

A culture that cultivates the prostitution of teenage women¹: based on the experiences of prostitution among teenage women

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1. Introduction

The fact that teenagers construct a unique identity of their own different from the older generation became the subject of new discourses in Korean society since the 1990s. As the sexual experience of teenagers came to be understood as an important element in constructing their differentiated identity, the issue of teenager's sexuality has drawn attention from the mass media and culture studies scholars alike. In particular, as it became widespread that the sexuality of teenage women became the "yonggae"² product which adult men favored, the sexuality of teenage women became one of the most sensationally portrayed topics in Korea's mass media since the mid 1990s.

The most dominant discourse on the sexuality of teenage women is based on the approach of protectionism. Another approach, which is usually adopted by feminist studies on teenage women, is that of acknowledging the reality where teenage women are constituted as sexual subjects within the consumer-capitalist society. In the approach of protectionism, the teenagers' practicing their sexuality is understood within the discourse of defiance, delinquency or victimization. Here teenagers are positioned as sexless beings and as minors living a present that only exists only subordinate to the future. What is noteworthy is that the word "teenagers" in general usually refers to teenage boys. Teenage girls are usually described more specifically as female students or young ladies who are considered as a sub-category within the definition of teenagers. They represent the

"young lady" (*the Korean word for young lady also has the meaning of virgin*), a minor preparing for the future in a patriarchal society.

Since the mid 1990s, feminism studies in Korea have criticized and deconstructed the way in which the teenagers, especially teenage women have been categorized, and the male-centric norms and morals that were used when defining their sexuality. (Kim 1997; ChoHan 1998; Lee 1998; Min 2000) First of all, feminism studies on teenage women understood the reality that teenagers living in the consumer culture of the 1990s had desires and curiosities of sexualities and relationships, and described how a teenager's sexuality was situated in Korean society.³ They have carried out discussions on what teenagers consider to be the sexual, on the relationship between the meaning of what they accept and practice as sex and the sexual script that is dominating the Korean society, on what knowledge or education on sex they are looking for and how this can be provided.

With this as a background, this paper attempts to study how the experience of sexuality in prostitution is possible for teenage women and how their experience constitutes their sexualized gender identity. This paper does not apply the categorization of pro-positive sex feminism, anti-sex feminism or sex-radical feminism (Chapkis 1997) as such in looking at the teenage women within the sex industry. Rather, this paper attempts to understand why there exists a cultural acceptance that makes teenage women entering the sex industry a viable choice as a means to fulfill their needs, and to reveal how the Korean society makes them use sex as a trade.

I want to explore the way in which teenage women understand and interpret their sexual practices and how they articulate the idea between the body, sexuality, gender and the idea of “me. By doing so, I want to find new way of questioning about women’s sexualities in feminist studies in Korea

2. The background of *Wonjokyojae*⁴ as prostitution

(1) *Teenagers in the sex industry that slip through the “Teenager’s Sexuality Protection Act.”*

How we name or how we define a phenomenon given within a context is very important because the term itself may be determining the way in which the reality is created and understood. By examining the use of the term *wonjokyojae* we can understand how the social norm on sexuality of teenage women has been developed. Since the mid 1990s, the word *wonjokyojae* has been used in Korea to describe teenage girls under the age of 19 having sex with middle-aged men for money. It was first believed to the imported sexual practices from Japan, as it is said that the four Chinese character word was something like from Japan. However, this was not a mere imitation of something foreign. Rather my position is that it came out in Korea where sex was being commercialized and traded in a variety of ways and a Japanese word was borrowed to name this very phenomenon.

Many women’s groups that had succeeded in politicizing and legislating the crimes of sexual violence toward women and many groups that claimed to fight for the protection of teenagers were against the use of word *wonjokyojae* for the prostitution of teenagers on the basis that this word concealed the unequal relationship between a teenager and an adult, and that it blurred the very clear act of prostitution into it. When the Teenager’s Sexuality Protection Act was established in July 2000 the word “*wonjokyojae*” was replaced by the word “teenage prostitution” in the media and many academic studies. However, since the dominant norm in Korea is that teenage prostitution in no matter what form must be prohibited and penalized there is no

distinction in the category of teenage prostitution. A study that points this out as a problem uses the term “individual prostitution” for *wonjokyojae* to distinguish it from teenagers working in the prostitution businesses (The Commission on Youth Protection 2002).

There are many Korean words terming women’s prostitution such as *yunlak* (literally means ruining the ethics), *maechun* (selling sex), or *maemaechun* (buying and selling sex). When such terms are used along with pleasure industry, malignant industry or sex industry they become “obscene practices”, malignant practices, and prostitution.⁵ “*Yoonlak*” is defined as an act of sex that is provided to someone for the purpose of monetary or financial gain (Prevention Act of *Yoonlak*). This word, which refers to the moral corruption of women engaging in prostitution, holds a moral perspective and is indicative of the double standard of sexual ethics that apply to men and women. Moreover, the perception embedded in this word is that it is the woman that is at fault for such trade of sex. Another word is “*maechun*” or “*maeum*” which is a gender discriminating word that only focuses on the selling of women’s sex. On the other hand, *maemaechun* provides an economic perspective that emphasizes the act of buying and selling based on the labor market’s logic of supply and demand (Chang 1999: 156). In many cases, however, these terms are centered on the people who buy or sell which means that the intermediaries that make this possible are excluded. Feminists who are active in tackling this issue in Korea have argued that the term should be more clear and formal so that it can reveal the context with which the practice of selling and buying sex occurs, and to expose the social situation in which sex is being commercialized. This is how the official term for *wonjokyojae* was changed.

The basic framework of which the prostitution of teenage women is regulated and discussed in Korea today is under the auspices of the Protection of Teenager Sexuality Act. However, before this was legislated in 2000, the regulating law was the *Yunlak* Prevention Act legislated in 1961. Under this regulation, teenagers engaging in prostitution

were considered 'Yoonlak' women and penalized accordingly. With the new "Protection of Teenager Sexuality Act" those who are subject to punishment are not the teenagers who are selling sex but the adult customers who are the buyers. Although both teenage boys and girls are subject to the "Protection of Teenager Sexuality Act", from a realistic, practical and cultural point of view, those who are subject to protection under this law are teenage girls who are automatically considered or supposed to be sexually innocent.⁶

The two major axes in determining sexual subjects is gender and age in Korea. The axis of men and women and that of adult and teenager is the most important criteria that determine an acceptable sexual subject. Hence, the sexuality of teenage women is considered to be something to be protected and the sexuality of adult women, something to be silent. The laws on the protection of teenage sex focuses on the fact that they are minors and therefore society should protect them. However, the "Protection of Teenager Sexuality Act" ducks the reality that teenagers also have sexual needs and want to be treated as adults by society and ignores the institution of consumer capitalism and the sex market that designates teenage girls as sexual subjects. Prostitution of teenagers including *Wonjokyojae* occurs from the fact that although teenage girls are minors from a social perspective, they have the sexual resources that can be traded in the sex market.

(2) A reference framework for the discussion on prostitution of teenage women

Hoigard and Finstad who studied the prostitution of teenage women in Oslo, Norway (Hoigard and Finstad 1992) make very significant points on questions of who become prostitutes, how do women become prostitutes, and what it is to become a prostitute. They base their study on a gender and male violence model that provides a specific context for looking at how economic and physical enforcement draw teenage women into prostitution and how women's sexuality is used as a means for survival. They write that the experience of becoming a prostitute is a pro-

cess of destroying the respect towards themselves, other women and men (Hoigard and Finstad 1992: 17). They also point out that the road that leads to prostitution is not personal, but rather social.

According to many studies on prostitutes, their social background from a functionalism point of view is that of delinquency. It is not, however, that the delinquent social background is the cause for them becoming prostitute, but rather a background of woman who can become prostitutes. A harsh socio-economic background cannot be a sufficient condition for a woman to become a prostitute. According to Hoigard and Finstad the reason that teenage girls become prostitutes is not because of their difficult socio-economic backgrounds but because they experience the sharing of a collective culture where prostitution is an option and become integrated as a part of it. This happens when teenage girls go through a collective experience of sharing the idea that prostitution is an option with other teenagers, then transforms this into a individual experience and become a member of that group, and also when they learn what being a woman and man is as a part of this collective experience. A more important transformation is that before they engage in prostitution teenage girls go through an experience of self-transformation believing that a woman's sexuality/body is her most crucial asset. Hoigard and Finstad points out that what image of women they adopt as their own image is critical in understanding the process of becoming a prostitute (Hoigard and Finstad 1992: 17-19). The behavior of teenage girls who sell themselves as sexual products should not be interpreted within their individual context but rather within the transformed collective experience that has become part of an integrated culture. Thus, prostitution is acceptable within the sub-culture that they share, and furthermore becomes an act of solidarity among the members of the group. One may become an outcast or delinquent when one does not take part in this process. This is why Hoigard and Finstad argue against the reasoning that women prostitutes are women who have been rejected from society and claim that a model that explains

prostitution based on sub-culture of social delinquencies and crimes is inapplicable. These women are creating their own shared experiences.

What is interesting about Hoigard and Finstad's study is that they separate between the individual question of why women engage in prostitution and the actual process of women becoming prostitutes. From an individual perspective, prostitutes do what they do for money. Hoigard and Finstad discovered in their study that there was not one single woman who cited any other reason for being a prostitute (Hoigard and Finstad 1992: 40). However, such individual motivation alone is not a sufficient condition for becoming a prostitute. They explain that only when a society recognizes prostitutes do they create them, and this is why the issue of prostitution must be discussed within a social context.

Prostitution is possible in a society where sex is a product of exchange — more importantly, in a society where sex can be sold and traded in some contexts, but at the same time this is unacceptable in other contexts. In such a society, women can gain access to profit/resources through men who use women's sex, which is why it is possible that women, who have a relatively lower possibility of earning money compared to men, engage in prostitution for money. The fact that women's sex becomes a means of trade and a product that can be sold is another evidence of male suppression. In this sense, we can see that the prostitution of women emerges through a combination of the gender system based on heterosexuality and the sex industry.

Then, how are teenage women in Korea absorbed, without any buffer mechanisms, into the male centric, sexually discriminating hierarchal society through their individualized experience of prostitution?

3. Study method and subjects

Data for this study was collected through interviews conducted from July to October 1999. The interviewees of teenage women living in or close to Seoul. They include teenagers who have experienced the involvement in the sex industry either as the form of

individual prostitution such as *wonjokyojae* or through diverse sexual trades. Some interviews were conducted with teenagers in the juvenile correction and protection facilities who used to work in the sex industry, but also with teenagers who can randomly be found in areas in and around Seoul where they hang out such as in front of Ewha Womans University or Yonsei University, Dongsoon-dong, Nowon Station, Shillim-dong, Karibong-dong, Sungnam Market, Anyang etc. Teachers, social workers, the police, civil servants, etc who have close contact with teenagers were also interviewed. There were 45 interviewees and the analysis report on the statements from 414 *wonjokyojae* teenagers, which was part of a study published was used as a reference (The Commission on Youth Protection 2002).

4. The easily accessible network of the sex industry⁷

(1) How teenage women enter the sex industry

The most significant channel for teenagers entering the sex industry is running away from home and their peer group network. Running away from home was the most significant turning point when explaining how teenage women entered the sex industry. Among the 25 teenage women that were interviewed, 15 of them voluntarily jumped into the industry after they ran away from home. This explains why and how teenagers are absorbed into the sex industry, which is the problem of not having money or a place to live after they run away. The sex industries that runaway teenagers go into are *dallanjujum* (a bar with a karaoke that sells drinks), ticket *dabang* (a clandestine coffee shop where the waitresses provide prostitution), *wonjokyojae*. For runaway teenagers who do not have a place to stay *dallanjujum* and ticket *dabang* that provide room and board are favored. Since most teenagers who have left home do not have a place to stay at night, they start working for the sex industry or depend on their peers who have already left home.

There is a very close connection between the sex industry and the network of peers. Friends, colleagues, and younger or older

acquaintances in the peer group are all mediums that introduce one another to the industry. People they know such as the owner of a coffee shop may also be a medium. Ten out of fifteen teenagers said that they were introduced to the industry through their friends or people they knew, and others started working through ads in daily community newsletters or through touts. There was one case where the teenager did not get involved in the industry but she was offered a *wonjokyojae* relationship from the owner of an accessory shop that she goes to. This indicates that many people teenage women know serve as mediators in introducing the sex industry which means that the everyday lives of teenage women and prostitution are very closely linked. Furthermore, precisely because friends or people they know introduce them they feel less sense of rejection towards the industry.

A newer trend is that teenagers work in the sex industry without having run away from home. This would be the case for the new fad in the sex industry such as *wonjokyojae* and 080 telephone dating service. Some teenagers work on the weekends from their home. With sex service being provided in such diverse ways teenagers now have a more diverse channel to enter the sex industry. These examples also illustrate the limitations in protective measures that just send teenagers who have been in the sex industry back home. They were returned to their homes based on the normative ideology that "home is safe" and "outside of the home is dangerous". This solution also has drawbacks in that it limits the needs and values of the teenagers as something that can be addressed within the domestic boundary. In addition, nowadays teenage women voluntarily seek the sex industry through the Internet or phone services, or by contacting someone who may have given them a business card on the street.

(2) *Economic marginalization of teenage women and prostitution as an Albeit (a side job)*

A teenage feminist at the Haja Center, which is a group that tries to promote the issue of independence and autonomy of teenage women as part of a social agenda, says that the

most serious problem facing teenage girls is work and sex. She points out the fact that they do not have the right to work means that they cannot have any economic income publicly, and that there is no support system that provides knowledge or physical support on the exercise of sexual rights. The structural context that makes teenage prostitution possible is the economic peripheralization of teenage women and the sex industry that has a demand for teenage women as sexual products.

Most of the teenage women who run away do not have money nor a place to sleep so when someone in the sex industry offers them work they are easily drawn into the sex industry. However, the main reason that teenage women get involved in the sex industry and stay there for a continuous period of time is that there is no work within the society that can serve as a source of income for teenage women and meet their need for cash. Teenagers need money to maintain their relationships with friends and for their consumption. Some teenagers want to become more independent from their parents and earn their allowance or their living. Many teenagers that were interviewed during this study said that they wanted a side job so that they could earn money.

When teenage women need money they do not just enter the sex industry as a first choice. Although they are influenced by the sexualized consumer culture they are also greatly aware of society's negative perception of the sex industry. Therefore, they start out looking for part time jobs that seem suitable for teenagers, but there is only a limited amount of work they can do, such as working in coffee shops as waitresses, in gas stations, bus boys in restaurants or diners, or distributing flyers on the street. The teenage women interviewed in the study had experience working part time in the following places — karaoke, newspaper delivery center, textile factory, gas station, Seven Eleven type convenient store, restaurant, coffee shop, shoe store, beer hall, *dabang* (a clandestine coffee shop) doing dishes, handing out flyers. These are all menial chores that are difficult to define.

However, it is fiercely competitive to get even these jobs, which are exhausting due to

its repetitiveness, and they pay very poorly. Thus, teenagers do not consider such jobs to be long term. In comparison, the sex industry does not require any training nor is there an age limit — the younger the better — and a high income is guaranteed which is why it is so tempting to teenage women. Once they have worked in this industry they know that although it does not guarantee a fixed stable income they also know that they cannot even get close to touching this amount of money with other side jobs. This explains why teenage women who have at least some experience in the industry feel that they can always go back in times of financial difficulty and endure it.

In the Korean society, teenagers equal students and all they have to do is study. Any other type of identity is socially unacceptable. Therefore, teenagers who are no longer at school or isolated from it are considered delinquencies, and the life or future that they may build outside of a school is deemed problematic or something peripheral.

This is why there is officially no labor market that guarantees the source of income for teenagers who are not students or those who have to earn their own living. However, today's teenagers whose self identity is formed by the consumer culture and products promoted by the mass media, want to earn quick money and prefer to live way they want to rather than choose the future success that good grades guarantee, and money is what they need most to live the life they want. These teenagers are willing to earn money doing whatever it takes and believe that this is justified because they are selling just sexual service not "me".

This is how teenage women enter the sex industry. For them, a side job is something temporary which does not require special talent and the job itself is not the issue but rather the income is, so they do not take much into consideration the social meaning of what it is that they have to do. That is the reason that teenage women exchange information on places to work and introducing adult men who they are having a *wonjokyojae* with to other friends because they consider this type of work to be a side job.

5. The culture of distinction for teenagers directed by a consumer society

One of the most stressed facts about teenage prostitution in the Korean society is that teenage women choose to do it voluntarily. This results in two different discourse: one, which is that teenage women must be protected, and the other is the criticism that "teenage women are tainted by a "pleasure" consumer culture and that they enter the sex industry to fulfill their needs or to earn money to go out or for other consumption needs."

The relationship between the consumer culture and teenage women can no longer be explained through the logic of need and deficiency. Today's teenagers consume not because there is a need but rather to prove their existence. To these teenagers who have been brought up from the day they were born listening to messages from the mass media and advertisements that "consumption is a virtue" consumption is more than mere pleasure. School grades are not the only yardstick that determines inferiority and superiority. Questions such a where one is hanging out and doing what, with whom have become a very significant criteria that determines their value within the peer group.

Although teenage women living in a consumer culture and them entering the sex industry in itself cannot be considered the same thing, there is a close correlation. Therefore, searching for answers on questions such as how do teenagers act in a consumer culture, what kind of values and identities are formed, why can't teenagers be free of the consumption space, where does teenage consumer culture and sex industry meet and where does it divided, will allow us to understand how prostitution has become a viable option for teenage women.

Teenager's playground: commercial decadent establishments

According to a high school teacher, decadent establishments have become a playground not only for delinquent groups but for all teenagers. In line with the strategy of the consumer industry where teenagers are

shaped into consuming subjects, teenagers are molding their identity as subjects of consumerism in this decadent playground along with their peers. They go to video room (*an establishment with many private rooms where you can watch videos*) in their uniforms and go to nightclubs and movie theaters during the weekends. They go to *soju-bang* (*a bar that sells drinks, mainly soju a Korean alcoholic beverage*) to drink *soju* and beer. They go to *colatechs* (*a nightclub that is supposed to sell only non-alcoholic drinks*). They can't stand being bored, and constantly want to have fun, but they need money to go to these places where they can have a good time.

The reality is that places where teenagers can relieve their stress and have fun is extremely limited, but officially it is considered "delinquent" or "outcast" for them to use such decadent commercial establishments. There was a teenage girl, saying that they can't have a good time if they don't do what they are not supposed to do, which indicates how limited the space is for teenagers in Korea, and also that having a good time has become a critical standard in the teenage culture. The "good time" or "fun" that they are referring to exists within a specific space and mechanism that creates this "fun" time, which means they need cash to have a fun. Having a good time is closely related to the self-representation of the consumer culture, for instance, what they do, where, what they drink, and what clothes they wear. The teenagers who do not have the money to go to these establishments feel a sense of impoverishment due to the restrained level of consumption. This leads them to have a sense of deprivation that their playground has been confiscated and that they are banned from the freedom of entering a space that allows them to relieve their stress. In other words, money and the decadent establishments are inevitable conditions for them to have a good time.

Teenagers as consumers: a mechanism that ranks values and prestige

Today's teenagers are positioned as consumers rather than producers, and most of them are students. Bo-Gill Kang (1997), who

has studied the genderizing process of teenage girls in the education environment, elaborates on how female students use their looks to differentiate themselves with other students. It is not only students who are considered "problem students" that try to deviate from a student-like appearance (*most middle and high schools in Korea require a uniform*) by bleaching their hair, fixing their eyebrows, putting on make-up, wearing different socks, shoes, shirts, putting on a scarf on their necks, piercing their ears, shortening the length of their uniform skirt, etc. This has become a common practice among students who want to enhance their looks and is no longer a differentiating factor distinguishing the "problem students (Nalrair)" and the "good students (Bumsangi)". Male students may also alter their uniforms for a tighter fit in an attempt to differentiate themselves from others. The efforts teenagers put in to look better, such as wearing hip hop clothes, getting plastic surgery, or going on a diet, is no longer just considered an expression of their individuality or being in style, but is even recognized as an investment for getting a better job or career in the future.⁸

To teenage women, the clothes and looks is an expression of their individuality that differentiates them from others, but at the same time, it is also a symbol that determines their sense of superiority and inferiority. As a result of comparing their appearance to determine whether they are better or worse, psychologically, they feel either cowered or confident.

Jin-ah: You have to dress well to be cool. This one time, I went to *Lotte World* (*an indoor amusement park*). I was wearing a T-shirt and shorts. My friends and I bumped shoulders with these women and we glared at each other for a while and it was hostile, but these women had permed their hair, had make-up on and dressed really well, so we felt inferior and couldn't say a word. They looked the same age, but we felt like we were weaker so we apologized first. If we had been wearing nice clothes we

would have acted with more confidence. We couldn't say anything because we had on such lousy clothes ...

Ha-nul: Clothes matter. You can feel really inferior. Your clothes or your hair has to have style to make people think that you're cool and popular. Then, other kids in school can't harass you.

En-ha: Do you know how boys are like these days? They tell us that it's bad manners to go out without make-up on.

The quotes from the teenagers portray our reality where their effort to look better is a means to achieve the status of "cool" or "popular". Moreover, we can see that the social values in which women who do not put on make-up or who do not do a lot about their appearance are judged to be unfeminine, are embedded among teenagers as well. So putting on make-up is considered as "having manners" and becomes a part of one's own gender role. To teenage women who want to be accepted by their peers and who want to maintain their "individualistic" status, consumption plays the role of maintaining their dignity and shaping their personality.

Money is something teenage women need to gain access to clothes so that they can look better and go to places where they can have fun which are all prerequisites to hang out with their friend. It is not something they need as a part of their livelihood. The amount of allowance they need to buy luxury brand products and to hang out with their friends in their drinking culture is growing to huge levels. In this age of information technology, the telecommunications cost associated with the competitive purchasing of cell phones has also become an important factor in increasing the level of consumption. They have to buy cell phones, top brand clothes and their own computer. They also need money to drink. Therefore, they need a side job to earn all this money.

It is important to realize that the amount of money that these teenagers need to hang out with friends or keep up with the style is

increasing, and that there are more situations that require money. Therefore, not having money means losing your pride and creating a boring situation where actions and desires are defeated. In other words, it leads to a state in which one's will to do has not been triggered. In a consumer society, teenage women confirm their ego through the rewards of consumption and the sense of achievement they get when they consume, so they seek ways to acquire cash to make this possible.

7. The body as a resource for teenage women: a space where different meanings of sex are practiced

In the Korean society, teenagers who express their practice of sexuality are considered to be "delinquent". Therefore, their sexual interest and needs had been hidden, and it was only recently that "teenage sex" as something that actually exists was discussed officially and publicly when a program on sex education aired on network TV. In sex education, sex was usually portrayed as something beautiful or as a step to motherhood. However, teenagers do not want sex as a part of motherhood or sex in the future, but sex, desire and relationship in the now and present. The prevalent discussion in society on teenage sex has been focused on the ignorance on the topic and on uncontrollable impulses. The teenage women that were interviewed in this study know how their sexuality is understood in reality and use their sexuality as a resource, as a means for exchange in social relationships. The act of using their body as a resource and practicing sex, of course, is deeply rooted in our consumer capitalism and gender politics. Teenage women engage in sex with men to make friends they can hang out with, to have a place to stay and be protected, to relieve their emotional loneliness and to acquire materialistic resources. Hence, teenage women regard their sexual acts in a different way depending on the context of the act and on whom they are having sex with.

Sex" as a game within the peer group

The teenage women in this study were engaging in sex as part of a game they play with

their peers. By placing this as a game, they transform the personal and individualized meaning associated with sex into something else.

Hwa-young: Everybody kisses and stuff like that at bars or beer halls so I don't feel offended. It's just a game. We're playing around. If I feel like I can do it (sex).

Hye-kyoung: I'm sure all the kids have kissed. And if you have a few drinks kissing is like a given. It's weird not to do it. Kids think that you must really be weird to not have even kissed. You sometimes kiss because you don't want to ruin the mood, but there's nothing wrong that. It's just a game anyway. Well, it's not a big deal who I kiss. I can kiss anybody.

Ha-nul: I have had sex with my boyfriend, and I think that this makes us closer. After you have sex, you both think that he's mine or she's mine, and nothing's embarrassing anymore so you become closer. You know, it's really embarrassing if you're still a virgin when you're in the 9th grade. Older women in the school make fun of you if you're still a virgin. And it's really embarrassing if haven't kissed when you're in 8th grade... I don't understand why adults don't let us have sex. Can't you have sex if you love someone? It's unfair. Kids can drink and smoke if they're stressed out. Why don't adults let us do these things when they do it all the time? Kids do it even more out of rebellion.

Young-eh: But do you know what teachers tell us. They tell us that if a man really loves a woman he protects her virginity. We really can't understand this.

The teenager's attitudes and actions towards sex shown in the comments above are very different from the society's idea of sex, which considers teenagers to be non-sexual beings. Resisting the prohibition and forbid-

ding of sex by age, and freely breaking the taboos instills in them a sense of liberation and challenge. It is a distinctive experience that separates them from the adults, and confirms the incommunicativeness between them. It is an experience all their own. At the same time, teenage women are concerned that they may be taken as "cheap" or "a girl that can be treated in any way" in their relationship with men if they have sex with them implying that they are still influenced by traditional values and stigmas. There was a teenage girl who said that when an older boy who pays her cell phone bills "asks me to have sex" she is still playing it hard to get because she doesn't want him to think "I'm cheap". Many teenage women who have been in the sex industry say that "when boys or men want to do it there's nothing much we can do. If they want it, we usually do it." This means that they refuse at first to express their opinion, but if they refuse too many times they're afraid that "this will ruin the mood and make the guys angry." So they compromise after a certain point, and if they really don't want to do it, they wait and see and then stop seeing them.

Sex is deeply integrated into teenagers' entertainment culture through games or events (Getting Laid Ceremony, 100th Day Ceremony, etc.). The sexual acts that have infiltrated into their entertainment culture is no longer understood as something personal but rather as something that is collective and situational, and as a part of the gender role plays. Therefore, the contents of the sexual games are compromised within the script of the gender relations based on heterosexuality where women are passive and men are considered to be aggressive holding strong sexual impulses.

The femininity/body/sex of teenage women as a trade-able resource

Hoigard and Finstad (1992) pointed out that women internalize the idea that a woman's body can be an asset as they see and hear about images of women portrayed in the many different media starting from when they were very children. In Korea, when we

see the constantly controversial Miss Korea beauty pageants, and hear stories about top star women or models we can see that the trend of women's bodies being accepted as a resource for wealth and fame is becoming stronger. The mass media sends the message, and many women believe, that "being pretty" is an individual ability and an asset. The teenage women interviewed in this study are well aware of the fact that a woman's face and body are social assets and so becomes a resource for exchange in their deals with men. Teenage women, who believe that physical appearance in itself is her resource, naturally think that they shouldn't have to pay for any drinks or entertainments or on dates when they are with men. The assumption is that they have their looks as their resource, and this is being exchanged for the economic resources that men have access to. Thus, the relationship begins by receiving a gift from the boyfriend and in return giving him what he wants, in other words, being a "woman".

As was mentioned in the above, teenage women usually go the singing rooms, or decadent establishments when they want to go out. Somebody has to pay for this and when they're with guys they think the guys should pay. They believe they have to pay because they are "men" and that this is why they have a boyfriend in the first place. For this reason, boys who are generous in spending money are popular. In return they accommodate the boy's request. There are some boys who propose that they both should pay, but girls call these boys "losers".

The idea that sex is experienced as a resource for exchange is shared among peers of teenage women, which then becomes the basis of their decision to easily accept sex as an exchange with adult men. One girl mentioned that although she didn't receive any money for the *wonjokyojae* she rode in *ajussie's* (a Korean word for middle-aged men) car, he bought her nice meals and a handbag, so she thought that this was just another form of earning money.

Teenage women who have experienced the sex industry think that their boyfriends should absolutely pay for all dating expenses because they are "giving them a good time".

In other words, they are providing emotional and sexual services by "giving them a good time". In this context, they accept "one-time" acquaintances. Teenage women don't pay on dates because this is a type of deal involving a variety of exchanges, in which she provides her young femininity, body and sexual interaction. They use their sexuality as a resource in the deal and are aware that it can be used. They understand that sex can become a product isolated from their self, and treated as something irrespective of her emotions or personality. In a way, they think that it is easy to earn money. They don't need any talent or training for men to want them, and all they have to do is just "have a good time with them" or just "do it".

Ajussie: different from a boyfriend

When teenage women have a relationship with men they separate the "boyfriend" and *ajussie* category. The term *ajussie* is a categorization of how they understand and accept men. To the teenagers, *ajussie* is not the middle-aged men that it usually refers to, but rather men who are differentiated from boys in their age group, different from their boyfriends because they are not the subject of romance but a source of economic resources. *Ajussie* has the connotation as "resentful" men who, according to teenage women, see them as "play toys". According to statements from 571 men who paid for prostitution, 76.1 percent of them were in their twenties and thirties (The Commission on Youth Protection 2002).

Ko-eun: I like boys with a lot of money. These days, boys who have a lot of money are more popular than boys with good looks. But old men and young men are different. For example, if I am wearing something hot and an *ajussie* checks me out I get the creeps, but when a boy does the same thing, I feel good.

Jin-ah: Although it may be the same touching, it will feel different when your boyfriend touches you and when your teacher or an *ajussie* touches you.

With a boyfriend, you like each other so I imagine it's going to feel really good, but with a teacher, for example, I wouldn't like it.

Interviewer: I heard that it's embarrassing if you're still a virgin when you're in the 9th grade.

Ha-nul: That's different. It's embarrassing if you haven't done it with a boyfriend, but those women are doing it with just anybody or with *ajussies* — without any love. It's okay with a boyfriend because you love him... I just hate all adult men. All these men want from women is to have sex these days. It's disgusting.

Hwa-young: When we say no, our boyfriends get a little upset and say never mind and give up, but I don't like *ajussies* because they are really persistent tempting us with money ... *wonjokyojae* is doing it with an *ajussie* so it's disgusting. It's boring and there's nothing in common. It's different with boys our age. All *ajussies* say is I'll give you this much money, come on let's do it. We call them perverts.

The general perception teenage women have of *ajussie* is that they are "perverts obsessed with sex", "money source", "crazy about sex", "dirty", "nothing to talk to about, creepy and boring", "men who are willing to buy sex", "they want to have sex with someone who is not his wife", "keep on asking to have sex even when we say no", "adults", "old men", "all they think about is going to a motel", etc. On the contrary, boys in their age group are considered to be "someone who I can love or like and have an emotional relationship with", "boyfriend", "someone we can talk to" because they have a similar cultural environment. In line with this distinction, teenage women are offended that *ajussies* think of them as sexual objects and therefore consider a relationship with them only possible when there is a deal. Although teenage women express their resentment to the fact that *ajussies* have a thing for *younggaes*, at the same time

they realize the economic value their body as a young girl has in this society. *Wonjokyojae* is an example of the fact that they understand their value as a product and how they take advantage of it.

Wonjokyojae is defined as a relationship where a young girl interacts with an older adult who has a lot of money for the purpose of sexual exchange. *Wonjokyojae* occurs as a result of the unequal power structure in terms of gender, age and economic resources. In a *wonjokyojae* relationship the emotional intimacy such as exclusiveness or romance is not triggered. So, if a teenager is in urgent need of money, they can borrow their friend's *ajussie*, or if something comes up they can ask a friend to take her place.

Wonjokyojae is like a side job, not an emotional relationship where affection is involved. In the exchange of sex for economic means, *ajussies* consider teenage women as sexual objects or products, and teenage women reified the *ajussies* as "money" or "things" that can be lent and borrowed.

Sexual violence trivialized as "perverse" desire

The mass media reports on the increased level of prostitution among teenage women including *wonjokyojae* tends to focus on the "voluntary nature" and the "pleasure consumption culture of Korean society". In these reports, teenage women are depicted as initiating and being active players in the sexual exchange. As was mentioned above, teenage women consider sex to be something that can be exchanged and traded, and sometimes as part of a game. However, the reality of their encounter with men when sexual trade occurs is actually associated with something the teenage women could never imagine. Men's sexual desire and the practice of sex in this commercial trade of sex are associated with violence.

Teenage women experience a wide range of sexual violence — for instance, when they are subject to sexual violence without any compensation in a *wonjokyojae* relationship, or

when their boyfriend uses sexual violence when they are out having drinks. However, teenage women do not realize that such sexual violence is an act of violence, but regard it as a gender relation or sexual relation that results from the difference in masculinity and femininity. This way of thinking leads to a self identity in which they believe that in a sexual relationship or a relationship between a man and a woman, a woman's sense of self can only be formed through going through a certain period of male violence and compromise. This is why when an "ugly women" is a victim of sexual violence this is made fun of. This is an acknowledgment of femininity. They have to do what they are told even if they don't want to during a commercial sexual exchange, or have sex with someone they don't want to as part of their deal. They say, "I don't like it but I endure it because I say to myself that if I close my eyes for just a little while I can earn 200,000 won. I don't think about anything and I don't feel anything. I just close my eyes real hard."

Words such as "sex", "things that I don't want to do", "trade" are all part of the vocabulary of the sexual prostitution of teenagers. Teenage women accept the fact that this is an implicit contract where they have to do as requested for getting paid. They consider sexual violence to be something that is "strange" or something that "perverse" people with personal problems commit once in a while, and something that is sometimes part of the deal but that this is not the case for all deals. The logic here, as is sometimes the common view, is that even if a prostitute was a victim of sexual violence, if they were paid then it is not sexual violence. Therefore, even though the sexual interaction occurs in a way they do not like in a *wonjokyojae* situation or at a ticket *dabang*, they think this is an only natural, a part of the deal. They believe that when a woman makes a sexual deal with men they have to accommodate the "impulsiveness", "violence" and "forcefulness" as part of what is common in a relationship between a man and a woman. In other words, they think that since they are bound by the deal their bodies and their sex, in a way, belong to the buyer.

Teenage women are seen as sexual objects when they are working, such as in gas stations, at school or when they are with boys of their age, they experience a great level of violence. However, since such violence is so frequent and happens in many places, it is not considered to be a big problem. They protect themselves by trivializing sexual harassment and sexual violence as fooling around or by justifying that they would rather just have sex with them than becoming a victim subject to physical violence.

Teenage women call men who commit sexual violence or sexual harassment "perverts" and they think that these men do these things because they are perverts. The definition of a pervert is someone who engages in abnormal sexual behavior due to mental illness. Therefore, it is difficult to explain the definite inherent meaning of the word, and it can be better explained by the sexual standard accepted within a given society. The meaning of "pervert" has a different meaning for teenage women. They call many different types of men who have behaviors that they find difficult to understand "perverts". Describing sex that constantly exists in the form of violence as men's "perverse" behavior is a way for them to justify a problem they cannot resolve as something that pertains to the individual. Rather than understanding sexual violence as a violation that humiliates one's dignity, teenage women caricaturize sexual violence as a way to justify the violence that they were the victims of. Therefore, the word "pervert" conceals or shifts away from the many potential problems that can occur in prostitution that does not involve an intermediary. The caricaturizing of sexual violence as an individual characteristic pertaining to a few men covers up the issue of sexual violence or a situation where women in the sex industry may be susceptible to it. It also seals up the violent nature that is inherent in prostitution, and the violence that men commit upon women in this process.

8. Conclusion

In Korea, the sexuality of teenage women is considered as something to be protected. The

Protection of Teenager Sexuality Act, which penalizes those who pay teenage women for sex, is an official governing regulation coming from the perspective of protectionism. However, at the same time, there is the consumer culture and sex industry that positions the sexuality of teenage women as "sexualized commodities" or "sexualized subjects," and there are many mediums that introduce these teenage women to the sex industry. Upon talking to the teenage women who experienced prostitution, it is believed that sexuality is not the essence, nor the core of their integrated subjectivity, but rather just one of many things in their daily lives that can be practiced and understood in many different ways depending on the changing social reality. Sexuality is no longer the one and only signifier that signified the innocent identity of teenage women. The sexuality of teenage women in Korea is caught somewhere between the discourse of patriarchal norms and the discourse of the commercialized resistance/subversion of such patriarchal norms, being scandalized by the social competition between these discourses.

The teenagers in Korea today consider themselves to be different from any other generation of teenagers, and claim that they cannot be understood by applying the values or imagination of teenagers from other generations. They believe their sexual and cultural experiences are special, and the very point where this uniqueness is manifested is their body. They try to form their identity through bodily performances, such as through their looks, style, fashion, sexual attractiveness, seeking a good time, expressing their individuality, etc. This allows them to differentiate themselves from other generations, but within the peer group, the purpose can be to differentiate or to assimilate.

The identity of teenagers is interconnected with the hierarchy of products in the consumer market which serve as signifiers that form a hierarchy of their identity. This hierarchy of identity based on looks or appearance, and the politics of acceptance and exclusion that surround the assimilation and differentiation within the peer group triggers their desire for more access to the consumer

market as a means to obtain their identity. Their body is not a fixed essential foundation of their identity. The body is a place that is damaged and violated by external power or force, but at the same time it is a means and a medium that endlessly creates something new.

The stories of teenage women who experienced prostitution is a narrative of how such a body performed in the process of acquiring the means to meet their desires. They claim that they want money, but that they are neither selling themselves nor their personality. What they do not understand is why the body, the personality and the self is integrated and should be considered as one. They argue that the personality and self, and the body that is being traded is separated, that this is what they actually experience. They do not understand why people say it is the same thing. They also claim that what they do is a purely individual decision. However, the experience of prostitution teaches them that the means that is applied in fulfilling their desire through the experiences of materialistic compensation, rejection and violence becomes the condition for constructing power structures, and also makes them realize the deal/trade between the means and power. Prostitution occurs when this deal is understood.

The purpose of this paper was to reveal the context of where what they call "individual" and "desire" are positioned so as to illustrate that this is a social issue and that their desire exists as an effect of a social discourse. Their desire is "to have a good time", to be "accepted" by their peers and to have a "romantic" relationship with boys. Their desire is interrelated with the industrialized entertainment/pleasure culture, consumer culture and the patriarchal heterosexual/gender relation model. They need "money" to satisfy their desire. What they need and are interested in is "money" to fulfill their desire. They do not question the desire itself. Prostitution is a way to acquire this means called money. In Korea, where the labor market excludes teenagers, the only way a teenage girl can access money is from their parents or by having a side job. Prostitution is considered to be a type of side job that is the

easiest and pays the most. Through this experience, teenage women become aware that the economic romance scenario of men and women is based on the economic and social imbalance of men and women, and that this scenario is performed at every point where men and women interact.

For teenage women living in Korea in the 21st century, what they believe will damage their identity and what they are most afraid of is not sexual experience, but the exclusion from their peer groups and from the consuming culture. Nevertheless, the predominant discourse on teenage women is either based on patriarchal norms concerning on the protection for sexuality, or on commercialism that tries to take advantage of the teenagers' scandalous sexuality as resistance toward such patriarchal norms. Since the end of the 20th century, the mass media has represented teenagers as if they are a completely different species from adults by showing their experiences, attitudes, tastes, style and their unique slang vocabulary. The image of teenagers portrayed in the media leads some adults to consider them to be a problem, while some to regard them as attractive objects of voyeurism. The discourses based on patriarchal norms, and commercialized resistance toward such norms represents teenage women as gendered and sexualized bodies separating them into a special category as new sexual subjects. Then, they start transforming the teenagers' bodies and sexual attractiveness into their value as a trade-able commodity.

The feminists in Korea have criticized the prostitution of teenage women, the main reason being that prostitution degrades women's sexuality as a trade-able value which results in women using their looks or femininity as a means in the competition for survival, that it drains out the productive energy of women as a whole and that it exterminates their potential abilities. They also argue that this has been a factor in forming a society today where a woman's competitiveness is oppressed compared to men. (Lee 1997; Korea Women's Institute 1999)

This study, furthermore, points out that in order to understand the issue of teenage prostitution, the focus of future studies must shift

its direction to exposing how they position sex in constructing their identity and on the mechanism of female sexuality becoming products or commodities, before we can say that their sexuality is being traded or that they themselves are understood as commercialized sexual beings. The need for the shift in focus is due to the fact that since sex is considered as a means to fulfill their desires, the issue should be the structure of their desire and the mechanism of men who desire them. The way that sex is functioning in constituting their identity and the sense of self of teenagers today is quite different from what it used to be for Korean women.

Notes

1. In this paper the term "teenage women" is used for female teenagers. In Korean society, the common term is "female teenagers" with the exception of feminists. The words of "teenage women," "teenage girls" and "teenagers" are used interchangeably in this paper.
2. Literally, this means "spring chicken" but is used commonly to describe a young fresh catch for men and women.
3. In this paper to describe and discuss teenage women's ideas, notions and practices of the sexual, I use the term 'sexuality' or sometimes 'sex' depending on the context. I will not deal with the conceptual differences for them here.
4. *Wonjokyojae* Literally means a relationship in which one financially supports the other in relation.
5. In Korea, places where sexual services are provided are called "malignant business", "pleasure business" or "decadent business". The words "pleasure business" or "pleasure industry" implies that sexual pleasure is exchanged as a product. Feminists in Korea do not use such words when referring to prostitution of women because it conceals the power structure that exists and suggests that the exchange between the men who are buyers of pleasure and the women who sell it is an objective business deal. The word malignant industry implies that sex belongs to the adults and that it is malignant or harmful to teenagers. Feminists in Korea have argued that a place where the profit is made of sex as a means should be termed the sex industry, which is to emphasize the fact that the women's sex is being industrialized as a product that creates value of exchange (Chang 1999; Korea Women's Institute 1999). There is criticism that the term 'sex industry' approaches sex from an economic point of view which may result in ignoring the socio-cultural aspects of women's

sexuality in a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, this term is used because it allows us to expose the issue of anonymous and commercial trade of sex for money within a capitalist society, and to question why it is women's sex that is industrialized within the mechanisms of the sex industry.

6. According to the data between 2000 and 2001 from the prosecution and police the buyers of teenage sex were all male.
7. Among the 414 teenagers that were indicted by prosecutors and police as witnesses in cases against customers of prostitution, 76.1 percent was individualized prostitution (*wonjokyojae*) and 23.9 percent worked for businesses. 69.1 percent were 15 to 17 years of age, 1.9 percent were 19, and 3.9 percent were under the age of 13. 54.6 percent had run away from home and 46.4 percent were engaged in prostitution without running away from home. 58.0 percent were not in school and 41.9 percent still attending school. In the case of individualized prostitution, they met their customers through the Internet (58.7%), telephone dating rooms (13.2%), cell phone services (9.0%), or a friend (6.3%). Individualized prostitution/*wonjokyojae* this was not limited to teenagers out of school and they were meeting customers through a variety of channels. Furthermore, contrary to the general view that customers are middle-aged men, most of them were in their twenties and thirties (76.1%), among which 67.1 percent had jobs. In individualized prostitution/*wonjokyojae* the fee was usually determined by age, with the younger receiving the lowest compensation. This is because the younger the teenagers, the more disadvantage they have in making a deal with the customer. (The Commission on Youth Protection 2002: 29-62)
8. Large sections of the department stores and advertisements place teenagers to be an important target in their sales strategy. There are two studies on women's effort to enhance their looks and style as an issue not of individual expression or of trying to keep up with what is in style, but rather as an issue pertaining to the identity of women and as a basic investment required to participate in the labor market (Hahn 1997; Hong 1997). Kim (2000) points out that managing their looks is becoming an essential part of female students' preparation process for a career.

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