

## ABSTRACT

### North Korean Female Defectors' Gender Roles Portrayed in South Korean Media

Seung-woo Yeom, M.A.

Mentor: Marlene S. Neill, Ph.D.

This study analyzed how North Korean female defectors were depicted in South Korean media through a content analysis of the reality television show “South Korean Men, North Korean Women.” Among the episodes ( $N=142$ ), 14 episodes of season two were analyzed. Through the lens of framing and identity theories, this study took a close look at the television show's captions ( $N=467$ ), South Korean male entertainers' dialogue ( $N=131$ ) describing North Korean female defectors, and self-description of North Korean female defectors ( $N=75$ ). This study found that the television show emphasized portraying the role of North Korean female defectors as femininity and masculinity, while the female defectors and South Korean male entertainers on the show focused more on cultural factors.

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by

Seung-woo Yeom, B.A.

A Thesis

Department of Journalism, Public Relations and New Media

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Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

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Marlene S. Neill, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

Alec C. Tefertiller, Ph.D.

---

Daniel. Shafer, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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## DEDICATION

To my wife, Eun-A Park, without you, I could not even start and complete this paper.  
Thank you. You do not know how much I love you.  
I love you.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This study investigates how North Korean female defectors, and their gender roles are portrayed in South Korean media programs. The term “defector” has a negative connotation in English. The debate about the naming of North Koreans who escaped North Korea and are residing in South Korea has flourished over the past decades. However, the majority of North Korean activists and organizations define themselves as “defector” (Chubb, 2013). Thus, it is appropriate to use “defectors” in this research as a recognition to North Koreans’ agency and their self-identification.

Based on the data from the Ministry of Unification (2020), North Korean defectors living in South Korea are more than 30,000, and nearly 70% of them are women (See Table 1). Since the mid-1990s, the number of North Korean defectors soared due to the food shortages and economic difficulties in the country. The great famine in the 1990s caused a multitude of deaths estimated between two to three million people, and more than half of the nation’s population suffered from malnutrition. The country’s devastating circumstances provoked numerous defectors (Lee & Park, 2013).

With an increase in the number of North Korean female defectors, many South Korean media programs, particularly in television entertainment shows featuring North Korean female defectors, have emerged, and the female defectors are becoming TV stars through the television programs (Elise, 2016). The purpose of the television shows, such as “Now on My Way to Meet You” and “Moranbong Club,” which are talk shows

sharing the female defector's experiences and stories, was to portray the female defectors as more cultural and emotional characters rather than ideological figures. This phenomenon is an interesting social change since North Koreans have been stigmatized by South Korean propaganda as Red communists for many decades, but these television programs show the value of fun, warmth, reunification, and mutual understanding between North and South Koreans.

Previous studies have examined the phenomenon and television talk shows, such as "Now on My Way to Meet You" and Moranbong Club." However, many of them placed an emphasis on political and sociological issues since most popular North Korean female defectors' television shows, including the above two programs, are broadcast on South Korean's conservative television channels, and these television programs can be identified as "national conservative" and reunification of the two Koreas (Cho, 2018). Media have a strong effect on viewers, and the roles of North Korean female defectors on the television shows affect audiences' perspectives of North Korea and North Korean defectors (Cho, 2018). North Korean female defectors on the television shows are variously depicted, but previous studies have leaned to the sociological and political issues and concentrated less on how South Korean media have framed the female defectors' individual images and their gender roles.

Therefore, this study analyzed how North Korean female defectors and their gender roles are described by South Korean media programs. This study conducted a qualitative content analysis by exploring a reality television show, "South Korean Men, North Korean Women," rather than talk shows since this reality television show provides

more humanized images of North Korean female defectors by focusing on non-political and entertainment characteristics instead of discussing politics and tragic stories.

Unlike the reality television show, talk shows, such as “Now on My Way to Meet You,” have been criticized since program producers conceived and meditated the testimonies of North Korean female defectors on the shows. Viewers on the talk shows received meditated information regarding North Korea, which was affected by the program producers (Cho, 2018). Nevertheless, it is important to ask who these North Korean female defectors are, how they construct and reconstruct their identities by using the media as a tool, and how they interact with native South Koreans. Reality shows are the perfect setting to investigate these questions because they allow spontaneity and fluidity to spark in order to generate real life scenes.

But it does not mean reality shows are value-neutral and untouched by producers. They are edited and framed for intended audiences. Nevertheless, reality shows provide actors with a great level of flexibility and leeway to shape the direction of the program. These characteristics create a space for North Korean female defectors to express their thoughts and act as if they would behave in North Korea. Thus, this study also focuses on how North Korean female defectors portray themselves in the media by highlighting their agency. In other words, this study sheds light on the narratives and speeches of North Korean female defectors in the media contents. It focuses on media because the reality show generates higher degree of reliability regarding the representation of North Korean female defectors in South Korean media. As a result, this study extends our background and knowledge in studying North Korean defectors and their cultures; at the same time, it

broadens our understandings of how North Korean female defectors were depicted in South Korean media programs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

As a framework for the study, four streams of knowledge in the literature are discussed: (1) Framing Theory and North Korean defectors (2) The pattern and causes of North Korean female migration (3) A reality television show: “South Korean Men, North Korean Women,” (4) and Self-definition of North Korean female defectors.

#### *Framing Theory and North Korean Defectors*

The term “Frame” has varied conceptually depending on the authors’ approach to the study. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) argued that media frame could be conceptually defined as “A central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (p. 143), and Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1995) argued “The framing and presentation of events and news in the mass media can systemically affect how recipients of the news come to understand these events” (p. 4). North Korean female defectors account for more than 70% among the North Korean defectors living in South Korea, and most television shows dealing with North Korean defectors consist of North Korean female defectors. The two framing definitions broaden our understandings of how North Korean female defectors have been depicted in television shows, and how their gender roles have been framed through the shows.

Historically, how have North Korean defectors been framed? During the period of liberation from Japanese occupation, 74 million people who defected to South Korea were framed as “crossers to the South,” “Northerners,” and “Miserable of the 38th

Parallel” (Chung, 2008). Moreover, about 65 million people moved to South Korea during the Korean War (1950-1953), and they were defined as “War refugees” and may have a higher affinity with recent North Korean defectors (Chung, 2008). The Korean War led to the division of the Korean Peninsula, and North Korean defectors living in South Korea have been variously portrayed.

North Korean defectors who entered South Korea from 1962 to 1993 were welcomed and treated as “Heroes Who Returned to the State” as well as received financial compensation. Before 1993, the number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea was less than ten each year, and most of them were former officers or diplomats in North Korea (Chung, 2008). However, the numbers have surged since 1993. The collapse of the socialist bloc in North Korea has dramatically affected the country’s economic and social systems, which has caused many defectors seeking food or jobs in China, and some of them arrived in South Korea (Chung, 2008). When the number of North Korean defectors in South Korea increased, they were treated as poor compatriots and no longer framed as heroes (Lee, 2019).

With the increased numbers of North Korean defectors, diverse television programs, such as “Now on my way to meet you,” broadcasting the defectors, particularly focusing on North Korean female defectors have emerged. The television shows provide entertainment factors as well as share the defectors’ experiences developed in North and South Korea. Cast members on the television programs are mostly North Korean young female defectors aged between the twenties and thirties. The female defectors on the television programs are framed as sexualized and commercialized characters (Kim & Lim, 2014). The female panelists should wear “too revealing” clothes

and do a “sexy dance” to emphasize their gender, and their beauties are used for the programs’ popularity (Cho, 2018).

Most of the television shows, such as “Now on my way to meet you” and “Moranbong club,” follow the type of talk shows. The television programs are kind of a ‘confession show,’ and the female defectors’ stories and memories on the shows play a role in reinforcing South Koreans’ anti-communist memories (Tae & Hwang, 2012). However, the female defectors’ voices on the shows are regarded primarily for entertainment value. Their comments are losing political and social values since it is restricted to “unknown content” and captured by South Korean conservative opinion (S. M. Lee, 2014). The television programs provide mixed perspectives and messages from political issues to entertainments values.

Some studies have been conducted to examine this phenomenon, but many of them have analyzed it based on political views. Among North Korean defectors, over 70% are female. North Korean female defectors are not homogeneous. Individually, they have different experiences, characteristics, and developed identities. However, studies exploring how South Korean media and television programs focus on these issues are limited. Therefore, the findings in this study would provide informative insights into how North Korean female defectors have been portrayed by South Korean media.

### *The Pattern and Causes of North Korean Female Migration*

Prior to 2001, the number of North Korean female defectors entering South Korea was lower than men. Most North Korean defectors were former male officials or diplomats (Chung, 2008), and the proportion of female defectors accounted for only 12% until 1998 (Ministry of Unification, 2020). Since 2001, however, North Korean female



defectors have surpassed the number of male defectors, and the patterns of the migrations have entirely changed (See Figure B.1). In 2020, more than 70% of North Korean defectors entering South Korea were female (Ministry of Unification, 2020). The increased number of North Korean female defectors indicates that North Korean migration has become feminized (H. K. Kim, 2014).

Why have North Korean women started leaving their country since the mid-1990s? Existing studies have concluded two factors regarding the causes of feminization of North Korean migration. First are the push factors inside North Korea. From the economic perspective, the North Korean private economy has heavily relied on women since the Great Famine of the 1990s (Park, 2012). North Korea has suffered from the food shortage and economic hardship since the Great Famine. As a result, the nation's grain rationing system for all citizens collapsed. However, women were more vulnerable to the food crisis than other groups or classes of people (Lim, 2005) since in North Korea, women are required to live with the traditional virtues of a housewife, and it leads them to have the primary burden of household chores.

The food crisis in North Korea brought unsurmountable starvation deaths, and the country's adverse circumstances led women to take more responsibility for their family's livelihood. Therefore, North Korean women began participating in various economic activities to support their families (Lim, 2005). Their economic activities allowed them to have more mobility than men, and the government authorities were unable to control all their absences. Some of them crossed to China to carry out some business with Chinese merchants, and some women went to border areas to purchase some goods from China and sold them back to others in their hometowns (Lim, 2005).

Due to the wide range of economic activities, North Korean women could be more exposed to outside sources and information than men, and they discovered that the South Korean government allowed North Korean defectors to enter the country. Many North Korean women defected their country and entered South Korea with their families to seek a better life. Consequently, the majority of North Korean defectors entering South Korea were women, children and their families (Chung, 2008).

From the socio-political perspective, North Korean women have been able to cross the borders more freely than men because of the paternal and patriarchal structure of the North Korean political system. The North Korean regime has been controlling men tightly (Moon et al., 2000). North Korean men belong to the public sectors, and if they fled to China, they would be harshly punished by the government. In contrast, women in North Korea face less suppression by the government compared to men. Crossing the borderland to seek food, economic benefits, and a more comfortable life has been relatively easy for North Korean women, and this is one of the reasons why the number of North Korean female defectors has kept increasing.

The second cause that existing literature has identified is the pull factor in China. To answer the question why the proportion of women among North Korean migrants is growing, several studies found out the border between North Korea and China has been increasingly “women-friendly” (Choi, 2014). There are two possible explanations based on the results of the existing studies. First, Chinese men especially in poor rural areas have shown a growing interest in marrying North Korean women. To gain access to protection and working opportunities in China, North Korean women have no options but to marry poor Chinese men. By (in)voluntarily entering Chinese households as brides,

North Korean women hope to send remittances back home through the illegal brokerages. In this process, these women take the role as both breadwinners for their families left behind and caring workers for Chinese families (H. J. Lee, 2014).

Second, as suggested above, the pattern of North Korean border crossing has become feminized. This is particularly true when we consider the multifaceted relationships between mobility and space and the cultural meanings attached to the North Korean- Chinese border (S. K. Kim, 2014). In other words, most North Korean female border-crossers perceive and sense the borderland as a “gendered place.” This gendered migration is a result of female Korean Chinese’s migration patterns. In searching for economic benefits, thousands of female Korean Chinese have migrated to South Korea either through labor recruitment or through marriages. Their absence has intensified the demands for female service workers as well as brides, which led North Korean women to fill those empty positions and roles left by female Korean Chinese (Y. J. Kim, 2014). Although it remains unclear how many North Korean women are residing in China, evidence shows that they have spread within most ethnic Korean-Chinese towns.

*Reality TV Show: “South Korean Men, North Korean Women”*

“South Korean Men, North Korean Women” is a reality television show, which was manufactured for unification between South Korean male entertainers and North Korean female defectors. The television program shows how South Korean male entertainers and North Korean female defectors live together through the virtual marriages. The show was designed to provide the possibility of unification between South and North Koreans as well as to understand the values of unification by accepting the two Korea’s different and similar cultural characteristics (TV Chosun, 2014). The

television program began on July 4, 2014 and ended on April 7, 2017, and it consists of two seasons with a total of 142 episodes.

In contrast with the good purpose of this television show, it has been criticized since the gendered framework has not changed despite the fact that many couples have appeared on the show for around three years. The television program depicts the typical patriarchal marriage between South Korean male entertainers and North Korean female defectors. The female defectors on the show are educated regarding the South Korean marriage system, and the role of South Korean husbands is to teach their North Korean wives to become members of South Korean married lives (Cho, 2018). South Korean male entertainers are depicted as saviors who educate their North Korea wives to become good wives in their social systems, and the roles of North Korean wives are described to strengthen the patriarchal system (Cho, 2018).

Moreover, North Korean female defectors on television shows are often portrayed as beautiful, soft, and pure women. However, focusing on the female defectors' appearances rather than their personalities, cultural characteristics, or other factors provides biased perspectives to viewers since it can be generalized or interpreted in a negative way (Min-Yeong, 2012). Consequently, analyzing the reality television show would help scholars understand how North Korean female defectors, particularly in their gender roles, have been framed.

### *Self-definition of North Korean Female Defectors*

The Korean peninsula was divided into North and South Korea after the Korean War in 1953, and the two countries have formed their own cultures, social norms, and ethnicity. Despite the fact they shared the same ethnic root, people in the North and the

South have developed their own ethnic and cultural identities. To build an ethnic identity, it is required to be a member of an ethnic group by sharing values, attitudes, and feelings with the association (Phinney, 1990), and language, cultural maintenance by parents, and social interaction are essential factors for developing the ethnic identity (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). When it comes to cultural identity, groups have a particular cultural system of symbols and ideas, and it is historically handed down to new members. However, cultural identities can be changeable and affected by external factors such as media, literature, art, and interaction and conversation between people (Collier, 1997).

North Korean female defectors have developed their cultural and ethnic identities in their country, but in South Korea, they are exposed to diverse environments that influence their identities. For example, negative media depictions of North Korea may play a detrimental role in defining North Korean defectors' identities. Since Jang Song-Taek, who was a political heavyweight in North Korea, was executed in 2013, South Korean news media have focused on not only political conflicts inside North Korea and Kim Jong-un's reign of terror and his violation of leadership but also military confrontation and tension between the two Koreas (Seol & Jo, 2017). Denunciating North Korea as a threatening and hostile nation causes ethnic heterogeneity and negative perceptions of North Korea (Seol & Jo, 2017).

Due to the negative media depictions of North Korea and stereotypes toward North Korean defectors, defectors tend to hide their origins and identities. For North Korean female defectors, they often do not disclose their birthplace when they participate in a group such as a parent meeting for their children (Jeon, 2014). Individuals' identities

can be attributed and ascribed by others' stereotypes and communicated views (Collier, 1997). Ascription is the process of defining others' identities, and it can be caused by unconscious stereotypes or malicious intent (Oetzel, 2009). Oetzel (2009) demonstrated that identities can also be avowed by consciously or unconsciously expressing to others what identities you want to show through diverse modes of expressions or directly telling the preferred identities. This study expects that the reality television show, "South Korean Men, North Korean Women," provides diverse images of how North Korean female defectors express and define themselves and their identities. Therefore, analyzing the television program is vital to understand how North Korean female defectors self-define their identities and how it has been negotiated and co-created in South Korea. Furthermore, the analysis of the television show would provide insights into how the television show's depiction and South Korean male entertainers' perspectives toward North Korean female defectors play a role in ascribing the female defectors' identities.

### *Research Questions*

- RQ1a: How are the gender roles of North Korean female defectors depicted by this South Korean television show?
- RQ1b: What are the dominant themes?
- RQ2: Based on the television show's dialogue, what do South Korean male entertainers think of North Korean female defectors and their gender roles?
- RQ3: How do North Korean female defectors on the television program define themselves and their identities?

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This study aims to explore how South Korean media programs depict North Korean female defectors' gender roles by examining a reality television show, “South Korean Men, North Korean Women.” To gain comprehensive findings and the most in-depth information, this study utilized a qualitative content analysis method.

Content analysis is used “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314), and when analyzing text data, the qualitative content analysis is one of the well-known research methods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The primary purpose of the qualitative content analysis is to find out the characteristics of language as communication or contextual meaning of the text (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967; Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and the text data may be collected through diverse channels, such as print media, television, verbal, interviews, narrative responses, observation, focus groups, and open-ended survey questions (Kondracki, Wellman & Amundson, 2002).

This study analyzed the data gathered from the reality television show “South Korean Men, North Korean Women.” Among the episodes ( $N=142$ ), 14 episodes of season two were analyzed since the rest of episodes were not available through an online search, even on the main website for the television program. In current phase of this research, only 14 episodes were available electronically. To answer the research

questions, this study took a close look at the television show's captions, South Korean male entertainers' dialogue describing North Korean female defectors, and the self-definition of North Korean female defectors.

The reality show had relatively less conversation than other talk shows, but there were many captions to describe characters and their emotions and contents, which need more explanations. In order to examine how the television show frames North Korean female defectors, this study focused on captions. Captions play a role in providing the meaning of contents but also strongly design the screen composition by including further explanations such as aesthetic, entertainment, and revival aspects. The letters inside the screen have an extreme effect on the meaning and its changes (Rhee, 2003). A total of 467 captions depicting North Korean female defectors were collected. A total of 563 references were coded, but 47 references were excluded due to the lack of relation to the research questions. Thus, 516 references showing relationships with the depiction of North Korean female defectors were coded. Total coded themes were 48 and they were divided into seven main themes. The codes and themes were identified based on an emergent coding system to obtain insightful concepts and ideas from the references.

To explore how South Korean male entertainers think of North Korean female defectors, this study analyzed their dialogue describing North Korean female defectors. They mentioned a total of 131 times of describing the female defectors, and 131 references were coded. Total coded themes were 26 and they were categorized into five main themes. When it comes to how North Korean female defectors describe themselves, this study placed emphasis on their dialogue mentioning themselves. A total of 75 times



of dialogue were gathered, and 79 references were coded. Total coded themes were 26 and it was divided into four main themes.

To avoid bias perspectives and increase intercoder reliability, two researchers separately gathered data and conducted consensus coding meaning the two coders consensually agreed on all codes and themes. The collected data were required to be translated from Korean to English, and the data was coded and analyzed through the NVIVO data analysis program.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

#### *Gender Roles of North Korean Female Defectors in the Television Show*

*Research Questions 1a and 1b* asked, “How are the gender roles of North Korean female defectors depicted by this South Korean television show? and What are the dominant themes?” To answer the questions, this study analyzed the reality television show, “South Korean Men, North Korean Women,” and found 467 captions depicting North Korean female defectors. The captions were coded, and the result provides seven dominant themes, “Femininity,” “North Korean Wife or Bride,” “Masculinity,” “Cultural Ignorance,” “North Korean Memories,” and “Emotional Expression.” Figure B.2 shows the seven dominant themes, but this study focuses on the first four themes, which account for the highest percentage among the themes.

First of all, according to Figure B.3, the theme of “Femininity” made up the highest percentage (28%). This theme demonstrates how North Korean female defectors’ roles are depicted in the television show as femininity. The theme, Femininity, consists of sub-themes, such as “Caring,” “Beauty and Purity,” “Worrying,” “Housewife,” “Relying on husband,” and “Supporting.” The caring role of North Korean female defectors accounted for the highest percentage (11%) compared to other sub-themes, and North Korean female defectors in the role were portrayed as a person who takes care of and works for her husband. Some example captions follow:

- *Jiwoo is the only one who takes care of her husband.*
- *Give the delicious food to her husband first.*

- ☐ *Wife taking care of her 45-year-old husband.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife thinks of her husband first, even when she is resting.*
- ☐ *The wife prevents her husband from getting rained on.*

The second highest sub-theme of “Femininity” is “Beauty and Purity” (6%), which described the appearance of North Korean female defectors and how much they are pure.

For example:

- ☐ *North Korean girls are pretty.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife suddenly shy.*
- ☐ *Pure North Korean wife stuttering about a kiss.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife has never been in a romantic relationship.*
- ☐ *A beautiful North Korean wife.*
- ☐ *The wife can't look at her husband because she is embarrassed.*
- ☐ *Innocent*

The portrayals of “Worrying,” “Housewife,” “Relying on husband,” and “Support” accounted for relatively low percentages, which are from 2 to 3%. Through the result, it would be expected that the television show was more likely to depict North Korean female defectors as feminine roles who take care of their husband and have beautiful appearance and purity images.

The second highest dominant theme is “North Korean Wife or Bride” (18%). The television show repeatedly utilized the term of “North Korean wife or bride,” while not using many times the term of “South Korean husband.” The program's purpose was to enhance mutual understanding between South Korean men and North Korean female defectors and integrate two different cultures (TV Chosun, 2014). However, media repeated coverage of the term would cause a stereotypical view of North Korean female defectors and provide a distinction between them and South Korean male entertainers. In South Korea, there is a common perception that a woman from an economically poorer country comes to South Korea to get married to a Korean man to have a more affluent

life (Kim & Sul, 2019). North Korea is one of the isolated and underdeveloped countries. Thus, repeated uses of the term would lead audiences to link the image of North Korean female defectors with the common perception rather than focusing on their diverse characteristics and cultural backgrounds.

Figure B.4 shows the third dominate theme “Masculinity” (16%), which depicts North Korean female defectors as a strong character who has leadership and strong desire to win. North Korean female defectors were usually portrayed dealing with many complex tasks on behalf of their husbands, and the roles between husband and wife changed on the television program. Some examples follow:

- ☐ *Husband and his wife are changing roles.*
- ☐ *It is strange between the wife's chopping firewood and husband's fire-making.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife's superior labor force.*
- ☐ *The husband acts as an assistant to his wife.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife holding saws instead of her husband.*
- ☐ *Husband can't even close the door without his wife.*
- ☐ *The roles of the husband and wife have entirely changed.*
- ☐ *A brave wife who is better than ten men.*
- ☐ *Captain North Korean wife.*

Furthermore, North Korean female defectors were described as strong personalities with a strong desire for competition, brave and fearless characters. The role of the female defectors was to order and teach their husbands to handle several issues. For example:

- ☐ *North Korean wife coaching her husband.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife led her husband*
- ☐ *A husband who's been put under his wife's leadership*
- ☐ *North Korean wife ignores her husband's words*
- ☐ *A fearless North Korean wife.*
- ☐ *North Korean women's overwhelming desire to win.*

The last dominant theme in the captions of the television program is “Cultural ignorance” (12%). Based on the Figure B.5, the theme “Ignorance and Curiosity” accounted for the largest portion compared to other themes. North Korean female

defectors on the television program showed different cultural background and knowledge, which was experienced and developed in North Korea. Due to the lack of cultural experience and knowledge in South Korea, they were described as an ignorant person having many curiosities. The female defectors were often underestimated and regarded as foreigners because of many differences except for the language. Some examples follow:

- ☐ *The husband was frustrated with his wife, who didn't know the term "Beekeeping."*
- ☐ *Eun-ah living in South Korea for seven years is still a long way to adapt to.*
- ☐ *She does not know much about the Olympics.*
- ☐ *You have never been to an apartment in South Korea before*
- ☐ *Neat interior and the bathroom inside that you can't see in North Korea.*
- ☐ *North Korean wife is ignorant about the capitalist economic system.*
- ☐ *She does not know much about the multiplication table.*
- ☐ *A simple thing is difficult for the North Korean wife.*
- ☐ *A North Korean wife who is interested in many things.*

#### *South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors*

*Research Question 2* addressed, “Based on the television show's dialogue, what do South Korean male entertainers think of North Korean female defectors and their gender roles?” To answer the research question, this study focused on male entertainers' dialogue describing North Korean female defectors. This study mainly analyzed what South Korean male entertainers thought about North Korean female defectors, and how they expressed their feelings toward the female defectors. This study found 131 examples of South Korean male entertainers' descriptions regarding North Korean female defectors, and they were coded into five dominant themes, but this study focused on the top three themes; “Cultural Ignorance,” “Emotional Expression,” “Femininity” which each represented over 10%.

Figure B.6 shows the five themes, but “Cultural Ignorance” makes up the largest proportion (49%) compared to other themes. The theme, “Cultural Ignorance,” consists of three top sub-themes, “Curiosity and Differentiation,” (16%) “Underestimation,” (15%) and “Teaching” (14%). When referring to North Korean female defectors, South Korean male entertainers showed curiosity regarding North Korean culture and lifestyle, and even if they spoke the same language, they considered them foreigners. For example:

- ☐ *Where is your hometown in North Korea? Is this a traditional dress that everyone wears in North Korea?*
- ☐ *Do they raise dogs like this in North Korea?*
- ☐ *What are the broadcasting people? There is no such thing in South Korea.*
- ☐ *Cultural shock. You are swimming like a spy.*
- ☐ *The style is totally different, so I decided to think my wife is a foreigner, a person from a different country.*

According to Figure B.7, with the theme, “Curiosity and Differentiation,” “Underestimation,” and “Teaching” accounted for the largest parts. South Korean male entertainers showed expressions that underestimated North Korean female defectors with different cultural backgrounds and knowledge. They thought potentially that North Korean female defectors lacked knowledge and experience.

- ☐ *"Beekeeping" is not a place. It is honey, and honey is beekeeping. You idiot.*
- ☐ *English? You can read English. Right?*
- ☐ *Do you know a gold medal? Do you know the Winter and Summer Olympics?*
- ☐ *How do you know Chile?*
- ☐ *It's been two years since she came to South Korea, so she does not know much about here. South Korean language sounds like a dialect to this person's ears. Please understand it.*
- ☐ *I mean, no matter what I give to her, she does not appreciate it.*

With the underestimating expressions, this study found that South Korean male entertainers played a role in teaching and educating North Korean female defectors who did not know many things regarding South Korean culture and lifestyle.

- *Call me “Oppa” If you are close to a man who older than you in South Korea, you call him “Oppa.”*
- *Why does your speech keep getting shorter? No matter how many years we have lived together, you are supposed to respect your husband, but you are treating me like a little brother. Someone might think I am younger than you.*

The second dominant theme in the dialogue of South Korean male entertainers is “Emotional Expression” (20%), which analyzed what kind of emotions South Korean male entertainers expressed toward North Korean female defectors. Figure B.8 demonstrates that South Korean male entertainers showed diverse emotional expressions, and “Annoyance” (9%) made up the largest proportion, followed by “Appreciation” (4%) and “Encouraging” (3%). South Korean male entertainers showed annoyed feelings toward North Korean wives who had many curiosities and were nagging at their husbands. For example:

- *I'm a little tired because there is a lot my wife wants to do.*
- *Go home if you think you are going to nag me.*
- *These days, it feels like you are opening up your work, and I'm wrapping up.*
- *I can't go with you because you're so old-fashioned. Just watch it quickly.*
- *Stop scolding me.*

Although the portions of “Appreciation” and “Encouraging” were relatively lower than “Annoyance,” South Korean male entertainers were proud of and appreciated their wise wives who were happy about even little things. The male entertainers also encouraged their wives to adapt well to South Korean society.

The third dominant theme of how South Korean male entertainers thought about North Korean female defectors is “Femininity” (14%). This theme examined how South Korean male entertainers portrayed North Korean female defectors in a feminine way. Figure B.9 explains that South Korean male entertainers considered North Korean female

defectors a worrisome person who needed to be taken care of, and they also thought that the female defectors were pure and beautiful.

- *I was worried that day. What if you climbed and fell from the tree? Even a monkey would fall from a tree. Isn't that what your parents have always said?*
- *You know you drank a lot last night. Why do you drink so much? As a husband, I must take care of this.*
- *North Korean women believe in everything. I could not make a joke because they thought all the jokes seriously.*
- *This is my wife, a beautiful woman from North Korea*

### *Self-Definition of North Korean Female Defectors*

*Research Question 3* asked, “How do North Korean female defectors on the television program define themselves and their identities?” To give an answer to the research question, this study emphasized the description of how North Korean female defectors explain themselves, and how they share their stories with South Korean male entertainers. This study collected total 75 times of mentions and found four main themes: “North Korean memories,” “Cultural ignorance,” “Masculinity,” and “Femininity.”

When it comes to the theme, “North Korean memories,” which accounted for the largest portion, it examined how much North Korean female defectors linked themselves and their stories to their memories in North Korea. This study found that North Korean female defectors showed a high tendency (53%) to link themselves and their stories to their old memories and experiences in North Korea. Identities can be depicted through various types of expressions (Oetzel, 2009), and the analysis of how North Korean female defectors expressed their stories and memories found that the female defectors continue to maintain their North Korean identity by linking themselves to their North Korean memories and experiences. Some examples follow:



- ☐ *I am a freshman in South Korea who has been here for almost a year. I lost my father in North Korea before I defected from the country. I haven't seen my father die. If my father were alive, I want him to see my dancing and singing.*
- ☐ *In North Korea, we wear traditional clothes when we have an important day, such as an event and meeting with a man who will be a future husband.*
- ☐ *When I see the mothers living here, I feel like I am watching North Koreans.*
- ☐ *The kitchen is excellent. This smell, local smell, is so good. It reminds me of old memories.*
- ☐ *It's the same snow I have seen in North Korea, but it looks different here.*

The second highest theme is “Cultural Ignorance” (21%), which focused on how North Korean female defectors on the television program culturally think of themselves in South Korea. This study found that the female defectors expressed their curiosity many times due to cultural and environmental differences, and that differences made them feel like strangers from other countries even if they spoke the same language. They also often underestimated themselves due to their lack of knowledge and experience in South Korea, but they showed strong sympathy for traditional factors such as communication with old generations and traditional houses. Examples follow:

- ☐ *I am very curious because I just came to South Korea.*
- ☐ *I've never seen a bug like this before in South Korea.*
- ☐ *I am a bit like an alien, so I don't know a lot.*
- ☐ *I have lived here for years, but it doesn't change at once. It takes a long time. The environment and culture are entirely different. Everything is different except for communication.*
- ☐ *How do I know the term “Beekeeping?” I should not have been here before. I should not have seen beekeeping. I don't know what it is.*
- ☐ *I am the only one who understands grandmothers' North Korean dialect.*
- ☐ *I think I am on good terms with older people.*
- ☐ *Even if the traditional house's bathroom is outside, I still like it.*

The remaining themes of self-definition of North Korean female defectors are “Masculinity” and “Femininity.” Figure B.10 shows that the percentage of “Masculinity” is a little bit higher (14%) than “Femininity” (11%). In the theme, “Masculinity,” the female defectors described themselves as strong people with a strong desire to win and a

strong attachment to life. Besides, through their conversations describing themselves, it showed that they were fearless and breadwinners taking responsibility for their husbands.

- ☐ *If I lose, I can't sleep well because I am stressed out.*
- ☐ *I have a strong attachment to life.*
- ☐ *I can live well. I can settle down well.*
- ☐ *I love climbing trees.*
- ☐ *I am also a woman, but I am doing all sorts of things.*

When it comes to “Femininity,” descriptions of purity and innocence were accounted for the highest part, followed by roles of supporting husbands, and housewives. The female defectors thought they had little experience in romantic relationships and believed in everything, including a small joke. They also expressed that they want to be a good wife supporting their husbands.

- ☐ *I have never been in a romantic relationship in North Korea before.*
- ☐ *I don't really know how to kiss. I have never done that before.*
- ☐ *Even if it is a joke, I just believe in everything.*
- ☐ *Usually, North Korean women don't eat first. After the guys are done eating, and if there is anything else left, we eat it.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Conclusion

#### *Discussion*

The reality television show, “South Korean Men, North Korean Women,” aimed to provide a mutual understanding between the two cultures of North and South Korea by showing the virtual marriage of South Korean male entertainers and North Korean female defectors. This study was particularly interested in how North Korean female defectors on the television program are depicted, and how their gender roles are described and ascribed. Thus, this study analyzed the television show’s captions, South Korean male entertainers’ dialogue, and North Korean female defectors’ self-descriptions.

The findings in this study provide some interesting factors when comparing previous studies. One of the studies demonstrates that the reality television program emphasized how South Korean male entertainers educate their North Korean wives to be good wives and become members of South Korean marriage systems. The male entertainers also played a role as saviors teaching their wives, who are the newcomers in South Korean society, and the female defectors' performance, such as attitude toward their husbands and a way of eating at the table, was evaluated (Cho, 2018).

This point of view is consistent with the findings from the dialogue of South Korean male entertainers, which were examined to understand how they think of their North Korean wives. The male entertainers also regarded that North Korean female defectors have many curiosities, and they are in the process of adapting to South Korean

cultures. One of the male entertainers' roles was to teach their wives to become good adapters in South Korean society, but one interesting point is that the female defectors on the show were evaluated and underestimated due to their lack of knowledge and ignorance about South Korean society and cultures.

Previous studies also highlight that North Korean female defectors on the television show were depicted as docile wives who subordinate to their husbands (Cho, 2018), and their images are often regarded as beautiful, soft, and pure women (Min-Yeong, 2012). These analyses are supported by the findings from the television show's captions describing North Korean female defectors. The findings show that the female defectors' roles were more focused on the images of beautiful and pure people taking care of their husbands.

However, unlike the previous findings, the television show also placed emphasis on the female defectors as strong characters dealing with various issues on behalf of their husbands. This may be because all North Korean women have the primary burden of taking care of their family's livelihood, and their roles as a breadwinner were more expanded due to the food crisis, which caused unsurmountable starvation deaths in the 1990s (Lim, 2005). Therefore, the female defectors on the television program were depicted as strong characters who have a strong living ability and responsibilities for their families and husbands.

Furthermore, this study explored how North Korean female defectors define themselves and their identities, and how they were influenced by external factors. External factors, such as media, literature, art, and interaction and conversation between people, affect and change the cultural identities (Collier, 1997). Additionally, Collier

(1997) argued others' stereotypes and communicated views could play a role in attributing and ascribing individuals' identities. This study analyzed whether external factors, such as media depiction of North Korean defectors, and South Korean male entertainers' perspectives of North Korean female defectors, influence the female defectors' identities or not.

When it comes to the media depiction, the reality television show distinguished North Korean female defectors from their South Korean husbands by repeatedly using the term of "North Korean wife or bride" rather than a standard term such as "Wife." Distinctions between members of cultural groups and those of others result in a sense of superiority or favoritism or prejudice (Oetzel, 2009). In this view, South Korean male entertainers can be seen as belonging to the major cultural group, while those of others are North Korean female defectors. South Korean male entertainers on the television program considered their wives as newcomers in South Korean society who have many curiosities and questions. The male entertainers showed underestimation and annoyance toward their wives' lack of knowledge and experience in South Korea, but they taught and educated their wives to understand and adapt well to South Korean culture and society. The South Korean male entertainers' dialogue implies that they perceive themselves as superior to North Korean female defectors. Oetzel (2009) discussed that individuals' identities excluding from the main group are ascribed and placed in a lower or inferior position by the main group's privilege. The female defectors on the show were placed in a lower or inferior position, and the privileged roles of South Korean male entertainers may have an influence on how the female defectors self-define themselves and their identities.

The above two factors, distinction between North Korean female defectors and South Korean male entertainers, and South Korean male entertainers' privileged roles over North Korean female defectors, may have impacted how the female defectors on the television show define themselves and their identities. While adapting to a new place or culture, newcomers face various factors, such as learning language and culture, perspective taking, compromising, ignoring, or passive acceptance. In particular, defining identities can be varied depending on the level of integration with new cultures (Ni, Wang, & Gogate, 2018). When the female defectors described themselves, their experiences, and personal stories, they showed a high tendency to link these parts to their memories in North Korea. They leaned more toward their home culture. This phenomenon may be explained that the female defectors showed passive acceptance and low integration with South Korean cultures, and it reveals that the female defectors on the program continued to maintain their North Korean identity.

Moreover, North Korean female defectors on the show recognized themselves who have many curiosities but lacked cultural experience and knowledge in South Korea. A lack of cultural competence, such as lack of cultural understanding, lack of shared contexts, and lack of cultural-specific knowledge, generates stress to newcomers (Ni et al., 2018). From this point of view, the female defectors may experience various types of stress since they felt that they lacked specific knowledge and cultural understanding in South Korea. This may affect them to continue their North Korean identities by bringing in their North Korean memories and experience in order to avoid the stress. These findings confirm the external effects may play a role in influencing how the female defectors publicly portray themselves.

Consequently, many parts of this study's findings support and follow the previous studies. The last interesting point is that the reality television show provides conflicting results. The show's captions emphasized portraying the role of North Korean female defectors as femininity and masculinity, but the female defectors and South Korean male entertainers leaned to the theme of "Cultural Ignorance." This means that the television show tended to focus more on the female defectors' feminine and masculine roles, while both the female defectors and South Korean male entertainers were interested in cultural factors.

For the limitations, this study includes the limited sample episodes and small numbers of cast members on the television show. This study gathered and analyzed only 14 episodes among the 142 episodes. The remaining episodes were not available through an online search, even on the main website of the television program. For the 14 episodes, the main cast members were three North Korean female defectors and three South Korean male entertainers. This study provides insights into how South Korean media depict North Korean female defectors, and how South Korean men think of them. However, the limitations of the small sample size and limited numbers of episodes cannot generalize and represent South Korean media outlets, South Koreans, and North Korean female defectors.

Moreover, even though two researchers in this study collected data from the television show and coded it together, biased perspectives may have existed during the translation from Korean to English and the creation of main themes. Furthermore, the effects of how the television program affected audiences' attitudes toward North Korean female defectors were not measured. This study also did not compare how South Korean

and North Korean wives are differently depicted in the media. Therefore, further studies, such as examining how the television program influenced audiences' perspectives and attitudes toward North Korean female defectors, and how South Korean media programs differently treat South Korean and North Korean wives, may be required. In addition, there are several television shows broadcasting North Korean female defectors, and studies comparing the differences and similarities between the television programs and analyzing how the programs differently treat North Korean female defectors may be appropriate.

### *Conclusion*

More than 30,000 North Korean defectors live in South Korea, of which nearly 70% are women (Ministry of Unification, 2020). As the number of North Korean female defectors increases, the female defectors are becoming TV stars through South Korean television programs (Elise, 2016). This study investigated how South Korean media programs depicted images and gender roles of North Korean female defectors by conducting a qualitative content analysis of a reality television show "South Korean Men, North Korean Women," which provides more humanized images of the female defectors.

The findings demonstrated that the reality television show emphasized portraying the roles of North Korean female defectors as feminine and masculine, while the female defectors and South Korean male entertainers in the show more focused on cultural factors. Consequently, this study broadens our knowledge and background regarding North Korean culture and North Korean defectors, and how North Korean female defectors are portrayed in South Korean media.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Codebooks

Table A.1. Themes Coded by the Television Show's Captions

Theme	Description	References
1. North Korean wife or bride	The television show repeatedly utilized the term "North Korean wife or bride," while not using many times of the term "South Korean husband."	188
2. Femininity	This theme demonstrates how North Korean female defectors' roles are depicted in the television show as femininity.	140
2-1. Caring	North Korean female defectors take care of and work for their husbands.	55
2-2. Beauty and purity	This theme describes how much North Korean female defectors are pure and beautiful.	33
2-3. Worrying	North Korean female defectors are worried about their husbands.	18
2-4. Housewife's role	North Korean female defectors are depicted as housewives at the house.	16
2-5. Supporting	North Korean female defectors support and encourage their husbands.	9
2-6. Relying on husband	North Korean female defectors rely on their husbands.	8
2-7. Loving husband	North Korean female defectors show their love to their husbands.	1

(Continued)

Theme	Description	References
3. Masculinity	This theme depicted North Korean female defectors as a strong character who has leadership and strong desire to win.	83
3-1. Changing roles	North Korean female defectors were usually portrayed dealing with many complex tasks on behalf of their husbands, and the roles between them and their husbands are changed.	31
3-2. A strong personality	North Korean female defectors were described as strong personalities.	20
3-3. A strong desire to win	North Korean female defectors show a strong desire to win the competitions.	16
3-4. Ordering to husband	The role of the female defectors here was to order and teach their husbands to handle several issues.	7
3-5. Hardworking	North Korean female defectors work hard for their jobs.	4
3-6. Solving	North Korean female defectors play a role as solvers dealing with problems on behalf of their husbands.	3
3-7. Being afraid of wife	South Korean male entertainers are afraid of their wives.	2
4. Cultural ignorance	This theme focused on how the television show culturally portrayed North Korean female defectors.	53
4-1. Ignorance and curiosity	North Korean female defectors have many curiosities and a lack of knowledge regarding South Korean cultures and society.	34
4-2. South Korean lifestyle	North Korean female defectors realize and understand the South Korean lifestyle.	4

(Continued)

Theme	Description	References
4-3. Underestimation	North Korean female defectors are underestimated regarding their experiences and skills.	4
4-4. Foreigners	North Korean female defectors are described as foreigners from other countries.	3
4-5. Old-fashioned	North Korean female defectors prefer traditional factors such as a traditional house.	3
4-6. Surprised exposure	North Korean female defectors wore short clothes, which were described as too much exposure.	3
4-7. Age difference	The age gap is large between South Korean male entertainers and North Korean female defectors, who are younger than their husbands.	2
5. Dexterity	North Korean female defectors are talented and professional in many parts, including speaking Chinese.	25
6. North Korean stories	North Korean female defectors share their memories and experience developed in North Korea.	17
7. Emotional expression	North Korean female defectors' emotional expressions to their husbands.	10

Table A.2. Themes of South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors

Theme	Description	References
1. Cultural ignorance	This theme focused on how South Korean male entertainers think of North Korean female defectors, and what cultural factors exist.	64
1-1. Underestimation	South Korean male entertainers show underestimating expressions to North Korean female defectors.	23
- Ordering	South Korean male entertainers order their wives to do something instead of discussing it.	6
1-2. Curiosity and differentiation	South Korean male entertainers ask questions to their wives regarding North Korean culture and their wives' experiences and memories developed in North Korea. They also distinguish themselves from their wives due to many differences between the two cultures except for the language.	21
1-3. Teaching	South Korean male entertainers teach their wives regarding South Korean culture and system.	11
1-4. Old-fashioned	South Korean male entertainers mention their wives are old-fashioned and traditional.	8
1-5. Age difference	South Korean male entertainers mention the age gap between them and their wives.	1
2. Emotional expression	South Korean male entertainers show diverse emotional expressions toward their wives.	29
2-1. Annoyance	South Korean male entertainers are annoyed by their wives asking many questions or nagging at them.	10

(Continued)

Theme	Description	References
2-2. Appreciation	South Korean male entertainers are appreciated by their wives.	7
2-3. Encouraging	South Korean male entertainers encourage their wives not to be frustrated.	5
2-4. Jealous	South Korean male entertainers are jealous of their wives' talents.	2
2-5. Romantic expression	South Korean male entertainers show romantic expressions with romantic words to their wives.	2
2-6. Apologize	South Korean male entertainers apologize to their wives.	1
2-7. Distrust	South Korean male entertainers distrust their wives.	1
2-8. Impatient wife	South Korean male entertainers mention their wives being impatient.	1
3. Femininity	South Korean male entertainers think of their wives as feminine ways.	21
3-1. Beauty and purity	South Korean male entertainers express their wives are beautiful and pure.	10
3-2. Need to Take Care of	South Korean male entertainers think that they need to take care of their wives.	5
3-3. Housewife	South Korean male entertainers think of their wives as housewives.	3
3-4. Worried	South Korean male entertainers are worried about their wives.	3
4. Masculinity	South Korean male entertainers describe their wives as masculine roles who have a strong personality and desire to win the competitions.	13

(Continued)

Theme	Description	References
5. Dexterity	South Korean male entertainers think that their wives are talented and good at diverse areas.	4

Table A.3. Themes of Self-Definition of North Korean Female Defectors

Theme	Description	References
1. Reminding North Korean memories	When North Korean female defectors share their experiences and personal stories, they link them to their memories developed in North Korea.	31
2. Cultural ignorance	North Korean female defectors show not only many curiosities regarding South Korean cultures and social systems but also a lack of knowledge and experience in South Korea.	19
3. Masculinity	North Korean female defectors describe themselves in masculine ways, such as a strong personality and desire to win the competitions.	15
4. Femininity	North Korean female defectors describe themselves as feminine ways, such as people who are pure and submissive to their husbands.	13
4-1. Purity	North Korean female defectors believe in every small joke, and they have little experience in dating.	6
4-2. Submissive to husband	North Korean female defectors are submissive to their husbands.	3
4-3. Housewife	North Korean female defectors define their roles as housewives.	2
4-4. Husband's wife	North Korean female defectors define themselves as their husbands' wives.	1
4-5. Feeble	North Korean female defectors describe their physical strengths.	1

## APPENDIX B

### Figures

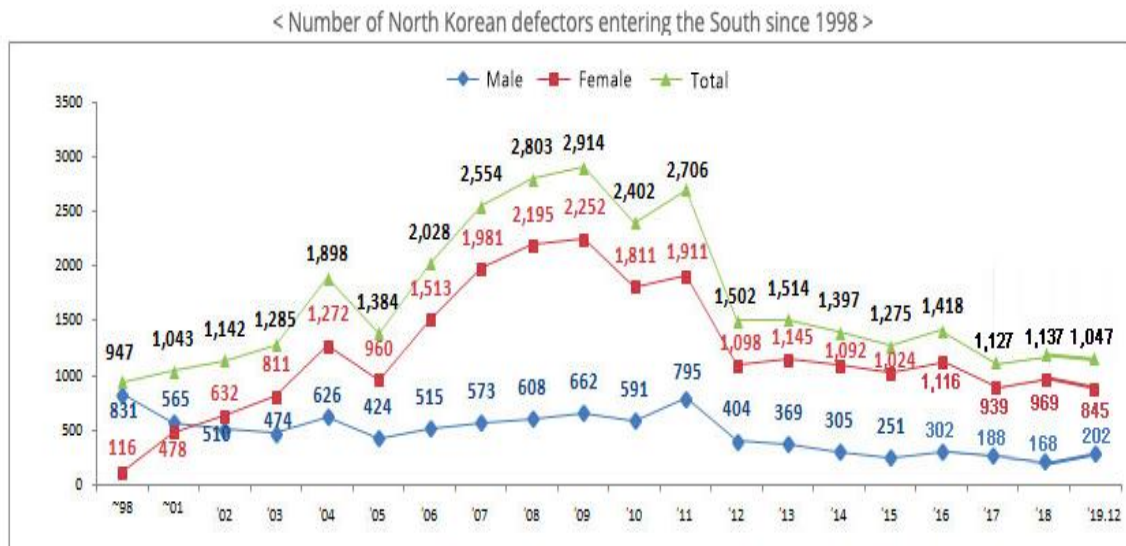


Figure B.1. Number of North Korean Defectors Entering the South Since 1998 (Source: The Ministry of Unification)

Captions' Dominant Themes Depicting North Korean Female Defectors

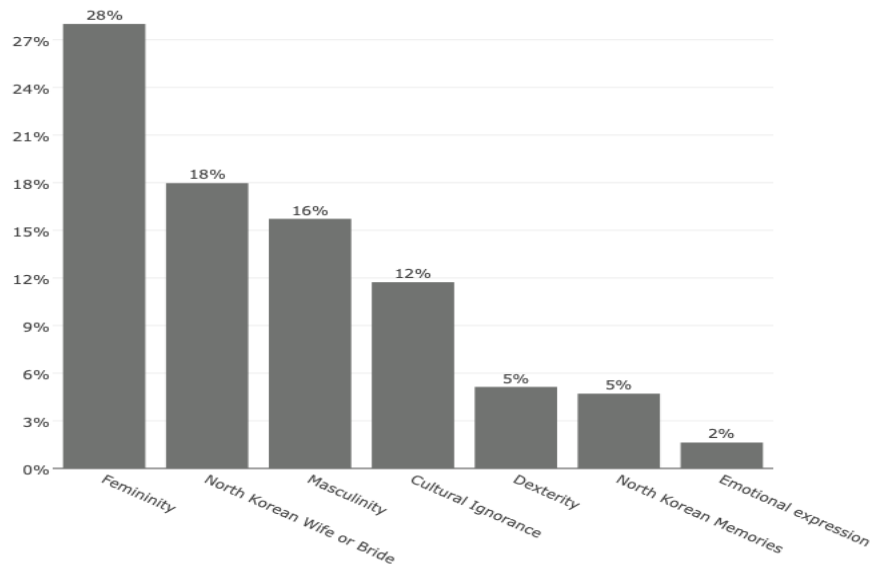
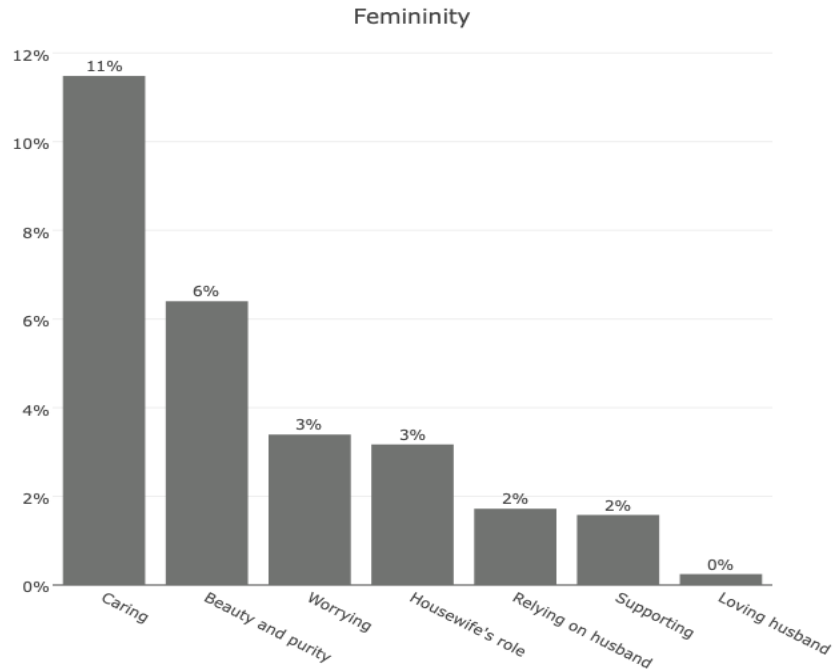
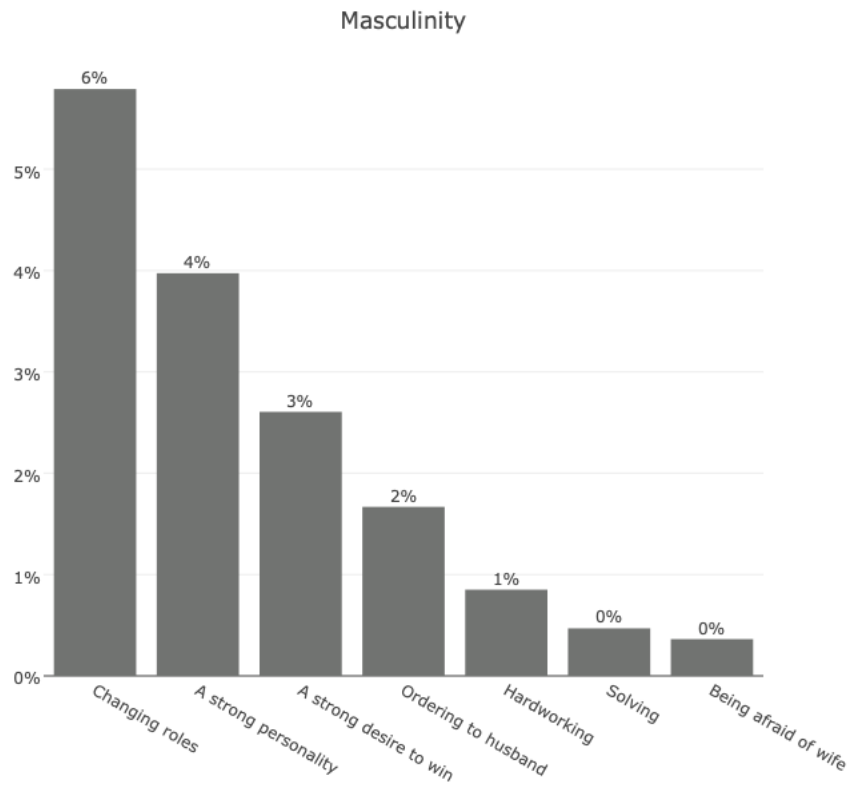


Figure B.2. Captions' Dominant Themes Depicting North Korean Female Defectors

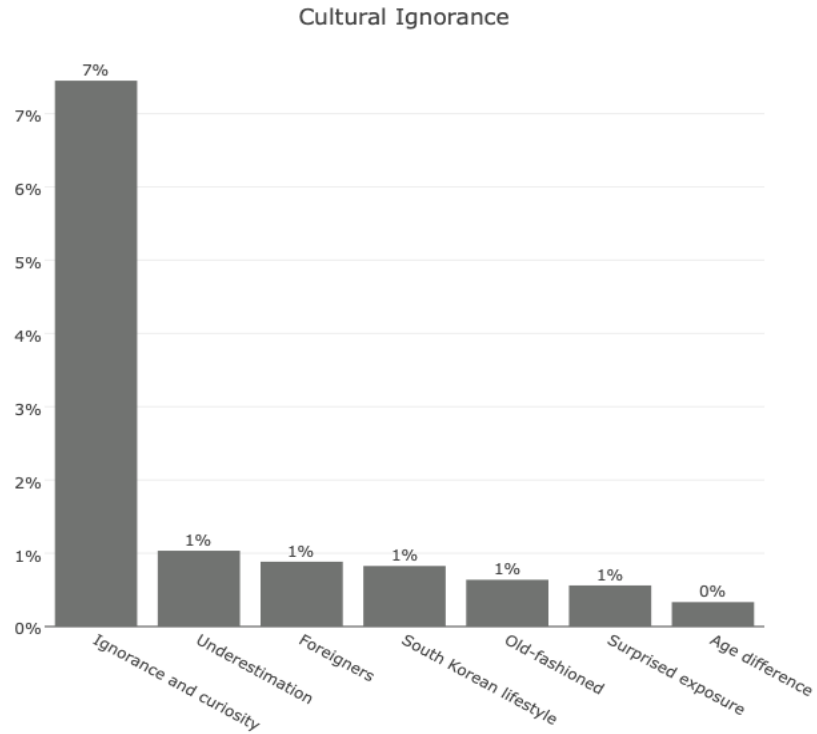




*Figure B.3.* Captions' First Dominant Theme Depicting North Korean Female Defectors

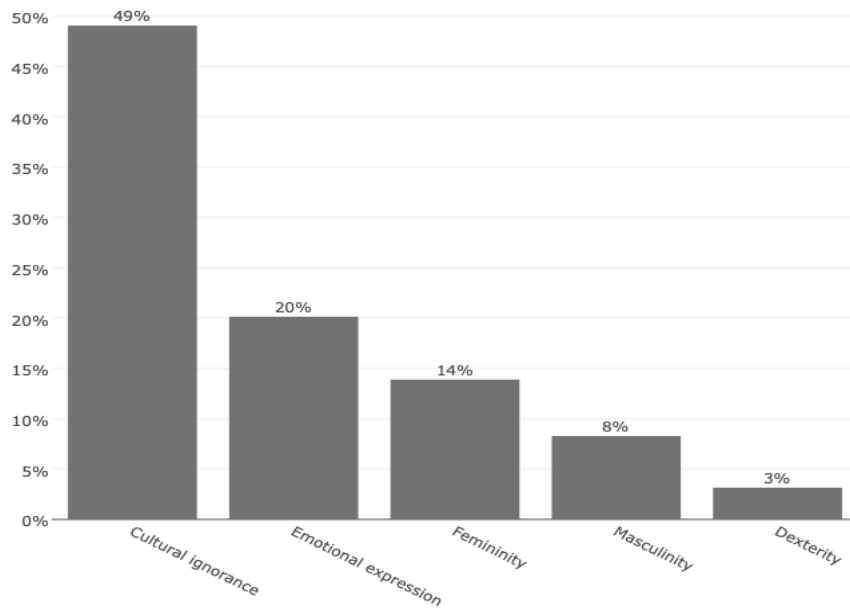


*Figure B.4.* Captions' Third Dominant Theme Depicting North Korean Female Defectors

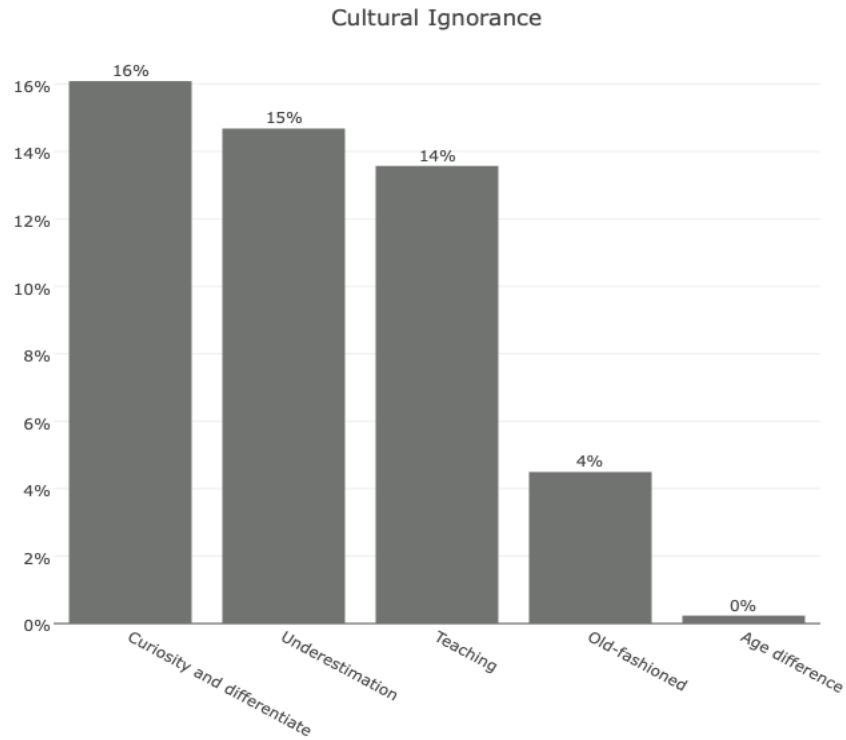


*Figure B.5.* Captions' Fourth Dominant Theme Depicting North Korean Female Defectors

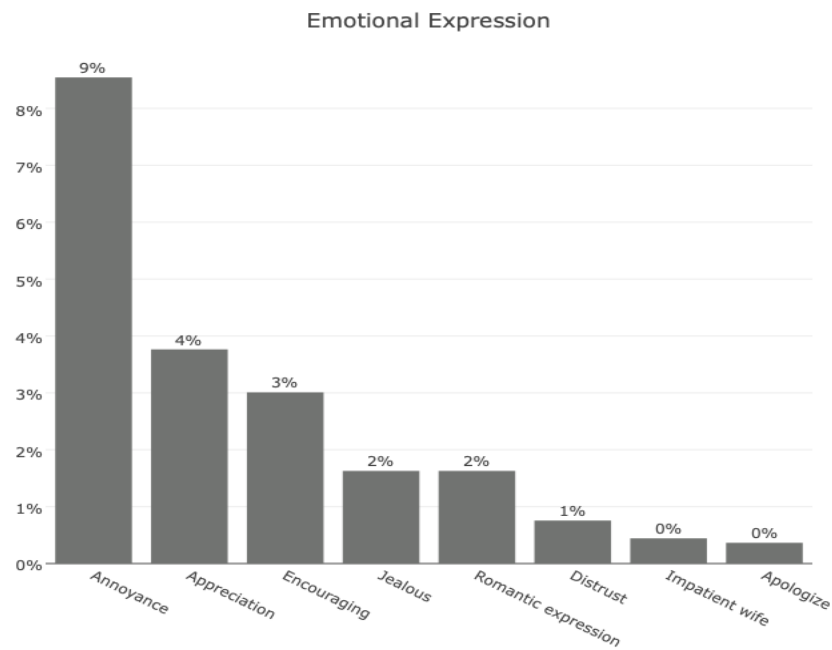
South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors



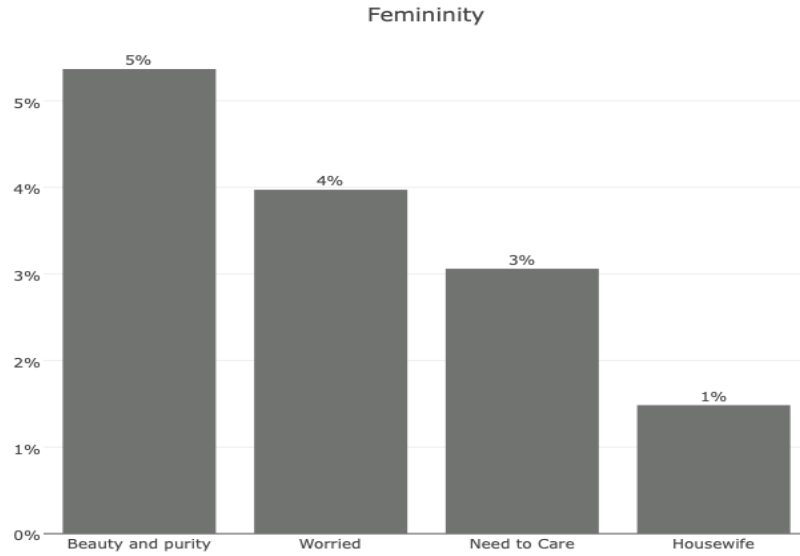
*Figure B.6.* Dominant Themes of South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors



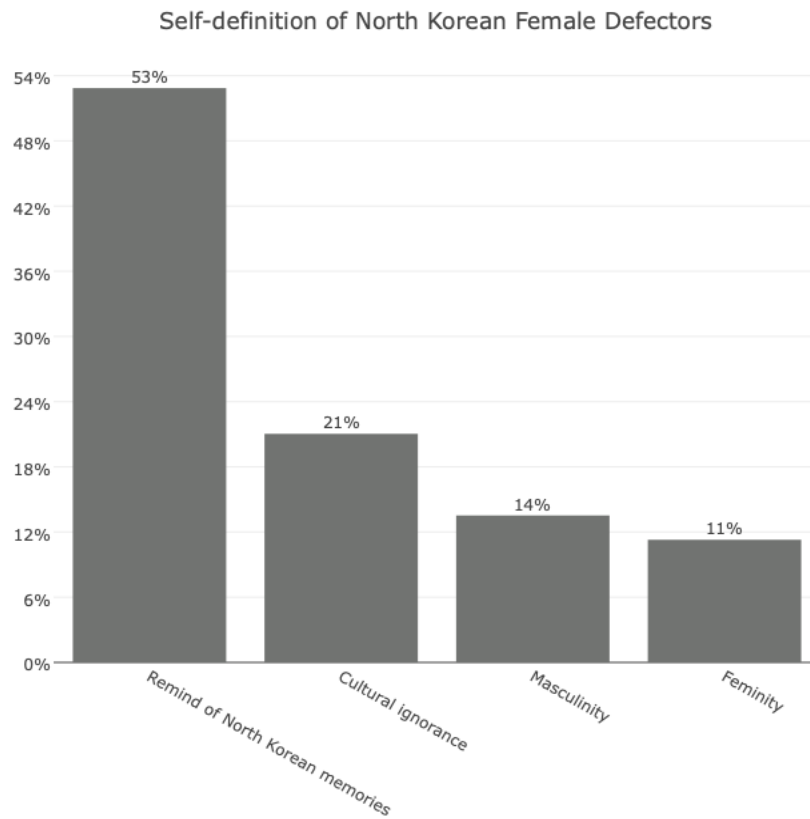
*Figure B.7.* First Dominant Theme of South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors



*Figure B.8.* Second Dominant Theme of South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors



*Figure B.9.* Third Dominant Them of South Korean Male Entertainers' Dialogue Describing North Korean Female Defectors



*Figure B.10.* Dominant Themes of Self-definition of North Korean Female Defectors

## APPENDIX C

### Tables

Table C.1. The gender composition of North Korean defectors arriving in South Korea per year

Year	Male	Female	Total Number	Female Rate
2011	795	1,911	2,706	70.6%
2012	404	1,098	1,502	73.1%
2013	369	1,145	1,514	75.6%
2014	305	1,092	1,397	78.2%
2015	251	1,024	1,275	80.3%
2016	302	1,116	1,418	78.7%
2017	188	939	1,127	83.3%
2018	168	969	1,137	85.2%
2019	202	845	1,047	80.7%
2020	72	157	229	68.6%
Total	9,402	24,256	33,658	72.0%

Source: This Modified table based on data from the South Korean Ministry of Unification (2020)

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