

# Cyberspace and Sexuality

Chang Pilwha

## Abstract

*The hope of achieving gender equality with the emergence of information society has been held high. As one of the countries which has seen the fastest growing information industries, it might be expected that gender division is mitigated in Korea. This article examines how sexuality, which is an inimitable location of gender differences, is incorporated in cyberspace.*

*In order to examine what women and men expect from the Internet and how they use, and to evaluate what they gain from the use, this paper deals with several aspects of women's use of Internet, with a particular focus on sexuality. Section two examines how the new Internet environment affects women's locations with respect to various aspects of sexuality, focusing on the recent scandals over "sex videos" and the increase in teenage prostitution. Both are relatively new phenomena and are closely connected with the emergence of information technology. In section three, I will discuss gender differentiation vis-à-vis cyberspace. In the final section, the traditional concept of sexuality will be reviewed to make better sense of the contemporary "clash" between new and old.*

**Keywords:** cyberspace, sexuality, women, pornography, gender

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## Introduction

This article attempts to review some aspects of the tremendously complex changes Korean society has undergone in the realm of sexuality in recent years and to investigate the extent to which cyberspace mediates those changes. The consumer culture of contemporary Korean society is becoming sexually saturated and so is cyberspace. Internet users are daily bombarded by spam mails containing sexually explicit messages, images, and advertisements, and portal sites allocate significant spaces for sexual contents. Not only adults but children are easily exposed to graphic materials.

Information society, information technology (IT), and computer technology have been included among the most important keywords in the last decade in Korea. Along with globalization, these keywords were taken most seriously by policy makers, enterprises and individuals and accordingly investments in money, time and effort have been directed to the development of IT related hardware, software, infrastructure and skills. Venture capitals have mushroomed in IT related industries and revered examples of businesses were often ones which had successfully accomplished early deployment of the information industry. As a result, Korea has become one of the world's largest Internet user countries.

Consumer culture both strengthens and is reinforced by the usage of mobile phones, personal computers and many other IT gadgets which have become essentials for the majority of the people. In other words, owning the latest model of mobile phone equipped with Internet connection, digital cameras and many other functions becomes more than a mere display of conspicuous consumption but an everyday necessity.

Despite the optimistic prospects that IT will lead us into a better world by opening up new possibilities for freedom, there are growing concerns about its negative consequences. The rapid increase of credit cards along with overspending spurred by the Internet, has resulted in many individual bankruptcies. An astounding number of over three million people were labeled as "delinquent debtor" in the middle of

2003. The new syndrome of Internet addicts or game addicts, as well as the digital divide of the population, has emerged as a growing social problem (*Kukmin Daily* 2001; *Hankyoreh* 2001; *Korea Daily News* 2001a, 2001b). What makes the matter more serious is that solutions created to deal with these problems are far from satisfactory.

We have become accustomed to the rhetoric that the twenty-first century will be a women's era in which high technology minimizes the handicaps women used to have, such as weaker muscular strength. Indeed, the expansion of cyberspace, along with other high-tech devices, seems to offer great potential power to subvert the established order. Patriarchal society in its entirety seems to have paradigmatically shifted or broken down by the waves created by cyberspace. This phenomenon was displayed by the mobilization of cheering crowds at the 2002 World Cup games, and similarly active participation of voters in the 2002 presidential election campaigns. However, from a feminist perspective, questions need to be raised as to what extent the advantages and ramifications of the new technology might be different depending on the gender of the users. Despite the growing perception among the general public in Korea that the gender division has mitigated with the increase of women in the social realm, I maintain that there is an inimitable location of gender differences in the area of sexuality, a point upon which this paper will elaborate. Unless this issue is taken seriously into consideration, gender equality cannot be achieved.

The discourses of sexuality during the last decade have both reflected and changed sexual norms and behaviors of people. At the same time, the power of history that still determines the way people feel and reach judgment remains largely intact. As one foreign correspondent observed, "South Korea is one of the most wired countries in the world, but it is also a traditional society in which . . . premarital sex is a scandal."<sup>1</sup> This commentary was put forward in response

1. Doug Struck, "S. Koreans Clash on Internet Sex Video: Traditionalists Defend Old Values in 'Wired' Nation," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 25 December 2000. [http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p\\_action=doc&p\\_doci...](http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_action=doc&p_doci...)

to several incidents in which “show business women’s videos” were first circulated widely through the Internet, and a short while later hit the national news network.

This cyberspace and sexuality, though very different in their nature, certainly have some curious interconnections with each other. In order to examine what women and men expect from the Internet and how they use, and evaluate what they get out of their use, with a particular focus on sexuality, this paper deals with the following issues. In the first section we will review some aspects of the Internet population and women’s use of the Internet. In section two, we will see how the new Internet environment affects women’s sexuality with respect to the various locations they occupy. We will more closely examine the recent “sex video” incidents and the increase in teenage prostitution, both of which are relatively new phenomenon that have close links to the emergence of new forms of information dissemination. In section three, gender differentiation vis-à-vis pornography in cyberspace will be discussed. In the final section, the mechanisms of tradition will be discussed to make sense of the contemporary “clash” between the new phenomena and the old norms.

### Women Internet Users

Statistics recording the population that use the Internet vary,<sup>2</sup> but all show that the numbers have dramatically escalated. At the end of 1999, the total population using the Internet exceeded one million, which increased to 26 million, or by 2.6 times, in July 2002. The increase rate of women users was 1.6 times more than that of their male counterparts over the same time period, accounting for some 45 percent of all users.<sup>3</sup> This increase, which is in part due to the gov-

2. National Computerization Agency, *2002 hanguk inteonet baekseo* (Korea Internet White Paper 2002) (Seoul: National Computerization Agency, 2002).

3. *Ibid.*

ernment’s policy of promoting “the information society” and utilizing Internet links, encouraged a broad distribution of cheap high-speed Internet services. The lowered cost of using the Internet as well as the expansion of network services has made it easier to use the Internet at homes, workplaces, schools and computer rooms. An increasing number of social and commercial services are provided through the Internet, which in turn increases the need to log on to it. Internet banking and shopping have become an indispensable part of daily life for an increasing proportion of the population. Students rely on the Internet to do their homework, although they are also diverted by games and online chatting. Homemakers seek advice on child rearing, medical matters, investment and other housework. The Internet is also frequented for entertainment, for example, chatting, games, music and movies.

For many women, the possibilities of interaction that surpass the limitations of their physical condition are the main attraction to the Internet. For women homemakers who are relatively restricted by the boundaries of their home, cyberspace offers an unlimited range of access to information as well as ways of getting in touch with other people. One respondent (homemaker) says, “It is marvelous. One can find people (in cyberspace) any time, people are gathered at all hours of the day. I wake up in the middle of the night and enter this space to find people. When I am alone and miss people, and want to talk to people, I can enter the cyberspace.”<sup>4</sup>

Cyberspace therefore answers the need for “being with people” and also fulfils the desire to expand one’s circles of friends or

4. Chang Pilwha, “Saibeo gonggan-gwa yeoseong chamyeo gicho yeongu” (Basic Research on Cyberspace and Women’s Participation), *Yeoseonghak nonjip* (Women’s Studies Review) (Korea Women’s Institute, Ewha Womans University) 19 (2002): p. 105. For this study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Questionnaires were completed by 71 male and 79 female randomly selected Seoul residents in their 20s and 30s. The qualitative, in-depth interviews were carried out on 30 female Internet users. The participants of the interview were limited to those who had been using the Internet for at least a year and who had been participating in various Internet communities at the time of the interview. The interviews were carried out offline.

“communities.” On the other hand, there certainly are limitations. The biggest problem of using the Internet for women arises out of technical difficulties.<sup>5</sup> There are quite a number of women who are not familiar with computers and feel uncomfortable with the Internet environment. To use the Internet at home one needs at minimum a computer, an Internet connection, a modem or a LAN, but few families have a computer for each member. Women home-users often do not have exclusive access to personal computers, and they are usually the last ones to use the computer due to the priority given to other members of the family. The cost of installing an Internet service line and upgrading the computer still restricts women’s usage of the Internet.<sup>6</sup>

More important than these physical constraints are the qualitative problems that are related to the contents in cyberspace. As critics suggests, information technology and cyberspace developed in the context of globalization of cultural industry are becoming a new colony of global capitalism.<sup>7</sup> This tendency creates problems of a digital divide across socioeconomic groups as well as a gender divide (Na 2001).

While online, women netizens often receive threats that are gender-specific and which imply sexual violence and stalking. An interesting survey on people’s awareness of sexual violence in cyberspace shows that there are statistically meaningful and consistent gender differences between male and female respondents. Higher percentage of women respondents believed that sexual violence in cyberspace would contribute to increase in sexual harassments, rapes, and other sexual crimes in real life. Also more women than men felt insulted and degraded when they received sexual messages through e-mails

5. Chang Pilwha et al. (2002).

6. Nearly 40 percent of women respondents in this study said they hesitated to use the Internet due to the costs involved.

7. No Seong-suk, “Munhwa saneop-ui jiguhwa-wa seong bulpyeongdeung” (Globalization of Cultural Industry and Gender Inequality), in *Jeongbo mache-ui jiguhwa-wa yeoseong* (Globalization of Information Media and Women), ed. Chang Pilwha et al. (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2002).

and while chatting (Yi Sun-hyeong 2000).

There is no tangible material in cyberspace, but it offers a source for exciting the human senses and creating experiences through people to people communication and people to program interactions which create a hyper reality that is more real than the real world. The majority of the contents on the Internet, which were created by men who were the first users of cyber resources, impedes women’s easy access to the cyber world and hinders women from feeling comfortable with it. Cyber pornography, lewd stories, aggressive manners in debates and discussion groups are part of the male cyberculture that poses problems for women. This issue will be dealt with more concretely in section three. The next section provides a broader picture of the sexual milieu of contemporary Korea.

## Women’s Sexuality Mediated by Cyberspace

### *Recent Sex Video Scandals*

In March 1999, a videotape known as Miss O’s tape became more famous in Korea than any multi-billion dollar movie production. This video recording (made by a hidden camera) of sexual acts of a female TV star with her male partner was copied, and circulated rapidly through the Internet. She had been a contestant in the Miss Korea pageant and gained popularity as a TV actress. The name “Miss O” was given to her because her last name starts with the letter “O” in English. Netizens who had watched this video during the preceding months argued about whether or not the heroine of the video was really Miss O, and various chat-rooms were opened to discuss the matter and any other matters that were related to this case. The chat room received more than 1,000 entries in a day. While many netizens expressed their criticism about the producer and distributor of this video and expressed their sympathy with Miss O, some others asserted that she had to demonstrate ethical responsibility as a “public person.” The *Chosun Ilbo*, known to be the most conservative newspa-

per in Korea and having the largest readership of all daily papers, ended one article on this incident by quoting two netizens. One said that "Whatever the roots may be, Korea values chastity and has taboos against premarital sex. As an adult, she has to be responsible for all her actions." The other netizen said, "Miss O is a public person. As a public figure she has to demonstrate right behavior and assume ethical and moral responsibilities" (*Chosun Ilbo*, 28 March 1999).

Six months later, another similar tape was circulated, this time that of Miss Baek, a top female pop singer. "Fans of Miss Baek tried to paralyze Internet sites offering the video showing Baek and a former producer having sex. . . . The Internet site built new firewalls in defense. . . . The video clip multiplied and raced across the Internet, reportedly at a rate of 200,000 copies in one day."<sup>8</sup>

This same pattern persists because, according to a show business columnist, "the manager gets a tape like this in order to get leverage." And it is not uncommon for managers or producers to insist that aspiring starlets make such videos, which are held in case the woman tries to dump her old associates after she enters stardom. In other words, sex before marriage still gives reason for threat and blackmail.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually Miss O and Miss Baek each called for a press conference in which the gist of the message they tried to convey to the public was one of apology and regret for having disappointed their fans. Nevertheless, neither of them has yet to recover their status as a star.

In the same year, Seo Gap-suk, a TV actress published a book entitled, *Nado ttae-ron poreunograpui-ui juin-gong-i doego sipda* (Sometimes I Want to Be a Heroine of Pornography) containing descriptions of her sex life. While such sexual content is not uncommon in books written by men, this book created another round of heated discussion leading to a court trial. The court decision was that the book was "harmful for teenagers." Unlike Ms. O and Ms. Baek,

8. Doug Struck, op. cit.

9. Ibid.

Seo is married and the expose was her own decision, yet a similar "scarlet letter" was branded on her. Kim and Jang (2000) analyzed netizens' responses regarding these events and concluded that the majority held a double standard in their opinions on love and chastity. Both men and women judged "my" woman, and "other" women by different standards.

With the Internet, these "scandals" spread much more speedily, widely and broader graphically. It costs nothing to the people who distributed and consumed the content of someone's private life, but the careers of these women were destroyed. Nobody could be held responsible for this. Anonymity of cyberspace was the breeding ground for much shared sexual curiosity. But entrenched in this double standard, only the women became the victims.

### *Activating Teenage Prostitution*

Korea, like many other countries, has a long-standing tradition of utilization of women's bodies and sexual labor for both public and private ends (Moon 1997, 37-39; Jo and Chang 1990). The increase in prostitution, in different forms as well as in number in recent years, however, is unprecedented particularly because of the alarming number of teenage girls engaged in "compensated dates" (*wonjo gyoje* in Korean and *enjo kosai* in Japanese). This new phenomenon is a transaction in which male clients pay young girls for their sexual services. One study shows that one out of four high school students have experienced compensated dates in Busan in 2000 (Kong 2003, 84). The factors driving teenage girls into these activities are complex and may be derived from childhood experience of sexual violence, pressure from schools, lack of support and care from family and poverty. Moreover, they are exposed to an ever expansive consumer culture, wherein consumption pertains not merely to buying something to fulfill a need, but also to prove one's own identity and status. Buying consumer goods like mobile phones, Internet services and others material goods become an imperative in which the need for money drives number of teenage girls into prostitution.

My study on teenage prostitution shows that the contact is made through Internet chatting (58.7%), phone rooms (13.2%), mobile communications (9.0%), through acquaintances (7.2%), or through hunting (5.7%). Initially, information about prostitution is circulated by acquaintances or friends who are involved in. At times, solicitous messages are sent directly to the girls by men in Internet chatting rooms (Chang et al. 2002). At the same time a great deal of people meet their clients through mobile communications. A sixteen year-old girl says that "One rings up the number found in magazines and calls the phone room. Then one has to become a member by paying 30,000 won. Then they give a membership number and a secret identification number (password) and from then one can call the phone room."

The streets, which used to be known to buyers and sellers to make contacts, nowadays are considerably deserted. Instead of going to the streets, they go to PC rooms (where one goes to pay for the use of the Internet). It is very easy to find Web sites giving out information on where to look for clients, because even if one is not looking for such information, it is not difficult to avoid it. "I was just typing something, and it just popped up. So I went into the chatting room and all the nicknames were really strange, like 'compensated dates' and 'looking for an extra job?'"

Teenagers find chatting room Web sites, such as "skylove," "bodybody," "sayclub," "ohmylove" on the Internet and open up chatting rooms with names such as "last job," "want a job," "job," "do you want me?," "how much are you going to give me?" "let's meet now" by giving themselves nicknames such as "whore1" and "easygirl." The intention for these chatting sites is as obvious as the nicknames chosen by teenagers in which the eventual outcome is prostitution.

To those young people "job" meant something other than the ordinary meaning. The answer by a fifteen year old to the interview question "what does it mean to 'do a job' in the context of chatting on the Internet?" was that "It means to meet that day and have sex."

Internet chatting rooms, phone rooms and mobile communica-

tions provide ways to individual prostitution. Teenagers may begin these dangerous activities by being offered such an opportunity either by a man (stranger) or an acquaintance and then may actively pursue such activities through the Internet, phone rooms and hunting. One may thus see that while at first prostitution begins via personal relationships, later, anonymous relationships are developed with the aid of cyberspace.

### Cyber Pornography

Like many real world magazines, webzines are full of sexually explicit images. The difference between Internet screens and paper magazines is that the scope and quality of images on the net have an infinitely larger and more diverse usage and audience. The distinction between the consumption and production of these Internet images and paper texts is blurred. The consumer can become a producer of pornography relatively easily if s/he has the skill to use the appropriate tools. The images can be synthesized and fabricated without representing a real object. It is also possible to multiply and send pornography through e-mails, searches, files, the web and CD-rewriters. In short, the new technology makes it possible to mass-produce pornography and circulate it widely in cyberspace in an instant. The distributor is not limited to those with commercial motivations but to any consumer who can play the role of an active circulator.

#### *Increasing Incidence of Pornography in Cyberspace*

There are innumerable Web sites that specialize in creating and distributing pornography. But a larger number of portal sites<sup>10</sup> offers

10. Internet portal sites are sites that are built as a starting place that contains links to other useful sites. An example of a consumer portal that provides a range of services including free e-mail, personalised home pages, instant messages and chat rooms is Yahoo (www.yahoo.com).

sexually explicit images and contents. Many e-businesses with no income sources other than advertisements use these images to expand their readership. The extent to which sexually explicit images and contents are used for luring readership is limitless. Wireless Internet on mobile phones also offers pornographic images and contents, which are supposed to promote consumption in cyberspace.

### *Variety in Form and Content*

Both commercial and noncommercial sites have sexually explicit contents and images. Cyber pornography ranges from digital real-time movies, animations, photos, novels, cartoons to interactive forms such as sex chats and sex games. The sex novels deal with graphic descriptions of sexual acts and sensational subjects such as incest, while games range from *Strip Poker* and *Sex Tetris*,<sup>11</sup> to the more complex games with basic story lines such as *Dating Simulation* and *Rape Games*. Sex photos of nude women, close-ups of body parts and scenes of sexual acts, and sex movies of existing pornographic videotapes are all available on the Internet. Netizens can also download and watch new videos taken from hidden cameras. Videotapes of the providers themselves filmed with a “self camera” have emerged as a new medium. And “rooms” have been created within general portal Web sites as well as specifically pornographic Web sites for netizens to express and share. Animation with pornographic images and story lines, including the genre of *hentai*,<sup>12</sup> also makes up a significant part of cyber pornography.

A prominent new development is the “Internet adult broadcasting stations,” in which an “Internet Jockey” (IJ) mediates the show and serve the demands of the viewer. This enables interactive communication at a relatively cheap price, which is the unique characteristic of cyberspace. Thus, an environment that resembles real world

11. *Sex Tetris*, an application of the once popular game of *Tetris* is made up of images and sound effects of the penis penetrating the vagina.

12. In Japan, adult cartoons are called *hentai manga*, *manga* meaning cartoon and *hentai* meaning lewd.

“sex bars” otherwise known as “room salons” is recreated virtually. Viewers are no longer mere onlookers but participants who can talk to and make demands of the IJ who will provide custom tailored services that could include stripping, showing body parts and getting into any bodily position the viewer wants to see.

The increasing number of women Internet users means that they are also exploring Web sites with sexually explicit content that are less accessible in the real world. Mass e-mails sent to female consumers advertise and solicit pornographic Web sites, which further facilitate women’s initiation to cyber pornography.

### *Gendered Experiences of Cyber Pornography*

A recent research conducted on Internet pornography and women<sup>13</sup> asked the following questions: How does your encounter with pornography in cyberspace connect with sexual practices in daily life and does one’s gender affect this?; and Do men and women experience pornography differently, and if so, how? The research, which was conducted through content analyses, in-depth interviews, and supplementary questionnaires show the following results:

Within the production/circulation/consumption system of offline pornography, it was not a general experience for women to access pornography. Unless they were given pornographic material by men around them, most women never had a chance to see any until they were married and introduced to the practice of using pornography as sex manual or stimulation for sex with their husbands. Since cyberspace uses computers as its medium, women who want to see some

13. Chang Pilwha et al. (2002), “Saibeo poreuno grapi-wa seongbyeol jeongchihak” (Cyber Pornography and Gender Politics), in *Jeongbo mache-ui jiguhwa-wa yeoseong*. The main research methods used were content analyses, in-depth interviews and supplementary questionnaires. The interviewees were 21 women and men between their late 10s to late 30s with the experience of accessing pornography through cyberspace. Questionnaires were distributed to 93 women and 84 men, 177 people in total, in their 10s and 30s who had used the Internet for more than one year and had accessed pornography in cyberspace at least once.

pornographic images do not have to be conscious of other people. They have the privilege of anonymity in seeking various pornographic materials in privacy and gaining sexual pleasure from them. At the very least, cyberspace is proving to be a new space in which women have new opportunities to explore sexuality that is different from the real space.

But there still exists a considerable gender difference. Men are the more active agents of collecting or providing information about pornography whereas women still tend to remain as recipients of it. Even before cyber pornography became prevalent, it was more natural part of the “male” culture to use pornography and share information thereof. Through exchange of information, men acquire the means to access contents of the paid-per-view sites for free. Information such as this is quickly reproduced and disseminated among male acquaintances. In this sense, patterns of consuming pornography outside cyberspace are intricately connected with those inside.

Women display different emotional reactions to pornography. Even in cases where women intentionally seek pornographic sites, many women often feel uncomfortable about pornography. This reveals the inner conflict of these women with regard to the current male-centered sexual culture and pornography. In the case of interactive pornography, which is the more active form of cyber sex, men and women differ greatly in their perception and experience. According to the results from the questionnaires, men who had visited an Internet adult broadcasting station made up 57.1% of the respondents whereas women made up only 23.7%. In the interviews, most men replied that they like to engage in role-playing simulations such as the “cute girl” games<sup>14</sup> but women replied that they mostly play

14. “Cute girl” games are animation games made in Japan that are circulated illegally in Korea. The *Lolita Syndrome* is a classic “cute girl” game where the player has to rescue a little girl and in return is shown a sexually explicit photo. These kinds of animation games are developed into more sophisticated simulation games where the player can educate the girls in the game as their sex partners or seduce them. This could go further and extend to hardcore porn where re-enactments of rape are incorporated.

the comparatively simpler *Sex Tetris*.

Both male and female respondents talked of the sexual pleasures that they derive from interactive forms of cyber pornography. They were able to have some of their own subjective input, which made for an experience similar to real sex.

Sex games really arouse you sexually. They are role-playing games . . . and because you can put in your own selections, it is more real and stimulating. I've only watched the free rebroadcasts on the adult stations. They are quite entertaining. They (the female IJs) show you everything you want, and it's almost like being in a room salon. I don't pay to watch porn, there are so many ways to watch them for free . . . (Male, 27).

Sex games are a little different from the thrill of winning. I played it once, and it's really a lot of fun when you make the penis penetrate and you hear the sound. Other games are about going over how many stages and setting a new record but this [sex game] is different because it's funny when you get them [the penis] to fit and make those funny sounds . . . (Female, 23).

This seemingly common response, however, hides the qualitative difference in experience. While many men take pleasure in the acts of taking off the clothes of girls and women in the games or IJ's in adult stations and exchanging sexual banter, women have much limited experiences and are restricted to only watching and following.

When I click, something pops up. Click some more and some more images pop up. . . . It's fun to see whatever I want popping up. I'll just randomly click something and they will strip or do other things. . . . Rebroadcasts of adult stations are about “taking it off” and that's it. I mean honestly, it is funny but. . . . I think I've seen it about five times. They do whatever the guys tell them to do. . . . But it's the guys who are ordering them and so. . . . I never watched it till the end. I kind of get sick of it because it's always the same thing. I wish the content were a little different . . . (Female, 23).



As in the real world, sexual entertainments are geared toward men, such that prostitution is extended to cyberspace. The fun of interacting with the IJ comes naturally to men who are used to the practice of buying sexual services in the real world, whether they do it on the street, in the bar, in the brothel or in the tearoom. In this way, male consumers of cyber pornography are able to go beyond the pornographic activities that take place in the real world by culminating their control of women through means of directing the action of women according to their male sexual desires. Thus, men enter a new sphere of reality where they can access the “actual” bodies of women without accessing “real” women. On the other hand, women who sense this male-centeredness in cyber pornography and the objectification of women, have a hard time sustaining their pleasure in and actively reconstructing it.

#### *Textbook for Real Life*<sup>15</sup>

Many women in the study expressed their discomfort when they realized that pornography mediated their sexual relationships in real life. The respondents of the study rarely discussed sexual matters openly with their sexual partners, be they husbands, lovers, or casual companions. Accordingly, they said that men led their sexual interactions and when they did not explicitly refuse their proposals, they took it as consent. But some women expressed disgust about the new bodily, sexual positions that men attempt to replicate from pornographic sites. Often they followed the men’s lead in order not to embarrass them or out of sense of duty. Married women in particular complied with their husband’s wishes in order to keep their spirits high. A woman said that her partner had more frequent access to pornography through the Internet and that:

He does things that are preposterous from a woman’s view. Sometimes I wonder, what does he think of me, what is he doing? When

15. Interviews taken from the same source as above.

I only want petting, he does something weird or suddenly gets into a pornographic position. I get depressed and think to myself, he lacks experience but watches porno excessively . . . (Female, 23).

Other women said:

I do not particularly enjoy watching porn. Sometimes it provides stimulation but not always. My husband watches them and then nags me. He wants to do it. He really gets on my nerves. I just don’t want to do it sometimes, you see. But one day, he comes home from watching porn and says he wants to do it in a strange position. I say no, but I can’t say no all the time. I feel bad. So I leave him to do what he wants and tell him to finish it quickly. I do not like sex very much but my husband likes it too much. Sometimes I get money for it because I hate it so much (Female, 31).

When we have sex, my husband wants to do something from a pornographic movie that I don’t want to do. He doesn’t even say it. He just pushes for it and does things that I don’t like . . . grabbing the waist and . . . I complain but he keeps on saying it’s fun let’s do it again. What strange things he picks up from porns. . . . But although I don’t want to, I often just let him do what he wants. It doesn’t seem right to keep refusing. Even between a married couple, these things are hard to talk about. It might hurt his pride. On the other hand, he won’t do what I want. Mostly, it’s about what he wants. That makes me mad. Sometime I cry . . . . Then I feel better (Female, 30).

In the absence of communication about sex, sexual pleasure is turned into something that is owned by men, and women’s involvement in sex remains passive. As long as most women are uncomfortable with the sexual content of cyber pornography, no matter how open it may be to women, it cannot but be a space for male pleasure.

Silence regarding sexuality has been broken although the subject still remains taboo in the public sphere. From women’s perspective, the social awareness about sexual violence against women has become widespread. Now the young generation growing up in the

consumer society is asking to leave behind the “victim” aspect of feminist discourse and to start promoting more active, positive and pleasurable aspects of sexuality. However, it is my view that the dichotomy of “danger” and “pleasure” is misleading, for the reasons I will discuss below.

### **Sexual Heritage**

#### *Valorization of Women's Chastity*

Korea has a long and arduous history of developing patriarchal family and social system. Understanding the mechanisms that maintains and modifies the patriarchal tradition is an integral part of analyzing the contemporary society as well as strategizing for change. Patriarchal societies have intricate systems of controlling women's sexuality because sexuality lies at the core of creating and maintaining the patriarchal family and society.

Since patriarchal notions of marriage as an institution could only be maintained by women's chastity, it was imperative that women ought to be controlled and not to be given sexual freedom. In order to regulate women's status, ideological and social systems were devised to create a system of control. The ideology of “women's virtues” used to be supported by social systems that rewarded or punished women according to the levels of virtue. More concretely, valorizing women's chastity and categorizing them into either chaste or unchaste women was developed in most patriarchal societies. Women, themselves, internalized these ideas.

The traditional rhetoric of “a woman's chastity is more important than her life” may sound archaic but variations of this belief still persist in people's minds. The ideal of sexual “purity” cannot be sustained unless it is backed up by other beliefs such as “women have naturally little or no sexual desires.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the sexual curiosity

of women is regarded to be unusual, unnatural and dangerous, and something that which needs to be held in check. The destructive power of the “sex videos” of Ms. O and Ms. Baek, therefore, becomes more evident against this background

Men, on the other hand, are the “opposite sex” of women, being supposedly born differently. Common rhetoric touts that men are naturally driven by strong sexual urges, and that their virility is the core of manhood. As initiators and actors of sexual encounters, men are charged with actively learning the various sexual skills. The virility of men is valorized because they need to hand down their “seeds” to continue the family line. Therefore, as seen in many patriarchal cultures, men's promiscuity is not only tolerated, but also encouraged to a certain extent.

In this scheme the borderline between being active and aggressive blurs, and likewise rape and consensual intercourse are not differentiated. It is easily justified on the part of a man to force a woman to have sex, since she cannot welcome it if she wanted to be a virtuous woman. In patriarchal culture, men have had the authority to define the rules in both the private and public spheres, through which the double standard of sexual norms can be maintained.

#### *Two Kinds of Women*

The double standard of sexual norms can be more firmly established when it is supported by categorization of women. For example, good women are limited to having sexual relations with their husbands for the purpose of procreation and responding to the husbands' demands. Women's lives are judged within familial relationships and their goals in life are set in terms of “wise mother and good wife.” Individuality or achievements outside familial relationships are not recognized. In this archetype, a good wife passively responds to her

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fessional women were known to engage in sexual activities outside of marriage. But they belonged to the lowest class in society, and could enjoy neither freedom nor status.

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16. In traditional Korea, women entertainers, courtesans and a small number of pro-

husband's sexual needs but does not demand gratification of her own sexual needs, which should be nonexistent in the first place. The mother is supposed to be an asexual being who may be relieved to have her husband's sexual energy diverted to other women, as long as her status as wife and mother are left unchallenged. On the other hand, women, who are sexually active by definition, are stigmatized and their stigmatization, in turn, protects the lawful and respectable wife in a significant way. Prostitution is a system in which a group of "the other woman," is created for men to explore the wild world beyond the boundaries of "good sex" with "virtuous women" who supposedly are uninterested in sex.

Sex in itself is not an evil act to be eradicated or condemned. In a consumer society, commercialization of sex might be an unavoidable part of life. If we agree, however, it is wrong to degrade human beings, we will also agree that prostitution and pornography are objectionable. As we have seen above, cultural heritage provides different positions from which women and men are situated, and in this context women are degraded in ways that men are not degraded. Men and women have grown up with different patterns of self-respect and expectations regarding the extent to which they deserve and will receive respect or degradation. The man who does not understand why women do not want to be treated as sex objects (because of his own desire to be treated as such) is not likely to think of himself as being harmed by that treatment; a woman might. Garry suggests that "if one were to try to degrade a man sexually, a promising strategy would be to emasculate him—placing him into a position of being either incapable of having sex at all or functioning only in the place of a woman" (Garry 2002, 342). This suggestion is to illustrate the point that playing a women's role in sexual relationship may be a degrading experience that is difficult for men to imagine.

## Conclusion

People in today's information society move about, navigate or float in both the real world and the cyber world with two maps in hand. While nation states, social and economic status, gender status within previous societies have fixed and demarcated the self, people in cyberspace have the possibility to create a free, voluntary society according to their differentiated values and choices. The navigator in the sea of information ("inforonaut") has to have a flexible and multiple self(s) rather than a fixed one.<sup>17</sup>

Cyberspace is often defined as a space which is not real as the real world is real, but as existing within computer networks. Thus, the difference between cyberspace and the real world is often emphasized, but this overamplification of the differences may lead to overlooking the continuum of cyberspace with the real world. We have seen the sexual heritage in the real world carrying over to cyberspace myth.

Sex that is promoted in pornography and in prostitution does not look significantly different from the sex in rape or the sex teenage girls are pressured to have (Barry 1995, 59). In cyberspace, too, the lines between rape, prostitution, and private sex have blurred.

The capacity to punish or fix responsibility for sexual violence in circumstances where the perpetrators' identities are not revealed is weak if not impossible. This misuse of anonymity combined with the male sexual culture of the real world, operates as a form of violence against women, while also marginalizing them and impeding their consistent use of the Internet.

Along with the incredible increase in the amount of information, as well as the quantity of networks, paradoxically, new kinds of

17. Yun (2002) argues the following five characteristics of cyberspace as ontological characteristics. Cyberspace is 1) a real space rather than an imagined space, 2) a continuous and overlapping space in which the interaction could hurt feelings and "crimes on the mind" can be committed, 3) an expressive space, 4) a cognitive space in which communication, learning as well as forgery, theft could occur, and 5) a social space.

scarcity arise, such as that in significance, intimacy and communication. In this context, “synthetic reason” is required to cope with new dimensions of time, space, ethics, and perception. The past, present and future, which coexist in a new space and offer new possibilities, stimulate our imagination for a more equal and democratic society for the future, although they still remain mere possibilities. In order to actualize them, we need to be aware that the present is not a cultural vacuum, and we are not isolated beings but rather interact with others. Any attempt to focus on merely “pleasure” would have to give attention to the issue of unequal power relationship between women and men set against the background of the still dominant patriarchal tradition.

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