

Revisiting Durkheim's Social Regulation: Anomie and Fatalism in South Korea

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I explore Durkheim's suicide-typology in the context of South Korea. Given that suicide rates are globally high in the country, I interview 29 South Koreans in their 20s-30s to gather perspectives on how they conceptualize suicide, and what elements of society and life they deem related to globally high suicide rates. In doing so, I link interviewees' ideas about suicide to Durkheim's original four suicide types. Moreover, I find evidence through these interviews that complicates the exclusivity and distinctiveness of these suicide types. Chapter Two takes a historical look at well-known cases of suicide in Korea and puts into conversation the multiple Durkheimian interpretations one can take when classifying suicides. Chapter Three explores how interviewees related suicide to a tension created from differing values forced upon them by older generations, relating to concepts of anomie and fatalism simultaneously when thinking about motives for suicide. Chapter Four posits that people often slide between Durkheim's types, and specifically between fatalism and anomie given anomic reactions when people fail to meet fatalistic social expectations. Chapter Five operationalizes Durkheim's four suicide types and demonstrates the intersection of social regulation and integration; times at which where people at times relate to all of Durkheim's suicide-types at once when conceptualizing motives for suicide. In concluding this dissertation, I rethink Durkheim's suicide theory and demonstrate that in exploring individual suicide types, there is overlap between the types in terms of how people think through suicide, as well as what elements of social life they relate suicide to.

Chapter One: Introduction

“Suicide is a massive social problem. It doesn’t just affect those who are close to the victim. It’s a full-blown epidemic that is spreading through our society” (South Korean captain¹, as cited in Mauduy, 2015, 14:04-14:17).

Deemed by some as the *Republic of Suicide* (Mauduy, 2015), and others as *Suicide Nation* (Jang, 2014), South Korea² has had one of the highest national suicide rates in the world over the last two decades (Choi and Yo, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; OECD, 2022a; WHO, 2012). In 2022, South Korea ranked highest among OECD countries with 23.6 suicides per 100 000 persons, compared to the OECD average of 11.1 (Statistics Korea, 2022). Relatedly, suicide is the leading cause of death among South Koreans ranging in the age group of teens to thirties (Choi and Bae, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Suicide rates within this age group have also seen significant increases over the past two decades; for example, suicides per 100,000 teens rose 68.8% from 2000-2011 (Lee, 2016). Thus, suicide is increasingly prevalent in South Korea and deserves study.

In this project I focus on the 20-30 age group to explore narratives and reasons from South Koreans themselves about suicide. This not only contributes to understanding how suicide is conceptualized among youth in South Korea but connects suicide to particular societal and cultural elements unique to life in this context. The study of suicide has been argued generally to be too heavily reliant on positivist and quantitative approaches (Ansloos, 2018; Kral, 2012; White et al., 2016), without qualitatively asking the important question, “why suicide?” (Kral, 2012). Prioritizing voices in such a study is key in providing more nuanced and contextual

¹ In charge of rescue operations for people who fall or jump into the various rivers in South Korean cities.

² I use the terms “Korea” and “South Korea” both in this dissertation. The times at which “Korea” is used is meant to represent the time until 1945 that Korea was one country. Where “South Korea” is used, even when discussing aspects of the country’s history, I am only discussing South Korea specifically and not meant to be representing North Korea, which has undoubtedly had a different course of history since the split.

understandings of suicide than statistical analyses alone can give (Hjelmeland, 2016). Scholars often call for suicide research to be sensitive towards local cultural, experiential, and environmental conditions (Ansloos, 2018; Baer et al., 2013; Wexler & Gone, 2016), and I contend that an approach that explicitly asks people themselves about suicide is best-suited for providing a contextual and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, it has also been argued that more effective approaches to suicide prevention can be developed by directly prioritizing input from community members themselves (Fullagar & O'Brien, 2016; Kral, 2019; Morris, 2019). This approach falls in line with an anthropology of suicide that places focus on how people 'make sense' of suicide (Münster & Broz, 2016). Following suit, this project is focused on prioritizing the voices and narratives of people themselves about suicide in order to link these explanations to social life locally in South Korea.

In one of the most influential social studies on suicide, Durkheim (2002/1897) developed a sociological model to explain the occurrence (and the variation in the occurrence) of suicide in society. He conceptualized social dimensions or social forces that determined suicide mortality in society, and categorized suicide into four types: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. Durkheim notably focused on suicide *after-the-fact*, meaning he used suicide rates to develop his theory. For example, suicide *attempts* were left out of Durkheim's study, even though they are suicidal behavior and that they are often more common than completed suicides (Chua, 2016; Kushner & Sterk, 2005). Suicidal intent was also left out of Durkheim's classification as his study was rather focused on the result (Broz, 2016). Thus, while I want to clearly acknowledge the significant contribution of Durkheim's original study, there were elements of suicidal behavior that his study did not explore.

It is also necessary to avoid forcing contradictory evidence into Durkheim's typology, and instead reconsider his typology based on such contradictions (Burawoy, 1988). Durkheim's suicide types were originally presented as static concepts. While Durkheim admitted that individual types may share "kindred ties" (see Durkheim, 2002/1897, p. 2019), he remained adamant that the suicide types were mutually exclusive. A suicide could not be anomic and fatalistic, for example, given that these concepts were opposites and would mean someone is experiencing low and high social regulation concurrently. However, in this dissertation, I provide evidence that people's own conceptualizations of suicide complicate this notion of exclusivity. Talking to people themselves about suicide reveals that people at times relate suicide to both opposites of regulation (i.e., anomie and fatalism) *simultaneously*, and at other times move fluidly between Durkheim's proposed themes (in terms of how they conceptualize the social forces that lead to suicide). In other words, while the present qualitative approach demonstrates the utility of Durkheim's suicide-types, it also adds to how these types can be used and applied in a modern use of his theory. Instead of potentially forcing an individual suicide into an ill-fitting given type, I demonstrate in this dissertation that suicides can be conceptualized by people themselves as being related to several of Durkheim's types, simultaneously and fluidly.

Durkheim's Suicide-Theory

Durkheim's (2002/1897) *Le Suicide* theorized that suicide rates fluctuate based on levels of *social regulation* and *social integration* within groups. Regulation refers to the normative or moral demands placed on the individual that come with membership in a group, while integration refers to the extent to which person is bound to the moral demands and social relations of a group (Bearman, 1991). Using these processes, Durkheim developed a typology to categorize suicides. Extremes of regulation and integration influence suicidality: too much social

integration leads to *altruistic suicide* (e.g., someone sacrificing their own life on the behalf of the greater good, a soldier dying in a war); too little social integration leads to *egoistic suicide* (an isolated and lonely person who has no social ties around them); too little social regulation leads to *anomic suicide* (e.g., someone who cannot adapt their life and goals to a sudden economic crisis); and lastly, too much social regulation leads to *fatalistic suicide* (e.g., a prisoner serving a life-sentence). Durkheim suggested that maintaining an equilibrium, or ‘healthy’ levels of regulation and social integration, is what protects the individual and society against suicide.

Specifically, I propose that *social regulation* is particularly useful to understanding suicide in the South Korean context. I argue that South Koreans conceptualize and describe suicide in terms of both extremes of regulation, high regulation (fatalism) and low regulation (anomie) in connecting suicide to elements of their lives in South Korean society. However, I place emphasis on the *both*; that is, people describe suicides in terms of anomie *and* fatalism, demonstrating great overlap between Durkheim’s mutually exclusive types.

Below, I describe how each of these concepts can be theoretically connected to the South Korean case, and how they are used in this project.

Anomie and Cultural Ambivalence

In 21st century South Korea, traditional Korean values and belief systems (e.g., but not limited to: Confucianism, shamanism, collectivism, traditional Chinese medicine) *exist alongside or in opposition to* Western values (e.g., but not limited to: Christianity, understandings of mental disorders and psychiatry (derived from German influence) and biomedicine) and beliefs of individualism (Cumings, 2005; DiMoia, 2013, 2014; Duncan, 2002; Han, 2003; Kendall, 2009; Kim, 2013; Kim-Yoon and Williams, 2015; Sleziak, 2013; Yoo, 2016). I contend that the simultaneous existence of South Korean and Western value systems relates to Durkheim’s

(2002/1897) concept of *anomie* given the resulting social dysregulation coming from being caught between two cultures. This contention draws heavily on Park's (2013) theory of *cultural ambivalence*. Cultural ambivalence is defined by Park as coming from "a social condition in which an old set of values becomes blurred, while a new set of values is not recognized or accepted by its members. This pathological social condition, with its lessening of the normative regulation of the society, can lead many people to have an unclear concept of what is proper and acceptable behavior" (Park, 2013, p. 237). In other words, if people are caught between two cultures, this may be relevant suicidal behavior as the lack of cultural continuity is a risk factor to suicide (Kral, 2019).

Park's concept of cultural ambivalence is derived from Durkheim's (2002/1897) *anomic suicide*. Durkheim argued that a lack of social regulation would lead people to commit suicide; that is, when people do not have a clear set of social expectations, and thus society cannot regulate them, they are likely to commit suicide. This lack of regulation happens when society is in a state of *anomie*. Similarly, Park's (2013) cultural ambivalence contends that anomic suicide happens in South Korea due to the blending of traditional Confucian and 'Western' values. Cultural changes have happened in South Korean society that have increased the assimilation of Western values and consequently decreased the strength of Confucian values. Notably, in his original work on suicide, Durkheim (2002/1897) postulated that having a strong connection to traditional and religious values served as a protective factor to suicide. In the South Korean case, this could mean that a strong connection to Confucianism, filial piety, collectivism, and other traditional South Korean values would protect against suicide. However, Park (2013) explains that Western values, characterized by individualism, came with industrialization that began in the late 1960s and 1970s in South Korea. The tension that arises between interpersonal-directed

Confucian values and individual-oriented Western values creates a source of distress for many people in South Korea. Park argues that contemporary South Koreans are provided with no clear set of social expectations, only conflicting and confusing messages stemming both from mutual-help, collectivistic ethics (Confucianism) and self-serving individual needs (Western/individualism). As Park points out, the inability of society to set clear normative dimensions (due to the duality between the values associated with individualism and Confucianism) creates an anomic society for South Koreans of all ages, albeit in different ways (Park, 2013). Thus, like within Durkheim's *anomie*, people experiencing cultural ambivalence are unclear of the normative expectations and goals within society, leading to suicide (Kang, 2017; Park, 2013). Importantly, the aim here is not to essentialize or simplify Korean culture into the aforementioned belief systems. Korean culture has a long history and is much more complex than just described. However, the idea here is that there is a conflict of values between people in South Korean society, and this conflict may result in a tension that in one way or another is related to suicidal behavior.

Moreover, like *anomie*, cultural ambivalence is theorized as being associated with one suicide type. However, in this dissertation I demonstrate that while people report feeling caught between two cultures and experiencing cultural ambivalence, they also struggle in *fatalistic* social circumstances, making for a situation in which people relate suicide to *anomie* and fatalism simultaneously. This briefly highlights a main contribution of this dissertation as a whole; that is, when considering what people themselves say about suicide and directly juxtaposing that data with Durkheim's suicide types, we see that there is often overlap between types and themes that can be used to characterize the described context. In other words, there are often multiple applicable types that can be used to describe the social conditions that people

connect suicide to, challenging the idea that one suicide type alone fits best. To be clear, I find great merit in the utility of using Durkheim's suicide types to describe such circumstances. However, it is the exclusivity of the individual types that is challenged by the findings of this dissertation.

I find cultural ambivalence to be a useful concept to use throughout this dissertation, as it is a nuanced version of Durkheim's anomie for the South Korean context. However, I contend that I build on cultural ambivalence here by demonstrating that people in South Korea think about suicide in terms beyond the constraints of the concept. Cultural ambivalence, like Durkheim's original suicide types, is premised on the idea that one type, anomie, fits best in describing the social conditions that promote suicide. In this dissertation rethink and add to this idea; while acknowledging that cultural ambivalence is a relevant and salient concept, I indicate that the concept itself is not enough to capture the fluid essence of suicide described by South Korean youth and young adults.

I further find it important to add that Merton's (1938, 1968) interpretation of anomie directs, in large part, how I employ the concept in this dissertation. Merton contends that anomie comes from the inability to realize and meet cultural goals given the inadequate structural means to achieve them. In other words, if people are expected to achieve something in their lives but society is unable to regulate them to this end, they will experience anomie. Like cultural ambivalence then, the version of anomie being used in this dissertation is one that captures the individual's micro reaction to experiencing tension; whether or not this is from conflict with other generations, value systems, or an inability to meet cultural goals, people experience anomie within this framework of not being able to follow expectations. Where cultural ambivalence creates uncertainty in the expectations to follow, Merton's interpretation argues that the

expectations cannot be followed in the first place. In either case, as I argue in this dissertation, it seems that anomie can be used at the micro individual level to capture the essence of how anomic tension influences their suicidality.

Fatalism and South Korean Education

As noted above, suicide is the leading cause of death among South Koreans ranging in the age group of teens to thirties (Choi and Bae, 2020; Lee et al., 2020), and rates are steadily increasing among this age group (Lee, 2016). This particular age group is widely depicted by South Korean researchers as being primarily made up of university students (Ahn and Baek, 2013; Choi and Bae, 2020; Kim & Chung, 2019), given that South Korea consistently ranks among the highest of OECD countries in terms of enrolment in secondary and tertiary education (OECD, 2022b). Moreover, South Korea is widely known for its competitive education system and stressful academic environment, which consequently is said to affect adolescents' physical, mental, and emotional well-being negatively (Ahn and Baek, 2013; Seth, 2002). Hence, much of the research on adolescent suicide in South Korean teens attributes high rates at least partly to school-caused depression or 'academic stress' (Kwon et al., 2016; Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2020). Furthermore, reforms and changes to the education system, such as the reviving of university entrance exams and the raising of academic standards have occurred over the past 30 years in South Korea, coinciding with steady increases in student suicides (Seth, 2002). Thus, it goes without saying that the relationship between suicide and education is an important area to explore.

I find in this dissertation that South Koreans in their 20s-30s qualitatively characterize their lives as being *blocked and oppressed by excessive discipline* (language that Durkheim uses to characterize fatalistic suicide, see Durkheim, 2002/1897, p. 239) and within the confines of the education system that they navigate. These people express stresses and descriptions of their lives

that fit within Durkheim's theory of fatalistic suicide: oppressive social expectations surrounding education that consists of a high regulation of students' lives. For example, South Korean high school and university students are often said to have strongly regulated lives where achieving high education is prioritized over personal interests and social lives (Ahn and Baek, 2013; Kwon et al., 2016; Kwon et al., 2017; Landgraf, 2020; Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2020; Seth, 2002); an element that is argued to be relatively stricter and more intensive in South Korea than in other countries (Bray, 2009; Choi et al., 2012; Ha and Park, 2017; Nam, 2013). South Korean students also spend much of their childhoods fully dedicated to preparing for the *Suneung* university entrance exam. Their success is measured by obtaining a high score on the Suneung, and if this is not achieved, then they are left with no alternative paths to success. Students who fail or do not obtain high scores have to wait until subsequent years to take the test again, something that at least 20% of test takers have to do every year (Kwon et al., 2017). Moreover, it is the score that a student receives on this test that often determines a student's major, rather than their academic interests or aptitude, due to the significance of scores across the covered areas (Kwon et al., 2017). Kwon et al. add that this frequently results in students struggling to search for their career path, because their major was essentially assigned to them, rather than chosen. Thus, even students who receive high scores in certain areas of the Suneung might experience fatalism; the discipline, or the shaping influence that the test has on students' futures has the absolute power to, in Durkheim's (2002/1897, p. 239) terms, *choke their passions*.

It is important to note that the Confucianism that has influenced belief in South Korea (and much of Asia) for centuries would arguably give South Koreans much experience with the collective duty to the family and society (Chang and Song, 2010; Kweon, 2017; Kwon, 2017; Lee, 1998). Thus, it could be argued that the point about fatalism is moot given that in such a

context, the concept of the autonomous individual cannot be taken for granted. In other words, how can it be argued that people, who have for years believed that the self should be sacrificed on the behalf of the collective, are suffering negative consequences (i.e., suicide) from fatalistic circumstances that promote this very duty? I would contend that the increasing penetration of Western values and individualism in the last two decades, creating the cultural ambivalence (Park, 2013) mentioned in the previous section, has weakened this collective duty. Indeed, Confucianism's influence is said to be weakening among younger generations of South Koreans over past decades (Cho, 1998; Duncan, 2002; Kim; 2013; Slezniak, 2013) while generations are said to be increasingly focused on pursuing self-interests (Kang, 2017; Park, 2013; Slezniak, 2013). In this way, there perhaps has never been more tension created between the desire to pursue one's own life path and the expectation to sacrifice individual desires in South Korean society.

Fatalistic suicide is an underdeveloped part of Durkheim's (2002/1897) original work on suicide. Fatalistic suicide is one element of Durkheim's four suicide-typologies originally proposed in his classic work, but in contrast to the other three types (anomic, egoistic, and altruistic), the concept was not greatly expanded on by Durkheim and he only wrote one paragraph length footnote about it. However, I contend in this dissertation that fatalistic suicide is an important theory with great contemporary relevance to suicide in South Korea, and exploring the concept qualitatively allows us to ask new questions using the theory. That is, investigating this concept in the South Korean case reveals that people relate suicide to themes of fatalism *and* anomie. These two concepts were posited by Durkheim as being opposites: high and low extremes of social regulation. Finding evidence for both existing simultaneously for the same conception of suicide provides a unique contribution to the social theory of suicide, given

that suicide can be potentially thought of as swinging back and forth between categories of social forces.

The Present Study

Using Durkheim's (2002/1897) original work on suicide as a backdrop, I intend to answer two questions in this dissertation: what elements of society will young³ South Koreans use to explain suicidal behavior, and what does this tell us about Durkheim's suicide theory? I intend for this dissertation to be deductive in the sense that it rethinks Durkheim's theory on suicide, but at the same time I aim for an inductive contribution: one that asks "why suicide" to a particular group that experiences high suicide rates, and developing ensuing theory based on this. This approach could be categorized as abduction given that it begins an inductive look at the data without constraints of predetermined theory, but then linking novel findings to said theory (Halpin and Richard, 2021; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). Abduction is meant to represent a balance between inductive and deductive; an approach that puts findings into conversation with existing theory, yet one that avoids working only within the constraints of the given theory. In the context of this project, I juxtapose what interviewees say about suicide with Durkheim's suicide typology. This will allow me to forward explanations about the social environment and conditions that people think themselves are most related to suicide in South Korea, comparing it to the general theory that Durkheim (2002/1897) originally proposed. While this approach is of course based on existing theory, I am not limiting this approach to only explore what Durkheim proposed, and am more interested in how the interview findings will build upon the suicide typology. Upon encountering "surprising observations" (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014, p. 38),

³ In this project the focus is on the 20-30 age group, as outlined in the opening paragraph.

I use abduction to extend existing theory into new substantive areas about suicide and Durkheim's typology.

This project is an article-based dissertation, comprising three main articles. In addition to these articles, I will first provide a short chapter on suicide dating back to Japanese occupation (1910-1945) in Korea⁴. The point of this historical chapter is to put into conversation the potential multi-applicability of Durkheim's types when classifying suicide. Suicide has a long history in Korea and by analyzing some well-known cases of suicide in Korea's history, I demonstrate the potential to interpret and relate suicide in multiple ways according to Durkheim's types.

The first of the main articles, Chapter Three, titled *Different Expectations, Different Cultures: The 썩대 (Kkondae) and Cultural Ambivalence Among South Korean Youth*, explores the theory of cultural ambivalence, a nuanced version of Durkheim's anomie. In this article I juxtapose South Korean students' narratives about suicide among their age group (20-30) with anomie and cultural ambivalence as Park (2013) conceptualized it; that is, anomie due to a tension between individualistic and collectivistic values. This article introduces the term *kkondae* to describe members of older generations (particularly parents and grandparents) that force youth to think their ways about how to live their lives in regard to attitudes, work life and career decisions, and living philosophies. Interviewees reported that the differences between their own and older generations' expectations put a tremendous amount of stress on them and conceptualized this as being a reason for high rates of suicide among the student age group. These same people also felt that they could not escape these circumstances, and the expectations of how to live that were set by their families. In this sense, their lives are highly regulated from

⁴ I write "Korea" instead of "South Korea" here, as in this time period North and South Korea were one country.

which suicide is conceptualized as an escape. Interviewees related to both anomie and fatalism given that they experienced strong regulation passed onto them from their families' social expectations, and anomie from the resulting tension and normlessness when resisting these circumstances. This article contributes to demonstrating the potential for someone to be experiencing anomie and fatalism at the same time, two opposite extremes of social regulation.

Chapter Four, titled *One Big Race, Narrow Paths and Golden Spoons: Fatalistic Narratives Among Young South Koreans*, focuses on the other extreme of Durkheim's social regulation, that being fatalism. In this article, I report narratives related to suicide put forth by interviewees that mirror elements of fatalistic suicide, such as social expectations that lead to violently blocked passions and oppressive discipline. Participants in this age group often discussed that they have constantly felt immense pressure from society to achieve particular life goals by certain ages, and not achieving these expectations essentially means that one's life is over. The expectations for realizing these lofty expectations, such as going to what is considered a prestigious university or getting a well-respected first job, places pressure to achieve a dream that is hardly possible for the masses, and instead sets up many students and postgraduates for inevitable failure. Failure in this case means ultimately being unable to meet the social expectations placed upon them by family members, friends, and society at large. This failure that most people must go through can be classified as one form of anomie, given that people come to a rude awakening of not being able to realize the goals that society regulated them for. In this way, there is a contradiction between values and reality. This chapter's contribution is demonstrating how people can move between extremes of social regulation, in this case fatalism and anomie and perhaps fatalism again.

Chapter Five, titled *Doomed Dysregulation* and the Overlap Between Durkheim's Suicide Types, operationalizes Durkheim's suicide types. In this article, I find evidence of interviewees relating to all four of Durkheim's types, albeit not equally. This paper advances the argument that regulation and integration are not mutually exclusive, demonstrating that one is not adequate in capturing the essence of how people themselves conceptualize suicide. Rather, people have significant overlap in terms of the Durkheimian themes that they relate suicide to. Furthermore, I propose the concept of '*Doomed Dysregulation*' that captures the essence of the overlap between fatalism and anomie. I will end this dissertation by discussing the theoretical implications that this project has for Durkheim's suicide-typology, as well as comments on future research and policy directions.

Limitations

This dissertation is not without its limitations. The heart of this project is exploring suicide qualitatively through interviews, which is admittedly not what Durkheim originally did. Thus, this project is limited in its capacity to criticize Durkheim's statistical analysis since it does not replicate the prior design. However, despite this, my intention for this dissertation as a whole is to expand upon the original study, and to put qualitative data alongside Durkheim's suicide types in order to juxtapose their implications.

Further, as with any project including interviews, when to stop and proceed to data analysis is a subjective decision by the researcher. Qualitative studies often have small sample sizes below 50 (Bernard, 2018), and I followed the recent convention in similar studies done in Korea with smaller samples (Kim, 2018; Lee, 2019). I did 29 interviews for this project and could have certainly done more, however, I reached data saturation (Bernard, 2018; Francis et al., 2010) at 20 interviews, and did an additional nine, finding that subsequent interviewees were

discussing similar or the same themes. A project that sought to reach more people for interviews or a different design entirely (e.g., surveys or mixed methods) could also supplement Durkheim's original study by similarly asking people about suicide and perhaps yield different results. Additionally, I focused on a particular demographic group, those being Korean youth aged 20-29, and can only relay findings from that demographic. Finally, the interviews were all conducted mainly in English and thus in interviewees' second language, perhaps resulting in different articulations than if the interviews had been fully in Korean. In spite of these limitations, I believe that gathering rich data from people on their perceptions of suicide does add greatly to understandings of the phenomenon, including identifying the social stressors in people's lives; something that has been missing in current prevention efforts in South Korea (Yoo, 2016).

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Chapter Two: A Durkheimian Lens in Analyzing Historical Cases of Suicide in Korea

Abstract: Suicide in Korea has a long history dating back to Japanese occupied Joseon/Korea (1910-1945) and beyond. Émile Durkheim's influential social study of suicide has provided utility in classifying suicides across various contexts, and I contend here that his suicide-typology can be used to understand suicides during this time period in Korea. Through analyzing secondary sources, this historical analysis will provide a basic foundation of how suicide has been understood and practiced during this selected time period in Korean history, with specific focus on how the uprooting of traditional society and culture under colonialism has shown a multiplicity of Durkheim's suicide types. For this very reason, this paper further discusses the theoretical implications in arguing the fluidity of Durkheim's suicide types.

Introduction

While 21st century South Korea⁵ continuously ranks among the top countries in the world in terms of suicide rates, suicide is certainly not a new phenomenon in South Korea. Suicide has a long history dating back to the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897) and beyond. More specifically, in examining historical cases of suicide, I can demonstrate that there is plausible overlap in terms of classifying suicides into Durkheim's typology. The concept of suicide is fluid, everchanging, and can be marred with contradictions. Thus, using Durkheim's (2002/1897) suicide study as a backdrop, I contend that historical cases of suicide in Korea demonstrates an overlap between Durkheim's suicide types, setting up the central argument of this dissertation.

Colonial Changes

In 1905, the Eulsa treaty was signed, depriving Korea of its diplomatic sovereignty and making it a protectorate of Imperial Japan. This document was signed without the consent of the Korea Emperor at the time, Gojong, as the treaty was signed by pro-Japanese Korean government

⁵ I use the terms "Korea" and "South Korea" both in this article. Since this is a historical article that analyzes multiple time periods, the times at which "Korea" is used is meant to represent the time until 1945 that Korea was one country. Where "South Korea" is used, even when discussing aspects of the country's history, I am only discussing South Korea specifically and not meant to be representing North Korea, which has undoubtedly had a different course of history since the split.

officials without Gojong's knowledge. Five years later, Korea was officially annexed by Japan, and renamed Joseon, which lasted until 1945.

Pro-Japanese Korean officials and the Japanese government alike were under the impression that allowing Japan to rule Korea was necessary for the development of a modern, civilized Korea. However, because of this perceived necessity to change society for the best, consequences associated with these societal changes were deemed as acceptable collateral. Beginning in the early years of Japanese occupation of Korea, the Korean press started to report on a new "epidemic of suicides", with increases of recorded suicides from 474 in 1910 to 1,065 in 1920, and to 1,536 in 1925 (Yoo, 2021). The new "modern" life that Japan was trying to install in Korean society consequently brought along many new changes, such as internal migration, rapid industrialization and urbanization, the end of a rigid class system, moral decadence, and other social stressors that were thought by the Korean press to be causing the plethora of suicides (Yoo, 2021; Yuh and Soddu, 2022; Yum, 2021).

The Korean press reported on triggers from modern society that would perhaps be related to this increase in suicides, such as rapid industrialization, which had triggered an outmigration of people from the countryside to the urban centers. People faced isolation and anxiety with the breakdown of traditional social structures and class expectations, which often resulted from a lack of normlessness and social regulation; a sense of anomie where unemployed intellectuals drifted around urban centers without a sense of belonging or community (Yoo, 2021). However, alongside this anomie the argument could also be made that those people without a sense of belonging due to the changing conditions around them would be isolated from the society that they were used to, and thus Durkheim's egoistic suicide would be also applicable. Indeed, these suicides may be difficult to classify as either anomic or egoistic in Durkheimian terms.

Japanese occupation brought changes to the schooling system in Korea, introducing high expectations to achieve high studies at top universities (Yuh and Soddu, 2022). Yoo (2021) further details that Japanese occupation saw the rise of the university entrance exam, as thus suicides among students were related to, according to the press high expectations and desire to gain admission to a top high school or university, failing the entrance examination, getting caught cheating, doing poorly in school, or feeling pressure to drop out because of financial problems at home.

The Korean press considered that Japanese occupation was particularly hard on the lower classes in relation to suicide. Yoo (2021) argues that the gap between the rich and poor widened, which saw an increased stigma and embarrassment for the poor in Korean society, and also put many in the lower class in worse financial situations due to the stripping of tenancy rights and the installation of Japanese landlords.

Interestingly, the Korean Press and the Japanese Government General (in charge of overseeing the Korean occupation) had radically different opinions about suicides in Korea. In the 1920s a popular notion emerged in the Korean press and in public opinion that there was an epidemic of suicides related to the associated changes brought to Korean society by the colonizer (Yoo, 2021; Yum, 2021). As noted above, the Korean press very much problematized the epidemic of suicides, as it was abnormal and a cause for concern. Suicides were emblematic of the tragic consequences of colonial modernity, affecting all mores of society from changing traditions to increased economic hardships (Yoo, 2021; Yuh and Soddu, 2022). However, the Japanese colonial government essentially normalized the increase in suicides, as it was an associated cost of modernization. In fact, the Japanese colonial authorities viewed the rise in suicide rates in Korea as an indicator that their project of modernization was working.

Essentially, suicides needed to happen according to the Japanese in order for Korea to undergo the rapid transformation that Japan had in mind for society. Yoo (2021) contends that it is for this reason that Japanese colonial government documents rarely engaged with prevention efforts, or any solutions to reduce the suicides. Moreover, during the epidemic of suicides (1920s-1930s), the Japanese government could not allocate funds to new types of public health care due to rising costs of the war/colonial project (Yum, 2021), including suicide prevention. To summarize, prevention was not Japan's concern, and instead Japan focused on the idea that suicide was a social phenomenon and that rates were inevitably going to increase as Korea developed into a more modern civilization. As Yoo (2021) notes, for the colonial authorities, increased suicides in Korea meant that their project of uprooting Koreans from their passive, traditional ways was indeed on the road to success. These Korean traditions, such as early/arranged marriage, infidelity, abusive mothers-in-law, violent relationships, the buying and selling of wives, profligate husbands squandering family fortunes, and divorce, were targeted by the press as compelling women in particular to take their own lives, so extinguishing these traditions through colonialism was seen as beneficial for the benefactor despite the new suicides.

Chaste Suicide and Women's Suicide

Another type of suicide prevalent in the Joseon era and during the Japanese occupation of Korea was chaste suicide. There are many accounts from the Joseon era of women taking their own lives to follow their recently deceased husbands into death (Kim, 2014; Yuh and Soddu, 2022). This practice was strongly based on Confucian virtues of the ideal wife of chaste wife (yeolbu). Beginning early in the Joseon era, widows would not remarry but instead commit themselves to lifelong service to her deceased husband's family. Moreover, a deepening of Neo-Confucianization from the seventeenth century rendered the ideal of chaste women more

prominent and instrumental, and the concept of women's fidelity became gradually enmeshed with the idea of bodily self-sacrifice, serving as the ultimate proof of chaste widowhood and criterion for wifely virtue.

Interestingly, the practice of chaste suicide is based on conflicting Confucian values of the aforementioned ideal wife and filial piety, the latter of which would be violated if one were to take their own life and thus render oneself unable to care for parents (Kim 2014). As Kim (2014) explains, a wife's loyalty to her husband was deemed to be equivalent to a man's loyalty to the king, and both were considered essential for social order. Although some Confucian scholars spoke against valuing widow suicide over staying alive to serve the surviving family, most literati esteemed it as the highest expression of wifely duty (Kim, 2014; Yuh and Soddu, 2022). Chaste suicide was then conceptualized as a product of a calm and unemotional resolve to follow proper practice, not as an expression of grand emotion. In other words, Confucian elites at the time largely avoided portraying widow suicide as a selfish, and thus it did not defy Confucian filial piety.

The reluctance to classify women's suicides as selfish, or egoistic for that matter, is significant, as the conception of the "New woman" was beginning to emerge in the 1920s (Yuh and Soddu, 2022; Yum, 2018). Korean elites at the time saw the increasing social status of women as being representative of the advancement of society, and thus new discourse began to emerge about women's freedom, selfhood, individual personality (Yuh and Soddu, 2022; Yum, 2018). However, despite advances, even the women with the most freedom were still limited in Korean society under Japanese rule. Yum (2018) writes "It is often said that discourse is not an accurate representation of social reality" (116). In this case, I refer to the double love-suicide between Hong Ok-Im and Kim Yong-Ju. Despite her exceptional status, both economically and

intellectually, even Kim was forced into an arranged marriage at the age of seventeen (Yum, 2018). It is such examples that demonstrate a glass-ceiling for many women, something that Park (2013) directly associated with anomic suicide for 21st century South Korean women.

Moreover, the transitional phase of Korean society under Japanese occupation painted freedom for women but did not literally offer it, constituting a tension and uneasiness for women. On one hand, women could access more education than ever before; on the other, traditional Confucian practices that restricted women's freedom and social mobility remained. Women had newfound expectations from being more educated but did not receive the freedom necessary to fulfill those expectations. Thus, novel expectations were created but had yet to be manifested in everyday life (Yuh and Soddu, 2022; Yum, 2018). A glass ceiling very much limited women's freedom at this time, echoing similar themes in 21st century South Korea (Park, 2013).

South Korean Suicide Protest

Japanese occupation ended in 1945 and Korea split into two countries shortly after. As the two Koreas went on radically different paths post-split, new practices of suicide emerged in South Korea. As South Korea underwent a rapid economic and societal transformation post Korean war (1950-1953), South Korean factory workers and labourers soon became infamous for suicide. Mainly, suicide among South Korean workers was known to be often used as a protest, dating in the modern era to the self-immolation of garment worker Chun Tae-II, whose 1970 dying plea to remember the labour law helped provoke decades of labour resistance (Doucette, 2013; Ji, 2020; Kim, 2021). In fact, more than one hundred workers have committed labour-action-related suicide between 1980 and 2012 in South Korea (Ji, 2020; Kim, 2021). Also, as Ji (2020) notes,

during this time South Korea ranked fourth highest in the world for self-immolations (people lighting themselves on fire to commit suicide).

Worker suicide has typically been viewed in South Korean society as a righteous act, with the suicider being conceptualized as a martyr, or a *yeolsa* (martyr) whose act of suicide demonstrated resistance for coworkers or towards the ‘cause’. The *yeolsa* is known to be a person who sacrifices their life without violent resistance in the name of an important social cause (Doucette, 2013). Ji (2020) notes that worker suicide in South Korea has remained relatively sizable in the 2000s.

Workers have typically committed suicide in South Korea to resist labor exploitation (Doucette, 2013; Kim, 2008; Kim, 2021). The infamous case of Chun Tae-II demonstrates this. A labor movement leader, Chun was focused on improving working for low-wage clothes-makers. When Chun’s many appeals to the labor department went unsuccessful in terms of improving conditions, he set himself on fire in the streets of Seoul in 1970, writing in his diary about the meaning of his suicide:

I come to an absolute decision to be alongside my poor brothers and sisters. I will throw myself away. I will die for you so as not to leave you... I am struggling to be the dew for countless withering innocent lives. (As cited in Ji, 2020, p. 240)

Chun’s protest suicide mobilized thousands of workers and university students into subsequent collective actions and led to the great democratic movement of 1987 of student activists and workers alike (Doucette, 2013; Ji, 2020; Kim, 2021). Chun’s self-immolation has also led worker suicide to be seen by South Koreans as not an isolated act of a desperate and ill-individual, but as an action of strong resistance by brave people against injustice (Jang, 2004).

The martyrdom expressed by these suicides is related to the Korean concept *minjung*, meaning the people or masses (Doucette, 2013; Ji, 2020; Kim, 2021). *Minjung* represents those

who are politically oppressed and alienated economically from the benefits of economic growth in the rapidly changing South Korean nation (Doucette, 2013). Minjung was an effective concept for mobilizing people, students and workers alike, to fight towards the goal of improving labor conditions and democracy respectively. As Ji (2020) writes, this resistance is also an effort to release a deeply felt grief (*han*), as well as to transform one's individualistic suffering into collective liberation of the people through self-sacrifice (Doucette, 2013; Kim, 2008). Worker suicide in this case constitutes a meaningful moral force, representing the collective suffering of the people, the moral dignity of the unbending worker, to both challenge the government morally but also to shake up the public consciousness in an attempt to empower the weak (Kim, 2008; Park, 1994).

People were keenly aware that their acts of suicide would be in support of the collective. Their collective action was goal-oriented in disrupting the labor system and inspiring activism among their peers (Kim, 2008; Kim, 2021). For example, Kim (2008) writes that the suicide notes left by suicide protesters explicitly reveal that they committed suicide protest in order to “inspire movement activism among half-hearted activists and apathetic bystanders” (573). Kim discusses the various strategies used by protesters in their notes to inspire action, such as portraying the current political and economic system as unjust and illegitimate, directly blaming their target audience as responsible for the injustices, and emphasizing a wake-up call that would urge their peers to join the movement. In the case of suicide protests in South Korea, the suicide were not only then a protest but used as a means to mobilize the hearts and minds of the exploited masses (Kim, 2008; Kim, 2021).

In South Korea, it is estimated that nearly one-hundred laborers and student activists committed self-immolations during the last three decades of the twentieth century in their

struggle to organize trade unions and/or to struggle against the dictatorial military governments (Park, 2004). Park explains that through South Korea's repeated acts of resistance in its history (e.g., against Japanese occupation), Buddhists were often at the forefront of resistance efforts, and so the act of self-immolation became prevalent in South Korea for its history of being used to fight oppression. Viewing self-immolation as a sacrifice is tied to the notion that it was intended to result in a profound benefit to others. However, suicides through self-immolation were not necessarily condoned by Buddhist followers, despite their aim, because they involve a rejection of group norms since "self-destruction is one of the most serious transgressions of the precepts" of Buddhism (Thích, 1993, p. 45). Buddhist leaders have historically tried to prevent self-immolation, pointing out how it stood in tension with the principles of Buddhism. However, acts of self-immolation have not necessarily always been condemned by Buddhist leaders either, as many have been seen as "an act of love" (Thích, 1993, pp. 44-45). Thus, worker suicides in South Korea have a complicated relationship with moral standings and interpretations.

Discussion: Durkheim's Suicide Theory

The above review has selected cases of suicides in Korea/Joseon's past dating back to Japanese occupation. Suicide has been present in different forms depending on the time in history, as something like chaste suicide has not been written about as something happening in 1980s South Korea, nor (to my knowledge) has worker self-immolation been recorded during Japanese occupation. Therefore, it can be said that suicide has changed through time, however, as Durkheim's suicide typology of interest here, I ask at each point in this article if the theory is of use, or what the examined explanations about suicide tell us about the typology.

In each of these examples, one suicide type can be said to best classify the social conditions that existed. An altruistic sacrifice, a rise in egoistic individualism, or a changing

environment leading to anomie can be used to describe these circumstances. However, I contend that in each of these outlined examples, the theme of fatalism is also present. For example, the Korean woman whose husband has died young due to unforeseen circumstances is bound to a highly regulated life in which she is expected to kill herself. She is very much disciplined by society and cannot escape this as her circumstances cannot change, with suicide being her only escape. Her expected sacrifice is certainly altruistic in one sense, as it is said to be for the betterment and functioning of society. However, she is yet bound to her circumstances with no escape. She has no options; the moment her husband died, her life course was determined, her future blocked and her actions ruled by discipline. This is fatalism as much as it is altruism. Moreover, the generations of workers who are doomed to working in exploitative circumstances believe that their suicides are the only way to inspire change. Dying by suicide was the only way to both escape from their exploitative working conditions, but also to achieve their goals of convincing change. Their suicides were altruistic, again on behalf of the collective. But they had no choice, and saw no future due to their working conditions. Like the chaste wives, the workers were bound to their circumstances, doomed to commit suicide in order to inspire change, with no other foreseeable options. Their peers expected them to follow suit and commit suicide to inspire further change. This is fatalism.

For Yum's (2018) "new women", or women who are increasingly in society becoming more egoistic and individualistic, they are bound to their circumstances. Yum claims that these women feel an ambivalence in society with traditional values such as Confucian collectivism and the perception that they are not understood or that society is working against them. For example, the classic case of Hong Ok-Im and Kim-Yong-Ju shows that the two women felt an emptiness in their lives in that they were isolated from everything except for each other (Jeon, 2007; Yum,

2006). If suicide is the only way out of an isolated life, these people were regulated by a changing Korean society from which suicide was the only escape.

These women were bound to living among social changes happening in a colonized society, something at the root of Durkheim's conception of anomie. These women and others who lived under Japanese rule in Korea suffered from a society that rejected many traditional beliefs in favor of modernization (Yoo, 2021). Upon studying suicide notes from this time period in Korea, Yum (2006) created a short iMovie and narrated it with her own voice in order to try to represent the psychological state of Korean women during this time:

I still remember the summer day in 1926 when I returned to Seoul for the first time in years after leaving for my studies in Japan. Quickly I was taken by the changes of my surroundings. New shops, cafes, newsstands, dancehalls, light the narrow streets. I heard the sounds of trains and taxis, rushing from one location to the next. But I woke up the next morning to find that the atmosphere was somehow different. Subdued in an air of shock, I waited for my train at Myeongdong station and saw young women huddled around a newspaper. "Did you hear?", they said, Yun Sin-Dok is dead. Chills ran down my spine, as I heard *사의 찬미*, or the beauty of death, for the first time. This was the song that Yun, the most famous singer in Korea, had recorded just moments before her double love suicide with noted writer and father of two, Kim Woo-Jin. Many considered this song to be a suicide note; 'oh, lonely world, desolate world, what is it you are after? Laughing flowers, and singing birds? Your fates are all doomed. Oh forsaken, and wretched life'.... (0:00-1:33)

In this example, the narrator was shocked by the changing society around her, and then immediately associated it with suicide. In all the societal changes around her, she was unable to grasp life as it was before. However, I again question if it could be separated from fatalism. It is true that the two concepts are opposites, straddling opposing sides of social regulation. But the Korean woman who lives in a changing society under colonialism is bound to her life, and she is

highly regulated as she does not control these changes. In Durkheimian terms on fatalism, her future is blocked by the oppressive discipline of colonialism. Even her own passions that may have been defined in a precolonial Korean society have changed due to the overwhelming influence on society that the Japanese occupier brought.

Moreover, the Korean elderly who suffered suicide due to displaced and alienated during colonial changes could be classified in several Durkheimian ways. Like the population at large, many elderly in colonial Korea would not adapt to the changing society around them (Yoo, 2021), and thus anomic suicide seems like a theoretical fit. However, through a changing Confucian influence at the time, coupled with economic and social changes, children became less filial and thus did not care for their aging parents in the same way that previous generations did (Yoo, 2021). The lessening support from children for the elderly put many in anomic conditions where society could not regulate them. However, it may be just as theoretically applicable to say that, like many elderly in South Korea who have suffered similar circumstances due to unfavorable changing pension systems (Moon, 2001), that elderly committed suicide to avoid becoming a burden to their children (Mauduy, 2015). The increasing social isolation that elderly feel due to social and economic changes, and the lessening influence of Confucian filial piety made many feel like suicide could be done to avoid placing this burden, perhaps making their suicide altruistic. In this case, their suicide would be obligatory for the betterment of society, akin to chaste suicides. But what of fatalistic suicide? These elderly were also bound to their socially isolating circumstances with increasingly blocked futures. Moreover, social isolation and the weakening of traditional values through social changes are remarkably similar to Durkheim's egoistic suicide. It suffices to say that there is more than one interpretation of these suicides in Durkheim's terms here.

Similarly, there may be a fluidity of suicide among one group in which people move between Durkheim's suicide types. Ji (2020) proposes that worker suicide in South Korea have changed in terms of Durkheim's suicide-typology. Traditionally, suicide among workers has been viewed in South Korean society as being a noble act of sacrifice, with the committers being characterized as martyrs on behalf of other workers. Their deaths were in the name of resisting the unconditional control of employers on the worker collective, as well as to protest social issues such as calling for democracy in South Korea. However, since the democratization of South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, worker suicide, while not decreasing in its frequency, has stopped evoking the same level of perceived martyrdom in today's era of neo-liberal economics (Ji, 2020). Instead of being perceived as martyrs, more contemporary worker suicides in South Korea have been associated by society as being in protest to individual workplace conditions and dissatisfaction. Righteous suicides, which Durkheim (2002/1897) likely would have classified as altruistic, have changed to anomic as these suicides have shown increasingly anomic characteristics, such as suicides being associated with the unfolding of a neo-liberal South Korean political-economic order characterized by the rise of contingent and exploitive jobs (Ji, 2020).

Through many of these examples, one Durkheimian type comes to mind when considering suicide. For the chaste woman or the labor protestor, their suicides were immediately altruistic, obligatory for serving a larger cause or a higher power. For the new women who were grasping their own agency under Confucian rule and static gender hierarchies, it may have been egoism according to some who classified their increasing individualism as a cause for suicide, or even a newfound anomie that hit women when they were met with a glass ceiling of social mobility. Durkheim's suicide typology as it was proven to be accurate in classifying many of

these suicides, and describing characteristics about the circumstances that led to them. That being said, the presence of fatalism in all of these cases, or specifically how people were bound to their own circumstances with blocked futures and choked passions, seems to call to question the exclusivity of suicide types as constructed. If anything, examining suicide historically in Korea demonstrates the necessity of a nuanced political contextualization of the phenomenon.

Conclusion

One of the associated goals of this article is to rethink Durkheim's suicide typology, and more specifically how Durkheim conceptualized suicide. In the above discussion, I have proposed that there may be more overlap than originally conceptualized between Durkheim's suicide types. On overlap specifically, Durkheim wrote that:

Certainly, (anomic) and egoistic suicide have kindred ties. Both spring from society's insufficient presence in individuals. But the sphere of its absence is not the same in both cases. In egoistic suicide it is deficient in truly collective activity, thus depriving the latter of object and meaning. In anomic suicide, society's influence is lacking in the basically individual passions, thus leaving them without a check-rein. In spite of their relationship, therefore, the two types are independent of each other. We may offer society everything social in us, and still be unable to control our desires; one may live in an anomic state without being egoistic, and vice versa. These two sorts of suicide therefore do not draw their chief recruits from the same social environments; one has its principal field among intellectual careers, the world of thought—the other, the industrial or commercial world. (2002/1897, 219)

Thus, the suicide-types, as per Durkheim, are independent of each other, and a given suicide can be anomic without being egoistic, and vice versa. This argument, however, refers to a person at a particular point in time. It may be true, for example, that someone could be egoistic without being anomic at one time, but could they move between the two? This is rather unclear. Moreover, whether these types can mix with say, fatalism, is not argued by Durkheim.

While there have been countless follow up studies to Durkheim's work on suicide, I believe that future directions should focus more on how Durkheim's argument of the independence of suicide-types holds up when considering individual suicides. For example, how does the exclusivity of these concepts hold up when considering what people currently say about suicide, obviously not after the fact of suicide? The latter is not answered in Durkheim's work, as he made his inferences about suicides that already happened. However, I place importance in juxtaposing conceptualizations of suicide among South Koreans with Durkheim's suicide types to see if this exclusivity between types exists in people's own explanations. For example, will people's conceptualizations about suicide fit narrowly into one typology, or will they straddle multiple types? And what would this say about the concept of suicide, both in relation to Durkheim's typology and the mechanical processes that go on in someone's head when considering suicide? Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) propose that there is merit in combining Durkheim's suicide types, as people may experience social conditions that straddle multiple suicide types. Moreover, studies such as Hamlin and Brym (2006) and Chandler and Tsai (1993) demonstrate that individual suicide types are often insufficient on their own when considering individual cases of suicides, as people experience multiple competing forces that influence their suicidal behavior. In other words, one of Durkheim's suicide types alone may be not enough to capture the complexity of the phenomenon.

There are many questions to be answered about Durkheim's typology when considering suicide and its complicated history in Korea. I believe that this article contributes to highlighting such complications, but there is much work to be done to further an understanding of the phenomenon that continues to plague South Koreans today.

Seeing suicide through Durkheim's lens provides salient ways of viewing the social conditions behind the phenomenon. Being able to characterize the social environment that a person exists in might, for example, help to identify how psychiatric diagnoses can emerge from given conditions; if suicidal impulse is located in the social environment, focus can be placed on changing this environment to reduce emotional distress (Marson, 2019). However, these social conditions as originally postulated by Durkheim (2002/1897) need to be nuanced to the South Korean case in order to gain a more contextual view of suicide. From the discussion here, select cases of suicide prevalent throughout Korean history challenge the exclusivity of Durkheim's suicide types. Thus, I find it necessary to further explore Durkheim's suicide in Korea, specifically South Korea, and juxtapose his suicide-types with people's own conceptualizations of the phenomenon today. In this way, I can compare more cases and ideas about suicide to Durkheim's original formulation to suggest ways that the original theory can be expanded upon. That is, the theory can be rethought in a way that captures the contextual essence of suicide in Korea, making for a nuanced understanding that can potentially add to understandings of the phenomenon, including but not limited to aiding prevention efforts.

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Chapter Three: Different Expectations, Different Cultures: The *kkondae* (Kkondae) and Cultural Ambivalence among South Korean Youth

Abstract: *Cultural ambivalence*, a nuanced version of Durkheim's *anomie* for the South Korean context, is defined by Park (2013) as coming from a social condition in which an old set of values becomes blurred, while a new set of values is not recognized or accepted by its members. In other words, if people are caught between two cultures, this can influence suicidal behavior given that a lack of cultural continuity is a risk factor to suicide. In this article I interviewed young-adult South Koreans about suicide among their age group (20-30) to see if their explanations would be similar to *anomie* and cultural ambivalence. What I found was that students often used the term *kkondae* to describe members of older generations (particularly parents and grandparents) that force them to think in particular ways about how to live, work life and career decisions, and living philosophies. However, interviewees also related to Durkheim's concept of fatalism given the strong regulation that they felt due to intensive social expectations. Interviewees posited that fatalistic social expectations and anomic tensions were both reasons for high rates of suicide among the 20-30 age group, demonstrating the simultaneous existence of opposite extremes of social regulation.

Introduction

South Korea currently and over the last two decades has had one of the highest national suicide rates in the world (Choi and Yo, 2020; Kim et al., 2019b; OECD, 2022; Park & Jang, 2018; WHO, 2012). Suicide is the leading cause of death among South Koreans ranging in the age group of teens to thirties (Choi and Bae, 2020; Lee et al., 2020), which researchers consider widely to be strongly related to this age group being primarily made up of high-school and university-aged adolescents (Ahn et al., 2015; Choi and Bae, 2020; Kim & Chung, 2019). Suicide also accounts for a smaller share of total deaths as age increases past 30s (Lee et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2018). Suicide trends within this particular age group have also been significant increases in rates over the past two decades; for example, suicides per 100,000 teens rose 68.8% from 2000-2011 (Lee, 2016). These increasing rates are notable on a global scale, as the suicide

rate of South Korean adolescents into their late 20s has been consistently higher in the past decade than in other OECD countries, while rates among adolescents in other countries are decreasing (Kim et al., 2019a; Kõlves & De Leo, 2016).

In particular, suicide among South Korean university students has risen 60% in the past six years (Han & Lee, 2021), while the number of university students who experience suicidal ideation is also increasing (Kim & Cha, 2018). Given high rates of enrollment of high school students in higher education (~80%) and the fact that the majority of South Korean university students are in their 20s, the suicide rates among the 20-30 age group is thought to be largely representative of suicide among students (Ahn et al., 2015).

Park (2013) has proposed that Durkheim's (2002/1897) concept of *anomie* holds particular relevance to understanding suicide among this age university student age (~20-30) group in South Korea. Anomie is one of the most influential parts of Durkheim's suicide-theory, referencing a state of society in which a person is not able to be regulated and thus cannot define their own identity and reach their own goals. Thus, taking inspiration from Durkheim and Park (2013), I explore young South Koreans' conceptualizations of suicide and juxtapose them with Durkheim's anomie.

Specifically, Durkheim (2002/1897) argued that protective factors to suicide could be traditional beliefs and values, such as religion. In 21st century South Korea, it is argued widely that such traditional values and belief systems conflict with "Western" and especially North American values and beliefs. In this paper, "Western" refers to the prioritization of the individual over the collective, Judeo-Christian epistemological and ontological underpinnings, division of the mind from the body, understandings of mental disorders and psychiatry (derived from German influence) and biomedicine, all of which differ in fundamental ways from

Confucianism, Shamanism, collectivism and traditional Korean medicine (Cumings, 2005; DiMoia, 2013, 2014; Duncan, 2002; Han, 2003; Kendall, 2009; Kim, 2013; Sleziak, 2013; Yoo, 2016). Following Park (2013), I contend that this simultaneous existence of South Korean and Western value systems is a form of Durkheim's (2002/1897) concept of anomie, as well as his typology of suicide. Park has developed a specific version of Durkheim's anomie with his own theory of *cultural ambivalence*. In other words, if people are caught between two cultures, this can lead to suicide as the lack of cultural continuity is a risk factor to suicide (Kral, 2019).

In the present study, I explore Park's (2013) interpretation of anomie through interviews. I assess whether South Koreans in their 20-30s explain suicide in ways that reflect a tension between cultural values and social expectations. Through these interviews I found that young adults expressed tremendous stress from social expectations placed upon them by older generations. Generational rifts and tensions exist between age groups in ideologies on how to live, resulting in anomie. Not only was this evidence for Durkheim's anomie, but because suicide was seen as an escape from these oppressive circumstances, there is evidence for Durkheim's fatalism as well. This finding implies that people who are bound to their anomic circumstances from which suicide is an escape experience fatalism and anomie together.

To begin, I will present my theoretical perspective and approach to explore anomie specifically in South Korea. I will then present what interviewees overwhelmingly reported on about suicide that could be related to the themes of anomie and fatalism. I end by discussing the relevance of finding evidence for overlap between Durkheim's two suicide types that were originally posited to be opposites.

Durkheim's Anomie and Park's Cultural Ambivalence

My interpretation of anomie is based on a nuanced version of anomie already developed in the literature. However, I meant to do more than simply prove or disprove Durkheim's theory, as my intention was to juxtapose interviewee's own conceptualizations of the conditions for suicide with the existing theory, building on and rethinking the concepts in the process. Specifically, I follow Park's (2013) theory called *cultural ambivalence*. Cultural ambivalence is a particular version of Durkheim's anomie that Park argued exists in South Korean society among all age groups, but notably among the university student age group that I intended to focus on in this project.

Cultural ambivalence is defined by Park as coming from "a social condition in which an old set of values becomes blurred, while a new set of values is not recognized or accepted by its members. This pathological social condition, with its lessening of the normative regulation of the society, can lead many people to have an unclear concept of what is proper and acceptable behavior" (Park, 2013, p. 237). In other words, if people are caught between two cultures, this can lead to suicide as the lack of cultural continuity is a risk factor to suicide (Kral, 2019). Park argues that this cultural ambivalence exists today in South Korea, created by the penetration of external influence into South Korean society, most notably from Western imperial powers. Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, these external values have been often in conflict with traditional norms resulting in a tension between interpersonal-directed Confucian values and individual-oriented Western values (Park, 2013). There is a clash between Western individualism and South Korean/Confucian collectivism, and this tension causes suicide.

Put simply, according to this theory there is a conflict between South Korean and Western values in South Korean society. Park (2013) contends that this tension and confusion contributes to suicide. In the same way that Durkheim argued that a lack of social regulation

would lead people to commit suicide, as in when they do not have a clear set of social expectations, and society cannot regulate them, Park's (2013) cultural ambivalence contends that anomic suicide happens in South Korea due to the blending of traditional 'Confucian' and 'Western' values.

Cultural changes have happened in South Korean society that have increased the assimilation of Western values and consequently decreased the strength of Confucian values. In his original work on suicide, Durkheim (2002/1897) noted that having a strong connection to traditional and religious values served as a protective factor to suicide. In the South Korean case, this would mean that a strong connection to Confucianism, filial piety, collectivism, and other traditional South Korean values would protect against suicide. However, Park (2013) explains that Western values, characterized by individualism, accompanied industrialization that began in the late 1960s and 1970s in South Korea. The tension that arises between interpersonal-directed Confucian values and individual-oriented Western values creates a source of distress for many people in South Korea. Park argues that contemporary South Koreans are provided with no clear set of social expectations, only conflicting and confusing messages stemming both from mutual-help, collectivistic ethics (Confucianism) and self-serving individual needs (Western/individualism). The inability of society to set clear values, expectations and normative dimensions due to the duality between the values associated with individualism and Confucianism, creates an anomic society for South Koreans of all ages, albeit in different ways (Park, 2013). Thus, like within Durkheim's anomie, an anomic pathological condition, where people are unclear of the normative expectations and goals within society, leads people to commit suicide (Kang, 2017).

There has been little work following up directly on Park's rendering of Durkheim's cultural ambivalence, but Kang (2017) provides a counter-response. Kang suggests that the penetration of Western individualism into South Korean society, most notably for the younger generations, would not only lead to an increase in *anomic suicides* as cultural ambivalence would suggest. It would be equally as valid, according to Kang, that increased Western individualism would lead to a rise in *egoistic suicides*. Egoism and egoistic suicides were characterized by Durkheim (2002/1897) as being related to an individual's weakened ties to society to the extent that they are socially isolated. Their egoism, along with their eroded networks to others in society, would promote suicide.

The tension between Park and Kang here is interesting, because the two are examining the same situation (that is, suicide among South Korean young adults) and coming up with two different Durkheimian suicide types. Kang (2017) is most concerned with how the Western individualism operating South Korean society is perhaps leading to egoism and egoistic suicide, but Park (2013) calls that same thing anomie (cultural ambivalence) because of the tension that the individualism creates. The relevant take-away here is that more than one of Durkheim's suicide types is applicable to the same situation, demonstrating that it may not be so straightforward to call an individual suicide or situation by a given type, as such situations may be best characterized by multiple themes and types from Durkheim at once.

Thus, it is just as theoretically plausible to consider Park's (2013) reasoning that there is an increase in cultural ambivalence/anomie in South Korean society due to the penetration of Western ideals as Kang's (2017) argument for egoistic suicide. What is needed, I contend, is asking people themselves about suicide and how they conceptualize it to more accurately juxtapose it with either cultural ambivalence, egoistic suicide, or neither of the two. Prioritizing

people's on own conceptualizations of suicide may provide a more nuanced and contextual understanding of suicide; one that places focus on how people 'make sense' of suicide, something that is said to be largely missing from much of the literature on the phenomenon (Hjelmeland, 2016; Münster & Broz, 2016). Moreover, exploring suicide qualitatively in this sense will shed more light on the possibility of there being more than one Durkheimian type that can be useful in describing the social conditions that people themselves say are relevant to suicide. While Park (2013) and Kang (2017) both propose that Durkheim's concepts are sufficient on their own to classify suicides, their two studies were done without asking people themselves about suicide, and so we can build upon these works. Thus, in this article I intend on exploring the following questions: among the 20-30 age-group in South Korea, do people conceptualize of a conflict between values when thinking about reasons for suicide, do they feel that an isolation from society is most significant, or are either of these explanations absent in people's own reasoning for suicide?

Combining Anomie with Fatalism

While he admitted they share ties, Durkheim (2002/1897) maintained that his suicide types were distinct. One could not exist on the opposite extremes of social regulation, for example.

However, I contend that anomie will not be adequate alone to describe suicide among young South Koreans. While anomie has the potential to capture much of what young South Koreans may feel in relation to suicide, combining the concept with other parts of Durkheim's suicide theory may prove to be useful.

I am not the first to propose this combination of types. Marson and Powell (2011) contend that people may experience more than one of Durkheim's suicide types on a sliding spectrum. In the case of anomie, a person could experience strong regulation beforehand

(fatalism) and if the person experiences a sudden normlessness, this may lead to anomic suicide. It should be noted that the higher the degree to which someone was regulated may make suicide more likely (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014), given that normlessness would be a stronger disruption in the person's life. In the case of young South Koreans, strongly regulated cultural and social goals followed by a sudden inability to achieve these goals could plausibly be conceptualized as anomie resulting from fatalism.

Marson (2019) contends that while it is possible for someone to exist in an environment where they experience both differing extremes of regulation and integration, it is mostly argued in the literature (following Durkheim) that one cannot exist on two opposite ends of the spectrums at once (i.e., fatalism-anomie, egoism-altruism) (Marson, 2019; Marson and Powell, 2011). That being said, if we explore Durkheim's four suicide types based on macro and micro perspectives, we may be able to shed light on how different suicide types can exist at the same time. For example, Johnson (1965) argues that despite knowing that a particular group is experiencing egoism at an individual, micro level, that in itself is not enough to predict its suicide rate. We must also know whether its level of regulation perpetuated by society at large is anomic, moderate, or fatalistic (Johnson, 1965).

While Johnson's argument is about overlapping types between the regulation and integration spectrums, Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) suggest that opposite sides of the same spectrum (i.e., high/low degrees of regulation or integration) can exist at the same time as well. Specifically, fatalism and altruism are ways in which macro social structures are characterized in their content and values. Anomie and egoism are psychosocial, micro reactions to these macro forces (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014). In other words, one can experience anomie at an individual

level within a fatalistic social environment, or one's reaction to fatalistic circumstances can be anomie.

Chandler and Tsai (1993) also make the point that fatalism and anomie may be mixed in particular Asian contexts where fatalism may be more common (as opposed to Western countries where fatalism is less common). In their study on Japan, their paper argues that Japanese businessmen who fall short of high social expectations to perform well at their job die by suicide due to both fatalistic and anomic elements of the implications of their continued existence in flux and disgrace. This also runs similar to Abrutyn and Mueller's (2014) proposition that fatalism and anomie can both be connected to shame of not meeting expectations. The point here is that when taking people's own accounts into how they experience fatalistic expectations, anomie may simultaneously exist as a way to describe how people feel about these expectations.

In building on how Durkheim's anomie and fatalism overlap and combine, it is essential to place an important role on people's reactions to circumstances in their lives (Hamlin and Brym, 2006). For example, Hamlin and Brym ponder how we can use Durkheim's typologies to represent a particular emotional response to social pressures. Durkheim neglected suicide intent in his original work, and so finding a link between social pressures and how people react to such social pressures in an unchecked area of potential suicidal behavior.

Hamlin and Brym (2006) also make the case that anomie is not enough alone to explain suicide among their case study of the Kaiowá of Brazil. Rather, in exploring how people themselves respond in the face of anomie, their paper found that anomic conditions lead Kaiowá women to experience an unprecedented level of *high* social regulation within the family. In other words, these women experience feelings of fatalism *because* of anomie. Due to the introduction of new values and opportunities (anomie), Kaiowá women's culturally prescribed disposition

toward individualism becomes reinforced (Hamlin and Brym, 2006). Thus, a highly regulated individualism stemming from strong anomie makes for a combination of anomie and fatalism that could not be adequately described by either force alone.

Thus, the essence and way forward of seeing fatalism and anomie, two opposites, combined, is to focus on people's own micro reactions to macro social forces. I contend that fatalism is a micro force that emerges from interactions, which could in some situations be anomic. In other words, if people experience anomie in society, then they could view their own circumstances as fatalistic. This idea and article contribute to related literature on Durkheim and also that on the specific overlap of Durkheim's types of emphasizing that anomie and fatalism can be present at the same time in the social conditions that promote suicide, including how people themselves perceive the reasons behind suicidal behavior. While it seems contradictory to suggest that someone can be both strongly and lowly regulated at the same time, I argue that following the above literature review, young South Koreans' own reactions to fatalistic environments and social expectations will be revealing of feelings anomie, and a derivative form of cultural ambivalence. Moreover, I find in this article that the concept of *kkondae* is useful in explaining the generational tension approach to suicide, which has largely been missing in previous literature on suicide in South Korea. As I will explain below, *kkondae* is a term that demonstrates generational rifts among age cohorts in South Korea, building upon the idea of cultural ambivalence (Park, 2013) and anomie (Durkheim, 2002/1897).

Methods and Methodology

I conducted twenty-nine interviews⁶ with South Koreans in the (20-30) age group in Seoul from January-August 2022. Interviews were conducted in mostly English, with sporadic Korean for difficult-to-translate terms. In these interviews, I collected open-ended perspectives on suicide in South Korea by giving participants an opportunity to develop their answers outside a structured format (Burgess, 1984; Skinner, 2012). Interview participants were all in the 20-30 age group due to the fact that I wanted to focus on people belonging to the age group that experienced relatively high suicide rates in South Korea, along with the fact that it is this age group among which suicide accounts for the leading cause of death (Choi and Bae, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2018). Furthermore, I follow recent South Korean anthropological studies which have done interview projects with similarly sized participants pools (Kim, 2018; Lee, 2019).

Appendix A contains a full list of participants that I conducted in-depth, formal interviews with, along with information about age, gender, and university major. I note that all names are pseudonyms and that this research has ethics approval under Dalhousie University REB# 2021-5795.

Outside of formal interviews, I also draw on my own field experiences in this article. While living in Seoul, I had many informal conversations about suicide and related topics in South Korea. While the main data that I use to inform this article is certainly formal interviews about suicide, I believe that the addition of informal conversations while in the field is also significant data. Such an inclusion is said to allow the researcher to appreciate the interviewees and their social worlds (Greene, 2012; Skinner, 2012), while interviewees are said to often divulge rich data outside of the confines of a formal interview (Wulff, 2012).

⁶ I felt that I had reached data saturation (Bernard, 2018) at around 20 interviews, and continued to see it in the subsequent nine interviews (Francis et al., 2010).

Below, I will review some of the explanations that participants gave about suicide in South Korea that pertain to both anomie and fatalism.

The Kkondae

A term that became immediately relevant in early interviews on the subject of suicide was *kkondae* (꼰대). According to interviewees, this is a term used most commonly by those in the younger-adult generation (~20s-30s). The term *kkondae* is used to describe a person belonging to an older generation that forces their way of thinking (가치관, 삶의 방식) onto a person who is younger than them (most commonly), or a person who is in a less powerful position of status.

Ho-Jin, a 28-year-old philosophy student, first explained the term to me. When asked about suicide at the start of the interview, Ho-Jin began locating the reason of why suicide was so common in South Korea among his age group in parts of Korean culture that put pressure on the younger generation:

Have you ever heard of the term *꼰대* (*kkondae*)? When older Korean people force the younger or subordinate Koreans to think in their older thinking, their old ways, many younger Korean people think they are really like *kkondae*, like a curse or swear (word). (It's) not only about their age, but about (their) way of thinking. If someone's thinking is really based on collectivism too much, we really hate it.

This term is used by many younger adults to express the severe pressure that they experience from older adults to live in a certain way. The word itself is used with an intended negative connotation, and it is much more than simply labeling someone as having an older way of thinking. As much as the word is about the former, it is the *forcing* of the “older” values that captures the fully intended meaning. This is represented by Ho-Jin's mentioning of how someone might use *kkondae* to label someone as forcing collective values on them. Ho-Jin felt that this was something that was unique to South Korea:

Collectivist culture leads to one way of living, and anything else is labeled wrong by *kkondaes*⁷. Young Koreans are fed up with the collective thinking of the older generation and have a strong individualistic tendency. And, compared to the Western world, there is still a collective personality (in Korea).

Ho-Jin's familiarity with the terms collectivism and individualism was particularly useful for both my project and exploring Park's (2013) cultural ambivalence because that is similar language to what the theory uses itself. Furthermore, from the introduction of this term I appeared to be a little closer to an answer regarding the debate⁸ between cultural ambivalence or Kang's argument for (2017) *egoistic suicide*. Ho-Jin specifically mentioned that the younger generation was more individualistic and suffered from the older generation forcing *collectivistic* values upon them. Suicide for Ho-Jin was not necessarily due to the individualistic tendencies of the younger generation itself, but was rather due to the role that the *kkondaes* played in forcing values upon them. This forcing could be conceptualized as a tension that creates a situation where someone in the younger generation is unsure of what to believe in and how to live. On one hand, they have individualism as Ho-Jin said, but on the other, people in society are vehemently telling them not to live like that.

Furthermore, collectivism itself can be conceptualized as a traditional value in Korean culture, perhaps most accurately associated with Confucianism (Cumings, 2005; Yoo, 2016). For example, Kim (2013) argues that Confucian values are a source of the Korean relational self; that the maintenance of social order and harmony between people is based on the Confucian idea of the healthy human as one being in relationships with others. In previous generations, people were able to build an ideal self when they were able to maintain harmony in all areas of life and to live

⁷ Used to describe a person belonging to an older generation that forces their way of thinking onto a person who is younger than them (most commonly), or a person who is in a less powerful position of status.

⁸ Whether or not the rise in western individualism would result in anomie due to the weakening of traditional values (Park, 2013) or a rise in egoistic suicides (Kang, 2017).

in a healthy way, defining oneself within relationships and their roles in those relationships, as opposed to a Western foundation of an individualistic self (Kim, 2013). Thus, as South Koreans in the younger generations become less collective, less family-centered, and more individualistic, they become dislodged from these traditional values in favor of individualism (Sleziak, 2013). This resembles the process outlined by Durkheim (2002/1897) when explaining anomie, as it was these traditional values that served as a protective influence on suicide.

Kkondae also exists in the political arena. One news article (Park, 2022) that I came across inadvertently during my time in Seoul caught my attention as it discussed the term in relation to political rifts that followed the completed presidential election in May 2022. According to the article, Chung Jin-Suk, aged 61, an experienced lawmaker and speaker of the National Assembly, criticized fellow People's Party member Lee Jun-Seok, the 37-year-old leader of the party, for Lee's surprise visit to Ukraine. Chung accused Lee of being negligent of the potential connotations for traveling to the Ukraine during the war with Russia, but was met with resistance from younger politicians who accused him of patronizing younger party members because of the age difference. In another example leading up to the May 2022 election, the liberal party, the ruling party at the time, committed to distancing itself from *kkondae politics*, as Park Ji-Hyun, a 26-year-old rookie politician who rose to be the party's co-chair, openly called on seniors in the party to step down from leadership posts (Park, 2022).

I then found it salient to further explore the term *kkondae* as it became clear that it was a term that could perhaps capture tensions between generations in South Korea. I found it fruitful to further examine the values within this tension itself. I wondered what exactly a *kkondae's* vision for life looks like, as diving deeper into what was being forced upon people by *kkondaes* would perhaps tell us more about life and suicide in South Korea today.

A Kkondae's Expectations: Career, Productivity, and Postwar Progress

I was not entirely surprised to report that 16 interviewees (55%)⁹ mentioned the word “parents” when asked about suicide in interviews. South Korea may not be the only country in the world where parents are explicitly related to suicide, but what is unique in the South Korean case, however, is how these expectations are contextualized with recent Korean history, including that of Japanese colonialism (1910-1945) and the Korean war (1950-1953).

Predictably, many of the interviewees that I talked to mentioned strict expectations on how to carry out their careers (커리어), free time (자유 시간), and how to live (가치관, 삶의 방식). But it is the exact nature of these expectations and where they come from that is so interesting. For example, Ah-Hyun, a 27-year-old business graduate, told me that:

Parents and all society, they always tell people like me that we need to do something for our future, and for our *country*. For example, they always tell us “Don’t waste your time”. When I was in university, during my vacation, I just wanted to take a break. But the parents always say, you need to do something, you need to study English, or get a license. You need to do something that is helpful for your future. Always moving forward. (Emphasis added)

I find it salient to emphasize that Ah-Hyun mentioned that expectations are on her to do something productive for her country, in addition to herself. Here, we can see the collectivism from the older generations and parents (according to Ah-Hyun) come out. Personal success is one thing, but it is just as important to the kkondaes to work on behalf of your nation and help its progress. Ah-Hyun is more concerned about taking a break for her own benefit and rest, placing her own individual needs before others’, but this is in opposition to both advancing herself and producing for her country.

⁹ Found through a text-frequency search in NVivo.

The inability to break from constant production to Ah-Hyun this was directly related to suicide, as she suggested to me that those people who have less free time are generally unhappier, and implied that South Korean people of the younger generation die by suicide so much in part because they cannot have enough time for themselves. Ah-Hyun argued that “Koreans commonly feel depression” because of the pressures of always being expected to be productive, and that depression is “one of the causes for suicide”. This argument is similar to that of the South Korean education system, which is notoriously blamed for sacrificing the socio-emotional development of youth to achieve educational success (Ahn and Baek, 2013). In both cases, people are expected to follow strict guidelines on how to live at the expense of taking care of themselves and spending free time as they wish.

Furthermore, Ah-Hyun contextualized the reason of *why* the older generation may push so hard:

The older generation grew up in (a) very hard environment, like think about the Korean history. So, they (the older generation) want us to live in more good environment. So that's why they tell us like that (to live a certain way). They were growing up when Korea was changing a lot.

When they were growing up though, they didn't have the opportunities. So, they want us to live better. I heard that they wanted to study, they didn't have enough money to go to university, so they didn't get to graduate. So, they want their kids to have opportunities (that they did not have)

Those people who would be the age of grandparents and parents of Ah-Hyun would have grown up either during or shortly after the Korean war (1950-1953). It is well-known that post-war South Korea experienced severe poverty as the country began to rebound from a devastating war. Moreover, the fact that South Korea today stands as a developed nation that in no sense of the

word would be considered poor is a testament to how quickly society developed since a war that was less than 100 years ago (Seth, 2017). Thus, the expectations that Ah-Hyun is talking about are deeply rooted in a relatively short history of South Korea; a history that saw hardships being endured by older generations in order to produce the developed South Korean nation that exists today.

This drive to persist and do everything you can to survive and improve was something that many participants in my study talked about in relation to the expectations that a *kkondae* might force upon them. Similar to how Ah-Hyun contextualized expectations with South Korea's history, another participant, Ha-Eun, a 27-year-old business graduate, told me that *kkondaes'* expectations are most certainly:

related to Korean history... At the time living was so hard (for the older generation growing up) and the IMF crisis. They thought hanging in there was important. No matter what happened, they had to hang in there. Just to survive. Nowadays it is not so hard to live, and the quality of life became more important (to the younger generation). They (*kkondaes*) don't think like that (resting, free time) because they had to survive. And there are many conflicts because of this between the older generations and younger generations in the workplace because of this.

For me, they always force me to think in their ways. I have two older bosses. One of my bosses forced me to learn his way. But I think I had to be respected in my own way.

In a similar way that her grandparents' generation had to survive the Korean war and its post-war destruction on the country, Ha-Eun mentions the IMF crisis as something that set her parents' expectations of how to live. The IMF crisis is a reference to the 1997 Asian financial crisis in which South Korea was one of the most negatively impacted countries, with the economy essentially crashing and the International Monetary fund (IMF) having to step in with tens of billions of dollars (US) in emergency economic aid. The salient point here is that more than one

participant is locating the source of kkonadaes' expectations of how to live within times of socioeconomic hardship in South Korea's short history. The expectations that are being forced upon younger generations can be contextualized in Korean history as there seems to have been little time in the last 100 years where South Korea enjoyed a long period free from economic turmoil, considering the devastating and lasting effects of war and the more recent financial crisis.

Furthermore, Ha-Eun mentions that the "quality of life" became more important to both her and the younger generation. This can be related to the previous participant, Ah-Hyun, mentioning that she wanted to take rests while on school vacation. Participants in my study of the younger generation felt that they should try to enjoy their own lives by satisfying their individual needs. Perhaps the absence of the feeling that they should be productive on behalf of others and their country comes from the fact that they are not recovering from a recent war or financial crisis. But the fact remains that there seem to be significant differences in how to live between generations.

This is precisely where a cultural ambivalence emerges, as young South Koreans feel that they are caught between social expectations of older generations and their own. They are expected to always be productive, despite their own desires. These social expectations coming from people's families and older society members are oppressing them. However, it is incomplete to only call this cultural ambivalence, or anomie for that matter. These interviewees expressed cultural ambivalence but also high regulation of their own lives. They cannot live towards their own goals, and so society does not regulate their goals. In this way they experience anomie, as per Durkheim. However, they feel strongly regulated in their lives, and are oppressed, key features of fatalism. In this way, anomie and fatalism are relevant in describing the social

conditions that people are outlining themselves about motives for suicidal behavior. Anomie and cultural ambivalence are general macro forces that seemingly exist in South Korean culture and society. Moreover, people respond and interact to these macro forces by feeling as if they have no control over their own circumstances, as if they are controlled completely by the disciplines of expectations. Anomie and cultural ambivalence are not enough alone here to capture the forces behind suicide here, as people ultimately describe fatalistic feelings and circumstances as well. Put simply, there is overlap between anomie and fatalism, two concepts said to be opposites according to Durkheim.

Younger Generation's Resistance

I found that those in the 20-30 age group that I interviewed overwhelmingly reported strong feelings of resistance towards the expectations bestowed upon them by the older generations. Specifically, the idea of a work-life balance often came up when participants discussed either what they envisioned being important to them to live happily, or what the younger generations generally want to focus on in terms of how to live. These topics were brought up by participants when asked why, in their opinion, people among the younger generation commit suicide. One participant, for example, told me that “resting time” (쉬는 시간) was necessary to balance her life and to keep her refreshed, implying that those who do not have such a balance would be more susceptible to suicide. Another participant, Hye-Kyung, a 28-year-old graphic designer, told me that:

In our generation, we try to focus on more balance, working and life... I think there's a struggle that the older generation wants us to work more harder. I understand why they think like that, because they've been living like that. But we have the internet, we can connect with everyone. We know about the other countries, we travel a lot. We accept, embrace the other cultures, values. So, we think differently than the older generations.

So, there's a conflict I think.... I think it could be related because people who don't have the balance and how too much conflict might be suicidal. I think that's why people are unhappy.

This is speaking to suicide directly, in that the opposite of suicide is being presented as having a healthy work-life balance. In other words, the protective factor against suicide is balancing one's own life; a healthy work-life balance, one that is currently not being promoted by older generations. According to Hye-Kyung, older generations are forcing ways of living that demolish factors that she believes essential to preventing suicide.

“Happiness” (행복), refers here to the life satisfaction that comes with a work-life balance. The concept is salient to understand here, because not only are there differences that I found between values of how to live between generations, but there are also many different conceptualizations of what exactly happiness entails according to my participants in the younger generation. Yong-Gi, a 22-year-old computer science graduate, told me that:

Employers and older persons said to us, we have the only way to live. In high school (we are told) we need to go to university, in uni (we are told) we have to employ (get a good, well-respected job). They say the same cycle to us. I think the young generation thinks it is the only way to live because that's what the older generation says. I don't agree, I think there are more ways to enjoy life. Now the younger generation, because they heard from the older generation, they value only material realities, like money, ownerships, cars, houses. Because in life they (the older generation) had those material things. Happiness, love, they know about the meaning but their mind is sick towards it because they don't know about the value of happiness. They only see and follow the material. This is the only way to achieve success. Older persons, they had these things, because Korea was poor in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s (and thus material things were cheap to purchase). But we made vertical growth. There were side effects. Korea is a developed country, but our thinking not much change. They (the older generation) still want development, change, as

if we are still a developing country. Older people had to earn their money and success, so they said to us, the young generation, we value only material things.

This long quote reminds me of what another participant in the same age group said about how the older generation tells them to live a certain way because they want them to “live the way they wanted to live”. This is a cycle that persists, one that sees the older generations who were responsible for both enduring and repairing South Korea’s postwar hardships into the developed country it is now. However, according to the participants in this study, South Korea is no longer a country that needs to achieve rapid development and “modernization”. This is a similar phenomenon to what Cho (2001) describes in that young women in their 20s (at the time of writing in 2001) had mothers and grandmothers who endured the Korean war and Japanese occupation/colonialism, respectively. The younger women’s generation, however, did not need to endure such hardships, and could enjoy the fruits of their older generations’ labor. Because of this, Cho argues that a change happened in ideology for many women that led them to be less concerned with progressivism, and social development, and more concerned with *adapting to the current circumstances* and society that was before them presently. Similarly, participants in my interviews are not so concerned with striving for the development and progression of South Korean society. They do not mention their inability to buy material things, or to earn money, as desires. Rather, trying to live comfortably in their given circumstances is their main concern. This is where the idea of life/work balance comes into play, where it could improve the quality of life for some of the younger generations but is seen as impeding development by the older generations.

There is a presence of both anomie and fatalism here. The older generations are enforcing a certain way of life that the younger generation does not want to live in. Specifically, it is this way of life that the younger generation sees as a fundamental cause of suicide. Not living that

life and instead living outside expectations and striving for work-life balance is to be happy. Accordingly, those who cannot escape from the oppressive social expectations are most prone to suicide. Or, in other words, people who commit suicide are conceptualized as those who are living in a highly regulated (fatalistic) cultural ambivalence (anomie).

Difference = Wrong

Furthermore, it is important to discuss these social expectations specifically, and how difficult it is for people to resist them. This demonstrates the degree to which people feel oppressed. According to interviewees, when young South Koreans resist oppressive social expectations, they are not just met with aversion; they are blatantly seen as ‘wrong’. There is no room for negotiation, and instead there is a correct way of living being perpetuated and enforced by older generations.

The differences in lifestyles (가치관, 삶의 방식) among generations in South Korea seem to be great. Furthermore, they are difficult to change, and are rooted in Korean history. In fact, one participant related this to the Korean language itself, which shows how deeply cemented these differences are in Korean culture and society:

There is a very interesting language habit of the older generation in Korea. Older generations cannot distinguish between “different” and “wrong”. And older generations use “wrong” in the situation when they are supposed to use “different”. As I said last time, I think people living in a collectivist culture tend to live as if there is only one correct answer in life. These characteristics have advantages and disadvantages, and the disadvantage is violence against life in a different way from the exemplary answers shared by the community. Isn't it because there is little tolerance for difference by the collectivist culture, so it is “wrong” even in situations where many Koreans should say it is “different”? This is a violent way of thinking. The kkondae way of thinking, naturally they are likely to force younger generation, subordinates think of their answer, their one

answer. To force younger generations to think in their own answer is very natural (Ho-Jin, 28m).

According to Ho-Jin, the older generations cannot accept deviations from their own thinking, and this is rooted deeply in Korean culture and language. Taking care of one's individual needs before the collective's is considered to be wrong. It is a natural phenomenon to enforce these ways of thinking and living on younger generations and social subordinates. These interviewees are not just talking about a select group of older generations, they are referring to the generation at large, as if it is a societal wide trend. The fact that they believe this to be true, and choose to relate these points most saliently to suicide, illustrates the extent to which these social expectations affect people.

Throughout this article, I have provided a modest sample of views of the younger generation who I interviewed. However, the idea that the older generations may not be able to accept difference is perhaps not just an opinion that the younger generation perpetuates. During my time living in Seoul, I held a job teaching English at a private school in addition to my field research. One night after work, I was invited out to dinner by two of my South Korean coworkers. The two coworkers were friends outside of work and both women were the same age (~50). Going out with coworkers and team leaders after work during weekdays is a common event in South Korea, usually consisting of the sharing of a meal and drinking alcohol, commonly soju (a Korean spirit) and beer. This practice actually has its own term, being called *hoesik* (회식), and is thought to be a subculture for many South Korean companies for team building.

My coworkers knew that I was a PhD student doing research, and they were specifically interested in what I was finding as this was about two months into my interviews. As I explained

what I had found so far about the concept of kkondae, the two women both smiled and laughed, surprised both by the fact that I knew about a concept like that (a term that would not be widely-known to foreigners) and the embarrassing recollection of discussions that they have had with their own children:

Eun-Hee: I think I'm a kkondae. What about you? (turning to the other coworker)

In-Suk: Yeah, I think so too. My daughter called me that more than once.

Eun-Hee: Me too. I try to avoid it when I can, as I'm always trying to think about it. I think when my children are lazy or something and I tell them (to do something) about it they call me that. But I think it happens most often when I see differences. Differences in between me and them, what they want to act like. To me I cannot accept the differences. I can try and I know they can't be the same as me, but I can't accept the differences. I have a really hard time.

In-Suk: I think I'm the same. When we grew up, we had hard lives. We were in hardship. Our parents talked about hardship too. Surviving during hard times. During war, during poverty. They had to work hard to survive, to develop Korea. But now gen (the younger generation) grew up when Korea is already developed. The younger generation can just enjoy the benefits (of fast development) from us. So, they really must have weaker minds, because they don't have to face the hardship.

Most of all, this conversation was revealing of the fact that members in older generations were able to recognize the tension that exists between differences in values and living between generations. It is not just the younger generation's perception of the older generation, but it exists on both sides, and is not necessarily a problem to be fixed. Rather, the differences in opinions exist. Taking a break, something that a participant in the younger generation wanted to do but was frowned upon by the older generation, was something that Eun-Hee and In-Suk might

consider as “lazy” (귀찮은, 게으른). Actions taken by younger generations to take care of their own needs are interpreted this way by older generations. My coworkers felt that perhaps those in the younger generations are not dealing with anywhere near the hardships that they themselves had to go through in order to enjoy life and even consider taking care of their own individual needs. To the older generation, satisfying themselves instead of simply surviving was a luxury. In this way, anomie and fatalism are relational; that is, personal rest is achieving happiness, but this comes at the cost of going against social norms. In other words, escaping from fatalistic social forces leads to normlessness as anomie. Young adults swing back and forth between fatalism and anomie during their negotiation to meet social expectations and take care of their personal well-being.

In-Suk also mentioned her own parents being in hardship, and passing their own expectations onto her. In-Suk felt that her own futures were blocked when she was growing up, and yet the two women are admitting that they themselves may be *kkondaes* and contribute to the social expectations on youth today. In this way, fatalism is relational, being passed on through generations. Blocked futures and discipline are passed through family members, signaling that it is not new that fatalism is being perpetuated through family members. However, In-Suk’s mentioning that the younger generation today has little to no hardship given South Korea’s social development suggests that there may be even more of an expectation that youth should live in hardship to essentially deserve their lives.

What is also notable is towards the end of the conversation where In-Suk mentions that the younger generation has a *weaker mind* (멘탈이 약하다). One of the interviewees that I talked to in the younger generation said something similar that her mother told her once:

I talked about this (kkondae, generational differences) with my mom a lot. And, like, let me tell you about my mom. She thinks that our ages, we don't really have strong mentals (mentalities). So, my mom will have conversations with someone who is around my age, and she only talks with us because I'm her daughter. And that was kind of the first time she talked with someone who is in our age. And she thought, she was kinda of shocked, because she didn't know (people in their) 20s had that kind of weak mental. (She thinks) they're easily exhausted from the problems that she doesn't think is a thing. So, she was kind of shocked, because they have so weak, fragile mentals. My mom thinks that our parents had strict parents, more strict parents than her, so they don't really want to do the same things to their child, so (the young generation) easily get spoiled. Or you know, if they tell their problems to their parents, the parents are going to solve it for them. They don't have independence, or they don't really have their skills to solve their own problems. I don't want to be so harsh, but that's true. That is the reality of this society, our age, according to my mom. (Young-Ae, 26f)

Again, we see this idea of the younger generation having weaker minds due to the fact that they did not have to endure hardship of the past that older generations did, or in this latter example of a participant's mom, current problems of the younger generations are simply handled by their parents. The point here is that there certainly exists a tension between expectations on how to live, as the characterization of having a weak mind being put on those in the younger generation who may conceptualize as satisfying their own needs before the collective's is indicative of cultural ambivalence. Moreover, older generations think that young people should passively accept the hardships and fatalistic conditions since they themselves had to deal with it growing up. Many of the older generation may feel that they endured even more hardship and fatalism than will ever be possible for today's youth, leading to a stricter enforcement of ideals and oppressive lifestyle. People's explanations of suicide pertain to both themes of being expected to live in fatalistic social expectations, and any resistance towards this leads to a generational tension that is plausibly described as cultural ambivalence or anomie.

Discussion

In this article I found evidence that two of Durkheim's suicide types are present and coincide. To begin, there is a tension, a cultural ambivalence between the older generation and younger generation in South Korea, one that interviewees acknowledged from both generations when asked about suicide. This strongly conveys Durkheim's anomie and Park's (2013) cultural ambivalence, as young South Koreans struggle between lifestyles, values, and philosophies. Society is unable to facilitate their own personal goals and expectations, and in this way, they are caught between two cultures: one that expects them to live a certain way, on behalf of the collective, to undergo the same hardships that their parents went through, and to always be productive. However, these circumstances that young South Koreans find themselves in are fatalistic to the core. People have strictly laid-out expectations of what to do and what not to do, how to live and how not. Their futures are blocked due to what is expected of them, and they live their lives under extreme social discipline. Happiness can be only achieved by escaping from these strongly regulated circumstances, and this very escaping is itself seen as a protective factor to suicide and a requirement by the interviewees in this article to live happily, or at all.

Marson (2019) proposes that people can slide back and forth on the spectrum of social regulation. Thus, it is plausible that people can move between fatalism and anomie in their lives. However, Marson acknowledges that people cannot be experiencing anomie and fatalism at the same time. These are opposite sides of social regulation, and the idea that someone can be socially regulated and not regulated is argued against.

Conversely, Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) contend that the opposites of anomie and fatalism can overlap, as the latter describes macro social forces whereas the former describes one's reaction to such forces. In other words, a person can experience both anomie and fatalism as they live within fatalistic circumstances, and they experience a micro level of anomie within

this environment. Following Abrutyn and Mueller's logic, anomie, or cultural ambivalence, are social-psychological concepts that reflect one's reactions to larger structures in society that perpetuate fatalism, such as the content of directives and norms. I believe this interpretation to be salient as it does make space for anomie and fatalism to exist at the same time. Fatalism exists as the content of macro social forces and can be used to describe the structure and content of social expectations placed on young South Koreans. Their lives are oppressed and thought out for them already, and they are for all intents and purposes supposed to follow this one narrow path to success. Anomie, or cultural ambivalence, is societal-wide ideological tension between generations because of these fatalistic expectations. The ways in which families and peers enforce a fatalistic life upon young South Koreans in this article creates anomie, a reaction to the very placing of these expectations. People only feel a tension between generations *because* of the resistance to those very generations and what they believe in. In this sense, the South Korean case as described by participants themselves can follow the logic of anomie being a reaction to fatalistic circumstances. Moreover, this case further builds upon Durkheim's theory by demonstrating that two opposite ends of social regulation can exist simultaneously.

Alternatively, Powell (1958) extends the definition of anomie (low regulation) to also include an interpretation itself of high regulation. This may immediately seem contradictory, but Powell makes the case that those individuals who cannot act as themselves because they are totally subsumed by the cultural expectations: "the self is rendered impotent- unable to act- which engenders the meaninglessness of anomie" (132). In other words, those people who cannot act on their own passions and goals because of the extent to which society regulates them, are in a sense not having their individual selves and goals regulated. The resulting meaninglessness is anomie, the same anomie that would come from a situation in which people

cannot have their goals regulated at all because of a breakdown in society or on their part. Moreover, Powell argues that the person feels as though they are not really living at all, given an anomie that stems from a combination of low and high regulation. The drive for success that leads many to self-destruction can strongly determine and regulate one's behavior, but provides no regulation for what the person really wants.

Powell's interpretation gives light to another possibility of high and low regulation existing at the same time; however, it skips the utility of fatalism. Fatalism can be used just as plausibly to describe how people's own passions are not met and regulated in its very regulation of the entire person's life. A person's own passions not being regulated is built into the very concept of fatalism. Despite my disagreement with Powell, the main takeaway here is that Durkheim's theory must be built upon as individual suicide types are not sufficient alone to describe the circumstances that may lead to suicide in the case of someone failing to meet highly regulated expectations.

Moreover, this article demonstrates one way in which fatalism and anomie can be understood as macro and micro processes, respectively. These expectations exist in South Korean society to a large and general extent, as the interviewees in this project implied that this was not something limited to a select few. Rather, it is South Korean youth in general, who are caught in a conflict between increasing individualism and collectivism values. In this way, anomic tension exists on a macro scale from the conflict caused by fatalistic social expectations, pervasive throughout society. However, the very fact that people locate the cause of suicide *not* here, on the expectations themselves, but at the point at which they cannot escape from their oppressive circumstances created by this tension shows that anomie is just as relevant as a micro

force in terms of the perceived cause of suicide. It is the interaction between anomie and fatalism that suicide is linked to by interviewees, and not before.

Conclusion

The ways in which young South Koreans conceptualize suicide exhibit characteristics of both fatalism and anomie, two opposites of social regulation. On the surface, it is a contradiction to suggest that people are both lowly and highly regulated. But when the totality of the interviewees' conceptualizations about suicide is considered, it becomes clearer that these social forces can affect people at the same time. Young South Koreans find themselves strongly regulated by social expectations, but the presence of this very regulation leads them to be unsure of their lives. If this was not the case, people would give in to the regulation and would not express resistance to me at all about the expectations. They would simply follow the fatalistic circumstances. But since there are major feelings of resistance, that is, people feel as though they cannot be happy when living this way, people are not passively accepting of their high regulation, resulting in tension between generations. This tension of being caught between cultures and unclear of one's own identity can be described as an anomie and normlessness (Park, 2013). Yet, the tension is only created because of a strict enforcement of these ideals, and the excessive discipline (fatalism) it constitutes. This is an overlap of Durkheim's mutually exclusive suicide types, as young South Koreans experience both anomie and fatalism in their efforts to both meet social expectations and to find happiness.

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Chapter Four: “One Big Race”, Narrow Paths and Golden Spoons: Fatalistic Narratives Among Young South Koreans

Abstract: Durkheim’s *Le Suicide* outlined two distinct types of suicide that depend on an individual’s level of social regulation. While one of these, anomie/anomic suicide has been greatly explored by both Durkheim and subsequent literature, the concept of *fatalistic suicide* has been neglected due to Durkheim’s own proclamation that it had little contemporary importance. In this article, I report narratives related to suicide gathered from interviewing South Koreans aged 20-30 that mirror elements of fatalistic suicide, such as *violently blocked passions* and *oppressive discipline*. South Koreans in this age group often discussed that they have constantly felt immense pressure from society to achieve particular life goals by certain ages, and not achieving these expectations essentially means that one’s life is over. Furthermore, I contend that achieving these lofty expectations, such as going to what is considered a prestigious university or getting a well-respected first job is hardly possible for the masses, and instead sets up many students and postgraduates for inescapable failure. The reaction to this failure of being able to meet goals and expectations can be understood in terms of Durkheim’s anomie, given that people’s goals can no longer be regulated by society once they have failed. This article posits that people move between extremes of Durkheim’s social regulation.

Introduction

Durkheim’s *Le Suicide* outlined two distinct types of suicide that depend on an individual’s high or low level of social regulation. While one of these, anomie/anomic suicide has been significantly explored by both Durkheim and following literature, the concept of fatalistic suicide was developed only within the confines of a footnote in Durkheim’s work, with Durkheim himself neglecting the concept due to its “little contemporary importance” (Durkheim, 2002/1897, p. 239). In this article, I contend that the concept of fatalistic suicide is useful in understanding young¹⁰ South Koreans’ narratives of suicide by demonstrating that people themselves will talk about fatalistic themes when asked about the topic. Moreover, I will build on this neglected part of Durkheim’s typology in showing that people’s own conceptualizations

¹⁰ To be defined below as people aged 20-30.

of suicide transcend the exclusivity of Durkheim's suicide types. The social conditions that people themselves conceptualize as causes of suicide exhibit characteristics of both *fatalism and anomie*, two concepts that were supposedly mutually exclusive in Durkheim's original work.

South Korea is a salient case in which to explore Durkheim's suicide theory. The country has consistently ranked among the highest global suicide rates for the past two decades, (Choi and Yo, 2020; Kim et al., 2019b; OECD, 2022; Park & Jang, 2018; WHO, 2012). Moreover, South Korea ranks first among OECD countries with 23.6 suicides per 100 000 people, almost 13 higher than the OECD average of 11.6 (Statistics Korea, 2022).

Specifically, suicide is the leading cause of death of South Koreans aged 10-40 (Statistics Korea, 2022). Among the 20-30 age group, high suicide rates are considered widely to be strongly related to this age group being primarily made up of high-school and university-aged adolescents, given the link between educational stress and suicide (Ahn et al., 2015; Choi and Bae, 2020; Kim & Chung, 2019). It is important to note that suicide accounts for a much smaller share of total deaths as age increases past 30s (Lee et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2018).

From the year 2020-2021, suicide among teens and South Koreans in their 20s increased 10.1% and 8.5 % respectively. This increase has been seen in other years as well and should not be related simply to COVID-19, as this particular age group saw a 68.8% increase in suicide rates from 2000-2011 (Lee, 2016). Moreover, some older age groups such as those in their 40s have seen recent decreases in suicide rates (Statistics Korea, 2022). It is specifically the suicide rate of South Korean teens and those in their 20s that has been consistently increasing in the past decade, remaining higher than in other OECD countries, while suicide rates in the same age groups in many other countries have seen decreases (Kim et al., 2019a; Kölves & De Leo, 2016).

Furthermore, suicide among South Korean university students has risen 60% in the past six years (Han & Lee, 2021) while the number of university students who experience suicidal ideation is also increasing (Kim & Cha, 2018). Given high rates of enrollment of high school students in higher education (~80%) and the fact that the majority of South Korean university students are in their 20s, the suicide rates among the 20-30 age group is thought to be largely representative of suicide among students (Ahn et al., 2015). It is widely held that South Korean university students experience immense pressures associated with school life itself, making this group perhaps more vulnerable to suicide than the small minority those who do not attend university or who are in older age groups (with the exception of high suicide rates among the elderly) (Choi and Bae, 2020; Kim and Cha, 2018). Thus, as will be explained below, the argument in this article will not be that fatalistic suicide happens as age increases but instead is most applicable to describing suicide among South Korean students aged 20-30.

Much of the research on adolescent suicide in South Korean teens attributes high rates at least partly to school-caused depression or “academic stress” (Kwon et al., 2016; Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2020). South Korea is widely known for its competitive educational system and stressful academic environment, which consequently affects adolescents’ physical, mental, and emotional well-being negatively (Ahn and Baek, 2013). Furthermore, reforms and changes to the education system, such as the reviving of university entrance exams and the raising of academic standards have occurred over the past 30 years in South Korea, coinciding with steady increases in student suicides (Ahn et al., 2015; Kwon et al., 2016; Seth, 2002).

Because of how the education system has been described in previous literature, for example as sacrificing the social and emotional development of youth (Ahn and Baek, 2013), I contended at the outset of this project that it would be plausible that South Korean university

students would describe their lives as being “blocked and oppressed by excessive discipline” (language that Durkheim uses to characterize fatalistic suicide, see Durkheim, 2002/1897, p. 239) and the confines of the education system that they navigate. Thus, elsewhere (Anderson, 2023) I have argued that the concept of fatalistic suicide is particularly useful to theoretically classify the suicides of South Korean youth who feel oppressed due to the education system. However, by drawing on interviews, I will demonstrate below that the concept of fatalistic suicide may have much contemporary relevance outside of the education system as well in describing suicide. In the following pages, I will demonstrate that Koreans in their 20s-30s exhibit conceptualizations of suicide that coincide with Durkheim’s original formulation of fatalistic suicide.

Moreover, when considering people’s own conceptualizations of suicide, I contend that more is revealed about fatalism and Durkheim’s suicide types. I demonstrate in this article that young Koreans relate not only to fatalism but also its opposite, anomie, when discussing suicide. This finding suggests that there is fluidity between Durkheim’s suicide types and associated social forces, both of which originally argued by Durkheim to be mutually exclusive. As young South Koreans find themselves living their lives up to university within the confines of fatalistic social expectations, society is likely to set them up for anomie when they meet an inability to achieve said goals. I will demonstrate how people can move between Durkheim’s suicide types, and extremes of social regulation (anomie and fatalism).

Durkheim’s Fatalistic Suicide

Durkheim’s (2002/1897) typology of suicide includes four distinct types: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. Fatalistic suicide was not significantly written about by Durkheim in contrast to the other three types, nor has it been used in contemporary academia relative to his

other types. Durkheim's short explanation (its definition only existed within a footnote, see Durkheim, 2002/1897, p. 239) coupled with its subsequent absence in later studies is telling of how he viewed the importance of the concept; Durkheim himself admitted that "examples are so hard to find aside from the cases just mentioned (his examples were 'very young husbands, the married woman who is childless') that it seems useless to dwell upon it" (p. 239).

Despite examples of fatalistic suicide being so hard to find, fatalistic suicide was perhaps created out of a need of conceptual symmetry from Durkheim (Aliverdinia and Pridemore, 2009). Specifically, Durkheim hinges his suicide typology by competing levels of social integration and regulation, and every extreme is a different type of suicide: too much integration leads to altruistic suicide; too little integration leads to egoistic suicide; too little regulation leads to anomic suicide; on the opposite side of the regulation spectrum, too much regulation leads to fatalistic suicide. Maintaining an equilibrium, or "healthy" levels of regulation and social integration so to speak, is what protects the individual against suicide.

The impediment that Durkheim mentions, that there might not exist many contemporary examples of fatalistic suicides, may possibly have been more accurate at the time that Durkheim was writing in. For example, Bearman (1991) writes that it is certainly possible to identify structurally equivalent examples to Durkheim's own examples of fatalistic suicide. I support this contention that one is able to find an in-depth example of fatalistic suicide that is outside of the examples related to marriage, or what Durkheim (2002/1897) refers to as "very young husbands, (or) the married woman who is childless" (p. 239). But first, allow me to clarify and fully contextualize exactly the parameters of what is being discussed. Durkheim's entire definition and explanation of fatalistic suicide exists in the following footnote:

there is a type of suicide the opposite of anomic suicide, just as egoistic and altruistic suicides are opposites. It is the suicide deriving from excessive regulation, that of persons

with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline. It is the suicide of very young husbands, of the married woman who is childless. So, for completeness' sake, we should set up a fourth suicidal type. But it has so little contemporary importance and examples are so hard to find aside from the cases just mentioned that it seems useless to dwell upon it. However, it might be said to have historical interest. Do not the suicides of slaves, said to be frequent under certain conditions... belong to this type, or all suicides attributable to excessive physical or moral despotism? To bring out the ineluctible and inflexible nature of a rule against which there is no appeal, and in contrast with the expression "anomy" which has just been used, we might call it fatalistic suicide. (2002/1897, p. 239)

The defining phrase in this explanation is "that of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline". However, as per Durkheim's structural approach, it seems rather difficult to acquire the necessary information to assess whether or not a person fits within these criteria without actually talking to people themselves.

Examples of fatalistic suicide require contextualization with cultural context to best illustrate the concept's relevance. For example, van Bergen et al. (2009) provide a suitable example that integrates cultural context, identifying that elements of fatalistic suicide are correlated with suicidal behavior among young Turkish, Moroccan and South Asian women. Their study demonstrates that excessive regulation and family pressure to adhere to cultural norms creates an absence of freedom and self-autonomy among these women, leading to oppressively demanding norms. Their interviews suggested that this overregulation was central to suicidal behavior, making for an appropriate classification of their suicides as fatalistic. A similar example comes from Davies and Neal (2000) who find that the suicide of young women in China could be classified as fatalistic suicide according to Durkheim's definition. In their case, it is the combination of the expectation to marry a family-chosen husband, the reality of living under the control of her mother-in-law and an environment where the legitimacy of harsh rules

and expectations is accepted, and the moral subordination to an often-brutal husband that creates a pitiless future. Both of these examples are important as they can be characterized as situations where the person's *future* and *individual passions* are both being blocked.

Aliverdinia and Pridemore (2009) find that specific geographic parts of Iran where Iranian women have greater freedom from regulated and established cultural norms, as well as from the traditional influences of family and the local community, are those in which the female suicide rate is lower. Their study concludes that suicide in the cases where regulation is strong, is more the result of repression and a fatalistic outlook than an expression of a sincere desire for death. Thus, fatalistic suicide is a result of social overregulation. Not only does this echo the other mentioned studies that fatalistic circumstances might contribute to high suicides, but this study also proposes that the absence of fatalistic elements in society among similar social groups and demographics might be correlated with lower suicide rates.

While these examples are largely referring to a specific example of women's oppression, fatalism in all of these cases is referring to the suicide of the subordinate and oppressed. Furthermore, Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) propose that other examples might not be so rare, and posit "What if (fatalistic suicides) are due to the intersection of high moral regulation and low integration" (338)? or "What if they are the suicides of persons who feel, whether objectively or subjectively true, that they can never live up to others' expectations" (338)? These questions, while still capturing the themes of the above studies on fatalistic suicide among oppressed women, open up consideration to further examples of fatalistic suicide. Most importantly for this article is Abrutyn and Mueller's latter question that ponders if fatalistic suicide can be applied to those who feel that they can never meet others' expectations. As I will demonstrate in this article

through interviews, many young South Koreans today feel trapped in circumstances created by such expectations; that is, expectations that they can likely never meet.

I can build on Abrutyn and Mueller's (2014) conception of fatalism in showing its link to anomie. To illustrate their socio-emotional conception of fatalistic suicide, Abrutyn and Mueller use a quote from Baumeister (1990, p. 93) that reads "death may come to seem preferable in the short-run to one's emotional suffering and the painful awareness of oneself as deficient" (Baumeister 1990, p. 93). They include a quote in the same paragraph that describes such a death as being one characterized by a feeling of *incongruity*. While Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) do later combine suicide types and anomie with fatalism, I contend that it is such an interpretation of fatalism that shows the concept's inherent possibility to be mixed with anomie. If one feels that they are incongruent with society because of their perceived deficiency, they are experiencing both high and low regulation. They are being regulated by strong social expectations that they cannot, for any reason, meet; and yet, not meeting those same social expectations puts them in a situation of flux, in which they cannot define themselves in society. In this sense, the person is fatalistically doomed to their anomic circumstances. Or, in other words, the individual faces an inescapable situation of not fitting into society.

The Fluidity of Durkheim's Suicide Types

In Durkheim's original work on suicide, he noted that suicide types could share ties, maintaining that that the types, however, had distinct social causes. Moreover, Durkheim wrote a section on mixed types as well, however, it did not explain how social forces create mixed-type suicides, rather making the assumptions that they result from individual dispositions and psychological states alone (Hamlin and Brym, 2006; Kang, 2017). The contribution of the present article will

be to demonstrate the fluidity of Durkheim's suicide types, including but not limited to how people can experience two types at once or how their circumstances can move between types.

Durkheim was also unclear on whether suicide-types could shift through time and space. However, examples exist in contemporary literature that demonstrate the fluidity among his suicide-types. For example, Ji (2020) proposes that Durkheim's suicide types among cases of worker suicide in South Korea have shown how the types can move around. Traditionally, suicide among workers has been viewed in South Korean society as being a noble act of sacrifice, with the people dying by suicide being seen as martyrs on behalf of other exploited workers. Suicides were in the cause of resisting the control of employers on the worker collective, as well as a means to protest social issues such as calling for democracy in South Korea. However, since the democratization of South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, worker suicide, while not decreasing in its frequency, does not evoke the same feelings of martyrdom in the 21st century's era of neo-liberal economics (Ji, 2020). Instead of being perceived as martyrs, worker suicides in South Korea have shifted to being associated as a protest to individual workplace conditions and dissatisfaction. Righteous suicides before were altruistic à la Durkheim, but the same acts now have changed to anomic. This is because these same suicides today have shown increasingly anomic characteristics, such as suicides being associated with the discontent and normlessness of a neo-liberal South Korean political-economic order characterized by the rise of contingent and exploitive jobs (Ji, 2020). The point here is that what was once altruistic suicides became anomic in the span of a few years.

Another example of this fluidity is shown by Im et al. (2018) in their study that claims that suicides in South Korea for individual reasons, such as social isolation (egoistic) are underreported by South Korean families. This is because in a cultural context still influenced by

Confucianism, suicide for personal reasons (e.g., individual isolation, free inquiry), signifies moral failure in fostering appropriate values by the family of the deceased, a violation of Confucian values. Thus, a negative cultural meaning is attached to the egoistic type of suicide in contemporary South Korean society, leading to such suicides in South Korea covered up, or even classified as other types of death to avoid stigma or shame attached to one's family (Im et al., 2018). However, like worker suicides Ji (2020), these suicides can be viewed by South Korean society as positive moral acts in some situations, such as purposefully killing oneself for noble causes, or to preserve one's honor or integrity. Such people would be portrayed as martyrs, and thus their suicides would not necessarily be intentionally covered up by the family (Im et al., 2018). In these examples, suicides are classified as egoistic/altruistic depending on how a social group itself views rationalizes the individual act of committing suicide in particular circumstances.

The way that suicide can be classified in Durkheimian terms can change then, but the fluidity of his suicide types, I contend, can characterize how a person experiences social forces at a given point in time. For example, Marson (2019) and Marson and Powell (2011) propose that people can move fluidly on axes of social regulation and integration. In other words, a person may, for example, experience high regulation and low integration at the same time, or high regulation may intersect with high integration.

Additionally, people can go from one extreme to another on the spectrum of regulation and integration. Marson and Powell (2011) argue that, for example, an elderly person who experienced strong regulation throughout their lives in accomplishing their goals and working may feel a sudden normlessness in retirement, struggling to find out what to do with themselves. This state could be characterized by fatalism leading to anomie. Moreover, the degree to which a

person was regulated before experiencing the sudden normlessness may lead to a larger impact of anomie in contributing to one's suicide (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014). Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) similarly contend that people may experience anomie when reacting to normlessness from not meeting fatalistic social expectations.

In this article I demonstrate that South Koreans in the 20-30 age group think of suicide in ways that are similar to themes outlined by Durkheim's fatalistic suicide. People describe facets of their lives where their futures and passions are oppressed. However, because of the way that these people are facing social expectations and thus very strong regulation, they feel as though they are systematically doomed to not finding a stable place in society, thus experiencing what I contend to be anomie as well. Another interpretation will run similar to Marson and Powell's (2011) example of the elderly person. As young South Koreans experience high regulation from social expectations during their lives leading up to university, their individual passions are choked out and their passions are blocked. They live strongly regulated lives and have plans enforced upon them by others. When they reach the point at which reaching these expectations is not possible (i.e., retirement for the elderly, Marson and Powell, 2011), they cannot adapt as society no longer regulates their goals. In this way, people move from fatalism to anomie, demonstrating the fluidity of Durkheim's suicide types.

Methods and Methodology

From January-August 2022, I conducted in-depth interviews in Seoul. In total I interviewed 29¹¹ South Koreans that told me about personal life stories as they went through the South Korean schooling system, as well as their perspectives on suicide in South Korea. Interviewees were all in the 20-30 age group since I wanted to specifically hear from: a) people who were currently or

¹¹ I felt that I had reached data saturation (Bernard, 2018) at around 20 interviews, and continued to see it in subsequent interviews (Francis et al., 2010).

recently were university students, and b) people in an age group that has suicide as the leading cause of death.

My approach to interviews was to begin by asking participants what they knew about suicide in South Korea. Suicide was always something that interviewees knew a lot about, including the facts of how high globally the country's rates were. The specific format of my interviews was an open-ended style that focused on giving interviewees the opportunity to develop their answers outside of a structured format (Burgess, 1984; Skinner, 2012).

I originally planned on operationalizing Durkheim's fatalistic suicide to explore related themes, such as if participants felt controlled (regulated) or that they had their passions oppressed (fatalism). This would have been a purely deductive approach in the sense that I hypothesized that students would tell me about suicide in a similar way to Durkheim's typology. However, I quickly became more interested in simply asking participants about suicide to see if they would organically mention themes that could be related to Durkheim's fatalism. The method of abduction allows qualitative data to be gained without confining questions to a theoretical perspective, but then also using those same answers to connect to a larger academic community and theory (Halpin and Richard, 2021; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014), which in this case was Durkheim. Furthermore, I report a sample size ($n=29$) that follows conventions of recent South Korean anthropological studies which have also done in-depth interview projects (Kim, 2018; Lee, 2019).

I possessed a basic knowledge of the Korean language that helped me conduct most interviews in such a way that participants could answer or be asked questions in English or Korean, although it is important to note that the majority of interviews were conducted in English. Participants often communicated to me that part of the reason that they were doing the

interview with me was to practice explaining things in English, or to even simply have the experience to participate in a university study in English. Moreover, due to the fact that the age range that I was specifically recruiting was 20-30 and thus was made of up current university¹² students and recent graduates, participants almost always possessed English skills that were better than my Korean skills. This is not to say that the time I spent learning Korean leading up to my fieldwork was in vain; on the contrary, these skills came in handy when participants could not explain something in English, or wanted to express a word that was not directly translatable between languages.

See Appendix A for the full list of interview participants that includes age, gender, and university major. It should be noted that all names are pseudonyms and that this research has ethics approval under Dalhousie University REB# 2021-5795.

I also had a chance to interview two mental health professionals for this study. While certainly not as robust as the student sample size, these people were able to give unique perspectives on suicide in South Korea and Korean culture more broadly that supplemented my project. One of these mental health professionals was also not South Korean and instead was a psychologist practicing in Seoul, which also provided another unique outsider perspective on suicide. Information about these individuals can be found in Appendix B.

Below, I investigate some of these ideas in-depth by adding thoughts and full explanations of how participants think through suicide and fatalism.

Expectations and Age

Durkheim (2002/1897) conceptualized fatalism as when people have their lives strictly controlled and oppressively disciplined. In his explanation, their own passions are choked out,

¹² Notably, English is a subject on the national university entrance exam (Suneung) that students must study to enter university.

and they must live within the confines that are assigned to them by society. A confine that is important in this article is social expectations of how someone is supposed to live their life, including a timeline. That is, when asking interview participants about suicide, many interviewees, in one way or another, referenced *age* in South Korea. More specifically, the idea that South Koreans have specific goals that they *must* achieve by a certain age was a common theme among participants in my study. For example, 27-year-old Ha-Eun told me that:

I knew that the suicide rates were high because I can see that in the internet. In Korea, living is harsh. People around me expect some things, like you have to get married at this age, and you have to get a good stable job. It makes people stressed. This society is actually not caring about taking care about people's mental health. Also, we have some culture in comparison. People compare themselves to other people a lot. It's related, because especially Koreans have many things in common. As I said, they usually get a job at some age. *It's like framed*. So, if they cannot reach the expectations, they get stressed. When they don't meet the expectations, they get stressed and easily think about killing themselves. Even in Seollal (Korean lunar new year where extended families often get together), I got to meet my family, but my family says you have to get married, you have to meet your boyfriend now. Whenever I meet my own family, I always hear like that. I think it's not only my problem. It's many peoples' problem. (Emphasis added)

Ha-Eun mentions several different things in this passage that the people around her expect her to achieve. Notably, marriage, relationships, and getting a stable job are expected of her, and these expectations become more urgent as she ages. Ha-Eun also explains that these expectations are a source of stress and people's mental health is an afterthought when it comes to expectations. Notably, Ha-Eun started this explanation only when asked about suicide.

Ha-Eun was certainly not alone in expressing such sentiments about the link between the pressure to meet expectations and suicide. Many other participants said something similar, including 26-year-old Yi Jae's personal experience with suicide:

I think there are so many reasons that Korea has high rates of suicide. But in my case, I thought about suicide when I kept failing on job interviews and feels like I'm useless and there's no hope in the future. Because we have certain rules that we have to achieve something in your ages. I think other countries have similar things, but I think we (Korea) have more higher standards. Like you have to start your career in two years after graduation, otherwise you can't find a decent job. I'm a master at depression things. (Yi-Jae, 26f)

What is salient about these quotes is that these participants feel a pressure from social expectations that they have certain things that they absolutely need to achieve by a certain age. This is constantly checked on and asked about by family members. Furthermore, both of these participants mentioned the pressure in relation to mental health: Ha-Eun mentioned that people get stressed because of this and their negatively affected mental health is not prioritized. When people do not meet the expectations to achieve things by a given age, Ha-Eun said that they “get stressed and easily think about killing themselves”. Yi-Jae, in similar fashion, referenced personal feelings of suicide when she could not meet goals assigned to her, as she felt useless and as a failure for not meeting the goals, while also referencing depression at the end. The stark quote, “I’m a master at depression things” is referencing that the above explanation of the assigned age goals is depressing for many South Koreans that feel a great amount of pressure.

Both of these quotes are mentioned directly in relation to suicide. The latter’s, Yi-Jae’s, is particularly relevant to fatalistic suicide because Yi-Jae mentions that failing to meet certain goals makes her feel like she is useless, and that she has no hope in the future. This is a situation where she, and others who go through it, feel like they are trapped with no hope. That there is a doomed future with no hope for recourse is quite related to Durkheim’s (2002/1897, p. 239) description of *blocked futures*.

What is more than finding evidence for fatalism is that people are *not* saying that they die by suicide because of the expectations themselves. It is what happens to people when they do not meet the expectations that is thought to lead to suicide. As much as the expectations constitute a fatalistic environment, not meeting the expectations leads people to feel as if they cannot live up to society. In this way, people feel like they are deficient in society, and thus experience an engulfed shame (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014). However, if people are under an immense pressure to live in these fatalistic circumstances, and are doomed to do so, they live their lives facing this deficiency; that is, they face suicide when they do not meet the goals. For example, Ha-Eun said that she thinks people die by suicide when they are unable to meet expectations. In other words, if society cannot regulate individuals, they die by suicide. This is akin to an anomie that arises when people literally cannot meet their goals (Merton, 1938, 1968). The social expectations are the norms that regulate people's lives, and the act of not meeting those same expectations if being referenced as a reason for suicide. This act is facing anomie when fatalistic circumstances are not followed.

Furthermore, these expectations placed on people to achieve certain goals by particular ages may be contextualized with South Korea's short history. Seung-Hee, a South Korean psychiatrist, told me that it is related to the country's rapid social and economic development:

Korea is a rapidly growing country, and (therefore) Korea is used to “빨리 빨리” (pronounced bali bali, meaning quickly quickly) culture. So, people think as if they have a specific task that must be completed at a specific age. In the case of the 18-30 age group, people think of independence, employment, and marriage as tasks that they must complete. And if they fail to do it, they are regarded as failures. So, in fact many people who have lived abroad and come to Korea often struggle with this problem. When they were abroad, they were respected to live in their own way, but here if they marry or get a job late, they are considered a loser, and they feel a lot of pressure to do something

quickly, so I think that age group has a lot of social tasks that are required. Because family members ask, “When will you marry?” “When will you get a job?”. That is very stressful, but Korea has more severe pressure than other countries in this area, I think. Every country has this problem, but Korea is more severe.

Seung-Hee is implying that South Korea’s rapid postwar development from a poor country to its current state (Seth, 2017) has impacted people’s attitudes to consistently achieve fast social progress. More important is that these expectations exist, and these are the goals that young South Koreans are conditioned to achieve and strive for. To reference Durkheim, young South Koreans are “disciplined” to live in this way according to these achievements. In fact, Seung-Hee’s mentioning of those who experience more freedom abroad is indicative of “choked passions”. South Koreans may not be able to follow the dreams or lifestyles that they personally want, as these may be sacrificed for what is expected of them, such as getting married by a certain age.

Furthermore, again we see the point made that not meeting these expectations can severely damage one’s future prospects. According to Seung-Hee, people may feel like “failures”. I would argue that the people who feel like failures feel that way because they cannot define themselves within the system of norms in society. If they fail to meet social expectations they experience normlessness, or anomie. In the following section, I will further interrogate what being a “failure” exactly entails according to young South Koreans themselves in relation to suicide.

Irreparable Failure and Starting Over

Having expectations of how to live, while contextualized in the previous section, is evidently something that exists across contexts. Thus, it is not enough to simply identify these expectations that young South Koreans are pressured to meet and call it fatalism. Rather, it is just as important

to show that these people *cannot deviate* from this path at all. Deviations from the narrow path that is laid out for young South Koreans, as seen in participants' explanations in previous quotes, is seen as a failure, and in this section, I will demonstrate how there is *no coming back* from this failure.

An example that shows this phenomenon is the prestige given to certain South Korean universities. There is a common conception in South Korea, certainly based on many truths, that attending and graduating from a “good” university will lead to a respectable job; on the other hand, not going to a good university may doom someone to never be able to get the same respectable job. Universities in Seoul are considered widely to be “good” universities, with particular prestige being assigned to the SKY universities (an acronym for Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University). Participants often explained the importance of going to a good university for one's future prospects, such as 28-year-old Ho-Jin:

Because of Korean culture, many Korean students want to go to a nice university. In order to get into a good university, they studied very hard, actually they don't play outside, they study all day. Especially high school students. So naturally Korean students think that “if I get rejected from university, that means in my life I failed”. I even saw a similar case. Today, I just met my friend in a fried chicken restaurant. My friend told me one of his friends has kept preparing to get into university to become a teacher, for 10 years! For 10 years, he has always studied, only studied. Recently he gave up because he got rejected from good universities, and he prepared for the test for public servant (instead of continuing to try to become a teacher).

Ho-Jin explains that people may prepare and study to go to what is considered good universities for many years. If they cannot achieve this, then they might not go to university at all. The university itself and the prestige associated with its name is so significant in South Korean society that jobs and people's entire futures may depend on it. While this is a phenomenon that

certainly exists in other countries, participants are constantly relating this to Korean culture (Ho-Jin) or even earlier when Yi-Jae mentioned particularly “high standards” in South Korea. This becomes clearer with 26-year-old Young-Ae’s following explanation of how she views people’s career paths:

Young-Ae: I’m so sad that I need to say this, but if you are gonna survive in Korea, there are so many people who see your resume, so if you're from university outside of Seoul, they think like “he must not be diligent in their school life”. That's gonna be the standard for the future work. That is why people keep telling you that you need to be in a good university.

Me: They really think your whole potential for the rest of your life only depends on when you're 18, where you go to university?

Young-Ae: It’s step by step. A good university (leads to) a good first job. But if you don’t go to a good university, a Seoul university, it’s hard. Especially when you look for your first job, which is really hard for Koreans, because they (the companies) all want experienced workers for their companies or those who go to Seoul universities. And the problem is, your first job is really important for the success of your career. Samsung, chaebols (Korean big companies, respectable jobs), they actually think your university is really important. So, if your first step is not gonna be in chaebols companies, then your career path is not gonna be what you expected. That's the reality.

Young-Ae’s explanation is dense and contains a lot of information and ideas. First of all, you can see a step-by-step process in which there is a strict requirement for each step of becoming ‘successful’ in South Korea: a good university leads to a good first job, and a good first job leads to respectable future jobs and prospects. The respectable companies look closely at one’s university and weigh it heavily on their decision to hire someone. However, on the opposite side of the spectrum, if you do not go to a good university that is in Seoul, universities which are

obviously very competitive to get into, you cannot easily get a respectable first job, which in turn affects your resume and perceived future-potential among employers. But it is not just that going to a good university works for you, it is the fact that *not going to a good university works against you*.

Young-Ae also mentions that “your career path is not gonna be what you expected” if people cannot go to good universities. This is salient to anomie, as it is a case of people suddenly not having their lives regulated by society. If someone lives their entire childhood leading up to the university entrance exam with oppressive social expectations to go to a good university, this is their defined life path. However, when this person suddenly can no longer pursue this life according to social expectations, they are left to live a life no longer according to their own expectations. That whole life that society regulated them for during their pre-university years can no longer be possible, and society cannot regulate them anymore to go on the path that they were expected to. In this case, fatalistic circumstances define social expectations and lay out a particular life path, but for most this life is not widely achievable. Then it is theoretically plausible to state that most people are expected to live a certain life, most people cannot achieve that life, and most people experience anomie at the university age due to the sudden change in society’s ability to regulate their goals (whether they were strictly their own or not).

Moreover, the fact that one may need to either wait many years to go to a prestigious university, or that they may need to wait many years to find a stable, respectable job after not going to a respectable university, also may trap people in these circumstances of dysregulation and normlessness. It is not as if people have infinite time to wait, study more, or prepare in various ways to increase their chances of getting admitted to a good university. As Young-Ae explains, people are very much on a timer:

My younger brother, he didn't go to university right away (after high school). He waited and worked at a part time job when he graduated high school. He could go back to university, but the companies might not still hire him (after he graduates). The problem with these people who are a bit older is that companies don't wanna hire someone who is older than the manager. For example, my manager is 35. She doesn't want to hire someone who is older than her, as her employee. Because that is kind of uncomfortable, especially in Korea. Because we have like, we need to respect our elders. So maybe my manager would have some problem ordering someone that is older than them. And the language is also different, the honorifics. She would have to use formal language to him as her boss. That is a Korean thing, and it would be weird for her.

Indeed, there is an age culture in South Korea that people of older ages need to always be respected by those who are younger, despite merits (Kim-Yoon and Williams, 2015). As Young-Ae explains, those who take longer to find a job or to a university may have less chances to get hired the longer they wait. Moreover, people that are younger use different verb conjugations in Korean when speaking to those who are older, and Young-Ae felt that it would be odd for a manager to have to use formal language when speaking to an older employee that would actually be her subordinate.

Thus, young South Koreans are very much expected to achieve certain things by particular ages; securing a stable and reputable job is one of these expectations. However, to secure such a job, one needs to go to a good university, which is difficult to get admitted to. As the average person would not be admitted into a top university, they may feel as a failure. However, the longer they wait to get their life back on track according to the expectations bestowed upon them, the less chances they have to meet the expectations. This is a situation in which people for their entire childhoods have their own passions suppressed to live on this one fatalistic path. In every facet of life, they are disciplined to strive for academic success through a prestigious university. They are expected to do so, despite the fact that it would literally only be

a small percentage of people who can attend the top three universities in the country. As I mentioned above, 20% of Suneung takers each year fail and must take the test again (Kwon et al., 2017), and this does not even count those who barely passed, or those who got non-exceptional scores, all of which would not lead to admittance into a prestigious university. Young South Koreans are widely and strictly expected to live a life that is not possible in practice, and it is at this precise point that people locate suicide. I contend that this sudden inability for most people to continue to realize social expectations results in normlessness and an inability to be further regulated in society, leading to anomie.

The Golden Spoon

Aside from studying and achieving a remarkable score on the Suneung, there are many informal instances of lobbying behind the scenes that upper class families engage into secure spots for their children in prestigious universities. From changing and forging academic records, to paying university presidents to admit students despite their low scores, many instances of the upper class using their power and money to help their children have existed in South Korea for decades (Lee, 2019).

This idea of corruption that helps many upper-class students secure their spots in prestigious universities runs similar to the idea that education reproduces inequalities. That is, the access to capital that upper classes have (in this case economic) lead to higher outcomes of educational success (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). This directly contradicts the functionalist argument of meritocracy in education (Parsons, 2018); despite how hard young South Koreans work to gain admittance, they are unlikely to get into a prestigious university due to the fact that those outside the upper class cannot lobby, nor can most people achieve a high enough Suneung

score anyway. On paper, the system is literally set up for most students to not meet social expectations of success.

Students from privileged backgrounds are often said to benefit from forms of capital in their education, leading to higher education outcomes (Reay, 2004; Zhu, 2020). In this way, education reproduces inequality, as those who are more privileged are set up for success, and vice versa. Bourdieu discusses the myth of meritocracy (1999) in that those who are able to benefit from more cultural and economic capital are more likely to achieve educational outcomes. In the South Korean case, success is often measured and strongly correlates with academic success (Ahn and Baek, 2013), so those who are set up for educational success may be less likely to experience fatalism and anomie. In contrast, if there is a context in which educational success is particularly hard to achieve (compounded by the existence of strict social expectations), fatalism and anomie may exist more here than in other situations. In the South Korean case where education is so strongly valued (Ahn and Baek, 2013), more so than other contexts (Bray, 2009; Choi et al., 2012; Ha and Park, 2017; Nam, 2013), this is salient. We can think of anomie and fatalism not being equally distributed in society; rather, they are tied to larger social inequalities, especially in education.

The idea that meritocracy is a myth came up quite often in interviews, and the following instances are particularly striking due to participants feeling like they never had a chance compared to the upper class. In fact, a term called “the Golden Spoon”, representing the idea that those born into rich families eat from a gold spoon and have benefits offered to them upon birth, is salient to one interviewee:

Have you heard of the **금수저** (Golden Spoon) idea? It might be worse in Korea than in other places. It's like when people are born with a rich parent or something, they are right away eating from a gold spoon. But people can't change or choose how they're born or

their parents right? The gold spoon people have advantages right away from birth because of their money. Their parents can use their money to change their child's grades in school, to make them go to the best *hagwons*¹³ with the best teachers, or even to influence them to go to the best university. But the people who aren't born that way would never be able to achieve this so easily, and even if they work their hardest with all their efforts, they still might not even be able to achieve the same thing as those who were born with a gold spoon. Because of this people aren't judged only on what they deserve, but their background. So, people without the gold spoon think they might be stuck on a path, or doomed, and they can't change anything about it. (Ji-Min, 28f)

Ji-Min is evidently correct when she says that people cannot control the families that they are born into. As most people are not born into Golden Spoon families, the average person cannot use large sums of money to alter their chances of meeting the lofty expectations and goals that South Korean society and culture places upon them. The Golden Spoon idea was even apparent to an outsider, a foreign psychologist practicing in South Korea that I interviewed:

You are probably aware of the corruption scandals, plagiarism, putting undergraduates as the lead author on articles, such as the offspring of famous people, just to get them ahead. These are things that exacerbate the sentiment. For most Koreans, they think, what is there for me? I'm not being judged on my merits, even if I do work hard, because the power distance is ingrained, fundamentally, from when I was a kid. They are aware of this. If you were born in the society, you recognize your lot in life. Recognize that you don't have many power connections. Not going to the best school. You recognize this from the beginning. And with the speech as another example, it's part of the consciousness of a kid. They learn to respect certain individuals from an early age, to respect this power differential. A common example is the *선생님* (addressing people by respectable titles) idea. And pretty much, you don't respect someone for being credible, or for them having done something to be respected for. You respect them based on their title. I imagine, from a young age, very young kids are told, you respect someone because they are older, if they are male, the older white male. Because those are the people with

¹³ Hagwons are private study academies, otherwise known as "Cram schools, prevalent in South Korea.

the most power in this country. So, if you recognize that you don't have these qualities, you can't change your skin color or your sex, you can't change your age or your background, when you imagine your future, like entering the workforce, you already see yourself at a disadvantage. It's part of language. Language is how we interact with the social world around us. (Min, foreign psychologist)

Both of these interviewees are from very different backgrounds and occupy different places in South Korean society, but report something strikingly similar: people are judged not based on their merits but are instead judged based on how much money and power they have. People who are not born with this power may feel like they can never achieve the contemporary step-by-step process that I outlined earlier: go to a prestigious university, get a respectable first job, and go from there. Rather, most people are doomed in a sense from birth. The education system reproduces inequality which only favors a select few in the upper class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979; Bourdieu, 1999; Reay, 2004; Zhu, 2020), something said to specifically exist in South Korea (Byun et al., 2012; Jarvis et al., 2020; Lee and Brinton, 1996). As the average person is not from the upper class, many young South Koreans may look at the slim chances that they have for the future of going to a prestigious university, which essentially means that they have minimal chances for actually meeting the expectations of how to live a respectable life pressured on them from their surrounding society and family members. Min, the foreign psychologist, connected this with ensuing consequences on people's mental health:

You can see how this could be linked with depression for example. People see themselves as inferior, "I can't move beyond this, because the culture, the structure is already in place to restrict my mobility". People realize that they might not be able to go very far in life, or they can see where they can go in Korea.

While Min describes this as depression, I suggest taking it a step further and argue that fatalism becomes clear here. People realize that they have a narrow path being forced upon them in life,

but they cannot actually achieve this path as they are unlikely to successfully live it from birth. Their future prospects are disciplined to work their whole lives towards a goal that is likely not to happen. The goals of the average person, assigned to them by South Korean culture and society, perpetuated by family members around them, are often blocked.

There is a step-by-step process that I have outlined in this article in which people must attend a good university to get a stable job. The inability for everyone to do this leads to people having a very hard time finding a first job after graduating university, and thus people likely cannot refuse the scarce opportunities for stable jobs that come to them. I noticed this theme in several informal conversations with interviewees before the interview started, where I would ask what they did for their job. Interviewees often told me that they wanted to, in one way or another, change their current jobs or careers. Through meeting many young South Koreans in my project and asking them what they did for a job, so many would tell me that despite where they are working now, they are planning to do X in the future, or are actively looking for new jobs. I wondered why it seemed like every South Korean I met wanted to change their job. On this note, participant Soo-Jung, a 30-year-old graphic designer, explained that:

Most Korean people want to change their jobs. The first jobs that they get after they graduate, they think they can't refuse them. Even if they don't like it, or it isn't related to their major, they think if they refuse then they will fail. They will not be able to get a good job in the future, or be stuck unemployed. So, they take it, and end up working a job with long hours that they don't even like. *They feel trapped like this.* That's why so many Koreans want to change their job now. (Emphasis added)

People cannot afford to refuse the first jobs that are offered to them, as graduates from non-Seoul or non-prestigious universities are at a disadvantage when searching for the first jobs. Even those who actually got a job related to their major expressed extreme gratitude and feelings that they were lucky:

But I got a job. I was lucky. I work in the ecommerce, so I sell the clients products to amazon. It's related to my major, I studied in business administration. But many Korean people don't work related to their major. Many Korean people want to change their jobs. When you apply for the company, you apply for the position that is not related to your major, because you want to get a job anyway. So usually, they work in something that is not related to your major, even when you are not interested in your job. But you need to do that because it's very hard to change your career, and hard to get into another company. (Ah-Hyun, 27f)

Thus, people expressed to me that they had jobs that they did not like and could not actually follow their passions in their work, often working jobs that were not related to their university studies. And to make matters worse, participants also explained that changing one's job was, to a large extent, frowned upon and stigmatized by society and those in older generations, such as parents or grandparents:

It's hard to change your career in Korea. For example, if I try to change my career, you know then Korean people, they don't want to restart. You know? If I tell my parents that I want to change my career, then my parents will say that "you already tried to make a career in this way. But why do you want to restart?" My friends will say, "you already have a job, why do you want to change your job?" Because there's a possibility that I might fail to change the career, and it will be a waste of time. (Ah-Hyun, 27f)

The people who Ah-Hyun is talking about, her friends and her family, are not concerned about the fact that she is not working in a job that follows her passions or university major. Rather, it is more important to have a stable job. This is corroborated by 27-year-old Ha-Eun:

Our generations, new generations, think that it is not so hard to change the jobs. But older generations thought that jobs are one of the most important factors in our lives. Even though they don't like their jobs, they still worked them and didn't try to change.

According to Ha-Eun, those in previous generations would accept the job they got, no matter if it was related to their passions or not. In Ha-Eun's generation though, people are more keenly

trying to pursue their own passions, which leads to more tension when they cannot follow their passions. In many cases then, young South Koreans have to accept any stable job that comes to them when they graduate university. They feel a pressure that if they do not accept these jobs that may be unrelated to their majors that they will not get any future opportunities. To many, any work experience may be better than none, even if that means *sacrificing one's own passions* to work in a job that is not in their field. However, once they accept these jobs, it is incredibly hard to actually change to what they want to do. The jobs that they get are seen by their families as something that maybe should not be changed once it is stable and is seen by society as a major risk. These kinds of problems are not so pronounced for those of the upper class, as they are all but guaranteed a spot in prestigious universities, meaning that they can get respectable jobs in their field after they graduate. Thus, for the average person who is unable to benefit from corruption, they become unable to meet the fatalistic goals expected of them, leading them to feel deficient and incongruent with society (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014), resulting in anomie. In this way, people slide from one side of the social regulation spectrum to the other (Marson, 2019; Marson and Powell, 2011), demonstrating the fluidity of Durkheim's suicide types.

Discussion

Bettering oneself through education is seen as the only way to achieve social success and prestige in South Korean society. Specifically, there is an idea perpetuated by family members and society at large that young South Koreans must attend a prestigious university to live a respectable life. This is the idea that determines their life paths growing up. They live their lives in pursuit of this goal, as education is seen as determining one's entire future prospects, including marriage, job, social capital (Ahn and Baek, 2013).

Both fatalism and anomie have strong relevance in light of these findings. In terms of the former, the social environment and life path that young children and adults are on leading up to university is fatalistic. Durkheim argued that fatalism constitutes an environment that is characterized as being marred with oppressive discipline, blocking futures and choking passions (2002/1897, p. 239). Indeed, the young South Koreans I interviewed meet these criteria. Their futures are expected to take a fixed path from birth, and they intensely follow the blueprint of these expectations. The participants who were interviewed spoke at great length of the constant pressure that they felt from these expectations, promoted by family members and society at large. Moreover, followers of Durkheim such as Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) describe that people feel an intense shame when being unable to meet these fatalistic expectations. Indeed, many interviewees expressed that the expectations made them feel depressed, as did failing to meet the goals set out.

However, it is notable that not one interviewee said that they viewed suicide as an escape from the expectations themselves. No one told me that cracking under the pressure of social expectations itself was *the cause* of suicide. Moreover, it was implied by each participant that suicide can be found at the precise moment after someone fails to meet the social expectations. Similar to what Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) postulated about deficiency and incongruity, suicide is located by interviewees here in the precise moment that a person realizes that they can no longer fit into the social expectations of society; they have failed to meet them, and they are deficient because of it. These latter feelings are best characterized as anomie and not fatalism. The person who is feeling that they are deficient and no longer congruent with society is experiencing anomie as they can no longer be regulated by society. The strict regulation that they experienced leading up to the Suneung and the realization that they cannot meet the lofty goals

of attending a SKY university, an acronym for the three most prestigious universities in South Korea, is the moment in which people's goals can no longer be achieved. Likewise, Merton (1938, 1968) contends that anomie arises from the societal disparity between cultural goals (e.g., SKY university) and the means to achieve them. If people do not possess the Suneung score, or the economic capital to lobby universities, or any other means necessary to achieve the social expectations, this is anomie.

In this way, the perceived cause of suicide, according to interviewees, was not the fatalistic expectations but rather the anomic tension that comes from not meeting said expectations. One way to interpret this finding would be to then call associated suicides anomic, since anomic tension seems to be the precise moment where suicide happens. However, I would add that by doing so, the relevance of fatalism would be missed in describing the social expectations that led to anomie in the first place. Much like current prevention efforts that are only focused on the already suicidal, seeing these suicides as only anomic glosses over the social stressors in people's lives that may have led them to suicide in the first place. In other words, to tell a fuller story of how someone becomes suicidal, we need not one but two of Durkheim's suicide types here: fatalism to describe the social circumstances that causes anomic suicide.

I propose that young South Koreans experience both anomie and fatalism in relation to the social expectations surrounding the South Korean education system. There is overlap in these forces in that anomie arises due to the fatalistic social expectations that are enforced on people. Social regulation in this case is like an elastic band, where people can swing back and forth between fatalism and anomie, or even be pulled to both at the same time. The 20% of people who fail the Suneung (Kwon et al., 2017), for example, are in fatalistic circumstances leading up to the Suneung. They take it, fail with an inadequate score, and experience anomie. Their goals

can no longer be met. Assuming they do not die by suicide at this moment due to anomie, they take the test again, returning to fatalistic circumstances from anomie. They go from fatalism to anomie, to fatalism again.

Conclusion

I remember one interviewee calling South Korean society “cookie cutter” as everyone is on one path, a fixed path, and deviating may mean your life is over. Interviewees expressed that they felt like South Korean society produces the same limited road to success over and over, meaning that everyone outside of the upper class is focused on competing for the same goals that are only literally achievable for a select few. People overwhelmingly expressed to me that their lives were essentially over if they could not achieve these goals. There is one path that sets all social expectations and is seen as leading to young South Koreans getting respectable, stable jobs. If you do not eat from the metaphorical *golden spoon*, you must go to a good university or accept jobs that sacrifice your individual passions.

Embracing the contemporary relevance of fatalism allows us to focus attention on how people’s lives are necessarily oppressed and restricted by expectations and institutions in South Korean society. Fatalism adequately describes the environment created by the social expectations themselves. However, the contribution of this paper comes in arguing that young South Koreans relate suicide to both anomie and fatalism in these narratives. These two concepts need not be mutually exclusive in every case, and people can move between types in their lives given fatalistic circumstances that in some way lead to anomie. In the case of the young South Koreans interviewed in this article, despite intentionality, when they fail to meet fatalistic social expectations for any reason, they are left stranded in a society that can no longer regulate them,

and their only option is to seemingly die by anomic suicide or return in some way to once again attempt to survive under fatalistic circumstances.

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Chapter Five: Doomed Dysregulation and the Overlap Between Durkheim's Suicide Types

Abstract: In Durkheim's original work, social regulation and integration were two different variables. Moreover, Durkheim mostly used one type of suicide to best fit a given case. In this article, I interviewed South Koreans in their 20s-30s to gather data on what social forces according to Durkheim they would relate suicide to, if any. I found evidence that people's perceived motives for suicide coincided with all four of Durkheim's types, and interviewees' answers would more often than not correspond to more than one suicide type at the same time. This paper argues that one suicide type is inadequate in classifying the motives for suicide and that individuals will pertain to extremes of social integration and regulation at the same, providing evidence against the idea that these variables are mutually exclusive. Moreover, this paper makes a contribution by introducing the term "Doomed Dysregulation" to describe states in which people experience multiple Durkheimian suicide-types at once, with particular emphasis on fatalism and anomie.

Introduction

South Korea has been referred to as the *Republic of Suicide* (Mauduy, 2015), and by others as *Suicide Nation* (Jang, 2014). The country has had one of the highest national suicide rates in the world over the last two decades (Choi and Yo, 2020; Kim et al., 2019), with increases year by year among those in their 20s (Lee, 2016; Statistics Korea, 2022). Moreover, suicide is the leading cause of death among South Koreans ranging in the age group of teens to thirties (Choi and Bae, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Thus, suicide is increasingly prevalent in South Korea and merits attention.

In this article I set out to focus on the aforementioned age group (20-30) to explore narratives and reasons from South Koreans themselves about suicide. This will not only contribute to understanding how suicide is conceptualized in South Korea but will connect suicide to particular societal and cultural elements unique to life in South Korea. The field of suicidology has been said to benefit greatly from qualitative approaches that focus on simply

asking “why suicide?” (Kral, 2012; White et al., 2016). I intend for this project to do just this, while prioritizing the voices and narratives of people about suicide in order to link these explanations to social life in South Korea.

In one of the most well-known and influential social studies on suicide, Durkheim (2002/1897) proposed social conditions of suicide *without* asking actors the question of “why suicide”. The suicide-typology that was developed out of Durkheim’s work then was used to classify completed suicides based on suicide rates. However, I believe that I can build upon Durkheim’s critical work by adding a qualitative approach to his own suicide typology. We can learn much from the addition of qualitative approaches in how people may themselves navigate conceptualizations of suicide that can be linked to Durkheim’s categories of social forces (i.e., anomie, fatalism, egoism, altruistic).

I contend that Durkheim’s suicide-typology, to be outlined in greater detail below, contains great merit for understanding suicide in the South Korean context. Durkheim’s approach was incredibly influential in the social sciences and to the social study of suicide. However, I think we can learn more about suicidal intent from actors themselves. Kral (2019), in his ethnography about suicide among the Inuit in Arctic Canada, contends, “It is important to privilege the voices of Inuit because it is their lives that this book is about” (p. x). Indeed, the phenomenon of suicide can benefit from a contextual, nuanced approach that accounts for local cultural, experiential, and environmental conditions (Ansloos, 2018; Baer et al., 2013; Wexler & Gone, 2016). Qualitative explorations of suicide that focus on the “why suicide?” (Kral, 2012) contribute to deeper understandings of what suicide means to people themselves (Ansloos, 2018; Kral, 2012; White et al., 2016). This is important as, for example, it is argued that more effective approaches to suicide prevention can be developed by directly prioritizing input from community

members themselves (Fullagar & O'Brien, 2016; Kral, 2019; Morris, 2019). In other words, an anthropology of suicide that places focus on how people 'make sense' of suicide (Münster & Broz, 2016) seeks to prioritize the voices and narratives of individuals about suicide in order to link these explanations to social life locally. Following this logic, I explore narratives and reasons from South Koreans themselves about suicide.

Halpin and Richard (2021) propose that taking the approach of *abduction* would balance an inductive and deductive approach, avoiding the constraints of existing theory but explicitly placing findings in conversation with said theory. Thus, abduction emerges between theory and observations: accounting for anomalies between the two and reinterpreting generalizations made by said theory (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). Accordingly, I take Durkheim's (2002/1897) original formulation of suicide types and juxtapose it with what interviewees say when asked the "why suicide" question. This approach identifies challenges and incongruencies with the existing theory instead of forcing contradictory evidence (Burawoy, 1988) to fit into the typologies.

Durkheim argued for the mutual exclusivity of his suicide types; that is, while his suicide types shared ties, they could not overlap. Durkheim did not posit whether or not someone's suicide could be both, for example, fatalistic and anomic, as these concepts were opposite sides of the spectrum of social regulation. Durkheim also did not explain much about the fluidity of his suicide types; that is, whether or not people can move fluidly between categories of social forces. In this article, I contend young South Koreans conceptualize suicide in a way that shows both the overlap and fluidity of Durkheim's suicide types.

To operationalize this fluidity, I coin a term that captures points of overlap between Durkheim's suicide types. *Doomed Dysregulation* is meant to represent the situations where people are expected to meet goals but can never possess the means to achieve them. While

society being unable to regulate someone's goals is anomie, the inescapability from this situation (that is, forever being expected to achieve the goals despite the chances) demonstrates a fatalistic element. This complicates Durkheim's existing theory; people cannot realize their goals, and thus are in a state of anomic normlessness, the very situation's inescapability is characterized by fatalism, and so related suicides can be plausibly classified into two types.

Furthermore, people mentioned in interviews that the reason they conformed to expectations was out of fear of what would happen if they resisted, or would reference where the expectations came from in the first place. Because of this, I found overlap between fatalism and anomie, but with a few instances of egoism and altruism, Durkheim's other suicide types. These themes were also present in some interviews. I contend that this is a significant contribution as at times, that all four of these themes are needed to adequately describe the situations in which people die by suicide. My respondents told me that they would face social isolation and ostracization if they resisted the lives and expectations placed on them by society, including but not limited to family members, constituting egoism. Moreover, altruism is relevant when people explain that they are expected to sacrifice their individualism for the greater good. Both the fear of this social isolation and context of self-sacrifice made people conform to lives, goals, and identities that satisfied society and the people around them, but not themselves. They felt as if their lives were cut out for them, defined by oppressive discipline on a path not to be deviated from (i.e., a fatalistic element). Furthermore, anomie is salient as well because of the tension that the very conforming creates between generations, and people themselves. The desire to pursue one's own dreams and life path conflicts greatly with society's expectations, creating normlessness; or, in other words, the very conforming to fatalistic expectations creates normlessness, as people cannot achieve who they really want to be. In a similar vein, Powell

(1958) contends the case that when “the self is rendered impotent- unable to act- which engenders the meaninglessness of anomie” (132). In this way, conforming to high regulation (fatalism) out of fear of social isolation (egoism) or the need to sacrifice (altruism) can lead to normlessness (anomie).

The takeaway is that we have multiple avenues to describe suicides resulting, in part, from the described circumstances. If someone experiences anomie from the inability to meet goals, and commits suicide because of this, we can call that anomic suicide. However, if someone feels like they have no chance in life because of the economy and its permanent inability to facilitate their goals, or the goals expected of them, they feel like they are doomed. They will never have a chance to succeed. It is a fatalistic anomie from which suicide is an escape. When people realize that they can no longer meet their goals, according to interviewee Si-Woo, “When you realize you can't follow this, that shock I think could make you overwhelmed and all of a sudden, your life could be over. Maybe you can't get over that shock”. In this way, people move between forces of fatalism and anomie, and there is much overlap between the two, which describes why participants’ own answers when asked about suicide relate to themes of both fatalism and anomie simultaneously. I end this article by discussing the implications of these findings for Durkheim’s suicide typology.

Durkheim’s Suicide-Theory

Durkheim’s (2002/1897) *Le Suicide* theorized that suicide rates fluctuate based on levels of *social regulation* and *social integration* within groups. Regulation refers to the normative or moral demands placed on the individual that come with membership in a group, while integration refers to the extent to which an individual is bound to the moral demands and social relations of a group (Bearman, 1991). Moreover, Durkheim developed a typology to categorize

associated suicides. Extremes of regulation and integration influence suicidality: too much social integration leads to *altruistic suicide*; too little social integration leads to *egoistic suicide*; too little social regulation leads to *anomic suicide*; and lastly, too much social regulation leads to *fatalistic suicide*. Durkheim suggested that maintaining an equilibrium, or ‘healthy’ levels of regulation and social integration, is what protects the individual and society against suicide.

Durkheim’s Suicide types

Anomic suicide is meant to represent suicides by those who cannot be regulated by society.

Merton (1938, 1968) posits that those people who have culturally-defined goals that cannot be realized by the institutions in society are most prone to anomic suicide. Anomie is often associated with the increase in suicides that may happen after an event that may lead to economic stability among people (Hodwitz and Krey, 2016; Puffer, 2009), an example that Durkheim (2002/1897) referenced himself when developing the concept. In the South Korean case specifically, Park (2013) contends that South Koreans of all ages experience anomie due to the uncertainty and tension that is caused by the lessening influence of traditional collective values in society, in favor of individualism.

Fatalistic suicides exist on the opposite extreme of social regulation to anomic suicides, given that they are the suicides of those who are subject to excessive regulation... futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline (Durkheim, 2002/1897, 239). van Bergen et al. (2009) for example posit that excessive regulation and family pressure to adhere to cultural norms creates an absence of freedom and self-autonomy among young Turkish, Moroccan and South Asian women. Davies and Neal (2000) find that the suicides of young women in China derive from harsh rules and expectations and a moral subordination to an often-brutal husband that creates for them a pitiless future. Aliverdinia and Pridemore (2009)

find that Iranian women who have greater freedom from regulated and established cultural norms are those in which the female suicide rate is lower. Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) relate fatalistic suicide to harsh social expectations, and contend that fatalistic suicides may be most prevalent in modern¹⁴ examples among people who cannot live up to such lofty goals.

In Durkheim's other dimension of integration, egoistic suicides refer to those who are socially isolated away from the binding ties of society. For example, Breault and Barkey (1982) find that of suicide rates are higher among those with lower levels of religious, family, and political integration. Those people who are a part of larger networks that form groups and communities, families provide social capital that serves as a protective factor against suicide (Bearman, 1991; Mueller et al., 2021). In South Korea specifically, Kang (2017) argues that the penetration of Western individualism into South Korean society has come at the expense of people moving away from traditional, collective values in society. This rise in individualism has led to increased egoistic suicides as people become less integrated with group members under collectivism.

Last, Durkheim's other proposed extreme of integration, altruistic suicides, represents the suicides of individuals that are too highly integrated into society that they sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Durkheim himself mentioned (2002/1897, pp. 180-183) an example of altruistic suicide being that of *seppuku*, a Japanese custom where people would restore honor to their name of family by disemboweling themselves and dying by suicide due to a perceived failure. Suicide protests are often labelled as altruistic given that people self-immolate and die on behalf of a greater cause (Ji, 2020; Stack, 2004; Park, 2004). Furthermore, contemporary examples of

¹⁴ Durkheim (2002/1897) contended in his original formulation of fatalistic suicide that it would have little contemporary use.

suicide bombers have also drawn on altruistic suicide as a means to explain the motives for such acts (Brym and Araj, 2008; Leenaars, 2004; Sadri, 2007).

Multiple Social Forces

There has been much discussion in the literature about the theoretical potential for Durkheim's suicide types to intersect. Specifically, it is suggested to be necessary to posit how a person experiences social regulation and social integration at the same time. Marson (2019) for example argues that elderly people prone to suicide can be experiencing difficulties from extremes of Durkheim's two different dimensions (regulation and integration) at once. Specifically, given that Durkheim argued that someone was not prone to suicide if they experienced mild integration or regulation (not an extreme high or low), a person who finds themselves at an extreme of integration and regulation simultaneously may be most prevalent to suicide (Marson and Powell, 2011).

Johnson (1965) posits that any given society is to some degree integrated and regulated, and knowing where society falls on one spectrum alone is not enough to predict suicidal behavior. Lester (2000) similarly argues for the usefulness of exploring where people fall on integration and regulation scales, as their suicides may not classify best into one singular type. Chandler and Tsai (1993) add that only by combining elements of integration and regulation can we understand the motives for suicide. Thus, the idea that looking at an individual suicide, or the circumstances in a person's life, in relation to how it relates to multiple of Durkheim's social forces is a salient avenue to explore.

Moreover, suicides are said to sometimes shift between Durkheim's themes. Ji (2020) argues that worker suicides in South Korea have typically been associated with themes of both altruism and anomie; the former because of a suicide protest on behalf of exploited workers, but

the latter because of suicide in response to exploitative social conditions that workers cannot regulate themselves within. Similarly in South Korea, Im et al. (2018) contend that the same suicide can be classified as egoistic or altruistic depending on how a social group itself (e.g., the family of the deceased) rationalizes the suicide. How an individual suicide is conceptualized by other community members including family tells us a lot about the social forces perceived by people themselves that lead to suicide (McGrath, 2022), a significant part of suicidal behavior.

Park (2013) argues that the penetration of Western individualism has led South Koreans of all ages to be caught between two cultures: one that gives in to individualism and prioritizes individual desires, and another that stresses the importance of the collective, defined by traditional Confucian values. Park argues that this tension causes cultural ambivalence, a form of Durkheim's anomie. However, Kang (2017) responds to Park in positing that a rise in Western individualism would not only lead to this form of anomie, but also egoistic suicide, given that individualism and a loss of traditional collective values was indicative of, by the very definition given by Durkheim, egoistic suicides. Here, we see here two different interpretations of Durkheim's typology: Western individualism can possibly lead to an anomic state and anomic suicides, or it can lead to egoistic suicides. On a similar note, Pope (1976) suggests if egoism and anomie share a cause (i.e., Western individualism), then they are aspects of the same social state and by definition are identical. It is plausible that someone who is disconnected from society (egoism) is also not regulated by society (anomie); thus, the egoist has some tendency for non-regulation and vice versa (Durkheim, 2002/1897; Pope, 1976).

Varnik et al. (2003) demonstrates that anomic, egoistic, altruistic suicides have all existed in the Soviet Regime (USSR) in the time period of 1970s-1990s. This is based on the argument that a Soviet ideology aimed at detaching people away from their families in order to join in

solidarity with their fellow workers made people lonely (egoistic). Simultaneously, self-sacrifices were socially justified as a necessary means of obtaining freedom from the Soviet ideology in the name of patriotism (altruistic). Last, Varnik et al. (2003) argue that since social regulations were imposed by force, this led to people no longer believing in and valuing the system, resulting in anomic suicides.

I would, however, add that it is this very high social regulation that led to anomic conditions for Soviet workers according to Varnik et al. (2003), and that by the very definition of high regulation there may be some plausibility for fatalism as well. The point here is that people in this context could relate suicide to any of Durkheim's four suicide types at once, as the social forces associated with these themes are all seemingly present at the same time.

Hamlin and Brym (2006) argue that social integration and regulation are not independent social dimensions; that is, people need to integrate in order to be regulated. To understand suicide then, a multi-causal approach that considers how people relate to regulation and integration is needed (Bearman, 1991; Hamlin and Brym, 2006; Kang, 2017). Moreover, labelling a suicide as only one Durkheimian type may oversimplify the motivation for said suicide and also forces a false dichotomy between regulation and integration (Mueller et al., 2017). Instead, if we consider how the salience of several of Durkheim's types being relevant to understanding vulnerabilities to suicide, we can see how integration and regulation are interrelated and how they work together in shaping one's vulnerabilities to suicide (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014, 2016, 2018; Mueller and Abrutyn, 2016).

Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) propose that we see can use Durkheim's suicide types to discern the socioemotional structure of suicide. In other words, they propose that we can combine Durkheim's four suicide types and use them to describe the emotions felt by those who

become suicidal. This important work uniquely grasps the merit of overlapping anomie and fatalism, for example, to demonstrate that a person may feel engulfed shame from not meeting social expectations; that is, a micro form of anomie when failing to live up to the oppressive social expectations placed upon them by society. I seek to build upon this work by exploring emotions, such as this engulfed shame, that emerge in the interview data when discussing the motives of suicidal behavior.

The contribution of this article will be to demonstrate that people conceptualize suicide in ways that coincide with multiple of Durkheim's suicide types simultaneously. This challenges the idea that we can use only one type to classify the social conditions that may promote a given suicide, and instead shows that suicides and its perceived causes often transcend the boundaries of the four exclusive Durkheimian suicide types.

Methods and Methodology

I conducted open-ended interviews in Seoul, South Korea from January-August 2022. In these interviews (n=29)¹⁵ I collected perspectives on suicide among South Koreans in the 20-30 age group. I recruited participants in this age group due to the fact that I wanted to focus on people belonging to the age group that experienced relatively high suicide rates in South Korea, along with the fact that it is this age group among which suicide accounts for the leading cause of death (Choi and Bae, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). I asked interviewees questions about suicide, such as simply beginning interviews by "why suicide?" in South Korea.

Appendix A shows a full list of participants that I conducted in-depth, formal interviews with, along with information about age, gender, and university major. All interviewee names are pseudonyms. This research has ethics approval under Dalhousie University REB# 2021-5795.

¹⁵ I felt that I had reached data saturation (Bernard, 2018) at around 20 interviews. I continued to see it in subsequent interviews much in line with Francis et al.'s (2010) description of data saturation.

I coded the interview data into NVIVO. After completing all interviews, I constructed themes to sort participants' interview data into in terms of what they related suicide to; a common method used to find recurring themes in interviews (Bernard et al., 2017; Krippendorff, 2013). I created themes inductively from what participants discussed about suicide (as shown in the two rightmost columns in Figures One to Four below), and then sorted those themes into predetermined suicide types from Durkheim (2002/1897) (as shown in the leftmost column in Figures One to Four below). This was completed *after* interviews, meaning I did not create codes beforehand beyond Durkheim's own language on suicide types. This was done intentionally to not restrict the gathering of data within the confines of predetermined theory, but also in an effort to link whatever I inductively found to a larger body of literature or theory; a method referred to as abduction (Halpin and Richard, 2021; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014).

I began inductively by starting with the question "why suicide?" and collecting themes from there. I then coded those themes deductively to Durkheim's suicide types. I did this in order to avoid simply looking for Durkheim's themes in interviews, or structuring research questions that would ask interviewees about related themes. The intention of this project was not to confirm or disconfirm Durkheim, but rather gather perspectives on suicide through open-ended questions about the topic. To be clear, interviewees could say whatever they wanted about suicide, and it was only after collecting these free-form opinions that I linked interviews to Durkheim.

Visual Representation of Types and Examples

By analyzing what participants inductively said about suicide and linking this with Durkheim's suicide types, I created figures for each of the four types. These visual representations are meant to show how I operationalized each of Durkheim's suicide types. To be clear, Durkheim's

suicide types and forces are abstract concepts that participants in interviews would not relate naturally to. There, it was necessary for me to outline how I went from the abstract typology to what participants said about suicide in interviews.

For fatalism I created codes based on the following diagram:

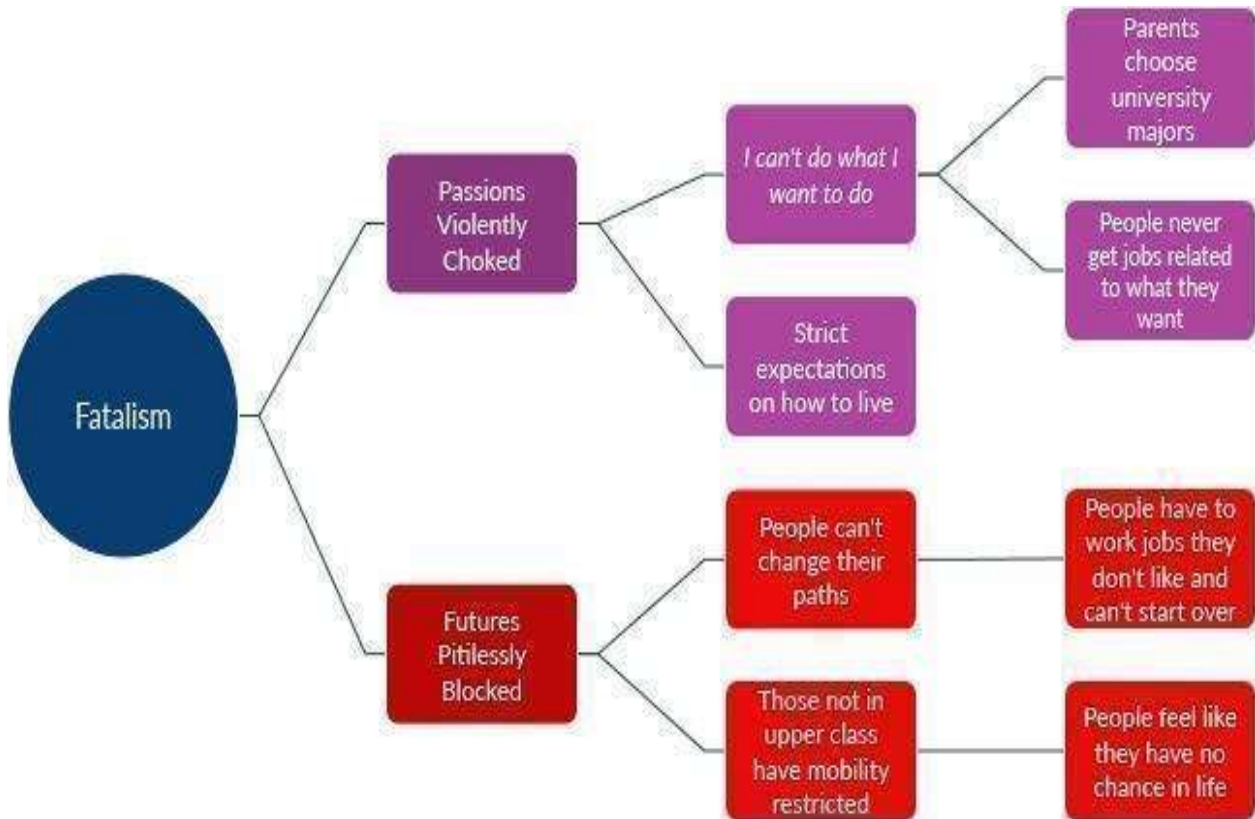


Figure One: Fatalism operationalized.

I operationalized Durkheim’s fatalism beyond his original language, shown in the second column from the right. The two rightmost columns are what interview participants said that I coded into Durkheim’s language on fatalism itself, that is that people have their passions choked and futures blocked. When asked about suicide, interviewees discussed the severe social expectations that they could not escape out of in relation to suicide. For example, they reported not being able to choose their own university majors, they could not stop and start careers, and they felt like they had no chance to succeed in life due to the narrow path that they had to follow. I then sorted

these codes into interpretations of fatalism, a bridge between Durkheim’s original language and what participants said, as shown in the middle column. In this way, fatalism’s oppressive discipline is operationalized to capture the control that society places upon people’s lives; situations where people felt that they had no agency in making important life decisions.

For anomie, I did something similar:

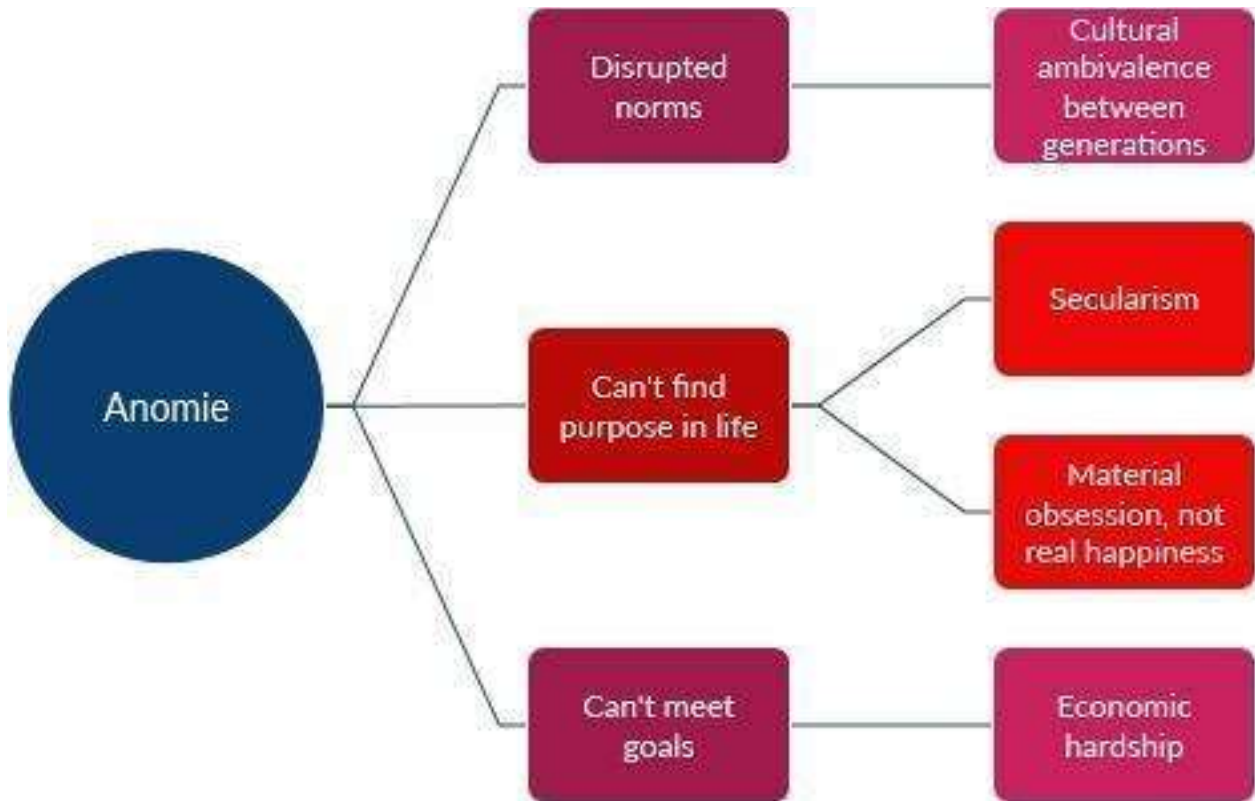


Figure Two: Anomie operationalized.

In the case of anomie, participants overwhelmingly talked about how, for example, people becoming less religious in South Korean society led to people being suicidal. Since they could not define and find purpose in life due to the weakening of religion’s influence, interviewees felt that younger generations, who were becoming more secular, were more prone to suicide for this reason. Moreover, differences in cultures between age generation, and economic hardship, the latter being textbook anomie due to society not being able to regulate goals, were referenced in

relation to suicide. Society does not provide venues for people to achieve what is expected of them, including ways to meet cultural goals (Merton, 1938, 1968).

Next is egoism:

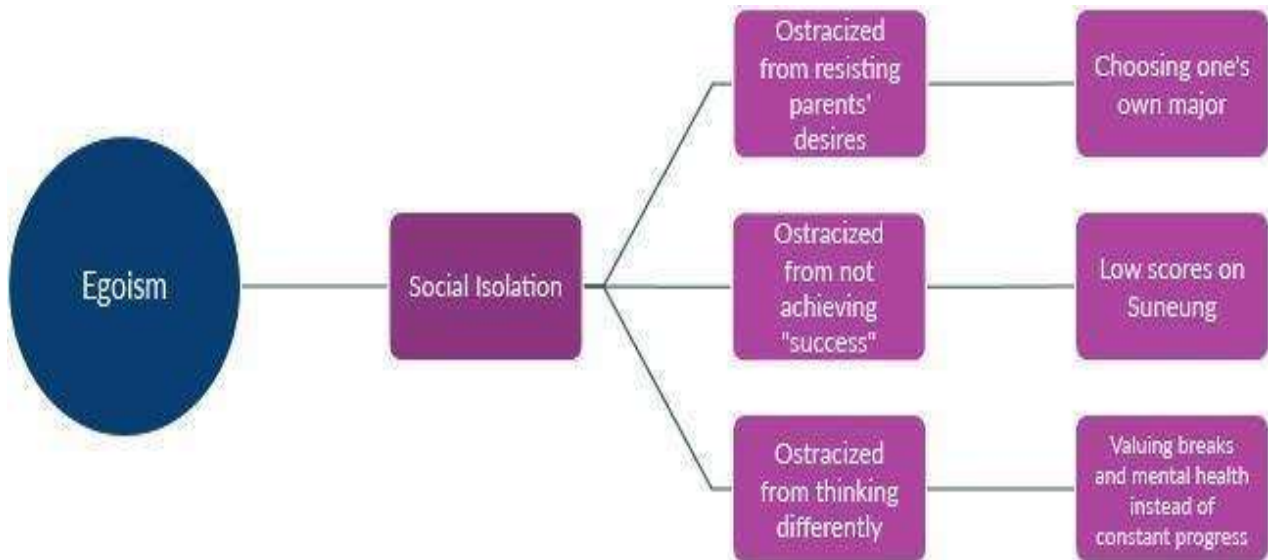


Figure Three: Egoism operationalized.

Durkheim (2002/1897) links egoism to social isolation. Participants, when asked about suicide, often told me that, due to not meeting certain expectations, they would become isolated from society. For example, if they went against their parents' decision and chose their own major, they would be ostracized. Doing poorly on the country-wide university entrance exam, the *Suneung*, would also make young South Koreans feel like they would be isolated from their parents because of their resulting inability to go to a good university. Moreover, even those who valued different things than their parents, such as the value of prioritizing one's mental health, made participants feel isolated from their family and community. In other words, Durkheim's original conceptualization of egoism, the suicide type meaning low degree of social integration and therefore little attachment to social groups, is used here to capture those feelings of perceived ostracization from society and its members.

Last was altruism:

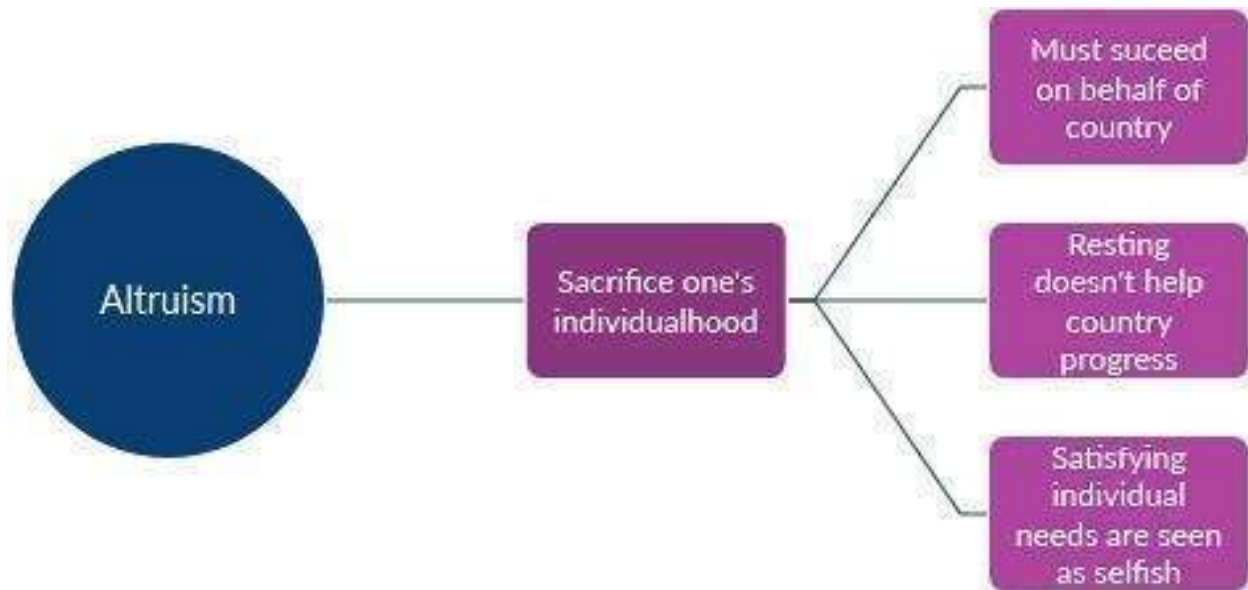


Figure Four: Altruism operationalized.

Altruism was again related to older generations' expectations on young South Koreans. The latter often reported to me that older generations wanted them, and pressured them, to live their lives according to what was best for the country, for the collective. Thus, failure to do so was violating the collective, or seen as a collective failure. For example, those young South Koreans who told me they were essentially barred from being able to take personal time to rest because it was not beneficial to their country were linking suicide to these feelings of altruism being forced on them.

In these figures, the point is not to oversimplify Durkheim's suicide types. I am keenly aware that Durkheim's altruism, for example, is a much more complicated concept than I have laid out. Moreover, anomie is not reduced simply to secularism and economic hardship. A shortcoming of this approach is that this is only one interpretation of Durkheim, and that

although Durkheim did a post hoc analysis on suicide, I am using his concepts with an in situ analysis. However, the contribution lies also in the fact that it is an interpretation with the same theory but different approach. I am building on Durkheim's work here and connecting qualitative aspects of suicide to abstractions. Moreover, the central takeaway from these figures is that people mentioned these rightmost themes in the figures when asked about suicide. These were themes that could be plausibly linked to forms of Durkheim's suicide types that interview participants in my study mentioned in relation to suicide. This is an argument that Durkheim's concepts can be useful in describing and classifying how people *themselves* think about suicide, showing a qualitative operationalization of his suicide types.

In NVivo, I created a mind map that would demonstrate how each of the 29 interviewees connected to Durkheim's suicide types in terms of what they said about suicide. What exactly would link to Durkheim's suicide types is captured in the four figures listed above, one for each type. The following mind map demonstrates that the participants overwhelmingly connected to multiple types when discussing and conceptualizing suicide:

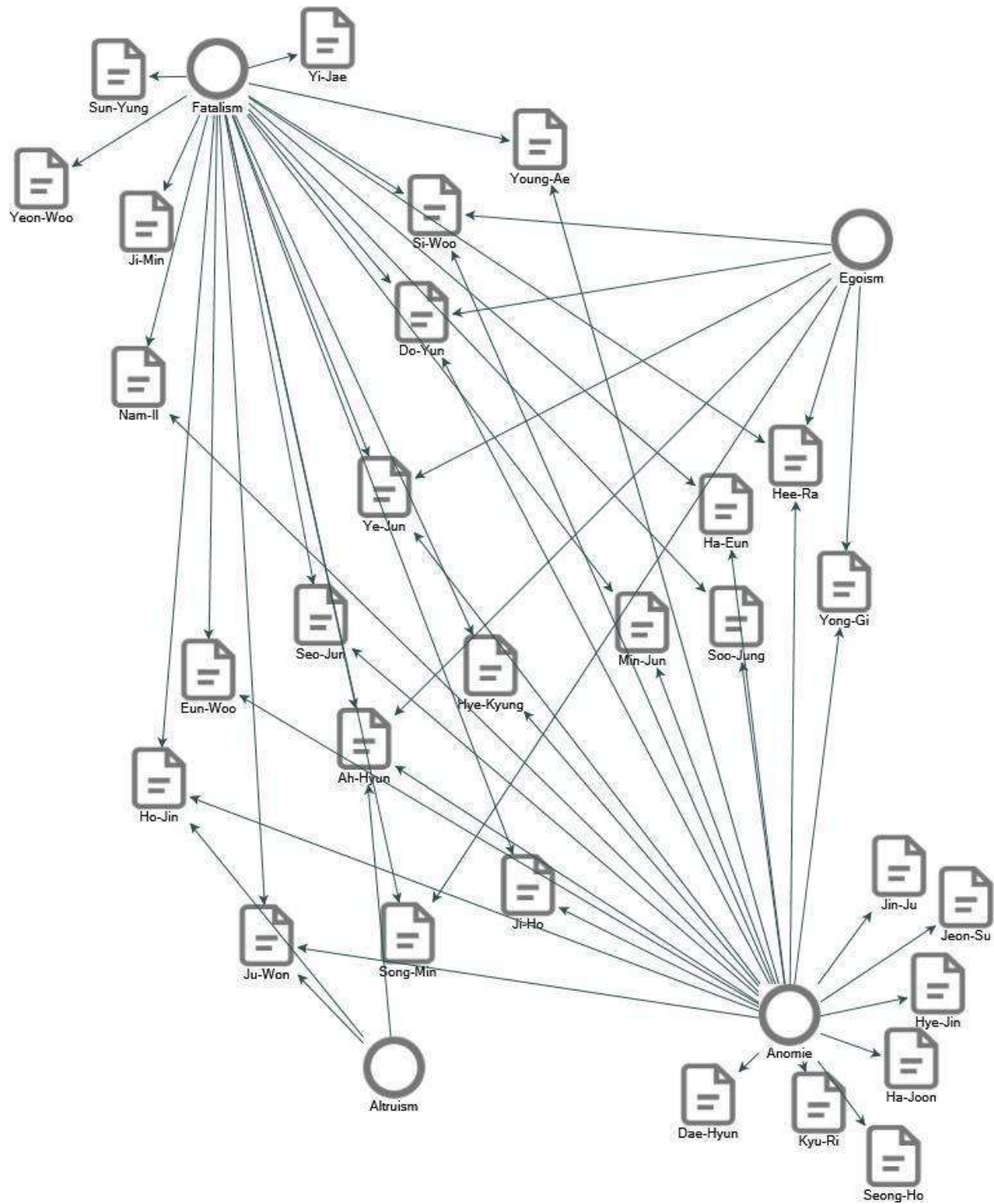


Figure Five: Mind map showing how participants' answers about suicide link to Durkheim's suicide types.

Interviewee (n=29)	Anomie (24)	Fatalism (21)	Egoism (7)	Altruism (3)
Ah-Hyun	X	X	X	X
Dae-Hyun	X			
Do-Yun	X	X	X	
Eun-Woo	X	X		
Ha-Eun	X	X		
Ha-Joon	X			
Hee-Ra	X	X	X	
Ho-Jin	X	X		X
Hye-Jin	X			
Hye-Kyung	X	X		
Jeon-Su	X			
Ji-Ho	X	X		
Ji-Min		X		
Jin-Ju	X			
Ju-Won	X	X		X
Kyu-Ri	X			
Min-Jun	X	X		
Nam-Il	X	X		
Seo-Jun	X	X		
Seong-Ho	X			
Si-Woo	X	X	X	
Song-Min		X	X	
Soo-Jung	X	X		
Sun-Yung		X		

Interviewee (n=29)	Anomie (24)	Fatalism (21)	Egoism (7)	Altruism (3)
Ye-Jun	X	X	X	
Yeon-Woo		X		
Yi-Jae		X		
Yong-Gi	X		X	
Young-Ae	X	X		

Table One: How participants’ answers about suicide link to Durkheim’s suicide types. “X” denotes that the participant said something that I coded into a Durkheimian type.

Figures Five and Six show the overlap between suicide types, and the themes that interview participants discussed when theorizing suicide on their own. While some interviewees only conceptualized suicide in one particular way in relation to Durkheim, it was more commonly the case that participants spoke to multiple Durkheimian themes their responses about suicide. Out of 29 participants, I coded three (10%) into altruism, seven (24%) into egoism, twenty-one (72%) into fatalism, and twenty-four (79%) into anomie using the operationalizations and definitions shown in Figures One to Four below. Notably, it is not equally distributed between types, as there are less mentions towards altruism and egoism than there are for fatalism and anomie, but the fact remains that there is overlap between the types in terms of how interviewees spoke about suicide.

It is also salient that the codes (see Table One) of egoism and altruism never appear alone. There were no interviewees who only related to one of these without also relating to fatalism or anomie (or both). This is because, when considering how interviewees describe suicide and the motives for the phenomenon, it seems that both are coercive forces that potentially lead to other circumstances that could be called anomie and fatalism. In the previous

section, I described that people are hesitant to resist living according to fatalistic social expectations because they may be socially isolated, or experience egoism. Furthermore, because they are coerced to live in these circumstances, but still feel the resistance in the first place, they live in contexts of anomie, or cultural ambivalence (Park, 2013), where people are unable to be regulated by society.

Specifically, I found that many interviewees spoke of situations indicative of anomie. For example, many interviewees expressed to me a tension between the lives that are expected of them and the lives that they can actually achieve within their means. Merton (1938, 1968) contends that anomie arises from the societal disparity between cultural goals (e.g., SKY university) and the means to achieve them. Following this, in Figure Two depicting anomie, the interviewees often talked about economic hardship not allowing them to reach their goals in life. A person who experiences economic anomie is doomed in circumstances that do not allow them to invest for their futures, for example.

I encountered this point when having an informal conversation with a South Korean man in his 60s, a friend of a colleague with whom I met at a group dinner¹⁶:

The young generation is like “victims” these days. They can't buy houses or have a good pension because we developed too fast, and the economy doesn't favor them or give them the same opportunities like it gave our generation. So, they (the younger generation) just focus on buying things for their lives, golfing, drinking, playing. It's really YOLO (you only live once) lifestyle. They think they only live once, and they live in the moment, so they focus on whatever can make them instantly happy, instead of investing for the future. Because they have no chance of buying expensive houses or apartments, and it's so difficult to invest for their future, they think they might as well live in the moment.

¹⁶ While I did focus solely on formal interviews in this project, I add this informal conversation to supplement the discussion about the perceived problems with social expectations that Korean youth may experience in society.

While it goes without saying that every generation would have many who were not fortunate enough to spend disposable income on investments rather than surviving by spending all they have on day-to-day needs, this trend that was being described to me was interesting. In the way it was being described to me, it was a particular generation, those who were 20-30 currently, that were in economic circumstances that previous interactions of this age group had not gone through, indicating economic hardships as shown in Figure Two.

I also valued the fact that this information was coming from people from the older generation instead of solely from the younger generation. This corroborated what I was collecting from interviews with participants from younger generations, from which I will highlight some quotes below. Having this situation being described to me made me think about what other interview participants had said to me about the precarious economic situations that they or people they knew were in. Many in the younger generation had told me that they were unable to reach goals expected of them by their families and larger society because of financial situations, and I now had heard the same thing from an older generation. This contributed to my study by highlighting the precarious economic situation that many youth find themselves in today, while it was implied that this situation is now worse than it has ever been before.

An interview participant named Jeon-Su (27m), who was asked first about suicide, referenced the consequences of the rapidly developed economy:

The Korean economy grew so (much) faster than any other country and I believe during that time the government missed a lot of things about human rights for Koreans. If they (the government) really wanted to make it right, they (would) have to fix the economic depression first. They have to think about how it makes people decide to commit suicide. I believe most of them (suicides) are related to money. Growing fast doesn't mean people in this peninsula get paid the same or equal money. That made income disparity faster

and deeply. During the growth, people just focused on money. While people were chasing it, they didn't care about their mental health.

South Korea's rapid economic development and transformation is often blamed for inducing severe social and economic consequences on the population, such as political dissent (Kendall, 2001), cultural ambivalence between generations (Park, 2013), and an increasing obsession with higher education at the expense of social-emotional development of youth (Ahn and Baek, 2013). Interview participants told me directly that they think that suicide is a result of rapid changes in South Korean society that have had such profound impacts on people, such as putting them in stressful economic situations where they cannot afford to invest for their futures. The people I interviewed expressed the view that phenomena such as mental health and high suicide rates, is second in priority to the South Korean government to continuing to push for more economic growth and development. I also find it fruitful to explore deeply where this push for development came from in the first place.

One interviewee named Nam-II (30m) echoes this argument, that suicide is related to the changing economy's impact on people's goals:

A main reason (for suicide among young people) is related to real estate price...real estate prices (are) too high, with too many people, and so it's impossible for people to reach goals because they can't afford to live.

Nam-II is telling me in this interview about how his inability, which is shared by many young South Koreans, to buy a house in the current market makes him feel ashamed and depressed. This is directly related to his feelings that he must reach goals put on him by society, or personal ones; regardless, these goals are in actuality unachievable. The fact that the South Korean economy is growing so fast is referenced by Nam-II as something that is leaving people helpless in what they can afford. Furthermore, an ever-increasing real-estate price could be related to the

pace at which South Korea's economy continues to grow, fueled by a government who, according to participants in my study, is still obsessed with rapid growth. In this way, people cannot meet their goals that are expected of them and experience cultural ambivalence, both of which I show in Figure Two.

Young South Koreans struggle in situations where they are literally unable to afford the expectations placed on them. I include here a quote from 22-year-old Yong-Gi, who feels like purchasing material things are the ultimate goals placed on him by society:

Employers and older persons said to us, we have the only way to live. In high school (we are told) we need to go to university, in uni (we are told) we have to employ (get a good, well-respected job). They say the same cycle to us. I think the young generation thinks it is the only way to live because that's what the older generation says. I don't agree, I think there are more ways to enjoy life. Now the younger generation, because they heard from the older generation, they value only material realities, like money, ownerships, cars, houses. Because in life they (the older generation) had those material things. Happiness, love, they know about the meaning but their mind is sick towards it because they don't know about the value of happiness. They only see and follow the material. This is the only way to achieve success. Older persons, they had these things, because Korea was poor in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s (and thus material things were cheap to purchase). But we made vertical growth. There were side effects. Korea is a developed country, but our thinking not much change. They (the older generation) still want development, change, as if we are still a developing country. Older people had to earn their money and success, so they said to us, the young generation, we value only material things.

Many young South Koreans who I interviewed expressed feeling conflicted about living under the expectations of the older generations, such as wanting to spend more free time, whereas the older generations wanted them to always be doing something productive for their future.

Importantly, as shown in Figure Three, interviewees specifically talked about being excluded or

isolated from major society if they did not or could not meet the expectations from the older generations:

If you don't meet the expectations, if one person does that, that person will *feel not included in major society*. Currently, a lot of my friends couldn't get a job, so they always tell, they're joking, "ugh I need to kill myself." (Ah-Hyun, 27f, emphasis added)

Being not included in society is akin to being socially isolated. Kyu-Ri (24f), a current university student undecided on her major, told me that differences in what people care about can also result in isolation:

They (the younger generation) can't find this happiness in Korea easily though, because Korea is not a place where having a strong heart is valued. Actually, it doesn't matter to anyone (in the older generation), and showing you care about it *could even get you isolated from society*. People will think you don't care about important things. Especially those above you in age or position. They think you must care about only the important things, like material. I want to show people that's not the case. (emphasis added)

Last, Hee-Ra (30f), a biology major, told me that people's choices in university majors can even result in isolation:

I think that these days living differently (than what is expected) can be very hard option for many people and even could make people more lonely. I heard some friends talk about someone they know that wanted to choose music as a major, but their parents didn't like that. The person's parents disagreed and wanted them to do something else that they thought was respectable like STEM. This is bad because it could force a lot of people to do things (majors) they don't want to do. This person's parents even threatened to kick them out of the house, and they wouldn't speak to them unless he changed the major. He ended up changing, but I think a lot of people risk being disowned from their families due to differences in their thinking.

In these examples, people feel like their lives are strictly regulated, and other elements of their lives, such as university majors, are chosen for them. They cannot pursue their own individual

passions. If someone has an interest in the arts, they may be still strongly pushed into the sciences because of their parents' expectations. For example, Do-Yun (20m) told me that:

People think it's really useless if you can't do their (parents') dreams. The dreams are go to X university at get X job, and if you can't, then you are nothing to be proud of. Your parents will be disappointed.

Seo-Jun (29m) also told me that:

Changing your major or dropping out of university is not an option though. Your parents would not allow that to happen. They would die (ha ha!).

These two quotes depict the weariness that young South Koreans have about violating and going against their parents' expectations. But they also outline the oppressiveness of these expectations. They are laid out, and they are according to their parents' desires, not their own. Thus, young South Koreans do not follow their own passions, or what they want in the future. It is rather according to what their parents want. Fatalism is relevant here given that I demonstrate in Figure One how interviewees often discussed that they could not do what they wanted; they had little to no agency, resulting in having their passions choked.

However, respondents did express resistance to these social expectations. The expectations are problematized in that I only asked them about suicide, and the expectations were what the interviewees brought up as part of the reason why young Koreans die by suicide in the first place. In other words, young South Koreans locate the source of suicide in these expectations.

Last, I found that altruism is coercing people to live in anomic and fatalistic circumstances. Consider what Ju-Won told me:

People in Korea are so obsessed with progress. Always moving forward. Don't stop, or your country will suffer. That's the thinking. The kkondaes also tell us we have to do well for our country. Forget about your individual wants, and think about your family and

your country. Be a good worker and citizen for Korea, because that's what your parents and grandparents do. I'm always told like this by teachers, or even advertisements.

“Don't stop, or your country will suffer” is relevant to altruism here. As I show in Figure Four, people are expected to sacrifice their own individualhood. It is as if Ju-Won must live his life according to what is best for the collective. Again, I stress the point that it is not because of the collective that Ju-Won is saying suicide happens; rather, it is because of the collective that Ju-Won is saying that people live within anomic and fatalistic circumstances. Similarly, Ah-Hyun told me that “Parents and all society, they always tell people like me that we need to do something for our future, and for our country”.

There are elements of multiple suicide types in these findings. Interviewees feel like the expectations placed on them are fatalistic in the sense that they are oppressive, they block their futures and choke their passions. People cannot even meet these expectations most of the time, so they are set up for anomie since their goals cannot be regulated from a societal point of view. Additionally, people are faced with a cultural ambivalence created by the differences between living philosophies between generations. Moreover, the people who do resist the fatalistic circumstances and this anomic tension are subjected to social isolation, or egoism. And last, there are altruistic expectations which force people to live on behalf of the greater good, an expected sacrifice that interviewees felt came at the cost of their individual passions and well-being.

Doomed Dysregulation

We learn something different about suicide about Durkheim's sociology of suicide when talking to people themselves about the subject. In this article, I analyzed interviews for people who have felt suicidal in the past, are feeling suicidal currently, or who had thoughts about suicide that they

wanted to share. They obviously have not died by suicide, and because they are alive and I am talking to them, their thoughts about suicide, including perceived reasons, are much more complicated. Methodologically, this is much different than how Durkheim originally used his suicide typology. Durkheim contended that one of his suicide types (egoistic/altruistic/fatalistic/anomic) would best fit the suicide rates of a given social group that he analyzed. Durkheim classified suicides that had already happened. This is an *in-situ vs post-hoc* analysis where the former allows me to discuss themes of fluidity and reasons for suicide that Durkheim did not have access to. From this analysis, I propose in this article is that there is significant overlap between Durkheim's suicide types when considering what people describe when asked about suicide.

I am not the first to propose this by any means. For example, Pope (1976) suggests if egoism and anomie overlap in causes, which they are said to in the South Korean case (Western individualism, Kang, 2017, Park, 2013), then they are aspects of the same social state and by definition are identical. It is plausible that someone who is disconnected from society (egoism) is also not regulated by society (anomie); thus, the egoist has some tendency for non-regulation and vice versa (Durkheim, 2002/1897; Pope, 1976). Park (2013) argues that the penetration of Western individualism into South Korean society has created a cultural ambivalence between younger and older generations, the former of whom feel more strongly about taking care of their own individual needs. Park calls this anomie, whereas Kang (2017) calls the same thing egoism, as a rise in individualism is just that according to Durkheim. Thus, it is plausible that there is more than one interpretation of any given state using Durkheim's typology. However, while Durkheim admitted that the types may share origins, he still argued that: "In spite of their relationship, therefore, the two types (anomie and egoism) are independent of each other" (219).

I propose the term “Doomed Dysregulation” to represent those people who are in inescapable situations of normlessness. The economy will not change overnight, and thus they find themselves unable to get out of these circumstances created by an anomic relationship between expectations and means to achieve. However, there is also something to be said about the inescapability of these circumstances. As shown in Figure One depicting fatalism, interviewees commonly talked about suicide in relation to not being able to deviate from social expectations. They had their own majors in university chosen for them, they had little to no class mobility, and they felt like they had no chance in life to succeed. One interpretation of not being able to meet expectations is *anomie*, as society cannot regulate these people. Their goals cannot be regulated by society because society does not provide the means for them to achieve what is expected of them. Their resulting suicides could be *anomic*. But at the same time, they are fatalistically *doomed* to these circumstances.

Given South Korea’s rapid economic growth, the economy now is no longer in a place where people can make the same vertical growth as before. However, expectations are not commensurate, rather, the same expectations that were possible 20 years ago are placed upon young South Koreans despite the fact that they are not possible. Merton’s (1938, 1968) argument that *anomie* arises from the disparity between goals and the means to achieve them is relevant here, because Young South Koreans can literally not afford to meet societal goals. The fact that they relate this to suicide gives weight to the idea that suicides can come from *anomie*. However, the fact that interviewees also strongly relate suicide to the fact that they cannot escape or deviate from these expectations shows the fatalistic element of what they are experiencing. In other words, if someone finds themselves in a situation that they want to escape from, and that situation is characterized by *anomie*, but its inescapability is characterized by fatalism, their suicides can

be plausibly classified into two types. In these outlined situations, people are set up for failure, fatalistically dooming themselves never to be able to achieve lofty dreams, expectations, and goals.

The takeaway here is that we have multiple avenues to classify suicides resulting, at least in part, from the described circumstances. If someone experiences anomie from the inability to meet goals, and dies by suicide because of this, we can call that anomic suicide. However, if someone feels like they have no chance in life because of the economy and its permanent inability to facilitate their goals, or the goals expected of them, they feel like they are doomed. They will never have a chance to succeed. It is a fatalistic anomie from which suicide is an escape, which is where I coin the term doomed dysregulation. When people realize that they can no longer meet their goals, according to interviewee Si-Woo, “When you realize you can't follow this, that shock I think could make you overwhelmed and all of a sudden, your life could be over. Maybe you can't get over that shock”. In this way, people move between forces of fatalism and anomie, and there is much overlap between the two, which describes why participants' own answers when asked about suicide relate to themes of both fatalism and anomie simultaneously. However, neither one of these concepts on its own sufficiently describes suicide in this situation, necessitating the combination of the two.

Moreover, it is also important to further discuss why people are coerced into dysregulation in the first place. In other words, what is stopping people from simply resisting the social expectations placed on them and avoiding the doomed dysregulation altogether?

Those in the younger generation have strict expectations to abide by, and if they do not follow these expectations or cannot, they are both ostracized from major society and labeled as having a weak mind. One might consider Kang's (2017) argument here, that egoistic suicide

should be considered as on the rise among the younger generations. Kang argues that the rise of individualism (and resulting social isolation) in South Korean society might result in more egoistic suicides, a counter argument to Park's (2013) cultural ambivalence (a form of anomie) that would happen with increased individualism. However, if a person experiences social isolation because they refuse to adhere to the older generations' expected ways of living, and they commit suicide because of this, we have many possibilities, following Durkheim's (2002/1897) suicide-typology, in how we can characterize their suicide.

A tension between values that exists may in fact be best characterized as anomie, or cultural ambivalence (Park, 2013). Put simply, people feel caught between two cultures: one from the expectations of older generations, and one that tells them to increasingly look out for their own individual well-being and passions. This is anomie, as people cannot define themselves in a state of dysregulation. Society cannot for these people provide a stable answer of how to live one's life. But if these people end up being isolated from society because of this tension and conflict of values, and die by suicide in an isolated death, their suicide could be called egoistic. In other words, they experienced an anomie created by society's inability to facilitate them meeting what is expected of them, and resisting this or failing leads to an egoistic social isolation. If we take Kang's (2017) premise to be correct, that is a rise in Western individualism has resulted in more egoism in South Korean society, then it is possible that we have people who become more egoistic. This newfound egoism creates tension with more collectivistic family members (described by interviewees), anomie ensues due to this tension (a cultural ambivalence of sort) and then the person becomes isolated because of this tension. In this latter example, the person is constantly swinging back and forth between egoism, anomie and egoism again.

In some of the answers and descriptions that young South Koreans give about suicide, three of Durkheim's social forces are related to: anomie, fatalism, and egoism. It may be the case that people are experiencing more than one of these types at the same time; for example, the person that experiences anomie because they cannot meet the goals expected of them, and is ostracized from their family as a result. It may also be the case that people move fluidly between Durkheim's types; that is, someone who is under fatalistic expectations experiences fatalism, thinks about becoming socially isolated if they resist and go on their own path, and the very pondering and weighing of different possibilities makes them unsure of what they really want (anomie). Here, the potential overlap and fluidity between Durkheim's suicide types is illustrated. What is more though, is that three of Durkheim's suicide types work in tandem to create circumstances or situations that people were describing. It is not straightforward to classify a suicide is the person who died by suicide conformed to fatalistic circumstances out of fear of being disowned by their family. Similarly, what of the person who could not find themselves in the midst of living a strict life that was expected of them?

I would also suggest that perhaps while egoism is a useful concept here, egoistic suicide is less important, at least on its own. Egoistic suicide for Durkheim was a type of suicide characterized by people living without sources of solidarity; that is, people had weak social integration and were isolated from society and peers. In the context of this study, egoism is relevant not because it is the context people are dying by suicide in, but it influences people's suicidal behavior. That is, people are *not* dying by suicide because they are socially isolated. Instead, interviewees express that they believe people die by suicide because of the circumstances that they must live in to avoid social isolation. Thus, people spoke of an isolation that is built on fear of anomie (e.g., generational tension, disappointment from family) that could

arise from not meeting fatalistic expectations. In this way, suicide is not located by interviewees at the point at which someone becomes socially isolated. In fact, interviewees never really discussed social isolation as a cause of suicide; it is the fear of social isolation instead. Thus, if social isolation is not used here to characterize suicide, that may suggest that egoistic suicide is not as useful as a suicide type. Instead, it may be proposed that egoism is a coercive force that leads people into fatalism and anomie. Egoism in this case works much better as a concept used to describe what interviewees fear instead of being used to classify their suicide.

For altruism, I believe something similar is happening. There was never an interview in my study where a person said that people die by suicide because they are sacrificing themselves on behalf of society or the collective, which is what Durkheim's (2002/1897) original formulation of the concept was. Like egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide does not necessarily exist in isolation here because people are not dying in the exact context of altruism. The expectation to always be productive if contextualized within altruistic sentiments on behalf of the greater good. But this is not being implied as a motivation for suicide, but instead as a motivation to live according to fatalistic expectations or in anomic tension.

To be clear, I am not implying that egoistic and altruistic suicides do not happen in the world, or even in South Korea. However, in this study, altruism and egoism are both inseparable from anomie or fatalism, and sometimes both. When examining the interviews in which egoism and altruism are present, they can both be seen as coercions to live within contexts of fatalism and anomie. People may feel that they have no choice but to resist letting their parents choose their life path and university major, because they do not want to be ostracized. In other words, they must live within a fatalistic environment in order to avoid egoism. Or, because of the feeling to work on behalf of the country's progress as a productive citizen, certainly rooted in Confucian

collectivism (Sleziak, 2013), people are expected to never take breaks and passively accept a certain work ethic. Although they may not accept this, it is altruism that creates the drive, so they are expected to accept it by society, creating a tension between generations. In other words, altruism creates expectations for older generations and society that are placed upon South Korean youth, leading to anomic tension. Self-sacrifice is rooted in having choked futures and thus is inseparable from fatalism in this context. I propose here then that egoistic and altruistic suicides are concepts that, as postulated by Durkheim, are wholly unable to capture the complexity suicides themselves. They exist as themes and forces that can be used to describe *why* people might be experiencing fatalism and anomie. For these reasons, they are a part of the story in terms of how people may think through suicide, including its motives, but may not exist as suicide types per se.

Durkheim classified suicides post hoc, and so one type usually sufficed. And perhaps if I were to similarly analyze the exact moments in which interviewees say suicide happens, I would have data that supports one type being often sufficient to characterize a given suicide. However, when interviewees are able to explain full contexts of suicidal behavior, we see situations in which combinations of Durkheim's types are needed to capture the full story of "why" someone dies by suicide, according to people themselves. Furthermore, important contextual elements would be missed by overlooking the influence of egoism and altruism in suicides that happens in such circumstances.

Conclusion: Rethinking Durkheim

What we learn from the findings in this article is that Durkheim's suicide-typology is akin to an elastic band: someone is being pushed and pulled to one side and then the other, as someone who is in an anomic situation like an economic crisis and then becomes fatalistic because they cannot

escape these circumstances is swaying between extremes of regulation. Someone who experiences anomie or cultural ambivalence and then is ostracized in society because of these experiences a lack of regulation and then a lack of integration à la Durkheim. And fatalism has a large part to play here, as whether someone's suicide is altruistic, egoistic, or anomic, they are, in a way, *doomed* to the given conditions. If someone is in a situation of social isolation, Durkheim says egoistic suicide, but if this person was convinced that their conditions of social isolation were inescapable, again, they are in a sense fatalistic. Even someone who suffers from an economic crisis; Durkheim says anomic suicide, but this person thinks they are doomed to being economically hapless, as they cannot escape these circumstances. In other words, it seems like there could theoretically be examples of altruistic, egoistic, and anomic suicide (as Durkheim conceptualized them) that have fatalistic elements to them.

Talking to people about suicide leads to more complex motives to be found. In Durkheim's suicide typology, adding people's own accounts to suicide complicates his typology; what could be X is actually Y, or what could be X is actually X and Y. Because of our methodological differences, I am looking at different elements of suicidal behavior that people can explain before suicide is completed. People were free in this article to speak at length about suicide intent, and this article gave weight to how people explain their circumstances rather than explaining their actions post-hoc on my own, as did Durkheim.

This article demonstrates both the theoretical applicability and overlap of Durkheim's suicide types. I contend that theorizing suicide by talking to people themselves allows us to collect information on elements of social life that are pertinent to suicide. Many qualitative studies have done this that explore suicide. Specifically, this article makes a contribution by building on Durkheim's (2002/1897) original study. This work was instrumental in bringing the

social study of suicide to light, and I believe that continually developing and rethinking his theory, as I have done in this article, can lead to beneficial contributions to critical suicidology. Durkheim's theory may be able to account for the specific suicidal act, but what this study does is provide an account for the process of suicide, including suicidal intent, motivation, and general suicidal behavior. This is a necessary complicating of Durkheim's typology that has suggested to examine suicide from multiple mutually exclusive types of social forces that lead to suicide, demonstrating the complexity of the phenomenon. When we consider how people themselves conceptualize the reasons for suicide, we get access to parts of suicidal behavior that went unchecked in Durkheim's study, intent and motivation. I intend for this study to both demonstrate the continued relevance of Durkheim's work but also to identify how we can build upon it in places that it did not go, and the overlap and fluidity of suicide types illustrate this critical rethinking.

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Chapter Six: Conclusion

Suicide rates are high in South Korea when considered on a global scale. Specifically, suicide accounts for the largest share of total deaths among the 20-30 age group. In this dissertation I connect suicide to Durkheim's social study of suicide. In doing so, I demonstrate both the continued relevance of this 100-year-old theory but also how we can build upon and rethink this theory when adding qualitative data. While it was not his intention given his quantitative approach, Durkheim's suicide-types can be applied to individual suicides to further understand the social forces that lead to the phenomenon (Lester, 2000).

In Chapter Two, I start the conversation about there potentially being overlap between Durkheim's suicide types when examining suicides within a selected point in Korea's history. When considering the social forces and circumstances that may lead to a chaste suicide, for example, it is just plausible to apply fatalism in describing the inescapable expectation for self-sacrifice as it is to use altruism. Similarly, examples of worker protest suicide and changing attitudes surrounding the practice are revealing of how suicide can move fluidly between Durkheim's altruism and anomie (Ji, 2020), finding evidence for the claim that suicides should be considered in terms of both of Durkheim's variables (i.e., regulation and integration) (Johnson, 1965). This historical chapter was meant to start the conversation on the multi-applicability of Durkheim's suicide types; that is, there is often more than one theme that we can relate a given suicide to when examining these suicides in history.

In moving onto suicides today and asking people in their 20-30s themselves about how they conceptualize suicide, Chapter Three focuses on one aspect of overlap: that two opposite sides of the social regulation spectrum, fatalism (high) and anomie (low) can exist at the same time in terms of the social forces that are thought to lead someone to suicide. This chapter contributes to the study of suicide by providing evidence for the unique notion that someone can

be strongly regulated and not regulated at all simultaneously. For example, when interviewees spoke about suicide, they related to relevant social elements of both heavily enforced social expectations on how to live, and the normlessness that comes from the tension between ideologies on how to live between them and older generations. In other words, people felt that they were regulated from social expectations but also felt anomie in the form of cultural ambivalence (Park, 2013), meaning that themes of fatalism and anomie were present in their conceptualizations of suicide.

The next section, Chapter Four, similarly finds evidence for the applicability of multiple of Durkheim's types to describe a given suicide, but focuses on a different type of overlap. Where the previous chapter found simultaneous overlap, Chapter Four discovers evidence that people are able to move fluidly between extremes on the social regulation spectrum (Marson, 2019; Marson, and Powell, 2011). Young South Koreans referred to the strong social expectations that dictated their whole lives leading up to the university entrance exam (Suneung) when asked about suicide. Interestingly, however, it was often within these social expectations themselves that suicide was located, but in the failing to meet these expectations when one was, for example, not able to achieve a high score on the Suneung. This supports the idea that people may have an anomic reaction when failing to meet fatalistic expectations (Abrutyn and Mueller, 2014). In other words, young South Koreans felt that they were unable to continue to find their place in society when they suddenly were unable to realize the goals and expectations placed on them. To call related suicides anomic would be to discount the entire relevance of how they found themselves in the anomic circumstances to begin with. For example, the degree to which people experience fatalism, or the magnitude of the strictness of their social expectations, may make their anomic reaction even stronger when they fail to meet said expectations (Abrutyn and

Mueller, 2014). Thus, it is essential to see suicides in this case as a person sliding from fatalism to anomie. Notably, 20% of Suneung takers who fail to achieve a high score take the test again (Kwon et al., 2017), leading them to return from anomie to fatalism once again.

Chapter Five takes a broader look at all four of Durkheim's suicide types, rather than focusing on social regulation specifically. Following similar studies that claim that evidence for all of Durkheim's suicide types can exist at the same time within the same social environment (Varnik et al., 2003), this chapter argues that interviewees relate to multiple of Durkheim's types at once when conceptualizing motives for suicide. Moreover, this chapter finds evidence for the argument that suicide needs to be classified on scales of regulation and integration at the same time to fully understand its essence (Johnson, 1965). This chapter operationalizes each of the types and provides figures that represent the overlap between all four of Durkheim's suicide types.

Implications for Policy

Studying suicide in South Korea using Durkheim has the potential of contributing to policy. Yoo (2016) argues that from 2011-2016, the South Korean government spent only 10 billion won (approx. 7 million USD) on suicide prevention programs, compared to over 1.8 trillion won (approx. 1.2 billion USD) into campaigns to prevent traffic accidents. Moreover, Yoo contends that the government has also paid a little attention to social patterns and environments in which people commit suicide in the first place, having yet to fund studies that “identify key stressors and supports in the individual's social environment” (5).

South Korea's state counter-suicide measures are mostly public awareness and education campaigns designed to inform the population and gatekeepers about suicide and depression. These are efforts such as educating schoolteachers to be able to recognize when a student is

susceptible to suicide (WHO, 2008). There has also been a range of measures put forth on a country-wide level to hinder people's physical ability to commit suicide. For example, South Korean authorities have responded to bridge-jumping, a popular suicide-method in South Korea, by implementing direct-telephone lines stationed on bridges that are connected to a suicide hotline, sensors that alert authorities when someone approaches too far on the edge of the barriers of the bridge, and CCTV cameras pointed at bridges that are supervised 24 hours a day by rescue teams (Mauduy, 2015). The *Bridge of Life Project* entailed writing inspirational messages on a popular Seoul bridge in order to dissuade those coming to the bridge to jump off of it. Messages read "Let's walk together" or "Have you been eating well?" in order to simulate a conversation with a friend (Baseel, 2014). However, as Baseel notes, efforts like this have backfired, leading at times to more suicide (increasing sixfold for this bridge in particular).

Such anti-suicide measures implemented by the South Korean government have been preventative in nature; they have focused on people who are already suicidal, rather than attempting to address possible (social) causes to becoming suicidal. Physically or mentally preventing people from jumping off bridges *does not* change their attitudes towards suicide, nor help change the circumstances that lead them to attempt suicide in the first place. While educating teachers may prove to be effective in training these people to recognize a suicidal person, it does little to prevent people from becoming suicidal. This is not to say that treating the symptoms of a suicide crisis could not be helpful. However, getting to a social root of suicide is equally, if not more, necessary. The present study is meant to emphasize that suicide is more complex than current policy suggests, as themes such as economy and generational divide need to be considered when developing any sort of effective suicide prevention.

Suicide, for example, is often said to be correlated with depression, and this relationship does inform much suicide prevention in South Korea (Ahn and Baek, 2013; Kwon et al., 2016; Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2020). Efforts to reduce suicide are then focused on something like depression, on the basis that dealing with depression will reduce suicide rates; many of South Korea's counter suicide measures have been concerned with depression itself (WHO, 2008). However, this becomes problematic as relying on risk factors such as depression as a basis for preventing suicide lacks engagement with logics informed by social and structural dimensions of suicide (Ansloos, 2018). Because of this, the range of actions that will be carried out essentially treat the symptoms rather than a cause.

One way of getting to a social root of suicide is exploring suicide from analyzing society itself. Durkheim's suicide-theory (2002/1897) explores distal forces in society that lead people to commit suicide in the first place. This gets at a more fundamental cause (Link and Phelan, 1995) of suicide, as well as particulars about South Korean society that may contribute to high suicide rates. It allows suicide prevention to be targeted at tangible elements in a person's life. That is, Durkheim's vision can lead to, for example, identifying how psychiatric diagnoses can emerge from a social environment; suicidal impulse is located in the social environment, and focus turns towards changing this environment to reduce emotional distress (Marson, 2019).

Social contexts that lead to conditions of depression, for example, are said to be essentially important for effective suicide prevention (White, 2017). For example, Targum and Kitanaka (2012) write that in the last two decades, the Japanese government has come to understand mental illness (e.g., depression) as a consequence of social pressures. Thus, suicide prevention (suicide rates are also globally high in Japan) has been structured around developing policies aimed at reducing heavy work schedules, and community programs targeting social

isolation. Consequently, the government has defined the suicidal person as a victim of their social circumstances (Targum & Kitanaka, 2012), and thus has focused on changing these social circumstances.

Other Contexts

I do not think that Durkheim's types would overlap only in the South Korean case. For example, Davies and Neal (2000) find that the suicide among young women in China could be classified as fatalistic suicide given strict social expectations that are related to marriage: the expectation to marry a family-chosen husband, the reality of living under the control of her mother-in-law and an environment where the legitimacy of harsh rules and expectations is accepted, and the moral subordination to an often-brutal husband that creates a pitiless future. However, I would be interested to hear what these women would say about resisting these expectations. That is, would they likely face social isolation and be ostracized from their families if they chose not to marry their family-chosen husbands? What about if they chose not to marry at all? This is similar to what I argued about the fear of social isolation in chapter five, where interviewees expressed that the reason they conformed to their fatalistic circumstances was partly of fear of what would happen if they did not: social isolation from their families.

Merton (1968) developed his interpretation of anomie based on the "American Dream". That is, it is expected that freedom will lead to individual success and upward social mobility. However, as in the South Korean case, it is not feasible for the average person to achieve lofty expectations of upward mobility. And yet, the American dream exists, or at least a version of it, and everyone knows what it is, much like the social expectations that exist for young South Koreans to go to a prestigious university. In both cases, people have a dream that includes expectations to live up to, but are unlikely to achieve the dream, and thus are susceptible to

anomie. On the theorization of anomie in this context, Taylor and Taylor (1968) write that “Individuals in society are seen as playing a gigantic fruit-machine, but the machine is rigged and only some players are consistently rewarded” (29-32). Moreover, their study emphasizes that for people to be less exploited (i.e., less susceptible to anomie), the possibilities and options for individuals to live up to existing values must be open to change. In the context of my project, existing values placed by *kkondaes* on certain ways to live and academic achievement and prestige must change in order for people to be less affected by anomie. Exploring the social inequality that prevents people from expected upward mobility is one thing, but exploring the same social inequality in the context of anomie and fatalism could further show that the forces do not affect people equally, drawing influence on the values themselves; values, norms, expected goals that Taylor and Taylor (1986: 29-32) call the “magic words” in the context of anomie.

The relationship between expectations of educational success and suicide may also be seen in other contexts. Japan, which also has higher than average suicide rates on a consistent basis and where suicide is the leading cause of death among young adults (Otsuka et al., 2020), is also said to value education very highly, and is even called by some as “examination hell” (Bossy, 2000). Otsuka and Anamizu (2019) report that for Japanese university students, suicide has been the primary cause of death since 1996. Furthermore, the pressures placed on young Japanese to succeed in school is often linked to high suicide rates in the country (Nagamitsu et al., 2020). It is argued widely that familial and cultural demands for academic excellence lead to the intensified pursuit of academic success in other East Asian countries as well, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan (Ang & Huan, 2006; Lin and Qinghai, 1995; Shih, 2015; Tan & Yates, 2011). Thus, gathering qualitative data on how people

in these countries conceptualize the relationship between suicide and education (if at all) could be useful to inform strategies to develop more effective suicide prevention efforts.

Nagamitsu et al. (2020) also add that stress related to family relationships was at the forefront of correlational factors with suicide. While their approach was a survey, it would be interesting to conduct interviews with these people to gain richer data on how they conceptualize suicide itself, and the reasons behind it. This may lead to more detailed and contextual explanations of these family relationships and troubles that would otherwise not come up in a survey answer. This is similar to other bodies of research that connect suicidal behavior to family conflict. Wright (1985) finds that high school and college students who experience family troubles and conflicts report more suicidal ideation. Ahookhosh et al. (2017) find that suicide ideation correlates strongly with family cohesion. While I again note that these studies are based on survey data, they both suggest that generational conflict is a salient area to explore in relation to suicidal behavior. The present dissertation suggests that by qualitatively exploring such cases, we can learn more about suicide and suicidal behavior, including the gathering of rich explanations about cultural and social aspects related to the phenomenon in a given context.

Furthermore, Haley (2018) has also suggested that an increase in individualism has led to weakening collectivistic values in 21st century Japan, leading to increases in anomic suicides. Again, the debate exists on whether or not this would actually be egoistic or anomic suicides, since an increase in individualism would be just as plausibly described by egoism as anomie, much like the debate between Kang (2017) and Park (2013). This could further shed light on the combination of anomie and egoism, as both are meant to represent low degrees of social regulation and integration, respectively (Durkheim, 2002/1897).

The point here is not that what works in one context or country should work in another, nor that the conditions that lead to suicide can be understood universally as the same. Rather, I argue that qualitatively exploring Durkheim's suicide-typology is salient for suicide research. It allows us to learn about the specific circumstances that people feel are related to suicidal behavior. Also, embracing and tackling suicide from a social point of view is often said to be a neglected part of suicide prevention. In South Korea, this has not been done in current prevention efforts, and Durkheim's social study of suicide, if imperfectly, provides a theoretical foundation to understand suicide in this way. Thus, this project does more than simply confirm Durkheim's suicide-theory, and specifically anomie/fatalism. The thought processes and the perspectives behind suicide that people report on themselves are prioritized in this project that demonstrate the missed social motives for suicide. By prioritizing local knowledges, South Korean culture, and South Korean perspectives on suicide, I capture here social elements of suicidal behavior that went unchecked in Durkheim's original study; elements of suicide that can be addressed in coming suicide prevention.

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Appendix A: Interviewee characteristics

Name (n=29)	Age (\bar{x} =26.2)	Gender (13F, 16M)	Major	Education
Ah-Hyun	27	F	Business	Graduated
Dae-Hyun	30	M	Religious Studies	Graduated
Do-Yun	20	M	General Arts	In-progress
Eun-Woo	29	M	Linguistics/Chinese/English	Graduated
Ha-Eun	27	F	Business	Graduated
Ha-Joon	27	M	Economics	Graduated
Hee-Ra	30	F	Biology	Graduated
Ho-Jin	28	M	Philosophy	Graduated
Hye-Jin	22	F	Business	Graduated
Hye-Kyung	28	F	Graphic Design	Graduated
Jeon-Su	27	M	Music	Graduated
Ji-Ho	23	M	Business	Graduated
Ji-Min	28	F	Linguistics	Graduated
Jin-Ju	29	F	Business	Graduated
Ju-Won	25	M	Computer Science	Graduated
Kyu-Ri	25	F	Undecided	In-progress
Min-Jun	29	F	Pharmacy	Graduated
Nam-Il	30	M	International Trading	Graduated
Seo-Jun	29	M	Visual Arts	Graduated
Seong-Ho	28	M	Social Sciences	Graduated
Si-Woo	22	M	Business	In-progress
Song-Min	21	M	Medicine	In-progress
Soo-Jung	30	F	Graphic Design	Graduated

Sun-Yung	25	F	Undecided	In-progress
Ye-Jun	22	M	Math	Graduated
Yeon-Woo	25	M	Social Work	Graduated
Yi-Jae	26	F	Software/Logistics	Graduated
Yong-Gi	22	M	Computer Science	Graduated
Young-Ae	26	F	Chinese/English	Graduated

Appendix B: Mental Health Professionals interviewed

Name	Gender	Approximate Age	Profession	Nationality
Min	F	Early 30s	Psychologist	Australian
Seung-Hee	F	Early 30s	Psychiatrist	Korean

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