Challenges and Negotiations of a Young, Female, and Unmarried Researcher: Reflections on Fieldwork in South Korea

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Abstract
This article presents my personal reflections on the process of conducting fieldwork as part of my PhD research into participant recruitment in South Korea. I discuss the challenges and negotiations I faced during my PhD fieldwork. The aim is to examine the following three issues: (1) obstacles faced in gaining entry to the fieldwork sample when conducting research in my own country, (2) the influence of my personal identity (i.e., my gender, race, class, religion, nationality, and age) on my fieldwork experiences, and (3) the research process itself and the strategies I used to overcome my vulnerability and marginality. I conclude by raising several ethical considerations and dilemmas, followed by a discussion of the significant implications of the study topic in terms of researcher safety and well-being when undertaking fieldwork and how this can be ameliorated.

Keywords
fieldwork, reflection, positionality, South Korea, qualitative interview

Introduction
Reflection is defined an ongoing mental process wherein past experiences are analyzed and prior knowledge reexamined in order to reformulate the meanings one ascribes to these experiences. Reflection thus leads to the development of new knowledge (Finlay, 2012; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Mann, 2016). It is argued that reflective practices are often regarded as a difficult approach for researchers who strive “to maintain an image of the field as essentially independent of their research activities and roles” (Emerson, 1983, p. 11). The reflective approach dates back to the 1930s and is now widely accepted as a necessary element of good fieldwork practice (Mruck & Breuer, 2003; Pillow, 2003). According to Harrison, MacGibbon, and Morton (2001), it is increasingly believed that “the researcher’s own experiences, values, and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interest, the way they choose to do their research and the ways they choose to represent their research findings” (p. 325). In other words, a researcher’s personal reflection is recognized as an important part of qualitative research design in the sense that it facilitates the addressing of “the distortions or preconceptions researchers unwittingly introduce in their qualitative design” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2012, p. 4).

Here, I focus on my own reflections on the fieldwork I conducted in South Korea (hereafter Korea) as a part of my doctoral dissertation research. In preparation for this fieldwork, I had to approach the gatekeepers first due to my lack of direct connections to the prospective interviewees. However, as these gatekeepers had been previously exposed to such requests from other researchers and journalists, they typically resisted any involvement in the research process. I interpreted this attitude as related to my positionality, something based on my own gender, age, marital status, and religion, which had a negative influence on the fieldwork process, as well as the relationship I had with those gatekeepers. It seems that my “perceived identity” influenced the manner in which the gatekeepers and some interview participants interacted with me. For example, some treated me as the wife of a foreign man, while others considered me incapable of conducting research at a doctoral level due to my age and gender. Faced with such circumstances, I had no choice but to gradually develop my own
strategies and tactics for coping with difficult situations in the field, which eventually allowed me to complete my fieldwork.

**Positionality and Its Relationship With Reflection**

Early research on positionality in anthropology and sociology was based on the premise that the researcher had to assume the role of an insider or outsider. However, recent empirical evidence has unveiled the complexity inherent to either status, resulting in growing recognition that the boundaries between the two positions are not well delineated (Herod, 1999; Merriam et al., 2001). It can be said that no researcher can ever be positioned completely on one “side” and that his or her position can also shift at different times (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). A researcher’s positionality is determined by physical and culturally ascribed factors such as race, gender, nationality, beliefs, political ideology, biases, and so on (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2007; Carter, 2004; Egharevba, 2001; Finlay, 2000; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010; Merriam et al., 2001). In addition, subjectivity, which refers to “the life experiences that researchers have had as well as the social, cultural and political factors that influence an individual,” can shape a researcher’s positionality (Kathleen & Angela, 2002, p. 3). On the basis of these factors, researchers locate their views, values, and beliefs in relation to the research process and the research findings (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam et al., 2001).

My position as a researcher in this study was complicated and volatile. I found myself in the midst of fluid identities, which were difficult to place on the insider–outsider continuum (Kerstetter, 2012). According to Acker (2000), the insider–outsider question can never be fully resolved, but it is necessary to find a way to work creatively within its constraints. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argued that all researchers are located somewhere between the two extremes (designated as complete insider and complete outsider); thus, no researcher can ever be positioned completely on one side. From the migrant husbands’ perspectives, I was an outsider as I was an academic researcher as well as a member of the mainstream ethnic group. At the same time, the migrant husbands felt that I was an insider because we both had migration experience. From the perspectives of the Korean women, my position was also simultaneously that of an insider and outsider. We shared the Korean ethnicity, in that we had similar physical attributes, clothing preferences, language skills, cultural competences, and so on. However, I was perceived as an outsider due to my marital status and my age. According to Chavez (2008), researchers are often judged by the indigenous people of their own community, according to the standards and cultural norms prevalent at the time. Specifically, I was a single woman who had never been married, and my age also somewhat defined my position as an insider or an outsider, depending on the age of the interviewee.

My position influenced the research process in three ways (Berger, 2013). Although in many cases, one’s position may facilitate access in the field (Berger, 2013), it took a while for me to gain the trust of potential interview participants. I noticed that once they realized that I was sympathetic to their situation, some individuals became more willing to share their personal stories (De Tona, 2006). Moreover, others who considered moving abroad or sending their children to an English-speaking country perceived me as an individual with relevant knowledge and resources, which made them more likely to show interest in me and be more open when sharing their stories during the interviews (Berger, 2013). Second, the position of researcher pursuing a degree abroad as a doctoral student may affect the nature of the relationship with interview participants (Berger, 2013). For example, sharing my overseas experience with migrant husbands had three advantages, described by Padgett (2008) as *easier entrée*, a head start in knowing about the topic and understanding the nuanced reactions of participants. Third, Kacen and Chaitin (2006) noted that the researchers’ viewpoints, backgrounds, personal life history, stereotypes, and so on, may exert a profound influence on the way the study findings are interpreted and analyzed. For instance, a friend of mine used to date a foreign man from an Asian developing country, and their relationship did not last due to intense opposition, disapproval, and rejection from their parents, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. My awareness of their experiences assisted me in deriving meaning from the narratives of Korean women with migrant husbands from developing countries.

While such effects exist in all types of research, qualitative researchers tend to use reflexivity to mitigate this influence (Cutcliffe, 2003). Reflexivity is premised on the idea that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is context-based and historically situated (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Berger (2013) defined reflexivity as “a researcher’s conscious and deliberate effort to be attuned to one’s own reactions to respondents and to the way in which the research account is constructed” (p. 3). In other words, all qualitative research is influenced by the researcher’s knowledge, views, and beliefs, and there is no neutral or objective truth (Wong, 2015). Hence, researchers should strive to be reflexive about the role and the influence of their beliefs and behaviors on the research process. In my particular case, I have made every effort to carefully self-monitor the impact of my own experiences and assumptions (Berger, 2013).

In order to maintain critical reflexivity throughout this study, I employed a number of strategies such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, and so on (Ahern, 1999; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2007; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Padgett, 2008). Specifically, I used prolonged engagement to promote credibility (Flick, 2009). I am of the view that becoming familiar with participating organizations, gatekeepers, and (potential) participants is essential. That is why considerable time was spent observing various aspects of a given setting and speaking with a wide range of people, including gatekeepers, (potential) participants, civil servants, and members of the local authority. This commitment to fieldwork allowed me to build rapport and gain trust, which are fundamental elements of a successful interview, and providing me with a valuable glimpse
into the private lives of migrant husbands and Korean wives (Berg, 2004). The next strategy I adopted relates to triangulation of the information yielded by different types of informants and obtained at various sites (Shenton, 2004). Informant triangulation allows the researcher “to obtain a richer picture and thus understanding of the situation being studied” (Remenyi, 2014, p. 90). Accordingly, I attempted to diversify the study sample with regard to age, region, religion, and so on. This strategy allowed me to obtain a variety of perspectives from a diverse range of informants, as well as to contrast viewpoints and experiences of those in a comparable position (Shenton, 2004). In addition, I included informants from a range of organizations such as state-funded organizations, private institutes, and religious groups/entities. This served to “reduce the effect on the study of particular local factors peculiar to one institution” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66), since obtaining similar results at different sites can enhance research credibility (Shenton, 2004). Dervin (1983) asserted the benefits of such an approach, including “a better, more stable view of reality based on a wide range of observations from a wide base of points from a wide base of points in time-space” (p. 7). Finally, I also employed peer debriefing, wherein I had regular meetings with my supervisors, discussed emergent themes and data with colleagues in the same department, and reflected with acquaintances that already held PhD degrees on various aspects of my inquiry.

**Participant Recruitment Process and Issues of Access**

The fieldwork discussed in this article took place in Korea from June to December 2014; individual interviews started in August of that year. The main issue I encountered concerning access was related to research fatigue, which acted as a barrier to participant engagement in the research process. Research fatigue occurs “when individuals and groups become tired of engaging with research” (Clark, 2008, p. 955), especially when participants are hard-to-reach groups and opportunities to access them are very limited (Clark & Sinclair, 2008; Emmal, Hughes, Greenhalgh, & Sales, 2007). As I had almost no experience with fieldwork and no prior connections to pertinent individuals or organizations, I focused on identifying persons with close connections to potential interview participants through the relevant Multicultural Family Support Center.\(^1\) The center delivers services and benefits targeted at multicultural families, under the Multicultural Family Support Law\(^2\) that was passed in 2008 (H. J. Kim, Kim, & Moon, 2014). However, as the Multicultural Family Support Centers are frequently targeted by journalists and researchers, the staff at the center have become tired and thus unwilling to engage further. This is potentially the reason why, when I attempted to establish links with institutions at which I had no inside contact, the person who answered the phone immediately hung up or declined my request once I mentioned research, PhD dissertation, or something similar. At institutions where I already had relationships with staff members, I was able to request conversations with them over the phone, even if they eventually declined to take part in the research. Moreover, even representatives of some churches well-known for their services to multicultural families and other migrants were reluctant to engage in my inquiry, as they clearly suffered from research fatigue due to frequent visits by researchers and journalists. Not even my status as a religious insider was able to help me form relationships with these individuals or guarantee easy access to potential study participants. For example, couples introduced by the head pastors were sometimes reluctant to get involved in my research. I witnessed discomfort on the faces of some couples, only to later discover that they already had negative experiences with journalists who had distorted their interviews to focus on the difficulties arising from their country of origin or race rather than examining the positive side of their lives in Korea. Consequently, they were unwilling to partake in any subsequent interviews.

However, in a few exceptional cases, the specificities of particular sites affected the level of research fatigue. For example, staff at one official center for low-skilled foreign workers who provides advocacy and welfare services to workers hired through the Employment Permit System (EPS) had rarely been approached by PhD students and other researchers and thus did not have a policy of refusing to facilitate participant recruitment for academic studies. In particular, one leader at this center gained his PhD at the same United Kingdom (UK) academic institution where I was pursuing my degree, so he afforded me access to groups that might otherwise be closed to outsiders. That is why I was able to visit the center once a week in order to build a rapport with the staff and with migrant husbands in particular. Similarly, leaders of churches where people had been far less exposed to researchers or journalists due to the small number of multicultural families and migrants in the congregation gave me a warm welcome. Overall, prior involvement in research or interviews with the media, or lack of involvement with the research, was the main factor driving people’s decisions about whether to partake in my study.

Overall, as I dedicated considerable time to the fieldwork, I was able to develop a rapport with the gatekeepers and potential interview participants. I would meet them at a church or a mosque on a regular basis, as well as try to engage in their everyday activities whenever possible. I also exchanged text messages and e-mails with many of the couples. Two to three months into my fieldwork, I narrowed down the number of people with whom I had such regular contact; these were the couples who eventually took part in the interviews, group discussions, and other social gatherings for the remainder of my fieldwork.

**Being Treated as the Wife of a Foreign Man**

In the absence of any prior knowledge about me, gatekeepers (most of whom were male) often misjudged me as the (future) wife of a foreign man, likely due to the legacy of yang-gong-ju. After the Korean War (1950–1953), some local women sold sexual services to American military personnel stationed in the
country. A few even married and emigrated to the United States (Kwak, 2018). These women, referred to as yang-gong-ju, were perceived as vulgar and shameful by Korean society, given that sexual purity until marriage was the most important moral duty of a woman under Confucianism (Kwak, 2018; H. K. Lee, 2008). Coupled with a patriarchal ideology and the double standard of sexual morality still prevalent in Korea today, many still perceive any association (real or perceived) with foreign men as indicative of lax sexual morals (Kwak, 2018). This means that women who have sexual relationships, or indeed any association, with non-Korean men, are stigmatized as divergent, inadequate, and perversive (Kwak, 2018). These preconceptions explain why I was often exposed to sexual harassment by both male and female gatekeepers aged 50 and over, whose attitudes were aimed at excluding me from the ethnic/ national community.

My age, gender, and assumed marital status were also problematic for some individuals involved in my fieldwork. Specifically, at the time I was conducting my fieldwork, I was of the appropriate age for marriage in Korea, which is about 30. Indeed, the average ages at which a Korean woman married in 2014 and 2017 were 29.81 and 30.24 years, respectively (KOSIS, 2018). Once the gatekeepers and (potential) interview participants I was in contact with realized that I was single, they immediately thought that my real intention was to search for a future husband from a developing country under the guise of conducting research. That is why, rather than engaging with my research, such individuals seemed to be more interested in arranging a match with migrant workers who came to Korea through the EPS. For example, one middle-aged woman unexpectedly gave my mobile phone number to a migrant without my consent, and another middle-aged man showed me pictures of several foreign men and asked me which one I would like to go on a blind date with. This issue likely arose because most of the gatekeepers were male and were much older than me and thus considered marriage as mandatory for a single woman rather than a personal choice. Others thought that I had a boyfriend from a developing country or another inside connection to this group. If I explained that none of these assumptions were true, they were quick to question my motives and would ask me why I was carrying out this research. This continual interrogation led me to question my own motives, leaving me unsure at times. Later, I was reminded of this experience by something one of my interview participants said:

People have often asked me why I got married [to] my husband. As far as I know, Koreans do not ask this kind of question to other Korean married couples, right? But I received many questions like that. At first, I did not take it too seriously, but the more people asked me, the more I start[ed] to wonder—why did I marry this guy? (Interview excerpt)

In Korea, couples consisting of migrant husbands and Korean wives often provoke suspicion and raise questions. An international marriage is seen as unusual for a Korean woman, reflecting the way that women’s subjectivity has historically been denied and subordinated to the constructed idea of “national subjectivity” (Jung, 2007; Kandiyoti, 1988). An incident related to the Korean Embassy in Pakistan is another recent illustration of the issue. In 2003, the Embassy posted a notice on its website directed at Korean women who got married to or in relationships with Pakistani men (Jeon, 2005). The notice said that Pakistani men prey on Korean women to obtain Korean citizenship (Jeon, 2005). Later, the post was removed, having drawn criticism from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Korean women married to Pakistani husbands. This is a good example of the prevailing image of women married to men from developing countries as victims who are easily seduced and exploited by men rather than as independent women making rational choices (Um, 2015). For those intent on subjugating women in the interests of patriarchal nationalism, women are merely “contested resources much like pastures and water” (Schneider, 1971, p. 18).

**Facing Doubts Over My Capacity to Carry Out the Research**

My unmarried status and age prompted some gatekeepers and potential interview participants to perceive me as incapable of researching married couples. In general, most of the individuals I approached were quite surprised at the fact that an unmarried woman was studying married couples. Unmarried women in Korea are referred to as mi-hon-yeo-seong (“unmarried women” or “yet-to-marry women”), which feminist commentators view as “a personally insulting and socially incorrect misnomer” (Chang, 2003, p. 603). This term is gradually being replaced by bi-hon-yeo-seong (“nonmarried women”), a more nuanced term describing single women who consider marriage a matter of personal choice rather than a mandatory obligation (Chang, 2003). Despite such changing perceptions, Korean women are still judged in relation to their marital status. For example, one lecturer confessed that she wears a fake wedding ring to class to avoid having her ability or suitability to give lectures regarding the issues facing married couples questioned by her audiences (S. Y. Kim, 2015).

My young age was also seen as an issue as, in Korea, age is a key pillar of the social hierarchy and determines how one should be treated and how one should treat others (Kwak, 2014). As I was younger than most of the (potential) interviewees and gatekeepers, they viewed me as being in the lower ranks of the social hierarchy and would at times patronize me. This large age gap also resulted in asymmetric power dynamics that sometimes hindered my research progress. Specifically, a few gatekeepers and/or potential participants told me that my PhD research was not strong enough and would sometimes put conditions on their involvement in the interviews. For example, I was told that one Korean woman married to a migrant husband would consider doing the interview, but only if the study focused solely on people of a specific religion or country. Similarly, some of those who participated in my interviews tried to teach me how to choose a good husband, advised me on how to establish a happy family, and so on. Such
experiences reflected an inequity in the power dynamics, as being a PhD student did not suggest any power or authority to the (potential) participants or gatekeepers, particularly in the recruitment process. Consequently, they felt that they were entitled “to assume control,” even if this control was only perceived.

Developing Strategies and Tactics

Owing to the negative experiences discussed in the preceding sections, I was unsure whether I would be able to access interview participants and then carry out the interviews within the designated time. Accordingly, I started to develop strategies and tactics for dealing with these issues. For example, to reduce opportunities for others to see me in a prejudiced way, I took more care to dress like a professional woman, while attempting to be more relaxed about being sexualized. I also started to rely more on informal networks as an alternative way to approach potential interview participants, instead of going through gatekeepers. I adopted this strategy as the interviewees I met in such informal settings seemed to exhibit fewer negative underlying judgments and tended to be more welcoming and more seriously inclined to share their personal stories with me. For example, my Pakistani friend in the UK introduced me to his Pakistani friend in Korea, who helped me to recruit participants by copying the participant information sheet (PIS) and distributing these copies to his colleagues. He also introduced me to a couple that he had just met during Ramadan. After their interview, this couple invited me to a Sunni Islamic service, during which a woman from Libya approached me, concerned that I may have heard inaccurate claims about Sunni Muslims from the Shia mosque. She then introduced me to a Korean Muslim woman, who subsequently played a significant role in sharing information about my study with several women married to husbands from Muslim countries. I took this initiative on her part as a sign that trust and credibility had already been established, which, in the words of Emmal, Hughes, Greenhalgh, and Sales (2007), grounds the administration of ethnic shops and restaurants. Still, I was given two entrance to the mosque if needed. Second, I was not permitted to enter the service room, which was located on the first floor of the mosque, but I could stand at the entrance door to observe the service. Early on in my fieldwork, I attended regular services at this mosque for a month. A very small number of Muslims were reluctant to approach and talk to me; still, many were willing to help me build bridges with potential participants. In this process, my limited understanding of Islam played an important role in forming intimate research relationships with Muslims, even if my lack of deeper knowledge about the religion seemed to leave a few feeling disappointed and raising the question of whether I had a sincere interest in their religion. It seemed that explaining their religion placed them in the role of expert and gave them an incentive to proselytize their religion.

First, like Muslim women, I was required to wear a hijab and long dress, which were always provided for tourists at the entrance to the mosque if needed. Second, I was not permitted to enter the service room, which was located on the first floor of the mosque, but I could stand at the entrance door to observe the service. Early on in my fieldwork, I attended regular services at this mosque for a month. A very small number of Muslims were reluctant to approach and talk to me; still, many were willing to help me build bridges with potential participants. In this process, my limited understanding of Islam played an important role in forming intimate research relationships with Muslims, even if my lack of deeper knowledge about the religion seemed to leave a few feeling disappointed and raising the question of whether I had a sincere interest in their religion. It seemed that explaining their religion placed them in the role of expert and gave them an incentive to proselytize their religion.
Ethical Issues

Several ethical issues emerged at each stage of the research process, the first of which related to financial incentives (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Given that it is common to financially compensate research participants for their time and effort in the Korean research environment, I adopted this technique in order to recruit a sufficient number of interviewees. This attracted potential participants and promoted active engagement for a few of the individuals that took part in this study. Other types of rewards, such as gifts, were presented as a way to show appreciation for their participation. If the participants did not want to receive any of the rewards suggested on the PIS, I bought small and inexpensive cakes, cookies, or fruits of the kind that is customary in Korean culture when visiting somebody’s home.

I also realized that it was very challenging to avoid involuntary participation in the interviews. I sensed that many of the potential participants felt obliged to take part in the study due to their relationship with a gatekeeper (such as a pastor or a manager). In instances where I felt that this was the case, I made no further arrangements to conduct an interview. In particular, if the gatekeepers were high-profile members of an institute, organization, or religious group, I was aware that these power relationships between the gatekeepers and research participants could lead to subtle coercion (Hennink et al., 2011). Whenever I sensed that such power dynamics were in play, I made sure to highlight that all the interviews were voluntary, and I waited until the potential participants approached me and showed a genuine willingness to take part in the study. In addition, I opted to accept informed consent from the participants in person only, not via a gatekeeper, and clearly told each individual that he or she could cancel or withdraw from the interview at any stage (ASA, 1987). I reassured them that gatekeepers would not be told of their refusal. Indeed, during the fieldwork, some gatekeepers repeatedly asked whether the person they had introduced had taken part in my research. In these cases, I told them that I could not disclose such information. The last strategy I used to overcome subtle coercion consisted of giving potential participants a considerable amount of time to think about the interview. Moreover, I avoided exchanging e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and/or social network service (SNS) personal account information if I sensed that someone felt uncomfortable about interacting with me.

Relationships with research participants can also raise ethical issues (British Sociological Association, 2002). After the interview, I had some concerns about the extent to which I kept distance from or maintained a relationship with the interview participants. A few sent me “friend” requests on Facebook. This was an unexpected situation and I was not sure whether I should include them in my personal realm in this way. Doing so could have enabled some of my friends and acquaintances to identify my interview participants, and it could have allowed participants to identify one another on my SNS. For these reasons, I initially considered opening a separate SNS account for participants, but in the end chose not to do so because I thought that a separate account could make them feel uncomfortable, as it would suggest that they were not invited into my private realm, as they already knew that I had a private account. My final decision was not to add participants as my “friends” on my SNS but rather to continue to exchange polite texts, KakaoTalk messages, and/or e-mails with them, even after their involvement in the study had finished.

The issues of access that stemmed from my age and religion have had a significant influence on the sample selection. My age certainly affected the diversity of the interview participants, as it was less difficult to meet those in their 20s–40s. In contrast, it was challenging to converse with individuals aged 50 and over because many of them did not view me as a proper researcher. That is why the age range of interview participants for this study was limited to those in their 20s–40s. Furthermore, the participants in this study were either Christians or Muslims. As mentioned earlier, I myself am a Christian, so I often started my fieldwork at a church and gained some help from the church and/or church-related NGOs and institutes. This explains why two thirds of the participants are Christians. Still, even though I am not Muslim, my Pakistani friend paved the way for approaching and including Muslims in my study.

Conclusion

In this article, I have reflected upon my own fieldwork experiences related to gaining access to gatekeepers and interview participants for the purpose of conducting research on the issues faced by couples consisting of migrant husbands and Korean wives living in South Korea. First, despite the difficulties associated with accessing participants, I found the overall process valuable because my fieldwork experience allowed me to explore the research topic through a gendered lens. It also affected the way I analyzed and interpreted the data and informed the conclusions derived from the investigation. Second, this article shows that it is not possible to construct a clear-cut insider–outsider divide because my identities and positions were perceived as diverse and fluid by all involved (gatekeepers and participants in this case), as is typical of qualitative research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam et al., 2001). Thus, I was uniquely positioned to carry out this research because of my age, gender, ethnicity, cultural backgrounds, and other dynamic aspects of my perceived identities.

Three significant implications can be drawn from this research. First, my experience suggests a greater need for researchers to engage in reflexivity with regard to their own embodied identities and their interactions with study participants during fieldwork. They should also carefully examine how these multilayered and perceived identities might influence each and every stage of the research process, from gaining initial access to the gatekeepers and/or potential participants to the analysis of the interview data. In addition, to ensure that researchers are capable of dealing with complex and often unexpected circumstances encountered during fieldwork, as discussed in this article, training on safety should be provided,
especially for novice researchers. Although such preparation cannot fully prevent or anticipate all potential challenges that may arise during the process of approaching gatekeepers and interviewing participants, in this specific case, I would have greatly benefited from some preparation on how to handle potential risks that fieldwork might entail. The next implication of this study is to consider the offering of psychological treatment and counseling sessions to researchers and PhD students planning to carry out fieldwork, which should also be available throughout the data collection process and upon completion, if needed. In my case, I simply put aside my personal distress in order to continue my fieldwork. When I reread the transcripts and reflexive journal in preparation for the data analysis, I could feel the surge of negative memories related to my fieldwork, which made it very challenging at times to revisit these experiences. Sensing my discomfort, my supervisors kindly arranged for me to see a professional counselor at the university I attended and, thanks to several counseling sessions, I have now reached a stage where I can reread the transcripts and revisit these painful memories. In this regard, I feel that it would be prudent for universities to offer professional training, support, and protection before and especially after research fieldwork takes place, which can be crucial for novice and young female (and unmarried) researchers in a patriarchal setting. I would advise that this be included in the relevant departmental curricula. It is hoped that this article might aid in establishing an insightful process of reflection that other novice researchers, especially young and female ones, might use as a touchstone.

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Notes
1. In 2017, Multicultural Family Support Centers and Healthy Family Support Centers were merged in order to enable a more active and flexible approach to dealing with the new and fast-changing social environment in South Korea (H. J. Kim, Kim, & Moon, 2014). Thus, such services and benefits are now delivered not only through the original Multicultural Family Support Centers but also through the Korean Institute for Healthy Families, which aims to “manage the development and distribution of programs and manuals, HR development and programs for the operation of the Multicultural Family Support Centres of Korea” for single-parent families, multicultural families, and so on (Danuri, 2015).

2. The center aims to improve multicultural families’ quality of life, promote social integration, and offer relevant information (Danuri, 2015).

3. KakaoTalk is the most popular free mobile instant messaging application for smartphones in Korea and is similar to WhatsApp or Viber. In 2016, KakaoTalk was used by 97% of the smartphone users in Korea (J. H. Lee, 2014).

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