



Subculture of Young Korean Women: *Seen through Independent Women's Magazines*

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Abstract

This study examines Korean independent women's magazines through the lens of subculture to understand how women of the digital-media generations are disseminating ideas through printed magazines. It reveals how Korean women in their 20s and 30s, who have often been excluded from the traditional publishing world, are able to find influence and community through independent magazines. This study also considers the history of the rise of independent women's magazines in Korea and how these magazines differ from commercial magazines for women, as well as past magazines for feminists. The rise of independent women's magazines also reflects changes in the outlook of young college-educated women, and how they are now claiming their space in a patriarchal society. The subculture dealt with in this study is not the heroic type of protest popular in the mid-20th century; rather, it is closer to the ambiguous, complex type of protest widespread in post-modern societies. Indie (independent) magazines for women function as a field of subculture that strengthens the sense of community among women in their 20s and 30s and helps confirm their self-identity.

Keywords: independent magazines, indies, Korean women, subculture, digital media, taste community, exclusive field

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Introduction

Young people in their 20s and 30s use new mediums of communication and have digital-based sensibilities, which has led to their appellation of “Net Generation,” “Digital Natives,” or “Millennials.” Internet-based media platforms are the most convenient platforms for cultural content creators in their 20s and 30s to gain public influence. Anyone who gains a fan base through a blog or YouTube activities can also benefit financially through advertising revenue. Moreover, these types of activities are recognized as professional experience and can bring about opportunities to gain yet more prominence. However, there are still young people who prefer printed mediums produced in limited numbers to publishing digitally. These are editors of indie, or independent, magazines.

Indie magazines began to appear in Korea with the publication of *Sinclair* (Singkeulleo) in 2000 (Shin and Park 2015). The year 2000 was also a time when interest in digital mediums was at its height as people began accessing the Internet in ever increasing numbers. However, assuming that the birth of indie magazines in 2000 was due to a nostalgia for more traditional media by those frustrated with the culture surrounding digital media would be incorrect. Indie magazines are published by independent publishers, meaning that small numbers of copies are published by publishing houses unaffiliated with conglomerates or multi-national corporations. Independent publishers are generally outside the mainstream distribution network based on the capitalist system, and because their content is considered less commercially-oriented, they generally deal with topics that are bypassed by the existing publishing market (Jeon 2013).

There is an independent book fair called Unlimited Edition that brings together indie producers and consumers. This event, which began in 2009 with just 900 visitors, had 18,200 visitors in December 2017 (Gu and Jang 2018). The number of independent bookstores selling indie magazines has also increased considerably over the past ten or so years, with statistics from late 2017 indicating there are around 277 such bookstores in Korea.¹ This

1. Jae-seung Jeong, “Dongnip seojeom hyeonsang” (Independent Bookstore Phenomenon),

demonstrates that interest in indie magazines has moved beyond being a temporary fad to a steadily growing phenomenon.

Unlike digital mediums that provide platforms accessible by anyone, indie magazines are platforms shared only by those who produce and consume them, forming a field exclusive unto themselves. Newspaper articles that discuss the reasons for the popularity of indie magazines provide explanations ranging from the magazines being a “medium for poor yet witty young people” (*Hankyoreh*, March 22, 2012) to describing them as holding “unique sentiments and values not seen in publications by older generations” (*Dong-A Ilbo*, February 26, 2015). By being part of the *youth culture* and distinguishing themselves from older generations, the producers and consumers of indie magazines represent a community protesting a mainstream culture dominated by capital and power.

The spirit of resistance by young people toward mainstream culture is a key concept employed in research on subcultures. Research on subcultures, including the Mods of the late 1950s, Hippies of the 1960s, and Punks of the 1970s, has long focused on theories related to youth culture and that culture’s rejection of the values and ethics of the dominant culture. Until the late 1970s, in the West the term *subculture* was used almost synonymously with *protest culture*. The main agents of protest culture can be defined in relation to the main agents of the dominant culture that form a society’s hierarchical structure. In other words, subculture has been explained within the context of hierarchy between different classes, such as workers resisting capitalists; between generations, such as young people resisting the generation of their parents; between those with different sexual orientations, such as heterosexuals and homosexuals; and between races, such as people of color versus white people (Hebdige 1998).

However, the significance of protest in subcultures has gradually weakened, and the dichotomy between mainstream culture and non-mainstream culture has led to an emphasis on cultural hybridism. Within a post-modernist atmosphere of diverse thinking and styles, it is no longer easy for heroes of protest to become to subculture icons. The term post-

JoongAng Ilbo, August 23, 2018.

subculture began to gain prominence in the academic world from 1987, and it was from around this time that heroism in subcultures virtually ended (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). A symposium on the topic of post-subculture was even held in Vienna in 2001. The full-fledged discourse on post-subcultures began in the early 2000s, leading researchers to focus on the culture of the digital-media generation without an overreaching emphasis on the spirit of protest. The discourse on subculture is instead focused on the inherent values and preferences of individuals or groups.

This study is an attempt to link the expanding indie magazine culture among Korea's youth to subcultural action on a practical level. It focuses on indie magazines for women targeted at young, college-educated female consumers. Previous studies have determined the reasons for the sudden prevalence of independent publishing in the last five years, explaining the increase in independent publishing as due to social and psychological factors (Gu and Jang 2018), or describing the cultural reasons behind the success of the independent book fair (C. Oh 2016). No study has yet analyzed the topic by relating the content of indie magazines to their producers and consumers. Moreover, there has been little research on women's indie magazines, except for cursory references to the rise of young women.

According to 2015 statistics, the majority of visitors attending independent book fairs and the main consumers of indie publications were women in their 20s and early 30s (C. Oh 2016). Notable especially is the participation of college-educated women in the indie publication industry.² In fact, the birth of Korean women's magazines itself around a century ago coincides with the rise of educated Korean women; by the 1920s, a generation of women with a secondary education emerged, and there was even a very small number of female intellectuals who had studied abroad. Women's magazines in Korea began to be published at this time and played a role in the spread of the concept among educated women of new families and women's changing positions in society (Kim 2017). Since then, however, the nature of women's magazines has changed considerably, and it seems

2. Dae-hee Lee, "chotburi hwaljjak pil ttae, dongnip chulpan-do tteotda" (When the Candles are in Full Bloom, Independent Press Rises Too), *pressian.com*, November 30, 2016.

that college-educated women of the 21st century have come again to desire magazines to share their stories.

The indie magazines selected for this study have all published at least two issues in the last five years. The publishers, contributors, and editors of these magazines are women who want to tell not superficial stories but stories about the real lives of women. Data collection was mainly done through visits to the Seoul International Book Fair, the Seoul Art Book Fair (Unlimited Edition), and indie bookstores in Seoul from October 2016 to May 2019. The researcher interviewed several producers of women's indie magazines and bookstore managers in person and was assisted by secondary sources such as *Independent Publishing, Here and Now* (Jeon 2013) and *We, Independent Publishers* (Kang et al. 2016). The characteristics of female consumers were investigated through participation in reading groups at women-friendly indie book-café.

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first is to examine why young college-educated women who are familiar with digital media feel the need for printed space. The second is to establish a theoretical basis for the subcultural connection between producers and consumers mediated by independent women's magazines.

The Background to the Popularity of Independent Women's Magazines

An Exclusive Field for the Digital-Media Generation

The publishing industry subculture has developed as part of the acceptance of diversity for minorities. One example of this is the independent publishing that was active in the United States during the 1960s. Publications with topics like mysticism, homosexuality, and feminism, those written by black or new writers, and other manuscripts that were considered lacking in potential for commercial use, were not accepted by established publishing houses. These writings were instead commonly published through small-scale publishing houses, and they were sold through indie bookstores run by individuals or non-profit organizations. The founder and editor of

Dustbooks, Len Fulton, gave his evaluation of the independent publishing culture in the United States during the 1960s as “the last, desperate socio-cultural and spiritual protest taken against the big machine by individuals” (Brown 2003, as cited in Park 2018, 402). Fulton viewed indie publishing as a subcultural phenomenon within the publishing industry because it constituted a struggle against authority and the methods employed by the established publishing industry.

A similar subcultural movement arose in Korea's publishing industry in the 1990s. Small-scale publishing attempted to protest several phenomena of the mainstream publishing industry of the period: the methods used by major bookstores and online book sellers to sell bestsellers; the reality of major publishing houses dominating the publishing market; and the literary world's emphasis on whether a writer had gained prominence. However, Korea's indie publishing culture can no longer be simply called a subculture of the broader publishing industry given that, since the 2000s, it has spread through society with the publication of indie magazines, even during an era of digital media. Indeed, the culture surrounding indie publishing in Korea has moved away from simply publishing and now appears to be a subculture aiming to realize small changes in all areas of Korean society.

It was Pierre Bourdieu, the sociologist who analyzed class through the concept of exclusive fields, who introduced the concept of *field* in his research on French publishing in the mid-1960s (Eun 2016). This concept suggested that the act of publishing and reading any given book, from the perspective of drawing distinction, allowed it to be read symbolically. However, the book-related culture, which only allowed writers of prominence the special right of being published, has changed, leading to an era where anyone can produce a book. The increase in amateurs ardently pursuing their personal hobbies across a wide-range of fields led to the production of books filled with content obtained from their own experiences, often resulting in books even more vivid than those by experts (Kang et al. 2016). The era where amateurs were unconditionally considered second-rate is over, and in terms of producing fresh content, amateurs have frequently surpassed the experts. The significance of class *distinctiveness* inherent in the act of publishing a book has accordingly decreased, and the authority once

held by established writers has dimmed.

In terms of the characteristics of the digital-media generations, one needs to broadly understand the heterogeneous, mixed culture of 21st-century subculture, including those areas that have been sidelined by mainstream culture and rejected by the values and morals that dominate society. There may be a need to deal with subculture as a cultural presence whose identity defies easy and clear definition. If the focus is placed not on the act of protest itself but, rather, widened to include the experiences, expressions, and ambiguous yet meaningful bodily actions and signals, then the scope of that subculture can expand.

One example was the act of *sending souls* to a women's film in April 2019, which refers to the purchase of several theater seats even if the purchasers do not attend the movie themselves.³ While a few tickets are not very helpful for box office success, a sign of support for a favorite movie is meaningful. Participation in a reading club is another such example. A feminist book café named Doing, located in Gangnam area of Seoul, offers book reading meetings once a month, with the author of the book invited as a guest speaker. This researcher attended these meetings twice and found that most of the participants were women in their twenties and thirties who attended alone. When the meeting ends, the attendees scatter without saying goodbye. Though such gatherings have nothing to do with acts of protest, participation is never meaningless.

The digital-media generations are as isolated as islands and yet connected to each other. Michel Maffesoli, the French sociologist, explained neo-tribalist culture in the following way: "Wired communications and electronic mediums created the basis for the catalyst for communication, and within this various tribes appeared with diverse objectives and external appearances and they remained robust until disappearing" (Maffesoli 2017, 246). Maffesoli's idea of tribes was not related to class, gender, and religion; rather, he was referring to social groups that shared the same thinking or had commonalities in their consumption habits or lifestyles.

3. Yoon-seok Na, "Peminijeum yeolpung: yeonghon bonaegi teurendeu" (Wave of Feminism: Trend of Sending Souls), *Seoul Economic Daily*, May 19, 2019.

An individual in a tribal society *participates in*—rather than being *affiliated with*—the tribe, and usually he or she is simultaneously participating in two or more other tribes. The members of tribes consider individual need and satisfaction to be more important than collective values or political idealism; as such, they are characterized by their constant movement from one tribe to another according to their own current interests (Maffesoli 2017).

The authors of independent magazines introduce themselves in a self-deprecating way, “a 23-year-old college graduate, 15 million won in student loan debt, no parental heritage and no employment,” or “originally a college student, sometimes a part-timer, still unemployed.”⁴ Their parents’ generation believes that finding a job and getting married right after college to be parts of the natural course of life and which must be achieved at a young age. But this has become a daunting task for these women. Young people tend to be engrossed in their lives *right here and right now* rather than preparing for an uncertain future. The criteria of what is meaningful to them centers on the self, and they are somewhat cynical of broader narratives involving, for example, national debates and the progress of history.

As Japanese subculture theorist Hiroki Azuma explained, “At a time of post-capitalism where life’s uncertainties have grown so much that they make planning or preparing for the future impossible, the narratives of have themselves been lost” (Azuma 2007, 164). Azuma (2007) also mentions the appearance of a new generation he deemed *database animals*—people who rely on digital mediums while living their lives as isolated as islands. Like *otaku*, who immerse themselves in only the things they like within their daily lives and retreat from broader society, individuals in post-capitalist societies are gradually burrowing deeper inside themselves.

Even writers who publish in indie magazines have an *otaku*-like characteristic to them in that they speak for individuals who are isolated. Generally speaking, writers have a desire for their writings to be widely read and to influence society at large. However, indie magazines are produced in small numbers and distributed in a small number of bookstores that sell

4. “Du yeoja-ui nodeulseom seosikgi” (Two Women’s Nodeul Island habitat), *Wolgan ingyeo* (Monthly Surplus), no. 16 (2015).

independently produced publications. This means that the distribution structure in place is not conducive to allowing many people to read their work. If they spread their work through digital media, they may succeed in securing more readers. Moreover, if the reception of their work on digital media is positive, that work may then be published by top publishing houses.

However, instead of going down this road, producers of indie magazines are content with staying within the confines of the more *exclusive* printed magazine world. They continue to publish their work, perfectly content with their limited number of readers. They have a similar tendency to that of the *otaku* in that, in Azuma's words, "they aim to satisfy themselves without many other people" within a society "where broad sympathy does not exist" (Azuma 2007, 148, 162).

Jang Eun-soo, a commentator on the publishing industry, interviewed indie publishers on a program devoted to books and broadcast by KBS1 in 2015.⁵ He summarized the three reasons these publishers liked independent publishing. The first was that they wanted to find their own stories. The second was that they wanted to move beyond the same topics addressed by traditional magazines. The third reason, according to Jang, was their desire to share with their friends and solidify those relationships through publications. Indie magazine producers create magazines on the basis of their own individual characteristics, philosophies, and awareness of issues. They place meaning on the entire process of publishing their magazines, from raising money and writing articles to the editing process.

Commenting on the reasons for the publication of a paper magazine, the editor of the indie women's magazine *Sister's Yard* (*Eonni ne madang*), Jeong Ju-yeon, said, "Above all, the process of making a book is similar to life. It's not a digital media buzzword, it's my life on paper."⁶ Similarly, Lee Jeong-ok, editor-in-chief of the indie women's magazine *Way*, commented,

5. Jeoung-kyun Kim, director, "TV chaek-eul boda" (TV Watches Books), TV series no. 84, KBS1, August 24, 2015.

6. Ju-yeon Jeong, editor of *Eonni ne madang* (Sister's Yard), interview by author, Seoul, May 27, 2019.

“What I write on social networks spreads out in the air. It’s a piece of information that’s consumed. But the printed text remains on the paper without flying away.”⁷

The popularity of indie magazines is related to the desires of the agents of subculture who are attempting to create an exclusive cultural field distinct from the distracted general public that hangs out on digital media. At a glimpse, they appear to be people who enjoy the non-digital nature of the printed book, but in reality, those involved in indie magazines are thoroughly part of the digital generation and are fluent in the workings of the mediums of digital space. An important fact here is that despite their creation of printed books, they view the world through the lens of digital media.

The environment where an individual in a tribal society can have fun alone is, at its foundation, satisfied by the development of information and communication technology, and digital media have allowed the development of a culture of sharing bonds and exchanges among isolated individuals. However, the producers of indie magazines and their consumers are sometimes looking for seclusion in printed spaces, free from the eyes of the digital public. They do not want to conduct meaningless communication and waste valuable energy through digital media with a public that holds different opinions. The subcultural characteristics of independent magazines in Korea are different from those of the West; they seek to maintain *exclusivity* from the general public rather than confrontation with mainstream groups.

Drawing Distinctions with Familial Women's Magazines

In general, women's magazines by mainstream publishers classify its female readers into single women in their 20s and 30s and married women in their 30s to 50s. Magazines that focus on unmarried female readers devote much of their article space to beauty and wedding planning, while magazines for married female readers focus on raising children and home decor.

The first magazine for women, *Sinyeoseong* (New Woman)—whose first

7. Jeong-ok Lee, editor-in-chief of *Way*, interview by author, Seoul, May 22, 2019.

issue appeared in 1923—along with other women’s magazines of modern times, espoused the aims of female enlightenment across two areas. The first area involved unmarried women and focused on ensuring they realized that women have the right to freely date and select their own marriage partners. The second area involved married women and placed emphasis on their need to take charge of their own roles as the female head of the nuclear family, which was centered on the mother and father, rather than to simply live as a member of a broader family within the traditional patriarchal system (Kim 2017).

The ideal of the nuclear family as promoted by women’s magazines was only fully realized in Korea in the 1980s with urbanization and the mass spread of apartment complexes. The Korean nuclear family that emerged during this period has two distinct characteristics: the increased role of housewives in managing the household economy, and the significant increase in family resources dedicated to child-rearing and education, although the average number of children per household had decreased. The pattern of nuclear family-centered apartment living coincided with the rapid increase in the consumption of household appliances, such as large TVs and refrigerators, which peaked in the mid-1980s (Yim and Lee 2017).

Middle-class familialism and family-oriented consumerism are fundamental factors in the flourishing of women’s magazines. The early 1990s were the heyday of women’s magazines. The middle class, with purchasing power, had a growing desire to enjoy leisure time, and women’s magazines put forward housewives as the main agents of cultural consumption. Idyllic home images presented by women’s magazines, including children’s rooms with fairy-tale decorations and kitchens furnished with high-tech gadgets, became the dream of middle-class Koreans (Yim and Lee 2017).

But in 1997, Korea faced an economic crisis caused by foreign exchange shortages, which resulted in IMF intervention and the effective collapse of the country’s stable middle-class family. Women currently in their 20s and 30s were children in 1997, and in many cases had to watch helplessly as their families fell into poverty. Unlike their parents, these young people came to believe that no matter how hard they try they will be unable to enter

the middle class. It was from this time that the aforementioned individuals began to appear like islands and familial magazines for women began to lose their direction.

According to Shin Kyung-hee's 2018 study (Shin 2018), which compiled statistics from examining articles in three mainstream women's magazines over the previous five years, the content of these magazines can be broken down as follows, by topic:

Table 1. Classification of Articles in Korean Women's Magazines (2013–2017)

Topics	%	Details	%
Celebrities	46.4	Pop-culture figures	75.7
		Political and other figures	24.3
		Subtotal	100
Domestic lifestyle	31.0	Fashion and beauty	53.7
		Cooking	25.4
		Home decor	20.9
		Subtotal	100
Family care	16.5	Sex and health	44.1
		Travel and hobbies	21.3
		Raising children	20.2
		Financial know-how	14.4
		Subtotal	100
Other articles	6.1		
Total	100		

Source: Shin (2018).

Note: The three journals analyzed by Shin (2018) were *Lady KyeongHyang* (Reidi gyeongyang), *Jubu saenghwal*, and *Yeoseong JoongAng*.

As shown in Table 1, the content of mainstream women's magazines, which is mainly focused on family life, differs from that of independent women's magazines, which is focused on the self-reliance of individuals, as discussed further below.

Women's magazines, as with other mainstream periodicals, are largely dependent on advertising revenue, and thus, they are inevitably full of promotional articles. According to advertising studies researcher Oh Hyun-sook, reporters for women's magazines try to satisfy their magazine's advertisers by frequently writing articles for the likely consumers of the products featured within the magazine's advertisements (H. Oh 2011). Women's magazines are turning into magazines for potential consumers who have the money to buy advertised products, rather than venues for stories about the real lives of women. Moreover, many women's magazines fail to provide realistic information about the paths young women take in society, and this has caused them to fall behind other mediums as a source of information for women about life (Yi and Jeong 2014).

Of course, the main crisis facing mainstream women's magazines is the decrease in demand for printed magazines. Most women's magazines have a digital presence, and they even use influential people on social networks to complement the content in the printed versions of their magazines. Yet despite such efforts, women's magazines are failing to return to their influential past role, when they served as the leading communication platform for women. Their sluggish attempts to reflect some of the opinions of Internet users only exposes a failure to adjust to the transformed ways of communicating through digital media. The temporary shutdown of the general women's magazine *Yeoseong JoongAng* after its January 1, 2018 issue is emblematic of this situation; it was the longest women's magazine in print in Korea.⁸

In December 2017, a month before *Yeoseong JoongAng* halted publication, copies of a novel called *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*, written by a woman in her 30s named Cho Nam-joo, sold over 500,000 copies and made the bestseller list. Many women strongly identified with the novel's female protagonist, who, as a woman in her mid-30s, takes center stage in a vividly detailed narrative about her sufferings in the deeply-rooted Confucian and patriarchal Korean

8. Il-seok Moon, "Lady Kyeonghyang and Yeoseong JoongAng: Janggi hugan-ui uimi" (*Lady Kyeonghyang and Yeoseong JoongAng's Suspension of Publication*), *Breaknews*, December 24, 2017.

society. Additionally, in May 2016, before that book was released, a woman in her 20s was randomly killed in a Gangnam Station bathroom, and anger about this incident from women in their 20s and 30s reached astronomic heights. The social atmosphere at the time demanded anything but women's magazines full of advertisements; rather, a place exclusive to women was needed as a space to share writing that broke the ice and frankly diagnosed the realities facing women.

Unlike regular magazines, indie magazines use crowdfunding to cover their publishing costs, and thus they are defined by having no or very little space devoted to commercial advertising. Moreover, unlike commercially oriented magazines, indies are not bound by the need to maintain a large readership or advertising revenues; the energy propelling indie magazines has been driven by a thinking unburdened by the need to satisfy the general public or advertisers. Publishers of these magazines believe that their work only need be read by and sold to those people who want to read it (Kang et al. 2016).

Tumblebug is a well-known crowdfunding platform, and in the aftermath of the 2016 Gangnam Station murder, independent publications with the theme of *feminism* became the platform's number one target of funding (Gu and Jang 2018, 120). Women's magazines that relied on advertising were not prepared to hold discussions about feminism, and because there were many cases of fights breaking out between male and female participants in online *chat rooms*, indie magazines for women seemed to be the most appropriate forum to handle discussions on the topic. Amateur female writers, who had had no opportunity to discuss their opinions because of the many people who unconditionally rejected anything related to feminism, gained courage from the smaller readership of indie women's magazines.

Indie magazines for women cannot be seen as completely non-commercial despite their lack of reliance on advertising and advertising revenue. The market size and readership of women's magazines and indie magazines for women are different: indie magazines for women further differentiate themselves by not targeting the general public as their readership base. This has led to the coexistence of the magazine format,

which is based on mass production and mass consumption, with the era of the informal zine, whose diverse content is read by a small number of consumers.

The Subcultural Characteristics of Indie Magazines for Women

The Formation of Solidarity Among Individual Women

IF, a general women's magazine that officially espoused feminism, was first published in May 1997. In an article commemorating the first issue, the magazine's editor, Pak Mira, argued that women needed to take a leading role in inquiring what life as a woman is all about, stating *IF* had been created to seek answers to that question (Pak 1997). Contributors to *IF* were all female intellectuals, and the magazine was clearly different from existing women's magazines because it acted as a whistle-blower in terms of dealing with gender-related social issues. Until it folded in 2006, *IF* dealt with major gender-related issues still relevant today.

As cases of sexual harassment and assault came increasingly to light and began to enter the social discourse beginning in January 2018 as a result of the #MeToo movement, *IF* began publication again in February 2018, after a more than 20-year hiatus, thanks to Tumblebug funding. The original *IF* magazine relied on advertising revenue to stay afloat, but the re-released version in 2018 covered its costs through crowdfunding. And its issues were sold at the same independent bookstores as other indie women's magazines.

Indie women's magazines have chosen to create solidarity among women from the bottom up rather than espousing feminism in the direct, enlightened top-down manner adopted by *IF*. Cho Pak Seonyong, editor for the 20th anniversary commemorative *IF* book, points out that, "*IF* was started by feminists from a wide-array of backgrounds in media, academia and cultural arts who had either studied women's studies or had accumulated experience in feminist cultural movements. On the other hand, contemporary indie magazines for women differ from *IF* because they are forming their bonds of solidarity within communities of women in their 20s

and 30s.”⁹ Cho Pak also hints at the fact that by creating publications after a bond of solidarity has been formed, indie magazines are published with contemporaneous points of interest in mind rather than based on a vision for the future or sustainable foundation.

The types of indie magazines for women in Korea that have either published more than two issues still continue to be published as of February 2019 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Korean Indie Magazines for Women (as of February 2019)

	Magazine name	Main content	First issue	Latest issue
1	<i>Quarterly Alone</i> (<i>Gyegan hollo</i>)	Non-dating single life	February 2013	October 2018, Issue 13
2	<i>Erotic Fetish Art Book</i> (<i>Jeotjeun japji</i>)	Sexual desires of women	August 2013	November 2016, Issue 9
3	<i>Jokes for Old Virgins</i> (<i>Nocheonyeo-ege geonneneun nong</i>)	Aging single women	May 2014	December 2015, Issue 4
4	<i>Sister's Yard</i> (<i>Eonni ne madang</i>)	Sisterhood	September 2014	November 2018, Issue 11
5	<i>Girl Literature</i> (<i>Sonyeo munhak</i>)	Literature written from a feminist point of view	June 2015	June 2018, Issue 4
6	<i>Errant Magazine</i> (<i>Ddanjit Magazine</i>)	Opposition to authoritarian life	September 2015	February 2018, Issue 8/ November 2018 (bound volume)
7	<i>For Heart</i> (<i>Sasim</i>)	Women's studies for beginners	October 2015	March 2017, Issue 6 (final issue)
8	<i>Small Letter f</i> (<i>Somunja f</i>)	Daily lives of feminists	April 2016	September 2016, Issue 2
9	<i>Second Film Magazine</i> (<i>Sekeondeu pireum maegeojin</i>)	Female image as represented in film	May 2016	July 2018, Issue 3
10	<i>Queer Feminist Magazine FeRM</i> (<i>Kwioe peminiseuteu maegeojin perm</i>)	Discussion of sexual minorities	June 2016	July 2018, Issue 4 (total of 5 issues)

9. Mee-young Kim and Dool-rae Gu, “Peminijeum dongnip chulpan japji, jisik-gwa jaemi da japji” (Independent Feminist Magazines, for Both Knowledge and Fun), *Hankyoreh*, March 20, 2017.

	Magazine name	Main content	First issue	Latest issue
11	<i>Movie Feminism</i> (<i>Mubi peminijeum</i>)	Movie talk from a feminist point of view	April 2017	March 2018, Issue 4/ July 2018 (reprint of Issue 1)
12	<i>Monthly Resigned</i> (<i>Wolgan toesa</i>)	Life before and after quitting a job	October 2017	May 2018, Issue 3
13	<i>Woman's Life</i> (<i>Yeoseong saenghwal</i>)	Women's self-reliant lives	December 2017	February 2018, Issue 2
14	<i>Hysterian</i> (<i>Hiseuterian</i>)	Book talk from a feminist point of view	February 2018	June 2018, Issue 2

Among the 14 titles listed in Table 2, any given independent bookstore will usually sell three to six of them. Park Kwang-taek, manager of an independent bookstore called *Hutsory Lab* (Nonsense Lab) said, “We only deal with three independent women’s magazines, which is not many, but they sell steadily among young women. *Quarterly Alone* (*Gyegan hollo*) is relatively good for sales. On average, however, independent women’s magazines account for about 10 percent of total sales. I heard that multi-purpose women’s bookshops, which are also used as spaces for women, sell much more than we do here.”¹⁰

Excluding the five indie magazines in Table 2 that focus mainly on literary or film criticism, the remaining nine (those shaded in the table) publish stories about daily life. These nine magazines publish works relating to the real-life experiences of Korean women on the individual level. They do not divide the reality of women’s lives into being married or single. These magazines include stories that delve deeply into what Korean society silently demands of young people or women in their daily lives, including the story of a woman who left her job because of conflict in her workplace and a woman who experienced symptoms of amenorrhea due to stress.

Indie magazines for women include many articles by women using witty aliases or pen names that act as secret confessions, which are difficult

10. Kwang-taek Park, manager of *Hutsory Lab* (Nonsense Lab), interview by author, Seoul, May 23, 2019.

to share in public. The main objective of these publications is the creation of solidarity with other women through the sharing of personal experiences, while also attempting to publicly discuss, in an indirect manner, a society that fails to judge the value of women through a diverse set of criteria.

Taking *Sister's Yard* as an example, most of the magazine's editors have a college degree or high, and are freelancers whose careers have been cut off by marriage or parenting. Likewise, readers who participate in magazine-sponsored events are mostly college-educated job seekers or young women who have lost their social status by living without regular jobs.¹¹ To identify the core content of women's independent magazine articles, this researcher analyzed articles in *Sister's Yard* and *Errant Magazine*, the two women's indie magazines that have been published most consistently over the last five years. I divided the various articles according to three broad themes: self-reliant life, freedom from family values, and anti-authoritarianism, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Classification of Women's Indie Magazine Articles

Magazine name	Publication year	Total articles	Articles about self-reliant life	Articles about freedom from family values	Articles about anti-authoritarianism	Other articles
<i>Sister's Yard</i> (<i>Eonni ne madang</i>)	2014	47	21	8	15	3
	2015	79	46	11	21	1
	2016	68	31	26	9	2
	2017	38	14	15	8	1
	2018	67	33	15	19	0
	Total	299	145	75	72	7

11. Ju-yeon Jeong, editor of *Eonni ne madang* (Sister's Yard), interview by author, Seoul, May 27, 2019.

Magazine name	Publication year	Total articles	Articles about self-reliant life	Articles about freedom from family values	Articles about anti-authoritarianism	Other articles
<i>Errant Magazine</i> (<i>Ddanjit Magazine</i>)	2015	40	25	2	11	2
	2016	54	31	5	16	2
	2017	33	18	5	6	4
	2018	39	16	5	17	1
	Total	166	90	17	50	9

The three topics derived here were also common themes in articles from other indie magazines for women. First, we will examine the idea of a self-reliant life. A primary readership demographic of indie magazines for women are those who feel discontent about having failed to build their own economic security due to their inability to find a proper job within Korea's capitalist society—a society, in other words, that requires money to obtain independence. For example, issues 1 and 2 of the *Monthly Resigned*, which were published in 2017, ran a total of 18 stories by women who had left their jobs. The writers all agreed that after leaving their jobs, they became *human beings who left their jobs*—not just unemployed—and that they had found, for the first time, their own ways of expressing themselves.¹²

In the December 2015 issue of *Errant Magazine*, one article argued there was no reason to feel defeated about life as a whole if one does not get a job; rather, that one should move beyond being chained to an organization and find something one can do on one's own. "We always thought that we had to become office workers, but it's actually just OK to do whatever job we want. There is, of course, no need to go to work just to obtain a career. Aren't we placing too much emphasis on being a part of an organization?"¹³

12. Jee-yun Park, "Toesa ingan" (People Who Resigned from their Companies), *Hankook Ilbo*, March 10, 2018.

13. "Suda-ga mureuikneun bam" (Night Chat), *Ddanjit Magazine* (Errant Magazine), December 2015.

The magazines also criticize defining female identity within the limited frameworks of love, while further criticizing women who seek happiness based on the opinions of others rather than taking control of their own lives. Issue 9 of *Quarterly Alone*, published in 2016, builds on this further: “The assumption that women can only be happy if they are loved projects onto them a sense of passivity. It completely ignores the preferences and independent sense of self that women can have as human beings. Women are people. Only pet dogs are in need of absolute care by others.”¹⁴

A second theme observed in all of the indie women's magazines is freedom from family values, for these magazines promote ideas that differ considerably from traditional Korean views on marriage and motherhood. The magazine *Jokes for Old Virgins* is full of articles criticizing the notion that women must date and Korea's marriage culture more broadly, which projects the belief that, in order to have a normal life, women must get married and have children before they miss their opportunity. Issue 9 of *Quarterly Alone* points out that “The problem is not simply dating or marriage in itself; rather, the issue is [the idea] that these things are required to live a normal life.”¹⁵ Issue 9 of *Sister's Yard*, published in 2017, argues that “Pressure to ‘fit the standard’ is higher on women than men. That Korean society's emphasis on a ‘womanly standard’ for women is perpetrating violence against them in the name of fitting that standard.”¹⁶

The third characteristic observed in almost all indie magazines for women is the concept of anti-authoritarianism. These magazines reserve disrespect for people who, by virtue of their advanced age or higher rank, believe they are unconditionally correct and ignore the opinions of others. Issue 10 of *Sister's Yard*, published in 2018, presented articles based on readers' opinions about the types of adults undeserving of respect. Most of the responses were similar to this: “It's not right for an older person—no

14. Jee-in Yoo, “Na-reul saranghaejuneun vs. nae-ga saranghaneun” (Someone Who Loves Me vs. Someone Whom I Love), *Gyegan hollo* (Quarterly Alone), August 2016.

15. Yellow (alias), “Gwahakgeok-igodo eoreon-seureoumyeo” (Scientific and Mature), *Gyegan hollo* (Quarterly Alone), August 2016.

16. Peruae (alias), “Ot-e manneun mom” (Body Fitted for Suit-Size), *Eonni ne madang* (Sister's Yard), February 2017.

matter how much they know and how experienced they are—to tell others to unconditionally adhere to and follow their [the older person’s] own way of life. Their knowledge and experience only applies to their own life.”¹⁷

Like most of the content uploaded to social networks, the articles of indie magazines for women are searching for small-scale bonds of solidarity based on everyday lives: what women see, hear, and eat, and who they meet. However, we cannot ignore the small, personal narratives in a post-modern society where master narratives have lost their power. The objective of publishing women’s indie magazines is to manage the mood to ensure these bonds continue to be formed.

Club Culture for Taste Communities

Bourdieu’s *Distinction* emphasizes that “the distinguishing of experiences creates mutual habitus of different types” (Bourdieu 2006, 312). The producers of indie magazines for women aim to create a space of writing centered on their own value systems and lifestyles, rather than being content with the stories of others created by established publishing outlets. They move beyond just creating publications that are distinctive to establishing works that create habitus, revealing their own preferences and the methods and attitudes of enjoying them.

Bourdieu calls those who possess cultural capital, or a friendliness toward culture, *cultural intermediaries*, and focuses on those who manage TV or radio educational programs, as well as critics, writers, journalists, and reviewers who publish in high-end newspapers and weekly magazines. Bourdieu describes cultural intermediaries in the publication industry as *taste makers* who effectively intervene in the industry while wielding the power and influence of public figures toward the distribution of books (Bourdieu 2006, as cited in S. Lee 2010, 157). Producers of indie magazines for women can also be called cultural intermediaries. However, they are not experts within the mainstream culture that dominate the upper crust of

17. Garam (alias), “Eoreun-ui eolgul” (Face of Elders), *Eonni ne madang* (Sister’s Yard), March 2018.

society, such as professors, broadcast producers, or journalists; rather, they are non-mainstream publishers who have *otaku*-like characteristics and are also amateur writers who have made writing a serious hobby.

The amateurish sentiments of indie magazines for women become clear in the drawings, illustrations, photos, and comics created by writers and editors that appear unrefined, even sloppy. Their writing uses B-grade cultural language that is also unrefined and fits exactly with their strategy of enticing young readers. B-grade cultural language refers to language that sounds cheap, vulgar, and of poor-quality, yet, is a way of protesting and mocking high-level culture, which is both sophisticated and refined (H. Lee 2013).

Most indie magazines for women use popular slang commonly used by young people or on TV comedies. Even writers who can write as professionals revert to B-grade cultural language when writing in these magazines to intentionally create affinity between themselves and their readers. This leads to writing that appears direct and unfiltered, and even gives readers the impression that anything can be said, even something controversial.

The amateurish sentiments of indie magazines for women can be compared to the way indie music or indie films express ideas. In the United States or United Kingdom, independent publishing is synonymous with small-scale publishing; however, in Korea, the nature of independent publishing is deeply influenced by the indie arts genre. This can be seen from the fact that an independent publishing fair is called an Art Book Fair. After censorship restrictions on popular arts were relaxed in Korea in the late 1990s, indie creativity based on individual free expression gained prominence in each sphere of the popular arts. The popularity of independent publishing meshed with the popularity of and trends in indie creative culture (Park 2018).

Indie musicians and indie filmmakers were cultural producers who protested the restrictions placed on their creativity by commercial demands. As a result, they proposed alternative content and methods that differed from what was the norm in the established cultural industry. Indie publishing also received attention for having a diverse range of content and

topics and for attempting unique methods never tried before.

However, while indie music and indie films were able to shift their production and consumption to the digital world, the works of indie publishers have rarely been transferred to digital media (Eun 2016). Producers of indie magazines for women operate under the assumption that their magazines will be sold in physical bookstores. They place value on people coming and going, picking up and perusing their publications. They place their magazines in bookstores that consider the preferences of young women, i.e., small bookstores that display works selected by the owner, not large bookstores or online bookstores aimed at the masses.

Small bookstores make an effort to create a space that provides a comfortable atmosphere for taste communities and associated promotional events. Operators of small bookstores display indie magazines that are emblematic of specific tastes and lifestyles to better reveal the nature of the space. Independent bookstores that focus on the tastes of the minority, however, inevitably face limits on their profits. The owners of independent bookstores are, as expected, less interested in earning money than being immersed in their own interests, and they operate their stores to meet other readers with similar tastes.¹⁸

Just like people's belongings and clothes reflect their tastes, the indie magazines people read or the indie bookstores they visit reveal their tastes. Bourdieu called this symbolic capital, which consists of distinct symbols that allow an understanding of differences in class and is not, in fact, a reflection of subcultures. Sarah Thornton, a researcher of subcultures, argues that in the current era where class lines have blurred, the term *subcultural capital* is more appropriate than symbolic capital (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003).

Thornton explains subculture as a kind of *club culture*. Within the lines of club culture, there are complex, intersecting heterogeneous symbols that draw borders between groups. A certain action describes the tastes of a particular club, meaning that the nature of club culture gradually becomes clear as it passes through the process of being classified and reclassified as

18. Jae-seung Jeong, "Dongnip seojeom hyeonsang" (Independent Bookstore Phenomenon), *JoongAng Ilbo*, August 23, 2018.

appropriate or not. Subculture as a club culture is not stable in appearance; it is something generative that is created through daily consumption patterns and cultural actions (Thornton 1995).

If someone's consumption pattern is understood to be a club cultural activity, one could say that browsing or buying a book in an independent bookstore is also a club cultural act. This is considered an act of social communication to connect oneself with people of similar tastes, and at the same time, an attempt to create a border against others with different tastes. Lee Jeong-ok, chief-editor of *Way*, said, "Just as publishing a book is self-expression, buying a book is self-expression. That's how producers and consumers of indie magazines relate. This kind of relationship is, of course, not permanent."¹⁹

People can confirm who they are by looking at their own consumption patterns. An important process of confirming one's own identity is to receive recognition from others as a certain type of person based on the consumption of symbols that products possess. From the context of consumption society, the consumption of products does not just occur due to physical needs but is a locutionary act that confirms and reveals oneself.

The consumption of luxury brands is a typical consumption pattern that allows one to confirm an identity (due to their high prices, luxury brands are not easily purchased by the average person). Consumers who purchase luxury items of outstanding scarcity confirm their affiliation with a special group and, simultaneously, distinguish themselves from others (C. Oh 2016). The act of purchasing indie magazines for women bears witness to a similar psychology of scarcity and the feelings of affiliation at work. Similar to the few people who buy luxury goods based on their quality, while ignoring the symbolism of the brands, consumers of indie magazines for women do not purchase the magazines simply for their content. In sum, producers and consumers of indie magazines for women form new taste communities via products and attempt to receive confirmation of their own identities through the lifestyles espoused by that community.

19. Jeong-ok Lee, chief-editor of *Way*, interview by author, Seoul, May 22, 2019.

Conclusion

Indie magazines for women, just like other indie magazines, are created by young college-educated women who feel they have not entered the middle class of the capitalist class structure and who are discontent with the authoritarianism of older generations. Publishers and contributors to these magazines criticize the deeply rooted patriarchy of Korean society and raise issues with a women's magazine culture that is chained to the notion of female domesticity. This study discussed the character of indie magazines for women relative to middle class family-oriented women's magazines.

The sense of protest inherent in indie magazines for women can be felt within the complex structure of conflict that is inseparably intertwined with class and generational differences and gender consciousness. However, this sense of struggle is not part of a grand discourse that includes female enlightenment or the overturning of a patriarchal society. The places where indie magazines for women connect with the subcultural phenomenon of the 21st century are the taste communities of diverse minorities, rather than in the act of struggle itself. This study's analysis of indie magazines for women through the framework of subculture was able to draw out the following three points.

First, producers of indie magazines for women are generally college-educated women in their 30s and they target female readers in their 20s and 30s. Women in their 20s and 30s have been relegated to the farthest sidelines without a cultural center that allows for their self-expression, and they have failed to dominate the press and publishing worlds. Through indie magazines for women, however, they have gained an exclusive field.

Second, this study illuminated the changes in the publishing industry through indie magazines for women caused by the combination of non-digital sentiments and the digital environment. Indie magazines are the result of the mixture of non-digital platforms of printed books and bookstores absorbed by the digital-media generation, which has formed networks based on shared interests. This easily explains the phenomena whereby the main agents of the publishing culture are shifting away from male intellectuals in their 40s and 50s toward amateur women in their 20s and 30s.

Third, this study pointed out that the lines between subcultures and dominant cultures have blurred. This phenomenon has a major cultural impact, and it is worth conducting future research using specific case studies on this phenomenon. For example, the famous Japanese modern artist Murakami Takashi succeeded in distinguishing himself in the world art market through a strategy that combined pop art and *otaku* culture. Japan's *otaku* culture was an exclusive one of isolated individuals, but it was absorbed by commercially popular cultural fields, like games and animation, and even extended into the sphere of *high art*. This can be seen as a result of the borderless exchange between a subculture and dominant culture.

As this shows, after beginning as individuals' hobbies and expanding into minority groups, subcultures hold infinite potential to cross over into the field of popular and high culture. Indie magazines for women will function as a field of subculture that intervenes in the territory of existing culture to precipitate changes, both large and small.

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