

How Do South Korean Female Executives' Definitions of Career Success Differ from Those of Male Executives?

Research on career success indicates that men and women have divergent conceptions (Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Heslin, 2005; Lyness and Thompson, 2000; O'Neil *et al.*, 2008; Sturges, 1999). Men's objective career success is defined by verifiable attainments (e.g., promotions), while women's subjective career success is defined by internal criteria (e.g., work-life balance). Women's careers are considerably more complicated than men's due to barriers imposed by gendered social contexts, so women experience competing priorities for their time and attention across career stages (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil *et al.*, 2008). However, we are unsure if the study findings are applicable to a different context.

Problem Statement

Research on career success in a South Korean (Korean, hereafter) context presented similar findings to the western literature: men aim for more objective career success and women for subjective career success. Kim's (2004) study of Korean women employees in a large bank showed that for women, intrinsic aspects were more important determinants of career success than objective measures. In a survey of 260 Korean workers, Kim and Cha (2014) presented 11 dimensions that Korean workers defined as career success including: learning/experience, relationship/ recognition, social help, economic stability, work-life balance, wealth, self-realization, life-long work, social status, happiness/fun, and running a business. Of those 11 dimensions, *work-life balance* surfaced as a distinctively women's definition of career success, while *running a business* was the number one men's definition of career success.

The above two studies showed gender differences in definitions of career success based on the study participants' perceptions of career success in a survey. In contrast, Cho *et al.*'s (2016) qualitative study of 50 women leaders in large Korean companies revealed that interview participants had modest definitions of career success such as "personal satisfaction." When asked about success factors, many of the women mentioned "luck" rather than their own "ability." Although the study presented women leaders' definitions of career success in their own voices, we do not know to what extent their definitions were subjective because we asked for women leaders' own definitions only and there was no comparison between both genders' definitions.

In this context, we feel a strong need to hear both genders' voices to gain a broader understanding of their definitions of career success. Comparing women leaders' narratives with

those of their male counterparts provides insights for gender differences in career success and development. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to compare Korean female executives' definitions of career success with those of male executives, identify their career development strategies for success, and provide implications for research and practice. As HRD research on organizational factors that support or impede women's career and leadership development is limited, this study contributes to HRD research conducted in a non-western context.

Literature Review

We reviewed three bodies of literature on career success (career development strategies included), tokenism theory, and cultural context that provide a useful lens to explore Korean female executives' definitions of career success compared with those of male executives. In career success, we introduce research on gender differences in defining career success and career development strategies. In tokenism theory, we present the explanatory power of Kanter's (1977a, 1977b) perspective in understanding women's token status compared to men in Korea. In cultural context, we emphasize the importance of understanding Korea where there is a unique national and organizational culture, which creates the gendered workplace.

Career Success

Research on career success has measured objective and subjective indicators. The first indicator is objective or extrinsic career success defined by verifiable criteria (e.g., pay) (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Nicholson, 2000). The second indicator is subjective or intrinsic career success (e.g., job satisfaction) defined by an individual's reactions to one's personal career experience (Law *et al.*, 2002; O'Neil *et al.*, 2008).

Research indicates that the factors leading to objective career success are different from those of subjective career success. While educational level, prestige, and degree factors explained objective career success (e.g., financial success), only motivational and organizational factors (e.g., the number of employees) were related to subjective career success (e.g., career satisfaction) (Judge *et al.*, 1995). In a meta-analysis of studies on career success (Ng *et al.*, 2005), human capital (e.g., work experience) and socio-demographic (e.g., gender) factors had positive relationships with objective career success, whereas organizational sponsorship (e.g., supervisor support) and individual differences (e.g., personality) predicted subjective career success. An empirical study with Korean women in the public sector (Choi, 2015) also supported that personal factors (e.g., personality, demographics, and motivation) were associated more with

women's objective career success, while situational factors (e.g., work environment) were related more to their subjective career success.

Research on career success has shown gender differences. Women highlighted the importance of balance and relationships, whereas men focused more on material success (Dyke and Murphy, 2006). Women and elder managers appeared less prone to define career success in terms of hierarchical and financial advancement (Sturges, 1999). Lyness and Thompson (2000) found that career success was positively related to developmental assignments for both male and female executives, but mentoring was more strongly related to success for male executives than for female executives.

Research on career success in Korea has also shown gender differences in definitions of career success as in Western literature. Kim and Cha's (2014) study indicated that Korean workers' definitions of career success were influenced by gender, age, and educational level. Kim (2004) showed that the length of work experience had a significant difference as Korean women who worked for seven or more years placed a significantly higher value on personal interests or excitement at work, advancement, and autonomy than did others. Jang and Shon (2012) found that gender inequality, personal weaknesses, and insufficient family support hinder career success of female workers.

Career development strategies. Career development is a process of individual growth and advancement in the organization; career success is a goal and/or outcome of such career development (McDonald and Hite, 2005). Increasing flexibility in the workplace drives individuals to take responsibility for their own career development (Lips-Wiersma and Hall, 2007). Yet, multilevel factors including organizational, social, and cultural and personal factors influence career success and development (Egan *et al.*, 2006).

Cultural context is considered a crucial factor moderating work-life balance, career and leadership development, and gender (Cheung and Halpern, 2010; Gibson, 1995; Lyness and Judiesch, 2008). Because of women's primary responsibilities for childcare and housework, women's work-life balance influences their career choices, advancement, and interruptions (Guillaume and Pochic, 2009; ten Brummelhuis *et al.*, 2014). Family-friendly policies and benefits, therefore, may not be effective for women's career development without a culture supporting work-life balance (O'Neil *et al.*, 2008).

Rowley, Kang, and Lim (2016) showed that male-dominated organizational and social cultures in a Korean context are a crucial factor resulting in gender differences in career success and development. A comparison of the gender representation and barriers of women's career advancement between the Korean government and the U.S. government (Choi and Park, 2014) revealed that Confucian tradition and collectivism in Korea have affected female career development, making it more challenging than in the U.S.

Mentoring and networking promote possibilities for career success by enhancing accessibility to information and resources, which are important for individual and organizational performance (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Mentoring is effective for the underrepresented groups including women in organizations; networking for career success is gaining more attention (Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, and Wiethoff, 2010) than before. Both mentoring and networking, however, can be challenging to women's career success. Due to a small number of women in senior leadership positions, women have difficulties experiencing female role models and building networks (Ely *et al.*, 2011). A study (Cho *et al.*, 2016) on women leaders conducted in a Korean context revealed that informal networking (e.g., over drinks) was considered a major challenge for women leaders' career development.

Rowley *et al.* (2016) also identified that female managers in Korea did not have networks or mentors for career support, though networking affects their work experiences, training and development opportunities, and eventually career success. Yet, according to Gress and Paek (2014), when faced with difficulties in accessing informal networks at work, female managers informally establish networks with other females, which possibly provides opportunities to challenge the male-dominated, discriminatory space in Korea. Research suggests that family, organizational support, and the government's family-friendly policies promote women's career development and success and also play a positive role in addressing work-family/work-life conflicts (Wayne *et al.*, 2007). Given women's diverse career patterns, the government and organizations are called on to consider challenges women face in their career development and to provide optimum supports for career success (Ely *et al.*, 2011; Hopkins *et al.*, 2008).

Tokenism Theory

The status of Korean women leaders is still considered *token* because only a small number of women take leadership positions in almost any sectors (Kim, 2013). For instance, of the top 30 large companies (called *chaebols*), female executives make up only 1.83% (Park,

2015). As a result, Korea has one of the lowest female representations in senior roles, boards, and executive committees both in Asia (McKinsey & Company, 2012) and in the world (World Economic Forum, 2016).

In this context, Kanter's (1977a, 1977b) tokenism theory is relevant to understand how women's proportional representation in work groups affects their workplace experiences. In a seminal study (Kanter, 1977a) of 20 sales women out of over 300 men working in a Fortune 500 firm, she revealed that due to women's token status in the workplace, three consequences including visibility, contrast, and assimilation emerged as follows:

- The token female group feels highly visible due to their differences. This visibility creates performance pressures, so they usually overachieve or become socially invisible to avoid attention from men (dominants).
- The dominant group tends to exaggerate their differences from the token group, so women feel isolated or try to become insiders by turning against their own social identity (so-called "women-prejudiced-against-women").
- Assimilation involves the use of stereotypes about token women's social category, which tends to be distorted to fit the dominant group's generalization; stereotypical assumptions made about tokens force them into playing limited roles (e.g., secretaries) in the organization.

Kanter's theory of tokenism has been tested across a variety of organizations (Gustafson, 2008; Hekman *et al.*, 2017; Yoder, 1991). Studies examined law students, partners and associates in law firms, corporate executives, academic faculty, and policewomen.

Cultural Context

Women leaders' token status is deeply rooted in a uniquely Korean context where Confucianism and military-led industrialization have a lasting effect on the society and on the way organizations are managed (Cho and Yoon, 2001; Hemmert, 2012; Park and Cho, 1995). Confucian values, such as *respect for the old*, *loyalty to superiors*, *harmonious relations*, and *filial piety*, are the main values that have significantly affected interpersonal relations and work culture in Korea (Choi, 2015; Kee, 2008; Park and Cho, 1995). In corporate culture, employees are treated as family members and, in return, they are expected to be willing to sacrifice personal interests for the benefit of the company, leading to the remarkable economic success in Korea (Cho and Yoon, 2001; Lee and Lee, 2014).

Korea shares Asia's Confucian model of family in which a clearly defined gender division of labor prevails (Raymo *et al.*, 2015). Although women's participation in economic and political fields promoted their social status and leadership, some cultural traditions remain unchanged. Roles of mothers and wives have been strongly preserved as the fundamental duty of women (Chung, 2013; Kee, 2008). The term "glass fence," coined by Kim (2013), means that a strong divide between a woman's domain at home and a man's domain at work keeps women from taking more active roles outside the home.

Korea was ruled by military leaders between 1961 and 1992, at a time when a series of Five-Year Economic Development Plans were launched and resulted in the nation's remarkable economic growth (Heo and Roehrig, 2014). Korea's success with military-led industrialization is based on the command culture and sense of loyalty, working on clear-cut targets, and no tolerance of failure (Hemmert, 2012). As a result of the combined effects of collectivism by Confucianism and military culture, building team spirit for group harmony through eating, drinking alcohol, and singing together is highly encouraged in organizational life in Korea (Kee, 2008). Women leaders in Korea face challenges by cultural and organizational constraints (Cho *et al.*, 2015).

Method

The purpose of this study was to compare Korean female executives' definitions of career success with those of male executives, identify their career development strategies for success, and provide implications for research and practice. Two research questions guided our inquiry: How do female executives' definitions of career success differ from those of male executives? What career development strategies do male and female executives use for career success?

To answer these two questions, we used a "basic" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 23) qualitative research design, the most common form of qualitative research, the goal of which is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences. Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's "lived experience," (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10) are well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives.

Data Collection

In this study, we used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit interview participants to hear their own voices (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). We purposefully selected male and female executives who have worked (or have just retired) for many years in

the same organization and who have taken leading roles as top managers (CEOs, executive vice-presidents, senior managing directors, and managing directors) in their organizations so that they can define career success in their own words.

Initially, we contacted interview participants meeting the selection criteria through referrals from a previous study (Cho *et al.*, 2016). We recruited more participants through a snowball approach by requesting initial participants to help us make contact with additional participants. In the process, we attempted to make both gender groups similar in terms of taking senior levels of leadership positions and having a long tenure of working in the same organization so that we can better compare their definitions of career success (see Table 1).

<<<Insert Table 1 about here>>>

Fifteen male executives and fifteen female executives worked in 28 corporations including large (18) and small (3) companies, multinational corporations (MNCs) (5), and public corporations (4). Participants included eight CEOs (including three recently retired CEOs), three executive vice-presidents, four senior managing directors, and 15 managing directors. All were married with children, except two single and one divorced woman. A majority of our participants were in their 50s with the youngest managing director being 44 years old. Two participants (6%) worked less than 20 years, 19 participants (63%) more than 20 years, and 9 participants (30%) more than 30 years. Five female executives worked as a CFO (chief financial officer) in their organizations.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 participants using an interview protocol of 13 questions regarding background, career success, and final thoughts. The interview protocol includes the following questions: How do you define your career success in your own words? Do you think that career success is the same as happiness in life? We asked this question because *happiness* surfaced as women leaders compare with success when asking what success means in the previous study (Cho *et al.*, 2016). Our interviews took a total of 25.9 hours and an average of 52 minutes each. We recorded and transcribed all interviews for analysis. We sent transcripts to participants for member-checking to ensure the validity of the study. Based on 15 (50%) participants' responses, we made corrections in wording, misspellings, and misplaced statements.

Data Analysis

We analyzed participants' narratives following the three steps of the coding process. In the first step, given 13 categories and 37 administrative codes (titled "refined codes") that were developed from the previous study (Cho *et al.*, 2016), we developed 14 categories (e.g., defining success, challenges, and career development) and 46 administrative codes (e.g., defining success: definitions, changes of definitions, and reasons for the changes) through a test coding with each of both genders' narratives about the definitions of success. In the second step, we used those codes as a template to migrate all narratives to *NVivo 11*, qualitative data analysis software. The analysis team of five researchers worked in pairs to ensure the reliability of the study. Paired groups independently coded one male and female transcript assigned and compared agreement rates reported in *Nvivo 11* to close the gap. A paired researcher coded the rest of the assigned transcripts, and the other reviewed coding results to confirm. We also used the memo function in *NVivo11* to write questions and resolved them in online meetings. When we completed the first coding process, the analysis team leader (the second author) categorized all nodes that were placed in 46 administrative codes to identify emerging themes. When this thematic analysis was complete, the analysis team discussed overlapping and missing codes and reached consensus on the final 45 codes for both gender groups (see Table 2). In the third step, we compared the final 45 codes in *NVivo* with the codes the first author developed manually. This final step helped us check and balance if there are any misplaced codes.

<<<Insert Table 2 about here>>>

Research note. We found that the use of *NVivo* can be aided by manual coding for data analysis. The strength of *NVivo 11* includes manipulating a large amount of interview data with ease. However, we had to double-check if codes in *NVivo* were rightly named and assigned to the corresponding narratives. To that end, the first author's manual coding was instrumental in finalizing the data analysis process.

Findings

To answer the first research question (How do female executives' definitions of career success differ from those of male executives?), we found gender differences in the definitions of career success and success factors. We noted that our participants' definitions of success have changed due to transforming experiences. Our participants' narratives on success factors had two sides, internal and external. To answer the second research question (What career development strategies do male and female executives use for career success?), we found gender differences

in their career development strategies including challenges, mentors, and networking (see Appendix A for the comparison of male and female executives' definitions of career success).

In reporting, we added a number in parentheses to indicate the number of interview participants who responded to ease readers' understanding of the study findings, although these numbers were not statistically significant. In this sense, we agree with Miles and Huberman (1994) that numbers in qualitative research can reduce researcher bias and support the robustness of our insights.

Definitions of Career Success

A majority of male executives (14) spoke of more objective criteria (i.e., achievements, recognition, reputation, positions, and promotion) than subjective criteria. Many male executives defined their career success as achieving tangible outcomes, as one male executive stated:

When I became an executive in my company, I was given a new office with a secretary, a company car with a driver, a golf membership, increased salary, business class for flight, and, most importantly, decision-making power.

In contrast, all female executives, 15 participants, spoke of more subjective criteria (i.e., work-life balance, respect from family, relationships, and personal growth) than objective criteria. Many female executives defined career success as feeling happy when receiving respect from family, as one female executive stated: "When my daughter is proud of me as a working mom and regards me as her role model, I feel I have succeeded in my career."

Transforming experiences. We asked participants what experiences triggered them to change their perspective of career success. We call it *transforming experiences* to emphasize the importance of changes in their perspectives from objective to subjective criteria. Gender differences were detected in our participants' narratives about transforming experiences. Ten male executives stated that their experiences changed their definitions of success. These men's transforming experiences were generated from: studying abroad, (early) promotions, demotions, mentors' influences, and crises at the company. However, no single male executive mentioned his work-life balance being a critical incident in changing his career.

In contrast, only five females, a third of female executives, mentioned a change in their perspective of success, but it was difficult to see what specific experiences triggered the change, as in one woman's statement: "In the past, I thought success means financial gains and promotions. But as time goes by, I came to define success as self-respect."

This female executive's comment indicates that her change from objective to subjective success was a natural transition as she became older without going through transforming experiences. Several female executives, however, mentioned that their family triggered them to see their career from a different angle. One female executive shared her experience:

When my daughter was seven, I was working as a consultant even on Sundays, so I did not have sufficient time to take care of her. On a Sunday morning, I was about to leave for work and my husband was filling water in the bath tub to clean my daughter. At that moment, she, pointing to me, asked my husband: "Is she a father?"

After this critical incident, she applied for a leave of absence to take time off and went overseas to study for one year so that she could spend time with her daughter. We collected more narratives about female executives' children whose low academic grades and bad behaviors triggered a change in their careers in ways that they became more aware of work-life balance. In this sense, work-life balance is critical to female executives to change their course of life.

Is success the same as happiness? We asked participants if they see their career success as the same as happiness. Only four male and female participants thought the two are the same, as one female executive stated: "Success is the same as happiness; otherwise, there is no meaning for success."

Many participants thought that the two are different. Many male executives (9) stated that success and happiness differ. To male executives, career success means tangible and measurable achievements, while happiness is related to personal satisfaction, so success is necessary but not sufficient for happiness. Female executives (7) who defined career success as objective also perceived that success differs from happiness. As one female executive mentioned, "If someone pursues success only, she has to sacrifice a lot."

Success Factors

We asked participants what were the factors of their success. To both male and female executives, both internal factors (e.g. personality) and external factors (e.g., organizational support) were important in their career success.

Internal factors. A majority of the male (13) and all of the female (15) participants spoke of personality attributes as key success factors. To male participants, hard work, persistence, a challenging spirit, passion for work, positive attitudes, and the will to succeed emerged as internal success factors. One male executive witnessed:

When having conversations with successful people, I see they possess two common characteristics, positive attitudes and a strong sense of responsibility, which are also my success factors.

To female participants, similar internal success factors emerged including: balance, a strong sense of responsibility, persistence, hard work, will to succeed, an inferiority complex, passion, a challenging spirit, integrity, confidence, and positive attitudes.

As far as abilities/competencies are concerned, both men and women emphasized the importance of communication, presentation, and analytical skills as well as expertise for their career success. However, more men (8) than women (2) spoke of their abilities/competencies as a success factor, indicating that women seem to have a tendency not to report their abilities/competencies as a success factor.

External factors. Fourteen male and female participants stated that external factors positively influenced their career success. Gender differences were detected in their narratives about external factors. Male participants spoke of early challenging experiences, networking, supervisors, team members, and career strategies as external factors for success. To one male executive, family support means a division of labor at home:

I talked to my wife in the beginning: "I will concentrate on work and you should take responsibilities at home." Due to this division of labor at home, I was able to succeed at work.

In contrast, female participants spoke of more environmental factors than men did including: policy changes for women, organizational (top manager and supervisor) support, family support, husbands (or husband's death), and women-friendly workplaces. For instance, a few female participants stated that they develop networks to overcome their not-so-good educational backgrounds (e.g., only high school graduation).

In terms of family support, only one man spoke of his wife's sacrifice as a success factor, whereas four female participants highlighted their husband's support for family. These female participants' meaning of family support differed from men's, as one female participant stated:

Whenever I face difficulties, my husband gives me advice. Without his support, I could not have succeeded this much. My daughter also knew from earlier years that she cannot depend on me due to my commitment to work, so she became independent in achieving academic goals. My daughter's independence, therefore, is another success factor for me.

Career Development Strategies

We asked our participants what strategies they use for their career success.

Challenges. We detected gender differences in their narratives about challenges they faced in their career. While work stress (e.g., conflicts with top management and customers) surfaced as a challenge men faced, experiencing the token status in the gendered workplace was a major challenge for female participants.

Male participants' major challenges were pressures and stress they face as leaders. Seven male executives spoke of stress at work. In contrast, 10 female participants spoke of their difficulties as women. Because of women's token status in their organizations, they were excluded from men's informal networking, as one female participant stated:

When I was a team member, I did not have any difficulties sharing information with others. But when I became the only female team leader, I faced difficulty in sharing information with other team leaders and members, so I felt I was an island.

Female executives' mistakes were highly visible compared to men, which is common for token women, as one woman stated:

As only two women take executive positions out of 30 executives in my company, all of my work is being closely scrutinized. Because I am a token woman in the company, even when I make a minor mistake, I am being severely criticized. When I do excel, I will receive jealous responses. These are the challenges I face every day.

Female participants stated that they experience prejudices against women on a daily basis and also mentioned difficulties in work-family balance including raising children and a lack of support in and outside the home.

Mentors. Many male (9) and female (13) participants had (mostly, male) mentors whose help was instrumental in their career success. However, we found gender differences in mentor roles. To male participants, mentors were their seniors or supervisors who they respect and treated as a role model, as one male participant stated: "I meet my mentor once a month but I do not talk about my problems because I know I should not be a burden to him. Thus, I try to solve problems by myself."

In contrast, female participants' mentors were much more involved in their lives. Female participants discuss challenges they face and receive helpful advice from their mentors. They also mentioned that mentoring contributed to overcoming their lack of informal networks. Our

participants mentioned only three female mentors identified, so they emphasized a need for more female mentors in the organization.

Networking. To both male and female participants, networking was considered a critical component of their career development strategies. Many male (15) and female (8) executives stated that they have informal meetings (e.g., drinking alcohol) with colleagues, supervisors, and customers after work and that they play golf during weekends. Because of informal meetings, female executives had difficulties balancing work and family. In regards to forming networks, some participants enjoy creating networks and others are likely to join groups that are already formed. One recently retired male CEO boasted of his wide networks: "I manage a total of 26 networks because I like to drink alcohol with people."

In addition, reading with a wide range of topics including management, leadership (e.g., autobiographies), psychology (e.g., human nature), and industry data (e.g., benchmarking) was our participants' preferred choice for career development strategies. Both men and women liked to read books related to their careers and jobs, and sometimes formed book clubs to develop their expertise (e.g., finance, accounting).

Discussion

Our study findings showed gender differences in their definitions of success and career development strategies. In this section, we discuss the significance of the study findings and provide implications for research and practice.

Significance of the Study

As previous studies (Lyness and Thompson, 2000; O'Neil *et al.*, 2008; Sturges, 1999) indicated, in this study, male and female executives had different perspectives on career success: men tend to define career success more objectively than women. However, gender differences in this study were not as distinctive as previous literature indicated. Some male executives valued more subjective career success than others, while a few female executives spoke of more objective definitions than others. We could capture these subtle differences through in-depth interviews. By hearing our participants' stories, we could see both objective and subjective definitions of success, for both genders, which might not have been possible in quantitative research.

We detected gender differences in their narratives regarding transforming experiences. Male executives spoke of more narratives about changes than female executives did. Male

participants began their careers with objective criteria for success in mind, but in the course of their careers, some men faced a life-changing experience (e.g., demotion), so they learned a life lesson about the importance of work-life balance and the meaning of happiness. We consider this gender difference as being generated from men's diverse experiences in comparison with women's. As male executives aggressively seek more opportunities than female executives, they achieve what they want, but simultaneously they are exposed to more risks and challenges than women are. Men's changed perspectives, however, might also have to do with age, so the relationship between gender differences in transforming changes in relation to age (Judge *et al.*, 1995; Kim, 2004; Kim and Cha, 2014; Sturges, 1999) calls for further investigation.

Gender differences were also detected in our participants' narratives about work-life balance (Emslie and Hunt, 2009; Guillaume and Pochic, 2009; Keene and Quadagno, 2004). To male executives, family is something given and is not something they should take care of on a daily basis. As one male executive aptly stated, "I concentrate on work because I put more emphasis on family," he works hard for his family but does not necessarily do something for his family as much as women often do. We hardly heard about male executives' families (wives) as a key success factor, whereas female executives spoke of their husbands and family support as such a factor.

Our study findings reflect the nature of a uniquely Korean context (Kim, 2013; Rowley *et al.*, 2016). Our participants worked in a Confucian and military culture, which operates in hierarchical structures and the command and control system, coupled with a heightened spirit of camaraderie in the workplace (Cho and Yoon, 2001; Hemmert, 2012; Park and Cho, 1995). Both male and female participants consider eating and drinking alcohol as an essential part of organizational life because they know important decisions are made on those occasions. In addition, due to our participants' high level positions in the workplace, playing golf surfaced as an important venue for networking to build their camaraderie with colleagues, supervisors, and customers. Even to a few female executives who cannot drink alcohol, playing golf is considered a mandatory business activity they must perform during weekends.

Our participants' educational backgrounds also surfaced as a uniquely Korean success factor (Kim and Cha, 2014). We found that educational background has two sides, positives and negatives. Having a good educational background is a requirement for participants' career success, whereas having a not-so-good educational background means that they should work

doubly hard to succeed. Some male and female participants shared their success stories of having good educational backgrounds, whereas a few female participants shared the challenges they faced due to their not-so-good educational backgrounds. To these female participants, their educational backgrounds forced them to compensate with unwavering hard work and career strategies such as working late and expanding their networks.

Implications for Research

We present three research agendas needing investigation on career success, women's token status, and comparative analyses.

Career success. In this study, more male executives had transforming experiences such as early living overseas and crises in their companies than female executives did. It was noticeable that through those transforming experiences male executives' perspectives changed from objective criteria to subjective criteria for success so they came to value work-life balance and happiness more. As previous studies have not explored *how* and *why* employees' values are transformed in their career span as in this study, HRD researchers need to further investigate why gender differences exist on the level of changes in their perspective of career success, what factors influence those changes, and what consequences those changes bring to the individual and organizational levels.

Women's token status. As female executives face the token status in the gendered workplace, we feel a strong need to pay more attention to organizational factors that can promote physical and social infrastructures for women. This line of research requires an investigation of contextual factors that may contribute to a non-discriminatory atmosphere in the workplace (Gress and Paek, 2014). To that end, Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism is highly relevant to a Korean context, given no empirical study conducted in light of tokenism theory. Women's token status can be explored to see to what extent women experience the token status and how they cope with the consequences of their token status in the gendered workplace. Investigating women from the perspective of Kanter's (1997) tokenism theory will provide insights for the development of highly qualified women and women in the leadership pipeline in Korea.

Comparative analyses. Many of the challenges that female and male executives face are deeply rooted in a Korean context. Unless critical inquiry is undertaken into the unique research context, which fundamentally differs from western countries, governmental and organizational support might suggest that western approaches can easily be applicable to other contexts (Ghosh,

2015). In this sense, comparative analyses of Korea and other countries (e.g., Malony *et al.*, 2016) and Korean companies and MNCs in Korea are called for. For instance, one MNC in Korea had three women executives (60%) out of five executives under a woman CEO's leadership. A study on the gap in the proportion and promotion of female leaders in Korean companies and MNCs in Korea will provide evidence on organizational factors that might have led to female leaders' career success in the latter. These comparative analyses will eventually be instrumental in developing indigenous research (McLean, 2010) in which a uniquely Korean context is sufficiently reflected.

Implications for Practice

We provide three implications for practice including organizational support, the government's role, and HRD's role.

Organizational support. In this study, a few female executives, with their supervisors' support, were able to experience challenging jobs and assignments for their career advancement before taking executive level positions. One woman leader witnessed her experience:

Ever since my supervisor put me in a turn-around project, I had to work in diverse functions including planning, strategy, M&As, and new business development in the following 10 years. As a result, I became the youngest team leader in the company.

This female executive's testimonial implies the importance of organizational support, particularly supervisor support, on employee learning and performance (Cho and Egan, 2013). As developmental opportunities for both men and women include challenging, high-profile work assignments, and diverse business experiences, organizational leaders should provide diverse developmental opportunities that should be tailored to both genders' needs.

The government's role. Korea's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's Women's Leadership Development and Gender Equality Task Force Team (2016) has recently delivered 35 strategies for work-life balance that can be implemented in the corporate sector, concentrating on three focus areas: women leaders' development, work-life balance, and corporate culture for gender equality. It is laudable to see the government's efforts for legal protection, policies, and programs to create a family-friendly culture. However, as the government's strategies are not punitive and lag behind the implementation of policies and programs, the government, in collaboration with the private sector, should find ways to distribute its initiatives to all parts of society.

HRD's role. In this study, female executives defined mentors as those who they can trust and talk with freely about personal and work issues, whereas mentors are those who they look up to and play a "real boss" to male executives. HRD should factor these gender differences into developing mentoring programs in organizations. In addition, as female executives addressed a strong need for the development of leadership skills for women in the leadership pipeline through mentoring, HRD should encourage them to project their career paths through behavior modeling with the help of female executives in mentoring programs.

We also found that our participants are under a lot of stress due to their work demanding high quality performance, so some time off from work as sabbatical in academia, studying overseas for refreshment, and changing job functions for challenges will be helpful for their careers from a long-term perspective. In this context, HRD can provide interventions for men and women to manage stress and work in safe work environments.

Study Limitations

We began our research to see if there are gender differences in the definitions of career success after conducting research on women leaders (Cho *et al.*, 2016) in which we found that they defined success in a modest and subjective way. In this study, we wanted to know how female executives' definitions of career success differ from those of male executives, and, if there are gender differences, what career development strategies should be provided for male and female executives. To that end, we formed a research team of eight (seven female and one male) Korea-born researchers in HRD in the U.S. and Korea to uncover complexities and ambiguities of the interview data (Hill *et al.*, 2005). We all have work experience, speak the same language, and know the research context. As we took the researcher bias issue in qualitative research seriously, we added one male researcher who volunteered to join our team to enrich our perspective on the research topic and worked through before- and after-interview meetings and double (*NVivo* and manual) coding processes for data analysis. However, despite our efforts, it is still possible that the study findings may reflect in part our own identity as women.

Conclusion

In this study, many male executives, through experiencing transforming changes in their careers, began to appreciate work-life balance and personal happiness from success. However, the cultural context is slow to adapt to people's career aspirations, so it took many years for those

men to recognize the importance of work-life balance. One male executive witnessed why a Korean context is uniquely different:

To succeed at work, we should work hard, no matter where you live. The difference, however, lies in life after work. People in other countries take a break after work, but we cannot. We have to meet people and drink alcohol after work because informal meetings are critical for success in Korea.

In this context, unless culture changes in ways that are more supportive of both men and women who try to balance work and family/life and seek happiness as they succeed, we cannot expect their outstanding performance and the nation's continued growth in the long run.

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Appendix A

Comparison of Male and Female Executives' Definitions of Career Success

Definitions		Male Executives	Female Executives
Career Success	Definitions	Objective criteria (e.g., achievements, positions, and promotion)	Subjective criteria (e.g., work-life balance, relationships, and personal growth)
	Transforming Experiences	Study abroad, (early) promotions, demotions, and crises at the company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No transforming experiences • Work-life balance is considered critical to change women's course of life
	Success vs. Happiness	<p>Success and Happiness are the same for some male and female participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success means tangible achievements and happiness, personal satisfaction • Success is necessary but not sufficient for happiness 	Success differs from happiness because: "If someone pursues success only, she has to sacrifice a lot"
Success Factors	Internal	Both internal factors (e.g. personality) and external factors (e.g., organizational support) were important in their career success	
		Hard work, persistence, a challenging spirit, passion for work, and positive attitudes	Balance, a strong sense of responsibility, persistence, hard work, passion, a challenging spirit, integrity, confidence, and positive attitudes
	External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early challenging experiences, networking, supervisors, team members, and career strategies • Men rarely spoke of their wife's sacrifice as a success factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More environmental factors than men did including: policy changes for women, organizational support, family support, husbands, and women-friendly workplaces • More women than men highlighted their husband's support for family
Career Development	Challenges	Pressures and stress at work they face as leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's token status in organizations: Experiencing prejudices against women on a daily basis • Difficulties in work-family balance: Raising children and a lack of support in and outside the home
	Mentors	Men's seniors or supervisors who they respect as a role model	Women's mentors are much more involved in their lives by discussing challenges they face and receive helpful advice
	Networking	Both men and women have informal meetings (e.g., drinking alcohol) with colleagues, supervisors, and customers after work and play golf during weekends	