cut ties off with them when her mother prevented Hee-Su from contacting one of her brothers' bride-to-be. Her mother desperately wanted him to get married, but she believed that the rapist should not get married to any woman. She was not only dehumanized into the gender role of a daughter who must not cause any trouble but was also exploited, sexually, by her brothers.

> During many nights, things happened under the blanket. I closed my eyes because I was scared. Since I was not seeing anything, who knows, it could be any of them, including my father…For them, I was merely a sex toy…I find it disgusting that all of them function as if they are normal men who can get married.

From 2013 to 2020, around 300 to 500 instances of sexual violence among kinship relations happened each year (S.-G. Kim and Song 2021). The biological father was the most common perpetrator, with girls making up 80% of the victims (Seo and Lee 2007). During the interview, I remembered the moment weeks ago when she put down her ringing cell phone when she and several other friends were hanging out. Her friends stopped laughing, as if they knew something was going on. Sitting next to her, I asked, "Are you not going to pick up the phone?" She answered, straightening her back, staring at the void: "This is my mom, and I am trying to end my relationship with her."

Thesis Overview

Young Koreans hopelessly call their country "hell" (E.-H. Park 2015) because many feel that a happy and sustainable life is unattainable. Competitive job markets, toxic work cultures, unrealistic house prices, and a sense of community deprecating are the main reasons for such pessimism (ibid). Some argue that the term "hell" is a hyperbole. While I agree, I also want to ask whether the average GDP and the nation being a "pretty peaceful place" due to absence of war (Borowiec n.d.)—commonly used arguments to qualify the phrase "hell"—apply to everyone in the nation. Whose wealth is that, and whose peace is that?

The majority of my informants were in a precarious economic situation. They were working multiple part-time jobs to sustain their student life. Those who work full-time meticulously monitored their spending. Their private lives inside the 4B community were peaceful, but society was constantly disrupting their peace with misogyny and gendered-discriminations. Missiles might be a mere diplomatic fake alarm from North Korea, but what if the "warfare" constantly happens in the daily lives of marginalized people including people with disabilities, those who are impoverished, those with queer identities, and women (J. M. Nam 2023) without tanks, bombs and missiles crossing into the country? Feminist peace researchers (FPR) expand the notion of peace from traditional battlefields to daily lives, questioning if peace is truly achieved when people still face violences, including hate crimes and domestic/sexual violence (Wibben and Donahoe 2020). Their questions then redirect me to ponder what "war" is, whether the notion of war should be limited to tanks, missiles, and bombs.

In previous section, I showed how the society dehumanizes, excludes, and exploits women by offering detailed gender landscapes enmeshed with 4B women's critical awareness and experiences. I built my arguments on local contexts of gendered Korea, a seemingly glorious nation that curates a gendered "hell" for women. Now, taking FPR's theories (B. A. Reardon 2015; S. Choi 2021; Väyrynen et al. 2020; Wibben and Donahoe 2020) as a premise, I start with the assumption that women's current situations in Korea is far from being in a place of peace and security. I answer two questions throughout my whole thesis: (1) *Why* do 4B women decide to live without men? (2) *How* do they live without men? Answers to both questions are melded in each chapter. In the chapter "Feminism," I discuss how 4B women establish their feminist worldviews and what those perspectives look like. In chapter "Loves," I discuss how 4B women critically view the naturalized definition of love, then ruminates a new concept of love that can nourish them in a healthy way. In the chapter "Ambitions," I discuss how 4B women imagine their future differently after joining the 4B movement. Throughout this thesis, my main argument is that *4B women create their own "social order" (Gershon 2019), called 4B, to deal with and potentially change the gendered, patriarchal reality they live in*. Creating their own lifestyle and community that goes against the social norm to look for a new way to nourish themselves in the society where they are dehumanized, excluded, and exploited seemed to be a reasonable response from my view. By problematizing their given gender roles, heteronormativity, and patriarchy, those women go on the unusual journey to find their own happiness.

Positionality, Ethics, and Methodologies

Previous Research

In this section, I describe my positionalities, ethics, and methodologies. Previous research about the 4B movement is explained since my criticism against them affected my positionality.

The 4B movement appeared in several Korean and international newspapers (Seo-Hyun Kim 2020; J.-H. Lee, Choi, and Kim 2018; S.-M. Cho 2020; Sussman 2023; AFP 2019; H.-Y. Son 2021; S.-H. Jeon 2020; S.-S. Cho 2023). The movement also received academic attention from scholars in Korea (J. Park 2022; M. Kang, Kim, and Jung 2020; J. Lee and Jeong 2020; Jinsook Kim 2021; J. Park 2022; E. Jeong 2020).

Domestic newspapers do not particularly write in favor of the movement. Many articles correlate the movement with the detrimental birth rate numbers, giving the impression that the movement caused the low birth rate. They often end with the urgent notion of the "nation's fate" instead of pointing out the structural (gender) inequalities that cause such low birth rates (S.-S. Cho 2023; Y.-S. Nam 2020). Such discourses reinforce the everlasting sexist belief that confines women's role only in relation to the nation: biological reproduction for the sake of the survival of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997).

News articles treat the movement as something controversial, focusing on the movement's potential detrimental results, such as the low birth rate and "gender conflict" (S.-H. Jeon 2020); some urge women and men to stop hating each other, as if the movement is caused by simple hostility between genders rather than structural inequality (ibid). Another article does not explain any context behind the movement but juxtaposes the reactions from each female- and male-dominant online communities to the movement (S.-S. Cho 2023). Such juxtaposition gives the impression that gender equality has been achieved in Korea, where both genders can simply debate on equal standings. As Lee Na-Young says, one should not label women's feminisms and men's reactions against them as "gender *conflict*" because the term "conflict" should be only used when two parties are equal (N.-Y. Lee 2016).

Research articles offer deeper analysis, but no article had yet utilized anthropological fieldworks. I believe some unique data could be found through anthropological fieldworks. My fieldwork allowed me to investigate people's mindsets and behaviors over months and to meet each of them more than

three times to have deep conversations. During the process, I realized that they were wrongly depicted by some researchers.

First, I found that my informants are more complicated than "radical" feminists. The definition of "radical" feminists from my informants and from some established women's studies scholars differ. Some established women's studies scholars categorize 4B women as "radical" feminists because they believe both radical feminists and 4B women exclude "queers, transgenders, the disabled, the poor, and more" (B.-M. Kim 2018, 138; H.-M. Lee 2019). While some "radical" people from online produce politics of exclusion and urge people to focus only on issues of "women", such stance could not represent my informants. I assume depending solely on online observations instead of meeting people produced such limited analysis. Scholars might have generalized the people whom they never met by some signifiers they could read from online. Many informants explicitly told me they reject the label "radical" since they want to focus more on spreading feminism than clarifying the labels. Several told me that they are confused about what "radical" means; their activisms, such as caring about environment and animal rights, are not "radical" according to some people online. Even for those who wanted to be called "radical," the definitions of "radical" feminists presented online did not match with their thoughts and identities. Many are enthusiastic about the environment, bringing tumblers everywhere and sharing their zero-waste life on social media. Some do not eat meat because they care about animals. One informant corrected my pessimistic vision of young boys growing up to be misogynists. Not all, but some people had a gay feminist friend, genderqueer friend, and a straight male friend. One preached to me the importance of intersectionality. One studies Islam, arguing that the world vilifies the religion and its followers. One's favorite YouTuber is a transgender woman. One repeatedly emphasized the importance of defending all women even if they do not act as feminists according to one's standards. Many understood the inevitability of poverty in the capitalist structures, thus arguing that women in every economic class should be protected. One envisioned that, through the 4B movement, women would be able to assert their opinion wherever they end up being, whether the top of the capitalist ladder or on the lowest rung. Their focus on "material interests" (B.-M. Kim 2018, 38) does not signify that they believe every woman should be on top: rather, they were rather infuriated by the male-centered capitalist order, thus promoting the importance of women gaining financial literacy and dreaming big. Such "materialistic" discourses did not necessarily mean that they believe that all women becoming fiscally successful was the only solution for gender equality. Therefore, from what I observed, 4B women are more complex to be called "radical" feminists, if some scholars believe that "radical" means excluding certain groups of people.

Also, I argue that some voices are overrepresented online. People who write online are few, while people who learn from those online sources, who simply read instead of writing, are many. Those two groups are not identical. From what I found, they were more of an observer, when it comes to online discourses than producers. Even if some feminists confined their thinking based on "flawed" online sources, such a state was never permanent. 4B women learned about feminism from both online and offline resources, by independently reading books or seeking knowledge with friends. My informants, although they were first exposed to feminism through online resources, later extended their learning offline through book clubs, study groups, and intense debates with friends. During the interview, they would take out their e-book reader, showing numerous books they read. I must mention that their inspiration does not mean that they absorb everything they see.

Second, due to the generational shift, some scholars from older generations than that of 4B women seemed to misunderstand 4B women as part of "post-feminism" and who utilize neoliberalism in feminist language (Jinsook Kim 2021; M. Kang, Kim, and Jung 2020). This analysis would baffle the 4B women I met. 4B women pursue staunch feminism by discarding heterosexuality amid backlash, and they reconfigure gendered capitalism that gives more chances to men into something different, with their countercultural strategy of deliberately bonding with women. For 4B women to be "post-feminism" or neoliberals in disguise of feminism, 4B women should believe feminism is no longer needed and should pitch for individual change rather than structural change of patriarchy and heterosexuality. I thought that the 4B women's core philosophies, which are criticisms against how women's gender roles, sexuality, and patriarchy are taken for granted, were too critical of structures to be post-feminism. Also, this generation has lived with neoliberalism from a young age. Some language is used as a communicative symbol, a replica of common idioms, instead of meaning every word literally. For instance, 4B women kept telling me they should "not buy" men; considering this a neoliberal phrase, I asked what they meant, asking if they had any particular reason to refer sexually and romantically refusing men to buying and selling. My informants looked at me vainly as if I were asking a worthless question; their answers were that they were simply referring to the commonly used phrases. As Chicano/a scholars criticized Anglo anthropologists for failing "to understand when the natives were joking and when they were speaking seriously," (Behar 1996, 162), I argue that some scholars (mis)interpreted 4B women's language by taking their words far too literally, missing the possibility that this generation uses naturalized neoliberal language like idioms. Inspired by my question, one participant started thinking. She proposed that maybe the phrase came from idioms used in female-dominated online communities, where boycotting certain companies' goods or certain

celebrities' albums is a way that women can express their political goals. Language is powerful, but sometimes, contexts are empty, a mere repertoire of everyday language they hear. These findings that go against previous research about the 4B women formed the base of my research, affecting my positionality.

Positionality

Malinowski used the word "cult" to describe the scholars' obsession over "pure fact," arguing that "pure fact" is the "*idea* that knowledge only counts as such when purified of its social texture" (Pandian 2019, 20). Bernard also said that "total objectivity…is a myth" (Bernard 2017, 278). When "pure fact" is an idea and that objectivity is a myth, then it becomes a duty of a researcher to disclose their positionality since it is what makes their "objectivity" and "fact" found from the research.

I believe all research is inevitably personal, thus political: a researcher should *choose* a topic, methodology, and theory. Their subjectivity inevitably involves. Behar argues that "a mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place" inevitably becomes "personal" (Behar 1996, 5–8). Some choose anthropology in "desire for social transformation" or some choose it because they expect the discipline to be "expansive and plural space" (Pandian 2019, 2–3). I chose anthropology fascinated by its methodology of spending time with informants. I assumed that a methodology of "being there" (Hume and Mulcock 2004, xii, xvi) opens new sets of data as mentioned in the last section. I chose the topic of 4B women because I assumed my observations could add a fuller narrative to this group of people whom I believe deserve to be recorded in a certain way. I argue that 4B women are misunderstood due to their cautious, closed stance when it comes to inviting new people. By producing fuller narrative, I hope their stories could be later translated into different time-space if anyone needs their creative methods to counter their given lives. This stance might have affected the knowledge production in my writing.

Also, I gained access to the 4B women's their daily lives despite their closed culture due to my privilege as a feminist who studied the 4B movement on my own. My positionality as an "insider" benefited me. I was lucky to be liked and accepted by them. My informants generously decided to trust me especially when I shared my political stance which agrees and empathizes with the validity and legitimacy of their movement. They were happy to help me when I made it clear that I would help audiences who are unfamiliar with Korean society understand the movement in deeper

perspectives. However, I later realized that my positionality was more complicated than I had expected, since my role as a researcher forced me to move out of the situation and observe them, even when I wanted to mindlessly hang out with them.

Ethics

Following the principle "Do No Harm" ("AAA Statement on Ethics" n.d.), my top priority was my informants' safety. Current backlash in Korea was my biggest concern. To protect my informants from potential yet probable physical and verbal harassment, my principle was to only talk with them in private spaces, such as a secure seminar room, informants' places, or a closed room of a café. My informants and I did our best not to talk about feminism in public places where young adult men existed: although the voting discrepancy was not huge, such as the progressive candidate earning 47.8 percent and the conservative earning 48.6 percent, the latter who actively mobilized people through its antifeminist discourse, won (H. Park and Lee 2022). Their campaign "struck the biggest nerve among younger male voters by pledging to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family" (H. Kang 2022). "72.5 percent of male voters in their 20s voted conservative, a proportion higher even than male voters in their 60s and older," in a belief that they are "victims of feminism" (S. N. Park 2021); the survey shows "58.6 percent of [South] Korean men in their 20s said they strongly opposed feminism" (S. N. Park 2021); 79% of men in their 20s believe that they are "'seriously discriminated against' because of their gender" (Bicker 2022); hundreds of young men gathered to join the anti-#MeToo protest (Bicker 2022); men are cyberbullying and threatening to kill women who claim to be a feminist (Grouard 2021); after constantly being cyber-bullied by male online followers who accused her of being a feminist, both a female gaming YouTuber and her mother committed suicide (Bicker 2022). Anti-feminist backlash is severe at the moment that some women even feel "cautious even picking up a feminist book" at campus, afraid of her male peers in their twenties. (H. Kang 2022). On November 6, 2023, while working at a convenience store, a woman with short hair was beaten up by a young male customer in his twenties, who said "feminist should be beaten" (J.-H. Jeon and Kim 2023). The woman is in a severe condition (ibid).

However, a few informants insisted to get some fresh air, saying they do not mind having conversation in open restaurants and cafes. Some constantly refused my suggestions to stay inside together. Although we experienced hostile looks from people whenever we mentioned the word "feminism," no harm neither to my informant nor to myself happened.

I anonymized my informants' personal information, such as their hometown, their job, their name, and their school to prevent anyone from figuring out who they are in real life. 4B women, who explicitly believe and state that they do not want to engage with men romantically or sexually, are the subject of the most hostility and are branded as "anti-social" in Korea. While their feminism is valid from my perspective, the society does not think so. Therefore, I should not risk any possible identification since being a feminist means one would lose her job: From 2016 onwards, at least fourteen women reported that they were treated unfairly for having feminist identities, such as being fired or suspended at work (Y.-S. Han 2023). Also, male online users pressured one gaming company to fire their female employee for following social media accounts of feminist NGOs from her personal social media (MBICNEWS 2018). In 2023, another company fired their female illustrator after her personal social media was found out by the company's male online users (Y.-S. Han 2023); In her social media, she supported anti-spy-cam protests (Gong and Sullivan 2018) and decriminalization of abortion.

All recordings and fieldnote-writings from interviews, conversations, and deep hanging out were only done after I received an explicit consent. Consent is a continuous process, as my supervisor told me, so I regularly reminded the participants of the fact that my research and observation was ongoing when I were with them. I stopped the recording device or writing when they asked me to. When my informants wanted to have a deeper conversation with me, in relation to my thesis topic, but did not want to be recorded, I listened to their stories as a friend, not a researcher. Information gathered from those conversations are vaporized.

Methodology

I used ethnographic interviews in which I strategically expressed "cultural ignorance" (Spradley 1979, 61) to the participants to induce them to explain things to me step-by-step. Participant observations (Bernard 2017) were also used to find out how 4B women interact with each other. Deep hanging outs (Geertz 1998) allowed me to know the informants' deeper emotions and untold stories. I also used online ethnography (Boellstorff 2008) to observe how what type of philosophies they would share, by reading their posts uploaded. As someone who was doing "home" anthropology, I did my best to use both insider and outsider perspectives to turn my informants' and my "everyday place into a thing called a 'field'" (Madden 2017, 52).

4B community is “everywhere and nowhere,” as my informant told me; therefore, I used patchwork ethnography (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020) to capture full range of their lives. 4B women, as most people in Korea, did not share a flat all in one place. Some lived together, but most lived with their girlfriends, by themselves from government-subsidized buildings, or still with their parents to save money. Therefore, a traditional single-site village ethnography was not feasible. Also, I travelled to various sites in Korea including Seoul, cities in Gyeonggi province, several other towns, and an island to observe the participants, since they are all dispersed in the nation. Also, since this was a study of social movement and its people, I followed them into various sites to see how the same person reveals different aspects of their stories and thoughts accordance with the location. In seminar rooms, I focused on formal interviews understanding their philosophies and interpreting life histories. Sometimes, after receiving their consent, I was at their places, gathering details about their residence and how they decorated their house. Observing the same people hanging out with friends allowed me to observe their social personalities. Knowledge-wise, my data is a quilt of my participants’ narrated life histories in relation to their understanding of patriarchy and gender, their philosophy about feminism, their observations about Korean society, and their life updates. Communal activities such as commensality involving alcohol, shopping, playing sports, traveling, playing board games were suggested by my informants who wanted to do something fun. Engaging in these fun activities helped us to break the ice and ease each other’s anxiety.

I actively incorporated the anthropological idea that informants are “thinkers and theorists in their own right” (Pandian 2019, 1). Million ways exist in terms of framing gendered landscapes of Korea; however, to make sense of the 4B movement, the exact landscapes that the informants problematized when explaining their perspectives are the most relevant information. Therefore, I gathered pieces of gendered landscapes that my informants problematized, and I categorized them after adding more contexts, as I showed in the section “Analytical Frameworks.” Due to the limited time, my informants could not extensively explain the background information of the Korean society, neither they thought it was always necessary since they considered me as insider in some ways. Anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee had a similar experience that the more her Bulgarian speaking became better, the more her informants in Bulgaria abbreviated details, assuming that she already knew what they would talk about (Ghodsee 2016).

I was already involved in the 4B movement years before I started MA here. I used a snowball method starting from few friends that I have already known, and when I was recruiting people whom I had not known before, I established rapport with my other participants through social media. I

made it clear that I was a researcher writing on the 4B movement. We shared personal, and emotional stories about living in Korea as women through private messages. Some reached out to me after reading my advertisements, and I reached out to some of them. When the participants agreed to join the project, I shared the information sheet about my project along with the interview questions enough time before the interview. I conducted the interview only after asking the participants if they had understood everything on the sheet. I also asked if they had any questions before starting. On average, three to four interviews happened for each twenty informants and each interview lasted at least an hour to often three or five hours. The more we met, the more minute details they shared. Some informants trusted me and offered me a chance to join their leisure activities such as travelling to the countryside, playing games together, inviting to their gatherings. I was an "observing participant" (Bernard 2017, 276) who participated almost every communal activity and hanging out that they were doing. I wrote down the details every night when I was alone. I am still in their lives, maintaining good friendship who can share each other's vulnerabilities.

Ethnography is a fiction in some sense (Geertz 1975); to balance the "fictional" and "true" parts, I constantly asked my informants what they thought about the arguments I came up with. When my informants disagreed with my interpretation, I discarded that argument. During the interviews, I often presented a summary of what they had said so far, asking if I had understood them correctly. When they said I misunderstood, I immediately reflected their words in my notes and amended my interpretations. When I wanted to persuade them of my stance, I gave it a shot. Sometimes they approved, and sometimes they did not. Any argument that they did not approve of was discarded.

I incorporated indigenous scholarships about Korean society written by "insider" scholars not to solely depend on English-language sources from Western academia. Anthropology started with colonialism where "external" people visited the place of "others" to interpret those "others," in the hopes of smoother colonization (Bakker, Cohen, and Faaij 2021, 22). Behar says the discipline was "born out of the European colonial impulse to know others in order to lambast them, better manage them, or exalt them" (Behar 1996, 4). In hope of decolonizing the discipline but also to balance "insider" and "outsider" perspectives, I used both Korean and non-Korean scholarships, hoping to formulate the most contextualized details.

Chapter One: Feminism

> *But we are not only oppressed as women; we are oppressed by having to be women—or men as the case may be. I personally feel that the feminist movement must dream of even more than the elimination of the oppression of women. It must dream of the elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles.*
>
> Gayle Rubin (1990), *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex*

Past-life

I was invited to join a two-day trip exclusively for 4B women. The trip took place in a small guesthouse on an island. The island was the current residence of some of the trip's members and the hometown of many. Around thirty women joined. During the trip, we bought food from nearby grocery stores together, chopped the vegetables together, boiled the jjigae together in a communal kitchen, grilled the meat together at the barbeque outside, drank soda and alcohol together, and sang and danced together. Jovial laughter and chatter filled the house, regardless of the incessant mosquito bites and humid weather. Having spent time during the day, we became more comfortable with each other. We opened up and shared personal stories related to the 4B movement. In the next morning, we gathered around with messy hair and puffy eyes and cooked ramyŏn together for our last big breakfast.

When the night approached, all gathered into a large circle sitting on the floor. The game was about to start. The rule was simple. Everyone takes out her hand, showing five fingers spread. Then, a person would say "anyone who ____, fold down your finger!" Everyone would take a turn, filling the blank in the sentence. Anyone whose five fingers were all folded down had to drink alcohol in front of them, or soda if she does not drink. The game was full of maniacal laughter mainly because the blank in the sentence had to be related to the women's "past-lives"—the time before their 4B vow. Therefore, blank in the sentence functions as a mean tease. This game allowed the 4B women to shape a sense of community by acknowledging that everyone shares embarrassing history of "past-lives"; Those separate but shared memories were their self-portraits of actively having participated in various gendered practices, such as excessive grooming, only choosing feminine clothes, dating men, and many others. They found their past embarrassing, but at the same time entertaining, since they could confidently say that they are in a better place now.

4B women, when gathered to drink, would sometimes use these humor codes called *jeonsaeng*, meaning "past-life" in Korean. In philosophical or religious notion, this term means one's life before her birth; however, for 4B women, *jeonsaeng* means the time when the 4B women actively performed heteronormative gender roles. The word indicates that 4B women view their life extremely different before and after the vow of 4B. 4B women used to emotionally and economically invested in loving men, trying to fit into the role of a "good woman," doing most of the emotion work in the relationship, sacrificing her life outside of the relationship for her boyfriend's happiness, putting money into his wallet while letting him pay the date to make him look "manly" in the public, and many others.

> Anyone who has worn the tennis skirt... [people screaming in shame and bursting into laughter] ...fold down your finger!

Shouted the woman whose turn it was to tease others, as she grinned in her face red full of joy. Around around half of the women folded down their fingers. Women moved heads left and right to see who had folded down their finger, only to find that many of them had to fold down their fingers. They succumbed to another round of laughter. One with sporty short hair wearing a soccer team uniform also folded down her finger. Everyone stared at her folded finger and then hysterically laughed. "What? You?" People could not believe that even she wore a tennis skirt in her "past-life" to look cute. Buried in endless laughter along with screams such as "I cannot imagine you wearing the tennis skirt!" she also laughed, shuddered, and solemnly nodded: "Yes, I have. Come on—It is past-life!" All women laughed louder than before. The tennis skirt was a symbol of cuteness and sexiness back in 2016 and onwards. Such a style was popular among teenagers and young women after several iconic K-Pop girl groups wore them. Many women during that era, including me, desired to resemble these sexy and adorable singers, hoping it would appeal to men. Kim analyzes that "as the Korean state mobilized…young, docile female workers into the bottom of the hierarchy of capital accumulation…today's K-pop idols are conditioned as an obedient, disciplined, and sexualized labor force, directly manufactured by male corporate elites…" (G. Kim 2019, 33). Kim's parallel between female laborers during the industrial period in Korea and K-pop idols nowadays reminded me how K-pop idols being conditioned into certain cultural ideals are also in parallel with women in heterosexual relationships with men. Their critical stance against such sexualization in K-Pop was symbolic.

The game continued. Another shouted, “OK! Anyone who has had a boyfriend, fold down your finger!” Again, the majority of them had to fold down their finger. Someone shouted with a smile, “It is unfair! I am straight! She is lesbian!” The room was full of laughter. “Anyone who did piercings—do it! Yeah, fold down your finger!" another said. Then, the joyful contestation and friendly quarrel would take place, such as some women defending “Hey, I think piercing is fine” while some would respond, “Nope!” Discussion continued; No one was afraid of sharing different opinions.

Informants who had heterosexual relationships before often told me how they are much happier now; when their boyfriend told them to clear the acne of their skin or commented on their bodies, they became extremely depressed, believing that they failed as a girlfriend. One informant explicitly reflected that whenever the relationship between her and her boyfriend was not going well, her self-esteem was harmed since she (unknowingly) believed that her worth depended on her relationship with her boyfriend. Some dated men and automatically envisioned their future as a wife and a mother, unknowingly feeling depressed. Only later they found that those were not the future that they truly want. Their sadness in their past that they described to me made a stark contrast to the delightful laughter that was ceaselessly happening during the trip.

Abu-Lughod argues how resistance could be an index of existing power systems that actors react, something that “tell(s) us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42). By making fun of their past *themselves*, the 4B women show how they have been living in a society that pushes them to cultivate and maintain a specific type of femininity and pursue a gendered version of themselves by cultivating their desires in a certain way. 4B women mock their past selves in terms of how they were pressured to perform heteronormative gender-roles and adhered to heterosexuality. I concluded that the 4B women are specifically rebelling against the power structures of gender roles and heterosexuality, since they view that those powers oppress them.

4B women learned how women inside gendered power relations were dehumanized, excluded, and exploited. From those insights, they tackle bigger structures, gender roles and heterosexuality. Their transformation by discarding gender roles and heterosexuality was so uprooting that it deserved the analogy of them being born again. Now, they laugh at their distant past.

Escaping and Dismantling Patriarchy

According to informants, gender roles and heterosexuality are enmeshed, sustaining the patriarchy. Here, I analyze my informants' feminist perspectives to explain why they think that the 4B practice is the solution to escape and dismantle the patriarchy.

Feminist anthropologists were curious why women have been oppressed, universally. To answer, Chodorow argues about the psychological development of how girls and boys are raised into certain gender roles (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, 8); Rosaldo argues about the social emphasis on a "woman's maternal role" (ibid); and Ortner argues how the socialized and culturalized biology of females are linked "cultural definitions of the female that tend to be degrading" (ibid). Rubin introduced the concept "sex/gender system" to explain the culturalized parts of gender and sexuality (Rubin 1975). They all argue that women's oppression is caused not by the biological aspects but rather by how such biological aspects are culturally and sexually rendered.

While these texts do not explicitly touch the term patriarchy, the social and cultural aspect being the reason for women's oppression goes well with Ortner's and 4B women's theory about patriarchy. Women's biology or bodies are not something that oppress women: it is how the society interpret women's bodies and biology in male-centered view, imposing certain roles on those biology and bodies through heterosexual relationships, marriage, and reproduction. Thus, women could be saved if they reject such imposition. Women's bodies and biology do not exist to be married, have sex, or to give birth (with men); neither they exist to be oppressed by men. They exist for the sake of existence: 4B feminism strive to peel off the naturalized cultural notions of women's bodies, and they view such cultural imposition is mainly happening through heterosexuality, gender roles, and patriarchy.

Ortner defines "patriarchy" as both "system of binary gendered power" and intersectional powers (Ortner 2022, 1). Patriarchy could be "a social formation of male-gendered power with a particular structure that can be found with striking regularity in many different arenas of social life," such as the culture of the military (ibid, 2). According to Ortner, patriarchy is run by a strict and systemic hierarchy from highest to lowest rank, contains a social contract where lower ranked people receive protection in exchange for their absolute obedience toward superior (ibid, 3). Rape against women is treated with "near-total impunity" since non-men are not part of the social contract (ibid, 3). Moreover, since only certain ideal versions of men can qualify as a member of such a club, such as

those closer to white supremacy, heteronormativity, and ableness, members would mold their identity to be able to fit in (ibid, 4-5). Therefore, patriarchy is not only binary-gendered but also intersectional.

Ortner (2022) infers that patriarchy is something strong enough to prevail over society, ideology, and people: it is also something powerful that sets invincible rules that decide whom to include, exclude, abuse, and protect, to maintain a certain social order.

Then how do 4B women define patriarchy? Yeong-Ji, an activist working at a feminist NGO, defines patriarchy as:

> Patriarchy … the biggest thing is that *a man and a woman makes a family through marriage*. … and through that process, they *maintain certain gender roles*. And *the stereotype of what family should look like*... And that itself is exploitative to women. Ongoing through generations... That is the patriarchy.

For her, patriarchy is something that decides what "normal" family is (couple bonded with heterosexual marriage), and what "normal" role of genders is. It is also immensely powerful that it is repeated throughout history. When asked why she thinks that the patriarchy is exploitative to women, she answered:

> Without sacrifice of women, this specific type of composition of family never sustains. Women stay home, do house chores, take care of children. *Only then*, men can go out and earn money. But think how a girl who grew up in such an environment. Wouldn't she take for granted of the scene in which women wear chaperon, cook, and care children, while men always lay down on couch at home, exhausted from work?

She specifies what "normal" the patriarchy delineates: a system where a girl growing up to become a mother, who are fully responsible to house chores and belong to home while men are the breadwinners. Fixed notions of gender roles with hierarchy was her key understanding.

When she talks about what a patriarchal "culture" looks like, her argument resonates with that of Ortner's (2022). Yeong-Ji defines "patriarchal culture" as where "men are given more opportunities," "women are harassed and mocked," "women are thought to be inferior to men," and "men are thought to be the leader." She said, "…people take for granted that the leader will be a man. But women could also be a team leader. Women could also be a representative. But people never assume so." As Ortner (2022) thinks patriarchy positions male as exclusive members, Yeong-Ji thinks in an

equivalent way. She argues that such a stereotype is dangerous because it will pressure women, since women in a significant role should have a "special reason" to be there, to justify why they were invited to the boy's only club. She told me that she also suffers from such a pressure, whenever she is given any vital role.

Ji-Yeon, whom I mentioned in the Introduction, also gave me a definition of patriarchy: "Patriarchy? I think it stands for *women marrying men,* and naturally maintaining the stagnant *gender roles* that men and women are supposed to have, in Korean society." Here, she used the word "naturally" to emphasize how patriarchy is such a powerful force that determines norm. Like Yeong-Ji, she also mentions heterosexual marriage and gender roles as a definition of patriarchy, something that confines people by requiring them to perform roles which they are "supposed to."

Dan-Bi, who came from the distant province, is an engineering student in Seoul. As mentioned in the Introduction, she experienced patriarchy at home. Her mother had forced her to come home early to eat dinner since her mother believed the family should be all together at one table every evening. She punished her in various ways for not being a "nice" daughter, exploited her (care) labor, and refused to let her leave the hometown when Dan-Bi pledged that she wanted to transfer to a better university. Dan-Bi also perceives patriarchy as a system that could operate only when people commit to their gender roles, as if each solider of the military has a specific and rigid responsibility and task. Usually it was women who should commit more, confining themselves harder into a narrower roles than men. "I think that patriarchy would *never* survive without mother's effort. I feel like mothers are putting themselves into this mold of patriarchy *so hard,* like eeek! eeek!" By emphasizing how much transformative effort women should go through to fit in to patriarchy, she argued that not only the gender roles, but also people's loyalty to these gender roles are essential in maintaining its patriarchy. Requiring the commitment, loyalty, and rigidness of the role all resonated with Ortner's explanation about military as a patriarchal trope (2022). Thus, 4B women's focus on losing their previous (unconscious) loyalty to gender roles make more sense than ever.

Yeong-Ah, an engineering researcher I mentioned in the Introduction, is a victim of domestic abuse as many other informants I met. Domestic abuse/violence victims were molested by either their father or their mother. Who abused them was less important, I thought, since both shows the pattern that they were punished when they did not fit the "template" of patriarchy. While the main abuser was her father, Yeong-Ah revealed how her mother view patriarchy.

> I thought my mom was dead. Because that was all my kins told me …. Then later when I found out that she was not dead but divorced, I was so happy. She was also so nice to me and my sister when we met … But later I heard that she and my dad were divorced because she 'didn't want to see any of Suh's people.' To be honest, isn't it the case that one's family name can be changed? I supposed that she deemed me and my sister as a part of my father's body…" I interrupted, excited. "I think that's the aspect of patriarchy; I mean, you and your sister were made by both her and your dad…

I interrupted her, excited: "I think that's part of patriarchy. You and your sister were made by *both* her and her husband…" Yeong-Ah nodded: "But she thought that we are his kids (because we share his last name). I think that is why she left us." Her eyes became red from holding tears.

Patriarchal systems exclude women, as Ortner argued (2022); While Dan-Bi's mother was such an active participant of patriarchy, Yeong-Ah's mother was excluded from fully feeling that her own biological daughters were her children. She avoided her own kids because their last names were "Suh", not hers,, as if she were running away from trauma. Patrilineal last names being the social norm indicates the gender roles of fathers and mothers. While children can be claimed by fathers as their, mothers are left with ambiguous position. Even if she grew Yeong-Ah and her sister in her belly for nine months, the culture gives her babies only the father's last names when they leave her body and enter into the realm of patriarchy. Mother's gender roles focused on delivering the baby and father's those on claiming his genealogy again show how patriarchy operates with gender roles with heterosexuality.

The 4B women's rebellion against gender roles and heterosexuality constantly reminded me of parallels with Rubin's theory of the sex/gender system, the term she created to describe a domain of social life where biology becomes cultural. Combining the insights from Freud, Engel, and Lacan, she discussed how the domain of social life is often imposed a cultural meaning on neutrally existing biological selves and renders meanings from there (Rubin 1975). She says:

> Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained. Every society has some form of organized economic activities. Sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained. Every society also has a sex/gender system - a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be (ibid, 39).

As Rubin argues, 4B women also do not think that the biology of women is inferior. They rather focus on the culture that is imposed on women's minds and bodies that results in confining them into

certain set of gender roles. To not be transformed by the culture of patriarchy, one must leave the patriarchy and rebuild one's own life, forgetting all the notions learned about what a woman is from her early age.

One might ask, at this point, why these women are not changing this social order of patriarchy by staying inside the system, like a rebellious insider. I asked this to several informants, and one of them looked at me, baffled. Ha-Eun, a 4B woman in her late twenties, was then studying in a government-funded program to learn coding, hoping to get a job in an IT sector:

> Look at married women near you. Young or old. Do you see if they are still working? For me, no. I worked in a small lab when I was an undergraduate student. There were two women whom I admired. They both published articles, several articles, in a good journal during their lab life. Both married and disappeared.

I asked, "Why don't' they just come out and work?" She looked at me as if I was stupid. "How can they work when they got pregnant right after the marriage, gave birth, and few months later got pregnant again? I think they are occupied." As I have extensively proposed in the Introduction, for women to balance work and family is extremely challenging in current situations of Korea.

Ji-Won, a feminist friend of mine I mentioned in Introduction, reacted similarly when I asked why one need does to "escape" the patriarchy instead of staying inside and change it. She said:

> My aunt was my role model. I looked up to her. She went to a good university, and she is still working in a big firm, promoted in her early ages. One day, I eavesdropped her saying that a woman should study hard *to meet the man she deserves*… A person whom I revered said that a woman does not need a prestigious alma mater, like her, if she wants to get married and stay home. For a young girl, it was really shocking to me. I still vividly remember her words even today.

Probably, what her aunt mentioned about a woman's fate was not necessarily demeaning or sexist but rather observational from her lived experience. I would never know which tone she used. However, I focused on the fact that Ji-Won interpreted her aunt's words as humiliating for women. Her shock was exacerbated since her role model said them; I later found out that she was shocked especially because her role model was assuming the existence of women in relation to men, since her words were about tips to get a good husband, or to become a stay-at-home mom. Here, Ji-Won experienced how fragile the subjectivity of women is in patriarchal structures. She later observing how her role model was demeaned by her husband for "not being smart," or how it was only female

kins discussing their plans about family with their husbands but never males with their wives; Ji-Won felt that in a patriarchal structure, men and women are positioned differently. She wondered why her aunts respected her uncles, but her uncles did not respect her aunts. According to both Ji-Won and Ha-Eun, the power of patriarchy is too strong that even "powerful" women are heavily affected. Such condition, they thought, would not be ideal for feminist activism.

Subjectivity

So far, I connected some of my informants' arguments and formed narratives to show the complex web of patriarchy in people's lives that moves with mechanisms of gender roles and heterosexuality. I now want to expand more on the outcome of the 4B women's worldview of patriarchy, gender roles, and heterosexuality. Since they believe that it is most effective to dismantle the patriarchy by de-naturalizing heterosexual marriage and gender roles being social, cultural norms, they have decided not to marry men, date men, have sex with them, or have babies with them. You-Jin, a kindergarten teacher in her late twenties, said: "Patriarchy needs women. Even though men keep staying same, and yell at home "Give me the remote controller!" or "…please, give me dinner!" what is the point of them looking for us *when we would not be there*?" I answered, "Then I guess they will do those [things] by themselves?" You-Jin, excited, said happily. "Yes! The 4B movement is a declaration that we will stop having relationships with men. So, I think it definitely helps in terms of tackling patriarchy. Certainly." I asked, "Certainly?" She replied right away, "Yes. Certainly." What then happens after they took their lifetime vow, especially to the informants' psychology? According to most of my informants, they experienced better subjectivity which leads to a more confident, happy life.

According to Ji-Won, heterosexuality, and gender roles dilute women's subjectivity. When I asked Ji-Won why 4B practices have allowed her to "live as a *human*…instead of *women*," she answered without hesitation. Her lack of hesitance showed how long she had pondered this issue:

> I used to like one man for seven years even after I learned about feminism. I thought he could be an exception from other men. However, later, I learned I was wrong. After I decided not to like him anymore, I really started not to like him anymore. That resonates with how I think the 4B movement is about women living as a human. Even if I am well treated by him, equally treated by him, and my opinion respected by him, if I go *out*, outside of the relationship between him and me, even if I pour in a lot of effort, I will be deemed as someone lower than him. For instance, if I date a man, there is a huge possibility that I would be nominated as *his* girlfriend, *his* wife, not myself, but something *of* him. And there is also a high possibility that he could have consumed non-consensual film and sexually

> harassed women. So even though he is a unicorn, even if there is one unicorn in this society, most men are not. I wondered why I must sacrifice my body and mind to them. And if I continue giving them love, they will one day take for granted of gendered privileges they enjoy, instead of being empathetic to women or child... They are humans, so they will live according to what they are used to. I countlessly thought that giving them love, or not pursuing 4B, would lead women's rights to nowhere. So, for my human rights enhancement and for women rights' enhancement, I chose 4B.

She indicates how established gender roles in the patriarchy enmeshed with heterosexual relations can replace women's social identity. Ji-Won notices how society equates women to their relationship with men, so she decided to boycott such relationships. What does it mean for a woman to exist not as herself but as someone's girlfriend, wife, or mother, or vice versa?

I imagined 4B women's worldview as them problematizing (heteronormative) gender roles as connected to their subjectivity and selfhood. 4B women's newly found "subjectivity" replaces naturalized heterosexuality and gender roles that used to replace women's various identities.

The term "subjectivity" has not been actively mentioned recently in anthropology (Ortner 2005). Nonetheless, she argues for the relevance and significance of the concept. While postmodernist scholars argued for irrelevance of the concept "subjectivity" due to the contemporary world being structured with neoliberalism and capitalism, preventing people from performing active reflexiveness, Ortner argues how the concept is still relevant, arguing that even in these "changed," chaotic times, people still can perform certain reflexivity about their surroundings, in a critical sense, with complicated layers of consciousness, such as "…questioning and criticizing the world in which we find ourselves" (Ortner 2005, 46). She defines "subjectivity" as "a specifically cultural and historical consciousness;" by consciousness, she means "acting subjects" who are aware of the bigger interpersonal culture that they are embedded in (ibid, 34).

As postmodernist scholars believe that social actors cannot liberate their knowledge production mode from incomprehensible, chaotic neoliberal times (Ortner 2005), 4B women might also not be able fully liberate themselves from patriarchal social orders; However, they do experience a certain degree of change in terms of their subjectivity after joining the movement. As Ortner (2005) argued, even amid these (gendered) neoliberal, capitalist times, 4B women witness how their subjectivity is enhanced after discarding heterosexuality and gender roles. Throughout the interviews, I repeatedly heard them arguing that they could live more subjectively after joining the 4B, a life with a stronger sense of their own will and consciousness. Yeong-Ji, who works in a feminist NGO, reflects on how

she changed, especially when making decisions. Now, she decides about her life, while in the past, she had no sense of self:

> I definitely started to live with a stronger subjectivity. Before, I would… constantly ask other people's opinions instead of following my own judgement. You know that feeling, right? Even though I felt that this was not for me, I just did it anyways if other people told me that it would be good for me…I used to ask my mom for everything. Even if I was looking for my own house, I asked *her* opinion. Now, I remind myself that this is the house that *I* will live. I know *my lifestyle*, not others… So, after 4B, I chose the house that fits me, instead of asking my mom's opinion.

So-Jin, who works at an IT company in her late twenties, shared a similar story:

> I used to think that everything that happened to me was occurred 99% by luck… "I was lucky, so I came to Seoul from a different province." "I was lucky, so I got into the university." "I was lucky, so I got the job." … but it was not just because of luck if I think now. We moved to Seoul because of my mother's work. There was a reason for many things…I never thought that any of my achievement had to do with my effort…So, my self-esteem was basically absent…. I thought like this because there was nothing that I had actively chosen by my own will, by my own subjectivity… Usually, everything was given by the circumstances. But at the same time, in given circumstances, I did my best, right? But no one complimented me on anything, so I was not aware of that. Also, my standard was inside my family. As if my family was everything to me. For instance, I would think that since I have lower grades than my older sibling, then I am bad at studying. Therefore, if I get good grades, that means it was luck.

4B movement is the social movement in which the social actor can finally excavate her sense of self that was covered by the colossal amount of soil called gender roles and heterosexuality. Only after joining the 4B movement, So-Jin realized that when looking at herself, she looked at everywhere—luck, her families—except for herself. When interpreting her life, there was no sense of self. After joining the 4B movement, she concluded that it was also her effort, not only luck, that guided her to her current situation. By discarding heteronormative gender roles enmeshed in family ideologies, she could look at herself, for the first time. Such critical consciousness brought out her subjectivity that was not only used to re-evaluate her life course to give herself more credits, but also used to detect the unnoticed subjectivities she had been unknowingly performing—her pouring in effort into getting a job, for instance, while later she would have interpreted that it was all luck. She could feel that her self-esteem was much more strengthened, with a different consciousness.

Disowning Gender Roles and Accepting New Possibilities

So-Jin is a tall woman who always wore elegantly styled clothes, matching plain-colored sweatshirts with jeans. Her hair was trimmed short, and she always maintained a good posture. She also took care of her hygiene very well. Clean clothes with no stain, and dry hair unlike my stressed, greasy one. She looked like a perfect person who does not need to be scolded of how she looks; but, not surprisingly, she told me a different story.

She and I were sitting in a café, going through transcripts from our first interview. I asked her if she could tell me more about how she changed after becoming a 4B woman. So-Jin, throughout her whole life, heard from her relatives that she was (unfortunately) "born with a fate of a man." In other words, she is an unfortunate case of a male soul born into a body of female, and such evaluation about her status was the main reason why her relatives thought that she would never be a proper woman.

In Korean tradition, when a woman is about to deliver the baby, she, her husband, or her natal kins receive a supernatural sign in a dream, called *taemong*. This dream is believed to partially predict the baby's future. When So-Jin's mother was pregnant, she was puzzled since she had not dreamed any *taemong* yet. No relatives or family members shared any exciting news of So-Jin's *taemong* either. "But only after I was born," So-Jin continued after a short, soft laughter, "my mother found out that my grandmother had a dream about me. But she did not want to give the dream to my mother because I was a daughter. She told my mom that the dream was *too good for a daughter*, so she was waiting for a son to be born." I was so curious about her *taemong* that her grandmother hid from her. I asked her if she could share, and she said:

> Sure. There is a steep field behind the mountain near my grandmother's house. And there is a river in the mountain. While dreaming, she noticed the river was suddenly stopped. She went near the river, finding out the bones half-buried in the soil. Suddenly, the river started to flow. The water touched the bones, turning them into a *seonbi*[1]. He said, "I slept well. Now I will head to Hanyang." Then he started walking up the mountain. He was a really young *seonbi*, wearing white clothes and holding a baggage wrapped in a cloth. My grandmother interpreted that a newborn will be a reincarnation of him. She lamented that she had such a great dream when my mother was having a daughter, not a son.

[1] Seonbi was a male "virtuous scholar and intellectual" in the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), and later an intellectual elite with a lifetime devotion to learning during the Chosun dynasty (1392-1910).

Telling the story of a *taemong* acts as an affectionate gift in Korean tradition. Depending on who dreamt about whom, parents and elder relatives would tell *taemong* to their children, nieces, or nephews, showing how excited they were to meet them as a newborn. Such one way of gift-giving and gift-receiving strengthen the kinship bond. However, deemed not good enough to receive such a gift—since the gift was "too good for a daughter"—So-Jin was deprived of such a chance to hear her *taemong* and enjoy such affectionate traditional ritual. Her sex and gender did not fit with the gender role—a refined, male intellectual—depicted in her *taemong*. In the Introduction, I described how Korean society excludes women through gendered power relations. So-Jin was excluded from this traditional ritual because of her sex and gender. Later, such "too good" *taemong* acts as a shackle to her, as it offered a convincing explanation to relatives that she was wrongfully assigned born with "the fate of a man."

So-Jin did not perform the ideal gender roles that her family and relatives expected. Referring to her *taemong* supposedly being that of a male baby, relatives constantly lamented, worrying about her future as a woman. While the relatives wanted her to stay quiet and "skinny," she was simply not such a girl. Whenever the relatives could notice her active and wild personality, they would bring her *taemong* back, mourning that she is wrongfully born in "the man's fate." They were extremely worried, wondering how a wild, "fat" girl like her could become a proper woman in the future to marry a man, like everybody else does:

> Before I knew about feminism and 4B, I felt intense pressure about my nonconforming body. I knew I love women from early age, but I thought I had to marry a man because that's what everybody tells you to do. 'But how can I marry a man, I am not pretty, I am not skinny, they say?' So, I was always hopeless about that …. Those relatives would be concerned and say, 'How can you marry later when you are this fat?'… I was also an active kid. Older male relatives and I would run the mountain holding a long bamboo stick. We chased chickens and black goats, caught lobsters and Korean freshwater snails… Then adults would look at me, worried, "Look at how she plays—she is born with a fate of a man. What type of men would marry her?" They told me so numerous times.

The ill-fated prophecy was so shocking to her that she still remembered every comment. As a Korean myself, it was not difficult to imagine the relatives' reactions, especially among conservative adults, but it still felt so bizarre to think how people viewed her as "fat" and "big." I looked at her childhood photos: I could only see a bony child with tanned skin who burned all of her calories running around the mountain. I suspect that her goat-chasing and lobster-catching personality was not the gender role she was expected to perform. Her family hoped to have a calm girl who does not chase animals, whom they could proudly boast about to their neighbors of how pretty she would be when she

became an adult. She continued, "As a kid, I developed a complex about how I looked thanks to them. Then I developed hopelessness, which later turned into anger and sadness. How could a loving relationship like marriage get affected by appearance at all? … If you truly love someone, isn't what inside is far more important? But maybe that's not what men do." To understand the absurdity of her relatives' mourning, she came up with her own theory. When she heard one of her friend's male high school teacher praising his wife's beautiful face during the class, claiming such beauty keeps him from beating her, she was convinced. Maybe men highly value outer appearances of women when they choose a partner; maybe that was why the relatives were concerned. Her belief about love, at least according to bell hooks, is correct; true love has many requisites such as about accepting each other as themselves, developing together, recognizing each other, trusting each other, but none of them mentions about how a person should look (hooks 2001, 183).

Things changed when So-Jin realized she actually had no responsibility to mold herself into such gender roles, the roles to become an ideal bride for heterosexual marriage. Through 4B, she gained empowerment and confidence: "…4B is like a declaration, right? So, although deep down, I never wanted to marry men, I was thinking of marrying men since that is what everybody told me so, although it would make me very unhappy; But making a declaration felt different. It set up a firm standard inside my mind…I realized that I was not wrong." By joining a social movement that reiterates her belief, she felt her subjectivity strengthened and she gained courage to act accordingly to her desire (not to get married to men). If she would not need to marry men, then she was truly free from this gender nonsense.

> After 4B, I realized I don't need to feel bad about how I don't fit into this…[gender role]. My mental health became much better….Also, at the gym…sometimes, we [men and I] do arm wrestling. I thought they were being deliberately losing the wrestling. I thought, it is impossible for men to lose, right? Everyone says, you should marry men, Why? I wonder, then all they say is because they are strong, powerful, so that they can fix the furniture, protect you, etc… But one day I figured out that they were not faking the loss at all. I was beating them the whole time!

Here, her belief that anything happens to her life should be irrelevant to her own ability or effort is countered after she gained more confidence after discarding the heteronormative gender roles and the pressure that she should marry men. She was constantly scolded for being physically active while she reflected how she loved soccer from young age, wondering why schoolteachers would not let girls play sports while boys were allowed to use the soccer field. After deciding to discard heternormative gender roles, through joining the 4B, she decided to be more confident to her true self: a woman who

loves “manly” sports. That was when she started to go to martial arts class. Before, she told me, she was extremely timid, constantly worrying what other would think of her. In addition to that, her strengthened subjectivity with enhanced sense of self allowed her to doubt if her male peers were deliberately losing the match, which led her to reach the truth, the truth that she was actually winning her male peers with her own strength. Now, her life is opened to new possibilities where she interprets her life with a stronger subjectivity and better sense of self.

Conclusion

I first described how 4B women strengthened their bond through humor and jokes. Those jokes do not ridicule men but their own past selves who actively embodied ideal gender roles and heterosexuality. I identified those two forces, gender roles and heterosexuality, as the main foundation of patriarchy. Comparing Ortner’s and 4B women’s definitions of patriarchy, I found how both problematize gender roles and sexuality having normative, preconceived notions. Those turn out to be essential part of the patriarchy’s operations. Then, I argued how 4B women who experienced stronger subjectivity and sense of self are now experiencing new possibilities of life by reinterpreting themselves and their lives, after discarding gendered roles and heterosexuality.

Chapter Two: Loves

"The essence of true love is mutual recognition—two individuals seeing each other as they really are."

bell hooks (2001), *All About Love*

The Power of Heteronormativity

Ji-Won, a university student in her mid-twenties, once desired marrying a male doctor and having kids with him. I had a hard time imagining that part of her because all I could see in front of me was a proud lesbian. One day, she insisted I come out of her room, telling me there was something I needed to see. It was a photograph, attached to her old refrigerator with a small magnet. Two short-haired women holding hands together, giggling while looking at each other. It was just a simple photo, the one that anyone could get from one of the ubiquitous photo booths on the streets of Seoul. Although there was nothing special in the photo, she smiled like a child, looking at it. "Don't we look good?" It was one of the rare moments when I could see her smiling.

Ji-Won graduated from a prestigious high school. Therefore, she planned to become a devoted mother who focused on educating her kids, hoping to transfer her experience to them. Historically, mothers in Korean society have been expected to wholeheartedly manage their children's education (M. Lee 1998); this heteropatriarchal gender role is still prominent today (K. Shin, Jahng, and Kim 2019; K. Kim and Jin 2017). Her dream started from her middle school years. I tried to trace the origin of her dream and asked her where she got the aspirations. "School?" I asked. "No." She answered. "Family?" "Absolutely not—they didn't even mention the word 'marriage.'" "Then media? Dramas?" "No, I don't know!" She got annoyed by my persistent asking. She said, "That's why patriarchy is so scary. You don't even know, but at one point you are indoctrinated."

Power works in mysterious ways. It permeates into a girl's dreams without her knowing, or one day shows its painfully colossal existence, pressuring people to conform. While the degree of conformity differed, every single one of my interlocuters[2] felt pressure from heteronormativity. Specifically, they felt pressured into dating men, especially when they became adults. Within such controlling,

[2] So-Jin, who was sure that she was a lesbian from an early age, pessimistically expected her to marry man until high school years due to absence of same-sex marriage laws, homophobia, her family telling her that she would be disowned if she is queer, heteronormative culture, and etc. Due to the power normativity that limits queer people from being with whom they love, there are many lesbians marrying men and gays marrying women in Korea. See (John Cho 2009).

restrictive power, women experienced their desire being transformed, blurring the boundary between agency and power structure.

I asked Yeong-Ji, an employee of a feminist NGO in her late twenties, if she felt pressured into having a boyfriend, before joining the 4B movement. She looked at me as if I was asking something too obvious: "Of course! At that time, there was this prevalent atmosphere that once you start going to university, you must date [men]. So, naturally, I would look around seeing everyone dating, and be concerned, 'why am I not dating anyone?'…I wrote down 'making a boyfriend' on my wish list. (Where did you hear that you must date men, other than from campus?) Meme pages on social media… Friends would also casually write in the group chat, mourning, 'Spring has come, yet I still don't have a boyfriend.'" In a different interview, she said, seeming to be tired of answering my obvious questions: "If you grow up hearing you need to get married to a man a thousand times, won't you also take it for granted?" One day, before she joined the 4B movement, she finally dated a man, a male peer on campus. She finally could tick off her one wish from the list; however, it was "bad," according to her. She said, "He was the one who suggested us to become a couple, then he said he needed to go to the military soon. I was so annoyed. I broke up with him."

People behave under the influence of "social facts" (Durkheim 1966), but I assumed there should be a certain degree of agency even under such coercion. Yeong-Ah, an engineering researcher in her late twenties, dated one of her male classmates at the university. She dated him since her peers zealously pushed them to become a couple. When I asked if there was any of her subjectivity in the process, she said: "subjectivity…well, I also liked him a little? But…everything happened way too fast…I thought we were not a good match because of our personalities. But people constantly cheered us: 'You look good together!' 'When are you guys dating?' So, I felt like I had no choice. And of course, my prediction was right. We were not a match." She recalled how she felt that she had "no choice" but to satisfy the expectations of her peers. Her subjectivity was not in the environment where it could fully function.

You-Jin, a kindergarten teacher in her late twenties, experienced a similar culture. Whenever she talked with a male peer at campus, when she was a university student, her overexcited friends would wait until the conversation was over and ran to her: "Oh my god, do you like him? Are you guys dating? There is something, right?" Quoting You-Jin's words, she and the man had "nothing." However, after constantly hearing those comments from her friends, she later found herself slowly liking him, in a romantic way. She found herself frantically getting up earlier to spare more time to

groom to look better for him, and eventually, dating him. While Yeong-Ah reluctantly started dating to satisfy the public's matchmaking zeal, Yeong-Ji and You-Jin experienced how their own desire was transformed by the normative culture. Yeong-Ji spontaneously included heterosexual dating on her wish list. You-Jin found herself romanticizing a random male peer, even though she did not have a single romantic attraction toward him before.

Some actively chose to date men, even if they did not want to. It was the heteronormative culture that pushed them to make such a decision. Yeon-Su, a student of medicine who lost the student election to men, was depressed by the fact that she lost the election to unqualified male candidates, merely because she was a woman:

> I was invited to various hangouts to drink because people wanted to console me. He was one of them, from the student club I am in…we started messaging each other. Then at one point, I could feel that he was approaching to me in a romantic way…But I have never thought him in a romantic way, so I did my best to convey to him that I was not interested. But he thought this was his chance since I was vulnerable and mentally weak. He was very stubborn. Our student club has a weird culture where men bring women to their home to make sure they arrived safely, especially after drinking…so he knew my address. Whenever I opened the door, there was always a small gift hanging on the doorknob. Some will say it is romantic, but I was really scared. Because this means that he remembers my house's address…The fact that he constantly visited my house unannounced was weird and uncomfortable…But at that time, I was mentally worn out, and I did not identify myself as a 4B feminist. So, I thought dating him would be the solution to all of these uncomfortable emotions overwhelming me…I felt pressure from his actions, and he did not give up even if I politely drew a line, giving him the message that I was not interested. So, I thought, maybe I should date him. Maybe, by actually dating him, I would start liking him. But of course, it was a futile hope, and I broke up with him within a month.

She was threatened by his one-way, invasive, and aggressive courtship. She also did not like him either romantically or sexually. When he did not respond to her respectful rejection, her solution to his stubbornness was to accept him so that her overwhelmingly uncomfortable emotions could, she hoped, disappear. In reality, of course, forcing herself to like someone did not work. She prioritized the man's desire over her own (i.e. not dating him), in hope of molding her desire in a way that it would not induce any conflict. She hoped that the state of peace, where she could not feel threatened by seeing random gifts left in front of her door, could be achieved, not by rejecting him, but by rejecting her true emotions.

Under heteronormativity, she compromises her own emotions, and further, her own definition of peace. Even if a woman is not subject to an explicit gendered violence, using feminist peace research

theories, I view that a woman feeling unsafe due to ominous expectations that gendered-violence might happen to her can also be a threat to her peace. While pressured by the cruelly powerful heteronormativity, Yeon-Su was actively looking for ways to protect peace, a moment when she would not feel threatened by gifts and unannounced visits. If he would not listen to me, then I maybe I could change, Yeon-Su would have thought so. The problem was that, the violence—invasive, fear-inducing courtship of her male peer—should have been interpreted as "continuum" (Wibben and Donahoe 2020), a state of temporality that expands beyond the binary of "war" and "peace" (ibid). Feminist Peace Researchers disagree with the binary notion of war and peace, arguing that such binary might cause people to assume that the absence of war means absence of violence. However, "a country supposedly at peace with its neighbors may suffer domestic crime, poverty, and racism and be lacking health care and education" (ibid, 4); therefore, "continuum of violence…spans war and peace" (ibid, 4). In other words, saying "yes" to the already violent-start would not have solved a problem. As a relatively vulnerable party (women in heterosexual dating courtship cultures), when under the continuum of violence, the vulnerable will experience a limited range of agency. She tried to prevent the (potential) violence including her own anxiety and fear that harm her by acting as if she could get along with such violence. Not surprisingly, it did not work. Therefore, to protect the vulnerable, the situational "continuum of violence" should be examined: the society should not just treat her fear as a mere paranoia, but a valid concern that she developed through her "lived experiences" (Smith 1992) as a woman. As FPR scholars incorporated the expanded temporality "continuum" to make unnoticed violences (sexual, domestic violence, racism, and etc. still remaining in the nation after war) noticed, one should also notice the unnoticed miscellaneous breach of security that women in daily lives feel, such as anticipation of gender-based violence (GBV), even if it did not happen (yet). Since the unlucky result of GBV might be a death of a woman, mitigating the violence when the woman feels fear might be the best scenario.

Some also experienced reprimands when they were deemed to be deviating from normative gender roles. During a small fieldtrip where Hyun-Jin, Ji-Won, and I travelled to swim in the sea, Hyun-Jin, an artist who writes feminist lyrics in her late twenties, shared how she was "gaslighted" with "microaggressions" by a male lecturer in a private academy. He was a lecturer of humanities, and she admired his intellectuality. Since she was driving, I could not look at her face from the front, but from the side, I could read her calm, solemn, but bitter emotions, and a sense of betrayal. "He basically bullied me. He aggressively questioned why I don't have a boyfriend and long hair." The bullying continued inside and outside of the classroom. She reflected upon the experience as

"traumatic." She was reprehended for not being an ideal woman who should be interested in men in a specific heteronormative way, by having a long hair and makeup, in the Korean context.

As explained in the chapter Feminism, heteronormativity and gender roles are connected. To be a woman is to be a man's girlfriend, his future wife, and a future mother of his kids. Such normativity turns into a pressure to many women, especially when the women's personalities and desires do not fit well with those heterosexual gender roles. However, sometimes the pressure is not straightforward since it transforms one's desires. Even if humans are aware of the social rules, they cannot entirely, conveniently escape the social world, even with such strong consciousness and reflexivity (Ortner 2005); not only that, it is a matter of survival since "…to survive in society, they depend on a number of shared social conventions or implicit rules of behaviour" (Eriksen 2015, 53). In other words, people's agency differs in terms of how powerfully they are affected cultural norms. I propose the possibility that they transformed their desire to please others, fit into the society, to be accepted without getting reprehension for being an outcast. Every interlocuter I interviewed had willingly or reluctantly followed heterosexual gender roles, while the degree of inner conflicts within them varied. However, I should also note that some of their attempts to exercise their agency could be the effort to maintaining their peace: to satisfy the public's matchmaking zeal and achieve harmonious relationship between the women and the public; to satisfy the stubborn male peer to minimize the violence and to soothe one's anxiety and fear. Under the "continuum of violence" (Wibben and Donahoe 2020), such as the coercive power of heteronormativity, it is hard for women to feel peaceful and secure.

Is Heterosexual Love Possible?

In the previous section, I described how heteronormativity was so powerful that it pressures women to date men even if they did not want to, or confine women's agency and subjectivity to happen only *within* the rules of heterosexuality, not defying them. But regardless of how it is almost impossible for one to reject this heteronormative pressure, what about the gender dynamics inside heterosexual loves? Can there be love in relationships emerged from this normalcy where women are coerced to play the rules of heterosexuality and perform ideal gender roles? Or, as heterosexuality exercises normativity as a form of coercion, leading people to compromise their feelings to conform to social norms, does the coercion also play an influential role within heterosexual love?

"True love" has to be "unconditional," contains a "mutual recognition" that accepts each other as who they are, motivates to change themselves for others, gives courage to each other to stay fully honest to each other, and be interested in helping each other to unfold oneself to see their true self (hooks 2001, 166–89). Is this happening in heterosexual relationships? If not, what are the barriers to achieving this ideal?

Invited to an island, the hometown of Dan-Bi and Ji-Yeon, I happily joined a coffee chat. Dan-Bi, Ji-Yeon, and Dan-Bi's girlfriend sat on a dusty couch in Starbucks. Dan-Bi and Ji-Yeon were extremely welcoming to me, calling their fathers to see if they knew any restaurants that could host all of us. Ji-Yeon hung up her cell phone and laughed. "It's so funny. He is fishing now, and he suggested us to visit where he is. It's too far, so I said no." That was when Ji-Yeon first mentioned about her dad who "did everything except for gambling." As a Korean, I could guess what she meant, but I wanted to be sure. A few months later, I asked her what she had meant by that.

> …he is a very, very, typical Korean man. He did everything except for gambling. You know the old saying—'Avoid a man who beats you, who cheats, and who gambles.' My mom tries to assure me why she thinks my dad is not a bad person by saying, "nevertheless, your father never beat me or gambled" …he had an affair with a woman whom he met in the brothel.

Because of that affair, her mother and father beat each other. Then, it remains a mystery why her mother argues to her daughter why he had never beat her. Hearing her mother desperately yelling "Ji-Yeon! Help me!" Ji-Yeon found her father jumping on her mother's body. Ji-Yeon immediately called the police and ambulance. She stayed up all night at the ER next to her mother who was lying on a bed with a bruised face. Ji-Yeon was later furious to find out they had gotten back together.

Ji-Yeon's mother was lied to by her in-laws, who insisted she should come down to the island, where her in-laws were residing, since they "had everything down here." Leaving all of her friends, relatives, and family, she thew herself into a new life on the island with the love of her life, only to find out that he did not have any job ready on the island, contrary to what she was told, and that she would have to work hard to support him. His family, in fact, did not "have everything." For what is worse, her in-law exploited her labor. Giving her only 300,000 KRW per month, much lower than the standard wage at that time, the relatives forced her to work at their skin aesthetic clinic, justifying the exploitation by saying she "need[ed] to earn extra income for her husband." While it was obvious that she was the main breadwinner at that time, the fact that the "patriarch," the man, was *looking for* a job made him maintain the authority of "patriarch," a male breadwinner, who would eventually

have a job someday. Meanwhile, the wife remains as a temporary labor force, who earns “extra” income even if she was the only breadwinner at that time. She was marginalized by her labor being exploited and her credit as a main breadwinner being undermined to preserve the place of authority for a man.

Women in Korean society often think of their in-laws as part of their family while men do not consider their in-laws as part of their family (J. K. Lee 2005, 163); also, even though women feels more intimacy towards their natal family, women “often gave priority to their husbands’ families over their own” (ibid 163-164). Even though Ji-Yeon’s mother might have been aware that she was being exploited and coerced, I suppose that being aware of her situation would have been not enough for her to break free from moral responsibilities to maintain good relationships with her in-laws, even if it meant that she had to stay exploited. Who would want to ruin the marriage by saying ‘no’ to their in-laws, the marriage that you yearned to have from a young age? Ironically, it was the marital relations with her husband, the one that Ji-Yeon’s mother wanted to protect, was the core logic that her in-laws used to justify their exploitation of her labor.

When they were dating, Ji-Yeon said, he would tell Ji-Yeon’s mother sweet words: “you are so cute that I would bring you everywhere in my pocket” or “I would never let you wet your hands if you marry me.” Here, “wetting one’s hands” is an idiomatic phrase that refers to expected gendered labor that women have to perform in marriage, such as washing dishes, doing house chores, and other miscellaneous (care) works. Many men propose to women by saying such a phrase, only ending up women to do more house works than men (Y.-J. Park 2020). Not surprisingly, all his sweet whispers turned out to be lies: he would travel to shores to fish with other men, leaving her more isolated since she knew no one else on the island. He also did not interfere when his in-laws forced her to work in his family’s business. He also exploited her labor, leaving all the house chores to her. Since he is a “patriarch” who earns money, even though she works too, she should take care of home, according to him. Exploitation is a key to gendered power relations, as I mentioned in the chapter Analytical Frameworks, is evident in this case.

Although both of Ji-Yeon’s parents are in their late forties, her mother’s sacrifice matches with the description of elderly women in Korea whom anthropologist Alex Nelson met. According to his analysis, “Korean women, especially those of the elder generation, likewise emphasized sacrifices that conformed to culturally exalted virtues for their gender” during marriage, such as “endurance of hardship springing from inadequate financial resources, conflict with their husbands or in-laws, and

husband's attempts to unilaterally exert their will over them" (Nelson 2021, 1023). Ji-Yeon's mother endured the hardships that her in-laws and her husband gave. Although Ji-Yeon's mother uses the language of "a rational estimation of cost and benefit" (ibid, 1022) to justify her not leaving him, such as telling Ji-Yeon that "it is unfair to give up now" considering how much she had done so far [in this marriage], as if she is waiting for a rightful compensation for her decades-long endurance, I analyze her "cost and benefit" language in terms of a mere defense mechanism, justifying to herself that staying in this marriage is a reasonable thing to do. Ji-Yeon thought similarly. First, Ji-Yeon's mother would praise her husband for not gambling, beating, and cheating. After finding out he cheated on her, she said at least he did not gamble or beat her. After their relationship became physically violent, she told her daughter that at least he did not gamble.

Her face, flushed with stress, Ji-Yeon's hand gestures became bigger: "I understand if she has no ability to earn money. Then, she should depend on him. But she is not. She has been always working, which means she can work. She also recently got a master's degree, so she is a part-time lecturer. *I think she is just afraid of living alone.* Because her logic [when she explains why she will not leave him] is *not logical* at all." While the world would not end when Ji-Yeon's mother decides to divorce him, she is delaying the decision, one day telling her daughter she would do it, one day telling her she was not sure about it. What made Ji-Yeon's mother so afraid to leave alone, then, if Ji-Yeon's analysis is correct?

Ji-Yeon's mother grew up in an extremely patriarchal family in a conservative town, where elders showed preference to sons over daughters. Parents considered investing in a daughter's education to be a waste, so she had only one chance. Like many other Koreans, she failed at her first college entrance exam. She could only start her undergraduate studies when she was a forty-eight-year-old. She also did not get enough love or attention from her family, Ji-Yeon said. "When I asked her why she married him, she told me she *wanted to make a family*. But I understand her. She grew up in a patriarchal family which only treasured sons. She was regularly beaten up by her brother. Her mom and dad did not care about her. She wanted love from anyone…so she wanted to make a family as soon as possible." Her problem was, however, that she used the same script. Even with different people, with the same script of heteropatriarchal family, a chance of woman not being appreciated of her contribution could be probable.

Thus, Ji-Yeon's mother's loveless family motivated her to find a love that she had been desiring, and ironically the desire to be loved made her stay in the relationship that does not give her enough love.

Ji-Yeon's father promised her love, saying "I would bring you all the money," "I will always cherish you," or "You shall never do anything at my house." Ji-Yeon's mother wants to believe that one day, her husband will keep the promise. I argue that institutionalized patriarchal family culture and marriage played a key role: her not being loved by her family simply because she was a daughter, her being forced to work for in-law's family with low wage under the moral norms she felt to conform to, and her being afraid of living alone without being part of this established institution called "marriage." Marriage is a powerful institution that shapes "hegemonic" gender norms (Lewin 2004, 1001). Thus, I argue, the complex coercive power induced from these institutions created a catch-22 situation in her quest for love: she was motivated to form her own family where she could be loved unlike the loveless institutions of patriarchal family she grew up in; she found a "better" person who at least whispered her sweet words that she had never heard before; but again, as soon as she gets involved in the same institution, a patriarchal, exploitative heterosexual marriage, she experiences exploitation and violence, which is far from love; however, she endures those hardships, afraid of leaving the institution. Heterosexual love, which can only reach its apex through marriage, gets entangled with the patriarchal upbringing that shapes masculinities and the institutional power that it develops with cultures of marriage and in-law families. Therefore, it comes with coercive power from it being inseparable from cultural institutions, persuading a woman to constantly look for a reason to stay, even if the love turned out to be exploitative. Indeed, "as Engels and later feminist theorists warned, the entanglement of love and marriage further subjects love relationships to social structures shaping families, which often have gendered effects" (Nelson 2021, 1017).

Many of my informants reflected on how love was not realized in their parents' marriage. Such observations motivated them to join the 4B movement because those were not types of loves they were looking for. Broken promises, domestic violence, unfair distribution of work, heartbreaks from affairs, in-laws' meddling, and other obstacles. They argued how observing their mothers' suffering made them wonder whether men truly love women and whether heterosexual marriage is what they really want, regardless of how countlessly they were told that it would be what they want.

While it was hard to find how my informants were affected by their own marriage, since they had not, which is the whole point of the 4B movement, I could hear some hypothetical imaginations from informants where they argued they would feel burdened and trapped following the culture of these institutions, but again, with a certain degree of agencies and subjectivities, which makes the whole issue more complex. Na-Yeon, in her late twenties working in an IT company, avoids marriage

mainly because it being an “institution.” I was surprised to hear her stance, considering that her girlfriend wants to marry her in a country that allows same-sex marriage. She said:

> In Korea, marriage is not a combination of two individuals, *but of two families*. Each gets assigned of a *particular role* in that context. One has to also think about having babies. I am a family-person; therefore I would definitely stretch myself if I got involved in marriage. My partner and I would both care about our in-law’s family. It would tire me. I want to prevent that from happening by not marrying, including the same-sex marriage.

Indeed, Weston shows how queer people in San Francisco bay area recreate kinship by replacing the old, “biological” notions of kinships into those whom they could select (Weston 1991, 210–13); they would assign the status of “kin” to people who approve of their sexual identities, and who offer them mutual love and comradeship, instead of those whom they are born with (ibid). Some of my informants created their own “families” especially choosing them among people who understand their philosophy and support their mental nourishment. Their new families after 4B were their 4B housemates, their 4B girlfriend, or their pet animals, whom they wholeheartedly love. However, some 4B women were still heavily influenced by the traditional notions of “families,” “marriage,” and “institutions” as they admitted; For those, even if they were, for instance, living with their girlfriend and have bad relationship with their family, they would call their biological parents and siblings as “families.” Here, the term “family” does not necessarily have affectionate connotations, but rather something that some 4B women view that they could not change, no matter how much they wanted to. According to the 4B women’s philosophy, as described in the Feminism chapter, heteronormative gender roles and their efforts to conform to them prevented them from finding or living their “true selves.” bell hooks argues true love requires "two individuals seeing each other as they really are” (hooks 2001, 182–83). Then, finding the right type of love would be crucial to find their “true selves.” Without their true selves being embraced by themselves and each other, which seems like a challenging work when surviving in an institutionalized social order of patriarchy, their chance to experience true love becomes sheer.

Not only the coercive nature of institutions such as patriarchy, marriage, and in-law cultures, but also the coercive violence of masculinities that men show seem to hinder “true love” that allows honesty, nourishment, trust, mutual recognition among two people (hooks 2001) from happening in heterosexual relationships. My informants offered me myriad evidence of how they found young men in their twenties or thirties violent, thus feeling unsafe, especially through experiencing (micro-) threats when dating them. Anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson argues that it is not innate qualities of men that make them violent, but rather because boys “get the message in countless ways” that “to

kill is manly" (Ferguson 2021, S122). Thus, it is the society that shapes violent masculinities, not that men are born violent. Below, I describe how experiences of violences from men pushed women to rethink their heterosexual relationships. You-Jin, a kindergarten teacher in her mid-twenties and who now identifies as a lesbian, had a history of dating men in the past:

> At least in my experience, I often did not feel safe when I was with men. I was in a relationship with this man, and he swung a soju bottle in the air, describing the episode when something made him furious. There was four people sitting on the table including us. He was joking, I could tell. But when I told him to stop, scared if the bottle flew and hit me or other people, he did not.

Surely, he did not jump on her, making her yell for help, as Ji-Yeon's father did to his wife. However, such microaggressions made her rethink dating men. The fact that he did not listen to her discouraging him from swinging the bottle was also alarming to her. Some men, brought up with violent and apathetic masculinities, could disrupt women's peace and security.

Her suspicion grew when she dated another man. As with her previous boyfriend, her new boyfriend did not take her 'no' seriously, forcing her to have sex with him. She cried from pain, and he looked down on her, panting, and asking, "Do you like it?" Retelling the story, she did not seem scared; rather, she looked disgusted. She shuddered her shoulder as if she just watched a horribly made movie. That was the day when she decided to join the 4B movement and the Escape-the-Corset movement by cutting her hair short. "I can't live like this anymore." She said, imitating how she talked to herself the day after the rape.

You-Jin described the rape as the most relevant trigger for her to join the 4B movement. Including You-Jin, four informants told me that intimate partner violence from their male partners affected their choice to join the movement. Yeong-Ji's then boyfriend suddenly accelerated the speed of the car after a quarrel with her. Yeong-Ji thought, maybe that was how she would die: from the car accident drove by a provoked male partner.

Ha-Eun, a researcher in her late twenties, constantly repeated "I can't remember" when I tried to dig out her life history. "After he raped me, I formed a habit where I don't remember the past." Min-Ji, another worker in a feminist NGO, emphasized how being raped by her boyfriend was *not* the most significant reason for her to join the movement, but was definitely part of it.

Intimate partner violence, that Ji-Yeon's mother, You-Jin, Yeong-Ji, and Hae-Eun experienced, is not that "extreme" case. In 2020, among 2007 people in various gender and age who were working in public institutions, only 86.8 percent of men in their twenties agreed that having sex with unconscious person is a rape, the lowest number compared to their older generations of men (H.-I. Yoon and Oh 2022). Thus, men in their twenties heavily depend on reading consents from their preconceived notions of situational contexts instead of explicit consents from their partners (ibid). For every 1.6 days, a woman is killed by her intimate partner in Korea (Y.-J. Oh 2021). In the past five years, a total of 1206 incidents of violence against women occurred at university campuses (S.-M. Kim 2020), roughly 60% of the perpetrators being *male students* while in the past, the majority were by male professors (H.-I. Yoon and Oh 2022). Men in their twenties were my informants' mostly dated men before they joined the 4B. Heterosexuality, or heterosexual love, can therefore be "a political institution which disempowers women" (A. Rich 1986, 23).

However, a coercion was not always expressed in obvious forms of violences. Coercion happened, also, from a place of lack of empathy, and it made my informants question the possibility of heterosexual love. As I mentioned earlier, Yeon-Su was scared when her male classmate would leave a gift at her door, unannounced. Even though (or because) she felt pressured from his actions, she dated him. If the man was more aware and empathetic of the situation in Korea where women depend on searching 'how to safely break up with men' instead of calling the police (J.-Y. Lee and Lee 2021b), where a single-woman-household is frequently targeted for stalking, invasion, rape, and murder (K.-J. Son 2021), he would have realized that maybe, from Yeon-Su's point of view, he was pushing her. Similarly, You-Jin compares how she was not threatened by her past girlfriends but was threatened by her past boyfriends.

> Oh, wait, wait. You made me remember someone. I met this man who goes to the same university. I was a 20 years old…We had only met a few times, to get to know each other. We would sit in a convenience store. I was eating yogurt, and he was drinking a beverage. Like that. Not a deep conversation over dinner or something. But he kept inviting me to his house, saying he lives alone. To be honest, if it is because if he wants to be with me until late time, we could go to a pub. There are lots of pubs near the campus…or late-night restaurants. Or we could walk together in the park late at night! But he kept insisting that I come over to his place. (Even though you don't want to?) Yes!! My mom told me to be aware of men, but since he kept insisting, I reluctantly accepted his offer, saying 'OK, I am going, but only today.' But how should I describe this feeling? I was overwhelmed when I walked inside his place. (Overwhelmed? Why?) There was no stinky smell. It was not dirty. It was not clean either…but it was just a normal small room. But I felt overwhelmed. He was majoring in physical educations at our school. But….(why? Because it was a closed room?) Yes!!! I felt so uncomfortable. I could only think that I should get out as soon as possible. So I left his

> place few moments later. But when I was dating girlfriends, I wanted to bring them to my place. I also wanted to visit their places. Even if it was a small, closed room, I was not scared… he was a man no matter what. Even older than me, one or two years. I mean, I was in a closed space with an adult man in the place that I was unfamiliar with. That made me uncomfortable.

In this episode, the man did not interpret her reluctance but kept pushing her to visit his place. While she wanted to know him more through late-night walk at the park or over the dinner, several careless dates in the convenience store where they did not even share food was enough for him to invite her to come over. If the man was more aware of and empathetic of how women feel insecure and unsafe in their daily lives, living with the possibility of gender-based violence, I believe he would have chosen a different route, if he was serious about getting to know her. She also told me how her past boyfriends kept insisting on knowing her address, to prove the chivalry of riding her home; regardless of their intentions, You-Jin felt scared that they would not back off when she nicely rejected their offer. "What if they remember my address and come to me and harm me when I break up with them?" From 2016 to 2018, (more than) 108 women were killed by their male intimate partners when they announced the breakup (J.-Y. Lee and Lee 2021a). The book introduces one heartbreaking episode: "The woman showed the text to the police, the text threatening her. She also told the police that she was constantly raped by him. Listening to her words, the man punched her face with his fist while the police was watching. However, the man was released from investigation that night. The man visited her workplace the next morning. He ceaselessly poured hydrofluoric acid on her face. She died" (ibid, 98-99). This quote reminded me of You-Jin's another ex-boyfriend who insisted he would never leave You-Jin's work until she agrees to become his girlfriend. You-Jin also experienced her male peers and ex-boyfriends taking a photo of her without her consent. "One day, my friend and I searched each other's name on internet to see if any of the deepfake porn using our faces were uploaded. During the search we found one of our classmates' face used in the porn. We messaged her, and she said she already knew it." Men, when she problematized them taking her photo without her knowing, cut friendships with her.

Men's lack of empathy was not only shown in the one-sided courtships or their shallow understanding about women's fear in regard to gender-based violence. It was also shown in daily conversation. Dan-Bi was convinced that heterosexual love was impossible, at least for her, based on her perception of men's lack of empathy for her interest in feminism. Her words reminded me of Ji-Yeon's confident claim that if men truly loved women, they should have already declared themselves as proud feminists. Dan-Bi said:

> I love playing Overwatch… At the game, female players get sexually harassed as soon as they turn on the voice chat. A male friend of mine got furious when I complained about this issue, asking "Are you generalizing men?" The pattern continued…I am tired of persuading them.

When asked her if she could date and have sex with men, she told me that it is theoretically possible, but she would never do so. Similarly, Yeong-Ah, an engineering researcher in her late twenties, experienced questionable responses from her boyfriend:

> In a male group chat, I saw his male friends commenting on my body sexually like how my body is so hot. He did not defend me there, just replying: 'are you crazy?' to them…A male foreigner whom I met on the street suddenly asked me if he could take a photo with me. My boyfriend was there. While the foreigner was posing to a camera, he touched my waist without my consent. My boyfriend did nothing, and he saw it. I also told him that I felt violated. He didn't respond much.

Here, a patriarchal culture is visible: a man has a hard time standing up against other men in this homosocial order (Ortner 2022), even if those men violated his girlfriend's honor. It is because adhering to the homosocial order is essential for him to maintain a stable position of a man, and empathizing to women does not help them to focus on following the rules. Even if it costs his girlfriend's self-esteem and dignity, his own security (a position in patriarchal social order) was more important than standing up for his partner, which would be a breach of security. In patriarchy, non-men are not part of the social contract (Ortner 2022); therefore, protecting non-men by confronting men would only harm men's reputation as a loyal member of the patriarchal social contract (ibid).

Again, their anecdotes are relevant to feminist peace and security theory. "Violence and peace" are "gendered," and it is "concerned not just with spectacular instances of violence, such as the event of war, but considers the everyday as a key site of concern" which includes, for instance, "domestic abuse" (Wibben and Donahoe 1,2 ; Choi 60). When women are surrounded by people who cannot empathize their fear about gender-based violence or by people who inflict violence on them, women are not safe. 4B women joined the social order called 4B that they made together to find their own peace and security, by discarding heterosexuality in patriarchal society which failed in nurturing empathetic, non-violent, masculinities.

New Scripts, New Communications I: Beyond Reification and Objectification

So far, I have described how heteronormativity has a coercive power confining women from being true to themselves and how heterosexual love itself often brings out the coercive power of gender dynamics due to it being entangled with institutions and certain aspects of masculinities.

Now, I focus on how my informants described that lesbian love they chose after the 4B movement felt liberating to them since there was no "script." bell hooks asserts that "the more we let go of heterosexism…the more likely we are to see women as potential partners" (hooks 2002, 196). Learning that they should be critical of patriarchy and heteronormative gender roles along with heterosexuality, many informants were exposed to the idea of lesbian love only after joining the 4B movement. They would be invited to a small group of 4B communities which already had lesbian couples. Seeing them, some realized that they were raised up in heteronormative environment where lesbians were totally erased. Other informants said that they slowly emerged into lesbian literatures, movies, and cultures after joining the 4B. Surrounded by lesbian feminists and by their lifetime vow not to love men anymore, they slowly geared their life toward lesbianism, whether it being a sexual and romantic love between lesbians or interest in studying about feminist lesbian theories. Knowing about women-related literature, theory, and discussion was refreshing to them, since as Hee-Su jokingly told me, the choice in terms of sexuality in Korea is "Yes or Yes," and of course, the option is only one: heterosexuality.

According to Ellen Lamont, the majority of the queer people in San Francisco bay areas she studied "described heterosexual dating and relationship norms as both constraining and boring, emphasizing how heterosexual lives are *predetermined by scripts*" and "explicitly rejected heterosexual dating and relationship norms and expressed support for egalitarian and non-gendered practices" (Lamont 2017, 631–32). They mostly viewed that the script was "too rigid," "sexist," and "more disadvantageous and obligatory for women than men" (ibid). 4B women also views heterosexual "scripts" in a similar way. According to the 4B women, the heterosexual dating script induces the concept of *reification and objectification*. First, many informants told me how men focusing on the women's appearance rather than personalities disappointed them. My informants found such reification of human being into an (sexual) object as something too superficial to feel safe and develop love. For instance, in the anecdote shared before, You-Jin problematized when the man showed interest in dating her only by seeing a picture of her, concluding that she was pretty enough

to date. Instead of a holistic human being, You-Jin became a pretty enough person, whom he could date.

Similarly, Hee-Su, who shared how she was sexually abused by her brothers from a young age, complained how men treated her like "a piece of meat." Hee-Su wanted to overcome her trauma, by own back her sexuality. Her solution was to have sex with many men because she hated herself being timid when it came to her body and sexuality, due to her childhood trauma. During her journey, she encountered numerous men and came with one conclusion: that men do not view her as a human being but rather as a sexual being. Here, reification and objectification happened.

When she was handling some symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases and told by the doctor to not have sex for weeks to recover, her male partner at that time insisted that she should have sex with him. She realized at the moment that he did not care about her at all; he was risking his partner's health to meet his sexual desires. She wanted to develop "deeper connections with men," other than having sex. For her, a deeper connection meant sharing life histories. She shared her biggest trauma, the time when she had been raped by her brothers and her parents ignoring the rape. However, whenever she opened up and shared the past, every single male partners left her without giving her a good reason. She said that maybe the men thought that she was the person who is like a fictional character that appears in incest-theme porn, not a pure girl that they wanted. The mystery continued even when she finally found "the one." She recalled, "I was sure that he was the one. He was really the best man I have ever met. He seemed to have a good sensitivity. He was nice. He was also a university student, so I thought our background was similar since I attended university at that time too. But even him, the best man I thought that I discovered, was no different…He liked this girl, so I was simply curious about why he liked her. I expected something deeper such as her personality, connections, her thoughts…but he only repeated how pretty she was, and that was it." She said that if the best man was like this, then all the other men would be same. She emphasized that she had met "numerous" men, and she did not intend to explore more. Men Hee-Su met had an unfortunate pattern of reifying and objectifying women into pretty or/and sexy something.

Of course, the word "deeper" here has preconceived notions of moral superiority. However, I am not interested in making hierarchies of who are capable of what. I am interested in figuring out which element made my informants disappointed in dating men. Including all the episodes I could not mention here due to the length limit, their disappointments converge into the men's reification and objectification of women in a specific way. According to the 4B women's experience, male partners

they met seemed to be raised into appreciating the visual and sexual values of women such as their prettiness and sexiness from their complexions and bodies. Since women are objectified and reified as something pretty and sexy, male partners my informants met seemed to have less interest in investing care and effort into discussing with them about difficult topics, such as their life philosophies, inner thoughts, politics, and many others. You-Jin complained how it was impossible to talk about any complex topic with her ex-boyfriends; rather, they only were interested in superficial conversation of "describing the state," such as "Wow, the dog is there!" "Wow, this food is good." "Wow, the movie was fun." However, You-Jin wanted a complex, long banter of thoughts and discussions with him. Similarly, Ha-Eun remembered how with her ex-boyfriends, discussions about philosophy, history, and politics was not possible.

Their disappointment gets compensated when they found a new type of love in lesbian relationship. For those who were capable of lesbian love, they gained the courage to live a life as a lesbian. Da-Young was one of them. Da-Young compares her heterosexual past and her homosexual present with an astonishing episode. With her girlfriend, she is now seen more of a human being than a sexual object:

> This is an embarrassing story. But my butt is quite big. [chuckles] So when I was in relationship with men, they often emphasized and complimented on how beautiful my butt was. And that was it….But I wanted them to focus on my personality, or other things… Those type of compliments from males made me conscious of my appearance and feel small. But the girlfriend whom I am with now, she has never, ever, once commented on my appearance. She even never used adjectives like 'pretty' or 'cute' to me. I feel more respected, comfortable, and safe.

As of now, Da-Young is maintaining a stable relationship with her girlfriend, for almost several years. Such men's reification and objectification of women transforms a holistic human being to a desirable, in a specific way, often making a woman feel less respected, uncomfortable, and unsafe. Again, the FPR notion of security is evident here, too. Similarly, You-Jin offered this funny episode, where while her girlfriends view her as a holistic human being, his ex-boyfriends focused on her outer appearance:

> When I ask my boyfriend then why he liked me, he would just really simply say "Because you are pretty." And move on. I felt like something was missing… Now, with my girlfriend, I feel like I am truly loved. When asked the same question, my ex-girlfriend and current girlfriends would say, "When you talk about your passion, your eyes shine. I really like that of you." Or "One day, you tried to dye your hair blue by yourself. Maybe something went wrong. You appeared in front me, during our date, with blue hands. I asked you 'You-Jin, what is that?' and you hid your hands behind your back, and said 'It is nothing!' I thought you were so cute." Or "When you pushed that door and walked into this room, I thought you were very cute." Like this.

You-Jin's eyes indeed were shining when listing the compliments she appreciated. Compared to her ex-boyfriends' praises, her female ex and current partners' compliments were more detailed and cover the multiple aspects of her personality. Again, then notion of women being dehumanized in gendered power relations, as mentioned in the section Analytical Frameworks, resonate here in this theme of love again: with reification and objectification, the method that my informants' past male lovers were more used to, was not the way that my informants wanted to be loved or to love. 4B women were thus writing their own script, by refusing the reification and objectification, one of the most naturalized love language between men and women.

And when a woman goes off from the script, the script that says women should maintain their beautiful outer appearance to be qualified as a girlfriend, her boyfriend become baffled. As informants of Lamont said, the script is "rigid." As I mentioned before, many of the 4B women, and all of my informants, are also part of the Escape-the-Corset movement. When they decided to cut their hair short, many of them experienced ruptures in their heterosexual relationships. Their boyfriends got extremely upset that they cut their hair "without discussing it with them"; some even broke up due to the dispute coming from my informants' sudden decision to cut her hair.

Eun-Ji, a student of Korean literature in her mid-twenties, recalled the moment when her "seven-years-of love melted like snow," after she decided to join the Escape-the-Corset movement and cut her hair short.

> As soon as he saw my short hair, he asked me, disappointed, 'why'… It is *my* hair, so it is *my* freedom to do whatever to my hair. Why do I have to give him the reason, especially when he obviously looked upset? So, I asked him 'why are you saying like that? I can't even cut my own hair without your permission?' and he said that the permission was not important, but that I just had to give him a prior notice. I got shocked…He said, 'it is fortunate that we are a long-distance couple. When I meet you again, your hair will grow back. You will grow your hair, right?' I reached a tipping point there. 'No, I don't want to grow it back!... It is my hair. Are you dating me or are you dating my hair? Then just date a wig! Why are you dating me?' And then he said, if his girlfriend has short hair, he feels like he is dating 'a younger male sibling, not a girlfriend.' I became so mad, yelling at him, 'then date anyone who has long hair if that is what you care the most!!!' Then we broke up.

Eun-Ji experienced how going off the heterosexual dating script "without prior notice" risked her being transformed from a girlfriend to "a younger male sibling." Without the prerequisites that women need to have, in the Korean context, long hair that appears feminine, women risked not being

reified, which means that they might not be desired by males. Baffled men would try to express their confusion by saying that their girlfriends look like men. This negative reaction from men signifies how women are often reified and objectified in a certain way and such gender roles are essential for heteropatriarchal love to operate.

Of course, if women feel that they are not treated as a holistic human being but rather as something pretty and sexy, they could negotiate the heterosexual courtship cultures. Lamont shows an interesting study in which heterosexual women, with heightened sensitivity about gender equality, fail to realize the gender equality in their relationships regardless of their tireless negotiations. She argues that "to ease the conflict between a desire for equality and a persistence of conventional courtship rituals, women conclude that the symbolic gendering of courtship does not contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality. They construe men's participation in unequal courtship patterns as natural and inevitable and they explain their own participation as a personal choice that is rooted in their personalities and preferences. In this manner, women are able to reaffirm their autonomy and deny the significance of inequality in courtship, demonstrating how narratives of empowerment based on ideologies of individualism can be used to conceal the continuation of male privilege in ways that make individuals feel good about their conformity. Unfortunately, this approach not only limits the options for more privileged women, it also reinforces norms for women whose limited resources provide them with fewer opportunities to challenge gender inequality" (Lamont 2014, 207). Considering the meta-structure of gendered power hierarchy that causes exclusion, exploitation, and dehumanization of women, I argue that while negotiations are not impossible, it requires arduous work from both genders, not just from women, as shown in Lamont's case study. 4B women, concluding that men are not willing to change from their perspective, decided that escaping from this social order—patriarchy, heteronormativity, and gender roles—was faster than staying inside the order, negotiating, and calling for a change. Men often perceive less of the gender inequality in intimate relationships than their female partners do; for instance, such pattern was discovered in Erickson's study, where "women perceived the distribution of housework and child-care activities to be significantly more unequal than men perceived it" (Erickson 2005, 344). Therefore such "inner" work could be challenging.

New Scripts, New Communications II: Toward Egalitarian and Democratic Relationships

As Da-Young felt "more respected" and "connected" from her homosexual relationship since her girlfriend does not focus on her outer appearance, Ye-Jin, baffled by his past boyfriend's abrupt

change in his attitude when she cut her hair short, experienced better communications with her girlfriend. While she recalled how men she dated seemed offended when she told them she felt like something was not working in their relationship, her past girlfriends were open to listening and willing to find the solution together: “I really wanted to tell you this ... I think dating men and dating women are quite different. When I was dating a girl, I felt like I was sharing a soul with them.” Wellwood also coins "true love" as a "soul connection" (hooks 2001, 182). Ye-Jin says:

> Many men I met had a strong and clear goal when they were with me: sex. Dating men was also following a periodical pattern. I should have sex with them at least a certain number of times a month, I should meet them at least certain times a week, etc... But with her, I don't know, everything was spontaneous. We met because we both wanted to meet. We chatted because we wanted to chat. But my past boyfriends... it was impossible with them. When we go to cafe together, they don't talk to me. They only look at their phones. There was no spiritual connection or exchange. But with my ex-girlfriend, it was easy. When I talked, she listened. When she talked, I listened. We shared what happened every day. *We also gave feedback to each other about our relationship. 'I like this about our relationship; what about you?' 'I like this too.' 'OK, then how about we do this next time?' This was how we always stepped up our relationship.”*

After hearing her reflection, I asked her, “and this type of conversation was impossible with your ex-boyfriend?" Her answer was simple: "*Yes, it was impossible.”* Ye-Jin’s episode illustrates how going off the scripts of heterosexual dating could open new possibilities to new type of communications between lovers. Many of my informants reported how it was difficult to have a healthy conversation due to their then male partners having difficulties accepting critical feedback about their relationships. Writing a new script with a group of people (women) who are less affected by militarized culture that requires member for hierarchical discussion rather than egalitarian one that often involves critical feedback between each other, 4B women are experiencing some new types of love.

Ji-Yeon, who extensively argued how illogical her mother is not to leave her father, shared an interesting theory to explain why such communications of “feedback” do not work in heterosexual love. In anthropological classic of gendered linguistic difference, Keenan describes how a constructed social norm becomes the marker that shapes ideal style of speaking and writing of women and men (Keenan 1989). As described in this study, the “ideal” way of speaking and writing differed for each gender due to the gendered dynamics, including complex hierarchy, intersecting with the social norm, rather than each gender born with different innate qualities. Ji-Yeon and I were

facing each other in a small underground seminar room that I rented. I still clearly remember how she directly looked at me in eyes, and suddenly bring me into the interview:

> You and I, we are sitting here together, right? Do you think more of yourself when you are taller or bigger than me? Do I think less of myself if I think that I would never be able to beat you if we go into a physical fight? No, right? We are equal, sitting here. I joined your research because I thought you were an interesting person and I like you as a person. You also think same-wise. So, if we have a conflict, we are not afraid of each other, we will talk to each other, right? 'Hey, JiMin, I don't like when you say this. It hurts me. Can you not do that?' like that, right? But men, whom I met during my school years, do not speak up even if they are bullied or mistreated when the person who bothers them was taller than him, stronger than him. They don't complain if they think that they can't beat the person with their fist. There was always "rank" among men, a rumor when one boy knocked down another boy, so he is now the "king" like that. 'Now he is the no.1, not him!' The whole school will be like that.

Her episode reminded me of anthropologist Brian Ferguson who extensively researched to answer to the everlasting question, 'why is it always men who start wars' (Ferguson 2021). By showing various communities where boys are not brought up as warriors, he concludes that certain societies give boys the message that being manly means to kill (ibid, S122). Here, I argue that masculinities are reproduced in certain way that resembles "hegemonic masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) in the context of Korean society, which are the militarized ones (T.-S. Choi 2018; S. Moon 2005b; 2005a; Tikhonov 2009), who know how to fight, have a body of a warrior, follow the order of superior, give the order to inferior, and protect the weak. As shown in Um's fascinating study, military culture is rampant in workplace in Korea, where people are required to speak in *danaka*, the way of speech that "connotes a vertical superior-subordinate relationship and thus is a reflection of cultural competency in military organizations" (Um 2023, 1683). I suppose the hegemonic masculinities that men are brought up to do not match when they have to deal with their partners' complaints. The order of the military does not give any room for a male to complain (Ortner 2022). Thus, the patriarchy does not stay exclusively in military, but also in workplaces, homes, and romantic relationships. Masculinities affect how men receive their partner's attempt for democratic and egalitarian speaking, the prerequisite of women to become their partners, traits of women they are trained to appreciate, and type of conversations they are ready for.

Can Women Love Men?

One important thing to note is that 4B women not only asked "can men love women?" but also asked "can women love men?" As I have explained, my informants experienced more democratic

communication in their lesbian relationships than heterosexual ones where girlfriends would willingly listen to the critical feedback of the relationship or to the suggestion that requires egalitarian and communal decision-making. They also experienced how their same-sex partners would focus on more than their outer appearance when appreciating their partners, which, for 4B women, gave them the feeling that they are deeply connected. Conversations involving complex issues such as philosophies, thoughts, politics, and abstract concepts were more feasible in homosexual relationships than heterosexual ones.

Discovering these interesting differences, my informants also told me they questioned their own ability to love men. Such a re-examination was enlightening to them, especially because "the ability to love men" was never questioned in their heteronormative upbringing, nor in the general atmosphere of the society. You-Jin critically reflected that she never wanted that specific person to become her boyfriend, but wanted to have "a boyfriend". For her, having a boyfriend gave her a sense of stability and a secure social status. "A boyfriend" had prerequisites: A man with large shoulders who can hug her when she wants to cry. Similarly, Yeong-Ji realized that before 4B, she wanted "something to pour [her] love," not realizing at that time that it did not have to be men. Such reification resonates in some ways with the heterosexual script that their ex-boyfriends followed.

After the 4B, You-Jin finally had the courage to date women, and she learned how to love someone; While she thinks all her past heterosexual relationships were futile, leaving nothing after the breakup, she thinks differently when it comes to lesbian relationships. Reflecting on the latest breakup with her ex-girlfriend, she said, "I learned a lot. I learned a lot about myself and about love. I poured my emotions. I cherished every moment. The breakup was hurtful, but the relationship was nurturing. I became more mature thanks to the relationship. I think that's what's most important."
Similarly, Dan-Bi approaches dating in a different way because of joining the 4B movement:

> Before joining the 4B, I was obsessed with dating. (Dating men?) Yes…But now, my focus is not on whether I am dating or not. I don't want "someone" whom I could date, but rather a precious partner is what I want. In other words, the person whom I could arrange our differences and walk together. Before, I would walk away if I had to do such a work. But now, I never walk away, I try to solve the problem. (I am confused. How does discarding heterosexual dating lead to develop healthier approaches to dating?) At least I don't want to harm the person whom I am with right now. I cherish this person so much. Most of all, since I started loving myself, I realized how other people are also precious like how I view myself. So, my attitude changed…We are equal human beings, so we should be able to communicate and sort out our differences. Before I wanted to obtain something through dating. I wanted to obtain sense of stability. Sense of strength. The reason why I wanted to become a devoting

> mother and wife was because if I become that ideal version, a man would come and protect me, give me the sense of stability. But now, everything is different. I don't expect anything from my partner. I also learned that expecting something from others is something one shouldn't do. Because you can never expect human to act in your way.

Loving Friends

Going off from the heterosexual dating script opened infinite possibilities for 4B women to experiment with their new love. Now, I want to focus on other type of love, that are not necessarily romantic. After discarding sexual and romantic relations with men and joining the 4B community, many informants told me how friendship became more important to them, before they joined the 4B. Ji-Yeon, for instance, told me how her 4B friends saved her mental health whenever she encounters rude men because they understand her feminist rage. Plus, when she was discriminated against in her workplace because of her short hair—her boss insisting she put on a flower-pin or earrings to make "a less daunting impression to customers"—she received support from her 4B friends to gain enough courage to quit the job, believing that she could find a workplace where she would be accepted for who she is. Currently, she is thriving as a designer in a small company regardless of her extremely short hair.

Ha-Eun, a jobseeker in the IT industry, showed me a face full of light whenever she described her best friend. As a person who also romantically and sexually loves woman, I could not resist but ask her if she and her best friend are in a same-sex relationship with each other. She calmly shook her head and said, "No, we are just friends." I wanted to make sure because I was curious as a researcher: "Do you identify yourself as heterosexual?" "Yes, very," she replied, "And how about her?" I asked about her friend. "She is also," He-Eun said. When we were having coffee in the café, she would smile, tap the gallery icon on her phone, and open the photos of her best friend to show me: "See! This is her!" One day, Ha-Eun shared her piece of her day: "I was very depressed these days—but I met my best friend last night and had dinner with her. All my digestion problems disappeared. Friendship fixes everything!" She told me how she and her friend envision their future altogether.

For those who are not necessarily interested in romantic life and who are straight, they look for strong friendship inside or sometimes, outside the 4B community. Those friends were always women. Rather they could understand my informants' pain and rage since they shared the standpoint as a 4B feminist or rather they clicked with each other, 4B women were redefining the term "love"; while

before they thought that romantic/sexual heterosexual love was the only meaningful love, after discarding such sexuality-related normative gender roles, 4B informants are realizing that that was not everything that life could offer them. Many told me that they are happier now, where they could receive love from more diverse sources: feminist solidarity, feminist friendship, loving oneself due to an enhanced self-esteem and subjectivity, and for those who are capable of sexually and romantically loving women, lesbian love that they discovered would be it. You-Jin told me the words that I still remember vividly: "Before, if I did anything without my boyfriend, I thought it was meaningless. Eating alone? Meaningless. I would call him to call over. Travelling with friends? Meaningless. Travelling with friends therefore never excited me. Only trip with my boyfriend was meaningful. Now I think that…I was over-imposing the meaning on the heterosexual relationships."

Conclusion

My informants experienced and observed how women were dehumanized, excluded, and exploited by being situated in specific gender roles in gendered power relations. Those unwanted gender roles and inequality were apparent in heterosexual relationships and marriage. My informants started heterosexual dating due to a strong, coercive nature of heteronormativity. However, many of them were unhappy since they compromised their own safety, peace, and emotions only to conform to the culture. Observing how their mothers seemed not enjoying the true love in the coercive institution of heteropatriarchal marriage, my informants reconsidered heterosexual marriage. However, many tried heterosexual dating. During the process, coercion again rises, in the form of violent and apathetic masculinities they encountered from their partners. When starting lesbian relationships, many women surprisingly had better experiences, such as feeling that they were treated as holistic human beings instead of as reified, objectified something that is sexy and pretty. Communication style was also more egalitarian and democratic. Informants would also go through a deep self-reflection about themselves, wondering what true love is. In 4B women's version of true love, they should treat the partner as their truly equals, instead of "something" that has certain traits they expect. Lastly, by discarding heterosexual love and romance, a place for new friendships could blossom. Through their friendships, women confirm their bond, develop better health, and be happy together. By discarding the gender role of being a girlfriend (who are reified something sexy and pretty and who should have long hair with makeup) to a man, 4B informants are now open to new possibilities of loves.

Chapter Three: Ambitions

In this Chapter, I discuss several ways the 4B women envision their future in relations to their discarding of gender roles and heterosexuality. First, 4B women experience different temporalities when they decide to refuse to perform the gender roles that the patriarchal society impose on them. Second, they develop more affinity to economics and finance after joining the 4B, impacting how they imagine the future. Both of those differences are relevant to the existence and absence of heterosexual relationship or gender roles. Heterosexual intimate relationships play a key role in terms of confining 4B women's imagined temporality and their imagined relationship between themselves and economics/finance.

Gendered Time

First, I would like to bring the concept of "temporality," often used in feminist peace research studies. Reardon says that peace means "a social environment that favors the *full* development of the human person" (B. Reardon 1993, 6). Here, I focus on the term "*full* development." A "full development of the human person" takes a long time: it is not a short project. Therefore, for Reardon, peace is something that should *last long.* Also, peacebuilding should be something that covers the "continuum of peace" (Wibben and Donahoe 2020, 5), in other words, the extended, continued time of peace should be the goal of the peacebuilding practices.

I have established earlier how I view women's situations in Korea are far from being in a place of peace and security, when analyzed through feminist peace research theories, mainly because of them being dehumanized, excluded, and exploited due to the gender roles they are pressured to perform. Having intimate relationship with men worsens the situation, not only because of the intimate partner violence, but also because of the intimate gender roles that women end up performing: acting with a lack of sense of self, sticking to the rigid, sexist scripts by keeping the certain standards not to provoke their partners, being pressured into the relationship that they feel unsafe about, being affected by violent masculinities, and many others. These environment, that suppress 4B women's desire and personalities, are far from a place of peace where they could fully develop as a human being. Furthermore, being engaged into relationship, which requires commitment, make this state of them lacking peace too long. As peace is something that should be long enough, 4B women, ideally,

are experiencing a long enough time that they had not experienced before, by discarding heterosexual relationships. Based on that, I argue that 4B women, when envisioning their future, often feel a sense of liberation since they no longer have to incorporate the milestones of women's gender roles, such as getting married and having babies, into their life. Under the constant pressure where the society keeps give the message to women that the time is ticking, women developed hopelessness about their life. With all the gender roles to be performed, there were no space in their lives where they could insert their life goals or things that they really wanted to try. However, after joining the 4B, things change. Eun-Ji, a university student in her mid-twenties studying Korean Literature, shined her eyes when she was talking about her future:

> I really want to learn about so many things…however before, I could not do that, I thought, because my boyfriend at that time wanted to marry me. He wanted to marry me before we both get too old, and that is also how everyone does. So, I was sad and depressed. Later, I realized I was depressed because I was planning on doing something that I truly don't want to. Now, since I don't have to marry any man and think about having babies, my life seems so much longer! I can plan on any activity I want to do. I want to explore more on which study and which business I am good at. It was such a simple solution. If you feel like marriage and having babies would slow your life course in a way that you don't want to, then don't do them! Why did I take such a long time to take on that such a simple solution?

As explained in The Power of Heteronormativity section, I explained how women in Korean society are pressured into dating. As Eun-Ji is wondering why such a "simple" solution took "such a long time," I, again, assumes the power of heteronormativity that also affects the rigid sense of gender roles. Not surprisingly, many informants told me how their ex-boyfriends spoke to them as if they would be marrying, without discussing deeply whether the women really wanted the marriage and kids. With her life feeling "longer," Eun-Ji can now freely explore on what could nourish her. When one hair cut rendered her into her ex-boyfriend's "male sibling," she realized that heterosexual relationship should not be everything that she ends up learning in her life. She wants to try so many sports, diverse academic subjects, and hobbies to figure out what types of passion that makes her happy. Here, once again, I see the strengthened subjectivity, where Eun-Ji can finally plan her life in relation to herself, rather than in relation to her heterosexual gender roles.

My informants started to feel that their lives became longer not only because they could skip gender-normative life courses such as marriage and giving birth, but also because they stopped fearing aging. Before joining the 4B, You-Jin used to cry whenever she noticed a year has ended. She would lament that she was getting old. Now, she never cries even she notices a year has passed. Before joining the 4B movement, she cried at the end of the year, especially if she had not had any boyfriend that year.

Mourning such facts, she would believe that she was worthless. Her fear was originated from the misogynistic message that the society keeps giving, the older the woman is, the lesser her value is. Thus, she will have harder time to get a boyfriend as time goes by.

Ji-Yeon also told me how she was afraid of getting aged. While she hated the gender roles imposed on women from a young age, such as the duty of staying pretty and skinny, she was, however, affected by those strong norms. It made her worry what would happen if she became old, or in other words, "lose a value as a woman," as the society often would say. From 1920s, people of Chosun Dynasty grew extremely curious about white people visiting Chosun, often ending up admiring their height, big eyes, big nose, light-colored eyes, and light-colored complexion (Y.-A. Lee 2011); People of Chosun Dynasty did not fear the white people nor hate them, rather adored and admired them, "feeling inferior to their beauty" (ibid 212-221); To understand why they were colonized by Japanese Empire and their border being forced to open by Western (and Japanese) powers, people of Chosun started to believe in Darwinism, justifying that they were defeated due to their racial inferiority (ibid 222); therefore, they collectively studied eugenics, hoping to change their inferior race to superior one, such as white people (ibid). In that process, a standard beautiful woman was a tall, healthy, white woman (Y.-A. Lee 2011). In other words, "becoming a beautiful woman was to change her own race" (ibid 211). Based on such a beauty standard, from 1920s to 1930s, the unconditional revering of women's bodies and beauties were intensified (ibid 226-247), leading main discourses from media and pamphlets talking about how women's utmost value is outer beauty and men's utmost value is money (ibid). Although the social obsessions over glamorous beauty of women were diluted during the 1960s when the government-led industrialization took a place, such discourses obsessing over beauty of women during the 1920s and the 1930s still remain nowadays. These tendencies are now amplified by neoliberalism and capitalism, rendering Korea as a nation of plastic surgery (Leem 2017). Since now Ji-Yeon knows that such gender roles which reify women into beauty should be discarded for the sake of her happiness and liberation of women, she is not bothered. Being able to imagine her life when she became an elderly, her life, like others, became "longer."

Yeong-Ji's dream is to play the board game with her friend at her 80th birthday. Before joining the 4B movement, she automatically assumed marrying men, but she had never imagined herself living that long. Discarding heterosexual relationships gave an inevitable phase to all 4B women when they deeply think about themselves, before inviting other types of love such as friendships. During that process, Yeong-Ji focused more on her health, since she realized that living as a single woman until

she dies means that she needs to take care of her own health. It also gave her the realization that friends would be very important—indeed, she is maintaining meaningful friendships among the 4B community. A future anticipation that imagines herself as a healthy old grandmother (with no grandchildren) with healthy old grandmother friends made her motivated to achieve that dream.

So-Jin was planning to kill herself at the age of thirty since she had this incomprehensible sense of hopelessness that nothing would become better. However, after reading about the 4B movement and feminists inside the movement who were empowering themselves by studying about economics and finances, she made a promise to herself: to earn and save a certain amount of money until the end of that year. She succeeded in realizing her own goal. Such a fact made her extremely happy. I can still remember her eyes filled with happiness, recalling that moment: "Wow, I can do this! I can do this!" She imitated the moment for me. Now, she cancelled the plan of killing herself: If she could achieve this goal, she thought, then she should not be afraid of other adversities. With no plan to end her life, her life became longer, again, after joining the 4B movement.

Breaking The Generational Curse: from Mothers to Daughters

Feminist anthropologists approach "economy" in a holistic and complex manner. Yanagisako showed how the economy is not operated as "a singular logic" (Bear et al. 2015) but as an enmeshed, complex "logic" in relation to gender, kinship, history, and cultural realities, such as fathers passing on their business to his sons instead of daughters (S. J. Yanagisako 2002). Therefore, "economy" is not operated by a pure cost-and-benefit analysis: "Economy" is *cultured* by preconceived notions of gender that people and society hold. The statistics indicating a better performance of males in "economy" does not indicate the innate superiority of men; rather, one should look how cultures played in, to render such results. "Economy" is also something personal. Microfinance of Paraguayan women shows how "personal connections" of the women make or break their business (Schuster 2015). Contrary to common understandings, affectionate labor has always existed, *both* in pre- and post-industrial era (S. Yanagisako 2012). Thus, "economy" is highly related to personal-ness, emotions, and social-ness. At last, it is human beings who form the "economy." And humans are cultural and social beings (Eriksen 2015, 53–56). Based on these anthropological insights, I show how Korean economy is highly gendered: it is mainly the heterosexual intimate relationship that hindered women from achieving anything outside home.

My informants were born in the 1990s and a few in the 2000s. Their mothers and fathers were born in the 1960s or in the early 1970s. Around half of my informants' mothers were discouraged from pursuing economic actions or desires by the institutions of heteropatriarchal marriage, including their husbands. Regardless of a generational shift, many informants also experienced a similar restriction from their heterosexual past when they were dating boyfriends.

As explained in the section Analytical Frameworks, women in the early days were often discouraged by patriarchal families, including husbands, their parents, siblings, and many others, from getting education or pursuing their career. Eun-Ju, a job-seeking woman in her late twenties, reflected about her mother:

> I was a young girl. Kids always make mistakes. I remember that incident way too lucidly because it was very traumatic. I once slipped a bowl of noodles. What would have happened? Of course, the ramyon was all over the floor. But then my dad started yelling at my mom, telling her that if she had taken care of me better, then I would not have slipped the bowl. I didn't understand his anger. My mom was so upset, so she stormed outside. Then, my father halted the credit card she brought outside. So, she could not go anywhere but to come back home…Whenever my mom stormed outside angrily after fighting with my dad, my father again stopped her credit card. But what she does outside was to buy food to make supper, as always…(Wait, she did not have a card under her name?) No, because at that time we were dependent solely on his income.

She continued:

> If I put it in a harsh way, I thought that maybe... marrying a man is like becoming a free domestic worker for him. My mom had no freedom. Look how he constrained her freedom... as if he wanted to tell her constantly that you are under me. I don't want to live like that, really…

One of the alarming memories that Eun-Ju found problematic was how her mother had no economic or financial freedom. Whenever her husband was angry with her, he could shut down her economic activities at any time and leave her stranded. As a woman who wants to have full control of her own freedom, Eun-Ju decided not to risk her economic and financial freedom by marrying a man. After joining the 4B movement which highlights the problematic issue of women being excluded from society, including the economic realm, she realized that gender roles and heteropatriarchy are a key source of power that allowed her father to restrict his wife whenever he wanted to. Now that she is planning a life without marriage to man, she should not worry her partner restricting her from making her own credit card. Not only that, she could develop a more detailed life plan since she does not have to wonder at which year she should insert "getting married" and "having babies."

Eun-Ju's mother, however, was not just a victim but also a perpetrator of such restriction on freedom to Eun-Ju.

> My mom constantly told me that I could not do this, and I could not do that. I am very interested in learning Japanese. I wanted to step up my career. But my mom told me that our family does not have much money, so as the eldest daughter, I was expected to sacrifice my desire and make the family's money as a top priority. But the most furious part is that she gave money to my younger brother, who does not even have such a plan about his future as I have. She even pushed him to go to China to learn Chinese and get a job there. I was so mad.

Now Eun-Ju understands that her mother was filially performing the role of a mother in heteropatriarchal order: to encourage sons to develop their career but discourage daughters when they think daughters are being too "ambitious." She now lives with her other 4B friends. She is learning English via free online resources, preparing to have a job outside of Korea. She re-started learning yoga that she first learned at a young age. She is also working hard to improve her illustration skills. Due to her precarious financial situations, she is supporting her dreams with minimum wage jobs that she could find in her local area. She is meticulous when spending, monitoring herself if she is not over-spending. Watching her mom affected her motivation to join the 4B movement. With no partner who could discourage her from exercising economic autonomy, Eun-Ju is stress-free. When asked if she were happy, she told me that she was "very happy." She said, "I am living multiple dreams, and I want to achieve all of them."

Another pattern that I observed among my informants is that many of them were disappointed at how their ex-boyfriends shared a similar culture with their fathers: my informants recalled how their ex-boyfriends were already highly knowledgeable about economics and had already been investing in various passive income streams. However, these men had gatekept this information from their girlfriends and had not encouraged their female partners whenever they were trying something new.

Ye-Jin, who is now on a trip with some other feminists to start a new arts business, recalled a memory of her ex-boyfriend:

> I think he was rich. When I told him that I want to become this and that in the future, he never encouraged me. Because of the hereditary law, he had a building in front of his name passed down from his parents although he was only in his twenties like I was. I did not read a single book when I was dating him. All my life was orbiting around him. Why? Because as you would know, I was dominated by this depressive and lethargic sentiment that was prevalent among young women in their twenties.

Indeed, young women in their twenties are the fastest growing group in terms of committing suicide in Korea. Women's suicide rate is heavily related to their loss of job (J. Kang et al. 2023). According to Jang Soong-Nang, a scholar of nursing, women born in 1997 has seven times higher possibility to commit suicide than when women born in 1951 were at their twenties and such a number equals to that of generation who suffered war-related traumas (Lim 2020); Lim Yoon-Ok, an advisory committee member of Korean Women Workers Association, analyzes that women committed suicides after being heavily affected by the pandemic, since most of the precarious jobs are for women (ibid). Chung Haejoo, a scholar of health and social policy, points out how more women than men go to university while so many of them stay long in the labor market and argues that only when the labor market accept women as equal members as men, this tragedy might stop (ibid). Young women do not wish their life to be centered around marriage but rather around their work (E.-J. Kim et al. 2020). When such aspirations get frustrated, women feel extremely hopeless. And such hopeless emotions are reproduced among women. Ye-Jin continues:

> I did not study. I even skipped some classes to see my boyfriend. My boyfriend knew everything, but he never told me anything such as "Why are you skipping your classes to see me?" He was not interested in my priorities. I was obviously lost. My family is not rich as his. Our house did not even have an air-conditioner as his house did. When he visited my house, he once told me that if you marry me, you can live in a house where there is an air-conditioner. It was extremely insulting for me. I need to change my whole life just because of the air-conditioner? What did he think of me? He also studied all the knowledge about economics, stocks, and many other good tips of how to earn passive incomes.

I asked her, "Did he share any of this knowledge with you?" She got excited with anger and said. "No! He was focused on making me docile and not interested in other stuff such as studying and earning money. And he always pushed me to marry him. I am pretty sure he wanted me to be a full-time housewife. I didn't want that, so I broke up with him."

Similarly, Eun-Ji, recalls some puzzling parts about her past heterosexual relationship.

> I didn't even know there was something called "stocks." I thought that was only for professionals, not for people like me. No one instructs women about what Bitcoin is, for instance. But my ex-boyfriend was a Bitcoin lunatic. Of course, at that time I didn't even know what Bitcoin is. (He didn't let you know about it?) No, he didn't. He would have earned a lot of money from this time's Bitcoin market. Whenever I think of how much he might have earned, I feel like I am going crazy. I should have been investing in bitcoin with him. I also like money as he does. (Why do you think your ex-boyfriend keep the information to himself? Maybe a social reason?) Social reason? I think men do not really like women going "outside." If I earn many money, he might have thought that I would leave him. (Really, for that reason?) I ruminated on this for a while, and I cannot think of any other reasons. At that time, I was dependent on him economically since he paid some

> miscellaneous costs to maintain the little house that I was renting, food cost, and etc., although I was paying the rent. He bought me bowls, utensils, and stuff. I think he might have concluded that if I had earned money, he was afraid of me leaving him.

While her boyfriend was investing money in Bitcoin and earning massive passive income which she was only aware after the breakup, Eun-Ji reflects on her time when she was spending money in a totally different field when she was 20 and 21 years old. “I want to delete all those times from my life!” she exclaimed. She said, “I was crazy at that time. I was looking for dermatologist surgeries.” When one is constantly surrounded by aggressive advertisements for plastic surgeries in subways and on the buses, it is hard to ignore the pressure. Indeed, Korean beauty industry is “one of the top ten ... in the world” (International Trade Administration 2022) and the plastic surgery industry of the nation was “estimated to be worth about $10.7 billion in 2020" and is expected to be "around $11.8 billion" in 2021 (Roh 2021).

My informants’ ex-male partners were diligently adhering to their gender roles. Financial knowledges are for men since it is the role of a man to bring the bread for the family. Women could relax, maybe focus on different expertise. Those gatekeeping of financial knowledge shows a clear discrepancy of upbringings between young women and men. Young women were more trained to normalize discussions of makeup and dating as topics for networking. Young men were more trained to normalize having discussions about the economy, finance with their male peers or family members. The fact that the women later realized that the men were gatekeeping and discouraging women from exploring the world of economics and finance that they had never been encouraged to look into proves that it is never innate quality of gender for their interest, but rather a gendered, patriarchal hierarchy that made such assumptions and realized such assumptions. Women were “not interested” in money-making since they were not allowed to fully see what money-making is. Eun-Ji reflects on how her boyfriend at that time acted weird whenever she tried new things.

> I don't know! But what I can assume is that he was afraid of me being better than him. He discouraged me when I told him that I really want to go to university and learn new stuff. He also discouraged me when I told him that I want to be a script writer for a television show in Korea. He said that I should not do it because it does not pay really well. He also told me that he does not want me to go there because he said then I would have less time investing in our relationship and that there are also men in universities so he cannot trust those men. What type of nonsense is that? I am talking about my rights of education here? He wanted me to just stay as a nice, passive girlfriend to him whom he can later easily make a full-time housewife.

Eun-Ji's anger motivated her to focus more on the sentiment of the 4B movement to make women more ambitious. Eun-Ji and Ye-Jin's angry recollections of their ex-boyfriend's gatekeeping of important financial information reminded me of other informants who also pointed out how they were shocked later that their male peers or ex-boyfriends were already savvy about all the financial and economic knowledge to make themselves richer while they constantly kept the information away from their intimate female partners. By joining the 4B movement, these women could critically re-examine the gatekeeping of certain information of their ex-male partners. Realizing that those were based on heteropatriarchal gender norms, my informants were motivated to study more about capitalism, economics, and finance, knowing very well that Korean economy is already highly gendered.

Not only the urgency of securing one's financial independence and autonomy, but also in the context of eradication of gender inequality and women's liberation, many women told me how it is important for them not to give up their career in the capitalist society they are born with. You-Jin describes well of how she thinks that her not giving up her career, whether it is small or big, can benefit women in general.

> At my university, there is a really, really sexist male classmate. He has a good relationship with other students and also with professors, so he is like the absolute power. During any group work, he would often ignore female classmates' opinion and give more important responsibilities to male classmates whom he is close with. I always hated him for that. One day, he had to make a presentation in front of the whole class, about the education material that he made. Korean government explicitly makes the protocol that all the textbooks should be gender-neutral and that it should never reflect any gender stereotypes, such as this job is for men, and this job is for women. If he is taking his major, educations, seriously, he should have known that. But his PowerPoint slides had these several images where men were doing mechanical engineering while women were doing "womanly" work. When describing house, he would describe fathers lying on the sofa and mothers cooking and cleaning. When I was listening to his PowerPoint, I was like 'what the fuck?' Then, the professor told him that his education materials that he made are too sexist. He was told to revise and come back. At that moment, I thought that to change the sexism, to change the sexist behaviors of men, the best thing I can do is to climb up to the higher position. He did not listen to any of his classmates before. Only when professor told him so, he revised his materials.

You-Jin's observation continued:

> You know I am working in the convenience store, right? Our town has a lot of alcoholic elderly men who would walk into the store, and bring the soju bottle to the counter with their shaky hands. Most of them visit the store already drunk. There is this one particular old man who keeps telling me 'hey pretty! Smile!' or 'Hey pretty! Are you studying? How old are

> you?' One day, he raised his hand wide open in front of me when I was working, insisting that I should give him a high-five. I really didn't want to. So, I said 'no.' Then he said, 'fucking bitch' then went out. Next day, he revisited the store as usual. At that time, there was a male manager. He is not even that tall. Actually he is shorter than me and he is really skinny. But that man did not say anything when the manager was standing next to me! The one who would always bother me would not say a word! So, imagine, JiMin. If I was a employee, I cannot stand against him. I would get fired for being rude to the customer. But only if I can be the manager of that convenience store, when my employee is harassed like that, I could say something like 'hey, that's rude. Would you drop it?' So, I realized the importance of achieving into a certain position. That way I can protect myself and protect other women. I want to become a teacher in the kindergarten who can say to other teachers, 'hey, the education materials you made is sexist. Can you fix it?' That way, I can make a difference.

Situated in a social order where being a woman worsens the discrimination, my informants imagined the future, pondering how they could make a difference. Although it does not have to be a fancy board position, as You-Jin described, being a leader in a small local convenience store or in a local kindergarten can benefit women by exercising power in terms of persuading people to move further from sexism. Other informants, such as So-Jin and Yeon-Su, each respectively imagine a future where one establishes a small IT company that hires only women and a medical clinic that hires only women. Since women are already marginalized in economy in various ways, such as in their intimate partner relationships and also as described in the section "Exclusion," they hope their capital and effort to benefit women. As a result, they desire gender equality to come. As feminists who value the subjectivity and independent sense of self, securing income, i.e. getting a job, is also a priority for these women, instead of prioritizing about getting married to men. Dan-Bi interestingly said that the 4B movement would benefit all participants because it gives courage to participants through the movement's core philosophy and community always supporting each other. Regardless of women ending up in which position in the society, if they fully understand their worth and the concept of self-love, they would be able to voice their mind if they think they are being discriminated; however, as You-Jin said, there are situations where being confident is not enough for the vulnerable to speak up about the discrimination they are facing. Within hierarchies, 4B women see no harm in trying to make themselves stronger, so that they could speak up for themselves and for other women.

Sense of Community

4B women also reimagine their future in terms of sense of community, where they can uplift women in the gendered economy which already marginalizes women. Many of my informants had gone through extensive work, sorting out female artists on their playlist. Eun-Ji and many others told me

that the idea of giving money to men upsets them. They want every single penny to be spent to women, such as female singers and female business owners, if they have to spend money because, as scholars have found, the economy is already gendered, giving a much bigger amount of capital to men than women. Again, economy is not the realm disembedded from culture, but affected by the specific desires of social actors. In this case, it would be the moral responsibility that the 4B women feel and desire to realize, in hope of achieving gender equality through their conscious consuming (Browne and Milgram 2009).

This sense of community is not only burgeoning in terms of consuming, but also in their daily, physical lives in regard to their relationship with other 4B friends. Many informants told me how their lives were indescribable without their 4B friends. Yeong-Ji and Ju-Hee both mentioned, as a single household, often visit each own 4B friends' house to help out each other. When Yeong-Ji's friend was struggling to paint her wall, she travelled all the way to her friend's town and happily helped her. To save money, Yeong-Ji's friend was doing it herself, but finding that it was more challenging job than expected. However, when two people painted the wall, instead of one, the job was manageable. Not only that, Yeong-Ji also gets recommendations from her 4B friends which companies she should contact when she moves to a different place. Her friends would recommend her the service that would cost them less than other average services. Ju-Hee lives in a government housing. Amid their precarious economic situations, through the solidarity with friends, they develop a sense of community where they exchange knowledge regarding money and finance, which was gatekept from the society.

A "neoliberal" feminism?

When I was reading a book popular among 4B women, a book deemed as a canon to describe what "ambition" is (J.-A. Kim 2019), I concluded that the meaning of ambition was focused on a woman securing her job for a long time. She was not necessarily preaching about becoming a CEO, climbing up an insane corporate ladder, or a grandiose project that could catch millions of people's attention. When one calls 4B women "neoliberal feminists" just because some of their trends focused on economic empowerment, would it not be a voice from the privileged?

I myself was educated in a so-called elitist high school and went to a prestigious university in Korea. There, I felt suffocated by the endless neoliberal discourses that everybody so faithfully embodied: we make our destinies; we are a walking enterprise. Constant pressure from schoolteachers and

parents to keep my grades exhausted me. Only during my fieldwork did I realize that it was my privilege to feel fed up with neoliberal discourses.

Neoliberal discourses, which emphasize the importance of one's self-fashioning labor in constantly changing times, was actually subject to class and gender. Most of my informants grew up in precarious economic backgrounds. According to them, none of their friends, parents, teachers, or neighbors encouraged them to stay "ambitious," although here, the word would merely mean a successful balance between family and work since the majority of the society still expects women to be married and have family.

When discussing the trend of learning about stock trades, different types of bank accounts, fiscal policies of local government that benefit youth, informants exposed a sense of vulnerability, especially if they felt like they were not ready. One of my informants told me how she had too little money to invest in the stock market. She once joined an online community that specialized in information-networking about stock-trading, but she later left, feeling sad to see how other women had more money than she had. Regardless, she argued for the importance of such communities, that there should be a certain female solidarity in terms of educating each other financial knowledge and literacy.

Most of my informants also constantly commented on my spending habits, telling me how I should be more careful of my expenditures. When travelling together, I felt lazy and did not receive the money back from one of them, after paying on their behalf. It was less than 50 NOK in Norwegian Krone. I repeatedly told them that I do not mind; however, they looked concerned. Also, whenever I rented a seminar room, many lamented, scolding me why I did not look for a free option offered by the local government. While I could not find it due to lack of information, I could figure out their sensibility about money. They pay attention to the minute details of money every day since they know how valuable money is. A few of them told me that since they came from such a poor past, they are not afraid of anything that could come to their lives.

There was one informant who shared a similar economic class as me. She confessed to me, during our fourth interview, that she was so shocked when the word "ambition" was trending among women. She thought everything that they were saying, working hard for one's goal, motivating each other to study hard and get good grades, saving money and investing them into stocks, were such a rudimentary knowledge that one should have as a citizen of capitalist society. If one views 4B

women's stage of reimaging their future in terms of them having better materialistic conditions as "neoliberal," I assume that they are speaking from a privileged perspective. According to a person's class and privilege, the impact of neoliberalism becomes different. For those from precarious economic classes who were never encouraged in terms of achievements, "self-fashioning" discourses could sound liberating and empowering.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how men, in intimate relationship, often end up confining women's economic and social possibilities such as restricting their education, their chance to earn more money and their chance for better career prospects. Such a trend is shown in both previous and current generations of heterosexual couples. Again, based on the chapter "Feminism," I base this behavioral trend on the patriarchal social order where normative gender roles act as a power that maintains gender inequality where women are confined and restricted in many ways. Similarly, men, often assuming that their girlfriends would depend on them in terms of finance, did not show interest when their girlfriends achieved anything relevant to careers, and even often discouraged them. Then, I demonstrated how women embody the new concept of "ambition"; based on the critical reflections upon their heterosexual past and their mothers being restricted by their fathers, 4B women let themselves imagine a future that they had not imagined before. Now, the time feels "longer" since they are freed from gender roles that force them to include marriage and having kids into their life plan. Seeing how women are discriminated in numerous places of the society, some plan to obtain the position that could give them power to stand up against sexist people. Many argue the importance of financial autonomy, to maintain the subjectivity and independent sense of self that they have been preciously valuing from their escaping heterosexual past. A sense of community, where they consciously consume music and business in hope of supporting women and fostering gender equality and where they help each other 4B women's daily life, is burgeoning as important aspects of their lives.

Concluding Remarks

Eun-Ji was depressed before she was aware about the existence of feminism. After joining the 4B movement and seeing the 4B women participating in so-called "manly" sports, she decided to follow them. She thought, 'why are only men allowed to do this? What is preventing me from enjoying these sports? I should be able to do them too!" Excluded from various realms in society, from politics to workplace, being able to imagine oneself playing the sports that are deemed to be that of men gave her a sense of ecstasy. Decided to join the women's soccer club, she walked into a shop selling soccer shoes. The employee automatically greeted her, saying, "which size of your boyfriend's shoe is?" She told the employee that she was looking for hers, only to find out that there was no woman's size shoes at all, but only a kid's shoes. However, she did not give up and bought the biggest kid's size shoes. She ran on the grass wearing those shoes with other women, playing the soccer for the first time in her life. Her eyes became dreamy when recalling the moment: "The feeling that I felt when running the green grass where there were only women, playing soccer altogether… It gave me such a great happiness. Really… I can't emphasize."

Many informants told me how they were "depressed" before knowing about the feminism and joining the 4B movement. They described to me that they had not known the reason, but only after learning about feminism could they point out what was wrong. As I have extensively showed, gender roles, strong heteronormativity, and patriarchy prevented my informants from being themselves, loving themselves, and experimenting with loves and futures. Feminism gave them the language they unknowingly were deprived of to explain the source of their unhappiness. With the dual goal of finding a more nourishing life for themselves and liberating women from male-led oppressions, 4B women keep living their creative lives within the social order they created based on their uniquely critical reflections on their gendered lived experiences.

4B is a social order that the 4B women created to step away from patriarchal orders they are born in. Those patriarchal social orders require people to perform gender roles, and 4B women believe that women performing such restrictive, confined roles are unfair and subjugating. Through their lived experiences and learning about feminism, they often problematize certain gendered landscapes of Korea, which are unequal gendered power relations that trap women. Those power relations are shown in a form of women's dehumanization into gender roles, women's exclusion from politics, workplace, students' movements, and many other realms that not only make impactful decisions to the society but also help women survive in the capitalist society (i.e. workplace), and women's

exploitation by men or male-centered societies, mainly in regard to women's sexuality. With those observations, 4B women critically examine the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality and normative gender roles that sustain such patriarchy in Korea and decide to discard the heterosexuality and gender roles. By discarding these two main powers that sustain patriarchy, 4B women create their own social order in hope of dismantling the patriarchy of Korea. They envision the future where women are merely human beings, not culturally, socially defined women. Within that social order, following their four vows of not having sex with men, not marrying men, not dating men, and not giving birth with men, they enjoy the liberty of experiencing diverse possibilities coming from their newly defined love and ambitions.

Experiencing how the powerfully coercive nature of heteronormativity transformed their own agency and observing the coercive nature of institutions such as heterosexual marriage, 4B women had reconsidered whether they really want heterosexual relationships or marriage. When dating men, they experienced various types of coercions, such as stubborn, non-consenting courtship from men, violent masculinities, and apathetic masculinities that could not empathize with their gendered fear and anxiety. They also experienced disappointment after they discovered how men would only offer them superficial way of connections when it comes to appreciating their female partners or having conversation. 4B women, before joining the 4B movement, were also baffled when men would cut off the love right after the 4B women went off the script, such as cutting their hair short. In contrast, when they engaged in lesbian relationships, they found a deeper and holistic way of appreciation coming from their same-sex partners instead of reification and (sexual) objectification, naturalized and normalized love languages among heterosexual couples. 4B women in same-sex couples also experience deeper connections, probably because they communicate in a more egalitarian and democratic manner compared to the past communicative dynamics they had with their ex-boyfriends. 4B women also learned about other types of love than the romantic one. They started to value their friendships more than before and could see how those friendships could basically sustain women's lives.

In terms of ambitions, 4B women experience a longer sense of time after joining the movement. Before, expecting themselves to marry their boyfriends or giving birth made them hopeless since such life courses required by the social norm contradicted with their own life plan they wanted to come up with. Due to such heteropatriarchal gender roles, they could not imagine themselves living a life that they truly wanted to have. However, after discarding those gender roles, 4B women could freely imagine how to live their life in future. While they thought that their time was ticking, now

they believe they have a lot of time. Also, with strengthened subjectivity, setting a goal and achieving it gave my informants confidence that helped their suicide contemplation. Discarding gender roles also helped them fear aging less, fostering the imagination of what type of life they would be living when they become old. In regard to heterosexual relationships, I found that the 4B women were not encouraged by their male partners during their relationships to learn about economics and finance. Not only that, the women were not encouraged to continue studying or preparing for the job they wanted to have, since their then boyfriends wanted them to stay home as their wife. They observed a similar, but in a severe form of restriction by their fathers to their mothers. Sometimes, it was a mother who restricted such an ambition of a daughter. With no such restricting actors, 4B women freely prepare their lives, learning things they want to learn and trying things they want to try. Now, fully convinced that they should not engage with any heteronormative gender roles that could benefit the sustaining of patriarchy, 4B women are not looking back, continuing their lives of living without men.

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