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# **Walking the life path to success:**

*Discovering the Experiences of Job-Seeking Young Adults in  
Korea.*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the job-seeking experiences of Korean young adults to see how the choices of future careers have been made. Its knowledge was gained by a qualitative research method which interprets the meanings of the participants' experiences. 12 interviews were conducted in total and in-depth narratives were presented to them. The theoretical approaches have made that two sociological theories from Hongjung Kim and Nikolas Rose provide insight by focusing on the social-economical structure of modern society. The results turned out that the 'atmosphere' of competition and 'normalized path' is guiding the lives of Korean young adults to believe and act in an economical way which can be conceptualized as 'neoliberal culture'. Additionally, various emotions and many hardships experiences are observed though its logic was related to their situation that to endlessly seek their personal success which is forced by the 'neoliberal culture'. However, even though the existing system is rigid, the participants were living a life of their own, by recognizing the power and logic of the structure and feeling true happiness through desiring their own dreams.

**Keywords:** job-seeking process, Korean young adults, neoliberalism, survivalism, enterprising self

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this paper to all those young adults who strive for their lives to survive out of this world, when the world is unsurvivable. It would be the most meaningful for this paper if it could console them in some way.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background: Life of Korean young adults

Since the economic growth slowed down after the 1997 Asian financial crisis in Korea, the unemployment rate has rapidly increased<sup>1</sup>. In order to find a job, job seekers must put in a considerable amount of time and effort, this situation has been especially difficult for young adults who are looking for jobs. The Korean people as a whole have had to go through difficult times due to this, although the situation for young adults have were even more competitive than in other generations. According to data from Statistics Korea, the youth (17~27 years old) unemployment rate in 2000 was 8.1%, 3.7% higher than the total rate (4.4%) (Shin, 2015). Also, the average youth unemployment rate from 2010 to 2020 raised to 10.1% when the total rate indicated only 3.6% (Kim, 2021). Due to such an economic situation, many terms have been made and used in Korean society to represent young adults. The book '*Generation of 880,000 won*' by Sukhoon Woo exerted a huge influence on society after it is released in 2007. Many young adults recognize themselves in the explanation about how young adults born in 1988 are suffering from severe competition to get a job. It also criticizes that severe competition in the job market lets the survivor of the fittest is the rule of law. Because young adults are under the strain of competition, many other terms have been followed and used throughout society. N-po generation<sup>2</sup>, Abandoned generation, Ikea generation<sup>3</sup>, Chee-po generation<sup>4</sup> etc., are the terms that represent such generations who are

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<sup>1</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout occurred in 1997 in Korea which led to the bankruptcy of numerous enterprises, and large-scale restructuring of enterprises was unavoidable. It created a significant amount of unemployment and homeless people. Also, the consumption and leisure life of Koreans shrank dramatically and the gap between the social classes has been broadened (Kim, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> A generation that gives up N things such as date, marriage, child, house, employment, personal relationship, happiness etc.

<sup>3</sup> A term which compares the character of 20-30s and IKEA products. Youngsoo Jun had defined the features of IKEA products as, inexpensive, excellent in design, durable for price, incomplete/built-up products, and short-term satisfaction. These features can be compared with Korean 20-the 30s as, low salaries but excellent ability, short-term employment in contrast to their high qualification, unfinished/self-help, and unplanned life (Jun, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> A Chee-po is short for chee-up-po-gee, which stands for giving up on finding employment. It refers to the generation of young adults who cannot get a job because of the stagnant labour market

heavily affected by the unstable and bogged-down economic situation in Korea.

As these terms have made their way into the common vernacular, the situation that young adults find themselves in has been recognized by society as a whole and the media. Many studies and reports have shown how young adults in Korea feel unhappiness and express negative emotions about their experience of finding a job. One of the reports investigated the happiness and psychological stability among Koreans, and the people in their twenties rated the highest among all the age groups in feelings of unhappiness and ranked the lowest in general well-being and self-esteem (Lee, 2019). Likewise, KBIZ Korea Federation of SMEs reports that young job seekers showed negative emotions like “anxious” (82%), “lethargic” (65%), and “depressed” (55%) (SMEs, 2021). With these concerns, German Korean philosopher Byungchul Han criticizes such social phenomena because of being a competitive society. He says in the documentary ‘*Müdigkeitsgesellschaft*’ that Korean society has shifted to a service-oriented society where people self-exploit themselves to maximize the profit and outcome of their effort. He is sharply pointing out that pathological symptoms such as ashamed and lethargic could be a consequence of passionately exploiting themselves which is a standard of today’s service-oriented society and neoliberalism (Gresser, 2015). His account of the relationship between the neo-liberalized Korean society and the pathological symptoms of the Koreans at present exerted a huge influence throughout the society. It is not a coincidence happening that his work and a lot of generational terms come into the spotlight of the public. The mass and the media seem to have realized the seriousness of the struggle that Korean young adults face while seeking a career and the consequences that follow.

Along with the public's attention to the issue, popular books and media have actively devoted their efforts to spotting the harsh life of Korean young adults. After the ‘*Generation of 880,000 won*’ was published, various books about young adults’ lives were published after another and gained the public's attention. Since the ‘*Generation of 880,000 won*’ was focused on political and economical issues, it has been criticized for the reason that it only contains the voice of older generations, subsequently neglecting the diversity of life of young adults. In this regard, young writers raise their voices to show how young adults could live life autonomously including various topics such as: “criticism of older generations consoling the young”, “Multifaceted representation of autonomous young adults”, and “self-reliance and policy for young adults” (Lee & Yun, 2018, p. 90). It seems that consuming those popular



books has become one of the social-cultural habits among young adults<sup>5</sup>. Young adults are actively involved in producing the new discourse in our society to express their experienced lives and identities. However, when those voices come to the fore through the media, the voices are replaced by older generations which distorts the original tone of voice. In fact, a great number of media has covered the issues of young generations in recent years, however, most of the articles were published by other generations. Seongi Kim (2016) demonstrates in his paper that news articles about young adults were mostly written by older generations (509 cases, 91%) while only 41 cases (7%) appear to be young adults (p. 47). Though, if the facts about the lives of young adults were formed and spread by older generations, there would be an issue where the experienced life of young adults and their identity is being distorted. For this reason, it is important to derive the voices directly from the person in question: the young adults in Korea. Highlighting the voices of young adults appears to be a significant task for Korean society, perhaps as important as examining the structure behind it.

## 1.2 Research question and aim

It is a well-known fact that Korean society is severely competitive in pursuing higher education. Korean Economic Research Institute (KERI) shows that Korea ranked first for 10 years in a row in the rate of young adults (25~34 years old) attaining higher education among OECD countries (KERI, 2020). However, the rate of the economically inactive population scored the third highest among the 37 countries in OECD. It could be seen that pursuing educational success is considered the way to get a better job opportunity among young adults in Korea. Moreover, the rate of field-of-study mismatch<sup>6</sup> was 50% in Korea, which is the highest among 22 OECD countries (Montt, 2015, p. 11). To summarize, entering university is a highly common path in life for young adults in Korea, but many university students have to suffer from the gap between the competencies of the job market and their studies in

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<sup>5</sup> One of the biggest online bookstores ‘YES24’ has compared the best seller books for the 20-30s from the early 2010s and 2020s. It showed that when books of older generations consoling young were a mega hit during the 2010s, the books about telling young adults’ lifestyles and their identity by themselves became the best seller trends (Yes24, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Montt (2015) noted that “the field-of-study mismatch refers to a case where a worker may be matched to the job in terms of the key information-processing skills possessed or the quality of schooling received but not by the type of schooling received” (as cited in Robst, 2008; Sloane, 2003, Quintini, 2011a, p. 7).

university. Students experience intensive pressure not only to gain a good grade in their university exams but also to get involved in extracurricular activities for their future careers. Considering the life of young adults in Korea is linked to their surrounding social and cultural background, studying their experience of seeking a future career would be meaningful for society.

As such, composing a picture of the life of Korean young adults is the focal point of this paper, and it will do so by using qualitative research methods to highlight individuals' choices and acts regarding their future careers. This study aims to analyze how the choices of future careers have been made throughout the lives of young adults. In this regard, stories of difficulties and sufferings during their lives will be interpreted and related emotions, judgement, and values will also be discovered throughout the paper.

Thus, the following overall question will guide this paper:

*How do young adults in Korea experience their own and others' expectations of a career?*

To examine their experiences in a detailed account, further questions will help to gain insight into it.

- 1. How is the surrounding atmosphere perceived by the participants?*
- 2. Which direction are they guiding themselves in relation to their judgements, actions, and believed values?*
- 3. How do they feel about their life of seeking careers?*
- 4. How are they facing the difficulties to fit in themselves for job-seeking experience?*
- 5. How do they describe the meaning of their life living in their 20s in Korea?*
- 6. Despite the dominance of job-seeking life, how are they desiring their own dream?*

Six of each question will be answered by the subsequent analysis chapters which are divided into six chapters. First, chapter 5.1 defines the existing 'atmosphere' perceived by the interviewees which correspond to the first question. Second, chapter 5.2 provides the meaning of the 'normalized' path which indicates the specific type of lifestyle they prefer. Third, chapter 5.3 answers the third question that it discovers the existing emotions and uncovers the related values, behaviours, and desires they believe as true. Fourth, chapter 5.4 illustrates the stories by which some of the participants confess their hardship throughout their job-seeking process. Fifth, chapter 5.5 corresponds to question number 5, which

describes the meaning of experiencing job seeking process by using the direct voices of Korean young adults. Finally, sixth, chapter 5.6 illustrates the experiences that some of the interviewees have a fluttering heart in their lives despite the existing rigid system of neoliberal culture.

At this point, it is much important to clarify that this study focuses on Korean young adults' lives from perspectives of "survivalism" and "enterprising self" which were theorized by Hongjung Kim and Nikolas Rose. It implies that this paper will highlight the social structure in which the system of neoliberalism controls the lives of Korean young adults to feel, believe, and act in a certain way.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter will summarize and interpret some relevant existing research regards the topic of our matter and disclose my position as a researcher within the following discussions. It will review the related studies by covering two major points which are considered to be important for young adult studies. The first section is about the common meaning of 'young adults' which is formed by the media and widely accepted science studies. The second section concerns the life of young adults with the social-economical structure in Korean society. On this basis, it will introduce previous studies to analyze the social structures they use to point out the experience of young adults in Korea.

### 2.1 The common meaning of 'young adult'

Many studies about young adults have covered the issue of the hardship they face while seeking employment in Korea. Ever since the increased unemployment rate of young adults and severe competition among them caught the attention of the media, a great part of research conducted in Korea is also being devoted to interpreting the young adults' identity. Because this understanding of young adults is disseminated within Korean society, it is a significant area of research that aims to investigate the meaning and discussions around it.

As I mentioned above, '*generation of 880,000 won*' opened the discussions in media discourse and has been coined since then. When it comes to the media discourse, it was one

of their central points to show how the hegemonic discourse changed throughout time and to analyze how young adults are seen in their discourse, and what kinds of political structures lie behind it (Lee & Kang, 2018; Pang & Yoo, 2015; Song & Lee, 2017). In the case of Pang and Yoo (2015), they analyze the concepts which identify the characteristics of young adults in terms of the ways of living their lives. They collect the concepts from the media and analyzed the concepts by comparing them with their different political viewpoint to understand the life of Korean young adults. It mainly stresses the contrasting standpoints of the media regarding the understanding of the image of Korean young adults. For example, while the newspaper Chosun Ilbo explains the concept of the “G generation” by which young adults are important for the future to bring glory to Korea with their “Globalized mind”, the newspaper Kyunghyang highlights the uncertain and competitive circumstance of Korean society that they name the young adults as “N-po generation” which alludes to the harsh reality in which young jobseekers in Korea find themselves in (Pang & Yoo, 2015, p. 46). In addition, Song and Lee (2017) explore the detailed emotions and circumstances of young adults by investigating their inconsistent life based on the N-po generation discourse. They collect the autonomous voices of Korean young adults by interviewing them about their opinion on the N-po generation discourse and analyze their voices in detail through qualitative research. They explain the meanings and the experiences of young adults, describing the complicated circumstances by which an unsecured and unstable life world is embodied in those young adults. Those respondents were showing their agreement with the N-po generation discourse which depicts society as a stark law of nature, but also, they were criticizing how such dominant discourse neglects the other aspects of their lives.

## 2.2 Life of Korean young adults and the social structure

As mentioned earlier, the studies concerning young adults in Korea are interested in observing the relationship between young adults and their social lives and how their experiences shape their behaviour, thoughts, and their emotions. Judging by their perspectives, it seems as though there is a relationship between the socio-economic structure and changes and their experiences. Therefore, it is important to centre the analysis on the relationship between the social-economical factors and the related experience of young adults. According to studies of young adults in Korea, the most significant socio-economic change

that affected the lives of young people seems to be the rise of neoliberalism in the 2000s. One of the papers from Eun et al. (2011) aims to explain the process of transition into early adulthood and how experience is formed through following the path of the modernized life course. It describes that the power of the social structure is continuously affecting the life of the young adults which is embedded in the society producing a dominant meaning of the 'life course' (Eun et al., 2011, p. 8). Because the modernized Korean society went through a neoliberal economic development, they point out that difficulties and struggles would be experienced distinctively by class (Eun et al., 2011, p. 10). In such an uncertain time in their lives, young adults looking for work require multiple resources such as support from their parents among others. However, working-class young adults experience this phase of their lives differently from those of the classes above them due to their economic and social disadvantages. (Eun et al., 2011, p. 7). The paper elaborates on the anticipated role as 'an adult' for working-class young adults by focusing on this specific time of their life. It describes the relationship between the family members and the young adults by presenting their circumstances whereby they lack the resources for their career-seeking process and university admittance. They also interpret the surrounding economical circumstances of those young adults and their life experiences by presenting an in-depth narrative of the young adults.

Again, analyzing the life of young adults can be approached by classifying them as a homogeneous group that highlights the commonness of their experience. For instance, the following two papers explain their points by emphasizing the features of the social change in the 2000s in Korea. Cho (2015) and Lee and Yu (2013) each derive the features of young adults by classifying and categorizing them by the year. By their definition, the criterion of classification is determined by the social-economic changes in Korean society. In the case of Lee and Yu (2013), they define the "Y generation" as a young adult who was born between 1977 to 1995 and experienced economical affluence and the advantage of technology (Lee & Yu, 2013, p. 17). As a result, the Y generation wants a similar standard of living that is characterized by a balanced life, in which they tend to prioritize their own leisure time compared to other generations such as the millennials and X generation (Lee & Yu, 2013, pp. 16-17). Similarly, Cho (2015) refers to a "new generation" who were born after 1970, with the shared background of the rapid economic growth of the 1980s as their common background (Cho, 2015, p. 441). From her point, the new generation values freedom and self-

expression and a devotion to it selves to creative immaterial labour and their life projects of self-realization (Cho, 2015, pp. 442-443). Since both papers cover similar social factors to explain the similarly aged group of young adults' life, both lead to the strong statement that such economical transition in Korea influenced the formation of lifestyle and perception of those young adults.

With regards to the explanation of the experience, Kong and Yang (2012) examine how job-seeking young adults interact with their surrounding individuals, and their social circumstances by deploying in-depth interviews. One of the interesting points they came across was that interviewees express their anxiety about their future careers and worries in terms of failing in their job-hunting process which eventually put 'stability' above all the values of their lives (Kong & Yang, 2012, p. 54). Even though the interviewees had different backgrounds and surrounding environments, shared emotions and directing points were observed among them (Kong & Yang, 2012, pp. 55-56). Many interviewees describe that they feel anxious, restless, and guilty when they meet with failure during the job-seeking process and that they even voluntarily sever their social relations with all their friends because they believe future employment will solve all their life problems even their relationship with their friends (Kong & Yang, 2012, p. 56). This suggests that their similar circumstances caused them to experience resembling emotions which eventually shaped their beliefs, actions, and lives.

While Kong and Yang (2012) focused on the surrounding relationships of job-seeking young adults, Korean humanist, Kiho Uhm (Uhm, 2014) attempts to bring those microscopic discussions to a Further critical interpretation of Korean social structure. He assembles papers from his university students that depict their experiences of their struggles and thoughts about the social structure with a comprehensive analysis. He illustrates that the students call themselves "superfluous things", which means Korean young adults see themselves as surplus things in society (Uhm, 2014, pp. 56-61). However, in reality, they have their hands full of things to do and too many things to manage in their life when they become adults (Uhm, 2014, p. 59). Students live their lives occupied with work and studies in the name of 'freedom', but in fact, such word of freedom is made by capital which conceals the fact that the market is unsustainable (Uhm, 2014, p. 60). Because students live a life busy reaching the impossible goal under the name of freedom, it is why they call themselves "superfluous things" by attributing the failure to themselves (Uhm, 2014, pp. 60-61). One noteworthy

account from the university students claims that: “I came here because people say one cannot live a life as a human unless you go to university, but.. I don’t think I can live as a human being now” (Uhm, 2014, p. 68). In his book, students speak their minds about how they are going through such hard and tough times in their lives, but still, their lives continue with endless work and studies for their future careers. Another important reason for calling themselves “superfluous things” is that they have no particular goals in their life, but they repeat the same days following what others are doing (Uhm, 2014, p. 215). Kiho Uhm criticizes that young adult are devoting their passion to their initiative, but in truth, the logic of capitalism is exploiting such passion from them (Uhm, 2014, p. 232). Lastly, he marks that space for young adults to speak up their voices is absent in Korean society, thus, young adults' right to be heard and society’s duty of listening is required for a better future (Uhm, 2014, p. 237). His central point is significant in that the circumstance of young adults is deeply embedded in the capitalistic social structure in Korea.

### 3. Theoretical Background

This chapter will provide a summary of the theoretical background used for this study and an explanation of the concepts and mechanisms behind it. It introduces two sociological theories, the collected work of “survivalism” from Hongjung Kim (2009; 2015; 2018), and ‘*Inventing our selves*’ by Nikolas Rose (2016). It will also provide a discussion about the compatibility between the theories and the choice of selection by denoting the relevance of the research topic.

#### 3.1 Neoliberalism

Hongjung Kim and Rose define neoliberalism by their own perception regarding the institutions and the spread of certain types of beliefs and actions. Firstly, Hongjung (2009) proposes that neoliberalism creates a “state of nature” as a battle royale among the global, prescribing a universal type of life by restoring our life into the state of the war of all against all (p. 175). It also can be defined as a “culture” which presents the selves with an intrinsic existence and guide their behaviour patterns (Kim, 2009, p. 175). Neoliberalism as a culture

is incarnated as habitus in the subjects' bodies and minds, affecting their norms, values, and aesthetics (Kim, 2009, p. 177). It is because neoliberalism is incarnated in concrete and corporeal ways within the mundane life of the subject that its moral function as a rule of management of the subject's actions and habits (Kim, 2009, pp. 178, 179). It claims the legitimacy of neoliberal life as if it is a kind of ideology while reproducing institutionalized-neoliberalism (Kim, 2009, p. 179). Thus, the incarnated neoliberalism becomes the desire, hope, sense, and taste of ours which directs our action, value, and judgement embedded in our "heart" and "skin" (Kim, 2009, p. 179).

For Rose (1996), Neoliberalism is understood as a powerful contributor to spreading the technique of subjectivity. He describes that neoliberalism established a mentality of government, instructing the authorities to improve national well-being, and the nature of the persons upon whom they must act (Rose, 1996, p. 154). It considerably contributed to the reorganization of the problematics of government by administering the lives of their subjects for the sake of their well-being (Rose, 1996, p. 164). The aspects of enterprising self were possible in an 'advanced liberal' way, since "the goals of political, social, and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals" (Rose, 1996, p. 165). He explains that neoliberalism gains huge success in formulating those political rationalities and also, the regime of the self (Rose, 1996, p. 166). Our freedom and aspiration are governed in a liberal way by which the market gives the mechanism of those specific forms of living and existence (Rose, 1996, p. 157).

## 3.2 Survivalism

### 3.2.1 Formation of Survivalism

The theory of survivalism, as described by Hongjun Kim explained how the code of "survival" transforms and controls the Korean young adults in 21 century and he refers to them as a "survival generation" (Kim, 2015, p. 182). He explained that those young adults are facing an uncertain future and are exposed to a competitive society where a "survival heart" is imperative (Kim, 2015, pp. 182, 206). In his term, "the heart of survivalism" believes in the legitimacy of competition, survival of the fittest, and meritocracy, which is presumed as a truth of human life, but these beliefs are not a pure ideology but rather embodied as a habitus



among Korean young adults (Kim, 2015, p. 187).<sup>7</sup> It also places survival at the apex of the hierarchy of values, and simultaneously, functions as a logic of politico-moral legitimacy which ratifies the concentration of available resources to the task of surviving (Kim, 2018, p. 8).

Through “the heart of survivalism”, the varied attitudes and aesthetic propensities are observed, and the social institutions and systems exist to produce these practices, and also, “the survivalists” memories and dreams are expressed in the form of aesthetic representations at the collective level (Kim, 2015, p. 187). However, “survivalism” should not be mistaken for a mere ideology, a value, or a type of false consciousness, it instead operates at the level of cognition or knowledge, more significantly, on the plane of the human heart. (Kim, 2018, p. 8). “The heart of survivalism” can be formed through a certain process: A common ‘problem or task’ appears in people’s lives and practical necessities are brought up to the surface in order to redirect their behavioural ability to solve those problems (Kim, 2015, p. 188). That is, the heart of the young adults is formed and transformed through the logic of the composing processes of the problems (Kim, 2015, p. 188). Accordingly, the power structure is translated into the language of the subject’s life world and affects their experiential world in the form of definite events (Kim, 2015, p. 188).

To sum up, “survivalism” is formed in the process of organizing practices by which Korean young adults’ reality is symbolized and reconstructed through the privileged “signifier” of “survival”, and the most suitable heart of the regime is constructed to solve the problems (Kim, 2015, p. 189).

### 3.2.2 Meaning of the survival

In this context, survival refers to a state where you do not lag behind or avoid being culled in a competitive situation and such status quo continues in your course of life and in almost every area in your life world (Kim, 2015, p. 193). It means that the meaning of survival encounters a semantic transition from the “physical and biological prolongation of life or

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<sup>7</sup> He explains the concept of “survivalism” by the mechanism of a “heart”, a “heartset”, and a “regime of the heart”. The “heart” is conceptualized as an organ of will and emotion, an origin of “rationality”, “emotionality”, and “volitionality” agency (Kim, 2014, p.184; Kim, 2015, p. 187). A “Heartset” is an ensemble of rules and norms to regulate the ways of arousing, using, managing people’s heart, or even communicating with other hearts (Kim, 2015, p. 186). Over and above, a certain arrangement of social positivity is explained as a regime of the heart; a space consisting of ideology, habits, devices, and scenery that these four elements are interrelated, interfered and negotiated in the space where people’s “heartset” is produced, expressed, communicated, and used (Kim, 2014, p. 187, 198).

salvation from death” to a “being included within the competitive life world” (Kim, 2015, p. 193). Whilst survival is not about achieving a definite goal and transcending it, it is rather extending the competitive situation to the forthcoming future (Kim, 2015, p. 194). Your step forward is nothing but a step in a never-ending sequence, a permanent chain of survival processes, stepping forward to an unknown and uncertain future (Kim, 2015, p. 194). Now, the life world is forcing us to ameliorate ourselves through lifelong education or infinite self-innovation, which makes it impossible for us to achieve definite goals (Kim, 2015, p. 194). More importantly, survival is not characterized by achieving things with an ambitious and triumphant attitude toward a prosperous future, but by an image coupled with a defensive and passive attitude, concealed feelings of fatigue and resignation, and a desire for ordinary ‘normal’ life (Kim, 2015, p. 196).

If one goes through the survival-seeking process, it both means conforming (normalization) to the control of society and expressing (differentiation) one’s identity by self-realization (Kim, 2015, p. 197). It is no longer a case of giving up the self for survival or the survival for the self, in which there is no ultimate survivor or absolute loser in the life world (Kim, 2015, p. 197). But rather, the life world is a state of an eternal moratorium, society acting as a "setting of a contest" where people fight to climb the ranks by retaining an instrumental relationship with themselves and a competitive relationship with others that the entire self is forced to convert into a resource of a battle for existence (Kim, 2015, p. 197). This is a state of survival that dominate their lives, “a hegemony of survivalism” (Kim, 2015, p. 197).

### 3.2.3 Survival seeker, Survival model, and the loser

In terms of survivalism, individuals are forced to become an entity of self-governance which transforms their potential capabilities into tangible resources (capitals) (Kim, 2015, p. 197). The survivors can “survive” not because they are strong, but because they are extremely self-examining, self-controlling, and self-managing subjects who constantly manage, invest and reflexively relate themselves to the good, the truth, and the aesthetics (Kim, 2009, p. 185). Thus, they are also subjects who the self-governance program, who is ordinarily anxious and act toward the interminable reinforcement of one’s ability for survival which never guarantees success (Kim, 2009, p. 180). They are also subjects who obsessively strive for unapproachable goals and work on their self-discipline (Kim, 2009, p. 180). Taking this into account, those subjects who devote their best efforts and are being ‘realistic’ can be described as “survival-seeker”, and the subjects who become idealized models for them can be

identified as “survivor-model” (Kim, 2009, p. 181). The survival-seeker attempts to break through the mundane competitions by maximizing their ability of self-management and self-control (Kim, 2009, p. 181). They become subordinated to that management and control of themselves since the total of their abilities become capital which must be managed and developed for survival (Kim, 2015, p. 195). Moreover, “the survivor model” is a symbol that directs, guides, and instructs the survival-seekers which is produced in a numberless way under the neoliberal culture (Kim, 2009, p. 181). “The survivor-model” is a model for “survival-seekers” which is a dream of an unattainable reality, a hope for achieving the goal to live a life out of difficulties, and a possibility of potential success for survival (Kim, 2009, p. 181).

But then, what are the survival-seekers chasing after? Hongjung Kim (2009) suggests that they seek economic, social, and biological survival; fighting against the ‘spectre of uselessness’, and surviving from success-supremacy and careerism, and lastly, sanctifying health and birth by commercializing it (p. 182). It is why the subjectivity of neoliberal survivor is produced and at the same time, the hegemony of neoliberal culture is established in the process of chasing and pursuing the survivor-model (Kim, 2009, p. 184). Accordingly, a loser, the subjects who fall behind from the survival rank, is not solely incompetent but also considered to be morally inferior and aesthetically repulsive (Kim, 2009, p. 184). In addition, survivors do not ask themselves the question “why do I control, manage, and develop myself?” (Kim, 2009, p. 187). It is because they cannot reflexively understand the fact that such “survival” is a specific value of the markedly confined ideology (Kim, 2009, p. 188). Nevertheless, they habitually reflect on themselves under the neoliberal hegemony which is a mere “instrumental reflexivity” (Kim, 2009, p. 190). The instrumental reflexivity indicates that survival, a final goal of their behaviour does not become a target of their reflexive process and prevents them from questioning the neoliberal hegemony (Kim, 2009, pp. 187, 188). Therefore, it leads us to the fact that survival is not a “good life” but a “sheer life”, where survivors run after the “survival” as their ultimate form of life (Kim, 2009, p. 189).

### 3.3 Inventing our selves

Nikolas Rose (1996) has illustrated the ways and consequences of our contemporary notions of subjective autonomy and enterprise which are incarnated in the regulatory practices of a

‘modern’ form of life (p. 153). He argues that our contemporary culture of autonomous subjectivity has been embodied in our techniques for understanding and developing ourselves, which became accepted as fact, permitted, and desirable (Rose, 1996, p. 153). He presents a new image of subjectivity, in which the autonomous, choosing, free self is comprehended as the value, ideal, and objective underpinning, and also legitimates the activity which imbues the mentalities of the modern West (Rose, 1996, p. 151).

### 3.3.1 The Technique, psychology, and ethics

The proliferation of new images of subjectivity was possible by a “*techne* of psychology”. “The *techne* of psychology” organizes practices to produce certain outcomes of reform, efficiency, and virtue (Rose, 1996, p. 88). It is also the complex technical form of “the ways of combining persons, truths, judgements, devices, and actions into a stable, reproducible and durable form” (Rose, 1996, p. 88). It means that human beings are emplaced, enacted through a regime of devices, and techniques, and then, their conduct is problematized regarding ethical standards and social judgements (Rose, 1996, pp. 38, 88). Human beings’ routines, habits, and techniques are localized and connected in an “*assemblage*” within a specific domain of action and value, and those of each *assemblages* activate repertoires of conduct (Rose, 1996, p. 38). Webs of tension across the domain catch their capacities and powers by the *assemblages* of knowledge, vocabularies, and technical devices (Rose, 1996, p. 38). At this point, the knowledge should be understood as a matter of techniques which attempts to organize experiences in terms of certain values (Rose, 1996, p. 89). Here, he emphasizes the capacity of psychological languages and judgement, which make human beings follow “ethical practices” (Rose, 1996, p. 95). It also guides individuals to pursue the practices, seeking to improve themselves, their lives, and their aspirations and norms (Rose, 1996, p. 95). These practices are rather a single model of life conduct that a variety of practical rationalities are unified and established in everyday life (Rose, 1996, p. 173). Because such conduct has been rendered intelligible, practical rationalities indicate regimes of thought, where individuals not only accord significance to their experiences and aspects of themselves, but also “*ethicalize*” themselves in particular ways (Rose, 1996, p. 173).

### 3.3.2 Relationship between authorities and psychology as techniques

A Variety of authorities and institutions such as schools, factories, the labour market and the economy have advised, instructed, warned, and moralized for shaping the lives of individuals

(Rose, 1996, p. 95). The techniques have been embodied in a proliferation of social programs, bounding up with “socio-political aspirations, dreams, hopes, and fears” (Rose, 1996, p. 173). Since human beings are assembled within apparatuses of armies, schoolrooms, etc., psychological techniques have come to infuse, dominate, or displace moral and other regimens for bringing the self to virtue or happiness (Rose, 1996, p. 95). In this respect, the mode of functioning of psychology should be understood as techniques that discipline the human differences for making the person stable through constructing a perceptual system (Rose, 1996, pp. 105, 106). It is why those certain human conducts have brought certain authorities into power, speaking of our truth (Rose, 1996, p. 178). Certainly, the psychological languages and values have enabled both political authorities and individuals to reinterpret their conduct in terms of ‘life-style’ choices by which individuals are presupposed to invest themselves and shape meaning for their life through maximization of their ‘quality of life’ (Rose, 1990 as cited in Rose, 1996, p. 98). In his words, the development of institutions and techniques instructed the coordination of countless individuals in an economic manner to eliminate certain habits, propensities, and morals and to instil them in others, thus, making the distinction between “those who did or did not, could, or could not, would or would not learn” the instructions (Rose, 1996, p. 106). It is the individualizing techniques which enable one to maximize their capacities, personal contentment, and the efficiency of the institution in their mundane everyday life (Rose, 1996, p. 114). Therefore, on behalf of psychological capacities, individuals become the possible subjects for a certain system of power (Rose, 1996, p. 115).

### 3.3.3 Subjectification and the machination

The techniques also constituted the domain of subjectivity where the individuals become possible objects for rational management through the systematic government of subjectivity (Rose, 1985b, 1986a, as cited in Rose, 1996, p. 102). It means that it provided “the means for the translation of human subjectivity into the new languages of government of the schools, factories, the labour market and the economy” (Rose, 1996, p. 102). Here, the term “subjectivity” can be understood in terms of the relations of knowledge and technique, the development and transformation of modes of conceptualizing persons and their related methods for acting upon persons (Rose, 1996, p. 99). It is why subjectification can be explained as the effects that strive or operate to interpret individuals into diverse subject forms, capable of getting themselves as the subjects of their own and other practices upon

them (Rose, 1996, p. 171).

But most importantly, the “techniques of subjectification” operate through various assemblages: “a constant and intense self-scrutiny, an evaluation of personal experiences, emotions, and feelings in relation to psychological images of fulfilment and autonomy” (Rose, 1996, p. 195).<sup>8</sup> Under the contemporary techniques of subjectification, individuals relate to and understand themselves in the ways by numerous “assemblages” in terms of a psychological interior, such as desiring selves, labouring selves, thinking selves, etc. (Rose, 1996, p. 172). This leads the individuals to become the assembled subjects: “labouring subjects in the machines of work, desiring subjects in the machines of passion, responsible subjects in the machines of morality” (Rose, 1996, p. 182). It is, therefore, that technologies of subjectification are machinations which produce certain ways of being human and disciplining human differences (Rose, 1996, p. 186). Many themes recur in these machinations of beings: “choice, fulfilment, self-discovery, self-realization” (Rose, 1996, p. 195). Accordingly, the linkage between the human and other humans is perceived as the machinic connection which will produce and lead to the relations even which humans establish with themselves (Rose, 1996, p. 182).

Rose (1996) further explains that not just the relationship with others is a concern, but also the relation to themselves is itself folded in therapeutic terms. One problematizes oneself according to “the values of normality, diagnosing one’s pleasures and misfortunes, seeking to improve one’s quotidian existence through intervening upon an ‘inner world’ where we have enfolded as both to our existence and the surface of our experience of the everyday” (p. 192). Therapeutic relation to ourselves also indicates that authorities speak the truths of ourselves; the ways we act upon our existence; “in the understanding, planning, and evaluation of our everyday passion, fears, and hopes” (Rose, 1996, p. 192). For instance, if one speaks the truth about one’s feelings and desires, such confessions are those prescribed by an authority (Rose, 1996, p. 96). It becomes a way of interpreting their problems and problematizing their existence in a very technical form of therapeutic procedures (Rose, 1996, p. 96). In this way,

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<sup>8</sup> Rose (1996) understands the term “assemblages” through the concept of the body, which itself is “an assemblage of organs, processes, pleasures, passions, activities, behaviours, linked by fine lines and unpredictable networks to other elements, segments and assemblages” (Grosz, 1994, p. 120, as cited in, p. 184). In this sense, the assemblages are understood as to link up “outside” and “inside”- visions, sounds, aromas, touches, and collections together with other elements, machinating desires, affections, sadness, terror, and even death (Rose, 1996, p. 185).

‘the self’ is produced through the junction of the great number of actions and judgements that one applies to oneself by relating to one’s existence and different images (Rose, 1996, pp. 192, 193). It is why the relationship of our selves is the machination of the self, that is, a regime of subjectification renders the subjects to reflect on and act on all the diverse domains, practices, and assemblages (Rose, 1996, p. 39). Our practices of the self are connected with the truths of psychology with the notions that “normality, autonomy, and personal success can be achieved through the engagement of the self in a psychological regime of therapeutic remodelling” (Rose, 1996, p. 97).

#### 3.3.4 The enterprising self

Based on his account of psychological techniques and techniques of subjectification, Rose (1996) elaborates on the image of an “enterprising self”. Once people are technicized, machinated, located in place and practices, and equipped with autonomy, choices, and self-responsibility, psychology aspiring to self-fulfilment, they manage their lives as a kind of enterprise of themselves (Rose, 1996, pp. 33, 182). The image of an “enterprising self” understands the self as a subjective being: “to aspire to autonomy, to strive for personal fulfilment, to interpret its reality as a matter of individual responsibility, to find meaning in existence by shaping its life through acts of choice” (Rose, 1996, p. 151). These kinds of judgements of the selves are related to certain ways of acting upon them, guiding the selves to “experts of subjectivity” (Rose, 1996, p. 151). It refers to the selves who transform the questions about the purpose of life and the meaning of suffering into technical questions, the most effective ways of managing faults and improving “quality of life” (Rose, 1996, p. 151). A “technological” form is given to the enterprise by experts of organizational life, which engineers human relations through architecture, timetabling, curricula, and the like to achieve efficiency, excellence, and competitiveness, and to prosper economically (Rose, 1996, p. 154). For example, contemporary regulatory practices turn the ‘unemployed individual’ into an ‘active job seeker’ which has been transformed to embody the presupposition that “humans are, should/could be enterprising individuals, striving for fulfilment, excellence, and achievement” (Rose, 1996, p. 154). Here, the status of unemployment is characterized as a ‘job seeker’ to sustain ‘job readiness’ and to avoid the risk of encouraging ‘dependence’ (Rose, 1996, p. 161). It means that an enterprise assigns an array of conducting rules to an individual’s ordinary existence with energy, initiative, ambition, calculation, and personal responsibility (Rose, 1996, p. 154). The enterprising self will “make an enterprise of its life,

seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself” to become what one wishes to be (Rose, 1996, p. 154). Therefore, the enterprising self is a self that is calculating and that acts upon itself to better itself that is, being an active self and a calculating self at the same time (Rose, 1996, p. 154). That is, the enterprise takes a ‘form of rule’ as intrinsically ‘ethical’, articulating the ethical presuppositions of competitiveness, strength, vigour, boldness, outwardness, and the urge to succeed (Rose, 1996, pp. 154, 157).

### 3.3.5 Expertise of subjectivity

The expertise introspects, manages, and gets the confessions out of the subject in terms of their quotidian affairs of existence (Rose, 1996, p. 159). It forces the subject to ‘work’ on itself by taking control of its ventures, making its goals, and also planning to achieve its need through its own powers (Rose, 1996, p. 159). It means that human beings are becoming the ‘expertise of subjectivity’ that “they make possible between the aspirations of selves and the direction of life in institutions” (Rose, 1996, p. 160). It brings the subjects into an alliance with the aspirations of authorities by instilling and using the self-directing propensities of the subjects (Rose, 1996, p. 160). Here, the ‘aspiration’ is nothing but to maximize our lifestyles and make ourselves as individuals through relationships with others (Rose, 1996, p. 193).

Likewise, the expertise of subjectivity guides individuals to search for economic success, career progress, and personal development; “new expertise of autonomous subjectivity” (Rose, 1996, p. 161). For instance, work has become a vital element in the path “to self-realization, and the strivings of the autonomous self”, which is the essential ally in the path to economic success (Rose, 1996, p. 161). Such image of freedom and autonomy work as an image of individuals; “as the unified psychological focus of their biography, as an actor seeking to ‘enterprise’ their life and self through acts of choice” (Rose, 1996, p. 170). Under this dominating image, our life with such ‘freedom’ is a mode of being in the world where we would grant value to our lives that we understand as the expression of personal autonomy (Rose, 1996, p. 193). To sum up, our social field is governed by such a mechanism with “an alliance between the powers of expertise and the wishes, hopes and fears of the responsible” (Rose, 1996, p. 163).

## 3.4 Compatibility of the theories

The theories of Kim and Rose demonstrate certain compatibility in terms of the subject’s



actions, beliefs, and even human existence by which they put economic values in their priority. Hongjung Kim (2009; 2015; 2018) depicts the subject as a certain entity that believes in the legitimacy of competition and acts upon its beliefs to achieve its economic goal which leads to their trust in their certain form of existence as ‘truth’ by applying the concept of ‘heart of survivalism’, ‘survivor-model’, and ‘survival-seeker’. He illustrates that the subjects believe in the survival of the fittest, meritocracy as a truth of human life and also pursue the values of economy, success, and supremacy through the ‘heart of survivalism’. The subjects act upon those values by controlling themselves, managing and constantly investing and converting their capabilities for their existence. Related to this context, Rose (1996) has detailed the aspects of life in the west by explaining the mechanism of the ‘enterprising self’. The subjects manage their lives as a kind of enterprise of themselves through creating a goal and planning to achieve efficiency, excellence, and competitiveness. He also made a similar point to Kim that these actions and beliefs and aspirations are pursued by the autonomous selves. Those autonomous selves believe in choice, fulfilment, self-discovery, and self-realization to seek to improve themselves. He also makes a point that this can be possible by the technique of subjectivity, that subjectivity is embodied in our techniques for understanding and developing ourselves (Rose, 1996, p. 153). When it comes to the relationship with authorities and institutions with such a form of life, they both emphasize that certain values are presupposed by the institutions in our lives. Hongjung Kim (2015) explained that the social institutions and systems exist to produce the practices, and the power of structure translated into the language of our lives affects the subjects’ experiences (pp. 187, 188). Correspondingly, Rose (1996) points out that authorities and institutions discipline and presuppose to maximize their quality of life by which the aspirations of authorities are using the autonomous selves (p. 160).

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Choice of Methodology and Data Collection

Based on the accounts and theories mentioned above we can presume that the competition to find a job in Korea is harsh and that neoliberalism is having a direct impact on the job market

and society as a whole. On account of this, it would be important to demonstrate the experienced lives of young adults by taking a closer look at the individual's social world. Therefore, I believe that the knowledge derives from experiences that the researcher grounds the knowledge in the experience of concrete phenomena (Jackson, 2011, p. 61). Although when the researcher grounds the knowledge in experiences, there are different approaches within the strands of perspectives. Above all, phenomenology is interested in describing the world as experienced by the subjects with the assumption that reality is what people perceive it to be (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 30). Unlike positivism, phenomenology suspends all judgements about what is real but rather focuses on the interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018, pp. 122, 126). It is why this paper attempt to analyze the lived experience and also interpret the “texts” of life (van Manen, 1990, as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 126). To examine the lifeworld of Korean young adults, interpreting the meanings of individuals’ experiences through the process of reflecting on the interaction of research and the individual being will help to understand the acts of choice and the perceived subject’s lifeworld (Fuster & D, 2019, p. 223).

Thus, this paper will employ a qualitative research method. Since it aims to see how the choices of their future careers are formed, interview knowledge will help to understand nuanced accounts of different aspects of the interviewee’s lifeworld (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 33). The sample design set is: A Korean young adult aged between 20 to 30 who is seeking or preparing for a job within Korea. The age limit was set based on the data from Cho and Park (2002) and Saramin (2019) which includes all the young adults who are actively seeking their future job.<sup>9</sup> After setting the sample design, I used snowball sampling to recruit the participants, but I excluded the person whom I know directly to avoid the effect of intimacy. The online communities were used to approach potential participants and the interview recruitment notice was posted in various university communities.<sup>10</sup>

In total, 12 interviews were conducted for this research, and the social demographic features

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<sup>9</sup> One of the employment platforms in Korea reported that the maximum age of newcomers whom companies consider future workers was 30.1 years old for males and 28.5 years old for females (Saramin, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> The recruitment notice was posted in the following universities; Seoul National University, Seoul Institute of the Arts, Pukyong National University, Kangwon National University, Soongsil University, Kyungpook National University, Seoul National University of Science.

can be seen in the appendix (see appendix 7.3). The characteristics of the population are gender, university, region of origin and field of major. I gave each of the participants a pseudonym for anonymity and the individual profile can be found in the appendix (see appendix 7.3). During the interview phase, informing the interviewees about the research aim and the content was an important step to do as a researcher. After informing them of the research aim and the content, interviewees were also informed that their identities would be kept anonymous by providing them with pseudonyms. I was given consent by the participants to record and transcribe the interviews before they began (see appendix 7.1) and additionally mentioned that all the documents would be secured within my private laptop. To make the interviewees feel comfortable talking about their personal stories, I further noted that they could talk freely and openly about their experiences during the interview. The interview was conducted by online face-to-face meeting due to the distance between the interviewee and the interviewer. During the interview, I tried not to disturb the participants while they were speaking, but rather put myself as an active listener. It was important for me as a researcher to respond to their explanation in a way that did not disrupt their narratives while demonstrating that I was following what they were saying. It not only helps to avoid the misunderstanding of their lived experience from potential bias I might have but also shows them what my understanding was and gain the participants' trust for our conversational interaction. It also demonstrated to the participants how I was paying attention to their speech by nodding and responding when they are talking. The interview questions were semi-structured because the flexible structure of the questions would assist to form an interactive exchange of dialogue that would ensure that the relevant contexts were brought into focus. It also allowed the development of unexpected topics for both researcher and interviewee since the knowledge can be constructed through dialogic interaction (Mason, 2002). Likewise, I did not set the theory beforehand in my interview process so that it would not affect the research procedure.

## 4.2 Data Analysis

The process of finding codes and themes is presented in this section to provide the understanding of interview design. Since the interview knowledge is actively created through questions and answers, it is important to analyze the relationship between the discovered

codes and the interview questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 63). To explain the finding process, it will analyze what kinds of questions have guided the relevant responses and how those responses are theoretically meaningful.

The interview questions were prepared in a semi-structured style, but the questions have been modified and highlighted by the discovered codes and themes. For example, the question “how did you feel about the studies for entering university at high school times?” helped to generate more specified questions such as “how did you discuss with your parents/teachers about your choice of major?”. The first question brought up the stories of how interviewees discussed their problems of entering university with adults surrounding them. It seems to be a significant finding that interaction between their surrounding adults such as parents and teachers affected the meaning of “reality” for interviewees. The interviewees’ perception of the “reality” is found in their stories of how their dreams and desired majors were compromised with the “reality”. Based on those conversations, I was allowed to ask more questions about their dreams and answers about their experiences of failure. However, the reasons behind those choices are direct consequences of what the market requires from the individuals participating in it. Their dreams and future majors were selected by the neoliberal society which is also related to the perceived “reality”. It is therefore the theme of ‘harsh reality’ and the ‘neoliberal society’ has chosen to lead the further interviews. With those identified themes in mind, one of the questions brought very interesting responses from many interviewees. The question “what does it mean by being in the 20s in Korea for you?” was found to be an important question for the research. Interviewees openly talked about their concerns for their future careers, and their candid words turned out to be the essential theme by which to analyze their life of seeking careers. For example, one interviewee said that being in the 20s in Korea feels like in a survival movie. Every single task has to be done by themselves and the harsh “reality” increasingly challenged them to survive. According to their responses, it would seem as though their experiences of seeking a career have substantial.

Nonetheless, there were also some questions which were considered to be insignificant for the research aim. The early phase of the interviews occasionally had irrelevant responses from the interviewees because the questions were sometimes vague and broad in a sense. Questions such as “what kind of good or bad memories do you have in your university times?” encouraged interviewees to talk about their private issues by their personal backgrounds.

After reflecting on the interaction in the interviews, I decided to remove the question and rather focus on more specific experiences related to the job-seeking process. Meanwhile the question that most interviewees were reacting and answering to was “did you have any concerns or pressure about your future career?”. Their concerns and thoughts about their life of seeking a career brought an in-depth interaction between me and the interviewees. The surrounding atmosphere was stated by interviewees’ perspectives which enables them to interpret their life world in a detailed account. Following their responses and asking the related questions also helped to find the significant theme for the research. For instance, one of the interviewees talked about her concerns with her future career, “the problem is, I don’t know what to do about it.”. Then I asked again, “what do you mean by ‘don’t know’ in this sense?”. This extended question allowed me to understand the complex atmosphere around which her strategy to survive is interrupted by the highly competitive market and the limited time and resources. Another meaningful interaction that I found was asking how they interact with surrounding people regarding the job-seeking process. Many interviewees felt anxious and worried about their future careers when they socialize with their friends. Because the experience of finding a career is harsh and emotionally taxing for young adults, their emotions and thoughts are considered an uncomfortable topic among their peers. It is therefore I found that sharing emotions of frustration and sadness is considered to be an elephant in the room for Korean young adults.

### 4.3 Validity

Validity of the data explains the quality of data and checks the honesty of their spoken words by observing and reflecting on the interaction between interviewer and interviewees.

In the case of the quality of the data, those answers with abundant and detailed stories are appreciated as fine and acceptable data for the research. As I mentioned above, when the interviewees answered with long and detailed stories about their lives, I was allowed to ask further questions about those responses. Then, the interviewees explain more detailed and precise thoughts about the story so that our conversation went long enough to understand their complicated life world. In this case, even if I changed the topic to another question, the interviewees seem to understand where our communication was heading so their answers were kept on track with the fruitful narratives. Additionally, the interviewees’ positive

responses to my interpretation can explain the validity of the data. When I explained my interpretation of their stories to confirm that I had well understood their narratives, interviewees responded with positive feedback and agreement with my speech. For instance, if one spoke at length about their life living in their 20s in Korea, I gave them my understanding about it before we move to another question. Then, the interviewees showed their agreement with my interpretation by rephrasing the story for me or by adding more detailed thoughts and comments about the story. It can prove the validity of the data since a clear understanding of their speech tell the truth of their statement.

Even though, there are a few data which cannot prove to be telling the truth. One was the case since the interviewee was focusing on different themes than the research topics. Whenever I asked the interviewee's thoughts on the job-seeking process or how she/he felt about the experience, the interviewee was rather talking about what she/he heard from others. In this case, I once again elaborated on the research question and asked the interviewee to share it from her/his perspective. Although I failed to get the related responses from her/him that the interviewee kept sharing the information of what she/he heard from the media. I decided not to use this interview for the research because the interviewee might have not fully understood the research questions and the aim.

#### 4.4 Reflexivity and Possible Bias

Reflexivity is important to avoid the possible bias the researcher might have during the knowledge production process. There is always a danger that the common-sense notions will be supplied from the interviewer's mouth because the interview relationship is a social relationship (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 14, 37). It is why Bourdieu argued for sociologists to reflect their knowledge-producing process by questioning the implications of all practice and a priori conditions (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 4, 9). Acknowledging that the research relationship structure holds all kinds of distortions, I prepared myself for the interview to avoid the situation of social norms governing the interview questions (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 607). In this sense, I tried to ask open-ended questions and to become an active listener not only for their relaxed speech but also for proper understanding. Nonetheless, my role as a researcher needed to be reflected upon at certain points as not to let my prior expectations and

hypotheses affect my interpretation of the participant's narratives. During the early phase of the interviews, I was influenced by my own thoughts in which a certain hypothesis was dominating my judgement towards the data. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to receive some advice from my supervisor, hence, I was allowed to realize my fault as a researcher. If the viewpoint of the researcher stays in scholars' space, it may ignore the practical situation out there and destroys its object every time it is applied to practices (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 381, 382). By reflecting my role as a sociologist, it encouraged me to understand how the researcher's distorted point of view could affect the result of knowledge production.

## 5. Analysis

The analysis part is divided into six sections which provide an answer to the six research questions we have mentioned in the introduction part. Section 5.1 demonstrates how the surrounding situations are experienced by the participants by which the 'atmosphere' of competition is deriving the participant to believe and act upon the values of success and competition. Then, 5.2 explains the existing lifestyle that participants pursue and believe as 'true' by conceptualizing it as a 'normalized' path and additionally presents the notion of 'neoliberal culture'. When chapter 5.3 describes various feelings that participants reveal in their accounts during their job-seeking process, chapter 5.4 describes the opinions about life living in Korea by directly deriving the participants' narratives. Additionally, 5.5 introduces the specific cases of those who express their conflicting mind between the forced 'realistic' dreams and dreams of their own. Finally, chapter 5.6 demonstrates the cases of the fluttering heart, which desires dreams of its own despite the dominant 'reality'.

### 5.1 The perceived atmosphere of competition

This part of the chapter will provide an understanding of the surrounding atmosphere perceived by the participants. To investigate and define what 'surrounding atmosphere' is indicating, it will describe the existing values among their experienced events and their peers. It will also outline the related image in terms of the certain values which lead to their

judgement, thoughts, emotions, and existence.

#### 5.1.1 Face the ‘reality’!

When the participants were talking about their experiences, they often used the word ‘reality’ to describe their thoughts and decisions and it seems as though certain values are embedded in those use of the word ‘reality’. One of the participants, Jiwoo, reported that she gave up her dream to become an English teacher after facing ‘reality’. In her words, ‘reality’ indicated the possibility of achieving the goal where she evaluates and judges her own ability, resources, and the circumstance of the fierce competition. Such usage of the word ‘reality’ eventually made her give up her original dream and change her mind to choose alternative pathways, majoring in English Literature, based on her beliefs of ‘reality’.

Similarly, Hayoon confessed that she felt wounded when others talk ‘realistic’ to her about her choices of activities. For example, since her cousins already got their job and recently worked in the labour market, they advised her in a ‘realistic’ way that her dreams and methods to achieve them were ‘unrealistic’. She said, “like, if there is a company recruiting only ten workers in a year, they tell me that if I get in, it will be a miracle to our family.”. Also, when she once talked about her dream of becoming an architect, they advised her that “Think realistic! You majored in English Literature, do you think that dream is possible?”. Here, we can see that their decisions and opinions are formed, and forming by the context of ‘reality’, by calculating the possibilities of those dreams. The important point is that not only do their peers and judgement themselves follow the logic of ‘reality’ but also, they neglected the ‘other’ possibilities. Hayoon expressed in a flat tone of voice by saying that her cousins could have cheered her as; “Yes, try your best on that.”. She said, even though she was already perceiving the ‘reality’ by herself: how achieving such a goal is tough and even impossible to reach with her ability, her peers were reminding her and even imprinting the ‘reality’ to her.

#### 5.1.2 Perceiving the atmosphere of competition

While some of the participants directly use the word ‘reality’, others have shown how they felt certain feelings and chose to act in relation to their surrounding ‘atmosphere’. Many participants depicted the ‘atmosphere’ which has a strong connection to their emotions, values, judgements, and actions. According to Jimin, she felt that there was an implicit demand for a certain study outcome in her high school despite the fact that their curriculum



prioritizes other activities over university entrance exams.

“If we take midterms or mock exams, I felt there was a demand for a certain outcome. Like, interestingly, many of our students went to Sungkyunkwan university, so I set it as Maginot line for my university entrance.”

After becoming an adult, she, like many others, had to face the ‘reality’ because of her financial circumstance. She expressed with a relaxed and untroubled tone, without any hint of sorrow or suffering, “Thinking of my situation, financial support is missing so far, so studying for my master’s will not happen I believe.”

In a similar way, Hayoon forced herself to study until late at night during her high school times because she felt uneasy after observing her friends choosing to study instead of sleep. So, she set her mind to study late in a school studying room, but her mind was scattering with various thoughts. “I didn’t want to study but also, I didn’t know what I should do... I couldn’t either sleep by just thinking of my friends studying while I’m asleep. So, I also chose to study til late at night.” She said. Watching friends working hard on their studies to aim for higher universities, she even thought, “I didn’t even want those dreams and goals, but after watching them, I thought that ‘should I also pursue those higher goals?’.” It can be seen that both of the cases directed their own actions to a certain path, chasing success and greater education by embodying such values within themselves. They indicated that their actions and judgments; setting the Maginot line, studying until late at night, had a strong connection with the surrounding atmosphere which they perceived, embraced, felt, and acted upon.

In this regard, Seohyun narrated her having a conversation with her friend talking about the hardship of job seeking process during her fourth year in university. Her friend once majored in international relations, but she changed her major to nursing and told Seohyun that “at least this major provides you with a job after graduation.”. After listening to that, Seohyun thought, “she went to a higher university than me, but even she couldn’t get a job with an IR major. So, I think there is no hope within our major.”. From the conversation, she reacted to her friend’s story by evaluating the chances and possibilities of success to get a stable job and comparing it with her own status.

Moreover, one of the interviewees, Suah, also perceived the certain atmosphere around her motivated her to behave upon the certain values. When I asked Suah about her university life, she answered that she has a compulsion about scheduling ‘anything’ during the summer

vacation, which she described as; “any activities like extracurriculars or even a summer session”. She said that after watching her friends living their life busy, she also felt like, “I have to do something, or achieve certain results even if I don’t have any goal of mine.”. She further added that “I thought that ‘I shouldn’t loaf around, I need to spend my time productive.’”. We can see that the beliefs of certain values are synchronizing the path where she guides her actions and decisions about her life. Values like productivity and achievement is guiding her actions of doing ‘anything’ even before planning her goals and aims. More significantly, she decided and performed through perceiving and incarnating the ‘atmosphere of competition’. To better understand her situation, I further asked Suah that “what types of friends made you act in that way?”. Then she answered, “I don’t evaluate things with time or how busy they are, but rather the activities itself is a standard for my motivation.”. Her statement about perceiving the atmosphere by the unit of such activities indicates that the contexts of those activities; competition, productive etc. corresponds to the contexts of her perceived atmosphere.

Considering that: Jimin set her certain goal; Hayoon decides not to sleep and rather study; Seohyun thinks there is no hope in her major; and Suah spend her time productive, it can be interpreted that the ways of perceiving the atmosphere can be characterized by a certain type of values that navigate their ways of behaviours, thoughts, actions, and motivations. Especially since a “form of rule” renders them to perceive, accept, and act upon the specific ‘atmosphere’ above among the other ‘atmospheres’ in the society, those rules were taken as “ethical” for them. By explanation of Rose, those ‘form of rule’ presupposes ethical values such as “competitiveness, vigour, outwardness, and the urge to succeed” (Rose, 1996, pp. 154, 157). It can be perceived that certain values are presupposed, and beliefs are explaining the perceived meaning of the ‘atmosphere’, a competitive situation. However, to specify the certain values which guide the participants’ experiences and being perceived as an ‘atmosphere’ by themselves, I would have to explain the details by analyzing the perceived image of the ‘right person’.

### 5.1.3 Image of the ‘right person’

I have found that a certain type of image of the ‘right person’ is motivating, guiding, and leading the participants toward a certain ‘path’ regarding the certain values presupposed in their beliefs. For example, Jimin was problematizing some of her behaviours because she thinks that she cannot fit in the ‘right person’ for future employment. She used to walk

around the high school whenever she had time. Then, when after she got into university, she decided to prepare for the Public Administration Examinations (PAE), but the ‘problem’ came out from that point. “So, I started my study on PAE full of confidence, but you know, my habit didn’t go anywhere.” She said. She further explains:

“I think this part of me is definitely a problem for achieving something. I mean, I didn’t put my best into it, but I think at least I have done my part of the effort. The problem is since I couldn’t get a job, I keep thinking, ‘Have I passed the point of no return?’... I want to live life normally, but I know how hard it is. So, I need to fit in for the right person to achieve but, can I really?”

She was problematizing her habit of walking around, perceiving it as an obstacle to her dream to live “normally”. Most of all, she stated that her habit was not a problem for completing the tasks during her life, but it ‘became’ a problem after she faced a failure in achieving her goal. Consequently, she gave up studying for the PAE and now is preparing for getting into the public enterprise. However, the difference between the image of the ‘right person’ from public enterprise and PAE was making her confused by her identity since she must fit in the standard of ‘right person’ for the institutions where she wants to work for. She was feeling that she must force herself to become the ‘right person’ for her future dream by putting in considerable effort to accomplish the extracurricular activities and trials.

Correspondingly, the certain image of the ‘right person’ clouded Minjun’s judgement about his life in his 20s. By his words, his life did not seem hectic in comparison to that of his peers, who seemed to be working even harder and making more sacrifices to achieve their personal goals. Comparing himself to them, he was hesitant to claim that he had "worked hard on his life". We can see that both Jimin and Minjun had to alter their actions, judgements, and thoughts, by transforming themselves into a certain type of self-based on the certain image of the person's career required. In the case of Minjun, he idealized a certain type of person, who works harder than him, which became the standard of judgement over his experiences. These aspects of the certain image of the person, the ‘right person’ corresponds to the ‘survivor-model’ which Kim explains as an idealized model by the subjects that the survival seekers are directed, guided, and instructed by them. While he defines that the survival-seekers devote their ‘best efforts’ for their success, the meaning of the ‘best efforts’ can be interpreted differently and relatively to each other depending on the standards of comparison. For example, Minjun and Jimin compared themselves with ‘others’ who they idealize as their

“survivor-model”, however, we must understand that they also can be idealized as a survivor-model for others. This indicates that people are actively perceiving themselves by comparing themselves with others in terms of ability, skills, and success. In this way, human relations are connected by the image of the ‘model’ and the type of ‘seeker’ which becomes a mechanic relationship. For when I asked about the concerns in their job-seeking process, Joowon told me that since he wants to work for large companies, he questioned whether he could live up to the ‘right person’ standard for those companies or not. He turned to define himself in terms of his skills, in this case by his data collecting skills, that would make him seem like a viable candidate, the ‘right person’ for those companies. In his mind, the skills required for success are directly related to the image of the ‘right person’ which directly affects his self-determination.

On the other hand, Hayoon described the image of the ‘person’ who she expressed her negative feelings by which she refused to become in her future that can be positioned on the opposite side of the ‘right person’. Hayoon felt anxious by thinking of the certain image of the future. She mentioned those certain cases as; “a person living a life by a part-time job or contract work; becoming a black sheep asking for money from their parents after age; like her cousin who is still unemployed after graduation”. These images follow the rule of certain values, creating their meaning according to the standards set by the ‘right person’ image. This case is indicating that a certain image is leading the life of the interviewees which provides the rules and standards, the ways how to think and act. The image is dichotomized based on the values, forcing them to strive to be, what Kim explains, “being included in the competitive life world” and fight against the “spectre of uselessness”. His concept of the “spectre of uselessness” allows interpretation of the image of what Hayoon is afraid of becoming in her future. According to Rose, he also emphasized that individuals eliminate certain habits and propensities to live an economic life which is shown by Hayoon’s experience. By examining the participants' narratives, it seems as though this image of the ‘right person’ is having a considerable impact on their thoughts, emotions, and decisions by making them compare themselves to others in the competitive job market.

Throughout this chapter, it has described how the ‘atmosphere’ is perceived during their job-seeking process by illustrating the usage of the word ‘reality’ and the existing image of the ‘right person’. When the word ‘reality’ is used to indicate the competitive circumstances for young jobseekers, the image of the ‘right person’ was guiding the participants to feel, think,

and decide by the logic of success. To sum up, it can be said that the perceived 'atmosphere' follows the rules of competition which eventually makes the individuals put first priority on the competitive 'reality' and values of success for their career-seeking lives.

## 5.2 Walking the normalized 'path' of life

I have previously illustrated how the 'atmosphere' the participants find themselves in can help us to understand how they perceive their own experiences. This part of the chapter will elaborate on the 'path' these young adults face that will form their actions, judgements, and values to some extent as they attempt to conform to the 'right person' image and follow the 'normalized' path.

### 5.2.1 Useful majors vs Useless majors

The most surprising outcome of the interviews was that the participants and the people in their lives had strong judgements towards certain subjects. The participants' narratives of the process by which they chose their majors to seem to have been heavily influenced by the opinions of their peers, family, and teachers. Jimin's parents tried to persuade her to choose something else when she chose Sociology, Philosophy, and Aesthetics as her future majors. Since they seemed to disagree with her choices, it made her question herself, making her think; "It's true...how can I make money with these majors?", so rather than choosing what she initially wanted, she chose to take economics instead. Hayoon's parents also reacted differently to her alternatives, namely architecture or biotechnology, denouncing the former and encouraging her to choose the former. Correspondingly, Jiyoons parents reacted negatively to her decision to apply to a patisserie course and physical education as her major. They strongly insisted that she must choose something 'stable' instead of those majors. In the end, she applied for the majors her parents wanted her to pick; Electronic engineering, pharmacy, and dental hygienics. In her case, even her teacher expressed that he did not think she should choose those subjects. After a while, she left her job as a dental hygienist and started taking barista lessons. Then her peers advised her as follows:

"Can you eke out living with that?", "You have plenty of responsibilities, and you have many things to do, but how can you use your money on that useless thing?", "You don't understand the ways of the world"

It seems as though they are trying to send her a message that her choice of subject is considered to be useless by the rest of the 'world'. The meaning of the 'world' here, seems to have an intimate connection with the values inherent in their opinions. Subjects such as electronic engineering, biotechnology, and economics are associated with productivity and usefulness to society. These associations seem to directly influence the opinions and choices of the participants and their peers. Kim explains that these are related to one of the aspects of the "survivor" that adapts himself to what is considered productive and beneficial and the "survival of the fittest" mindset (Kim, 2009, p. 185; Kim, 2015, p. 187). The decisions on one's major were contingent on the predicted success and usefulness they would bring, which renders their perception of the 'world'. In terms of the explanation of the truth and certain values, Rose described it as the "truth of psychology" which renders the self to achieve normality, autonomy, and personal success. Among the mentioned characteristics of achievement, the decisions and behaviours of the interviewees have demonstrated their desires for personal success. Such desires for personal success are well described in the following cases. Minseo had to face her father's opposition to her choices when every time she expressed her dreams to become a writer, learn to bake, and majoring Korean Literature. Instead, her dad suggested that she become a bank clerk after entering "any" university with a four-year course. As for Jiwoo, she recalled that her parents were opposed to her decision to major in English and Korean Literature. She said, "My parents think English Literature is outdated and not helpful for 'reality'. They said that the majors in Humanities don't have any merit for your future employment."

On the other hand, some of the participants described that their choices of majors were made based on their opinions. Minjun majored in Aviation Service because the expected 'path' after his graduation appears to be seamless and definite. He made the decision by himself by anticipating the possible job offers he could receive in the end based on his skills and educational background, calculating how much of the 'path' is 'normal' enough and 'in harmony with' the 'reality' for him. Similarly, Joowon thinks that his major, Global Finance, certainly has merit within the market, since it holds a prominent position and also high 'possibility' to get into the job market. Even though he didn't know anything about Global Finance in the beginning, after living a life as a 'job seeker' during his 20s, he realized that his major has scarcity within the job market which makes it more likely that he will be able to lead a life of success. The examples of Minjun and Joowon seem different from the previous

cases because they seem to be more active and autonomous in their decisions than in the former cases. Even if the former cases illustrated that the strong opinions have been delivered by their peers to them in terms of choosing their majors, however, the former cases are also autonomous in the sense that they chose their major by ‘themselves’ through internalizing the existing ‘atmosphere’ surround them to pursue reach for their personal success. It means that they are talking by their own words; consciously perceiving and cognizing the problems; and choosing by their own will; and acting upon their decisions by the logic of the market. This sense of being ‘autonomous’ is illustrated by Rose that synchronizing the aspirations of themselves with the aspiration of the institution is possible when the “techniques of subjectivity” have been embodied. The participants’ illustration is clearly describing that they are self-directing towards that certain ‘path’ of life way, where the aspirations of authorities hold the power by maximizing the peoples’ lifestyles.

### 5.2.2 A ‘normal’ dream, but unreachable

Identifying the judgement that people have for certain majors can help us to understand how the participants choose their path in life and how their perceptions, decisions, and actions are connected to their ideas of how the Korean job market and economy work, and their image of success. Although some attention should be paid to the meaning of their 'paths'.

We have seen that the interviewees took particular 'paths' in life by choosing their various majors, in this section, I will elaborate on their dreams and aspirations that also had an impact on their choices of 'path'. A multitude number of interviewees was desiring to become public workers in the future including Jimin, Hayoon, Woojin, and Kunwoo. Among them, Jimin described her dream of becoming a public official.

“It is a heartbreaking reality, but I already decided to take PAE when I was in high school. My plan was to major in Economics at Seoul university, and after achieving my first goal, I start to work on my next goal since then.”

It was because a public official is stable enough to raise a child, so it had been her dream from a young age. Also, Kunwoo is currently majoring in Philosophy, although he wants to get into the public enterprise. He explains that “When I talk with my friends lately, they all are preparing for some exams to become things like public officer or certified labour attorney”. Jobs such as public officials are associated with an image of financial security and stability. Their desires for stability and continuity seem to be bound up with aspiration for a

'normal' life. Kunwoo said that he wants his life to follow this order of milestones; 'go to university, get a job, get married and have a child, then buy a house', which he referred to as a 'normal' life.

Furthermore, Jimin outlined the difference between what she considers to be a 'normal' and 'ideal' life for her. In her words, the 'normal' life means "find a job and work, and have a baby, and raise the children and live your own life at the end". Yet, her image of the 'ideal' life of her did not show much of a difference from the 'normal' life, nothing extravagant or glamorous but rather simple. She describes, "The ideal life for me, is like, if there is a way to earn some money, I want to keep studying. Yeah, I would like to go for MSc.". Similarly, Woojin expressed his desired life as; "having a house and a car, earning enough money to support his future family". It seems that their dreams and aspirations are somewhat 'normal' that do not diverge into anything far unthinkable or fantastical. Thus, the gap between the image of 'ideal' and 'normal' seems to be small. The reason why their dreams seem so ordinary and perhaps unambitious can be explained by the situation they find themselves in, one where this 'normal' life they seek is near impossible to achieve. Kim explains that survival no longer entails being ambitious and shooting for the stars but rather passively following the path that is most likely going to allow you to make ends meet, hiding how exhausted you are, and dreaming of a 'normal' life. It is the reason why their dreams and goals are consistent with the 'normalized' path, aspiring for stability and continuity.

At this point, I must explain that the 'ideal' dreams should be understood differently from the image of the 'right person' (see more in chapter 5.1.3). The image of the 'right person' also can be understood by Kim, as a goal which is unattainable and impossible for the self to achieve. Although, the meaning of the 'ideal' dream is a dream that makes sense within the economic situation of the young adult in Korea, one that is approved by society and the values it has instilled in the mind of the participant. It is why their dreams do not go beyond the 'path' of the 'normal', but instead, they dream what they are allowed to dream of. In fact, Rose also derives a similar point through conceptualizing the "expertise of subjectivity" that the "aspiration" means nothing but to maximize its lifestyle and its practices are in connection with the notions of normality. Being the "expertise of subjectivity" and being the "survivor" is connected with the image of the 'path'. It draws a similar point because the interviewees decided to pursue the life of the certain, choosing it by themselves to follow the logic of the economy, which leads their life towards the 'normalized' 'path'. The 'path'



carries out the meaning of 'normal' in which interviewees believe and act upon it so that their dreams could not escape from the 'path' and exist as "a single model of life conduct which disciplines the human differences" (Rose, 1996, p. 186).

### 5.2.3 Calculating self

When I asked the interviewees about how they spent their time at university, and about their daily routines in order to better understand their day-to-day lives, it emerged that they were restricting themselves in order to have a better future. As previously illustrated, the behaviours, emotions, and beliefs that the market favoured seemed to be the standard to which the participants were assimilating as it promised the best outcome for their future.

At the time of the interview, Seohyun had recently taken a semester off after finishing her seventh semester, although she still had a busy schedule. She wakes up at 7 am every day and starts the day with a telephone English lesson. And then she takes a private lesson from 9:30 to 18:00 in Big Data technologies. After the lesson, she goes back home and goes to bed around 00:00. She added in a calm and monotonous tone of voice that

"I just always had something to do. I have never spent more than one or two months doing nothing in my life so far. It is not that I make plans, but rather I have been doing things because there is always a thing that I have to do."

She seems to lead her life busy conforming to the routines of her own. Likewise, Woojin answered that he is trying to live his life for the better because he thinks that he has lived a too relaxed life. He problematized his way of living because the job market does not welcome those types of people who "do whatever they want for one or two years and try to re-enter the job market". Since the competition for employment is getting fierce, he decided to prepare for a professional career. The efforts to increase their attractiveness as a candidate for good positions also appeared in the case of Jiwoo. Jiwoo used to spend her time at university writing papers and taking part in study groups. One of the important reasons for this choice was that it would make her resume look better.

An interesting finding from the participants' accounts is that they not only guide themselves to choose their 'path', but also autonomously self-controlling their decisions and actions. It seems to be a habitual thing for them to control their own daily life in such ways. This indicates that even the interviewees' efforts would not guarantee success and money for them,

but rather it is their 'best' choice in order to survive the competitive world. In addition, they are investing and managing themselves to the truth of the job market and the competition which are also perceived as good. Therefore, it indicates that 'the path' seems to force the self to become an autonomous and free entity where it entails the same values as the economy.

The interpretation of the relationship between themselves and others is also described in Joowon's story. By his comprehension, he thinks that 'failure' is a natural circumstance for young adults, but it should not be repeated more than once. He explained that:

"I think we should get out of the circumstance where failure is inevitable. If you keep failing, you may be intimidated and eventually feel depressed about it. Then, you may want to give up all the efforts that you have been worked on, so I think one should get out of such status and enter the new circumstances of success and achievement."

In his words, failure indicates an occasion in which one loses the opportunity of raising one's reputation, which is very scarce. Additionally, he showed a certain way of perceiving the relationship with others by explaining the reason for his interest in others in his twenties. He explained that he feels interested when he meets somebody because not only, he can learn something but he can also observe a 'model' of a person who he does not want to be and tries to be better than. Based on his words, he seems to treat himself with strict rules to raise his reputation, and also rejects certain emotions such as depression for his own success and achievement. He was problematizing the feeling of depression and being intimidated so that he can "enter the new circumstances of success". In this sense, he is being a subject; who evaluates his experiences and feelings in relation to psychological images of fulfilment and autonomy; who decides the moto of his life with himself; who plans and desires for the future based on those values; and who chooses to walk the normalized path (Rose, 1996, p. 195).

To summarize, the 'normalized' path is preferred as the participants' lifestyle that they are highly controlling themselves and calculating the outcomes of their behaviour for their future stable lives. Most importantly, the truth of the job market and competition is believed as a key logic for their decisions and actions which are left out to be unquestioned but rather perceived as a 'good' for their personal success.

#### 5.2.4 Neoliberalism as a common culture

Based on the discussions through chapters 5.1 and 5.2, it could propose the conception of a

'neoliberal culture': Where the selves embody the values of neoliberalism to believe, desire and act upon those values, that is, guiding the selves to walk the path of normalization by their own volition. The 'neoliberal culture' delivers various signifiers such as; success, competition, greater education, stability, productivity, achievement, and enterprise. Even though these signifiers are varied, it guides individuals to live their life in a single way, as to live it single model of lifestyle and a sole way of existence under the common culture of neoliberalism. These signifiers have illustrated by the interviewees' narratives that they perceive, decide, and act upon the 'logic of market' to pursue those values in their lives which eventually can be defined as a 'neoliberal culture'. This 'neoliberal culture' appears to be cutting across the lives of the participant by which it makes them calculate their potential for their future career and ultimately seek a life of normalization.

These aspects of neoliberal culture are more explained by Jiyeon's narratives. She said that she made a "huge" decision to quit her job as a dental hygienist and decided to change her career to be a Barista. She was dragged out by chasing others which made her work so hard that she became depressed and exhausted (see more in chapters 5.4.2, 5.5.1). Also, the people around her actively showed her their displeasure based on her decision to become a barista and quit her job as a dental hygienist. Before she decided to quit her job, She took bakery lessons without telling her family, She explained that if she had told someone of this, then they would have seen it as an unproductive pastime and talked her out of her decision to become a barista and made her think "yeah I am being crazy, I should just keep my job as a dentist, what am I doing here?". However, after she decided to quit her work and live a life as a barista, her attitude and thoughts have been changed. She illustrates:

“Now I confidently talk about my job as a barista, being confident about myself and my decision. It's just a tough process to stop, but if you once stop, it is easy to think 'Why am I pushing myself so hard?'”.

These narratives from Jiyeon deliver a strong point: When you are walking on the path of normalization, it dominates your mind and body to control your judgements and actions. It means that it is powerful enough to control one's existence until one renounces the path entirely.

### 5.3 Emotions, as created by the atmosphere.

This chapter will discover the existing emotions related to the job-seeking process and will describe how they are evaluating their own emotions and uncover the related values, behaviours, and desires behind them.

#### 5.3.1 Anxiety

Various participants expressed their anxiety related to the perceived atmosphere they find themselves in while following their chosen path in life. Suah confessed that she feels a vague sense of anxiety when she observes a person who has excellent and desirable skills for their future job. She explained:

“When you see someone succeed in landing a job in online communities, they have so many splendid skills behind the success stories. I mean, I think I worked hard on myself, but after seeing that, the question gets into my head; ‘am I a problem?’. I believe my anxiety comes from a lack of confidence in myself. I am not sure that I can reach the higher positions within this highly competitive situation with my current skills.”

Interestingly, Seohyun felt anxious for the opposite reason when she doesn’t hear any news about her friends being hired. Considering that the ranking of universities is an important signifier of skills and licenses for getting a job in Korea, the news can mean that her university title is not competitive enough for stable and prestigious jobs. She also perceived and confirmed her ‘position’ by reminding herself of how many of her university seniors went to a ‘good’ company. As in the case of Jimin, she felt anxious and worried because she did not think she was living a ‘decent’ and ‘proper’ life as a job seeker. She describes that now her life is not diligent and earnest enough for the process. She thinks she needs to put in more effort such as getting the required scores or beefing up her resume, so after that, she can be prepared for her future life, however, her anxiety didn’t go anywhere. She said, “I keep feeling anxious because there is one thing I cannot change, my age.”. Among the many other demands and preferences, the Korean job market poses on job seekers, age is also a factor that can have an impact on the desirability of a candidate. Therefore, she believes that her age will be a disadvantage for her when she tries to get hired by private companies. It is why she has to persuade herself by constantly saying ‘you can do this’ whenever she loses her confidence. Lastly, Kunwoo’s anxiety began when he went through the ‘second-year-disease’

during his second semester. In Korean, ‘Second-year-disease’ refers to the psychological state in which second-year students worry about their future and feel anxious about getting a job. Kunwoo explained that after a time of enjoying and having fun entering his adult years, ‘second-year-disease’ appeared to him concerning the ‘reality’ of how to make money by himself. His ‘second-year-disease’ came earlier than others, although he feels less anxious now because he worked hard on ‘something’ which is considered a ‘visible’ and ‘obvious’ outcome for him.

Throughout the narratives, it has been found that the participants' anxiety is connected to their denouncing certain behaviours, idealizing certain images of people, comparing themselves to them, and guiding themselves towards a path of normalization. Firstly, it can be interpreted that Suah and Seohyun are perceiving their surroundings as “an imagined society of venue of a contest formed by ranking positions”, worrying about their ranking positions by comparing them to others above them and below them (Kim, 2015, p. 197). Secondly, a similar way of perceiving the life world is presented by Jimin and Kunwoo by judging their certain behaviours through the logic of fulfilment and autonomy and desiring the certain goal in their life. The particular way of life they believe in and follow corresponds to the logic of the job market. Whether the subjects feel or do not feel anxious is decided by those “rules of conduct” which eventually leads them to have a therapeutic relationship with themselves by problematizing their mundane existence (Rose, 1996, pp. 96, 192).

### 5.3.2 Fear

Similarly, the emotion of fear is described by Hayoon illustrating a specific circumstance in her mind. In her words, since her friends are of the same ‘standing’ as her, she fears a specific situation; everyone getting a job but her, left behind alone at the bottom. What she is also afraid of is related to similar situations in which she may lag behind the other competitors. She adds:

“I want to find what my aptitude is, but I can’t spend my time on that because you don’t know how long it will take. It may take a few months at the earliest, but you may not be able to find it at all. I am afraid about the occasion when those times will keep passing with no findings, so it is why I give up on this wish.”

Similar to the examples above, she also perceived her existence based on a certain way of perceiving the atmosphere, which is related to competition and the authority of the market.

Not only that, but she also holds a “machinic connection” and a “competitive relationship” with others (Rose, 1996, p. 182; Kim, 2015, p. 197).

### 5.3.3 Pressure and pride

Pressure functioned as a motivation for the participants to achieve and fulfil their aspirations which are in line with the atmosphere of achievement. Jiyeon said that she felt a lot of pressure during high school to receive attention from her peers. She claimed that her excellent marks on exams were followed by attention and compliments from others and the ‘atmosphere’ of achievement brought on the feelings of pressure. As for Woojin, the feeling of pressure motivated him to study hard for his university entrance exam during his last year in high school. He stated that “I somehow neglected my studies during the first half of that year, but then, I felt a psychological pressure that I shouldn’t neglect my studies, so I studied hard for the rest of my senior year.”. In his opinion, he believed that such pressure could function as healthy motivation for oneself. As it can be seen that the motivation for achievement and fulfilment is accompanied by the emotion of pressure which makes the participants believe in and act to follow a certain path in their life. Although pressure may not always be the best motivator for all, pride and gratification can also serve the same function. Suah reported that she feels gratification from the process of planning, doing, and finishing the preparation for her future career. She detailed that “When I learn the skills for real life and fulfil my existence as a full-qualified-person of the world, I feel that I’m proud of myself that I contributed to the organizations I like.”. In her case, she believed that ‘real life’ is where she retains an “instrumental relationship” with herself, polishing up her skills and standing with the values of achievement and success. Moreover, it can be said that feelings of pressure and pride are perceived by the interviewees corresponds to the perceived atmosphere of achievement for them, and how they think that behaving in certain ways aligns with the values of the Korean job market and economy.

### 5.3.4 Guilt

The feeling of guilt occurred when the participant could not fulfil the targeted amount of work in a day in line with their specific goals and aims. Jiyeon confessed that she felt guilty on her way back home from university that her effort was not enough to reach the goal of the day. In her words;

“I felt that I should have concentrated more and made more progress in my studies,

but I couldn't reach the goal that day...Like, I should have made progress of hundred pages, but I only made eighty, so I felt guilty because of that.”.

We can see here that her emotion of guilt appears with her judgement towards the specific behaviour which is in line with the goal of success.

The image of the emotions of anxiety, fear, pressure and guilt derives from an identical image of the self which Kim describes as, ‘a defensive and passive attitude, concealed feelings of fatigue and resignation’ (Kim, 2015, p. 196). Throughout this chapter, it has become apparent that the participants were dealing with those negative emotions and cognitions, even though they did not pause or give up their conduct for achieving their goal. Unlike Kim, Rose has depicted the image of an “enterprising self” that the enterprise believes in competitiveness, strength, vigour, boldness, outwardness, and the urge to succeed (p. 157). As illustrated in the chapter, the participants may ‘seek’ and ‘pursue’ for those values to manage their lives as a kind of enterprise of themselves, but it does not mean that their expressing attitudes and feelings are in line with those images. In this regard, Kim explained in a different way that the act of “survival” possesses the image of “defensive and concealed attitudes and feelings” rather than the image of “achieving things with an ambitious and triumphant attitude”.

## 5.4 Conflicting selves

As we have discussed in chapter 5.1, the certain meaning of the ‘reality’ is perceived by the participants which let the subjects realize harsh and fierce competition to survive the endless contest. Due to the fact that a certain image of perceived ‘reality’ is controlling the interviewees’ actions and values, it appears that the interviewees are going through an inner conflict between the choices of their own dreams and the ‘realistic’ dreams. This section will depict the stories of these specific cases who choose to give up the dreams of their own by which confessing their internal minds about the forced ‘realistic’ dreams and the dreams of their own, and additionally, lost minds which stop dreaming about their future lives. Also, it represents the cases who confess their feelings of being ‘passive’ for their experiences of career seeking process.

### 5.4.1 Dream of reality vs dream of my own

Firstly, some of the participants have once dreamed of their own, however, it was eventually left behind as an ideal ‘dream’ and replaced by the dream of ‘reality’. Suah once learned art for her future dream until she faced the ‘reality’ in her ninth grade. She used to attend the art academy to learn the specific curricula for the fine arts performance test to get into higher levelled universities. When she became the ninth grade, she starts to hear some of the sayings like “art earns a pittance” or “getting into the university of fine arts is tough”. The such surrounding atmosphere brought her the thoughts:

“I don’t think I’m good enough, then do I really have a chance to win this game? I mean, there is a saying that if you really like something, you do it without anticipating the results. But I’m already thinking of the results and start not to be liking the art, wouldn’t it mean that I truly don’t like learning art?”.

By the logic of winning the game, she was calculating the outcome and choosing to behave upon it, she decided to quit to learn the art from that point. Then, when I asked her ‘do you still carry the dream of doing art?’, she answered, “The biggest difference between now and then is that I no longer paint a drawing without the ‘justified’ cause.”.

Correspondingly, Minjun once had a dream to become a writer since he liked to write. He used to like writing in his high school and also had been awarded for his writings at a contest so that he mapped out his career path with writing. Although, he explained that “Well, but the things I had to face were not that dream but something else.”. And I asked, ‘then, what was more important than your dream?’, and he answered:

“Actually, the priority was survival. The problem was about money, such as, how much money should I earn for my living. Money is necessary for the things that I want to do in the future.”.

It could be seen that both Suah and Minjun had to put the other values over their dreams, which follows a certain “rule of conduct” for achievement, money, possibility, and normalization. By putting those values at the apex of their existence, the desire for writing or doing art is removed as a choice for them and instead, they rather try their best to maximize their capacities and the efficiency to become enterprising selves by their wills and choices. During this process of re-constructing the selves, they problematize those certain habits, propensities, and morals and “redirect their behavioural ability to solve those problems” (Kim, 2015, p. 188).



The process of finding a job made the individuals realize that they could realistically pursue their dreams, not only because it is considered 'unrealistic' but also forbidden by 'reality'. Because of the process, some of the participants have lost their way in life. Seohyun expressed that she is caught between a rock and a hard place. She enjoys her major in IR so she is aware of the jobs that are available and related to this degree, although, she found out that those options more often than not require a master's degree. The problem was all about 'money' she said, and after facing such 'reality', she has to choose what to give up on in order to find a 'realistic' career. As a result, she feels lost now that she has had to give up her path and passion for something that is considered more 'realistic' for her. She reported that "I've known about my preferences all my life, but recently, I don't know what I really like. I've never lived without a dream in my 22 years, but now, I feel like I don't have any future dream.". Similar to Seohyun, Hayoon confessed that the 'reality' forced her to abandon her decision to be an English teacher or Architect and expressed her anger about the 'reality'. She said:

"I was a bit angry because in your high school times, school often make you write down your future dreams and we answer it as a teacher or architecture, right? But after understanding the 'reality', such options were not in my option... What I can choose was either large companies or small companies like this."

She expressed her anger about such 'reality', but unfortunately, she had to embrace the reality and think of other options of what 'reality' approves, by calculating the skills that she possesses and judging her own 'level' by the companies' standards. In their case, their own dreams and desires are neglected and in favour of complying with the power of what is considered 'realistic'.

Since the 'reality' affects the individuals heavily, they have to lose their way of living life because the gap is huge between the path they want to follow and the forced path of 'reality'. It means that even though, they chose to act upon the values of survival and competition, it does not mean that their perceived identity is in tune with those common paths. Indeed, it has been shown that the common path they walk is guiding the individuals to think and believe in the values of success and survival and eventually, make them pursue a certain type of life. However, the participants' accounts demonstrate that they are not completely integrated into the system that values survival and competition above all else but is eventually driven to comply with those values although they do not match their own. One could say that Seohyun

and Hayoon have adopted survivor and machine-like selves since they eventually chose to abandon their own values and dreams to pursue more lucrative avenues. However, their emotions and thoughts about the process of losing their original paths in life show that it was not a decision that they easily made, and that the process of giving up on one's dreams for money breaks these multi-faceted individuals down into mere workers to be subjugated by the 'reality'.

#### 5.4.2 Being a passive self in the path of normalization

Some participants illustrated their stories of how this type of lifestyle makes them feel passive. In terms of Hayoon, she regrets being passive during her time at university and being controlled by the schedules at the time. She said that she got dragged into the university schedules during the semester and is busy with her part-time job during the summer vacation. She described the lifestyle as, 'too balanced' to live and claims that the ratio between the time spent in studies and in free time was too 'balanced'. Additionally, she thinks that her recent lifestyle is also reducing her to be a passive follower of a structured process.

“There are some guidelines and right manuals in the job searching communities, so I follow as it says. But I feel like I'm being passive in my activities all the time. Those activities like studying for licenses are so boring and I do them thoughtlessly. I don't even try to find interest inside but just do it like a robot.”

While Hayoon felt as though, she was being passive, Jiyeon illustrated that she was being rushed into resolving problems and chasing others. She thinks that she was moving at such speed in order to keep up with her peers whom she perceived to be one step ahead of her which meant that she had little time to focus on anything else. It is why at that time, the specific thought dominated her mind; “I have to do it so that I can live, not that I want it so that I live.”. These two accounts show that they are not acting, choosing, and living on their own with independent and autonomous attitudes towards their lives. Even if they chose to follow a certain path in life, it does not indicate that their minds and bodies are entirely connected and subordinated by the path of normalization. It is a significant finding that the individuals who are pursuing these lifestyles and values of the market, who give up their dreams and use various techniques to cope with their choices in order to survive in this system, still can recognise the flaws in this system and still dream. They may have gone through the process of becoming “autonomous selves”; embodied their techniques for

understanding and developing themselves, which gave them the “heart of survivalism”, and made them believe in the competitive job market and meritocracy, beliefs and habits that were embodied as habitus. (Rose, 1996, p. 153; Kim, 2015, p. 187). Nevertheless, there are chances to notice their ‘actual’ situation as we follow their ‘path of normalisation’ and observe how this process produces passive subjects of neoliberalism.

Throughout this chapter, it has emphasized the cases of the participants who detailed their internal minds distressing from the decisions between the dreams of their own and the dreams of ‘reality’. To seek the ‘realistic’ dream is being forced the participants to give up the dreams of their own and to follow the path of reality where survival and competition are valued for the choice of actions. Although, it has illustrated the crucial fact that some of the participants’ identities do not entirely in tune with the common path which depicts the hope of how the lives of Korean young adults can be diversified and multifaceted in spite of the powerful ‘reality’.

## 5.5 Life as a 20s in Korea

So far, I have discussed the perceived atmosphere and path that young adults in Korea take and how this leads them to feel, believe, and act in certain ways. This has led to the finding that the neoliberal nature of the job market in Korea has a significant effect on those who take part in it. However, the question of what it means to live in your 20s in Korea requires the voices of Korean young adults, which the following part of the chapter will illustrate through the participants' narratives.

### 5.5.1 Realizing selves

For the participants, living in their 20s in Korea was a process of observing and accepting the harsh competition as a fact of life. Kunwoo says that his 20s were occupied with this process of learning how to compete with others and to make himself stand out from the crowd. He realized that firstly, life is lonely because one has to try hard to achieve things by one’s own power and efforts. Secondly, he realized how the individuals within the market are categorised by their perceived usefulness and productivity. He had to realize the fact that people denounce the humanities or philosophy but idealize medical science based on the dominating ‘neoliberal culture’. The ‘neoliberal culture’ sends a message of a certain value of

‘usefulness’ which makes the individual judge certain subjects, act and choose them, and based on how much money it will earn them in the future or by how likely it is that they will find a job once they have completed their degrees.

As Kunwoo observed that ‘neoliberal culture’ exists in Korean society, Jiyeon went through the process of internalising the norms and values that became the “rules of conduct” for her own behaviour. Her twenties were according to her, depressing, tough, and tiring, and the values she had adopted compelled her to work non-stop until she ran out of energy. As she explains it, the common notions are:

“One has to run like a racing horse fighting to get first place, one has to be told ‘don’t you need to get a job?’ before their graduation, and one has to hear ‘what are you going to do with your life?’ after becoming the active job seeker but perceived as ‘unemployed’”.

For this reason, she expressed that Korean society needs more other perspectives such as “it is okay to take a break and having a break doesn’t mean that you are behind”. Based on her illustration, the existing notions are decrying certain behaviours and habits and revering others that are seen as more productive which in turn are internalised by young adults. These common notions make the individuals perceive their situation as: “an imagined society of venue of a contest formed by ranking positions” and lead them to possess a “therapeutic relationship to themselves by problematizing their mundane existence” (Kim, 2015, p. 197; Rose, 1996, p. 192).

One other interesting story was told by Minjun who explained that he felt as though his 20s had been ‘sold’ at a reasonable price for his stable future life. He argued that he doesn’t feel satisfied with his life in his 20s. Recalling his experiences in his 20s, he feels as though he had to give up many opportunities, fun experiences, and his youth. He has a stable job now, but he said that: “I feel like I’ve sold everything of my 20’s for a certain amount to afford the present life. I mean, it was a worthy somehow, but it was against my will, I’ve got forced to sell it by myself.”. The life described through his words can be understood by the logic of the market that his stabilized life today has been paid for by his time and efforts in his 20s. Also, such a process was not planned by his “autonomous” will, but rather society gave him no choice but to live a life as an “enterprising self”. The reason why he felt compelled to live a life in an economical way is consistent with the neoliberal culture in Korea, where the power

of neoliberalism positions the individuals as subjects who believe and choose to pursue a successful and achieving life. However, Minjun seems to realise that it was the neoliberal nature of the job market that obliged him to give up his 20s in order to have a stable life and career afterwards, and similarly, the two previously mentioned cases were also able to see the root of their behaviour and past decisions which directly related to neoliberalism. It means that despite the dominance and controlling power of the economy, the individuals who are part of it can realize and further, criticize the logic of neoliberalism. This realization may seem small and insignificant as a finding but knowing the power of ruling and its principles could be the beginning of the changes in Korean society.

### 5.5.2 Achieving selves

For some participants, their twenties meant a time of achieving and learning new things in order to better themselves. Suah described her twenties as a time where she derived much happiness from her achievement but that they were also tainted by her perceived inferiority to her peers. She added that she thinks she was lucky to learn a lot of things from her professors and friends during that time. For her, her twenties meant a time of a vibrant and energetic lifestyle where she endeavoured for a better self by learning and achieving things. Additionally, Joowon commented about his life in his twenties that he regrets certain parts of it and at the same time, was proud of the other aspects of his life. Firstly, he was blaming and regretting his lack of effort which he considers a ‘deficiency’ in his life. Also, he shows his sense of frustration that some of the activities have not been done by his ‘best’ effort. In his words, the meaning of the best means ‘giving one’s best out of one’s best’ which shows his enterprising and ambitious aspects of himself. On the contrary, he regrets the time spent ‘uselessly’ by criticizing his poor social background. He thinks that he spent his time uselessly blaming his lack of resources which he could have accepted and made the best of the situation which would have set him up better for the future. In the case of Joowon, he is judging his past behaviour as belonging to the dichotomous categories of useful and useless. Indeed, it seems as though both Suah and Joowon strive for, and value achievement above all else, pursuing the pathway of normalization.

### 5.5.3 Lone selves

While some participants understood their lives as a process of achieving more and more things, some understood it as a lonely existence. Seohyun describes that such a time of her

life was so hard to live out because everything had to be done by her, and her alone. She described that life in her twenties was a specific period of time where people should complete the tasks doled out by society in order to achieve stability in their future, however, Korean society gives too many hardships and sufferings to young adults. She says: “Just to mention the recent situation I know, the unemployment rate peaked in Korea and also the global situation got worse, as well as the domestic situation, I feel that our life is like a shooting a survival movie.”. Her expression of ‘shooting a survival movie’ sends a powerful and straight forward message to us that the possibilities of different and various lifestyles are declining in favour of the survivalist lifestyle. Above all, she thinks her life is too uncertain and she fears for her future due to the competitive and harsh conditions she finds herself in. Similarly, Hayoon also thinks that life in your twenties in Korea feels lonely because one has to succeed in everything by oneself. She illustrates, “It is so lonely to live a life in the 20s in Korea. Because you have to do it by yourself. No one can help you about it and you are the pioneer of your own life.”. She adds that she wouldn’t remember a single good memory of her 20s when she gets older since she hasn’t had a truly happy moment in her twenties.

Throughout the descriptions, the participants have shown how the ‘neoliberal culture’ exists as constantly forcing them to resolve the tasks and work to survive by their own effort. What should be emphasized here is that they have witnessed the hidden rules of the ‘neoliberal culture’: covering the truth that neoliberalism forces the individuals to bear the burden of living such an individual life separated from others in which individual achievement and constant productivity are valued above all else. Even if those heavy burdens are given by the structure of the economy, the ‘neoliberal culture’ makes the subjects condemn their behaviour of failing and falling behind in the competition.

## 5.6 Fluttering heart

The previous discussions have shown that the powerful culture of neoliberalism is affecting the participants to experience a certain atmosphere and simultaneously, reproduce the atmosphere and pursue a life of normalization. Yet, what has to be emphasized here is that this paper does not claim that the culture of neoliberalism is 'bad' or 'incorrect' for Korean society. Instead, the paper concerns the culture of neoliberalism which instructs Korean young adults to believe in the ‘atmosphere’ and makes them follow the ‘path of normalization’

which make them believe that this is the only way they can live their lives. As a consequence, the other ways of living life are ignored as trivial things. In this regard, some of the interviewees talked about living their lives in other ways as having fluttering hearts that are looking for happiness outside of this rigid system. Hayoon was expressing her fluttering heart when she thought of her dream to become an architect. She once visioned her future work in an architectural office to design buildings. But after she gave up the dream, she only allowed herself to go to exhibitions related to architecture. Then, when I asked about her emotions and thoughts about the experience, she expressed her fluttering heart in detail.

“My heart flutters from the very beginning on the way to the exposition. And there, I could see a lot of people who work in the construction industry, and I genuinely was so jealous of them.”

When she was talking about the story, her choice of words was much different from what she illustrated about her experiences of success and achievement.

These contradicting points are also well demonstrated by Jiyeon. When she was working as a dental hygienist, she decided to take a barista lesson after leaving her work. Then I asked why she chose to take the lesson, and she explained how much she wanted to and liked it. She said, “I felt so happy from the very moment when I grab the door pull of the place. Even for the occasion when I have to rush and jump into the train to the lesson place!”. When she was talking about this experience, her tone of voice and facial expression showed how genuinely happy and passionate she was about becoming a barista. Most of all, despite her tight schedule of working during the day and learning lessons at night, she said that she didn’t feel any pressure on her learning. She explains that if there was an exam, the whole process of learning was enjoyable and interesting to her. She exemplified it as: “I actually wanted to learn some more details about coffee at that time. Like, ‘Why does this one look like this’, or ‘Why does this coffee tastes a bit sweet, when this one taste bitter?’”. If we compare this experience with the previous ones where she devoted her efforts to become a dental hygienist, it reveals the fact that she feels more complete and happier in this position rather than in the one where she was following the 'realistic' and 'normalized' path. This argument is surely illustrated in her words:

“I now live a life where I no longer let others push me for the better. I mean, the life before was that I forced myself and also let others force me, and I was caught by the

thoughts that I have to be stuck in this small box and should not run out of this path. But now, I'm no longer a racehorse. I became a free horse that it runs the way of its own.”.

Her explanation of her life indicates a few important points. First, she is self-directing her pathway of life that she makes her goal of achievement and controls her thoughts and actions. This type of lifestyle should be interpreted distinctly from the previous cases, that is, while the other lifestyles were interrupted by the ‘rules of neoliberal culture’, her life seemed to be somewhat escaped from the control of neoliberal culture. It is because her process of reaching for her own goal has less spent on the result of gaining that her expressions about her choice illustrate how she truly feels happy about her life of own. Second, she expressed her feelings of freedom that she seems to enjoy her life through choosing the important decision by herself and having greater autonomy in her own life. Her sense of ‘freedom’ delivers a different meaning from the previous cases in which ‘freedom’ is forced and seduced by the existing neoliberal culture in Korean society. In her case, her choice is made through an insistent relationship with herself by reflecting on her inner aspiration, which should be less disrupted by the path of normalization. These findings guide my argument that every choice of path and lifestyle needs to be respected in Korean society regardless of their perceived ‘productiveness’.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis has discovered the job-seeking experiences of Korean young adults by using qualitative research methods. The previous chapters have explained how the choices of future careers have been made during their lives living in a neoliberalized society.

The first chapter ‘Perceived atmosphere of competition’ sought what situation the participants are facing which was discovered by the concept of the competitive ‘atmosphere’. It uncovers that certain ways of believing, feeling, and acting were strongly related to the logic of ‘reality’ which serves a variety of values such as success and productivity. The ‘reality’ was perceived as a ‘competitive atmosphere’ for the participants that not only they act upon those values for their achievement, but also internalizing those values as logic for



their lifestyles. Likewise, the image of the 'right person' was understood as a goal or model for the interviewees to motivate them or sometimes discourage them in terms of the process of attaining skills and achieving their goals. It indicates that the standard of 'right person' presupposes the values of success and competition which makes the interviewees perceive their surrounding 'atmosphere' in an economical way.

The second chapter suggests the notion of a 'normalized' path where those young adults confront that forcing them to wish for stability and continuity which is considered as 'normal'. The 'normalized' path was dominating the lives of the participants by categorizing the subjects as useful and useless. Also, this existing 'path' was leading the interviewees to calculate the values of their dreams for personal success. This was done by maximizing their abilities, restricting, and managing themselves, to have a better future which holds the same values as the job market. It is why the participants' dreams were forming and formed within the 'normalized' path, forbidding themselves to not go beyond the 'path'. At this moment the perceived 'atmosphere' and the 'normalized path' can be come together and explained as a concept of 'neoliberal culture'. 'Neoliberal culture' here, indicates that the selves embody the values of neoliberalism which guides the selves to walk the path of normalization of their own volition.

The third chapter discovers the expressed emotions of the interviewees' various emotions such as anxiety, fear, pressure, and pride are observed. These emotions are revealed when they are walking on the 'normalized path' by sensing the 'atmosphere' of achievement. Even the stories varied by the situation that they are facing, however, those negative feelings are related to their conduct for achieving their goals for their successful future.

The fourth chapter introduces certain cases who are going through an inner conflict between the choices of their own dreams and the 'realistic' dreams. Some had to give up their dreams of their own because the 'reality' was forcing them to put the values of competition at the apex of their existence. It describes that the existing 'reality' is powerful enough to make them walk on the common paths which emphasize the fact that the other dreams are neglected multi-faceted individuals are broken down to mere workers.

The fifth chapter explains what it means by living in Korea as a young adult by highlighting the voices of the participants. It displays how young adults live their lives as multi-faceted selves; realizing selves, achieving selves, and lone selves. For some participants, their 20s

were meant by the process of realizing the ‘reality’ where the value of neoliberalism is controlling the whole society, others have described that their lives are about pursuing success and achievement by learning new skills and regretting their lack of effort. The others expressed their feeling of being lonely and that life in their 20s was lonely for them because the ‘neoliberal culture’ was forcing them to resolve the tasks by their own effort.

The last chapter derives the stories of what fluttering hearts can be expressed with genuine happiness and passion by the Korean young adults which stay outside of the ‘normalized path’. Since the ‘neoliberal culture’ is ignoring the other values as trivial things, it will be significant to spot the lives living in other ways as having fluttering hearts which are seeking true happiness outside of the system.

Throughout the thesis, it has allowed deriving the stories of Korean young adults by detailing their emotions, beliefs, actions, and judgement about their job-seeking experiences.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Interview guide

Thank you for your participation today. Before we start the interview, I would like to introduce myself and the thesis topic. I am a 28(Korean age) years old Sociology Master's student in Lund, Sweden and I am in my last semester to write my thesis paper for the degree.

Since I have also lived and studied in Korea throughout my life, I appreciated how young adults in Korea experiencing the era of unemployment crisis and a competitive society. Because of this recent situation, many Korean young adults may have different kinds of concerns about their future and make a huge effort to make their dream come true. In this context, the thesis will focus on how young adults are experiencing the life of chasing their future careers.

All the interview stories will be used only for this thesis, and the transcript will be secured in my personal file. Additionally, the interview would be published anonymously to protect against disclosure of your identity. Though, there is a space for you to be credited with your name and your information, so please ask me if you want to claim it.

Before we start, do you have any questions related to the interview? Then, I would like to ask for consent for the recording.

### 8.2 Interview questions: Semi-structured questions

Socio-Demographic features

-How old are you? What is your gender? Where is your hometown? Did you get into university, and if so, where? Which year did you enter the university? What is your major?

High school times

-Can you briefly describe your daily routine during high school times?

-How do memories from high school remain in your mind now?

-How did you feel about your studies for entering university at that time?

-How many, and where did you apply for the university application? Why did you choose the major?

-How did you discuss with your parents/teachers about your choice of major? How did they react to your decision?

-Are there any difficulties in planning for your future at that time? If so, how was it?

#### University times

-How did you spend your university time? And why?

-Why did you choose your major and how are you satisfied with it?

-Did you have any pressure or concern about your future career? If so, why?

-If a person had pressure: Since, when did you start to worry about your future career? And how did you feel about it?

-How did you share your concerns with your surrounding people? What kinds of conversations did you have? If not, why? If so, why?

#### Preparation for future career

-What kinds of activities/works have you done in your life for your future career and why have you chosen to do that?

-How do you feel or think about your life of seeking a job in Korea?

#### Life Satisfaction

-How's your 20's so far? What does it mean by being in the 20s in Korea for you?

-How much are you satisfied with your life now and what does it mean to you as a young adult in Korea?

### 8.3 Social Demography of interview participants

The table below presents the social demographic characteristics of the interview participant for the thesis. The characteristics of the participants include gender, a native of the region, bachelor's university, and their field of major.

Table 1. Gender distribution

<b>Gender</b>	Female	7
	Male	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 2. Field of major

<b>Major</b>	Social Science	2
	Humanities	5
	Commerce and Economics	3
	Health Science	1
	Aviation Service	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 3. Native of the region

<b>Region</b>	Seoul	3
	Gyeonggi-do	2
	Incheon	2
	Gyeongnam	1
	Gyeongbuk	2
	kangwon-do	1
	Jeju Island	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 4. Enrolled University

<b>University</b>	Kungwoon university	1
	Kyungpook national university	1
	Korea national open university	1
	Sangmyung university	1
	Soongsil university	1
	Seoul national university	2
	Inha university	1
	Joongang university	1
	Hanshin university	2
	Howon university	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>



Table 5. Interview participants' profile

<b>Name(Given)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>University / Major</b>
Minjun	Male	29	Seoul	Howon university / Aviation Service
Jiwoo	Female	24	Gyeonggi-do	Hanshin university / English Literature
Seohyun	Female	22	Gyeonggi-do	Hanshin university / International relations
Minseo	Female	26	Jeju Island	Korea national open university / English Literature
Jiyou	Female	25	Gyeongbuk	Kungwoon university / Dental Hygiene
Hayoon	Female	22	Seoul	Sangmyung university / English Literature
Joowon	Male	20	Seoul	Inha university / Global Finance
Jimin	Female	26	Gyeongnam	Seoul national university / Economics
Sooa	Female	23	kangwon-do	Seoul national university / Sociology
Kunwoo	Male	22	Incheon	Soongsil university / Philosophy
Daeun	Female	24	Incheon	Joongang university / Business
Woojin	Male	22	Gyeongbuk	Kyungpook national university / English Literature