

WOMEN, WORK, AND FAMILY: A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF  
GENDER IDENTITIES AND ARCHETYPES IN TELEVISION DRAMAS

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By

Jiaqi Zeng B.A.

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# WOMEN, WORK AND FAMILY: A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER IDENTITIES AND ARCHETYPES IN TELEVISION DRAMAS

Jiaqi Zeng, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Michael Macovski, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the challenges that professional women face in the workplace, focusing on their attempts to balance work and family. In order to elucidate these challenges, it compares the discourse of female protagonists within several popular Korean and American TV series. More specifically, it suggests that these protagonists confront several key dilemmas, including stereotypically gendered family roles (e.g., childcare responsibilities, economic support) and workplace discrimination (e.g., pregnancy, appearance). Such dilemmas also illustrate the motivations that underlie these characters' work—including not only economic power but also social status and self-actualization. Then, taking a sociolinguistic approach to such issues, the later sections analyze conversational interactions between working women and their husbands regarding the division of domestic labor. Finally, the thesis examines these interactions from two additional perspectives: a grammatical analysis of working women's requests to their husbands regarding familial roles; and a semantic analysis of lexical items that reveal the profound influence of social hierarchy and Confucianism in modern South Korean society.

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# CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

## **1.1. Women in TV and Films**

### 1.1.1. Popular Feminism in Korean TV Dramas

The critical term “popular feminism” expresses the idea that some products of popular culture can effectively convey feminist discourses to the consumers of those products. Park defines this media phenomenon as a “‘feminism that has no name,’ because strongly identifying publicly a cultural product as ‘serious’ feminism may bring out a conservative backlash,” especially in Korean society. I would suggest, moreover, that various aspects of feminist discourse included in Korean TV dramas constitute such popular feminism. In other words, the dramas constitute a “women’s liberation movement placed in contemporary popular culture” (Kim, S., “Popular Feminism”, 2008, p.2).

In this context, one key embodiment of popular feminism is the media’s portrayal of women. “According to Lawrence Grossberg and Paula Treichler, studies of media representation have been conducted to discover how gender portrayals in media texts function to impose the dominant ideology, since women’s position, as oppressed in patriarchal capitalism, has been reproduced and maintained by the aid of ideological practice via media” (Kim S., 2008, p.3). For example, in Korean TV dramas, there are depictions of female protagonists as sexually liberated and freely expressive of feminist desire (S. Kim) (Lin, Kwan and Cheung). In the critical literature, moreover, studies of the media portrayal of women can be surveyed both vertically and horizontally: vertically, analyses range from negative – e.g., as “limited and mythical representations” contributing to “maintaining the patriarchal capitalist society” – to positive – e.g., as challenging dominant ideologies or

reversing gender roles (Kim, S., 2008). Horizontally, different media forms are found to produce different discourses about women –for instance, a different portrayal is found to emerge from the commentary on Korean TV dramas found in newspapers, compared with those found on television (Kim S., 2008).

Many feminist researchers also pay attention to other social functions and impacts of Korean soap operas and TV dramas. For example, one study claims that “TV soap operas have a largely negative impact, i.e., reinforcing and naturalizing traditional gender roles and values (e.g., the notion that women’s greatest happiness lies in marriage or women’s place is in the home)” (S. Kim). Ien Ang (1985, 1996), on the other hand, has sought to address the tension between female pleasure and feminist desire by exploring what she calls the “melodramatic imagination” (Kim S., 2008).

#### 1.1.2. Women on Contemporary East Asian Screens

Chinese researchers studying Korean TV dramas often rely on the theories developed by the influential feminist scholar Dai Jinhua in her studies of Chinese contemporary film. Her theories consist of three main points: 1) “Hua Mu-lan’s” dilemma – whereby deviation from Confucian stereotypes of femininity (feminine roles, feminine appearance and clothes) results in a portrayal marked as “masculine”; 2) female independence as an empty signifier – women are seemingly independent, but readily influenced by societal expectations and pressures; 3) women as objects of desire – that is, the effect of women’s constant subjection to the male gaze (Dai). The first element of the theory is named after Hua Mu-lan, a Chinese historical heroine who joins the army in place of her father, assuming the identity of a man in the Northern Wei Dynasty (412-502 A.D.). This characterization thus deviates from the other two points noted above, in that the female character is here marked by masculinity. Yet Dai’s other points also deserve emphasis: her second point is that female independence in these representations is actually an empty signifier; that is, women are often seemingly

independent, but they actually rely upon--and are all too easily influenced by—societal expectations and pressures. Finally, her third point is that women often confront the difficulty of escaping from both the male gaze and its representation of sexual desire. I would also emphasize, moreover, that these three general observations apply very effectively to the portrayal of women in Korean TV dramas, due to the same Confucian social system shared by China and South Korea.

## **1.2. East Asian Confucian Society**

The concept of an ameliorative “popular feminism” encounters obstacles in East Asian society, due to the historically ingrained Confucianism pervading that society. Indeed, there remain a number of Confucianist criteria that continue to perpetuate the division of traditional gender roles in East Asian Society. In one study on the dilemmas of working women, the term “Confucianist Asia” refers to “regions and societies that share a sociocultural history of having been under some of influence from traditional Confucianist familial, social and cultural values (e.g., China, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore)” (Lin, Kwan and Cheung). In another study on the negotiation of gender relations in Hong Kong, the authors cite Jensens, who argues that “there is ‘a cumulative tradition of local knowledge of rite [and] text—and the strategies for using them that we associate with Confucianism’” (Jensen). Yet Dirlik believes that this Confucianism is also the “object of reinterpretation and reinvention” (Dirlik, 1995, p. 235; Lin & Tong, 2007). In the end, though, such research suggests how Confucianism still pervades social structures in the form of gender roles, even in modern society.

To explain how Confucianism affects both modern working women’s situations and Korean dramas, Lee, Kwan, and Cheung (2004) make use of the Chinese word “qing” (compassion, attachment). In their view, the term “qing” corresponds to the “Confucianist/traditional version” of femininity: since the traditionally feminine woman’s is

dependent on men for protection, her ultimate goal is to marry a man and have a family, this being “the most-sought after form of happiness (which turns out to be the kind of happy ending offered in the drama).” At the same time, the traditional Confucianist sociocultural value placed on family is “stressing one’s responsibility to the family and to fulfill parents’ expectations” (Lin, Kwan & Cheung).

### **1.3. Tensions and Conflicts**

#### **1.3.1. Conflict between Personal Freedom and Duty to the Nuclear Family**

In these dramas, personal freedom can also take varied forms, such as looking for love outside of marriage norms—or a liberated desire for sex. The two Korean TV dramas studied by Kim share similarities in their controversial plots, both of which involve extramarital relations that express “doubt about the legitimacy of monogamy.” As one character avers in episode 8 of *Lovers*, “I think that a thirst for love cannot be slaked through marriage and cannot be quenched only by restraint” (quoted in Kim S. , 2008). Some dramas, in fact, feature extremely sexually liberated female protagonists, such as Ae-gyong in *The Woman Next Door*, who actively expresses sexual desire and considers her relationships with different men as a “vitamin” in her life (S. Kim). Still, a study of common, newspaper responses to these two controversial Korean TV dramas suggests that the social reality is that women’s behavior continues to be restricted. In fact, such counter-arguments—defending traditional values—point out that women’s extramarital affairs cause two or three times more severe mental pain to their spouses than do men’s. Such arguments thus characterize feminism as a “direct hit to the disruption of family,” and call for protecting the nuclear family system (S. Kim).

Lin et al.’s study also addresses the tensions between traditional norms and women’s sexual desire, showing, more generally, that the “recurrent plots about conflicts and struggles in these soaps function as metaphors for life’s torments (e.g., conflict between going one’s

own way in search of personal happiness, or [submitting] to the social fetters of the family structure)” (Lin, Kwan & Cheung). And more recently, discussing Korean melodramas like *My Love from the Star* (2014), Yi (2018) argues that “the K-drama re-creates the residual ideals of modern society, from the bourgeois family model to the primacy of individual sovereignty.”

### 1.3.2. Tension between Professional Life and Family Life

Recent developments in South Korean society have also brought major changes and breakthroughs in “women’s socio-economic status and political context.” More and more women are pursuing careers outside of the family. In the 1996 economic crisis, there were more job opportunities for women than for men, in order for families “to cope with the unemployment of husbands laid off due to economic restructuring” (S. Kim). However, even after “the Kim Dae-jung administration announced that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a ‘women’s century’ and declared ten clear-cut principles South Korea had to pursue—one of which was ‘moving from male-dominated society to a society where men and women are given equal opportunities,’” (Kim S. , 2008), there nonetheless remains a heavy trace of the ingrained traditional patriarchal Confucianist values implying that women should remain at home. Still, in her study of the foregoing two Korean dramas, Kim points out that the discourse promoting South Korean women’s desire to adopt more significant positions in society should be seen as a resistant discourse – resisting the dominant hegemonic patriarchal social system and contesting the dominant discourse that attempts to uphold traditional values, by reminding career women that their family/domestic role should come first.

Such tensions are also evident in the results of one study that, unusually, focuses on male viewers’ consumption of Korean TV dramas in Hong Kong, finding that many men express dissatisfaction with “new modern women” or so-called “strong women” in modern-day Hong Kong (Lin and Tong). The men surveyed suggest that modern women are

“ambitious, desire to advance, and are self-reliant, becoming much stronger than before.” In this study, men were found to express concerns about women losing their feminine virtues (Lin and Tong). In Hong Kong, moreover, there are more and more double-earner families, in which, increasingly, men are also taking larger roles in household labor (Lin and Tong), exemplifying a shift in boundaries that will be discussed in the next section of this thesis. Thus, women’s desire to be strong in the workplace is in tension with the ingrained, dominant traditional value prioritizing their domestic responsibility. Such tension has proven extremely hard to mitigate.

Korean TV dramas thus communicate both resistant and dominant discourses when portraying professional women, reflecting the broader tension between traditional and modern expectations of women. In the rest of this thesis, I examine these resistant and dominant discourses through an analysis of female protagonists’ inner goals and motivations, as embodied in roles they take in the dramas. These traits implicitly reflect the aforementioned shifting gender boundaries, contributing to the ongoing erosion of stereotypes of both genders.

In this context, my goal is to shed light on both the resistant and dominant ideologies noted above, especially in regard to the tension between family and career, as expressed in these Korean TV dramas. Keeping in mind the divergence of expectations between the ideal woman and societal reality, I then examine the various judgments directed toward professional women in Korean TV dramas. My contributions here are organized into two main parts: 1) the polarized judgment of professional women with ambition, and 2) the inescapable male gaze at professional women, making them an “object of desire,” as Dai’s third theory outlines (1994). That is, I analyze exactly how and why—in these television portrayals—men tend to judge women in the workplace more on their appearance than on their professional working ability. Here, I conclude that this “male gaze,” as represented in these Korean dramas, is radically different from the way that the male gaze is said to function

in American television shows. As we shall see, in traditional American film practice (and theory), the camerawork takes the male character's perspective—whereas, in Korean TV dramas, this male gaze is more often embedded in the lines and the plot.

## CHAPTER 2:

### ANALYSIS – A STUDY OF THE KOREAN TV DRAMA “MISTY” (2018)

The Korean drama *Misty* was aired by JTBC from Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> to Mar 24<sup>th</sup> in 2018, gaining a record 8.452% nationwide rating. It overtly challenges dominant, patriarchal ideologies by representing the female protagonist, Go Hye-ran, as a successful, high-flying career woman – the nation’s top anchorwoman on JBC News Nine – and an ideal image of the modern woman (which is just what the other women want to be). Yet this impeccable woman also becomes the prime suspect in a murder case, and her husband Kang Tae-wook ends up becoming her legal counsel, despite the fact that their marriage is on the rocks.

#### 2.1. The Choice between Career and Family

##### 2.1.1. Resistant Ideologies: Choosing Career over Family

In *Misty*, Go Hye-ran faces a choice between profession and family – the same choice faced by many other professional women. The drama questions, however, why women must make this often-difficult choice between family and work, and why women should allegedly abandon the family in order to become successful in professional life-- a situation that again resonates with “Hua Mu-lan’s dilemma” (Dai).

To address this alleged choice--“which one is more important, work or family?”--Go Hye-ran makes the difficult decision to have an abortion, in order to achieve the position of News Nine anchor. To her husband, she explains, “We can always have a child, but this audition opportunity only comes once.” To her mother-in-law, she confesses, “I had an abortion seven years ago. I couldn’t do an anchor audition as a pregnant woman.” This incident indirectly reveals the obstacles that real women face in workplace. That is, the portrayal of her pregnancy as a hindrance to her audition reflects the real situation in society, in which pregnancy is one of the underlying factors leading to fewer women hired in the

workplace, and especially in high-level positions. Hye-ran mentions, for instance, her fear of vomiting during the audition, due to pregnancy. The show also implies that hiring a pregnant woman might mean increased future costs and uncertainties. Such an implication is further evident when we consider that the news show in question airs every day, which implicitly suggests that employing a pregnant woman means she will be absent for a certain period of time in order to give birth to a child. On the surface, it might seem that a women's choice to give birth or not represents a kind of personal freedom and societal progress. Yet if Hye-ran has to avoid pregnancy and motherhood to maintain her position in the workplace, she may also be denying another aspect of her (female) identity. She is thus in a double bind, in which binary gender roles are forced on her—with neither one acknowledging her personal, individualized identity.

#### 2.1.2. Dominant Ideologies: Choosing Family over Career

There are, moreover, abundant instances of the dominant ideology clearly demanding that women prioritize family over career in this Korean drama. They again include the female protagonist Go Hye-ran, as well as another main female character Seo Eun-joo, both of whom represent the foregoing tensions.

Hye-ran is subject to scorn, for instance, during a fraught dinner party, due to her alleged childlessness. During this dinner party, the couples are all talking about their family and children. After seeing Hye-ran getting food for her husband, one of the other wives says, “You two are maintaining such a good relationship as a sweet couple! It is said that a couple can be too sweet to have children!” Ironically, this is actually meant as an insult to Hye-ran, implying it is a major problem for them to have no children. In fact, this woman has made the cutting remark due to her jealousy of Hye-ran's professional success. Hye-ran is the most successful woman among the wives on the table, and this reflects the fact that women, as wives, can rarely be simultaneously successful in their careers. After the dinner party, one of

the wives, who is also Hye-ran's predecessor as anchorwoman of News Nine, says, "I have forgotten being an anchorwoman of News Nine. For me, now I put my husband and children the first." This assertion garners compliments from other wives, indicative of a typical patriarchal dominant ideology, for which women's true duty lies not in the pursuit of a fulfilling career, but rather is her domestic duty, with top priority assigned to her husband and children. At the same time, the disdain she receives from other wives because of her family problems also reflects the dominant ideology, according to which a professional woman's successful career results in her family being have multiple "problems." Yet the real "problem" (and implication) here is actually that a successful professional woman cannot also be a good mother at the same time, according to the dominant ideology. The ultimate result is, allegedly, that the family will be childless or the couple disharmonious.

In this context, the drama also depicts Hye-ran's mother-in-law bringing a medicinal tonic good for pregnancy, regularly every month, and also reminding her to dress warmly so as to increase her chances of pregnancy. This mother-in-law even alludes to the "problem" of their childlessness by saying to Hye-ran, "Tae-wook's got no problem at all. Not sure where the problem lies...." This comment is clearly blaming Hye-ran for her infertility—and, more significantly, impugning Hye-ran's indirectly for her professional work life.

Seo Eun-joo, wife of the worldwide famous Korean golf player Kevin Lee – the victim of the murder in Misty – is another key character and a totally different female portrayal from that of Hye-ran. Eun-joo is a pregnant housewife who gives up her job in order to support her husband's career more devotedly. In fact, after learning of her husband's infidelity, there is no confrontation; she makes no inquiries to her husband regarding his extramarital affairs. Seo Eun-joo thus represents the traditional dominant ideology in which women must choose family over profession and personal freedom. She regards her husband as the core of her life, a domestic role demanded of women by the dominant ideology. Moreover, Seo Eun-joo is a high school friend of Hye-ran, and Kevin Lee is Hye-ran's ex-

boyfriend, prompting the audience to compare these two women. Yet his comparison actually amounts to a comparison between resistant and dominant portrayals of women, with divergent choices between family and career.

In the end, though, Eun-joo's fate turns out to be her husband's cheating and death, as well as her own miscarriage, indicating in a relatively indirect way the disadvantages of the dominant traditional ideologies.

Hence the problems of this false, enforced choice are apparent. According to the dominant traditional ideology, a woman should give priority to her husband and family, and be obedient and subordinate—such as when Eun-joo gives up her own profession and goes to another country to take care of her husband. She relies primarily on her husband, and she is never independent. Yet the disadvantages of being a woman in line with this dominant traditional ideology – choosing family exclusively over her own personal freedom – is that, in making a woman totally dependent, she will be powerless in the face of her husband's mistakes.

## **2.2. Different Judgments of Professional Women**

### **2.2.1. Polarized Judgments of Professional Women with Ambitions**

Various elements of society offer highly polarized judgements of women with professional ambitions, and these run through the entire drama series. Most of Hye-ran's female colleagues are, for instance, jealous of her success, regarding her as cold-blooded and vicious. At the funeral of Hye-ran's mother, where Hye-ran remains expressionless, without crying, several of Hye-ran's colleagues insult her, saying, "She is scary to be in such normal condition as her mother is dead." "She looks pale but still beautiful! She must have made a lot of effort choosing such a perfect foundation make-up color to match this funeral theme." "Didn't she go to a beauty salon in the wee hours to get her hair and make-up done in order to show up here in perfect condition?" Here, they are jealous not only of her success but also

of her ability to manage and display a perfect image, her beauty. One of Hye-ran's colleagues has a conversation with her in the restroom, trying to gloat in front of Hye-ran, because the colleague has a complete and happy family. This colleague says, "Shitting and tidying the house are two of the most pleasing things to do in this world, aren't they?" "Though my waistline has increased 2 units, my happiness index has increased 100 units!" These lines are meant to insinuate that Hye-ran must not be happy in her family life, with no children and not much domestic duty finished. But Hye-ran fights back, mentioning this colleague's demotion from a TV news anchorwoman to a radio broadcaster— which, at the same time, alludes to most professional women's difficulties in achieving workplace success, especially after marriage.

After the foregoing dinner party, noting that Hye-ran is not having a good relationship with her husband, other wives gather together in the restroom and gossip about her: "How ruthless and evil will a woman be to achieve that position? Men don't like that kind of cruel and vicious women, do they?"

Similarly, Hye-ran's younger rival, Ji-won, regards her youth is one of her biggest competitive advantages, even telling Hye-ran, "At your age, you should stow your ambitions. Or it looks ugly." In her opinion, an older woman who is not willing to abdicate – and even wants to climb upward – is indecent.

Yet one younger man is shown to admire her a lot, regarding Hye-ran as his role model. He functions as an assistant to Hye-ran in the workplace and trusts her deeply, even when she is suspected by the police of murdering the character Kevin Lee. And such trust also extends to the show's viewers: for the audience watching this drama feels compelled by the heroic aura of Hye-ran, a successful professional woman in perfect shape, who is strong and assertive. Despite controversial aspects of her character – her wicked plots against her rivals, her involvement in a murder case, and her difficult choice to undergo an abortion for the sake of her career – we are attracted by this character and long to attain the kind of power

she has. This admiration thus reflects the audience's attraction to the resistant ideology of the modern, ideal, professional woman—which accordingly belies the traditional dominant ideology of what a woman should allegedly be.

### 2.2.2. The Inescapable Male Gaze: Professional Women as “Objects of Desire”

Though women have been working hard in the workplace—deviating from traditional ideologies of femininity in order to remain independent—they nevertheless cannot escape the predicament of being gazed upon as objects, by men. *Misty* presents this problem most directly in scenes of dialogue among male characters, as they discuss Go Hye-ran. When Hye-ran is asked to come to the police station the first time, after discovering a dead body, the policemen comment on her appearance: “Firstly, she is really beautiful! And then she has such a good figure!” “She is exactly the dream lover!” Since Hye-ran's occupation is a news anchorwoman, a position of relatively high status, we can also imagine what these policemen say about women in other occupations that are regarded as depending even more heavily upon appearances: for example, singers, air hostesses, and so on. And even when they do not dress in a sexually provocative way, women are often gazed upon as objects of desire. Generally speaking, this is solely because of women's identity as women per se.

In the workplace, women are often said to be dressed in an allegedly “inappropriate” manner—and to be accordingly subjected to the male gaze not only as an object, but as a despised one as well. After Hye-ran has a stressful talk in the hospital with her mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, she chooses a bright red blouse – unusual for her simple and solemn style of dress – under a black suit-coat, for a News Nine broadcast. Perhaps she is feeling depressed and aims to add some vitality to the night's airing. In response, though, the male producer poses an ironic question to her, in front of all the other colleagues, “Aren't you putting too much effort into your dressing? Are you announcing the news or doing a runway show?” Then there are a few shots of other male co-workers in the room, all giggling at this

joke. Bold and resolute as Hye-ran is among these masculine characters, she is still looked down upon and mocked by men, just because of a bright red blouse. The producer and the other men readily insinuate that women who are dressed well must be unprofessional in their work. Generally speaking, such interactions again appear to result from an ingrained, patriarchal social system, one that renders it difficult for men to accept that a woman can be so admirable both in her appearance and in her work at the same time—and that, in fact, a woman is not really supposed to be good at work, only at dressing up herself. This dynamic constitutes another vicious circle, deepening the stereotype and abetting the male gaze at women as an object of desire.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**TOWARD CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON: MOTIVATIONS FOR WOMEN**  
**WORKING IN BOTH KOREA AND THE U.S.**

Women's decisions regarding work and motherhood have thus been a critical topic in television programs for years, and have been frequently explored in both Korean as well as American television productions. We would do well to look more closely, however, at exactly what underlying factors influence such difficult decisions. That is, although there has been much discussion of women's demands to enter the workplace, there has been less about the various reasons why women might need to work—or even crave it. Accordingly, the next section delves into the diverse reasons why women might choose work over family—both in the East and the West—and what cultural differences and similarities are reflected within television melodramas.

**3.1. Economic Reasons for Working**

One of the similarities between Korean and American TV shows regarding the portrayal of motivations for women working consists of economic reasons. It is reported by the Working Mother Research Institute in 2011 that the reason for “the majority of mothers working (or would work) is for a pay check” (Damaske 51). Working for monetary reason seems the most direct reason for everyone who chooses to work. But for women, it can be more complicated, especially as depicted on tv, which is conditioned by the family, or more specifically the husbands. As Damaske points out, during her research on female employment, she found that “most women say they work because it benefits their families” (51), in which case, there can be various conditions why working women are needed to address the family's collective needs.

However, it is crucial to point out that—in both Korean and American melodramas—we find the family problem of the absence or incompetence of a husband as a significant background – and an underlying reason – for the female protagonists’ striving to work and re-enter the workplace. In these cases, money might not be the most important reason for them to enter the workplace, but can be the most direct one. Among the American TV shows, we might consider “The Good Wife” (2009). In that show, the character Alicia re-enters the workplace as an attorney – after 13 years as a stay-at-home mother – due to her husband Peter’s being sentenced to jail, resulting from a political corruption and sex scandal. In “Dead to Me” (2019), Jen’s husband dies in a car accident, and Jen asks her mother-in-law for help getting a job as a realtor by saying, “...this job isn’t for me Lorna. It’s for the boys [Jen’s sons]. They are craving stability and electronics” (“Dead to Me,” S1E9). In “This is Us” (2016), Beth works because her husband quits his job and is too selfish to realize that Beth has been always been sacrificing to help him reach his goals. In Korean dramas, such as “Romance is a Bonus Book” (2019), Kang Dan-i--similar to Alicia)--re-enters the workplace after seven years, after a divorce from her husband (who has failed in his business and cheated on her). She has to work for living expenses and to support her daughter’s study abroad. In the Korean drama, “Misty” (2018), we have seen that Go Hye-ran is working under the pressure of her a marriage threatened by her decision to have an abortion in order to get the position of a news anchorwoman—after which she is emotionally abandoned by her husband. All of these TV shows—in both cultures--thus explicitly indicate that most of the female protagonists choose to go to work to make up for an absent or deficient husband; they must supply financial earnings to support their families. Hence, it is not difficult to conclude that a woman cannot depend on her husband solely for financial support; instead, she must always sustain her financial independence by entering the workplace—and thereby prevent her problematic reliance on a husband. Here again, this conclusion seems to be consistent across Korean and American cultures.

### 3.1.1. Social Status Reasons for Working—A Contrast between Korean and American Culture

In both cultures, then, women choose to enter the workplace instead of being a full-time housewife—thereby supplying financial earnings to benefit their families. Yet Korean melodramas also emphasize another remarkable reason for this choice—one that functions as an implicit social contract: namely, the desire to improve their social status, in order to match that of their boyfriend's or husband's family—a factor that is barely mentioned in American TV shows. In "Misty" (2018), Hye-ran explicitly confesses to her mother-in-law that one of the most important reasons she had to get an abortion to get the position of anchorwoman in News Nine, is that she has been longing for her parents-in-law's acceptance as their son's wife. Since at that time, she was just a reporter who comes from a poor single-parent family, while Tae-wook comes from a long line of distinguished judges; there are judges across three generations in Tae-wook's family, which is a family of high social status in South Korea. Tae-wook's parents refuse to neither show up on their wedding ceremony nor meet her when Tae-wook brings her back home to formally visit them after the wedding. When Tae-wook speaks to them outside the door, "She's your daughter-in-law now. You should accept her. (Misty, E3, 53:37)", his mother replied in one word: "Leave!" Faced with this, Hye-ran says: "They'll accept me someday. (Misty, E3, 53:51)" Perhaps at this moment, she further firms her faith to pay every effort in order to climb to a high position in her career, since she was just a new unknown journalist at that time. And as expected, it is not until she becomes a top news anchorwoman nationwide that her parents-in-law accept her eventually (though relatively speaking).

Hye-ran takes an abortion when she is faced with the intensely competitive national news anchorwoman audition, without reaching a consensus with her husband, Tae-wook. When she confesses her abortion for the audition of news anchorwoman to her mother-in-law, she tells the reason, "I wanted Father(-in-law) to acknowledge me, (Misty, E3, 49:37)"

“Father(-in-law) only met me after he found out I become an anchor. He didn’t even come to our wedding. He only accepted me after I became the News Nine anchor. (Misty, E3, 49:55)” Here, Hye-ran, as a working woman, one of her reasons for working is to improve her social status. Though this is conditioned by her husband, still, this is one of Hye-ran’s underlying determiners of choosing to take the audition instead of giving birth to a child. It is an East-Asian culture that people have been advocating “well-matched” marriages, or in other words, people want that kind of marriage, in which the power between both sides is balanced through matched family socio-economic background. In daily conversations among Korean, when people discuss about whether to marry someone or not, “집안”(jib-an) — “Family background”, is one of the high-frequency words that are brought up in this context. Marriage norms in Korea “have strong roots in Confucianism” (Jones et al.; Yoo & Lee 1999). According to Yoo and Lee, “Confucianism prioritize succeeding the family lineage over personal satisfaction and romantic feelings” (1999). Here, “the family lineage” is another translation of “집안”(jib-an).

There is a scene in another Korean drama, *Secret Garden* (2010), the male protagonist, Kim Joo-won, the CEO of a high-end departmental store, is on a parental pre-screened blind date with a woman who is a daughter of another rich and powerful family, arranged by his mother. Their parents are planning to involve both of them into “an arranged marriage,” which “was a social norm in countries with Confucian culture” (1999). Kim Joo-won argues with the woman when she expresses her disagreement regarding marriage without love: “So, driven by a hormone induced thing called love, they ignore pedigree and background, education and abilities, not being able to communicate and being on different levels. Do you think it’s right to substitute kissing for all of that? (Secret Garden, E1, 5:16)” In Joo-won’s words, he uses exactly “집안”(jib-an) to express “pedigree and background.”

There are plenty of Korean dramas on the theme of female protagonists from lower social status background in love with male protagonists from high social status background. Social status is put heavy attention on in the East Asian society; “class system”, especially of gender, is also prominent in Japanese Shojo manga (Choo 290). More specifically, “there are numerous shojo narratives featuring middle- or lower-class female protagonists longing for upper- class male protagonists” (290).

As a result of these social status dynamics in Korea, a female protagonist is often despised and opposed by the male protagonist’s family. In the Korean drama, *Secret Garden*, the female protagonist, Gil Ra-im, is a stand-in actress who has no parents while the male protagonist, Kim Joo-won is the CEO of a high-end departmental store, who calls himself in a “social level of leadership” (*Secret Garden*, E2). Joo-won’s mother thinks Ra-im’s family and occupation far from matching the standard of his son regardless of her personality. She even despised the oranges Ra-im brought to her home by saying, “If you can’t match our standards, then come empty-handed. How dare you think I live so poorly? (*Secret Garden*, E13)” This kind of social pressure also emerges in the Korean drama “*Misty* (2018)”, in which Hye-ran similarly suffers from her parents-in-law’s despising. She has to improve her social status, strives to become a top professional in her career, to garner recognition and respect not only from the audience, and her parents-in-law. This goal leads to a more painful dilemma of women especially in the Korean environment, that for women, to work or not to work is going to be criticized in either case.

Therefore, it is not hard to see that family background is closely related to and even inseparable in the consideration of marriage in Korean society and takes a significant role, while in American society, family background is not rigidly judged when it comes to the topic of marriage, largely due to economic factors. Still less the depictions of women entering the workplace in order to improve her social status so that she can be accepted by her parents-

in-law, or the depictions of female protagonist being despised by her parents-in-law due to her lower social class.

For working women, they are criticized of not fulfilling domestic duties. For especially lower-class women, not working means no opportunities to improve their social status, they are criticized in the way of being despised by parents-in-law. In Hye-ran's case, she takes an abortion and choose to take the audition so as to get a promotion in her career, but also resulted in the blame from her husband, her mother-in-law, even the society; there are certainly voices describing her as vicious, cruel and cold-blooded. Hye-ran's tough choice of workplace over family – audition over delivering a baby – in order to strive for acceptance from parents-in-law is a typical representative of women living under this dilemma, which will be discussed in the later sections.

### **3.2. Reasons of Personal Identity and Self-Acknowledgment**

Hence, money and status play significant roles in women's decisions to work. However, as Damaske points out, "Women work for far more complicated reasons than money alone" (Damaske 51). There are equally important reasons for women entering the workplace, for instance, personal goals, dream, and identity in a different sense, which is "a sense of accomplishment" (51) and self-acknowledgement. In the reality, according to Damaske's research on working women, "highly educated women are most likely to work (education is highly connected to income levels). (51)" In this sense, it counters the idea that financial needs dominate women's work, since actually there are lower employment rates among working-class women, but higher among middle-class women (51). Working-class women do have to work to support their families, but perhaps all women work for another reason, not just for money. In Damaske's research, she found that "despite what even mothers themselves say (and perhaps believe, women work for far more complicated reasons than money alone" (51).

Another possible reason can be explained by psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the top two of the pyramid, which are the two highest levels of need, “the esteem needs (Maslow 9)” and “the need for self-actualization” (9). “The esteem needs”, as defined by Maslow, “may be classified into two subsidiary sets”: (1) “the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom”, (2) “the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance or appreciation” (9). “The need for self-actualization” is referred by Maslow to as “the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially” (9). He further points out that “this tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (9). “What a man can be, he must be. (9)”

It is the same in the depictions of both American and Korean TV that more and more women are pursuing the satisfaction of their self-esteem, or realizing their lifetime dream, in addition to fulfilling domestic duties. They are “satisfied people,” as termed by Maslow (10) on “physiological”, “safety”, “love” needs, which are the left (lower level) of the pyramid. In the Korean drama *Misty* (2018), Hye-ran rejects Tae-wook’s proposal for several times, and once she says, “There are still too many things that I want to accomplish to get married. (*Misty*, E3)” She has been satisfied with her physiological and safety needs and her love needs are satisfied by Tae-wook, so all she left is “esteem needs” and “the need for self-actualization”. In *Misty*, her specific need for self-actualization can be interpreted as her pursue for the “truth”. There was an incident when she was a teenager: her first love didn’t believe her when she claimed she was not sexually assaulted by a jeweler, so he killed the jeweler and went to jail; moreover, neither did her mother and best friend believe her, they even think it was Hye-ran herself that had murdered the jeweler. During this significant incident of her life, no one in the closest relationship of her believed her, so she has a strong personal goal to let others believe her words (she keeps the faith of broadcasting the news

rigidly based on the truth as a news anchorwoman), which becomes her need for esteem, or in Maslow's words, "recognition, attention, importance or appreciation. (9)" Hence, prior to being a wife or mother, she becomes a journalist, to report the truth to the public, attaining esteem simultaneously from herself and others. Then, she is aware of what she "can be" and "must be", and becoming a national top news anchorwoman to broadcast valued truth is one of the most effective ways to achieve her and satisfy her "need for self-actualization. (9)" She sticks by her nature of assertiveness and faith on the truth, through the way of persistently announcing true and valuable news in her career, which results in her winning Reporter of the Year for five consecutive years.

This is the same in the American TV series, *This Is Us*, Beth similarly rejects her boyfriend's proposal by saying that she needs to work, and asks her boyfriend to stop proposing; when he confirms if this is an yes, she replies this is a "not yet". At this moment, she is working to satisfy her "esteem needs", to prove her "strength", "achievement", "adequacy", and gain "confidence (9)." Before get married, Beth thinks her work should be satisfied in priority rather than her marriage. She worked as an urban planner before which guarantees her wage to help her husband in the responsibility to support their family, but after supporting her husband becoming a city councilor which is her husband's dream of getting involved in politics, a turning point inspired her to pursue her childhood dream ---- a ballet dancer. So, she resigns from her previous job with a higher wage and becomes a ballet teacher. Faced with her husband's opposing opinions on the lower wage and less time home for their children, she speaks for herself, "I have something that I have been looking for longer than I knew, and I am not going to give that up." After satisfying her esteem needs, she is aware of, as in Maslow's words, what she "can be" and what she "must be" ---- a ballet dancer. Giving up her job with higher salaries to pursue her dream from childhood, Beth is a representative of women who choose to work for her personal goal and lifetime dream, in

order to achieve self-actualization and attain personal identity, instead of financial reasons or family duties.

It is tough for women to choose between family and work, but still, they have firm reasons both from family and herself. Often, they decide to work due to financial reasons, to make up for an absent or deficient husband. At the same time, however, money is never the only reason for women to work. TV series of both cultures show that women work for their personal pursuits as well, for instance, satisfaction of esteem needs, self-actualization, and lifetime dreams. However, it is more emphasized in Korean dramas, compared to American TV shows, that the female protagonists choose to work in order to improve social status and acceptance of parents-in-law.

## CHAPTER 4:

### CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND I: THE PROBLEM OF THE MALE GAZE

#### 4.1. “Lookism” in Korean Society

Appearance, served as a form of self-expression, is crucial in people’s interpersonal, social, and work-related aspects of lives (Park, Myers, & Langstein, 2018; Heilman & Stopeck, 1985). The research data from New York University demonstrate that “the identical performance information can lead to differential evaluations and treatment recommendations, depending upon the appearance of a female employee” (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985, p.212). While women’s personal/physical appearance in the workplace is a sensitive topic in almost every cultural context, in South Korean work culture, women are faced with especially intensified pressure in terms of appearance. In 2003, the word “외모지상주의 (oe-mo-ji-sang-ju-ui)” (literal translation: appearance first / “lookism”) first shows up in the neologism dictionary of the National Institute of Korean Language (Park, Myers, & Langstein, 2018, p.612). People in South Korea across different age groups regard appearance as especially significant in their social life. The 2015 Gallup Korean consumer report shows that 41% of young women between ages of 19 and 29 consider external appearances as “a ‘very important’ factor in life”, compared to 29% of males (Gallup Korea, 2015; Park et al., 2018, p.614). In Chung’s study (2019), 80% of participants who are aged 65 or over believe that “appearance management should continue until death”, and the two biggest reasons for their appearance management are “quality of life (37.3%) and self-satisfaction (32.8%)” (6). In South Korea, the difference of personal values toward self-appearance according to the aforementioned statistics between women and men is widely acknowledged, “likely stemming from the traditional gender inequality in traditional South Korean society and workplace” (614), inferred by Park et al. (2014). In workplace, despite the surrounding professional contexts, traditionally men may prefer more attractive female co-workers, “therefore making it

inevitable that a woman's attractiveness to become a significant part of the employment evaluation" (Park et al., 2019, p.614); this is also termed as "attractiveness-induced halo effect", which largely influences hiring decisions (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985, p.202).

#### **4.2. Korean Confucianist Sociocultural Values on Working Women's Appearance**

Besides the intensified "lookism" within South Korean society (as I mentioned before), Korean men a remarkable amount of attention to women's appearance in professional contexts, and the underlying factors can be dated back to the Confucianist sociocultural values which is deep rooted in South Korean society. Here again, under the strong influence of Confucianism, women are considered both inferior and attached to men. many behavioral restrictions and social norms imposed on women are derived from the essence of Confucianism, including "sāncóng (threefold obedience)" and "sìdé (four virtues)", among which, the third virtue is "fùróng (women's appearance)" (Knapp, 2015). in this context, there is a famous Korean saying, stating that a "woman dresses up for the man who loves her." Women's appearance is accordingly emphasized within the Confucianist sociocultural value system, while there is barely any norm emphasizing what a man should do with respect to his own appearance. Since "Confucian thoughts and social patterns have strong indirect influence in modern Korean society" (Myonggu & Douglas, 1967, p.43), these ingrained Confucianist norms with a focus on women's appearance are rooted in modern society value systems, naturally leading to a stigmatization of females in the workplace, instead of objective judgement on competence.

#### **4.3. Expressing Gender Identities through "Personal" and "Physical" Appearance Practices**

As mentioned above, appearance is a crucial part of one's construction of identity, and also a form of gender performance. Based on Judith Butler's performative theory of gender, as summarized by Kendall (2007) an "individual's practices bring gendered women

and men” (126). More precisely, Sims (2014) categorizes people’s appearance into “personal appearance” and “physical appearance”; “personal appearance” includes one’s “clothing, tattoos, piercings, makeup, and hairstyles” (269) and “physical appearance” includes one’s “attractiveness, skin tone, facial features, hair texture, weight, height, physical disabilities, age, and pregnancy” (271). People’s choices on both “personal appearance” and “physical appearance” (especially in Korea, where people tend to alter their physical appearance with plastic surgery, to meet personal demands) are “individual’s practices” that can express their gendered identities, as Butler’s performative theory of gender suggests. However, individual choices regarding gendered performance or practices--especially those embodied in one’s personal appearance, influenced by “society’s expectations” --are mostly the production of a patriarchal power system. In other words, stereotypes of gender are ubiquitous in people’s lives, latently restricting women’s “individual practices” on expressing their gendered identity, which is more intensive in professional contexts (Kendall, 2009, p.126). Women in authority should be more aware, especially regarding their attire, because of the impact of “traditional discourse”; that is, “work and family is based on gendered positions with women positioned as primary caregivers and fathers as breadwinners” (124) – which seems commonly acknowledged across Eastern and Western culture. In this sense, women at work are stigmatized as at odds with these “social expectations” (Kendall, 2009), and due to the expectation of women being a caretaker in the domestic scale, their ability and quality of caring is prioritized, rather than their competencies at work. Thus, male coworkers and superiors are paying less attention to women’s professional competencies than they should, and furthermore, men may be faced with more distractions (such as female workers) when judging women’s abilities at work. In South Korea, the intensified trend of lookism imposes even higher pressure on women in such work-related contexts.

Such “personal appearance” (Sims, 2014)—primarily defined by one’s attire—combined with ambiguous judgments of “physical appearance”—thus leads to a vagueness in

women's dress codes within the workplace (Smith et al., 2018, p.672). Smith et al. point out that women have more ways to modify their attire in a sexualized way than do men – more “personal choices regarding the characteristics of their outfit (e.g., color, accessories, material, tightness)” (Smith et al., 2018, p.672). However, within Confucianist value systems—expressed, here again as “sāncóng (threefold obedience)” and “sìdé (four virtues)”—women are supposed to be compliant to their men (father, husband, son), and their expected femininity is standardized within the scale of a woman's behavior, language, appearances, and abilities. Though these ideologies are weakened in modern society, the ingrained power is strong enough to result in working women's dilemma as being criticized as lack of femininity – being cold-hearted, mean, with lack of empathy – when dressed and appear in a professional style. Moreover, people tend to consider this kind of working women as being in conflict with “social expectations”: especially the role of primary caretaker, which is, in other words, a “good” woman who should be family-oriented. Then here comes the dangerous double-bind, if a woman tends to emphasize relatively more femininity in her professional appearance, she will be blamed on less competency in her work.

#### 4.3.1. Women's Double Bind: “Personal Appearance” at the Workplace

A related form of pressure comes from a hidden dilemma, “a double-edged nature of attractiveness” for working women (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985, p.212); whether she is attractive or not, a woman can't win either way. Tannen (2008) explains women in authority are trapped in a double bind: “a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't paradox” (127). More specifically, there are discrepancies between “society's expectations about how a woman should behave and how a person in authority should behave are” (Tannen, 2008, p.127). Tannen (2008) further explains the “double bind” by providing more detailed scenarios: on the one hand, if a woman speaks and acts in line with the “social expectations” as mentioned by Kendall (2009), “she will be liked but may be underestimated”, but on the

other hand, “if she acts in ways that are expected of a person in authority, she may be respected but will probably be viewed as too aggressive” (127). Things can be similarly complicated in the workplace, especially in terms of women’s attire. Here again, a woman cannot win either way: if she is dressed in a professional way, that will lead to her being criticized for not being a stereotyped image of a woman (that is, traditionally feminine); yet if she is dressed in traditionally feminine attire, she will be objectified—and judged to be incompetent and unqualified.

#### 4.3.1.1. Korean Drama Dialogues as Evidence: The Double Bind for Women in Authority—and the Question of Personal Appearance

Many Korean dramas have discussed working women’s appearance to raise awareness across professional contexts. In *Misty* (2018), the female protagonist, Go Hye-ran is acknowledged as a high professional in her career as a news anchorwoman, but still cannot be excluded from the stigmatization on her appearance. Mostly, she appears highly professional in her simple and solemn dressing style, with colleagues describing her as “cruel,” “indifferent”, “mighty”, “not someone you want to mess with!” In episode 1, after Hye-ran has a stressful talk with her mother (with Alzheimer's disease) in the hospital, Hye-ran chooses a bright red blouse under a black suit jacket for News Nine airing. She says that she wants to be “as lively as possible” today (Ep1, 22:04). Here, I would speculate that she intends to cheer herself up with a bright color blouse, not to be provocative or attractive. However, the male main producer poses an ironic question to her in front of all the other colleagues: “Isn’t your outfit too much today? Are you on the news or doing a fashion show? (Ep1, 23:42)” Then a few shots follow of other present male co-workers giggling about this including the male main producer himself. However, different from what mostly happens in the real life that women might ignore words like this, Hye-ran strikes back by asking “Isn’t it inappropriate to discuss clothing in the atmosphere now?” because “today’s headline has changed to murders” [...] “Two people have died.” This is indicating that her outfit has no

relation with her professional competence; she is fully aware of her professional performance in the upcoming air, but the male co-workers are paying too much attention to her outfit. It is obviously a few minutes before the air, not only Hye-ran, as an anchor, but also the other workers should be fully prepared for it. However, the male workers are attracted to the red blouse even under her dark suit coat and ridiculing Hye-ran's outfit while she is preparing herself for the program's opening by putting herself into the appropriate emotion, "atmosphere", according to her words. In another Korean drama, "Miss Hammurabi", the female protagonist, Park Cha-o-reum, works as a junior judge in the Civil Affairs Department at the Seoul Central District. All of her coworkers obey an unwritten law – they are all dressed in black suits; both male and female workers are dressed in these black suit jackets and pants. She draws everyone's attention when she walks in building in a bright red-color Chanel-style woolen suit with decorative patterns. Especially the male colleagues cannot avert their gaze from her legs, shown under a miniskirt and in black silk stockings. Her superior, Senior Judge Han, comes across her in front of her office, and stopped her by saying, "Where do you think you are that you're in a short skirt? [...] This is no way for a judge to dress. It's so bright and the skirt is so short! (Ep1, 51:30)" "Is there an ethics code provision regarding dress length in court? Is it in the court organization rules? (Ep1, 51:34)" But soon, she proposes that she will immediately change into something more "modest (조신한 jo-sin-han in original Korean)". With a purpose to be ironic, she changes her attire to a black Arab burka with only her eyes revealed and asks Senior Judge which one he likes. This burka symbolizes an illusion that as women are responsible for their stigmatization, and prejudice in terms of their apparels, they should wear conservative, "modest" and appropriate. Cha-o-reum use burka to provide the male superior a scenario to imagine what would be different if the societal expectations of women to be dressed in a standard way to prevent negative impacts (including rape) "caused" by apparels. Her series of gutsy actions are aimed to prove that women's attires matters nothing; perhaps men's gaze is more problematic.

Researches has shown that being dressed in a more attractive or sexualized way “can carry real risks” (Smith et al., 2018, p.672), inasmuch as people tend to judge those in more conservative attire more positively. On top of that, the two female protagonists I mentioned above are both high-achieved women in authority who have reached a relatively high position in their career and should be less queried on their professional competence. Research indicates that “women who dressed in sexualized ways are commonly perceived as less competent when in leadership positions”, which means this prejudice will be exacerbated on women in “leadership positions” (Glick et al., 2005; Howlett et al., 2015; Wookey et al., 2010; Smiths et al., 2018, p.672). Women in leadership positions are struggling between a stronger double bind as they need higher competencies than lower positions than the other women but still are expected to maintain feminine qualities. On the one hand, in order to show higher professionalism than the others, a woman in leadership position abandons her femininity to a large extent especially in her appearance, is more likely to be criticized as being lack of femininity, or not a traditional “good” woman. However, if she is dressed in a more feminine way, as a woman in authority who is required higher professional abilities, she will be questioned more on the “mismatch” of her professional competence and her feminine appearance. In short, a sad truth of a woman in authority is that she can never satisfy the demand of her professional competence and traditional feminine at the same time and the higher her position is, the severer her situation is.

#### 4.3.2. Women in Authority’s “Physical Appearance”: “Male Gaze” and Sexual Objectification

This phenomenon further leads to “gaze” conducted by male workers sometimes unconsciously, which is closely related to sexual objectification. Sexual objectification is defined by Shepherd (2018) as “someone being regarded as an object for sexual pleasure rather than as a human being” (p.26). In the aforementioned scene appears in the Korean drama “Miss Hanmmurabi” (2018), just because the female protagonist’s skirt is shorter than

everyone else, the other male coworkers cannot help themselves staring at her leg. The male protagonist even helps her cover her legs with his briefcase in order to avoid the gazes rather than just looking. Especially when she enters the elevator, in a relatively narrower space, there were heavy breathes, a lot of whisperings and a male colleague self-talks in a low voice, “I’m going crazy. (EP1, 51:00)” At this moment, she is not deemed as a junior judge in her workplace but stigmatized as a sexual object.

With respect to physical attractiveness, women, to a large extent, are faced with more “gazes” as an object being situated to receive judgments, and even worse, they cannot escape from these kinds of judgmental gazes in professional contexts. In “Misty” (2018), Hye-ran is a nationwide acknowledged top news anchorwoman, but in episode 1, as she is involved in a murder case and shows up in a police station, the policemen at the door stare at her for five whole seconds. And they gossip about her appearance, making judgments and compliments like, “First of all, she is really pretty and has a great body! She’s not someone you want to mess with!” “She is my ideal type!” (Ep1, 03:03-03:11). Here, “Ideal type (이상형)” means someone meets every expectation of another as a romantic partner, indicating this policeman is considering Hye-ran as a woman, rather than a famous news anchor. In episode 3, there is a conversation between some men and Kevin Lee, who has been interviewed by Hye-ran and aired through TV. One man asks him how is Hye-ran in real life, “Is she sexy in real life? They say she’s a knockout in real life! They say her body is on another level! Even on TV, she’s just... (Ep3, 19:47-20:03)”, followed by some deep breathes, without the actual gazes, men can rely on imagination to conduct sexual objectification, which further proves that it is never women themselves or more specifically women’s appearance that matters to the sexual objectification that leads to any sexism-related prejudice or insult. These men’s reactions like compliments and moans with desire following the mentioning of Hye-ran is an exaggeration of the natural response of men imagining women not as a normal human being, but a sexual object. Due to biological nature, a man can consider any woman as a sexual object, regardless

of what occasion he is situated in or what occupation the woman takes (not necessarily sex-related). Hye-ran's husband, Kang Tae-wook, happens to be on that same elevator, but neither Kevin nor the other men are aware of his presence (they have no clue about who Hye-ran's husband is). Kevin replies, "She is an amazing woman. Not just as an anchor, but as a woman. (Ep3, 20:05)" These words also are followed by other men's sexualized emphasizes, "Oh... As a woman! (Ep3, 20:07)". In order to strike back for his wife, Tae-wook, who works as a lawyer, interrupts the conversation by saying, "When you talk about a person who is not here and those words may cause offense, you can be sentenced to one year in jail and a fine of two million won. Criminal Law, section 311. (Ep3, 20:27)" Here, by mentioning law, Tae-wook resorts to the symbolized overwhelming authority to fight back to those who has imagined his wife a sexual object. Perhaps stronger law enforcement will be an effective measure to stop lookism and sexism, for example, by defining sexual offense both physically and verbally.

#### **4.4. The Mismatch between Women's Appearance and Competencies**

As we have seen, South Korean society is suffused with Confucianist values; there are abundant social practices that are influenced by Confucianism like their ways of greeting (a slight bow) and their strict age hierarchy in societal and domestic activities. According to Yoo (1973), "Confucianism has pervaded the conscious of Koreans" (77). In a Confucian-rooted society like South Korea, where women are overpowered by traditional patriarchal ideologies, sexualized objectification on women's appearance seems to be a common practice. Even in professional contexts, it seems natural for people to connect a woman's appearance with her professional abilities, including male colleagues and women themselves. The connection between appearance and professional competencies includes a causal relationship between both; judgments on a woman's appearance lead to inference on her professional abilities. The commonly acknowledged "attractiveness-induced halo effect" which is

exacerbated in South Korean society, highlights the “double-edged nature of appearance” that working women are faced with (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985, p.212); women are deemed as can benefit from being good-looking (including being physically and personally attractive) at the workplace, but meanwhile, they take risk to be attractive due to biased judgments on the negative relationship between appearance and work competence, which means, relying on sex appeal as form of power, a woman “may fail to build other competencies” (Smith, et al., 2018, p.680). And Confucianism-affected patriarchal value system in South Korea exacerbates the double bind in working women’s appearance by bringing critical voices, such as professional attires diminish a woman’s femininity, making a woman less woman-like or a “good” woman. Smith et al. (2018) state the imperativeness for women in authority to seek a balance between appearance and competencies, that “women must find a way to balance professionalism with attractiveness in leadership positions” (p.680). However, this is unrealizable if people, especially men at the workplace, keep focusing one and ignore the other. All in all, the truth is that women at authority, even those who are in high position can do nothing to win neither sides; there is no way for them to satisfy both sides: social expectations on a woman and professional expectations on a working woman. But when expectations in both societal and professional contexts are no longer at odds with each other in South Korea, women in authority can finally break through the double bind imposed on their appearance at the workplace gain enough objectivities on their professional competencies, regardless of their appearance.

## CHAPTER 5:

### CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND II: BALANCING WORK AND CHILDCARE

As we shall see, in the Korean show “Misty” child-rearing is one of the most crucial aspects of Hye-ran’s personal conflicts between work and family. Women’s increasing entry into workplace is accompanied by a declining fertility rate, especially in South Korea, where the national fertility rate has been experiencing a rapid decline through decades. “Misty” was aired in 2018, which was the year with the lowest fertility rate in South Korea. Leading up to that time, the Korean fertility rate had dropped to 0.0072 in 2020 from 0.044 in 1958 (Macrotrends, 2020), which is more than 60 times’ difference. South Korean society is experiencing a rapid transition from high to low fertility rate, which has been the world’s lowest in 2018 (Kim, 2020). As a side effect of the rapid economic development, low fertility rate has definitely been a social issue across South Korea. As female audience takes up the overwhelmingly larger part of the overall audience of Korean TV dramas, the problem of children has also been discussed a lot in Korean TV dramas. In Misty, one of the most controversial plots is the female protagonist, Hye-ran’s unilateral decision of abortion without telling her husband for the position of news anchorwoman. Moreover, this directly results in her marriage being pushed on the rock as her husband, Tae-wook, has been considering a divorce with her.

#### 5.1. Personal Costs of Having a Child

Given the rapid decline of the fertility rate in South Korea, Hye-ran’s extreme example of abortion is a reflection of an increasing number of Korean women choosing careers over children by saying, “I can get pregnant again, but there’s only one audition” (E3, 2:26). Her underlying reasons for this decision in Misty (2018) are worth scrutinizing. Hye-ran choose to give up this child, most directly, because there are costs, needless to mention

the economic costs, but more importantly the personal costs like “time, social norms, health, psychological costs” and social status (Kim, et al., 2017, p.6). Generally, the fertility rate and economic development is anticorrelated. The low fertility rate is a production of socioeconomic transformation in South Korea; the whole society is undergoing, as called by demographers “demographic transition” – “a period of population swell, decline and eventual stabilization that occurs as countries get richer”, as defined by BBC (Quick and d’Efilippo). “Demographic transition” is “a sequence of five stages” and South Korea has reached the fourth stage – “mortality low and birth rates low” (Roser, Ritchie and Ortiz-Ospina) and near the end of the transition. As the country get richer, people’s life standard improves and women pursue more than just building a family, assisting the husband and bringing up children as doctored by confucianist ideology; prior to being a wife and a mother, they choose to be a woman, educated, with a career. On the contrary, having a child with large financial, health, and psychology costs will encumber a woman with ambitions in her education and career. Therefore, Hye-ran, as many other modern working women in South Korea, is aware that having a child is not going to be advantageous to her self-fulfillment.

There is a dilemma here, especially for South Korean women. They are expected both to build a traditionally complete family with at least one child, and also to develop careers in their 20s at the same time. As the statistics from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show, there is a sharp decline of South Korean women’s employment rate at the age of 27 in 2018, from 70% to the lowest rate 60% at the age of 37. (OECD). Most often, Korean women “leave the labor market during childbearing ages”; they make an either-or choice between work and family. In other words, “when they opt for one, they forgo the other” (Ma).

In this context, it is not surprising that Hye-ran in “Misty” (2018) is faced with this either-or choice: with full awareness of the incompatibility of work and family, she gives up childbearing. Though she has expressed her priority of career, she chooses to get married

with Tae-wook in her early stage of career. However, she gets a great opportunity of the anchorwoman's audition for News Nine 9 (the national biggest prime-time news program) after she is pregnant. She tries to persuade her husband understand her decision upon taking an abortion, "I can get pregnant again, but there's only one audition. (E3, 2:26)" At this point, she is deeply aware of the truth that there is no way to both keep the child and get the position.

In South Korea, women are obligated by social norms to be the primary caretaker of their children. More broadly, within traditional confucianist norms, women are expected take the key role within the domestic space, while men are expected to take the main responsibility as the family's breadwinner. Under the shadow of the stereotypically gendered family roles, working women are more distracted by child-rearing, compared to men in South Korea, unless both wife and husband are taking the same responsibility in the family. The phenomenon of women's more efforts in domestic scope is also pointed out in Hochschild's work on "the second shift": she writes that "[m]ost women work one shift at the office or factory and a 'second shift' at home," and that women work "an extra month of twenty-four-hour days" (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, p.46). Domestic chores are more distracted if there is a child at home.

## **5.2. Grammatical Markers and Gender Hierarchy: The Use of -जू(jwo) to Demarcate the Suppliant Position of the Primary Caretaker**

In another Korean TV drama, *My Wife Is Having an Affair This Week* (2016) aired in JTBC, the female protagonist, Jung Soo-yeon, is a Team Leader in a top company and, at the same time, a mother. Unlike most other working women in South Korean Society, she doesn't quit after becoming pregnant, but instead keeps her job and takes the primary care role for her child, Do Joon-soo.

What is interesting is that whenever Soo-yeon is too busy to take care of their child, her semantics and grammar imply that she is seeking help that she is not sure she has the

right to ask from her husband, Do Hyun-wu—who is a main producer in the television station. Hence she always uses “-줘(jwo)” as the ending of her requests to her husband. “-줘(jwo)” is a casual form of “-주다(ju-da)”, which means “to give.” By adding “-주다(ju-da) to the stem of a word, Soo-yeon deploys a revealing grammatical form: one that implies that the action is somehow beneficial to the addressor (or whomever the action is being done for). In other words, the action is completed for the addressor. On the one hand, the addressor grammatically acknowledges that she is the supplicant and is asking for a favor. On the other hand, the addressor is (willingly) taking on the major responsibility for the action.

For instance, when Soo-yeon has some work to do in the middle of feeding her son, she will ask her husband, “Honey, help me finishing feeding him. (E2, 3:15)” (See excerpt E2, 3:15)

Excerpt (E2, 3:15):

Soo-yeon:	자기, 마저 좀 먹여줘.
(Romaja):	ja-gi, ma-jeo jom meok-yeo-jwo .
(Literal Translation):	Honey, finish please help me feed him.
(English Translation):	Honey, help me finish feeding him.

Here, she is not just asking her husband to feed his son, but asking him to feed her son for her. accordingly, she uses the grammar – “먹여줘 (meok-yeo-jwo, translation: help me feed him)” – which is utterly tentative. That is, the grammar here suggests that he is doing her a tremendous favor – instead of “먹여라(meok-yeo-ra, translation: feed him). Put another way, we can say that the grammar indicates her primary responsibility for feeding the child, while her husband is the helper. Similarly, when she asks her husband to help her take care of their son at home due to her working overtime, she says, “Honey, can you take care of Joon-soo tonight? There’s overtime work today, but everyone’s waiting for me because I have to pick up Joon-soo. He’s all washed, so all you need to do is read him a picture book and tuck him in.” (E1, 59:24) (See Excerpt E1, 59:24). Here, she is making a request in a grammatically hesitant register: “맡아주면 안돼? (mat-a-ju-myeon an-dwae, translation:

Would it be OK if you help me take care of (Joon-soo)?” In fact, “말아주면 (mat-a-ju-myeon, translation: if you can take care for me)” is the conditional mood of “말아줘(mat-a-jwo, translation: help me take care)”, which indicates another supplicant request to her husband. Soo-yeon thereby positions herself as holding the major responsibility of taking care of their son every night:

Excerpt (E1, 59:24):

Soo-Yeon:	준수	오늘밤에	좀	말아 <u>주</u> 면	안돼?
(Romaja):	Joon-soo	o-neul-bam-e	jom	mat-a-ju-myeon	an-dwae?
(Literal Translation):	Joon-soo	tonight	please	if take care for me	not ok?
(English Translation):	Could you please take care of Joon-soo tonight?				

In a similar manner, she makes a request of asking if her husband could take care of their son (“말아줘 (mat-a-jwo, translation: help me take care of him)”—instead of using a stronger imperative sentence like “말아해라(mat-a-hae-ra, translation: take care of him).”

And, again, in Episode 3, she is using the same expression to ask her husband for picking up their son from kindergarten for her (E3, 5:11), rather than telling her husband to do so (See Excerpt E3, 5:11).

Excerpt (E3, 5:11):

Soo-Yeon:	자기, 준수	좀	데려다	<u>줘</u> ?
(Romaja):	Ja-gi, Joon-soo	jom	de-ryeo-da	jwo?
(Literal Translation):	Honey, Joon-soo	please	pick up	for me?
(English Translation):	Honey, could you please pick up Joon-soo for me?			

Here, she can definitely just tell her husband to pick up their son by saying, “데려라 (de-ryeo-ra, translation: pick up him), instead of “데려다 줘(de-ryeo-da-jwo, translation: help me pick up him)”. Although she had the same kind of high-level career that her husband does, he grammar indicates she always thinks taking care of, feeding, and picking up her son is her job.

Further evidence of her absolute belief in her disproportionate childcare role emerges in similar dialogues on the show. For example, she tells her husband, “He’s all washed, so all

you need to do is read him a picture book and tuck him in.” (E1, 59:24). After showing a lower position to ask her husband to help her take care of their son, dragging the husband to her exclusive area of childrearing, while both of them are at home after work, she has the expertise and power to issue orders on the specific missions, as if her husband has always been the newcomer, novice, and outsider of childrearing.

Simply from the language of the working mother, Soo-yeon, we can see that child-rearing has been an enormous distraction for her, taking up much more of her than her husband’s—when she has her own work to do. On one hand, the grammatical ending of the request, “-줘(jwo)” – even to her husband – always places her in a lower hierarchical position--by claiming she is the responsible “owner” of the action. On the other hand, when it comes to the specific tasks necessary taking care of their son, she depicts herself as having the full knowledge and responsibility to issue instructions to him.

### **5.3. Childrearing with Her Body: The Cost of Health**

Another reason why more and more women come to realize that childrearing is detrimental to their overall career is that they are exposed to health impediments during pregnancy. In *Misty* (2018), Hye-ran confesses to her husband that she has had an abortion in order to keep the audition appointment for the position of anchorwoman for the news nine program: “i couldn’t audition while having morning sickness. They wouldn’t hire an anchor with a pregnant belly either. [...] I can get pregnant again, but there’s only one audition. (E3, 2:26)” In this situation, then, the uncertainty of nausea and vomiting during the interview is unacceptable. For Hye-ran, who is an ambitious woman and has been longing for the position grabbing this chance to achieve the top position in her career is definitely prioritized over having a child; she accordingly emphasizes this determination to her husband, “You know very well how long I waited for that job.” And being pregnant would not only expose Hye-

ran to a health impediment to the audition; it would also result in absences even after she attained the position--which would likely cause the TV station to replace her.

As for those women who are able to keep a child while staying in the workplace, they are faced with a similarly difficult physical stress. They are required to meet the intensive demands of both work and childcare at the same time, despite their clear need for postpartum recovery. In *My Wife Is Having an Affair This Week* (2016), Soo-yeon's mother-in-law empathetically points out that her husband might ignore the early stage after her son, Joon-soo is born: "When you were still breastfeeding Joon-soo, you must have run home from work. In the middle of winter, sweat was dripping from your forehead while you held Joon Soo. And your toes were bruised black. If your mother saw that, she would have cried so much. (E6, 43:28)" Here again, in a highly competitive environment, repeated absences will result in her falling behind her colleagues and even being replaced. Likewise, soo-yeon has just brought her son into the world, and breastfeeding is salutary for the baby's health. In this situation, then, she has to be back work soon after giving birth—and at the same time ensure that her son has enough breastfeeding and maternal care during his vulnerable, infant stage. To offset this intensive conflict, she has to sacrifice her own health to make up for both work and childcare--by working with high efficiency and shrinking her commuting time to get home earlier, regardless of how arduous the weather conditions are. And this is only one of the untold difficulties a working mother goes through—in spite of the fact that they may be indicated by something as subtle as the sweat on her forehead or the bruises on her black toes.

Though breastfeeding is linked only to a child's infant stage, which lasts for a limited period, Soo-yeon is still obligated to do house chores, which is also at great cost of health. Her mother-in-law, also as a woman, is empathetic, saying to the husband, "Those who do the housekeeping know. Just by looking at the kitchen and other things, you can see how much she cares about the family. She's a working mom. You can tell she's straining herself to make everything work out. [...] Look how thin she is. Don't you feel sorry for her?" In the

end, she is too overwhelmed with all the house chores, childcare, and work to take care of her own body.

#### **5.4. Time Costs: More Challenges for Working Mothers**

Hence the depiction of child rearing is a much more fraught job than is often imagined. If pregnancy is frustrating a woman attempt to enter the workplace, then giving birth to a child is not the end of this frustration—but just the beginning. Once again, this echoes with Hochschild’s “the second shift,” that with children, women devote more time than men caring for both house and children. This could, in a way, explain why a company is not willing to hire a woman who is about to get pregnant in the approaching future. In the Korean drama *My Wife Is Having an Affair This Week* (2016), the female protagonist, Soo-yeon, is in an online chat group with other mothers of the children in the same kindergarten as her son, Joon-soo is. This online chat group is intended for children-centered information exchange, like where to take painting classes, piano classes, etc. A majority of the mothers are stay-at-home mothers who have more spare time than a working mother; at least in the small group of Joon-soo’s friends’ mothers, Soo-yeon is the only working mother. As a result, Soo-yeon’s attention is easily drawn to the information popping out from the chat group from time to time. Joon-soo wants to take the same painting class as his best friend does but the quota is limited. In that sense, she has to keep good relationships with other mothers so that she can get her son into the class. As a result, she has to keep an eye on the online chatting record every several seconds, make phone calls outside of the office during working hours, and even treat the mothers at restaurant during lunch time as a return for her son’s art class spot.

In episode 5, when she is being heard by other colleagues, she talks on the phone in order to deal with one of her son’s problems. In this scene, instead of attending to her work, Soo-yeon goes to the stairwell to make the phone call and keeps looking around cautiously, wary of people passing by (see Excerpt: E5, 8:45-9:30).

Excerpt (E5, 8:45-9:30):

1. Soo-yeon: Yoon-woo's mother. This is Joon-soo's mom.
2. I wanted to ask you about Yoon-woo's art class.
3. I was wondering if Joon-soo will be able to get in?
4. Yoon-woo's mother: That art academy should have closed registration by now.
5. Soo-yeon: Oh, is that so?
6. Yoon-woo's mother: It's only four students per class.
7. Friendly mothers registered for it together.
8. Why? Does Joon-soo want to do it, too?
9. Soo-yeon: Uhm... Could there be another way?
10. Yoon-woo's mother: The owner is a friend of Seol-ah's Mom.
11. This is what I'm saying.
12. If you were friendlier with Seol-ah's mom, it would be easier.
13. Soo-yeon: I'm sorry.
14. Yoon-woo's mother: I'll ask Seol-ah's mom once. Don't get your hopes up, though.
15. Soo-yeon: Thank you. Yes, thank you!

This passage reveals a crucial conversation between Soo-yeon's son (Joon-soo) and his best friend in kindergarten (Yoon-woo). We learn that Joon-soo wants to take the same class that Yoon-woo is taking, so Soo-yeon asks Yoon-woo's mother about the opportunity to get in.

In line 7 and line 12, by saying "friendly", Yoon-woo's mother is implying Soo-yeon should get closer relationship with the mothers. She suggests Soo-yeon in line 12, "If you were friendlier with Seol-ah's mom, it would be easier," that she should have gotten closer with Seol-ah's mother. However, getting closer with Seol-ah's mother means spending more time and efforts to make social contact with her, which is difficult for Soo-yeon as the only working mom among the group of "friendly mothers (as mentioned in line 7)". Compared with Soo-yeon, the other stay-at-home mothers definitely have more time to devote themselves to the social activities that are beneficial to their children. Whereas for Soo-yeon, making social contacts with other mothers like making a phone call during worktime is already a cost of working efficiency and concentration.

Despite Soo-yeon's trying her best to reconcile her work and family, she experiences intense stress in response to the next thing that happens, right after the foregoing phone call:

her demotion from her position as the leader of the J-Motors Project, followed by the substitution of the department chief (see excerpt E5, 9:35-11:10).

Excerpt: (E5, 9:35-11:10):

16. Chief: How is the J-Motors Project going?  
17. Soo-yeon: We are proceeding without interruption.  
18. Chief: Team Leader Jung, you have a child...  
19. Handling this huge project on your own might be too much.  
20. Soo-yeon: I am okay –  
21. Chief: Actually J-Motors is asking for a change in the project  
22. leader. I know you've spent a lot of time on it.  
23. We cannot ignore the client's request...  
24. Soo-yeon: Yes. [Yoon-woo's mother call back and her phone vibrates.]  
25. Chief: Ji Sun-woo said you two finished the main part and that it would be fine  
26. if we gave it to the other employees under you.  
27. Soo-yeon: Yes, I will.  
28. Chief: Alright, I'm counting on you then.  
29. Soo-yeon: Yes. [Her phone keeps vibrating.]

The Department Chief uses Soo-yeon's maternal identity as an excuse to explain the substitution to her in line 18-19, "You have a child. Handling this huge project on your own might be too much." Despite the fact that she has already answered that they are proceeding the project "without interruption" following her leadership. The phone call from Yoon-woo's mother at this stressed moment pushes Soo-yeon to her limit of this struggling between work and family. Before this talk with the Chief, she was distracted by her childrearing issue, making a phone call with Yoon-woo's mother. What's worse, she received a call back from Yoon-woo's mother, very likely to be the result of Soo-yeon request upon her son's spot in the art academy, which is probably the same important as her leader position of the huge project in the company. The truth is that she can never let this call be the interruption of the conversation between the Chief, so she just let the phone vibrates till the end of the talk. What's sarcastic here is that, the Chief mentions about her being a mother of a son and the leader of this project simultaneously is too much for her. In line 19, "[h]andling this huge project on your own might be too much". Faced with this distrust by her superior, She denies by saying, "I am okay" in line 20, but immediately interrupted by him in line 21; he never cares about her explanation but firmly believes that she is distracted by the childrearing

issues. Perhaps, this is really too much for her, being a perfect mother and a high-ranking working woman at the same time, and the annoying, on-going phone vibration is a symbolization of her collapse at this point.

As mentioned in the foregoing discussion, a working woman with a child in South Korea (such as Soo-yeon) is going to be repeatedly hampered by the childrearing issues, and one of the manifestations in the Korean TV drama, *My Wife Is Having an Affair This Week* (2016), is Soo-yeon treats the other women at a restaurant during lunch time. Here's the conversation among Soo-yeon and the other mothers of the children who attend the same kindergarten as her son, Joon-soo (See Excerpt E6, 21:00-21:21)—

Excerpt (E6, 21:00-21:21):

30. Mother 1: Hey, I think this place is a little expensive.  
31. Joon-soo's mother, is that okay?  
32. Soo-yeon: It's fine. My son got into art classes because of you,  
33. and you've given me so much help.  
34. Mother 2: That only happened because there was an empty spot.  
35. Is it okay for you not to be at work?  
36. Soo-yeon: Well, since it's lunch time, it's no problem.  
37. Mother 3: Look how much weight you've lost! I'm jealous.  
38. It's become a worry of mine because I just keep gaining weight.  
39. Mother 2: Why are you jealous? She's having a hard time and that's why.

Soo-yeon sacrifices her lunch time to treat the mothers at an “expensive” place, in return for the favor of them getting her son a spot in the art class. On this table of mothers' gathering, five mothers in total, Soo-yeon is the only one with her own career, and the other four of them are all stay-at-home mothers. Treating them a meal is one of the ways that Soo-yeon get herself socialized with these mothers, as the only working mom who has less spare time as they do for the social activities to get “friendlier” as it was suggested in Excerpt (E5, 8:45-9:30) line 7 and 12.

It's worth noting that during the whole story of getting her son into the art academy, Soo-yeon's husband, also as Joon-soo's father, Do Hyun-wu has never involved in any part of it to help relieve his wife's tension juggling between work and family. And this is a representative of the stereotypically gendered responsibilities within the domestic scope, that

all these trivial childrearing issues are taken responsible by mothers; mothers are the “main parent” while fathers are “part-time father” (Sunderland, 2000; Kendall, 2007, p.133).

Neither in the chatting group nor on the table of the Soo-yeon’s treat, there is no father. In a dual-income family where both of the parents have a job, the father is usually more concentrated on their work than the mother.

### 5.5. “탈출(tal-chul)”: Escape from the Perfect Life as an “Amazing” Working Woman and a “Perfect Mother”

In the Korean TV drama *My Wife Is Having an Affair This Week* (2012), the female protagonist, Jung Soo-yeon is acknowledged as an impeccable woman. Her colleagues make compliments on her like, “From woman to woman, don’t think she’s amazing?”, “She’s good at work, and she’s a good housewife. Ah... I’ll never be like her. (E7, 1:03:04)” It is this flawless wife who makes faultless devotions to this family that has had an affair with another man, Ji Sun-woo. After the wife of the man who is having an affair with Soo-yeon learns about this, she asks to meet Soo-yeon and says to her “I heard you have a kid. It’s not easy working with a kid, is it? (E6, 58:15)” and she added a sentence as a definition of Soo-yeon’s affair with her husband, Ji Sun-woo (See Excerpt E6 58:19).

Excerpt (E6, 58:19):

Ji Sun-woo’s wife: 혹시 제 남편을 외출이 아니라 탈출 시켜줄  
(Romaja): Hok-si je nam-pyeon-eul oe-chul-i a-ni-ra tal-chul si-kyeo-jul  
(Literal translation): Perhaps my husband going out not escape help  
구원자라고 생각했나요?  
gu-won-ja-ra-go saeng-gak-haess-na-yo  
savior thought?  
(English translation): Did you hope that my husband would be your savior or something like that?

In the original Korean, this sentence essentially highlights Soo-yeon’s vulnerable position. In Korean, having an affair is also called “외출 (oe-chul, literal translation: going out)”, especially for those who already has a family, literally meaning going out of the relationship of husband and wife. Ji Sun-woo’s wife compares Soo-yeon to the one who

“escapes”, “탈출 (tal-chul)”, and her husband, Ji Sun-woo to the savior, “구원자 (gu-won-ja)”. She mentions Soo-yeon’s child right before this sentence, pointing out the underlying stresses that drive her to commit this mistake. Though flying in the face of moral norms, having an affair with someone else’s husband is like an escape from the dilemma of being a career woman and a mother at the same time; for Soo-yeon, Ji Sun-woo shows up in her life like a salvager who saves her from the endlessly overwhelmed life juggling work and childrearing. Ji Sun-woo’s wife, as a stay-at-home mother like most of the other Korean women, knows about Soo-yeon’s so painstaking life as a working mother that needs to be escaped from, “It’s not easy working with a kid, isn’t it? (E6, 58:15)”. However, as the wife of the man Soo-yeon cheated with, she says this in a sarcastic way. Literally, only one character is different between “외출 (oe-chul, literal translation: going out)” and “탈출 (tal-chul, translation: escape)”; but the former is neutral and a relative easy action – going out from somewhere neutral, while the latter is in a way negative and a difficult action – quitting somewhere arduous. In that sense, even the wife who is cheated has a knowledge of a working mother’s life is so strenuous that can push somebody to escape from.

However, Soo-yeon’s husband has no clue about his wife’s reason of cheating, “외출 (oe-chul, literal translation: going out)”. He is much less empathetic than any woman in this show, even after Soo-yeon’s sincere confession about her reason of cheating him (See Excerpt E7, 1:02:05 – 1:06:08).

Excerpt (E7, 1:02:05-1:06:18):

40. Hyun-wu: How could it just happen that way?
41. Does that make sense?
42. You were doing well all this time!
43. You were the perfect mother and housewife!
44. Everyone was envious of me.
45. Hey, we were fine. Really...
46. Soo-yeon: Yeah, I thought we were fine, too.
47. I guess we weren’t fine. It was hard.
48. I guess I was so busy I didn’t realize how hard it was for me.
49. I made the decision to marry and work,
50. so I didn’t want to be lacking in any aspect.

51. Even when I was tired and busy, I smiled as if I was relaxed.  
 [...]
   
52. Soo-yeon: I always rushed to pick Joon-soo up tight after work.
   
53. We were both busy with work, but we still did our best to live.
   
54. Everyone lives that way...
   
55. So I've never thought I was especially happy or unhappy.
   
56. But... I felt like I couldn't take it anymore.
   
57. Hyun-wu: Did it look like I was having an easy time?
   
58. Did it look like I was playing around every day?
   
59. Everyone lives like that.
   
60. Hey, at least when I had free time,
   
61. I picked up Joon-soo and took out the trash...

Soo-yeon's husband, Hyun-wu, cannot make any sense about why his wife chooses to have an affair, while she is such "a perfect mother and housewife" (line 40-42). In line 41, he says "you are doing well all this time!" and in line 43, he thinks everyone is envious of him so she should also feel the same that her life in this family is flawless, but overlooks her constant efforts of making him being envied by others. After having the intense talk with Ji Sun-woo's wife, and hearing the word "탈출 (tal-chul, translation: escape)", Soo-yeon admits that she is really "not fine", having a "hard" and "busy" life (line 46-47). She even compromises to the reality that she is too greedy to have a good marriage with a child and work simultaneously, making the decision to "marry and work" (line 48), and "didn't want to be lacking in any aspect" (line 49). But why can't she marry and work? Why does she have to be "lacking" in one aspect? Why is work and family always so incompatible for a woman in South Korea? Moreover, both Soo-yeon and Hyun-wu mention that "Everyone lives that way. (line 53)" and "Everyone lives like that. (line 58)" It is horrible to think that everyone is living a life like Soo-yeon, which is so arduous that she desperately finds a way to "escape" from it. However, still, many women are not able to "탈출 (tal-chul, translation: escape)", for moral norms, and for there is no such illusory "savior", but constantly enduring this arduous reconciling between work and family.

## 5.6. **Ostensible Ways of “탈출(tal-chul, Translation: Escaping)” from the Incompatibility of Work and Family: “Role Sharing”**

A key solution not only for this broken marriage of Soo-yeon and Hyun-wu, but also for every working mother who perhaps is looking for “탈출 (tal-chul, translation: escape),” instead of cheating on the husband and getting a divorce, is the husband’s ostensible contribution to the family by “role sharing” (Kendall, 2007, p.129). In line 59-60, Hyun-wu lets himself off the hook by mentioning that “at least when I had free time, I picked up Joon-soo and took out the trash...” It seems to him that these are all he could do, and constitute extra work as a “part-time father” (Sunderland, 2000; Kendall, 2007, p.133). Men thus claim the “egalitarian goal of role sharing” in “dual-income families with children” (Kendall, 2007, p.129). And the “sharing of housework” is regarded as a way to “free women from the confines of domesticity” (Echols, 1990; Kendall, 2007, p.129). We can conclude, though, that husbands could be involved more in the housework than what they think. There is more to fatherhood than picking up the child and taking out the trash.

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