Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter explains the purpose of this research, beginning with the research question and its place in existing knowledge regarding Korean migrant women (KMW) in the Australian labour market. Three issues inherent in the research question are raised and discussed, providing the background for the research and an overview of current conceptions relevant to KMW in Australia. The remainder of the chapter highlights the narrative analytical approach that the research adopts in order to examine the research question. It goes on to explain what is innovative and unique about the research and its significance. The final section provides an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This research seeks to identify, explore and test current conceptions of barriers to Korean migrant women’s access to the Australian labour market as presented in academic research and my hypothesis. In testing these identified barriers, this research aims to expose the determinative practices and effects of studying and describing migrants (particularly KMW) in the Australian labour market. The research critiques and supplements existing knowledge and studies in three ways. Firstly, it aims to reveal how white Australia dominates KMW through problematising them, regardless of their objective skills and qualifications, and despite espousing principles of access and equity, equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation. The focus is upon embedded discourses of domination that are reified in academic discussion, especially the apparently meritocratic and transparent human capital theory. Secondly, the research aims to provide some fill for the lacuna that exists with regard to studies of Asian migrants in the Australian labour market, a neglect which includes KMW. Thirdly, this research adopts a qualitative rather than quantitative approach to gathering and analysing
data of KMW in Australia, to provide a rich and complex understanding of the experience of marginalisation instead of a simplistic statistical summary of labour market participation rates.

The research is innovative in both subject and analysis. Qualitative analysis is performed here through narrative analysis: an examination of the life stories of KMW in Australia in relation to the academic discourses described above, testing for veracity, relevance, impact and alternatives. Narrative analysis offers the scope to hear the voice of the marginalised individual, otherwise generalised, summarised and silenced in quantitative studies (Boje 2001). While narrative analysis is an emerging technique in academic study, it is most likely to be applied to the narratives of those who can speak directly in the dominant language, the language of the research. In this research, life stories of KMW are recorded in Korean, translated into English and analysed using narrative analysis techniques. The labour market experiences of KMW are otherwise amongst the least likely to be studied through narrative analysis. This research is also new and unique in establishing the category of KMW while acknowledging the problematic of categorisation itself, in exploring individual and specific experiences of a shift from Korean cultures to Australian cultures and organisations, and in the nature of the division of the sample group into smaller groups for research purposes.

This research thus analyses the narrated experiences of Korean migrant women in the Australian labour market through their life stories to test existing academic notions and assumptions of labour market barriers. Three key issues for consideration may be identified within this endeavour: first, the understandings and existing literature of the Australian labour market; second, the paucity of qualitative approaches to the analysis of KMW’s ‘experience’ of the Australian labour market; and third, the categorisation and associated phenomena of defining a ‘KMW’. Each of these issues is summarised and discussed below.
1.2 Issue 1: Existing Literature and Conceptions

The first issue involves existing understandings and discourses of the Australian labour market, arising from theories of segmentation, human capital and organisations. Segmentation theory is the more established theory of a labour market divided according to gender and ethnicity, arguing that in Australia white men will dominate labour market opportunities, indigenous women will occupy the lowest rung of the ladder of opportunity, and others will rest in between (Collins 1978; Inglis & Stromback 1984; Chapman & Miller 1985; Castles et al. 1986; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988; Peck 1989; Chapman & Iredale 1990). Under this theory, KMW will sit low on the ladder, based upon their lower valued gender, race and ethnicity.

Human capital theory has evolved from segmentation theory to offer an alternative explanation for disadvantage in the labour market, focusing upon an evaluation of an individual’s apparently achievable skills or capital (Mincer 1974; Becker 1975; O’Loughlin & Watson 1997; Cobb-Clark & Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002). These skills include qualifications such as degrees, work experience, English language competence, and other qualities and attributes, such as age and physical fitness. Neither theory is entirely satisfactory, as segmentation theory offers little scope for individual agency nor human capital theory denies structurally embedded, covert discrimination practices. An emerging critique of the two theories considers the strengths and weaknesses of each and is the starting point for the development of a potential new model of the labour market. This critique considers the cultural, segmentation aspect of evaluating human capital theory, arguing that skills and qualifications are accorded value according to acceptance and similarity of individuals to the dominant culture. Despite this critique, discourses pertaining to segmentation and human capital theory continue to dominate perceptions and discussion of women migrants and thereby Korean migrant women.

Organisational theory provides another and more recent lens through which to view, discuss and understand the labour market. This emerging field of study considers
organisations as the core of social analysis, constituting ‘the most persistent and universal 
relations between individuals and … set[ting] the conditions for human action’ (Ahrne 
1994: 2). The term ‘organisation’ is used to refer to a wide range of social entities, 
characterised by formal and explicit rules of entry, exit and behaviour, including 
workplaces, schools and clubs. Organisational theory presents an understanding of 
gatekeeping, belonging, dependence and exclusion from organisations as a key aspect of 
all human experience and much social control. This research finds particularly cogent the 
notion of affiliation, or acceptance, of individuals into the voluntary but competitive 
organisations of the Australian labour market. The notion of affiliation provides that 
organisations are cultural entities largely defined by who is granted affiliation, who is 
not, why and how; and, as cultural entities rather than (ideally) meritocratic vehicles of 
industry, informal and implicit rules of entry, exit and behaviour may also be identified 
(Ahrne 1994). Each organisation has its own culture, and the rules and behaviours of one 
are never identical to another. This focus upon individual human experience of culturally 
embedded and silently understood rules of affiliation is best explored through qualitative 
analysis.

1.3 Issue 2: The Paucity of Qualitative Studies

A significant impact of the prevalence of human capital theory and discourse in current 
stimulates the majority of studies are quantitative, 
focusing upon apparently measurable indicators of qualifications and skill levels, and 
labour market participation rates. Often, these studies are based upon statistical 
collections, such as Census data. Such studies suggest a necessary link between the 
human capital and labour market participation and accommodate few other factors, such 
as individual circumstance, attitude and responsibilities. The result of this focus upon 
human capital theory is a paucity of qualitative studies that question the link between 
human capital and labour market participation and provide an understanding of the 
quality of individual experience in this context. Qualitative studies are helpful in 
revealing why particular individuals, such as KMW, may not participate in the labour 
market, without assuming, as segmentation theory does, that they are subject to racism
and sexism in Australia, or as human capital theory does, that they simply do not possess the necessary skills. Qualitative studies allow other reasons for non-participation to be considered; statistical or quantitative studies reveal particular outcomes (participation rates) but not motivations, rationales and personal struggles which are essential aspects that lead to those outcomes.

This study focuses upon revealing the experiences, including as much as possible the motivations, rationales and struggles, of KMW in the Australian labour market, and resists human capital reductionism. Qualitative analysis is best conducted through the words of those it seeks to understand and the most productive, emerging tool for this is narrative analysis. While a few qualitative studies (e.g. Watson 1993; Ho 2004) of migrant women in Australia exist, no narrative analyses of the experiences of migrants who experience linguistic difference and marginalisation (i.e. are from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) exist, making this research unique. Linguistically different, KMW represent both the least likely and least known subjects of narrative analysis in Australian academic research.

This study seeks to supplement existing quantitative research (e.g. Cobb-Clark & Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002) with a deeper and more meaningful level of understanding of how and why particular labour market trends and discourses occur and are felt by individuals. Quantitative analysis techniques are useful for collecting and interpreting information regarding labour market participation for large numbers of people, such as the entire Australian population. Qualitative narrative analyses are only practicable in highly focused studies of small research samples, such as the sample group used in this study.

Narrative analysis provides an opportunity to examine more than recorded labour market participation rates and to examine issues that lead to these rates, such as motivations to participate, unique situations and beliefs, and responses to Australian labour market processes and outcomes. Narrative analysis focuses upon the nature and quality of
experience as understood and described by those whose experience is analysed and is useful in interpreting trends of quantitative data more meaningfully. For example, it may clarify whether reduced labour market participation of KMW represents unsuccessful job hunting due to sexual or racial discrimination, or the deliberate choice not to work in order to offset escalating childcare costs or to explore other lifestyles. In this study, narrative analysis is used to hear KMW describe in their own words (notwithstanding some unavoidable translation and interpretation) how they experience and symbolically describe settling into Australia and broaching the labour market, if they have, and the decisions, factors and emotions that constitute that experience. Specific narrative analysis techniques used in this research are outlined in Chapter 3.

1.4 Issue 3: Categorisation

Korean migrant women represent a highly diverse and yet highly specific category rarely studied as a singular and defined group. Rather, KMW belong to a number of other, larger groups subject to study, many of which intersect, but none of which exactly fits. As Koreans in Australia, KMW belong to the category of migrants. As Korean migrants, they are recognised as a subset of the larger category of migrants with non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). They are also members of a larger category of Asian migrants. As noted above, existing literature reveals that while numerous (quantitative) studies of migrants and NESB migrants in the Australian labour market exist, there is a distinct lack of studies addressing Asian migrants in this context, and in particular, KMW specifically. Coughlan (1989: 300) writes that this lack is more pronounced in Australia than in Canada or the United States because of ‘an absence of a critical mass of Asian-Australian scholars’. In addition, a historical bias away from Asian migrants as skilled or desirable labour market participants may be seen as continuing in this silence. This study addresses this lack of Asian migrant studies in Australia.

To complicate the categorisation further, KMW as women represent a smaller and more specific subset of all of the categories above. Economic explanations of the labour market rewarding investment in education and experience founder when it comes to
women, describing them as having a greater investment in the family and thereby
generally lower labour market returns (Mincer & Polachek 1980). Apparently gender
neutral, meritocratic economic models of labour market participation thus include
traditional exclusion of women based upon gender roles, expectations and an appropriate
‘place’ in society. This has particular effect upon migrant women who find that
migration to Australia involves the loss of extended networks of domestic and caring
support, increased domestic responsibilities and downward mobility in the labour market
(Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988; Campbell et al. 1991; Collins 1991; Fincher et al. 1993;
Campani 1997; Yeoh & Khoo 1998; Salaff & Greve 2003).

This study attempts both to establish the category of KMW and to recognise the
determinative effect of the category. Categorisation involves the notion of identity as per
social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Whetton & Godfrey 1998; Alvesson
2000). These theories are most relevant to this study in describing an identity as based on
a set of understandings of ‘what is appropriate and natural’ (Alvesson 2000: 1105) for a
member of a particular group or category. This can be a fairly narrowly defined group or
category such as a company, occupation, department or team, or it can be something
more broadly defined such as nationality, ethnicity or gender (Turner 1982, 1984;
Ashforth & Male 1989; Covaleski et al. 1998; Doolin 2001). The social identity of
‘KMW’ would fall into this latter broader definition. Rather than focusing upon the
individual, advocates of social identity theory claim that ‘it is social, rather than highly
individualised identities that are of the greatest relevance’ (Alvesson 2000: 1105). The
social identity of the category thus forms a set of assumptions and expectations that the
individual either does or is supposed to identify with. By implication, this understanding
of who a person is, or which social identity they belong to, leads on to the issue of how
they are expected to think and behave. Social identity theorists argue that the
assumptions of what is appropriate and natural are often incorrect but maintained and
disseminated through discursive means. This research is not about the construction of
social identity *per se*, but rather about the narratives that might influence it. In
discursively creating a KMW identity it becomes incumbent on the KMW to think and
act in ways that are consistent with this identity. A KMW is not expected, nor does she
expect herself, to think or behave as a white Australian man, but the differences in thought and behaviour must be recognised less as necessary truths and more as discursive constructs, ideals and fictions.

The apparently eponymous category or social identity of KMW contains within it a binary opposition: a KMW is, most of all, not an Australian-born, white male. This opposition represents a relationship of power and domination that is likely to be perceived not in terms of neutral diversity but in terms of disadvantage (Derrida 1973). For example, the description of the KMW as different from the idealised Australian labour market participant may be mistaken for justification of disadvantage. While the creation of a category may be intended to further understanding and knowledge of people otherwise marginalised or misrepresented, it may also be (mis)used to explain the negative experiences of its members as though the description provided in itself the explanation: difference is necessarily disadvantage. This study aims to qualitatively analyse the labour market experiences of KMW in a way that is mindful of existing conceptions of issues faced by related groups of NESB migrant workers in Australia. However, the study also aims to move beyond existing conceptions and to offer an alternative paradigm for discussing KMW in the Australian labour market, derived from KMW themselves and not focusing primarily upon disadvantage. This is significant in moving away from Orientalist conceptions of the Asian ‘other’ in the West as ‘lamentably alien’ and in need of reform, and towards recognition of the impact of categorisation in studies such as these (Said 1978). This recognition aims to inform future studies of marginalised groups of the danger of reproducing dominant discourses embedded within existing quantitative and qualitative studies.
1.5 A Narrative Analytical Approach

As noted above, qualitative analysis is a significant aspect of this research in revealing individual human experience. However, beyond mere revelation of experience, narrative analysis is significant in acknowledging that, and exploring how, individuals interpret and translate their experience into their ‘own’ words. This research employs recently emerging narrative analysis techniques that focus upon the life stories of research subjects. These techniques have been particularly useful in contemporary feminist studies which aim to render individual experience significant and to privilege the experiences of those who are otherwise marginalised or unheard (Reinharz 1992). This research specifically employs antenarrative analysis, recognising that ‘narratives’ involve structure, theme and resolution, whereas ‘life stories’ is the raw material, the work in progress that precedes the construction of a formal narrative (Bertaux 1981; Turpin 1984; Cohler 1988; Riessman 1993; Rosenthal 1993; Stewart 1994; Atkinson 1998; Boje 2001). Antenarrative analysis acknowledges that many first-hand renditions of experience will wander, be unresolved, change over time and contain contradictions and misrepresentations. As much as possible, this research seeks to embrace and incorporate the process of how individuals make meaning from their life experiences, not merely to present neat summaries of those experiences.

Three types of antenarrative analysis are used in examining the life stories of KMW in this research. The first involves the identification and testing of grand narratives from current literature relevant to KMW. This is the most straightforward and predetermined form of antenarrative analysis, asking whether current understandings are supported or refuted by the life stories of this research sample and remaining firmly within the terms of those understandings. The second type of analysis involves examining microstoria that are relevant to or ‘around’ the grand narratives, focusing less on direct support or refutation and more on the quality of related experience and its interpretation. Where grand narrative analysis asks if this is so, microstoria asks how this is understood and felt. The third type of analysis involves examining the life stories free of the conceptions of the grand narratives of the literature review to develop a new grand narrative, if possible,
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directly from life stories. Together these three analytical techniques provide an assessment of current literature, an explication of how particular experiences are understood and felt, and the identification of a new paradigm for discussing KMW in the Australian labour market.

To facilitate and make more wieldy the antenarrative analysis, the sample group is subdivided into five smaller groups. The division of the sample group resists traditional taxonomies based upon human capital theory or statistical ease, such as groups defined by levels of qualifications or linguistic ability, age, visa category, recency of arrival or marital status. Rather than reiterating and reproducing these existing taxonomies, this study seeks to offer an alternative division of the group based upon human agency and individuality. These groups are defined in terms of the desire of KMW to participate in the Australian labour market. This recognises that not all KMW wish to participate in the Australian labour market and that non-participation should not necessarily be understood in terms of poor human capital value or affiliation failure. Rather, this research incorporates into its taxonomy a resistance to the conception of labour market affiliation and participation as the primary form of recognition and realisation of much human endeavour. While this research seeks to explore the interpreted and less interpreted experiences of KMW in the Australian labour market, it does not aim to ‘solve the labour market problems’ of KMW or to promote full labour market participation for all KMW as necessarily desirable.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The remaining chapters of this thesis build on the research agenda outlined in this opening chapter. Chapter 2 describes in depth the prevailing discourses regarding migrant women for whom English is not a native language in the Australian labour market, and how this research aims to critique and develop these discourses. It begins with an overview of existing literature and concludes with the identification of two testable propositions concerning KMW in the Australian labour market. Chapter 3
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explores the theoretical issues and basis of the research methodology of this research, focusing upon the utility of narrative analysis in the context of this study. Antenarrative analysis is defined and examined, concluding with identification of the three analysis techniques that directly test the propositions, allowing for relevant issues not directly included in them and discerning what is beyond their scope and terms. Chapter 4 describes the practical application of narrative analysis techniques to the life stories of the sample group, testing and moving beyond the identified propositions. It begins with a description of how the research data was collected and analysed, including the rationale and justification for dividing the sample group into five smaller groups based upon current labour market participation and desire to participate.

Chapters 5 to 9 constitute the antenarrative analysis of the research, each chapter addressing one of the groups within the larger sample. Here, a selection of life stories is presented and analysed in terms of the two propositions and the three types of antenarrative analysis. Chapter 5 includes two life stories from KMW who had never participated in the labour market and had no desire to do so at any time. Chapter 6 presents three life stories from KMW who would like to have participated in the Australian labour market but did not. Chapter 7 provides three life stories from KMW who expressed no desire to participate in the labour market but did participate anyway. Chapters 8 and 9 provide six life stories of KMW who wished to participate in the labour market in Australia and did so. Chapter 8 includes those KMW who acquired the desire and/or need to participate after migrating to Australia, and Chapter 9 includes those who were career oriented before migrating to Australia.

Chapter 10 discusses the findings of the antenarrative analysis of the sample group as a whole, asking whether the propositions are supported, refuted or irrelevant, and what and how relevant issues are interpreted and experienced by KMW, critiquing both segmentation and human capital approaches to the labour market.

Chapter 11 examines the findings of antenarrative analysis that do not relate to the propositions and offers different stories of labour market experience. These are used as
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the basis for developing alternative understandings of the experiences of KMW in the Australian labour market.

Chapter 12 concludes the research and describes the implications of its findings for future research of KMW and NESB migrant women in the Australian labour market. It argues that segmentation and human capital theory are both flawed and self-fulfilling discursive practices that prevent meaningful discussion and understanding of labour market disadvantage for marginalised groups.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinnings of this research, asserting that two dominant approaches have characterised much study of migrants in the Australian labour market and may be applied to KMW. While there may be others, these two approaches are selected as the primary focus of this research, constituting the accepted stories or grand narratives for discussing the Australian labour market. These approaches at times overlap and at other times ignore or contradict each other, each pointing to the weakness of the other. Here, it is argued that a more inclusive and holistic theory is required, embracing the strengths of each of the established approaches, and developed from a critique of each. This research aims to construct a more thorough and subtle grand narrative of migrants in the Australian labour market through problematising existing grand narratives.

The chapter begins with an overview of existing literature addressing theories of the Australian labour market, including Census data, studies and government policy statements. Segmentation theory and human capital theory are then described in detail, and examined in the context of the literature that addresses racial and sexual discrimination, the role and efficacy of anti-discrimination legislation, the history of Australian migration policy and the unique cultural and historical background of Korean women. The chapter concludes with the articulation of two testable propositions, each indicative of a grand narrative that permeates the thinking about and perception of KMW in the Australian labour market.
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2.1 Theories of Labour Market Disadvantage (LMD)

There are no theories that directly address labour market inequality for KMW as a specific group in the Australian labour market. However, theories addressing labour market inequality for groups that might include KMW provide a foundation for the development of research propositions. For example, non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) migrants experience higher unemployment in Australia than both Australian-born workers and workers born in other English-speaking countries (Inglis & Stromback 1984; Chapman & Miller 1985; Miller 1986; Jupp 1988; Whitfield 1987; Watson 1996; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002). Two established paradigms are most commonly used to describe and discuss the inequality of experience of NESB workers in Australia: segmentation and human capital theories. These theories highlight the impacts of gender, race and English language ability upon labour market outcomes. As KMW may be considered a subset of the larger group of NESB migrants, these two paradigms may defensibly be applied in attempting to interpret their labour market experiences. This section outlines each of these paradigms, the tension between them and points of overlap, and points to the development of a more satisfactory ‘human cultural capital’ theory. It states that this research aims to assist in constructing this emerging theory through critiquing the two established theories.

2.1.1 Labour Market Segmentation Theory

A segmentation approach to the labour market explains the inequality of NESB migrants as the product of a number of factors, including country of origin, gender, length of residence and the refugee or non-refugee status of the migrant (Inglis & Stromback 1984; Chapman & Miller 1985; Miller 1986; Castles et al. 1986; Wooden & Robertson 1989; Watson 1996). Miller (1986) typifies segmentation theory by describing a labour market segmented along the lines of class, gender and race. The use of this model of analysis is often characterised by a descriptive and qualitative approach to research and evidence provision, such as narrative analysis methods. This ‘segmentation’ approach considers
the wider environment in which the migrant seeks work, describing the society into which she enters and how she will be valued according to unchangeable aspects of her condition (being female, being Korean, and arriving recently). Broadly speaking, this may be considered a critique of society as more powerful than the individual, in whom the individual is, ascribed a value on the basis of qualities over which she has little or no control.

Collins (1978) uses this model to describe the Australian labour market as divided into six discernible segments on the basis of gender and ethnicity. They are, firstly, men born in Australia or in English-speaking countries; secondly, NESB men; thirdly, women born in Australia or in English-speaking countries; fourthly, NESB women; fifthly, Aboriginal men; and sixthly, Aboriginal women. Similarly, later data and studies (Turpin 1986; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988) argue that men born in Australia or in English-speaking countries are likely to dominate the upper rungs of the skilled labour market, while their female counterparts occupy the lower rungs. NESB men dominate the upper rungs of the lower or unskilled labour market and NESB women the lower rungs, which has led to the term ‘factory fodder’ being used to refer to NESB immigrants (Chapman & Iredale 1990). These studies may be regarded as directly supporting the segmentation theory of labour markets, and place KMW in the fourth rung from the top.

1993 data shows that the segmentation of the Australian labour market into the six groups outlined above is hardy and resistant to change (Awasthi & Chandra 1993; Collins 1994; BIMPR 1994). Despite higher standards of education and English language, the NESB immigrant is still stuck on the factory floor (Castles & Miller 1993). Times of economic recession hit the secondary market and NESB immigrants especially hard. Collins (1991) shows a disproportionate representation of unemployment among NESB immigrants in both the recessions of 1974-75 and 1982-83. In general, NESB migrants up to 1994 experienced unemployment rates of two to three times those of immigrants from English-speaking backgrounds and have been more likely to experience long-term unemployment (ABS 1994). This suggests that KMW will find it more difficult both to enter the labour
market at a level appropriate to their skills and qualifications and to retain their position in times of restructuring or national economic hardship.

Statistics have been interpreted to indicate a link between birthplace and unemployment status prejudicial to those not born in Australia. According to O’Loughlin and Watson (1997) the Australian-born unemployed are less well educated than their NESB counterparts. Over 70% of the Australian-born (recognised) unemployed hold no post-secondary qualifications, compared to 58% of NESB (recognised) unemployed. Further, these figures do not accurately reflect the characteristics of their relative labour forces, as only 56% of the Australian-born workforce have no post-secondary qualifications, and the figures are much closer between the NESB employed and unemployed (O’Loughlin & Watson 1997: 57). Put differently, 5% of the Australian unemployed hold tertiary qualifications compared to 14% of the NESB migrant unemployed. For O’Loughlin and Watson then, the argument of overseas tertiary qualifications enhances employment prospects for NESB migrants are misleading.

Regardless of whether or not qualifications are recognised, NESB migrants will remain disadvantaged in the Australian labour force. More significant is the place of attainment of tertiary qualifications, with the disadvantage most diminished when the qualifications are attained in Australia. Moreover, according to O’Loughlin and Watson (1997), English Language Proficiency has little overall effect on the unemployment rate of NESB migrants. This suggests that KMW will experience labour market difficulty regardless of their English language or tertiary achievements, but that this difficulty will be reduced if their qualifications are gained in Australia.

2.1.1.1 NESB Migrant Women

According to the literature, immigrant women rarely arrive in Australia as ‘principal applicants’, or the main visa holders; they are far more likely to arrive as dependants of either their husbands, fathers or brothers (Cox et al. 1975; Storer 1976: 30-72). Often, they arrive with few qualifications, little work experience and limited English: factors
Chapter 2: Literature Review

essential to the grant of a visa to a principal applicant but irrelevant to his dependants. Once in Australia, the avenues of paid employment open to NESB immigrant women of European background are limited to a labour market which is highly segmented along gender lines, including the white goods, clothing and manufacturing industries (Collins 1991). From 1911 until 1980, statistics reveal an ongoing high representation of NESB European background migrant women in blue collar occupations compared to their Australian-born counterparts (Power 1975; Collins 1991; Alcorso 1991; Alcorso & Harrison 1993). This suggests that KMW have been less likely than their husbands or fathers to hold qualifications or have English language skills upon entry to Australia, and that this has impacted negatively upon their labour market opportunities and experiences.

Since 1980, the story has not much improved. Between 1973 and 1991, the rate of participation of migrant NESB women decreased by 4%, while that of Australian-born women increased by 13% (Mawer & Field 1995). Since 1989, over 40 000 people, the vast majority of whom are NESB migrant women, have lost jobs in the clothing industry. The 1991 Census shows NESB women still concentrated in the lowest paying jobs and most vulnerable to award restructuring and industrial relations changes (Alcorso & Harrison 1993). Changes to vocational training have disadvantaged NESB migrant women, making them less likely to seek training or workplace opportunities if retrenched. This posits KMW as likely to work in poorly paid, low-skilled jobs that are vulnerable to restructuring, with little collective representation and industrial relations knowledge and no minimum conditions.

Unemployment statistics do not include the real numbers of those who are without employment or employment opportunity, and are dependent upon the definition of employment at the time. Often, as mothers or spouses, women without jobs will not be considered unemployed and the figures are an unreliable basis for analysis of gender inequity in the labour market. According to Collins (1991), the numbers for NESB migrants, and especially NESB women migrants, may have been underreported by as much as a third of the real numbers. It may thus be expected that levels of unrecorded and unrecognised unemployment of KMW are high.
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Unemployment statistics also paint a picture of long-term unemployment being the domain of NESB migrant men rather than women. This too is misleading, as NESB migrant women very quickly disappear from employment statistics once they lose their jobs, to become the hidden unemployed. The hidden unemployed are typified as women (over 75%) and particularly those with dependent children under 14 (over 40%). NESB women are also more likely to be unemployed with dependent children (nearly half) than Australian-born women (39%). The distinction between unemployment and non-participation is unrecognised (Brooks & Volker 1986) and migrant NESB women are effectively struck off the unemployment list by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. As wives, they are ineligible for unemployment benefits or recognition as being without work. Further, according to O’Loughlin and Watson (1997), they are more likely to withdraw from the workforce than their husbands as they are subject to constructions of the notion of the male as breadwinner and female as homemaker. The lacuna between the employment rates of NESB men and women is less than that between Australian-born women and NESB women. This lacuna between the two groups of women is not replicated between their male counterparts. This presents the likelihood that KMW are competing more with Australian-born women than with their own husbands, and that their husbands’ careers are likely to be privileged over their own while they perform traditional domestic roles. In performing domestic tasks, KMW are presented as neither employed nor unemployed, and step outside the existing confines of labour market discourses.

While unemployed NESB migrant women are characterised as married with dependent children, they also constitute a group identifiable as having limited English proficiency and limited tertiary education. However, the apparent lack of tertiary education of NESB migrants does not indicate the level of real tertiary qualifications held by this group. For Iredale (Chapman & Iredale 1990; Iredale 1991) the lack of formal recognition of overseas qualifications in Australia is responsible for high levels of both hidden unemployment and underemployment amongst NESB migrants a whole. This is significant in explaining why NESB migrants fare badly in the Australian labour market compared with their Australian-born peers. For Freedman (1976) and Watson (1996),
this bespeaks a collusion of government bureaucracies to build ‘labour market shelters’ which effectively block the participation of newly arrived outsiders and protect the labour price of the incumbent Australian-born. This suggests that KMW with English skills and tertiary qualifications will find labour market participation more difficult not because of a lack of these, but because of difficulty in having them recognised by Australian employers.

This suggests that KMW may be particularly vulnerable to workplace practices that might exclude them from training opportunities, that they are likely to be concentrated in particular industries with poor group representation and that they are likely to experience covert racism in the workplace.

2.1.1.2 Asian Migrants and the Australian Labour Market

The experience of Asians immigrating to Australia has been very different to that of European immigrants. In Australia, Asians have been typically seen as a monolithic group with little national or cultural distinction extending from the Middle to the Far East. Since 1990, Asia has been redefined as comprising North-East Asia, South-East Asia and South Asia. That monolithic group is most commonly identified as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Oriental’ (rather than Thai, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Malaysian etc.). Europeans have also been aggregated into larger groups (of Mediterranean ‘wogs’, for example), but none so large and as easily identifiable as the ‘Chinese’ group. The Asian immigration experience in Australia thus rests upon the history of Chinese immigration.

Prior to 1901, Australian colonial laws prevented Chinese immigration entirely, prohibited them from certain occupations or obstructed them from becoming Australian citizens. Chinese immigration to Australia dates back to the mid 1800s, when a shortage of cheap and reliable labour created a need to import Indian, Chinese or Pacific labourers. 1853 saw the arrival of the first Chinese gold-diggers, and the numbers increased until, at one time, Chinese immigrants represented 20% of the male population of Victoria. Even
though the number of British immigrants doubled in the 1850s, a fear that the Chinese might soon outnumber the British led to Victoria passing legislation in 1855 to impose a landing tax upon Chinese immigrants or the ‘Yellow Peril’. Further, the Chinese were confined to specified areas or ‘protectorates’ on the goldfields, which were overseen by government-appointed ‘protectors’ (Jupp 1988).

A series of riots on the goldfields from 1857 to 1861 illustrated the growing tide of anti-Chinese feeling amongst European immigrants. According to Jupp (1988), anti-Chinese feeling was based on three issues: the competition for claims, the purportedly ‘immoral’ habits of the all-male Chinese and the general cultural incompatibility of the Europeans and the Chinese. Anti-Chinese riots in Queensland in 1887 saw the introduction of legislation to prevent Chinese immigrants accessing virgin areas of the goldfields. Competition between the Europeans, Chinese and local Aborigines fuelled a growing racist ideology throughout the English-speaking world, expressed in terms of the fear of Chinese expansion. Chinese immigrants participated in other forms of work, including tin mining, pearl diving, cooking and working on sugar and banana plantations, but were nowhere so resented as on the goldfields. This resentment was so great that Western Australia prohibited Chinese participation in the Kimberley’s gold-rush of 1886.

By 1888, anti-Chinese rhetoric had grown so that Chinese passengers arriving by ship to Melbourne and Sydney were refused permission to land and were now termed the ‘servile races’. A European English language dictation test was introduced as the basis for exclusion of immigrants, which facilitated a White Australia Policy without enunciating it and remained in place until the Migration Act of 1958. This policy was largely effective from 1890 to 1960 and the Australian Chinese were largely restricted to catering and shopkeeping. An influx of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s saw the reappearance of racist discourse and fear of Asian invasion, according to Viviani (1992).

For Jupp (1988), the White Australia Policy was not primarily about the undercutting of wages, but the assertion that one race was superior to another and thus had greater rights to opportunity and prosperity. Castles (1988) argues that Australian public policy rests
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upon the three pillars of immigration policy, the arbitration system and tariff protection, linking economy, trade and immigration. For Castles (1988: 58), ‘the arbitration system provided a system of “fair wages” and economic security, subverting the need for a broad-based social security system; tariff protection and racial exclusion ensured a highly protected and regulated economic order and a tight labour market’. Hancock (1966) describes the White Australia Policy as the ‘indispensable condition of every other policy’ for over 60 years, both domestically and internationally. The recognition of the importance of Asia to Australia in terms of trade, education and security has diminished the strength of this sense of white supremacy and the need for such a policy, but Jupp (1988) argues that it resonates throughout media and public debate still.

According to recent literature, proportion of immigrants from Asia has increased particularly in the last two decades, and many of these immigrants are highly skilled professionals, technicians and managers in their home countries (Inglis 1992; Awasthi & Chandra 1993; Collins 1994; O’Loughlin & Watson 1997). Employment trends within Australia are evident within national groups of Asian migrants. According to 1991 Census data, 30 per cent of Japanese- and Taiwanese-born immigrants had moved into the primary sector, many of them self-employed or employed by Japanese or Taiwanese companies. Thirty-four per cent of Malaysian-born men and 22 per cent of Malaysian-born women were classified as ‘professionals’, which is more than double the overall proportion of Australians. Hong Kong- and Malaysian-born immigrants were more likely to find positions in the finance and business sectors of the economy, while Chinese- and Thai-born immigrants were highly represented in the personal and recreation services sectors, such as restaurants and tourist ventures. Indochinese men and women, particularly those who arrived as refugees from the Vietnam War, are highly represented in the secondary labour market, in particular in manufacturing. Vietnamese women are found in the declining clothing industry at 8 to 12 times the rate of Australian-born women (HREOC 1995). As the clothing industry declines, more and more immigrants are found working outside the factory as outworkers (14 outworkers to every one factory worker in 1995). This is described further in the previous section in the specific consideration of NESB women.
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According to ABS (1996, 2001) data, Asian immigrants from Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka are particularly highly represented in high status occupations compared with Vietnamese and Cambodian immigrants, who have very poor labour market representation. This illustrates what Hassan and Tan (1986) refer to as the ‘bipolar’ experience of Asian immigrants in the Australian labour market.

The study of racial discrimination in relation to NESB migrants and LMD sits within the segmentation model rather than the meritocratic, ‘non-discriminatory’ variables of the human capital model. Human capital theory does not allow for racial discrimination, referring to anti-discrimination legislation for any necessary redress. Jupp (1988), Turpin (1986) and Whitfield (1987) have argued that racial discrimination is a significant factor in explaining why NESB migrants experience LMD. This has been supported by a study of 1981 Census data (Bureau of Labour Market Research 1986: 103) that compared the earnings of Australian-born workers with migrant workers of comparable work and education experience (Miller 1986). As KMW are a subset not only of the NESB migrant group but also of the Asian migrant group, which has been subject to much racism in Australia historically and to date (Markus & Rickfels 1985; King 1988; de Lepervanche 1989; Pettman 1992; Castles 2000), it is likely that issues of racism in the Australian labour market are pertinent to KMW and this research.

2.1.2 Human Capital Theory

The second approach to understanding labour market inequality is known as human capital theory and is based upon concepts of merit, particularly pertaining to skills, qualifications, education levels and recency of arrival in Australia of workers. The human capital approach is advocated by economists and quantitatively oriented sociologists (Mincer 1974; Becker 1975; Cobb-Clark & Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002) and draws a direct and causal relationship between human capital and labour market outcomes. These researchers propose that migrants with higher levels of education and English language skills will be rewarded with greater and better labour market outcomes in Australia. Not
only will these migrants fare better economically but the national economy will benefit through their taxable income generation, contribution of skills and knowledge and the creation of employment for other Australians. These ideas are embraced by migration policy makers, who opt for skilled migrants over others in an economic argument of apparently direct causality (Cobb-Clark & Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002). Poorly skilled migrants will experience labour market difficulties and represent a drain on the public purse and are therefore less desirable, in this conception.

The human capital model is a development of the segmentation model, and thus more recent, but may ignore some of the ongoing considerations of its predecessor. Human capital theory overlaps with segmentation theory in offering an explanation for women and NESB migrants occupying the lower rungs in society but suggests that these positions are permeable and mobility is possible with an investment in human capital. The individual is accorded the potential for greater individual agency in this theory through realising investment in education and training in labour market outcomes (Mincer 1974, 1978; Becker 1975; Psacharopoulos 1996). Here, gender inequality is explained as women choosing to ‘invest’ in ‘family oriented matters’ and thereby losing competitiveness with men in the workforce (Mincer & Polacheck 1980). According to Fincher (1995, 1997: 226), men are more likely to have requisite work experience because they have not left the workforce in order to raise children and they are more likely to have English language skills. While other approaches to the labour market exist, these are the two approaches most frequently adopted and this thesis focuses upon the relationship between the two.

While the tension between the two theories has not been resolved, human capital theory is the prevailing narrative used to describe Australian labour market inequality and the experiences of migrants. It is the basis for much policy of Western governments over the last two decades, arguing in economic terms that new migrants with skills and education add to national productivity, while those without becomes a drain on the public purse (Ruddock 2002; Vanstone 2004). This is referred to as the ‘powerful success story
narrative of skilled migration’ (Ho 2004: 96), and the Australian Government states that as a result of the application of economic or human capital criteria,

‘recent migrants’ employment outcomes are better than those of earlier generations of migrants, and both nation and migrants themselves benefit from the successful integration of new arrivals into the Australian labour force. (Ruddock 2002 in Ho 2004: 96)

Following the human capital paradigm of LMD, there is widely expressed agreement that English language skills are a significant factor in determining the likelihood of success of migrants in the Australian labour market. For example, analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) (Cobb-Clark & Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002) describes migrants with higher levels of qualifications and English proficiency achieving better employment outcomes in Australia. The LSIA states that for migrants who have been in Australia for over three years, English language skills are a significant indicator of labour market participation (Watson 1996; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 2000: 61).

However, in an increasingly multicultural Australia and an increasingly global marketplace, some argue that English language skills are over-emphasised. This over-emphasis, they continue, is indicative of a misplaced concern with the perceived weaknesses of individuals rather than the more appropriate examination of systemic social deficiencies (O’Loughlin & Watson 1997). This is indicative of the segmentation theory critique of human capital theory and illustrates an ongoing tension between the two theories. As KMW are all non-native speakers of English, concepts of linguistic competence and exclusion are likely to be highly relevant to understanding their labour market experiences in Australia.

In Young’s study (1997), communication skill, or English language skill, remains the single most important (conscious and openly reported) factor for employers, as an
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indication of workplace cohesion rather than competency for the position. This is seen as highly significant in the interview process, where the ability to ‘sell’ one’s skills can make the difference between success and failure. In assessing language ability, employers most often cite the pronunciation of workers as a significant indicator of communicative ability (Richmond 1991; Hawthorne 1994; Watson 1996; Creese & Kambere 2002). Described as a skill of objective competence, English language proficiency is a human capital consideration. However, the employer in this situation is concerned less with human capital and more with particular workplace culture.

For writers such as Young (1997), this focus on communication skills and the ability to fit in with the workplace simply reinforces and propagates current prejudices, as described by the segmentation model, and is a form of institutionalised racism. The focus upon English language competency throws the responsibility for job loss onto NESB immigrants who may already have 20 years’ experience in the workforce. Women often suffer particularly from lack of competency as domestic/maternal/filial duties prevent them from attending English language tuition, and cultural sensibilities or economic conditions in their country of origin have also curtailed their prior learning. This describes the conundrum of human capital theory, in which objective and measurable skills ensure labour market value but pre-existing structural inequities ensure some will never be in a position to acquire the designated skills.

Ho (2004: 96) writes that the logic of human capital theory is used to make a straightforward argument that hides deeper questions of inequality. She maintains that there is a clear case for arguing, as Minister Ruddock does, that migrants with higher educational qualifications and English language skill will find more and better labour market opportunities. However, she queries whether this means that all migrants with the same qualifications and human capital will find the same rewards in the Australian labour market or whether migrants from some countries will find greater returns on their investment than those from other countries. She also questions whether male and female migrants will reap the same returns as their Australian-born male counterparts.
Other writers have also questioned this utilisation of human capital, finding that employment outcomes vary much based upon birthplace and gender (Campbell et al. 1991; Collins 1991; Fincher et al. 1993; Lever-Tracey & Quinlan 1998). Alcorso (1991) writes that NESB migrants, and in particular women, experience migration to Australia as ‘downward occupational mobility’. It is difficult to imagine that the human capital explanation for lower utilisation of female capital on the basis of ‘family investment’ is adequate, especially for women without children. Despite the issues outlined above in considering English language skill as an objective skill, its nature as a skill rather than a state lends itself most to discussion in terms of human capital theory, while issues of gender and race appear to be better described in terms of segmentation theory.

One way of resolving the inadequacies of both segmentation and human capital theories is a critique that considers the cultural aspects of human capital, arguing that evaluation of labour market value is neither objective nor colour-blind. This emerging critique has the advantage of acknowledging the complexity of issues of labour market inequality for NESB migrants, both critiquing society and according the individual some agency and potential for upward mobility. However, few studies contain enough data to apply this emerging theory and much prevailing discourse remains in the determinist segmentation approach or the neoclassical human capital model. This research contends that this critique provides a useful and comprehensive way forward for discussing migrant equity in the Australian labour market, but that the weaknesses of segmentation and human capital theories must be shown in order to necessitate the acceptance of this new theory. It is therefore the aim of this research to critique and deconstruct the two established theories to create an opportunity for the construction of a new model of labour market disadvantage.

2.1.3 Critiquing Human Capital Theory: the Cultural Aspect

A critique of the human capital theory is presented by Nee and Sanders (2001: 392) in the concept of ‘human cultural capital’. According to the human cultural capital critique, human capital theory is simplistic and inadequate for assessing the changeable value of
attributes such as qualifications and language across cultures. This critique acknowledges the value of certain economic and institutional achievements and investments but places them within a cultural system of values. Ho (2004) writes that human capital is not without cultural specificity and is not generic but that its value in Australia is decided through cultural compatibility. This essentially incorporates the ideas of segmentation theory in its levels of acceptance with notions of human capital.

Human capital theory is criticised for being a description of how things should be rather than how they really are and for ‘blaming the victim’ (Game 1984; Thornton 1990; Collins 1991; Nott 1999). Such critiques point to arbitrary value systems that are covertly maintained and in which human value is not measured objectively. The continuing use of human capital terms serves to obscure the lack of objective and socially neutral evaluation of marginalised jobseekers. This research elucidates this critique, providing details of the impacts of human capital theory acceptance upon ‘victims’, who themselves accept it to be true and reasonable. Examples of highly educated and experienced migrants with near native English language skills performing labour market tasks far beneath their capabilities, often without a sense of injustice, are not hard to find. The human capital/cultural critique accounts for this through the valuation of social networks in addition to skills and qualities. Nevertheless, human capital theory presents an inadequate and unreal theory of the Australian labour market. Much antidiscrimination legislation is, at best, nominal and tokenistic and, in general, lengthy, toothless, unutilised and persistently under threat.

The human cultural capital critique argues that cultural identification and acceptance are necessary in order to deploy or actualise the elements of human capital (Nee & Sanders 2001). The notion of ‘cultural capital’, as presented by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1984), describes how privileged groups use their own cultural traits (assets) to ensure their place within society. Cultural capital includes language skills, networks, social, political and religious knowledge, education and work experience. It is also described in terms of a ‘transferability gap’ (Stromback 1987; Beggs & Chapman 1987) or the failure of the Australian labour market to offer equal rewards to NESB
migrants for the skills and endowments they bring to Australia as it does to Australian-born workers of equivalent education. Migrants from countries characterised by British institutions and systems are not so much qualified as they are encultured into recognised cultural practices. It is this enculturation which activates or valorises their qualifications and skills above those from other countries. Accordingly, one university degree is not equivalent to its counterpart from another country, and technically proficient English language skills are not equal to those of a native speaker but are placed upon a scale of acceptance. This theory argues that human capital theory creates a myth of objectivity and meritocracy against which the non-native English speaker with a ‘foreign’ university qualification battles despite investment in her human capital.

A number of writers point to the downward mobility experienced by skilled migrants upon entry to Australia (Stromback 1987; Beggs & Chapman 1987; Alcorso 1991). Writers such as Birrel (2001: 32) attribute low returns to economic recession, while others refer to the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications or work experience (Stromback 1984, 1988; Evans & Kelley 1986; Tram-Nam & Neville 1988; Beggs & Chapman 1988; Chapman & Iredale 1990; Fridberg 2000). Studies such as the LSIA (Cobb-Clark & Chapman 1999; VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999, 2000; Cobb-Clark 2000, 2001; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002) show that, amongst a skilled sample group, NESB migrants experience much lower transferability, salaries and employment outcomes than English Speaking Background migrants. This highlights the significance of English not as a skill but as a birthright. This is supported by others who argue that migrants from Commonwealth or English-speaking colonies are more likely to have their human cultural capital recognised in Australia. Iredale and Niveson-Smith (1995) and Mak (2001: 17) argue that NESB migrants from countries such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines find greater returns on their qualifications in Australia. For Iredale (1993), the country of qualification is the most important factor in successful recognition of those qualifications. She argues that a hierarchy of preferences by country represents an ongoing form of direct discrimination as a legacy of the British Empire. O’Loughlin and Watson (1997: 16) write that qualifications from Commonwealth countries act as:
a kind of flag of approval which reassures Australian employers that they will find the bearer of these qualifications ‘amenable’ to the informal culture of their workplace, as well as an (assumed) guarantee that the qualifications are reliable.

Employers link overseas qualifications and overseas experience with a distrust that they are equivalent to Australian standards and practices or that they are genuine, according to Harris (1996). This devaluation of cultural difference regardless of objective skill, in favour of maintaining the status quo, directly supports the segmentation model and is in line with the human cultural capital model. Arguments presented in terms of the objective skills of human capital theory may disguise a preference for cultural homogeneity and the maintenance of the segmented labour market. In this way, human capital theory can censor or euphemise segmentation realities.

The issue of acceptance of overseas qualifications illustrates how apparently necessary and objective measures of competence and merit according to human capital theory are riddled with inconsistencies, subjectivity and prejudice. This is likely to be relevant to KMW with Korean qualifications attempting to compete in the Australian labour market. Segmentation theory acknowledges these subjective and prejudicial values as unchangeable and inherent where human capital theory seeks to disclaim them. Human capital theory thus represents a desired model and discourse of how things could or should be, but saying it does not necessarily make it so. While segmentation theory does acknowledge what human capital theory denies, it provides no scope for the individual to better her social position or for society to progress, an untenable theory for constructive research.

Despite these problems with human capital theory, its principles and terms are dominant aspects of discourses used in discussing the labour market for government, employers and KMW. For KMW who migrate to Australia with skills, qualifications and labour market expectations, it is the human capital story of the Australian labour market to which they ascribe. They are likely to have different expectations of the Australian
labour market, imagined as an untrammelled meritocracy, than of the Korean labour market in which they know social connections are paramount. The quality of Australian labour market experience described by a KMW, therefore, is likely to be shaped and coloured by the fulfilment or disappointment of expectations born of this conceptualisation. Qualitative analysis of KMW experiences must take into account the prevalence of human capital theory acceptance amongst migrants and society as a whole and its utility in providing narrative structure and logic, if not truth, in describing their experiences.

This research attempts to test and highlight the inadequacies of established segmentation and human capital theories to provide evidence for a more constructive and holistic approach to understanding the Australian labour market. English language issues are best explored through human capital theory and issues of gender, race and culture are best approached through segmentation theory.

2.1.4 Summary

Two paradigms of labour market disadvantage have been presented that may be regarded as relevant to the KMW in this research, neither of which may be regarded as wholly satisfactory and both of which provide useful frameworks for developing testable propositions. Segmentation theory focuses upon unchangeable states that determine the status and opportunities of different human groups in society and the labour market. For KMW who are unchangeably Korean in race and culture, always migrants and eternally women, issues of gender and culture are likely to be layered and inseparable in their labour market experiences. Human capital theory focuses upon measurable skills and qualifications that can be acquired and developed by the individual to improve her labour market value and opportunities. English language skills are particularly focused upon here as a significant criterion for NESB migrants, and therefore KMW, wishing to participate in the Australian labour market.
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While this research does not claim to resolve the tension between ideal human capital theory and older segmentation theory, it aims to complicate the logical positivist success story of the economic migrant of the past three decades. Human cultural capital theory is helpful in acknowledging ongoing devaluation and downward mobility of qualified and skilled English speakers such as KMW despite human capital theory claims. Current quantitative studies such as the LSIA provide useful data but cannot tell how KMW experience and understand settling in Australia. Without hearing these experiences direct from KMW, analysis of these statistics provides a theoretical wager rather than an insight into real experience.

2.2 Anti-Discrimination Legislation (ADL)

This section begins with an overview of Anti-Discrimination Legislation (ADL) in NSW and the issues inherent in a legislative approach to the disadvantages faced by some members of Australian society when participating (or not) in the local labour market. It then describes current objections to and critiques of ADL and employer practices with particular reference to NESB migrants and women. This section identifies two main areas of concern in discussing KMW in the Australian labour market, which does not deny that there are others, but provides some limits to the current discussion.

2.2.1 ADL and Women in Workplace in NSW

The purpose of ADL is to ensure equality of all members of Australian society and is the primary means for combating workplace inequality for NESB migrant women. ‘Society’ in these terms is represented by the public work space and does not include the domestic, the private or the unpaid. ADL in NSW includes the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW), the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (CTH), the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (CTH), the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (CTH), the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (CTH) and the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (EEOWW) 1999 (CTH). In New South Wales, this means
that employers are apparently held accountable for unfair behaviour on the basis of 
sexuality, gender, race, religion, marital status, disability or age.

ADL is not a unique way of combating issues of workplace inequality for NESB migrant 
women but the standard and constitutionally ratified response of a Western liberal 
democratic society. Thornton (1990: 259) argues that the Western liberal state is 
necessarily permeated with legal formalism and a need to maintain legitimacy, leading to 
her claim that ‘it is the concept of formal … equality which is the central tenet of 
liberalism’. ADL in this view provides the formal legal framework for the ‘concept of 
equality’ by prohibiting discrimination on the bases described above. However, for 
writers such as Thornton, there is the counterpoint of an ‘informal’ and unequal reality 
that exists despite the enactment of this sociopolitically necessary and ideal legislation. 
Jamieson (1999: 230) also writes of the problematic relationship between legislation and 
justice, arguing that however noble the social justice mission of ADL, it is impossible to 
create equality ‘merely by outlawing discrimination’. Poiner and Wills (1991) add that 
legislation does not forge the way forward for social change, but rather reflects change 
already apparent in society. They (Poiner & Wills 1991: 101) argue that ADL is a 
‘politically and highly visible response by legislators calling for reform’. Benokratis and 
Feagin (1991) describe some Equal Employment Opportunity legislation in terms of 
apparently appropriate ‘gestures … really to satisfy compliance reviews or for public 
relations purposes and [with] … little substance’ (cited in Poiner & Wills 1991: 8). The 
inherent danger of conspicuously addressing an issue is that it may be presented simply 
as ‘resolved’ when that resolution is superficial and compromised, and the urgency is 
removed.

Writers such as Thornton (1990) argue that systemic discrimination is both culturally and 
legally maintained, premised on the values and interests of the dominant groups who 
have the power to define the norm. Nott (1999) defines this norm as the white, middle 
class, able-bodied, English-speaking male by and for whom laws are made. Deviance 
from the norm results in social inequality as, for Thornton, homogeneity is an aspect of 
the binding force of culture as determined by the majority or the dominant. She argues
that ‘it would appear that any system of majoritarianism is likely to trammel the interests of women and stigmatised minorities’ (Thornton 1990: 259). Western liberal majoritarian states such as Australia, therefore, form the site of inequality for women and minority groups and provide superficial, ideal and misleading redress in the form of ADL.

Wilenski (1977: 231) describes the place of ADL in Western liberal democracies as both reactive and corrective, offering a means for resolving and redressing instances of discrimination experienced by individuals in groups covered by that legislation. Poiner and Wills (1991) argue that this focus upon individuals represents a way of helping a ‘victim’ in a system without really changing the system or the norm(s) and that ADL is insufficient for holistically or effectively redressing discrimination.

A complaint-based system, reactive non-discrimination delineates the offence and allows individual and easily identified transgressors to be picked off, but inevitably it is narrow in approach, patchy in application and painfully slow in effecting change. If any corrective action is taken it is, and unfairly, the victims themselves who must instigate it. While such legislation is a necessary tool in breaking down discriminatory behaviour it is not sufficient and certainly cannot cope with the bias and bent of systemic discrimination. (Poiner & Wills 1991: 12)

In this description, not all those who are covered by ADL will recognise that they are covered or avail themselves of it. For those who do use it and supply the required proof, victories remain individual and isolated, rarely giving rise to wider systemic change or creating cumulative benefits for all.

### 2.2.2 ADL and its Effectiveness

ADL in Australia is rarely, if ever, supported by penalties to employers, and this is significant in evaluating its effectiveness and role in Australia. While much legislation
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is enforced in society through the imposition of penalties if the legislation is shown to be breached, breaches of ADL do not generally incur penalties. According to Thornton (1990), this absence represents or is sanctioned by society’s belief that equality of opportunity has already been addressed to the maximum extent and that the legislation performs some other function. According to an Australian government publication from the Affirmative Action Agency, the main role of Affirmative Action is to provide information to workers for them to instigate change and to report to Parliament, and thereby the people, the results of that change (ABS 1992). Thornton (1990: 84) writes that the Affirmative Action Act’s only sanction, naming in Parliament of non-complying employers, attaches to failure to provide information rather than failure to carry out specific activities. The Act is also unusual in not specifying required outcomes and activities other than the requirement to provide information on the process set out in the Act.

Another argument against ADL is that it is counterproductive and any compliance on the part of employers is minimal and superficial, born of hostility and resentment. Thornton (1990: 84) argues that requirements imposed on organisations from without ‘will never have the sense of ownership accorded to internally developed strategies specific to an organisation’. While high rates of compliance may appear to bespeak successful legislation, one argument claims that this is only due to the low level of compliance requirements. Such an argument demands greater regulation, penalties for non-compliance and rigorous standards of compliance. If these measures were to be introduced and monitored, however, the question remains as to whether they would measure changes in equality or the effectiveness of the legislation, or both.

For employers who do develop and implement antidiscrimination practices there is also criticism. Thornton (1990) describes employers as establishing programs and practices for utilitarian purposes of productivity and efficiency, to avoid expensive and time-consuming litigation and to promote a benevolent impression of the employer. Eveline (1994) argues that many of these measures are aimed at target groups, identified by
employers as disadvantaged and in need of assistance to prosper within the organisation, measures aimed at groups rather than the organisational culture itself. Eveline contends that this targeting of ‘problem’ groups creates a discourse of disadvantage, defining and maintaining the position of the group within the organisation, demanding that they be assimilated rather the norm being reformulated to integrate them. In this way, not only do the disadvantaged become the problem, but the role of the dominant, who decide who is disadvantaged and why, remains hidden and unaddressed. For Bacchi (1996: 45), ADL is delegitimised if the source of disadvantage is difference from a norm which remains unapproached.

Thus far, this section has provided arguments against ADL and claims that women and minority group members are more likely to suffer discrimination in Australian society and workplaces where the norm is the white, native English-speaking male. The next sections examine ADL in regard to the most prominent differences between KMW and this norm: English language ability, race and gender.

2.2.3 ADL and English language ability, race and gender

ADL does not focus upon positive discrimination to favour members of certain groups, but focuses upon advancement in the workplace on the basis of merit. Liberal society codifies merit as the justification of hierarchy, and the objective and measurable basis for reward and recognition. This adherence to meritocratic principles is indicated by institutions such as the Public Service Merit and Protection Commission (PSMPC) and is in line with a human capital theory approach to individuals in the labour market (see Chapter 1). However, many writers argue that merit constitutes a ‘cherished myth’ which may be based upon undefinable ideals of potential as easily as perceived abilities, and that perceptions of merit are subjective and unaccountable despite claims of fairness and justice in selecting the best person for the job (see Kalantzis, Issaris & Cope 1985: 14; Thornton 1990). Thornton (1990: 223, 230) describes how the appeal the notion of merit as unquestionably reasonable is linked to a ‘legislative abdication’ for employers through legislative vehicles such as the American Affirmative Action Act.
Nothing in this Act shall be taken to require a relevant employer to take any action incompatible with the principle that employment matters should be dealt with on the basis of merit. (Thornton 1990: 223)

Meritocratic principles may provide both the justification for and the tools with which a dominant norm maintains its position in a hierarchy. As noted, the established norm consists of the Western, white, male, Anglo-Celtic, middle class and English-speaking worker with recognised qualifications in the workplace. To diverge from this norm is often characterised by theorists such as Said (1978) as to be colonised by the West. Even in postcolonialism, however, this insidious process continues as contemporary Western discourses about other cultures continue to be based on Orientalist assumptions; it is just that the ‘dominant’ phase of colonialism has now shifted to a ‘hegemonic’ phase through which attempts are still made by the West to perceive and control its Others. (Rizvi in Vasta & Castles 1996: 174)

Poiner and Wills (1991) contend that ADL cannot progress until the question of the identification and conceptualisation of ‘others’ is critically examined. In Australia, this group includes women, Aborigines, migrants and people with disabilities who are ‘marginalised in relationships rated high on a scale of social significance and rewarded accordingly’ (Poiner & Wills 1991: 17). Until the reasons some groups are vulnerable to discrimination are understood and addressed, they argue, attempts to deal with discriminatory practices of themselves cannot be completely effective.

Kalantzis et al. (1985: 14) claim that the language that defines the standards of selection based upon merit reveals cultural bias. As noted, principles such as ‘merit’, ‘potential’ and ‘excellence’ complicate claims of direct discrimination, bringing in a host of evaluative elements which increase the burden of evidence necessary for a NESB migrant woman to prove she has been refused a job on the basis of her sex/race. These writers also argue that words such as ‘resourcefulness’, ‘leadership’ and ‘initiative’ do not describe abilities or potential, but an image of desirability, and that any refinement to
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embrace women or racially different applicants is a small concession to systemic discrimination. Thus they argue that in making concessions,

no real change has occurred which would alter the criteria selecting an elite group of ‘anglo’ and ‘ethnic’ males and females. The composition of the group may change, but the nature of it doesn’t, nor does the structure which gave rise to it in the first place. (Kalantzis et al. 1985: 14)

In this regard, NESB workers represent ‘others’ in an established hierarchy that justifies itself by devaluing linguistic backgrounds other than English. Racial discrimination has been deemed unacceptable and unlawful, attitudes apparently reflected in ADL and monitored by such bodies as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. However, according to Foster (Foster et al. 1991: 110-111),

despite the existence of significant legislation outlawing discrimination and the introduction of racial vilification legislation in some States, there is ongoing and systemic evidence of discrimination at the general workplace level, involving in particular immigrants from NES (non-English-speaking) countries.

Racial discrimination in the Australian workplace is difficult to detect and prove (Collins 1996) and the distinction between discrimination and disadvantage is unclear (Foster et al. 1991). Neo-classical economic theory regards racial discrimination as a matter of exclusion from all employment (Collins 1996). However, racial discrimination may be manifested in higher unemployment rates of indigenous and NESB groups, employment of these groups but in jobs below their abilities, or in the higher earning potentials of white, English-speaking Australian-born nationals compared with linguistically and racially diverse immigrants/indigenous peoples. For Collins (1991: 156-161):

the key debate here is whether these earnings differentials are meritocratic or discriminatory… If they merely reflect differences in the human capital of
different immigrant groups in the Australian labour market, this would support the meritocratic view. According to this view, different average earnings merely reflect differences… in education levels and qualifications, or different competencies in English language, between NESB immigrants and others. But if NESB immigrants with the same human capital as others earned less, this would indicate discrimination…

Foster et al. (1991: 61), on the other hand, conclude that the evidence on the labour force status of immigrant workers ‘does lend itself to analyses of patterns consistent with discrimination’. In considering the arguments against meritocracy and the ongoing and embedded nature of Western dominance discussed by Said (1978), it is difficult to separate discriminatory from meritocratic practices.

Vasta and Castles (1996) describe cultural skills and the indications thereof, such as an accent or cultural knowledge, as triggering negative responses in the labour market. According to Vasta and Castles (1996: 17), racism and sexism reconstruct these skills to be reinterpreted as

‘poor communication skills’, ‘high training costs’, or ‘unreliability’. This is an example of indirect racial discrimination, which occurs when employment practices which are in themselves not explicitly discriminatory have discriminatory outcomes.

Labour market programs may themselves be discriminatory by excluding the most disadvantaged job seekers on the very basis of their disadvantage (Collins 1996). The Review of Migrants and Multicultural Programs and Services (DIEA 1986: 151) concluded:

The picture that emerges is of the most disadvantaged job seekers being excluded from the very labour market programs under which they are intended to receive
preferential treatment because their disadvantage (in this case lack of English) is considered to be too severe for them to achieve success in those programs.

English language skills are also seen as limiting worker participation in negotiating employment conditions. Australian industrial relations have moved away from centralised wage decisions and national wage cases to individualised enterprise bargaining practices and award restructuring. Collins (1990) warns that weaker groups within the labour movement, including women and immigrants, are unlikely to benefit from the changes. Baker and Wooden (1992) also argue that the ability to communicate in English has ‘become a critical screening device for entry into the award restructuring processes for women in the Australian communications industry’ (Collins 1996: 76). Others, like Levine et al. (1992) have found that workers with limited English ability in the automobile industry experienced greater difficulties in participating in retraining under award restructuring.

In addition to the potential discrimination arising from linguistic difference, the subjects of this research (Korean migrant women) deviate from the identified norm in being characterised as migrant women. When the *Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* was introduced in Australia, the Australian Government stated that the legislation was required to guarantee that employers took seriously a national commitment to women workers in a productivity argument. At its second reading in the House of Representatives (Hansard 19 February 1986: 862), this was stated:

The Government is determined that women should be able to enter and compete in the labour market on an equal footing with men and that outdated prejudices or conventions should not prevent them from fully participating. Neither individual employers nor the nation can afford to waste the valuable contributions which women can, and do, make to our community. Affirmative action programs are designed to ensure that any existing discrimination is identified and removed, and that equal opportunity is a reality in the large workplaces in this country.
Evidence confirms the above argument that women experienced substantial inequities in the Australian labour market. For example, they did not receive equal reward for work of equal value in a labour market characterised by occupational and industry segregation. In response to this situation, the Act requires the promotion of equal opportunity for women in the labour market and the elimination of discrimination by employers against women in the workforce. As noted above, ADL focuses upon the public sphere as seen in workplaces, ignoring the private, domestic sphere, and is phrased in terms of equality, merit and productivity. The public sphere is the focus, according to Thornton (1990: 259), because of the significance of paid employment in a capitalist society and because of the social and personal value placed upon individuals as a result of their occupation. Where liberal legalism rests upon a tenet of the same treatment for all, regardless of need or circumstance (see Thornton 1990: 223), the result is legislation that allows women to become like men.

2.2.4 ADL and unpaid domestic work

The separation of the public and private spheres is at the centre of ADL according to Nott (1999: 103). Bacchi (1996: 47) asserts that this separation allows men to step away from domestic responsibility, and that the merging of the two would directly threaten men and their lifestyles. Poiner and Wills (1991: 103) argue that ADL gives ‘primacy to paid work over private life and thereby unintentionally devalue[s] not only the private sphere but, given their place in it, women’. For feminist theorists like Nott (1999), this means that the same treatment of men and women does not give rise to equal results, merely the claim to the elimination of discrimination. Nott (1999: 205) writes:

Asking whether a woman has been less favourably treated than a man makes male behaviour patterns the paradigm to which law and legal system respond. If equality means no more than treating women in exactly the same fashion as men, then many women have little to gain, since their work patterns and their lifestyles are very different from those of men.
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Game (1984) also writes of the problems of offering women the opportunity to ‘become men’, or be assimilated into the male paradigm and do what is valued in the public sphere while the private sphere remains undiscussed and unintegrated. She questions what the value of women who do ‘women’s work’ is in this conception, where the performance of such tasks means they are absent from the workplace. Game (1984: 254) writes:

there is a very clear subtext here that any failure can be attributed to women themselves, their inability to take up the opportunities. The “catching-up” concept of equality is profoundly individualistic and lends itself to psychological and “blame-the-victim” explanations for lack of success.

Women who devote time and energy to domestic responsibilities either instead of or in addition to their ‘professional’ development are regarded in human capital terms as choosing the private sphere over the public, forced to be placed in one or the other. According to Poiner and Wills (1991), the downfall of ADL is in its lack of appreciation of and facilities for negotiating the numerous complexities of women as a social group, including race, age and motherhood status.

ADL does not distinguish between issues faced by immigrant women compared with Australian-born women, which Poiner and Wills (1991) argue limits its effectiveness: unless the reasons particular groups are subject to discrimination are understood and addressed, attempts to deal with discriminatory practices cannot be effective. Vasta and Castles (1996: 17) describe ADL as working best for middle class Anglo women at the expense of their working class immigrant counterparts:

For NESB women, the problem is lack of representation in high status jobs which means a lack of visibility in EEO programs. And that limits the potential for change.

A potential method for redressing entrenched racial and gender imbalance in the Australian workplace is through the recognition of qualifications acquired overseas
(Collins 1990), a primary focus for ADL. Castles (in Kalantzis 1992) states that there is an irony in requiring levels of qualification to gain immigrant entry to Australia that are then not recognised in the workplace. Only a small group of immigrants benefit from this, and these are predominantly middle class, educated males, ‘faithfully reproducing gender divisions within countries of origin within ethnic communities in their country of adoption’ (Castles et al. 1989: 64). However, even the small minority who have their qualifications assessed and recognised do not necessarily earn more for doing so. Chapman and Iredale (1991) note that employers tend to treat all immigrant employees as homogeneous, regardless of qualification. In this environment, it appears futile to follow the principles of maximising human capital or meritocracy if racial and gender stereotypes are to annul all efforts.

2.2.5 Summary

The Australian labour market is the potential site of expression of multi-layered discrimination and inequity based upon race, gender and physical ability. For migrant women in the workplace with limited English language skills or an accent in addition to unrecognised domestic responsibilities, ADL legislation is an imperfect tool for combating discrimination in Australian workplaces. Discussion in terms of merit and human capital remains the basis for economic and legislative understanding and expression of anti-discriminatory practices in the workplace. A wider debate is necessary concerning the nature and root of discrimination against particular groups ascribed lower values in Australian society before these practices can be productively changed. Intersecting Western meritocracy with women of countries in which even greater disparity is in evidence assures that their movement to the West will see them at the bottom of another pile.

2.3 Historical and Cultural Background of KMW

This section adds to the consideration of gender a specific cultural component, acknowledging that the construction of femaleness is not universal and varies with
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location and socioeconomic development. It suggests that the experiences of a KMW in Australia may have a unique flavour and interpretation otherwise undiscussed in hitherto examined literature. As this research focuses upon the narrated experiences of KMW in the Australian labour market, an understanding of potential terms of reference and cultural paradigms is helpful in analysing their life stories for dominant discourses.

2.3.1 Historical Background and KMW

The single greatest historical impact upon discussion and conception of the role of the Korean woman in Korea is that of Confucianism, introduced from China and adopted from the time of the Chosun Kingdom (1393-1910). The Confucian conception of women as experienced in Korea is repeatedly described in much literature as the circumscribing of women’s lives by their families and the lack of self-identity beyond the family existence (Kim 1976; Park & Cho 1995; Lee, M. 1998). The legacy of Confucian teachings upon the social status and role of women, particularly married women, is still in evidence, despite being in direct conflict with the increasing participation of women in the Korean labour market (Cho 1998: 151; Chang 1998).

Confucianism is a strict regulation of social organisation and behaviour presented as a harmonious, productive and natural way of living according to moral principles, one of which is dedicated to the ‘division between husband and wife’ (Park & Cho 1995; Chang 1998). Women were designated specific virtues of filial piety, sincerity, righteousness, wisdom, courage and propriety, to be obtained not through formal education but through a life of subordination to men (and their parents) and cultivation of ‘moral law’ (Kim 1976; Han 1985: 5). This life was characterized by self-sacrifice and exhibition of feminine qualities of obedience, chastity and self-control over one’s passions. An educated or intellectual woman was considered a danger to family and society as she may neglect her domestic duties. In keeping women uneducated and within the home, men were proven to be creative and inventive intellectuals and women to be passive, docile, ignorant and ineffectual in a self-fulfilling argument.
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The sexual division of labour ensured that women were wives and mothers who performed daily housework while their husbands provided financial support from outside the home and represented the family in society. Women were charged with producing sons to succeed their husbands’ families and looking after all family members, including their husbands’ parents, and devotedly preparing regular and frequent worship ceremonies for their husbands’ ancestors (Park & Cho 1995; Kim 1986; Cho 1998). In agricultural society, women were also required to assist in productive work, such as milling, weaving, sewing, tending vegetable gardens and domestic animals and so on, but their work was regarded as worthless. Middle and upper class Korean women traditionally also sewed garments and made handicrafts useful to the family, but these were regarded as hobbies rather than work (Kim 1992; Kim 1997: 35). It was not until 1910 that Ewha Hakdang, a college program for women, was introduced despite much opposition. As late as 1987, Yun Hoo-jung, tenth president of Ewha (Yun 1987: 43), wrote that the ‘state of women’s nature makes them fit to obey men’s dictates, to follow the leadership of men, and to work at home as they are not suited for working outside the home’.

According to Hampson (2000), gender inequality is the defining characteristic of South Korean society. This is despite great steps forward over the past three decades. Rapid capitalist economic development and democratisation and a response to global women’s lobbying groups have found some expression in the tabling and implementation of the Equal Employment Act (1986), amongst others. Nevertheless, effective and meaningful implementation has been unsuccessful due to traditional social and cultural norms. For Hampson (2000: 171),

Korea’s rapid social, political and economic transition has changed the family structure, weakened the traditional value system and broadened employment practises and each of these shifts has provided women with new opportunities. Yet Korean women’s choices are still constrained by the key axioms of Confucian thought: filial piety, family loyalty, conformity to group norms and chastity.
South Korea has since seen a great diversification in its economy, away from the old world economics of agriculture and primary production and towards a newer world of technology, industry and commerce. This has not been matched by equivalent social and political development (cultural tolerance) and it is this lacuna that confronts the modern Korean women in Korea. Palley (1994) describes culture as constructed by material and behavioural components. Using this description, Palley claims that South Korea has modernised and westernised its material components while it’s behavioural and Confucian-influenced components lag behind.

The Confucian context in which the lacuna occurs has led to modern permutations of the definitions of womanhood. Traditional Confucianism divided men and women into the public and private spheres respectively on the basis of sex alone. Choi (1994) describes this understanding as the primary barrier to meaningful change in women’s status. The impact of Confucianism on the collective female consciousness in Korea is described by Choi (1994: 203) as ‘a negative self-image based on centuries of the internalisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy’. She describes this as a ‘backwardness’ that pervades all aspects of society. Kim (1988: 278) presents this description of the Confucian legacy for women:

Because of the … socialisation process in our society, which has continued for too long, not only men but also women themselves tend to recognise the inferiority of women, at least unconsciously.

While there has been some social and legislative change in order to further the equality of women in Korea, Choi (1994: 196) argues that the ‘structure has changed but the functions have not’. Many of these changes are in response to the global feminist movement and changes in other modernising societies. Palley (1994: 293) argues that the application of Western tools and systems in Korea does not give rise to the same outcomes and that:
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it is unlikely that women who lead the struggle for change even want reform through the imposition of individualistic, Western-style behavioural norms and values, since family and relationships remain central to most Koreans.

Social mobility for Korean women remains dependent upon the mobility accorded through marriage than for women in Western countries (Palley 1994; Choi 1994; Cho, M. 1998; Hampson 2000).

2.3.2 Modern Korea and KMW

The education system in Korea has expanded greatly since the Korean War (1950-1953) but for highly educated Korean women, the domestic role of women continues to be privileged. Korean women are highly educated, and many Korean women hold tertiary qualifications, but few sectors of the economy are receptive to employing them. One sector that is receptive to female employment is that of teaching, but numbers of women teachers are still considerably below those of male teachers. University-educated women generally marry university-educated men who are financially comfortable, reducing the women’s need and tendency to work. Thus, women may pursue education not for access to greater employment opportunities, but because it may provide them with access to a more highly paid husband. As in Australia, women tend to opt for the humanities and social sciences when choosing subjects to study at university while men tend to opt for science and technology subjects. Korean women earn less than half of their male counterparts and dominate the poorly paid and industrial workplaces (Palley 1994). In the modern context, women are theoretically allowed entry to the Korean public sphere, but this is in practice often a temporary state before they finally embrace the domestic sphere for good. For those women for whom paid participation in the workforce is an economic necessity, this necessity defines them as of lower social value (Cho, H. J. 1998). Voluntary social participation, through church and other community groups, is acceptable, however, and does not compromise the ‘femininity’ of a woman in the eyes of Korean society. Indeed, this participation may add to her value, making her more interesting and virtuous.
The activities of the full-time housewife have changed over the last three decades from a wife captive in the home, serving husband and children, to one who leaves the home often, working full-time at self-realisation and development rather than housekeeping. Ueno (1994: 33) refers to this type of woman as a ‘full-time activist housewife’, a privileged class of women who choose not to go to work. For Ueno (1994), there is a stated desire amongst many young women to be full-time housewives, free to do as they please, raising their social status through marriage. However, the number of women wishing to become full-time housewives far outstrips the number of men who are able to support such lifestyles. For Ueno (1994: 34):

the fate that awaits these women when they reach middle age, who will be cast into an inferior marginal labour market with no preparation, is the same as that being suffered today by the many women who have already returned to work.

Korean women also experience age discrimination in Korea and there are few employment opportunities for women over 40 who wish to return to or join the workforce. While gender discrimination has apparently been prohibited, age discrimination remains unaddressed. For Korean women in their 40s who may have raised their children and are still physically strong, voluntary and community work offers the only opportunities. According to Ueno (1994: 38):

paid volunteering, profit-making club activities, and cooperative workers’ collectives are the new forms of urban self-employment in which the women can control the quality of labour and manage themselves.

Not driven by economic necessity, these women are able to focus upon alternative management and the quality of their participation in these ventures. This participation is a product both of the exclusion of Korean women from meaningful and well-paid employment and their choice not to participate in it. Self-employment provides an avenue for marginalised women to participate on their own terms. However, while this
represents another option, it is one only open to those already economically self-sufficient.

Yi (1998) argues in her study of Korean women that, in Korea, the man’s commitment to work is viewed as more important than family life. Women’s participation in the workforce is presented not as a contributing factor to the family’s lifestyle but as ‘self-development’. The focus on the domestic roles of women as first and foremost means that some women may be excused from their jobs early to look after a sick child, for example, but this also leads to employer perceptions that they are unreliable and less committed to their jobs. Women are also excluded from out-of-hours social activities as their domestic duties demand this time. These gatherings are important networking and development opportunities and attendance indicates dedication to the job. Corporate policies on recruitment, training, promotion and pay in Korea place a heavy emphasis on company loyalty rather than skills or experience. In order for the Korean man to be able to dedicate many of his waking hours to work and out-of-hours socialising, his home must be a place of rest. His wife, however, is responsible for the entire running of the household, which holds no rest for her.

Numerous studies (Kendall 1996; Lett 1997; Lee, M. 1998; Yi 1998) of middle class Korean housewives reveal that Koreans regard wives working for money as a stigma to the family status. Similarly, Korean husbands do not express a keen interest in their wives earning money but this opposition is dropped if the work is professional. Again, however, this work is described in terms of ‘self-development’ rather than contribution to the family finances. According to these men, a wife who is just a housewife is unattractive and can be blamed for neglecting her self-development. Nevertheless, the introduction of ‘self-development’ to the wifely duties represents more of a trivialisation of women’s work than an encouragement, according to Shim (1999).

Labour market participation of women in Korea and the division of labour within the family is changing but very slowly. The current situation often requires the assistance of the extended family in order to share the burden of women’s work and make any form of
social participation at all outside the home possible. Upon migration to other countries, this support is often lost and the gender equity issues brought to a head. These issues will add to other issues of racial discrimination, language barriers, cultural differences and the non-recognition of qualifications in the new country.

2.3.3 Summary

In summary, traditional Confucian descriptions of femininity as passive, uneducated and bound to the home have been appropriated in the Korean labour market as loyalty, diligence and obedience for low pay and part-time work. Professional opportunities for women, beyond nursing and teaching, are few, and legal mechanisms regarding gender equality are perfunctory and mitigated by employer practices. Women continue to be regarded in terms of their filial obligations and find difficulties in re-entering the workforce when these are discharged. Middle class women are likely to hold tertiary qualifications but choose not to participate as they are excluded from meaningful, well-paid work and are more highly regarded if they devote their non-domestic time to ‘self-development’ through voluntary, community activities.

While the results may be similar to those outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter, this section has introduced several culturally specific terms and notions that indicate the Korean discourse concerning women and work. These include the ‘good wife and wise mother’ and her ‘provider husband’, the notion of hobbies and ‘self-development’ rather than work, loyalty, diligence and obedience, aspirations to work in the nurturing professions of teaching and nursing, volunteer work as appropriate and a focus upon youth.
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2.4 Determination of Propositions

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an overview of current academic wisdom relevant to KMW in the Australian labour market, and to determine two testable propositions for research. Confucian notions of femaleness and Korean class sensibilities may be seen to restrict the activities of a KMW and ongoing institutionalised racism, ineffective anti-discrimination legislation and a segmented labour market may further limit her activities in Australia. Many studies are likely to render the KMW invisible, hiding unemployment or underemployment in dependence upon her husband, non-recognition of qualifications or an over-emphasis on her English language difference.

Theories of labour market disadvantage display an ongoing and unresolved tension between notions of the individual and the labour market, offering two established approaches. Segmentation theory lends itself to socially embedded values and practices that hinge upon unchangeable differences from a determined mainstream. Where that mainstream is determined to be white, male, middle class, English-speaking, Australian-born men, KMW will be considered in terms of race, gender and cultural distance from the mainstream. Under the segmentation model, disadvantage increases and becomes more complex, more than the sum of its parts, with compounded difference. Human capital theory lends itself to the notion of objective measurement and evaluation of attainable skills, such as English language proficiency or certain tertiary qualifications. Rather than attempt to resolve the tension between two theories, this research aims to test both, embedding each in the terms of a proposition. The first proposition is thus determined from a segmentation theory standpoint, and the second from a human capital theory standpoint.

The first proposition recognises the complex network of institutionalised cultural and gender-based constructions that are likely to operate to restrict the activities of a KMW. This chapter describes a segmented labour market in which KMW occupy the fourth of six rungs and experience a triple burden of racism, sexism and cultural difference. Applying segmentation theory, the first propositions states:
In line with the grand narrative of segmentation theory, Korean migrant women will experience barriers to labour market participation in Australia due to the triple burden of racism, sexism and cultural difference.

The second proposition focuses upon the contentious role that English language proficiency plays in the labour market prospects of the KMW in Australia. A focus upon qualifications may equally be chosen but for the purposes of this research and in the terms of human capital theory, a single choice must be made. This literature review shows that English is an oft-cited reason for lower levels of participation for NESB women migrants in the West. The institutionalised categorisation of migrants in Australia, and therefore KMW, on the basis of a non-English-speaking background highlights the significance of this ‘skill’ in discussions of the labour market. Accordingly, KMW without strong English language skill(s) are likely to be granted low labour market value, a value which can be heightened through the development and attainment of English language skill(s). The second proposition thus states:

In line with the grand narrative of human capital theory, Korean migrant women without strong English language skills will experience barriers in accessing and negotiating the Australian labour market

This thesis aims to test the veracity and relevance of these two propositions through narrative analysis of qualitative interviews with 33 KMW in Australia. This chapter acknowledges the weaknesses of the theories giving rise to these propositions, and this thesis aims to explore and evidence these weaknesses to contribute to the development of a more satisfactory human cultural capital paradigm. The following chapter describe the theory, forms and application of narrative analysis that will be used to test these propositions.
Chapter 3

Narrative Analysis and the Study of Korean Migrant Women

This chapter describes the purpose and value of narrative analysis for examining the propositions arising from the preceding literature review and determines the most useful type of narrative analysis for this research. The two propositions distil existing academic narratives, including theories, statistics and case studies, to tell a story of KMW in the Australian labour market. These propositions contain the theoretical underpinnings and some of the existing identified issues or themes for discussion of KMW and labour market disadvantage in Australia. The research aims to examine these propositions by applying narrative analysis and antenarrative analysis (Boje 2001) to the life stories of KMW in Australia. This examination aims to reveal the extent to which the propositions are valid and to identify any new narratives that go beyond the propositions themselves.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section argues the utility and relevance of narrative analysis for KMW attempting to participate in the Australian labour market and introduces the term ‘practices of power’. The second section describes currently acknowledged practices of power and related theories addressing language, race, gender, culture and organisations. The third section introduces and identifies two forms of antenarrative analysis to be applied as the research methodology.

3.1 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is used in this research as a tool for exploring the individual experiences of KMW in (and out of) the Australian labour market as opposed to the generalised understandings provided in existing literature. While the scope of the
literature reviewed in the previous two chapters has been broad, much of it (and the resulting propositions) is rooted within the generalised explanations of mainstream social science. Further, little of the available literature is specific to KMW, and the generalisations are for groups of which KMW are often only a small minority. Generalised, statistically based, apparently objective depictions must not be regarded as necessary truths but as constructed narratives, and only a small selection of many possibilities. Narrative analysis focuses upon language as being not merely a technical device for establishing meaning, but deeply and subjectively constitutive of reality (Riessman 1993; Czaniawska 1997).

For Riessman (1993), narrative analysis, or the recognition of subjective construction of reality through language, aims to see how research subjects impose order upon and make sense of their flow of life experiences. Methodologically, narrative analysis examines each individual’s story, analysing the tools of construction, the linguistic and cultural resources drawn upon, and how it persuades the listener of its authenticity. Existing narratives regarding women in their home cultures of Korea and Australia, as outlined in the literature review, are helpful here in recognising cultural resources for narrative construction.

Many writers describe research respondents as using narrative to make meaning from their lives by ordering and explaining events to themselves and others (Gee 1985; Mishler 1986a; Bruner 1990). Riessman (1993: 3) claims that this is particularly the case where there ‘has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society’. In this way, narrative is often used as a way of expressing and even resolving inner conflicts and frustrations when life situations are not as expected or hoped. Chapter 2 has provided an overview of the existing data regarding levels of participation of NESB migrants in Australia and the possible expectations a KMW might have. These include expectations to be supported financially, to take sole responsibility for children, to find a job in Australia worthy of her tertiary qualifications, and to be rewarded for diligent and obedient work or service. While these are generalised narratives, they offer a selection of available sources of potential conflict and frustration and resultant narrative sensemaking.
This is not to suggest that the individual therapeutic construction of narratives addresses and resolves all conflict between the ideal and real, self and society. Roth (1993) writes that despite the universality of the discourse form in explaining one’s problems to oneself, some experiences are difficult or impossible to speak of directly. Political conditions can impede the discussion of events and relationships, and the absence of social movements or the naming of injustices may mean that individuals do not connect with each other and galvanise into political action nor construct linguistic expressions of particular experiences. Herman (1992: 3) writes that a common response to atrocity is to banish it from one’s awareness, and thereby from one’s narratives. For Riessman (1993), narratives are useful in examining practices of power such as inequality and oppression that may not be recognised but taken for granted by individual narrators. Such practices of power may be discerned in the grand narratives of Chapter 2, generated on the whole by the dominant mainstream culture but banished from the individual’s narratives. These practices are addressed further below.

Finally, narrative analysis is interpretive, on the part of both the narrator and the researcher who facilitates the narrative, and focuses upon human agency rather than deterministic explanations of social phenomena. Riessman (1993: 5) writes:

Narrative analysis – and there is no one method here - has to do with ‘how protagonists interpret things’ (Bruner 1990: 51), and we can go about systematically interpreting their interpretations. Because the approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity. It is inappropriate for topics and theories in which the characteristics of actors as active subjects remain unexplored or implicit but well suited to others, including symbolic interaction and feminist studies.

This is significant for this research in acknowledging that labour market participation constitutes a form of symbolic interaction and that each KMW defines her own identity and human agency to some degree, in accordance with human capital theory, but within
limits, in accordance with segmentation theory. These limits are set by cultural practices of power which are described below. Attention to individual human agency and identity impacts upon the methodology of this study in shaping the taxonomy of smaller groups of KMW within the larger sample group. This is covered in greater detail in Chapter 3.

3.2 Practices of Power and Narrative Analysis

As noted above, narratives are useful for examining practices of power, many of which may be obscured by those in power (the dominant) to become invisible or unfathomable to all. As the dominated find difficulty in telling of their domination, narrative analysis that examines and reveals practices of power in their narratives must first be informed by an awareness of those practices. This section outlines the hitherto unarticulated practices of power and how they may be linked to the key factors of inequality for KMW in the Australian labour market that have been referred to previously in the literature review. These are language; race, gender and culture; and organisation.

3.2.1 Language

Discourse analysis is an evolving technique for examining social reality, expanding and with antecedents in sociocultural and sociolinguistic theory. In examining social reality, discourse analysis focuses upon how that social reality is produced. To do this, it focuses upon the role of language. Clegg (1989: 151) writes that:

In the broadest terms, language defines the possibilities of meaningful existence at The same time as it limits them. Through language, our sense of ourselves as distinct subjectivities is constituted. Subjectivity is constituted through a myriad of what post-structuralists term discursive practices: practices of talk, text, writing, cognition, argumentation, and representation generally.
Language provides both the medium of communication and the mode of domination of subcultures within the dominant culture. For Bourdieu (1991), language is widely regarded as an essential skill that binds society into an apparent whole and is necessary for inclusion. However, language also provides a basis for the justification of existing hierarchies, so that while it constitutes the criterion for inclusion, it is a conditional and stratified inclusion. The designation of the particular language of the dominant group as an essential skill obscures the practice of power of devaluing any other language. Thus the individuals without the dominant language are regarded as silent, difficult or impossible to include and outside the reasonable purview of communication. The greater the individual’s ability in the designated language, the harder it becomes to explain her exclusion, for which other practices of power, must come into play. The relationship is not one of rewarded linguistic skill but a description or rationalisation of levels of inclusion after the fact. Foucault (1976: 94) warns that power is not ‘acquired, seized or shared … but the immediate effects of … divisions, inequalities and disequilibriums’. Skill in the designated language is thus regarded as a value-neutral justification of the level of inclusion of an individual that in fact disguises a practice of power.

Bourdieu (1991: 167) describes the ideological domination of subcultures through the medium of communication in a way that supports this argument.

The dominant culture contributes to the real integration of the dominant class (by facilitating the communication between all its members and by distinguishing them from other classes); it also contributes to the fictitious integration of society as a whole, and thus to apathy (false consciousness) of the dominated classes; and finally, it contributes to the legitimation of the established order by establishing distinctions (hierarchies) and legitimating these distinctions. The dominant culture produces this ideological effect by concealing the function of communication: the culture which unifies (the medium of communication) is also the culture which separates (the instrument of distinction) and which legimitates distinctions by forcing all other cultures (designated as subcultures) to define themselves by their distance from the dominant culture.
In this way, the KMW who does not speak English is rendered silent and incommunicado, and little further justification is required for her lack of inclusion in mainstream society of which the labour market is one feature. As noted above, labour market participation is a form of symbolic interaction that is manifested by acceptance, financial reward and the granting of particular working conditions and opportunities. The function of communication or, more correctly in this case, English is concealed as a measurable and necessary skill, and operates to allow or prevent entry into Australian labour market organisations. Where entry is allowed and the KMW appears to be accepted, issues of lack of substantive and total inclusion, recognition and opportunity ensure that the KMW is reminded that she is a member of a subculture at some distance from the dominant, Australian English-speaking culture. The dominant culture, as Bourdieu describes, measures different subcultures in terms of distance from itself, creating a hierarchy based upon proximity. Bourdieu writes (1991: 168) that the dominant class is the site of struggle over the hierarchy of the principles of hierarchisation. Dominant class factions, whose power rests on economic capital, aim to impose the legitimacy of their domination either through their own symbolic production, or through the intermediary of conservative ideologies, who never really serve the interests of the dominant class except as a side-effect and who always threaten to appropriate for their own benefit the power to define the social world that they hold by delegation.

Seen in these terms, the reification of English language skills can thus be described as an act of expediency, to be used by the dominant class of English-speaking Australians. Bourdieu (1991) refers to this as euphemised and ‘misrecognisable’, so that it is accepted as natural and justified by dominant and dominated groups alike. In this way, there is an unwitting collusion in and obfuscation of the practice of power between the powerful and the marginalised. It is therefore likely that KMW will reveal an awareness of the significance of English language skills for their labour market participation in Australia but will not perceive a practice of power, describe it as discriminatory or express any
resistance to it. Rather, KMW may interpret a lack of (substantive) inclusion or acceptance as indicative of an absolute and essential need to further improve their English language skills.

This insistence upon English provides a ready explanation for existing taxonomies or hierarchies of people, usually migrants but also indigenous people, who speak more or less, similar or different, English. This includes, for example, the category of Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) migrants. This hierarchy is expressed through the exclusion or the inclusion of people at designated levels. These levels are characterised in the labour market in the form of divisions of labour: by industry, type of work, hours and conditions, working environment, remuneration, access to representation and opportunities for progress and career. The literature review provides a narrative of industry representation and participation patterns of NESB migrants as necessarily poorer or lower than for mainstream, English-speaking Australians. The role of English in defining the group characterised as poorer and lower thus becomes self-perpetuating and the reason for the status of the group, both prescriptive and descriptive. Bourdieu (1991: 169) summarises this:

> internal systems of classification reproduce overt political taxonomies in misrecognisable forms, as well as the fact that the specific axiomatics of each specialised field is the transformed form (in conformity with the laws specific to the field) of the fundamental principles of the division of labour.

Classifications and taxonomies thus contain the seeds of their own disadvantage or advantage and create the names of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983) that are useful for descriptions that pose as explanations. KMW are, from the outset, described as ‘other’ than the mainstream in three ways: they are Korean, they are migrants and they are women. Three ready explanations of labour market disadvantage have thus been provided. In addition, they belong to the larger group of NESB migrants, providing another explanation in waiting. The use of narrative analysis to examine practices of
power and render them visible assists in resisting the temptation to provide further data supporting self-fulfilling taxonomies.

### 3.2.2 Race, Gender and Culture

Race, gender and culture are common choices of ‘otherness’ from a defined mainstream that serve to define and describe imagined communities. Barrett and McIntosh (1985: 35) write that

Race and ethnicity are about difference. Sites of difference are also sites of power. Dominant representations of difference function to exclude and/or exploit, and to justify unequal access and valuing. Subordinate groups, on the other hand, may use difference to mystify, to deny knowledge of themselves to the dominant groups and to confuse and neutralise those who attempt to control or ‘help’ them.

In providing a definition of difference and concomitant levels of inclusion or power in society, race, gender and culture are key elements in identity construction. In constructing an identity, an individual chooses and accepts behavioural patterns and power relationships without necessarily questioning those behaviours or relationships (Tajfel, Flament, Billig & Bundy 1971; Tajfel 1972a; Turner 1975; Brewer 1979; Ellemers, Spear & Doosje 1999). For example, she might define herself first and foremost as Korean, or first and foremost as a woman, accepting all accompanying duties and restrictions without question by virtue of the fact that she is a Korean woman, whatever that might entail. The biological or circumstantial fact is thus inscribed with the behavioural and power relations of social invention. Narrative analysis offers an insight into the narrator’s identity construction and a tool for examining these accepted but unacknowledged practices of power.

As noted, a KMW may choose to describe herself first as Korean or first as a woman, drawing upon a range of points of difference to explain her behaviour and position in society. Each individual may therefore order and weight alternative points of difference
from the mainstream differently, constructing one possible identity from a spectrum of unique permutations from the same sources. Race, gender and culture are thus considered here together as points of difference and potential identity construction rather than specific sites of discrimination.

One of the more established and coherent theories of domination on the basis of race, gender and culture that is relevant to KMW is Orientalism. Said (1978) describes Oriental women as inferior, other and in need of corrective study by the West. He writes that

Along with all other people variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilised, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was thus linked to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were looked through, not analysed as citizens or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined – or as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over. (Said 1978: 207)

Orientalism operates in the same way as the narratives of the literature review and is a system of knowledge by one group, the West, about another inferior and problematic group, the East. For Said (1978), there are two basic assumptions upon which Orientalist knowledge rests, one of which may be regarded as a truism and the other as a utilitarian necessity in the practice of power. The first is that the West and the East are ‘irredeemably different’ and knowledge is produced in order to interpret that difference. The second is that knowledge production should serve the economic and other purposes of the knowledge producer.

The West approaches the East, attempting to interpret it, while the East remains relatively silent, creating and reinforcing the Western perception of the East as impenetrable, mystical and unfathomable. This suggests that from the West’s perspective, the Oriental
must learn to communicate the Western way, in Western cultural values and behaviours, because it is unthinkable that Westerners can really learn the ways of the East. The knowledge gained by Western interpretation is then appropriated in civil society by the administrative, the military and the economic, including the dominant masculine paradigms of the labour market. The result is a relationship in which the Orient is either the outsider or the ‘incorporated weak partner for the West’ (Said 1978: 208).

For Foucault (1977) and Gramsci (1971), civil society is the site of consensual domination, seduction rather than rape. Civil society houses culture, in which some ideas, fashions and paradigms are given precedence over others not by decree but by mutual consent. Cultural hegemony is defined as ‘domination achieved by engineering consensus through controlling the content of cultural forms and major institutions’ (Jary & Jary 1991: 271). Gramsci (1971) is concerned less with the apparatus of state repression and more with ‘the way that consent of the subordinate sectors of society is “solicited” in the domain of “civil society” through such channels as education and cultural practices’ (Moore-Gilbert 1997: 37). Narrative analysis may be used to gain an insight into this solicitation of consent by KMW.

3.3 Organisations

The study of organisations through narrative analysis in this research hinges upon the notion of affiliation. KMW may be regarded as necessarily affiliated with the state, by virtue of conferred migration, but not necessarily affiliated with civil society. Civil society may be described as constituted by voluntary affiliations and economic institutions and relationships, such as labour market organisations. This is opposed to the compulsory affiliations of the state such as citizenship. Organisational theory is useful for understanding the nature of voluntary affiliation, such as KMW attempting to participate in the Australian labour market.

In this context, ‘organisation’ refers to social entities that are structured with formal and explicit rules of entry, exit and behaviour. They are most commonly seen in workplaces,
schools and clubs and are associated with affiliation, recognition, exclusion, bureaucracy and hierarchy. For Ahrne (1994: 2),

The basic idea is that organizations in this sense are central to social analysis. The … features of organisations constitute the most persistent and universal relations between individuals, and organisations set the conditions for human action. Organisations are stronger and more persistent than either individuals or societies, and they constantly transcend borders of societies or systems.

KMW in this study do not constitute an organisation as such: they are associated as group members only by virtue of this study and some common characteristics, but do not know each other and have made no efforts to become members or maintain their group membership. However, in attempting to participate in the Australian labour market, some will try to learn and use the rules of organisations in order to join or affiliate themselves with one. For those who do join and participate in a company, a school, a church, a community organisation or a government instrumentality, organisational understandings and engagement are essential. Others may attempt to join Australian organisations and be unsuccessful or find alternatives to joining.

Ahrne (1994: 5-12) writes that

Employment is a voluntary form of affiliation that can pertain to all kinds of organization. Voluntary association, however, does not imply that all who want can become affiliates … Voluntary organizations … are generally strict about who is to be admitted as an affiliate … The basic human experience is belonging and dependence … If you are not recognised you will not be let in … Organisational gate-keeping and exclusion is one of the foremost mechanisms of social control.

It is this quest of the individual KMW for belonging, recognition and affiliation, as well as the learning of the complex social rules of organisational engagement, tacit and
explicit, that this research seeks to explore. In particular, this research focuses upon the roles of experience and language in how KMW come to understand both themselves and Australian organisations.

The last decade has seen an emerging field of enquiry in organisational discourse studies (ODS), in which discursive practices are studied in order to deliver insights into organisations and their key stakeholders (Mumby & Clair 1997; Keenoy et al. 1997, 2000a; Grant et al. 1998a; Iedema & Wodak 1999; Marshak et al. 2000; Oswick et al. 2000a). ODS include several schools of analytical practice, including organisational narrative studies (ONS), critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis within organisations. Increasing interest in ODS has corresponded with an increasing interest in ONS. The use of narrative analysis within the larger field of ODS is evidenced by studies such as that of Barry and Elmes (1997), for example, who have proposed and studied strategic management as a form of fiction. Dunford and Jones (2000) have used narrative analysis in their research on the strategic change that emerged in three organisations in New Zealand. According to Tietze, Cohen and Musson (2003) knowledge in narrative form, such as stories and case studies, has been used since the 1980s by teachers, consultants and managers in organisational learning and strategic development to persuade, inform and control members of organisations (eg Sims et al. 1993; Watson 2000). The following discussion of ODS in general is undertaken with particular attention to the role of narrative (and also antenarrative) analysis in ONS.

The link between discourse analysis and specific antenarrative analysis (in the form of storytelling) may be described as the constructive effect of texts. Grant, Keenoy and Oswick (1998) understand the significance of discourse in organisational studies as revealing the subjective individual making his or her own meaning. Accordingly they see discourse as:

constructing, situating, facilitating and communicating the diverse cultural, institutional, political and socio-economic parameters of ‘organisational being’. Thus, discourse not only shapes and directs organisational behaviours but also
constitutes actors’ contested and contestable meanings. Discourse analysis prioritises subjectivity, acknowledges instrumentalism, explores rhetoric, values multiplicity and celebrates uncertainty. (Grant et al. 1998: 12)

In a similar vein, Mumby and Clair (1997: 181) refer to identify construction through language:

When we speak of organisational discourse, we do not simply mean discourse that occurs in organisations. Rather, we suggest that organisations exist only insofar as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organisations are ‘nothing but’ discourse, but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organisation members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are.

Tietze et al. (2003) write of how the study of narratives not only creates meaning but also exposes the process of how that meaning is made. Focusing on organisations, they describe metanarratives of scientific management, human relations, globalisation, capitalism and so on acting as the grand stories used to explain individual and collective behaviour and realities. Tietze et al. (2003) describe the emergent use of the ‘little narrative’ of the individual in deconstructing and criticising metanarratives no longer held to be necessarily true or adequate, in a move from modernism to postmodernism. In this way, they refer to Lyotard’s (1979) description of postmodernity as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ (Tietze et al. 2003):

The love affair with organisational stories is to be seen against this background. Using organisational stories and storytelling to understand organisational processes is both a process of exploring how meaning is made, as well as a process of creating meaning in an otherwise opaque, potentially chaotic, world. By engaging with little narratives a means has been created to write meaningful accounts of organisations, while avoiding the reversal to the potential moral totalitarianism of metanarratives. (Tietze et al. 2003: 55)
The emergence of organisational discourse analysis opens new areas to discourse analysis and allows new conceptualisations to form and new questions to be asked. If discourse analysis allows the conceptualisation of a postmodern identity, then organisational discourse analysis allows the conceptualisation of group identities, in what Hardy (2001: 43) refers to as ‘organisations, collaborations, interorganisational domains and institutional fields’. For Anati and Widdicombe (1998: 10), individual identities are connected to organisations by providing the core material out of which organisational, social and institutional identities are fashioned. However, as a child of postmodernism, organisation theory suffers the ‘postmodern condition of fragmentation and simulation [that] makes coherence problematic’ according to Boje (2001: 5). The creation of identity and coherent social reality through discourse is mitigated by a ‘wandering audience [that] chases storylines on multiple and simultaneous stages’ (Boje 2001: 5). An understanding of these multifarious stages forces recognition of individual perspectives, experiences and interests in addition to the shared realities within an organisation. Recognition of competing discourses is not sufficient to discount all coherence, nevertheless, and as Hardy (2001: 28) argues,

Organisational discourse theory does not deny that some discourses may dominate, but it maintains that such dominance is an ongoing struggle between competing discourses, continually reproduced or transformed through day to day communicative practices.

Interest in the role of discourse in individual and organisational identities has given rise to studies employing intertextual and critical discourse analyses (Alvesson 1994; Garsten & Grey 1997; Phillips & Hardy 1997; Ainsworth & Hardy 2004). These studies are likely to focus upon local or micro level examples of discursive identity construction and then to position them within larger macro level (grand narrative) discourses (Alvesson & Karreman 2000). This positioning illustrates the interaction between text (individual life stories) and context (institutional stories and settings) that is maintained through discursive practice. The revelation of the daily construction of organisational identity
from individual identities through critical discourse exposes practices of power, such as those associated with organising and managing individuals (see Hardy 2001). Other writers such as Dunford and Jones (2000) have studied the impact of discourse upon organisational strategy, and Mumby and Stohl (1991), Knight and Morgan (1991), Boje (1995), Philips and Hardy (1997), Mumby (1998) and Ainsworth (2003) have contributed studies of the relationship between discourse and power within organisations.

Gabriel (1998 in Mallon & Cohen 2001: 48) argues that the use of stories provides a rich resource tool within organisational research, ‘opening valuable windows into the emotional and symbolic lives of organisations’. Mallon and Cohen (2001) apply this to the study of careers, examining how stories illustrate the realities individuals make with regard to both themselves and their environments or organisational contexts. They argue that stories are unique and valuable tools for understanding how ‘individuals make sense of their careers as they unfold through time and space, attending to both the holistic nature of career as well as to specific career transitions’ (2001: 48). For Mallon and Cohen (2001), the analysis of stories is useful not only in recognising the subjectivity of the storyteller but in regarding the relationship between the actions of the individual and the wider social and cultural context.

The significance of Mallon and Cohen’s (2001: 48) study of careers is its rejection of two traditions: the ‘prevalence of logical positivism within the career canon’ and ‘the old stultifying world of traditional, hierarchical careers’. In rejecting the traditions, these researchers argue that individuals do not understand their social worlds through scientifically reified mental practices of abstraction and inference, but through subjective and changeable sense making which is unclassified by science. This is, in itself, an objection to the totality of metanarrative or ideology and necessitates the use of the ‘little narrative’. The researchers also argue that the notion of careers has moved away from organisations and institutions towards ‘a mixed portfolio of work arrangements’ in which the individual’s relationship to the wider society is paramount and the holistic nature of careers must be considered. Cohen and Mallon (2001) entertain the notion that careers
can be within or outside organisations, paid or unpaid, work or not work, and that these definitional boundaries may change and wander over time.

Cohen and Mallon (2001) describe the limitations of traditional analytical frameworks in focusing on inclusivity and integration (the ‘affiliation’ of organisational studies) and how these frameworks prevent holistic understandings. They describe the continuing focus upon positivistic theories as the bases for creating analytical frameworks as both inadequate and resilient. They write

Preferred and traditional methods for examining career do not yield holistic understandings (Collin & Young 1986). Rather, they tend to produce analytical frameworks based on fragmentation, polarization and dichotomy (Collin & Young 1986; Derr & Laurent 1989; Barley 1989)... This has resulted in the persistence of unhelpful divisions: the individual or the organisation; career as a subjective or objective experience, the career as an external or an internal phenomenon; and now, we argue, the old career or the new. (Cohen & Mallon 2001: 51)

The impact of Cohen and Mallon’s work on the study described in this thesis is a warning against relying upon prevailing and traditional analytical frameworks such as segmentation and human capital theories. Cohen and Mallon suggest that a more holistic approach is necessary and desirable for a more satisfactory understanding, and that therefore questions such as labour market participation should not be regarded as finally answered or resolved for any individual. They warn that subjectivity and objectivity will cross paths in the life story, and that labour market participation should be seen in the larger context of KMW’s lives, rather than their lives in the context of the labour market. This is to take into account their desires, aspirations, fears and their definitions of labour market participation and non-participation. This research ostensibly aims to explore the experiences of mechanisms of affiliation and disadvantage for KMW attempting to participate in the Australian labour market through narrative analysis. Narrative analysis of the stories of KMW is chosen as the most fruitful research tool for individual experience and understanding of affiliation with or exclusion from Australian labour
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market organisations. However, the research also explores and accepts that not all KMW will wish or seek to be affiliated, or regard the same activities in the same way. The specific analysis techniques for examining the stories of KMW are outlined in the following section.

3.4 Narrative and Antenarrative Analysis

Narrative analysis encompasses many types of analysis, including what has been termed ‘antenarrative’ analyses (Czarniawska 1997; Boje 2001). This section defines antenarrative or story, in contradistinction to narrative, and introduces Boje’s eight forms of antenarrative analysis. Of these, two are selected for the purposes of this study: grand narrative analysis and microstoria analysis, and are used in conjunction with each other (Boje 2001). These two analysis types are chosen to provide a balanced, bidirectional approach to addressing the research question. Grand narrative analysis is used to test the veracity and relevance of current academic wisdom, particularly segmentation and human capital grand narratives, while microstoria analysis is employed to examine life stories beyond the confines of these grand narratives. In this way, the findings of the two analysis types combine to critically appraise what is ‘known’ and to present what is otherwise ‘unknown’.

For writers such as Czarniawska (1992), narrative differs from story in that it requires a plot to create a meaningful whole. Boje (2001) adds to this that narrative includes causally related episodes that lead to a solution to a problem, what Weick (1995: 128) refers to as ‘a history for an outcome’. The formulation of the propositions outlined in earlier chapters contains plot, causality and implied solution: if KMW attain defined skills (such as English) and the Australian labour market actively enshrines equality of opportunity on the basis of gender and culture, the ‘problem’ of labour market disadvantage should be solved. Story, on the other hand and in this conception, is non-linear, fragmented, polyphonic, incoherent and unplotted. A free-flowing story must be told before it can be refashioned with the retrospective sense and structure that a narrative
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requires: a story provides the raw material for the narrative and thus comes before the narrative, rendering it ‘ante’ narrative. Boje (2001: 1-2) writes that

Story resists narrative; story is antenarrative and on occasion even anti-narrative (a refusal to be coherent)…To traditional narrative methods antenarrative is an improper storytelling… Narrative tries to stand as elite, to be above story. The crisis of narrative method in modernity is what to do with non-linear, almost living storytelling… To translate story into narrative is to impose counterfeit coherence and order on otherwise fragmented and multi-layered experiences of desire.

Narrative is dignified as more meaningful and useful in understanding situations due to its formal coherence that implies clarity and truth. White (1987: 251) describes narrative as transforming ‘events into historical facts by demonstrating their ability to function as elements of completed stories’. This understanding exposes the highly constructed aspect of the truths of narratives, or what Bourdieu (2000) calls ‘rhetorical illusions’, as opposed to a naturally occurring ‘truth’ that is simply discovered. Less constructed antenarrative story, on the other hand, resists being summarised and pinned down and is placed lower on an academic hierarchy, as wavering, subjective, inconsistent and easily dismissed (Boje 2001). When the constructive and determined reality of narrative is recognised and acknowledged, alternative realities such as those revealed through antenarrative stories may also be accepted as useful or truthful, and their lower position on an academic hierarchy becomes apparent. For Derrida (1973), Western thought forms binary oppositions and hierarchies that are not readily apprehended because a narrative may pretend to narrate the only ‘true’ reality (Boje 2001: 24). Narrative analysis questions the truth and adequacy of narrative and thereby displays the otherwise invisible hierarchy of academic thought. In rendering the hierarchy visible, it becomes possible to subvert it and to allow marginal terms and voices to gain attention and credibility (Boje & Dennehy 1993).
Narratives, with a focus on causality and resolution, are used to explain phenomena in a way that is self-justifying. Ante-narrative, or story, seeks to describe how phenomena are experienced, rather than prove and rationalise that the already observed phenomena of inequality exist. Mallon and Cohen (2001) acknowledge that the use of the term ‘story’ is academically fraught, borrowed and vague and that it is unclear where it sits in relation to ‘narrative’ and other terms. However, they maintain the use of ‘stories’ in their research over other forms of narrative analysis, embracing the familiar, the commonsense, the ‘baggy, sometimes contradictory often circuitous accounts’ that ‘remind us of the ways in which we all continually cast and recast our life experiences in different contexts’ and for different audiences (Mallon & Cohen 2001: 50).

The purpose of antenarrative analysis in this research is not to ask whether and/or why KMW suffer labour market disadvantage in Australia, but to describe how KMW understand and express none or limited affiliation with labour market organisations. Much of their utterances may not qualify as narrative: they may lack causality or plot, remain vague, unexplained and a mystery to the speaker. Boje (2001) writes that in telling a story, storytellers ‘take a bet’ that what they are about to say, in interaction with their audience, will amount to a story, although this is frequently not the case. Antenarrative counters both narrative and metanarrative by refusing the logical positivism of the known story and expedient theory, and providing unexplained gaps and space for alternative understanding. Often missing a logical coherence, antenarrative provides a rendition of experience from the inside, with minimal interpretation and overlayed explanation. The messy, unpackaged nature of antenarrative tends to deny it academic consideration, leaving much antenarrative unheard, unexplored and even unvoiced. This research follows Boje (2001) who advocates bringing these unheard stories to the fore.

It is thus to be expected that the stories told by KMW in this research of their Australian labour market experiences will be less definitive and plotted than the narratives of the literature review or the propositional statements. It is also to be expected that the narratives will present elements of truth or agreement (consensus) with the stories, but
that each story will evidence much more than the whittled propositions point to. It is likely that each KMW will respond to the propositions with a cry of ‘yes, but it is not that simple’ or ‘yes, but that is not exactly me’. Individual KMW are likely to understand and describe similar phenomena differently by virtue of being interpretive individuals with alternative identities and powers of description. To provide maximum opportunity for complexity and nuance, this research employs the method of the life story which allows the KMW to tell her story completely in her own words rather than being summarised or edited. Atkinson (1998: 3-7) describes the life story as useful because

this subjective perspective … tells us what we are looking for in all our research efforts. This is what constitutes the teller’s reality of his or her world. The storytellers are the first interpreters of the stories told. It is through the personal construction of reality, and the story told about it, that we, as researchers, learn what we want to from our subjects… An individual life, and the role it plays in the larger community, is best understood through story. Telling our story enables us to be heard, recognised, and acknowledged by others. Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear.

Beginning as a recorded interview, the life story is transcribed and translated and becomes a flowing narrative completely in the words of the KMW. This methodology is transferable across disciplines and from one researcher to another, according to Atkinson (1998). The interdisciplinary applicability of life stories provides a wide berth for gaining individual perspectives on unique experience and interpretation. For Atkinson (1998: 13),

Life stories follow a natural tendency of arranging the events and circumstances of a life in a way that gives them a coherent order (Cohler 1988). As a way of meaning making, identifying life influences, and interpreting experience, there may be no better method that the subjective narrative of the life story to help the researcher understand a life from the insider’s point of view.
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For other writers, such as Bertaux (1981), Rosenthal (1993) and Stewart (1994), life stories draw to the attention of the reader the range of possible roles, identity constructions and standards that may exist within any human community, imagined or otherwise. They can illustrate how change is experienced and provide information outside the story and about the construction of the story. Life stories can also be useful in understanding the individual’s place in society and how and why this came to be. Stewart (1994) writes that life stories help the researcher to explain an individual’s understanding of social events, movements and political causes or how individual members of the group, generation, or cohort see certain events or movements and how they see, experience or interpret those social events linked to their individual development. Life stories as antenarrative are likely to provide the most fruitful research technique for examining the practices of power described above.

3.5 Boje’s Antenarrative

In introducing the notion of antenarrative for the study of organisations and communication, Boje proposes eight different analytical techniques. These include deconstruction, grand narrative, microstoria, story network, intertextuality, causality, and plot and theme analysis. Each focuses upon exposing the making of meaning, however unconscious or subconscious, by the storyteller, and upon the interplay between premodern, modern and postmodern discourses in marginalised voices. He does not suggest that this is an exhaustive range of antenarrative techniques but provides a scope of possible analytical choices for the researcher attempting to analyse a collection of antenarrative life stories. As Boje (2001) acknowledges, it is neither possible nor necessary to apply all of these antenarrative analysis techniques to the research: space does not allow it, many walk some of the same ground and not all are relevant for discovering the same points. This research aims to discover both the macro and micro realities that define and delimit the possible Australian labour market experiences of KMW. This research will employ the tools of grand narrative and microstoria analysis in order to discover the reified organisational truths (narratives from the literature review) and the rarefied individual expressions of experience (antenarrative interviews or life
stories). These forms of narrative analysis in particular offer the opportunity to conduct the specific kind of nuanced and subtle analysis of the KMW life stories that I wish to analyse and offer a way of generating the particular kind of data I require in order to carry out a meaningful evaluation of the stories and how they might be interpreted.

Grand narrative and microstoria are also chosen as the analytical techniques of this study because they act as counterpoints to each other, reflecting moves from modernism to postmodernism and beyond. Microstoria (a postmodernist form of antenarrative thought) contends that material texts or realities do exist and do so in resistance to grand narrative (a modernist form of propositional thought) which is not convinced of a discernible and separate reality from that which the speaker interprets and creates. The use of the two techniques creates a tension between modernism and postmodernism, antenarrative and propositional thought, experience and theory. This tension aims to provide a balance and scope for both focus and open-mindedness.

Grand narrative analysis involves identifying historically embedded, modernist narratives with explanatory power and deconstructing them with non-standard voices. Most of all, it attempts to

problematisate any linear mono-voiced grand narrative of the past by replacing it with an open polysemous (many meanings) and multivocal (many voices) web of little stories. (Boje 2001: 12)

Grand narrative analysis is referred to by Brown (1991) as a ‘regime of truth’ and approaches Foucault’s notion of networks of power, oppression and liberation. Grand narratives ‘may be fundamentalist, fascist, ultra-conservative and disempowering, or they may be equal, sustainable, just and empowering’ (Brown 1991: 192). Grand narratives may also weave between the two extremes, each appropriating the language of the other. Essentially, grand narratives are the social theory and philosophy that underpin the speaker’s stories, the unquestioned truths and possibilities. White and Epson (1990: 15) write that a grand narrative ‘ignores and marginalises experiences that fall outside of its
domain, and may not provide space for the performance of one’s preferred local stories’. Grand narrative analysis attempts to provide that space, in a way that acknowledges microstoria analysis.

Analysis of grand narratives involves taking them apart and rewriting them, in reviewing them as being ‘necessarily so’. In analysing grand narratives, Baumeister and Newman (1994) draw a distinction between propositional thought and narrative (or antenarrative) thought. Propositional thought, according to Baumeister and Newman (1994: 677), are ‘abstract and decontextualised … based on general laws often involving causal relationships … essentially the sphere of science, logic and mathematics’. In this study, the literature review gives rise to two significant propositions: firstly, Korean immigrant women without strong English language skills will experience barriers in accessing and negotiating the Australian labour market. Secondly, Korean immigrant women will experience barriers between their cultural and historical senses of identity and femaleness, and that some will find opportunity where others will find contest.

Narrative (and antenarrative) thought, unlike propositional thought, is context-sensitive, unclear and difficult to access, involving temporarily structured and individual stories of experience. Baumeister and Newman (1994) argue that it is more flexible than propositional thought (here the grand narrative) and the interplay of the two sees a ‘duality, shaping and being shaped by one another in a reciprocal relationship’ (Mallon & Cohen 2001: 58). Narrative does not necessarily exclude propositional or theoretical thinking and

while individuals may not justify certain explanations or beliefs in terms of formal logic, those same beliefs and judgments can be justified by people if they are part of a coherent narrative. (Mallon & Cohen 2001: 58)

Effectively, narrative thought in this sense may be regarded as microstoria. Microstoria may deny, negate or embellish the grand narrative. Rather than the ‘unitary, totalising
and universal’ grand narratives of history, microstoria identify ‘incoherence, discontinuity and contradictions’ (Boje 2001).

Microstorian focus on the excluded narratives of women, ethnic minorities, witches, day labourers, peasants, charlatans and other ‘little people’. Instead of great man grand narratives of the hegemony of a unitary macrohistory, the point is to create many histories from below. (Boje 2001: 45)

Microstoria analysis focuses upon the middle ground between grand narrative and the ‘postmodernist concern for local narratives’ (Boje 2001: 46). It allows both for the recognition of causality, social trends and unified beliefs and for individual, unplanned and unreflected experiences.

Microstornians focus on recovering forgotten and marginalised history through both quantitative and qualitative study. While they focus on the grounded emergent micro-aspects of stories, they also situate those stories within the grander narrative schemes of the time, such as class, race and socio-economic moorings. The analysis focuses upon identifying names of places of people in ways that allow microstories to be told. Microstoria is sensitive to the micropolitics of power, the middle ground between local and grand narrative, and treats historical material as real. (Boje 2001: 52)

For Igers (1997: 104), microstoria require contextualisation within grand narrative to avoid a ‘trivialisation of history’. Musson (1998: 11) also refers to the necessary space between the two approaches, writing:

Human beings, through their actions, impose themselves on and create their worlds, but they do so in a world which presents itself as already constituted through a network of typification.
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Boje (2001: 47) argues that microstoria analysis is not deconstruction and that microstorians assume that there is a ‘pre-existing social and natured reality outside the text’. Microstoria analysis rejects the postmodern approach to impossible singular truth and knowledge and the Marxist ideological assumptions that underpin deconstruction. Boje (2001: 49) writes that

In sum, the ontological approach of microstoria is one in which there is knowledge that is specific to time and place, that can be read in the material remains of stories recorded in various archives and diaries. What is antenarrative is the focus on entering the webs of storied relationships and meanings, the stories and counter-stories of that time… Grand narrative is interpenetrated here and there with local accounts, with microstories of how people have resisted domination.

Microstoria is thus presented as being somewhat dubious in nature: postmodernist in its ‘concern for local narratives’ (Boje 2001: 45) and in its resistance to grand narratives, but rejecting the postmodernist impossible singular truth and therefore many truths. Putnam and Fairhurst (2001: 113) describe a postmodernism that

rejects grand narratives, challenges traditional notions of representation, and centres on the instability of meaning. Power and knowledge are produced, not in universal narratives, but in temporary language games and small stories located in space and time.

Microstoria analysis is used in this study to hear the individual truths and realities not addressed by the grand narratives. Many truths may arise, due to the disparities and fortunes of individual experience and circumstance, but this is not to suggest that there is no discernible reality or truth for these women as a group. However, for the purposes of this study, microstorria will assume the postmodernist role as a counterpoint to the modernist roots of grand narrative analysis.
In applying these two methods of antenarrative analysis to the two identified propositions, each proposition may be regarded as embodying one the grand narratives of labour market affiliation within which microstoria may or may not be encapsulated. The first proposition concerns the grand narrative of segmentation theory and the barriers Korean migrant women will experience in the Australian labour market due to the triple burden of racism, sexism and cultural difference. The first proposition—*In line with the grand narrative of segmentation theory, Korean migrant women will experience barriers to labour market participation in Australia due to the triple burden of racism, sexism and cultural difference*—thus presents and critiques the first grand narrative of labour market affiliation. This study examines the experiences of KMW in relation to this grand narrative, testing its validity and veracity from the perspective of each respondent, questioning whether this is necessarily always the case and whether there are alternative ways of expressing the difficulties experienced by KMW in the Australian labour market. With regard to this proposition, a number of microstoria are examined, including experiences relating to the local Korean community and its expectations, cultural difference perceptions, desirable gender roles and identity.

The second proposition is similarly constructed from an existing grand narrative of the labour market. The proposition—*In line with the grand narrative of human capital theory, Korean migrant women without strong English language skills will experience barriers in accessing and negotiating the Australia labour market*—rests upon identification and critique of the second grand narrative. Again, the life stories of the KMW in this research are examined to ask how true and relevant this proposition is, and whether there are experiences related to English language in the labour market that may better be described in other terms. With regard to this proposition, microstoria addressing perceptions of English language skill, social networks, identity and institutional processes are examined.
3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the utility of narrative analysis in examining the human agency of the marginalised individual rather than the generalised and imagined group. It has identified the KMW as a marginalised individual inadequately represented in existing literature addressing larger groups or by other, less revealing research methods. The chapter has described how narrative analysis is helpful in examining the practices of power and domination often hidden and silently agreed to and how they are experienced and understood. These practices of power include the role of language as both the mode of communication and domination, the role of race, gender and culture as the hallmarks of difference and therefore social exclusion, and the relevance of theories of marginalisation and (non-) affiliation of Orientalism and organisational studies. The KMW is identified as attempting to become affiliated with Australian labour market organisations that may refuse her through practices of power based upon language, race, culture and gender. The chapter has defined the life story as the most fruitful focus of research for examining the labour market experiences of KMW, and identified two forms of antenarrative analysis for application in this study: grand narrative and microstoria. The application of these specific types of antenarrative analysis to the life stories of KMW is the subject of the following chapter.
Chapter 4

Research Methods

The aim of this research is to examine the experiences of Korean migrant women (KMW) in the Australian labour market in their own words. Preceding overviews of literature and theoretical work have resulted in the formulation of two propositions that provide the structure for this examination. These overviews include studies of non-English-speaking background (NESB) migrants in Australia, migration history and Australian and Korean cultural norms for women, as well as human capital theory, segmentation theories and critiques of human capital theory of the labour market. From these studies, KMW are presented as disadvantaged in the Australian labour market on the basis of linguistic, cultural and gender difference. The two resultant propositions are:

Proposition 1

*In line with the grand narrative of segmentation theory, Korean migrant women will experience barriers to labour market participation in Australia due to the triple burden of racism, sexism and cultural difference.*

Proposition 2

*In line with the grand narrative of human capital theory, Korean migrant women without strong English language skills will experience barriers to accessing and negotiating the Australian labour market.*

This chapter outlines how the propositions will be used as the foundation for narrative analysis of the life stories of the sample group of KMW. It begins by addressing key issues for consideration in the research method, including questions of translation, truth, reflexivity and standpoint theory. It continues by addressing data (life story) collection:
who was included in the sample group, what questions were and were not asked to the sample group, and how interviews were conducted and recorded. Next, the characteristics of the sample group are described. This is followed by a section addressing data analysis, including how the sample is divided into five smaller groups and the three types of analysis that are used: grand narrative, grand narrative applicable microstoria and grand narrative independent microstoria.

4.1 Research Methods: Key Issues

Several issues require consideration in the application of narrative analysis techniques to the life stories of the sample group as outlined above. While these issues may not all be resolved, the research acknowledges that some compromises and inconsistencies must be allowed for. These include issues of truth and the subjectivities of the sample group and the researcher. Issues pertaining to reflexivity and standpoint theory must also be considered.

At the outset, the problematic nature of symbolic truth must be recognised. The application of antenarrative analysis techniques to the life stories of the sample group of KMW has the advantage of giving voice to the experiences of the sample group. However, while these testimonies to experience may hold more detail, nuance and depth than statistical analysis, they cannot be regarded as unproblematic truths. While it may not be possible to share experience, it is possible to share the symbols of experience. The problematic truth is symbolised in language and narrative analysis recognises this, accepting, as noted above, the fragmented, inconsistent and contradictory elements.

4.1.1 Issues of Truth

There is no way to ensure that the interviewees tell the whole truth, or to determine whether social norms and values cause them to edit their responses. As the interviews take place within a small Korean community in Sydney in which anonymity is both
difficult and essential for interviewees, it is possible that they do not always answer with complete freedom and honesty. In place of genuine beliefs or experiences, they may offer general discourses. This does not mean that these answers should be discounted or analysed for relative integrity, but they should be seen in terms of shared symbols: discourses of convenience, preservation, explanatory power and expediency. Writers such as Gavey (1980) note that the symbolic utility of discourses varies in currency and relevance over time and circumstance. One discourse may be more powerful or restrictive for one woman than another at a particular moment, but this may change with further experience and perception. Thus this research acknowledges that there is a constructed fictive element in the data used for analysis, and that the research findings will lie in the realm of symbolic truth.

Further, this study involved a second language, meaning that discourse analysis is further complicated by the untranslatable and by the subjectivity of the translator/interpreter. As translator and interpreter, the researcher must be aware of the institutional, social, cultural and temporal contexts in which the interviewees responded to the research questions and endeavour to translate/interpret them into an Australian academic context. The translations are subject to the possible meaning transfer between Korean and English and it is acknowledged that some aspects may be diminished and others amplified as a part of this process. In acknowledging these concerns, they are accepted as sites of interpretation and potential misunderstanding, but are not regarded as sufficient to prevent the research from proceeding. Potter and Wetherell (1984: 160) note that proponents of discourse analysis must recognise that:

participants’ discourse or social texts are [to be] approached in their own right [original italics] and not as a secondary route to things ‘beyond’ the text like attitudes, events or cognitive processes. Discourse is treated as a potent, action-oriented medium, not a transparent information channel.
Chapter 4: Research Methods

Issues of faithful translation and of self-deception, protection or creativity with ‘truth’ have been accepted as inherent in this study and as insufficient difficulties to discount the research as a whole.

Just as perspectives and utterances are shaped by the speaker’s personal life story and situation, they may be impacted upon by the research process. This includes such aspects as the role and attitude of the researcher and the way in which she collects the stories of her respondents. For example, the use of a tape recorder may be more convenient for the recording of stories but may also encourage the storyteller to edit and consciously reinterpret her experiences. A researcher who engages in some storytelling, to ‘get the ball rolling’ or to create an atmosphere of trust or intimacy, may just as easily alienate the respondent or elicit a counter-response. Further, some stories may easily transcend linguistic, cultural and temporal barriers, while others will suffer distortion and incoherence. Some will benefit from emotional and temporal distance and their resonance with the researcher’s interests and purpose.

4.1.2 Issues of Reflexivity

The impact of the researcher as a subjective force in the research is described as reflexivity, referring to the identification of the researcher with the research subjects and topics. Acknowledging reflexivity in research involves reflecting upon the research methodology and how that methodology shapes the outcomes of the research (Clegg & Hardy 1996; Holland 1999). As discourse analysis involves the constructive nature of language, researchers must be aware that they are creating as much as they are presenting knowledge and information. Hardy (2001) reminds us that it is important to be inclusive of the wider research community, as to omit such mention would be to posit the researcher as some sort of lone hero. Nevertheless, in an effort to be pragmatic as well as inclusive and aware, Hardy (2001) warns against becoming bogged down in reflexivity and regarding doubt as the only surety in the human condition. Rather, she suggests an awareness of reality construction in which some voices will be heard at the expense of others. This research thus acknowledges the wider academic community and discourse.
Chapter 4: Research Methods

analysis tools that it employs, and accepts that the researcher has significant subjective impact upon both data collection and analysis.

While in all aspects the researcher fits the profile of the sample group and is thus ‘qualified’ to speak from within, she is also separate from the sample. This separation arises from conducting the research and also by being a member of another group: the Australian academic community. In practice, information is gathered from one (the sample group) and delivered or reported to the other (the dominant white ‘home’ group of the academic community). While the initial altruistic aim may be to understand and thereby offer assistance to the sample group, the result is commissioned through the other group and may be seen as further entrenching the sense of superiority of the dominant home group.

This issue of superiority relates to the standpoint theories of Harding (1992) which situate all knowledge socially, historically, geographically and in various contexts. Recognising the limitations of knowledge involves recognising the limitations of the systems from which it is produced. Standpoint theorists (Harding 1992) argue that modern Western thought is produced through limited and misleading social experience and that beginning from a marginalised point is potentially less imperfect. That is, there is little or no objectivity as purported by the Western scientific tradition, and recognition of ‘the fingerprints of the production processes’ is an essential aspect of knowledge production. Harding (1992) also discusses the nature of the dominant (academically or socially) researching the marginalised for their own purposes, albeit sometimes subconsciously, often to maintain that difference. Ideally, knowledge is produced in order to create a better life for the whole of society; however, in reality, knowledge tends to be used to pursue and sustain advantage for a particular individual or some particular social groups/classes.

To summarise, this researcher was presented with two main dilemmas in this research: the problem of truth and subjectivity on the one hand, and responsibility to the marginalised sample group on the other. The researcher acknowledges that no utterance
is perfect or complete but ultimately symbolic, while defending the symbolic utterance as meaningful and liberating. These competing issues must shape the way in which this knowledge is produced and must be kept constantly in mind without being allowed to paralyse or subsume the research. An over concern with truth and altruism will render all assertions unutterable. Thus, the tools of antenarrative (grand narrative and microstoria) and organisational analysis are applied to the interviews with KMW with full awareness of their restrictions, shortcomings and philosophical quandaries, in an effort to hear what is otherwise unheard.

4.2 Data Collection

The life stories that provide the material for the research analysis were collected from 33 KMW between February 2002 and February 2003. Thirty-three interviews were conducted in respondents’ homes or offices, in Korean, using a tape recorder and then transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. Interviews ranged in duration from the shortest of one hour to the longest of three and one quarter hours, with the average duration being two and one quarter hours. To maintain anonymity respondents are referred to in the study using assumed names (a list of interviews, dates and respondents’ assumed names are attached as Appendix No.3). Prior to interview, the respondents were told that data obtained would only be used for this research and would not be released for other purposes. All respondents were given a Subject Information Statement outlining the nature and purpose of the research, and informing respondents that their names would not be published, and that they could withdraw from the project at any time. All respondents signed a consent form at the time of interview. Both the Subject Information Statement and Consent Form (see Appendix No. 4 and 5) were available in English and Korean.

Research Questionnaire (see Appendix No.1) was filled by all respondents. All interviews followed the same basic structure (see Interview Schedule, Appendix No.2). The interviewee was asked to answer basic questions concerning her (and her partner’s/husband’s) age, salary range, educational and vocational experience, English
language skills and length of time in Australia. The inclusion of the women’s husbands/partners is to acknowledge that the cumulative burdens and resources of the family unit are of great impact on the circumstances and aspirations of the KMW. That is, for some KMW, employment is neither desirable nor possible: some may feel it would be culturally unacceptable to leave their children or others may simply not need to look for work for financial reasons. To ignore the family units of these women would be to present an uninformed perspective on their labour market participation rates. This provided essential data to assist in the analysis of the qualitative data to follow, including the identification of trends amongst particular members of the sample.

Secondly, the sample respondents were asked a number of open-ended questions designed to not only elicit answers concerning labour market experiences in Australia, but also to identify the level of awareness of respondents about the factors that may be affecting their opportunities. These open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide detailed accounts of the aspects of their experiences they felt to be most significant. This style of interview is best suited to gaining rich, high quality descriptions from respondents in their own narrative styles. It ensures some commonality of topic across interviews, while also encouraging KMW to expand into issues of significance to them. For example, KMW were asked why they decided to immigrate to Australia. This elicited a range of answers, from family reunion to the search for a better life than in Korea, or better opportunities for their children. The question was designed to ascertain what sort of opportunities was envisaged by potential migrants and whether these opportunities were in terms of the KMW (as opposed to the husband, the children or the family unit as a whole). If the primary labour market aspirations were described in terms of children, these were further explored at this point. This was also designed to understand whether the respondents had realistic aspirations for their lives in Australia or whether they were overly optimistic or pessimistic. The next question explored where these perceptions and hopes originated and what sources of information were explored prior to immigration. Respondents were then asked if life in Australia had met their expectations and what sort of difficulties they may have experienced.
Most significantly, respondents were not directly asked what labour market disadvantages they had experienced in Australia. Rather, they were asked what difficulties in general they had experienced in Australia and later, whether or not they held a paid position and how they felt about it. This approach paid attention to levels of perception of labour market disadvantage. A respondent who had no need or desire to work, for instance, might not identify labour market disadvantage as a settlement issue in Australia. Finally, as a gauge of awareness, respondents were asked if they had any knowledge of institutional and legal redress regarding racism, sexism and general discrimination in the workplace. This question was left to last, as respondents might refer to these issues of their own accord earlier in the interview. The interview was not designed to be a knowledge quiz but an expression of experience. In some instances, for those with limited experience, the final explicit question was necessary.

Interviewees were contacted via community groups and social networks. This did not tend to create a genuinely random sample but a cohort of KMW who have some form of connection with each other. However, the nature of the interviews required respondents who were both willing and interested in the research topic and prepared to speak at length about their experiences. As Watson (1993: 416) writes, the demands of research involving long tape-recorded interviews ‘usually rule[s] out conventional survey approaches to sampling where the interviewer is obliged to cajole his/her pre-selected subject into cooperation’.

**4.3 Characteristics of the Sample**

A summary of the research data follows, providing an overview of age, marital status, English language study in Australia, employment history, number of children, types of jobs, education levels and the situations of husbands of KMW in the sample. This is helpful in illustrating a general understanding of KMW and in revealing how difficult any taxonomy is to apply to any group of individuals. Without predetermining a qualitative understanding of likely KMW experiences in the Australian labour market, this overview
assists in ensuring no major misconceptions are held and provides a basic backdrop for understanding the position of KMW in Australian society.

All respondents came from South Korea as there were not many migrants from North Korea and all respondents lived in Sydney at the time of interview. Sydney plays a significant role as a Korean migrant destination in Australia, attracting 40% of the national migrant intake. The 2001 Census showed 38,840 Korean-born persons in Australia, and 27,970 of those in New South Wales. In 2001, 69% of the Korean-born population in Australia lived in Sydney (Healy & Birrell 2003: 66).

All respondents in the sample (n = 33) were originally from large cities in the Republic of Korea, although some had lived in rural areas as children, already experiencing some form of social change in moving from rural to urban areas. Some respondents had lived in other countries (Brazil, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and USA) before immigrating to Australia, possibly better equipping them for the Australian immigration settlement experience.

Respondents ranged in age from 20 to 60 years old and had all been in Australia for at least one year. This age range meant that labour market experiences and aspirations varied for the respondents: for some the question of labour market participation was an active and current issue, while for others the experiences of their daughters may be more relevant.

The defining characteristics of the sample of KMW included in this survey are that the overwhelming majority (30) were (or had been) married; they are middle class and educated to at least undergraduate level. Three respondents in the sample group hold postgraduate degrees and one is qualified to doctorate level. Nearly half of the sample had undertaken some kind of tertiary studies in Australia, not including English language lessons. Upon arrival in Australia, nine of the sample studied English through the Australian government funded Adult Migrant English Service (AMES). Sixteen of the sample group have studied in Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) colleges, choosing
subjects varying from childcare to fashion design and travel and tourism. It is interesting to note that those members of the sample who undertook TAFE studies were most likely to have held employment in Korea after marriage.

Eighteen of the sample group were employed in Korea before they came to Australia or before marriage. Of those, ten followed a traditional Korean pattern of ceasing work upon marriage. Only one quarter of the sample continued to work after marriage in Korea, most often as teachers, nurses, IT workers or other professionals. In Australia, thirteen of the respondents were full-time housewives, half of whom also participated in volunteer work and activities. Just less than one quarter (seven) worked with their husbands in small family businesses and slightly higher proportions (nine) were employed professionals. These included a director of a childcare centre, a hairdresser, two teachers, two interpreters, a bank manager and a flight attendant.

Two thirds of the sample group had two children. The remaining third was evenly split between having one, three or four children if married, and none if single. This may reflect the impact of Korean government family planning messages in the 1970s encouraging couples to limit the number of children to two per family, regardless of sex. A traditional preference for boy children was discouraged at this time as many families continued reproducing in an effort to produce a son. Three quarters of the group were home-owners (in partnership with their husbands) and owned their own cars (independently of their husbands).

Half (17) of the sample group arrived in Australia between 1986 and 1990, coinciding with and immediately post-dating, Australian government overseas promotion of Australia and the then Business Migration Program. At the time of this research, 26 of the sample group had lived in Australia for longer than ten years. The majority (18) of the sample group arrived in Australia as supported dependents or secondary applicants. A further 11 arrived in Australia under the family reunion category, sponsored by existing permanent resident Korean-Australian men or their family. Two arrived as students and married upon arrival in Australia, but the great majority (29) married before
coming to Australia. Another three had studied in Australia, returned to Korea and married, before applying for permanent residence. Only four of the respondents arrived in Australia as principal applicants in their own right, passing skills, age and assets tests.

In terms of age, four of the sample group were between 20 and 30 years of age, all of whom arrived in Australia as teenage high school students dependent upon their fathers. Six of the respondents were between 30 and 40 years of age, most of whom arrived as new brides in Australia. Fourteen respondents were between 40 and 50 years of age and nine were between 50 and 60 years of age. Those in the last two age brackets were most likely to be involved in volunteer work.

The research also considered the education and occupations of the husbands of the research subjects in order to more fully understand their circumstances. The majority of husbands (22) had completed undergraduate studies in Korea, nine had completed postgraduate degrees and two had completed doctorates. One third studied English through AMES upon arrival in Australia and nearly one quarter had completed postgraduate degrees in Australia. Ten of the husbands of the KMW in the sample had not undertaken any studies in Australia.

The husbands of the respondents had experienced some change in the nature of their occupations upon migration. In Korea, two thirds were employed by large companies; four were business owners and another four were other professionals such as university professors or dentists. In Australia, one was deceased and another retired. Twelve were employed by companies or businesses, twelve owned and ran small businesses with their wives and four worked as professionals within the Korean community.
4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Taxonomy

In testing the two propositions, it was necessary to divide the interview group into smaller groups for manageability and to identify any emerging trends. As identified in the literature review, labour market barriers are generally explained in terms of material circumstances: class, age, gender, education, linguistic skills, qualifications, country of birth, number of children and migration category of the KMW. Division of the sample group according to these material circumstances would serve to further embed these accepted grand narratives of how linguistic, gender and cultural difference are experienced negatively in the labour market.

This research seeks to divide KMW into groups based not upon material circumstances, but upon their own volition and desire to participate in the labour market. This acknowledges that non-participation may be a happy choice for some KMW rather than a signifier of labour market exclusion or failure. Other KMW may experience non-participation with disappointment or frustration, retrain or find alternative activities. For many, choices and behaviours are described terms of their identity rather than a strictly logical reckoning of their labour market chances and value. This taxonomy seeks to privilege individual identities and perspectives concerning the Australian labour market over material circumstances and prevailing taxonomies. While focusing upon the labour market experiences of KMW in Australia, this research avoids implying that labour market participation is desirable or necessary.
Table 4.1: Five Groups of KMW Identified in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group I: Never career oriented</td>
<td>Neither frustrated by unfulfilled desire to perform paid work nor constrained by perceived barriers to labour market participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group II: Career oriented but do not participate in the paid labour market</td>
<td>Willing to work and regard themselves as essentially career oriented but who for some reason do not participate in the local labour market despite the desire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group III: Not career oriented but participate in paid labour market</td>
<td>Not career oriented but forced into labour market participation by circumstance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group IV: Career oriented (post-migration)</td>
<td>Did not work in Korea but were keen and happy to participate in the labour market upon migration to Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group V: Career oriented (pre-migration)</td>
<td>Career oriented and worked in Korea or another country prior to migration and then continued to work upon immigration to Australia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group I: Not career oriented**

Group I is constituted by KMW who are apparently unconcerned by the question of labour market participation in the current conception of the labour market. Members of this group do not participate in paid work but may participate in some form of community or voluntary activity. They are neither frustrated by unfulfilled desire to perform paid work nor constrained by perceived barriers to labour market participation. Similarly, they are not forced to fulfil unwelcome roles or positions. This group may be summed up by the statement, ‘I have never wanted to work’. By way of example, one group member, Young-hee, talked in the following terms:
My parents did not want me to work outside of the home. Actually, they didn’t even want me to go to university at all; because we lived in the country and going to university meant that I would have to leave home. My parents had not even considered the idea of me leaving home and moving to Seoul to study, and they certainly wouldn’t have if my brother, who was already at university, hadn’t convinced them to let me go. So I went to Seoul to study and, when I finished, I returned home to my parents and I waited to get married.

All three women in this group hold university degrees, and one holds a postgraduate qualification in economics. One holds a university degree in ‘home management’ and another in English literature. All three married men with secure and financially rewarding jobs and concentrated on their own roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. Upon the maturation of their children, two of the group now participate in voluntary work within the Korean community in Australia.

**Group II: Career oriented but do not participate in the paid labour market**

Group II is constituted by KMW who are willing to work in Australia and regard themselves as essentially career oriented but who for some reason do not participate in the local labour market despite this desire. The reasons for this non-participation may vary from perceived external barriers to recognised internal struggles. This group may be summarised by the statement, ‘I want to work in Australia but I can’t’. In the words of one group member, Yung-ok:

> **In terms of work, I did not dare to think about getting a job even though I had a lot of work experience and expertise in Korea. I never think about getting a job in Australia because of my poor English. I did not pursue a career in fashion design because I was too worried about English and age barriers.**
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Instead, I made a lot of things and donated them to the church or community for fund raising.

Within this group, consideration of the impact of material circumstances arises: what is it that makes these KMW career-oriented and what is it that prevents them from realising this desire? All five of the KMW in this group were middle class and university graduates. Three KMW of this group had married and worked in Korea prior to migration to Australia but either did not work upon migration or did not work at the time of the interview for this research. Six KMW of Group II were married to men who were employed as professionals in their fields and had arrived as dependant applicants on their husband’s skilled migration visas or married Korean men who live in Australia. Despite these commonalities, Group II members revealed a number of different barriers to their Australian labour market participation. These barriers varied from English language proficiency to access to childcare and responsibility for caring for their parents-in-law.

Group III: Not career oriented but participate in paid labour market

Group III is constituted by KMW who unwillingly perform paid work in Australia. Members of this group may regard themselves as not career oriented but forced into labour market participation by circumstance, and are thus unwilling to be involved in any kind of work in Australia. Alternatively, members of this group may regard themselves as career oriented but forced into fulfilling a role not of their own choosing or to their liking. They may be willing to participate in the labour market in general or in theory, but are unwilling to perform the role that they hold. This group may be summarised by the statement, ‘I don’t want to work in my Australian job, but I have to’. Accordingly a member of this group, Jin-seng, described her position in the following terms:

I was a high school teacher in Korea. I worked after married for 10 years; it means that I worked before I came to Australia. My husband started business, and his business went very well and I had to work for his business. I did not want to be involved in my husband’s business but he half forced me
Within this group, consideration of the impact of material circumstances arises, raising the questions: what is it that makes these KMW need to work and why do they dislike their Australian jobs? Like Group II, all six of the KMW in this group were middle class and university graduates. Four of the KMW in Group III arrived in Australia as dependants on their husbands’ business skills visas; one KMW arrived as a dependant of a skilled migrant and one married a Korean man who already lived in Australia. These KMW were not required to have or evidence any particular skills or assets and were entitled to limited English language training upon arrival. As business migrants are expected to have more assets and be self-sufficient, they are expected to fully support their dependants. As fully supported dependants, wives were less likely to need to search for paid employment. However, the majority of Group III KMW contributed to their husbands’ businesses in some capacity, whether or not they regarded themselves as participating in the Australian labour market. The four KMW in this group were all involved in their husbands’ businesses and one KMW had her own business to support her family’s financial needs.

**Group IV: Career oriented (post-migration)**

Group IV is constituted by KMW who are avid and active participants in the Australian labour market. This group is composed of KMW who did not work in Korea but were keen and happy to participate in the labour market upon migration to Australia, finding an opportunity hitherto unavailable. This group also includes KMW who arrived in Australia as teenagers, with little choice but to attend high school and university in Australia and with no possibility for work experience prior to immigration. These ‘teenage’ KMW are members of this group more by circumstance than spirit. This group may be described by the statement, ‘I want to work since arriving in Australia and I do’. To use the words of one member of this group, Eun-sun:
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...I am very satisfied with my career. If I did not come to Australia, I would have lived as a good housewife and good mother. Maybe I never would have thought about getting a job, but my immigration experience made me work in a paid job and recognise my potential talent.

KMW who became career oriented upon immigration to Australia were much more likely to address the English language barrier by attempting to learn English rather than avoiding or sidestepping it. Of the eight KMW in this group, only one, a shopkeeper, attempted to sidestep second language acquisition. One of the eight became a translator and interpreter, newly capitalising upon her bilingualism.

**Group V: Career oriented (pre-migration)**

Group V includes KMW who were career oriented and worked in Korea or another country prior to migration and then continued to work upon immigration to Australia. The four KMW in this group were all principal applicants at the time of immigration, arriving as skilled and trained workers: an IT worker, flight attendant, a childcare director and a nurse. All satisfied the English language requirement and held at least an undergraduate qualification in Korea, and two pursued postgraduate studies in Australia. In Australia, one (the IT worker) studied English at AMES for three months upon immigration but did so more for social, networking and information-gathering purposes than for linguistic development. That is, none of the KMW who were already career oriented in Korea attempted to sidestep the English language barrier. However, this is not to suggest that the KMW in this group were entirely confident with their English language abilities.

Group V is constituted by KMW who are avid and active participants in the Australian labour market. Members of this group regard themselves as career oriented and have frequently performed paid work in Korea prior to migration and then continued performing paid work in Australia upon migration. This group may be summarised by
the statement, ‘I wanted to work before arriving in Australia and I do’. For example, Hyun-sun, a member of this group talked in the following terms:

*The job I had was so good. It was an internationally well-known company. They recognised my qualifications and work experience in Korea and the salary was very good. I worked very hard and they promoted me and my salary was increased. I appreciated the company’s treatment of me, even though my English was not good enough and I worked even harder.*

Within this group, consideration of the impact of material circumstances arises: what is it that makes these four KMW career-oriented? The four KMW of Group V were working class, have a vocationally oriented college education, are married and originate from a rural area in Korea. These KMW were likely to have moved from their rural homes to a city to complete their studies and to regard migration to another country as an extension of that experience. They were more likely to have chosen occupations that were always in demand in Korea and were traditionally female domains: child care, nursing, flight attendant etc. They were also more likely to arrive in Australia as principal applicants rather than dependants.

### 4.4.2 Grand Narrative and Microstoria Analysis

This research employs two main types of (ante) narrative analysis as its core research tool for examining the life stories of KMW in the Australian labour market: grand narrative and microstoria analysis. These two forms of analysis are regarded here as interconnected, examining both the grand overview and the particular, individual experience of labour market disadvantage. Initially, two testable propositions are developed that are each embedded with a traditional or prevailing grand narrative. Each life story is examined against each proposition to test not only the proposition’s utility, but also the utility of the analytical framework upon which it is built. Microstoria analysis is then employed to further analyse in depth issues and microstories that are not directly addressed by the defined propositions. Two types of microstoria analysis are
used: grand narrative applicable microstoria (experiences not directly covered by each proposition but still relevant to one or the other) and grand narrative independent microstoria (experiences entirely unacknowledged by either proposition). Where grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis is used to critique and problematise the two propositions and their attendant grand narratives, grand narrative independent microstoria analysis is used as the foundation for proposing a third, alternative understandings of labour market experiences of KMW in Australia.

Grand narrative analysis takes each proposition as the story of KMW in the Australian labour market and asks how this story is borne out in the life stories of the sample group. This is the most structured and controlled analysis in this research and aims to stay within the confines of the established propositions, finding that they are either supported, refuted or irrelevant. The five categories outlined above are useful here in allowing that the findings might vary between respondents according to their desire and need to work. It is to be expected that those with no interest in participating in the labour market will find no barriers and those already working in the labour market have proven their ability to overcome any barriers to participation that may exist. However, this may not be the case or may change over time. It is possible that the propositions as grand narratives may be shown to hold as true for one group, false for another and irrelevant to another. By beginning with the propositions as grand narratives and the five groups, the structure of the research follows. One chapter is devoted to each group, within which two or three life stories are analysed, first for evidence of each of the grand narratives and then in terms of microstoria.

Microstoria analysis is not based upon the above groups but on repeated and commonly told stories within the life stories of KMW. Rather than focusing upon whether each proposition is supported, refuted or irrelevant, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis asks what stories KMW repeatedly tell about gender/culture or English and the labour market in Australia that are aligned with the two propositions. This type of analysis allows KMW who were not or had never been participating, and had no intention to participate, in the labour market to contribute to the discussion and provide their perspectives. For example, a KMW who is a full-time housewife could describe
vicarious labour market experiences of friends, husband, relatives, neighbours and children with structure, rationale and understanding. Drawing upon available discourses and related experience, she tells a microstory or numerous microstories of the KMW labour market experience in regards to issues of language, gender and culture. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis allows for discussion of language, gender and culture issues that are unresolved or mysterious to KMW, and therefore not easily embraced by the propositional thought of grand narratives.

Microstoria analysis involves an intuitive and sensitive response to the echo of themes, resonances and ideas of a kind. Where an idea is repeated several times across the entire sample group in terms that are sufficiently similar to ‘ring bells’ of recognition, each life story is examined for utterances sympathetic to the idea. If sufficient examples are found, either in clarity or number, the idea is named and becomes the title of a microstory. The microstory is then constructed from the examples, to tell a single story informed by many. It is an inexact technique that is highly interpretive and likely to be unique to the researcher and cannot be read as exhaustive, complete or definitive. Rather, it is suggestive of a collective storytelling shared by members of a particular group of people who may not know each other and have unique material circumstances and experiences. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 58) write that,

analysis is not a structured, static, or rigid process. Rather it is a free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques and procedures freely and in response to the analytic task before analysts.

This analysis is more creative and constructive than grand narrative analysis and less a test of truth than an exercise in listening and retelling. As much as possible, the retelling is done in the words of the KMW themselves, focusing upon implicit and explicit attitudes, beliefs and statements of apparent fact and rationalised explanations. In explaining how gender or culture or English affects her, or another’s, labour market experience, a KMW reveals underlying expectations, responses to adversity and coping
strategies, which become the subject of microstoria. This type of analysis provides the opportunity for each KMW to tell many microstoria, some of which may be directly contradictory or applied at different times. For example, a KMW may use one set of ‘self-evident truths’ and assumptions to tell the story of her own experiences and beliefs and another to tell the story of her daughter or sister. Neither telling can be regarded as more or less ‘right’ than the other, but one available sense-making technique for understanding experience.

Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis is conducted last, after grand narrative analysis and grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis, and listens and retells stories beyond the grand narratives. A focus remains upon labour market experience, but it is here not necessarily linked to traditional concerns of language, gender and culture. This does not mean that these will not figure in this analysis but that other factors are allowed equal or appropriate consideration. This type of analysis uses the technique of microstoria to construct new stories and is the most creative in having the most ‘open ear’, unfettered by the propositions. Narrative analysis in this research thus moves from the most highly defined and tightly constrained to the freest and most creative form. This movement is helpful in defining the technique and in providing focus for the analysis, so that the plethora of microstoria is much reduced at the point of grand narrative independent microstoria analysis. Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis results in the construction of two microstoria and informs better understandings of labour market experiences of KMW in Australia that arise from life stories and non-existing literature.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an outline of how the data for this research, in the form of life stories of the sample group, was collected, organised and analysed. Issues and techniques for grand narrative and microstoria analysis have been outlined, acknowledging the interpretive and creative nature of this methodology. The chapter has also addressed the
somewhat unavoidable and unresolvable issues of problematic and symbolic truth, researcher subjectivity and the place of knowledge production in the marginalisation of non-dominant groups. The following chapter analyses the first group of the sample outlined in the taxonomy section using grand narrative analysis, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis and grand narrative independent microstoria analysis.
Chapter 5

Group I: Never Engaged Nor Wish to Engage in the Paid Labour Market

This chapter is the first of five chapters that examine the life stories of sub-groups (in this case Group I) within the larger sample group through grand narrative and microstoria analysis techniques. Each group is defined by its individual members sharing similar labour market attitudes and aspirations. This first chapter of life stories of Korean migrant women (KMW) questions whether the grand narrative propositions identified in earlier chapters can have any meaning for those who have no desire or need to participate in the labour market. The grand narrative propositions state that KMW will experience barriers in accessing the Australian labour market because of, firstly, their traditional gender and cultural roles as wives and mothers and, secondly, their limited English language skills.

Group I is constituted by two KMW who are apparently unconcerned by the question of labour market participation as they understand and define it. This allows for the possibility that one KMW may define a particular activity as labour market participation where another may not. Where quantitative analysis would seek to determine what is and what is not labour market participation, this qualitative analysis provides the scope for KMW to reveal their rationale for considering activities in labour market terms or not. Members of this group do not participate in what they regard to be the labour market, but may participate in some form of community or voluntary activity. They are neither frustrated by unfulfilled desires to participate in the ‘labour market’, nor constrained by perceived barriers to labour market participation. Similarly, they do not regard themselves forced to fulfil any unwelcome roles or positions.
The two women in this group hold Korean university degrees, with one holding an Australian postgraduate qualification. One holds a university degree in ‘home management’ and the other in English literature from Korea. Both are married, their spouses’ have secure and financially rewarding jobs, while they themselves concentrated on their own roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. Upon the maturation of their children, both now participate in voluntary work within the Korean community in Australia. Both arrived in Australia as their husbands’ dependants on their migration applications.

Two life stories are examined here to illustrate why KMW would not consider performing paid work whatsoever in any situation. The first story is told by Young-hee, who describes herself as satisfied with her role as a full-time housewife. The second story is told by Eun-ji, who has pursued academic and religious community activities and is less satisfied with being a full-time housewife.

The two life stories are examined in turn through grand narrative and microstoria analysis in this chapter. Each story is transcribed and translated into English and then analysed for evidence of the grand narratives. Each life story is first examined for evidence that supports or refutes each of the two propositions. This is followed by examination of individual experiences that are not adequately addressed or included in the propositions but nevertheless maintain some relevance to its key issues. These are addressed as grand narrative applicable microstoria. Finally, issues and experiences entirely beyond the scope of either proposition are examined as grand narrative independent microstoria.

5.1 Young-hee’s story

*We arrived in Sydney on the 18th of December 1988 with my two children. My husband had graduated from the Air Force Defence College in Korea. He was an air force pilot and engineer. The Korean Government had sent him to study in America. We went to America and stayed there for about three years. When we arrived in Sydney we stayed at*
a motel for two weeks. After that we moved to my husband’s friend’s house for two weeks and finally, we found a flat.

I knew that my husband had some problems finding a decent job in Sydney. He had interviews with very big companies, such as Qantas, and he told me why he thought he was not successful in getting jobs. They told him that his English was excellent, but they were not confident with his ability to manage emergency situations. My husband did all the English communication for my family, such as the banking and organising school and doctor’s appointments.

After a few attempts to find work in his profession, he decided that he would take any job. He applied to an import-export trading company and he got a job. It was not his trained profession and he didn’t need any special skills but at least it was managerial and in an office. He said that his job was not challenging and not hard but it was all right as long as he could support the family with his income. Often senior management of the company tried to cheat him by not giving him holiday payments or fringe benefits he was entitled to. When he realised what they were doing and approached them about it, it did stop. The staff thought that because he was Asian and spoke English with an accent that he didn’t know much. He stayed with the company for eight years.

I have never worked for money in my whole life. Even though I graduated from university, I didn’t even think about getting a job. My parents were very conservative — their idea of being a girl or daughter is to finish a university degree and marry a good husband who can support you. After I married and we went to America, I stayed at home and did household work. I liked housework. When I lived in Korea, I was also a full-time housewife. When I arrived in Sydney, I attended an AMES course for six months. After that I always stayed at home and looked after the children while my husband went to work. I did the housework and read books. I didn’t go out much nor have many friends since I didn’t go to a Korean Church.
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When we arrived in Sydney, my daughter was in year 5 and my son was in year 3. They both adjusted very well to school here. My daughter had many school friends and she used to invite them home. She studied psychology at Sydney University and after graduating, she studied for a human resources diploma at TAFE. Then she got a job at LG and she worked there for three years. Now she is working in a big Australian company as a human resources manager. She got married last year and is still working.

My daughter is living with her parents-in-law. My daughter tells me that every morning she gets up very early and prepares a lunch box for her husband and breakfast for her parents-in-law and her parents-in-law are very happy with her. When I met her parents-in-law, they told me that I had brought up a very good daughter. They were so proud of my daughter. When I heard this, I was so happy and I remembered that when my daughter was with me before marriage, she didn’t do anything, not even eat breakfast. But now, she wants to please her parents-in-law by doing all the housework and still going to work. I was happy because she was coping very well and her parents-in-law were very satisfied with her.

When I came to Australia, I found some women had to find paid work to support their families. I felt that I was so lucky that I didn’t have to. What would have happened if I needed to find work and couldn’t? I didn’t have any job skills and with my poor English, I just thanked God that I didn’t need to.

When we arrived in Sydney, we tried to settle amongst the Australian community. We went to an Australian church to learn English and Australian culture. I could not understand at all, but my children and my husband became used to it. I never thought about getting a job in Australia or Korea — I was just happy to stay at home to look after domestic matters such as cooking and cleaning and I had no friends at all. After a few years, when my husband started working for a Korean company, we started to attend a Korean church and I made a few friends. One of my friends talked about a counselling course at TAFE that was taught in Korean. I attended the course and it was very useful and we organised a group to help other Korean women. We meet regularly and have
seminars for self-development and we provide counselling services for Korean women. I have never needed to communicate with Australians.

My two children are grown up and I do not have to do much housework. I have too much free time. I don't like going out or the idea of playing golf. Every weekend, when my husband used to play golf, and I accompanied him, I just watched other people playing — it was so boring. So my husband persuaded me to play golf, so I am doing this for my husband.

5.1.1 Grand Narratives

The first grand narrative of gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation in Australia may be initially regarded as irrelevant to Young-hee, rather than negated or overcome. No barrier may be said to exist where it is not perceived as preventative of the fulfilment of need or desire. In organisational theory terms, Young-hee has little or no interest in being affiliated with Australian society, let alone the competitive affiliation characteristic of labour market organisations. Because Young-hee has no desire or need to participate in the labour market, it may be argued that no difficulty in labour market participation exists for her. In this sense, ‘no difficulty’ does not mean unlimited access to the labour market, but rather, an absence of the notion of being prevented from entering the labour market. This serves to highlight the subjective nature and notion of a ‘difficulty’ as a perceived phenomenon, which prevents one from doing or being what one wishes or needs to do or be.

However, in this case, gender and cultural phenomena are revealed as instrumental in rendering labour market participation unthinkable and barriers to it thereby irrelevant. Young-hee makes several statements that illustrate the unthinkability (impossibility to conceive) of her participating in any labour market, let alone the Australian one. She says, ‘Even though I graduated from university, I didn’t even think about getting a job. My parents were very conservative — their idea of being a girl or daughter is to finish a university degree and marry a good husband who can support you’, revealing strong
influences of her parents’ concept of appropriate gender roles. All discussion of the labour market for Young-hee is premised upon her understandings of her gender role. Young-hee describes her surprise in finding that the gender role was culturally determined, saying, ‘When I came to Australia, I found some women had to find paid work to support their families. I felt that I was so lucky that I didn’t have to’. Regardless of the country or culture in which Young-hee lived, her gender-derived role remained unchanged: ‘After I married and we went to America, I stayed at home and did household work... When I lived in Korea, I was also a full-time housewife... I never thought about getting a job in Australia or Korea’. Furthermore, Young-hee expresses no objection to this role, accepting and enjoying it, saying, ‘I was just happy to stay at home to look after domestic matters such as cooking and cleaning’. Such acceptance of a highly determined role on the basis of gender and culture thus renders labour market participation mutually unnecessary and undesirable.

The second grand narrative appears to be supported by Young-hee’s story, as evidenced by her statement that ‘with my poor English, I just thanked God that I didn’t need to [look for a job]’, linking English language ability to labour market difficulty. However, closer scrutiny of the statement reveals that the grand narrative is better described as irrelevant to Young-hee. As noted, the relevance or support of the grand narrative is essentially linked to the idea of what constitutes difficulty in general and to labour market participation in particular. Young-hee speaks of herself as a KMW who has neither the interest nor the need to participate in the Australian labour market or to interact with ‘mainstream’ (English-speaking) Australians.

Although Young-hee mentions that she attended Adult Migrant English language classes for six months upon arrival in Australia, and is objectively able to communicate in English according to this researcher, she describes her English language skills as ‘poor’. In addition to a low self-assessment of her English, she says that she has ‘never needed to communicate with Australians’ and that she was ‘so lucky’ that she ‘didn’t have to look for a job’. This highlights both how Young-hee comes to be placed in Group I and the link between a lack of desire and/or need to participate and the perception of her own
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Young-hee describes attending a course at TAFE that was taught in Korean as useful for her self-development, however, she expresses no career aspirations or interests in studying subjects that may lead to labour market participation. Nevertheless, Young-hee expresses a perception that were she ever to wish or need to participate in the Australian labour market, her ‘poor English’ in combination with her lack of ‘job skills’ would hinder her from getting a job. She says, ‘what would have happened if I needed to find work and couldn’t?’, indicating the causal link between the need to work and the presentation of the difficulty in doing it. This illustrates awareness on the part of Young-hee that this grand narrative might hold true for her, were she to wish or need to participate. In this way, Young-hee evidences the presence and utility of human capital theory, despite her longstanding non-participation. Young-hee’s story thereby neither refutes nor supports the second grand narrative, but renders it irrelevant to her in her current circumstances. Nevertheless, the basis for its irrelevance is a function of gender and culture.

5.1.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

While the above analysis determines the grand narratives to be irrelevant, grand narrative applicable microstoria are evident in the vicarious labour market participation Young-hee experiences through her husband and daughter. Just as gender and cultural forces render labour market participation unthinkable for Young-hee, labour market participation and financial provision from a non-negotiable role for her husband. Nevertheless, Young-hee’s husband was obliged in Australia to take on tasks traditionally outside his role as a provider, such as organising banking, health, education and family affairs, on the basis of his superior English language skills. Young-hee’s husband had three years work experience in America, in which he spoke English in a technical labour market position, but Young-hee describes his difficulty in securing a position in Australia. She says that, in one organisation, ‘they told him his English was excellent but they were not confident with his ability to manage emergency situations’, revealing an ironic and denied link between the perception of difference and the ability to trust or risk employing a person
who is unacceptably different. This is even though his ‘English was excellent’ and displays a conscious rejection of the human capital theory ideal of the labour market.

Young-hee also believes her husband has been cheated of benefits in another workplace as ‘the staff thought that because he was Asian and spoke with an accent that he didn’t know much’. Young-hee describes a barrier not to KMW directly, but a vicarious experience of how the Australian labour market may be closed or discriminatory to a Korean migrant man on the basis of his English language and physical and cultural differences, despite his objective English language proficiency. These stories of her husband’s labour market experiences may be understood both in terms of the rules of affiliation characteristic of organisational theory and the hierarchy of acceptance based on difference in segmentation theory. Because the negative experience is repeated in different organisations, Young-hee tends more towards a segmentation theory of the labour market, where the rules of acceptance are widely practised rather than particular to the organisation. This vicarious experience contributes to an awareness of labour market barriers were Young-hee ever to contemplate labour market participation. This awareness may in itself be sufficient to prevent any attempts in joining the labour market.

Young-hee describes her daughter as participating in the Australian labour market as a human resources manager, and describes an educational and career path that has led to this position. Here, unlike the stories of her husband, Young-hee tells a straightforward success story in terms of human capital. Objectively, Young-hee’s husband was far more qualified and experienced (higher human capital) than her daughter, but experienced far greater difficulties in participating in the Australian labour market on the basis of non-recognition of his human capital. Young-hee’s daughter, educated in Australia, resulting in an Australian accent, realised the potential of her lower human capital to a greater degree than her father. When Young-hee tells the story of her daughter’s labour market path, it is short, unproblematic and ideal.

While no negative or any other issues are referred to in terms of her daughter’s labour market experience, reference is made to a simultaneous role as a good wife and daughter-
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in-law. Young-hee expresses most pride in her ‘good daughter’ in terms of filial service: ‘every morning she gets up very early and prepares a lunch box for her husband and breakfast for her parents-in-law and her parents-in-law are very happy with her ... she wants to please her parents-in-law by doing all the housework and still going to work’. Young-hee describes her daughter’s career path in a matter-of-fact manner, with no associated mention of pride or approval for her daughter on the basis of her career. It is only when Young-hee speaks of her daughter’s more traditional gender role that pride and approvals are evidenced. While the traditional gender role does not prevent Young-hee’s daughter from realising her career path and participating in the labour market, it is her performance of the traditional role in addition to labour market participation that is applauded by Young-hee in her story. The change in generation and country of residence may change the labour market thinkability or possibility for a KMW (or her daughter), but does not release her from the responsibilities and social expectations of the role of ‘good wife and wise mother’.

5.1.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria

The predominant theme in this story that sits apart from the grand narratives is one of social connectedness and individual purpose. Young-hee’s story revolves around the activities and experiences of her husband and two children, which in itself is an expression of the totality of the traditional gender role. In terms of herself she says that she ‘didn’t go out much nor have many friends since [she] didn’t go to a Korean Church’. Later, when her husband began working for a Korean company, they attended a Korean church as a couple, leading Young-hee to make friends and develop a social network. This in turn led to Young-hee’s participation in attending a TAFE counselling course in Korean, and finding herself counselling KMW in Australia. Young-hee also describes accompanying her husband to play golf, in the absence of sufficient housework to stay busy, which she dislikes but does ‘for her husband’. Young-hee’s activities outside the family are limited to the Korean church, community-based counselling and her husband’s leisure activities. Young-hee describes herself as not having friends because she did not attend Korean church, revealing it to be the only real social source in
her mind. Non-attendance of Korean church in Australia for a KMW in this story is effectively antisocial.

Young-hee’s story of her social life is generally confined to the Christian church, both Korean and Australian, and the Korean ethnic community. Young-hee employs the discourses of Christianity (thanking God) and of ethnicity (wanting to become a part of the mainstream, wanting to be in the majority rather than the minority). Here again, Young-hee uses the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse in describing her attendance of an Australian church in which she cannot communicate. Young-hee mentions TAFE and her involvement in counselling as the most successful social experience. This counselling role is highly reflective of the ‘good wife and wise mother’ discourse in the absence of children.

Microstoria analysis illustrates numerous stories that act as conduits to express Young-hee’s sense not just of her role, or lack thereof, in the Australian labour market, but also of her holistic role and position in life. The story of marriage, why and to whom, and her resulting role, is the foundation or genesis point of Young-hee’s story; everything prior to marriage led towards it, including her education, parents’ attitudes, class and aspirations. Everything after marriage is defined by the responsibilities and limitations of her married situation as wife and mother. Within this marriage narrative, Young-hee uses the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse so entrenched in Korean society. The story of migration and becoming a migrant is a post-marriage condition, in which the discourse of ‘good wife, wise mother’ is again used by Young-hee to explain that her migration was based on her husband’s decision and career ambition, rather than her own. She did not consider her own needs or wishes, as per the self-sacrificing discourse, but privileged the wishes and wellbeing of her husband and children. Young-hee’s pride in bringing up a daughter who has fulfilled the Korean ideals of serving her husband’s parents was made clear, even dwelt upon, at some length. However, in addition to this role, Young-hee was satisfied that her daughter was also employed in the mainstream labour market, adding a second and newer role to the more traditional one.
Discussion of the labour market is approached in two ways by Young-hee. Firstly, she refers to her husband’s experiences, regarding the labour market as a realm in which she does not participate or belong. In describing her understanding of the labour market, she refers to notions of racism and English language skills, but is most concerned with discourses of status and concomitant satisfaction. This draws upon the discourse of the ‘provider husband’, the husband whose ability to provide financial support and command respect is the male counterpart to the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse. These two discourses are self-supporting and reinforcing. Secondly, in referring to herself, Young-hee states that she has never worked for money and is surprised to find Australian women doing so. Young-hee does not regard her domestic activities as ‘work’, with her narrative describing her as a ‘good wife and wise mother’ who has no job. She is aware that she is bored now that her children have grown up; her story describes children as filling and occupying her life, and releasing her from the need to work.

5.1.4 Summary

Young-hee’s story renders both grand narratives irrelevant, albeit in different ways. In terms of the first grand narrative, labour market participation is absolutely unthinkable for Young-hee, this unthinkability itself a function of gender and cultural constructions. In terms of the second grand narrative, English language barriers are irrelevant, simply because Young-hee neither wants nor needs to find a position in the Australian labour market. Despite regarding labour market participation as beyond her own personal realm of possibility, Young-hee tells of vicarious labour market and domestic experiences of her husband and daughter, which reveal microstoria relevant to both grand narratives. She describes her husband as experiencing discrimination on the basis of English language difference and applauds her daughter for managing to maintain a labour market role at the same time as a traditional gender role. Young-hee draws upon discourses and ideas of human capital theory and segmentation theory in particular, as useful in telling the labour market stories of her family. Even though both propositions are found irrelevant, there is evidence for the utility of their underlying grand narratives of segmentation and human capital theory.
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Young-hee is the site of a number of competing and reinforcing discourses, mostly cultural and gender based: wife and motherhood, Confucianism, Christianity, class and endurance. English language skills, or the perceived lack thereof, impose further limitations on Young-hee, changing the roles accorded her by her own culture into something less challenging and rewarding in Australia. Within the context of these discourses, it is difficult to imagine that the achievement of English language proficiency would in and of itself ensure that Young-hee would participate in the Australian labour market of her own accord. For this to occur, the teaching and learning of English language (and thereby Australian culture) would need to be a strongly transformative process that offered alternative and persuasive discourses to those listed above.

5.2 Eun-ji’s story

I came to Australia in 1989. Prior to coming to Australia, we lived in America for two years as my husband was transferred there with his Korean company. When I left Korea for America, I wanted to study while my husband worked. But I couldn’t because I found myself pregnant with my first son. I had a hard time in America, with poor English, no friends or relatives, and a difficult first pregnancy. I had my first son in America. We returned to Korea and stayed there for another two years. While I was in Korea, I had a second son.

One day, my husband told me suddenly that ‘we are going to emigrate to Australia’. When I heard this, I couldn’t believe my ears and I told him that I didn’t want to go to Australia. I had had enough in America and I was just scared of any foreign country. However, I could not change his mind. When we arrived in Sydney, my older son was six years old and my second son was four years old. On arrival, we were very busy buying a house and finding schools for my children. My husband had already found a job before we arrived. I had to arrange most of the housing and schooling.
In 1991, I enrolled in a Bachelor of Theology in a theological college. After completion of the degree, I studied a Masters of Theology. I wanted to be a Christian family counsellor but I couldn’t find a course that I wanted to study. So when I did my Master’s degree, I chose all the subjects related to counselling. My degree is a Master of Theology but I really studied more Christian counselling. After I finished my Master’s, I didn’t give up. I found that Relationships Australia offered a one-year family counselling course. I attended that and I got a diploma from there.

I had never looked for work in my whole life and I did not want to do paid work. It is a husband’s responsibility to bring money into the home. However, one day, my mother-in-law showed me an advertisement for a Korean teacher at a Saturday school. As I was already busy and tired with what I was doing, I didn’t want to apply, but my mother-in-law said that if I didn’t apply at the time, I would never get a job later. She thought that I would need a job as the children grew older and after they left home. I was annoyed but I applied. I was so happy when I didn’t get the job. The next year, however, they offered me a job. I found the principal of the Korean School was my senior at university. We had to make all the syllabi and curricula for the HSC course as none existed. I am still teaching there and I enjoy it very much.

I didn’t like the idea of getting a paid job, but when I got one and I started teaching, I liked the job very much. I can’t really say that it is really ‘work’. I only teach on Saturdays, and only during school terms. To me, it is like every Saturday I have a good reason to get out of the house and enjoy myself with students and other teachers. It is much more of a social thing for me rather than work.

My two sons completed high school. I wanted to find a job that I would really like to do, but it is very hard. I really wanted to be a counsellor but most of the institutions which advertised counselling positions required a qualification in psychology or social work which I do not have. Also, since I don’t have any particular paid work experience in Korea or Australia, it is very hard to get a job. At the moment I do volunteer work with
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Relationships Australia but only on a casual basis. If I can’t get a decent job, I might do a PhD. I am not sure at the moment.

I always wanted to help people who had problems but I haven’t had many opportunities. After marriage I had to look after my family and go to church, study and Saturday school. I was busy all the time looking after other people, whether it was my family or someone from my church. Even though I have two Australian degrees, these degrees have not given me jobs.

When I talk to Australian people, I often can’t understand what they are saying, even though they understand what I say to them. I think it’s because I do not have much contact with ordinary Australians. Most of my time in Australia, I studied at Australian institutions where they spoke Standard English, so I didn’t have much difficulty understanding them. But outside the education institutions, often, I have problems in understanding.

5.2.1 Grand Narratives

The first grand narrative of gender and cultural barriers is both rendered irrelevant (unthinkable) and refuted by Eun-ji’s story. It is first rendered irrelevant by Eun-ji when she states that she ‘had never looked for work ... and did not want to do paid work’, explaining that ‘it is a husband’s responsibility to bring money into the home’. This is the statement that justifies Eun-ji’s inclusion in Group I. Eun-ji’s role as wife and mother renders labour market participation unnecessary, undesirable and inappropriate, and ultimately unthinkable. The notion of a barrier (to the unthinkable) is itself unthinkable. Where no barrier can be conceived of, as that which is prevented is also not conceived of, the barrier, and hence the grand narrative, is rendered irrelevant. Thus the proposition can neither be supported nor refuted, as two of its key terms are rendered meaningless.

Nevertheless, the first grand narrative may also be regarded as refuted in this story. When confronted by her mother-in-law about applying for a position in the workforce,
Eun-ji describes being torn between her desire to remain a housewife and to be a good daughter-in-law. She says, ‘I was annoyed, but I applied … I was so happy when I didn’t get the job’. Although Eun-ji is paid for providing a service in teaching Korean, she does not define it as work. She defends her activity as being ‘not work’ on the basis that it is only Saturdays and during school terms, and is ‘a good reason to get out of the house and enjoy [herself]… much more of a social thing …rather than work’. If Eun-ji did not define her activities in the Korean Saturday school as work, but a fun, social activity that satisfies her mother-in-law, it is true to say that she has never been prevented from labour market participation on the basis of her traditional gender role. If, however, Eun-ji’s paid teaching is defined, against her will, as labour market participation, it is her deference to her mother-in-law that facilitates her labour market participation and the grand narrative is refuted. The first grand narrative is therefore revealed as potentially difficult to categorise firmly and objectively as either supported or refuted at any particular time.

The second grand narrative of the English language barrier cannot be supported by Eun-ji’s story as she has never seriously attempted to find a labour market position in any country, let alone within the (English-speaking mainstream) Australian labour market. While Eun-ji expresses a desire to work as a counsellor, she gives some indication that she does not feel she understands the English of ‘ordinary Australians’, but she does not link her English language skills to her labour market possibilities. Instead, she cites qualifications as her main barrier to securing her labour market position of choice, appealing to a human capital theory of the labour market.

5.2.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Despite refuting and/or rendering irrelevant the two grand narratives, Eun-ji’s story reveals microstoria that apply to the grand narratives and assist in providing further comment and understanding. As noted above in the grand narrative analysis, Eun-ji’s story reveals a complex and even contradictory rendition of the impact of gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation. By defining infrequent and enjoyable Saturday school teaching in Korean as ‘not work’, and doing it in response to her mother-
in-law’s request, Eun-ji manages to ensure her activity outside the home does not encroach upon her concept of herself as the good wife and wise mother. Eun-ji does express an interest in finding a job that she would ‘really like to do’ and that is ‘decent’. She mentions that she ‘always wanted to help people who had problems but I haven’t had many opportunities’. The idea of ‘helping’ or ‘looking after’ people is reiterated in Eun-ji’s description of her activities until the time of interview, when she says, ‘I was busy all the time looking after other people, whether it was my family or someone from my church’. In this way, the aspiration to become a counsellor may be regarded as an extension of Eun-ji’s wife and mother role outside the home once her children had matured. It is notable that her discussion of her counselling aspiration is immediately prefaced by statements testifying to her sons’ successful completion of high school and university entry. In Eun-ji’s sons entering university, she has successfully discharged her mothering role and is free to pursue activities outside the home that will now not compromise her role as a mother. Thus, roles that involve counselling or nurturing may exist in the labour market but, for Eun-ji, remain first a ‘decent and caring’ activity to be undertaken when home duties have finished.

With regards to the English language, Eun-ji refers to completing both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Australian universities, in addition to a vocational diploma, all taught in the English language. Furthermore, upon arrival in Australia and while her husband was working, Eun-ji’s English was sufficient for her to organise the family’s housing and schooling needs. Objectively, Eun-ji’s English language skills are of a high order, but she claims to have difficulty understanding Australians outside an academic context. Eun-ji refers to the English language used in academic contexts as ‘standard English’, in which she regards herself as competent, but her lack of contact with ‘ordinary Australians’ means that she can be understood but cannot understand others herself. This may be a difference in the use of vocabulary (colloquialisms) or alternative social rules for the ‘right to speak’ or the ‘right to be heard’. While she has not attempted to enter the English-speaking Australian labour market and does not express a fear of lack of communication as a reason for her lack of effort, Eun-ji’s chosen field of counselling is intrinsically linked to human communication and understanding.
Academically confirmed English language skills may be useful in their academic context but a less comfortable fit in other circumstances. Eun-ji’s perception that she is understood but cannot understand others herself is impossible to measure, and points to the great significance of individual perception in any communicative attempt. All English language achievements are valueless if, despite her perception that she is understood, Eun-ji defines her perception of not understanding as her problem: ‘I have problems in understanding’. If communication is a two-way or bi-directional process, Eun-ji takes upon herself the responsibility of both directions, accountable for both making herself understood and understanding others. It may be argued that this double burden of communication is likely to be taken on by any non-native speaker of English in an English-speaking environment.

5.2.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Two independent microstoria are revealed in this story: the role of qualifications and the educational promise in the perception of labour market barriers, and the impact of being a Christian, middle class KMW upon labour market choices.

As noted in the grand narrative analysis above, Eun-ji never attempted to enter the Australian labour market of her own desire or need, but does entertain the idea of becoming a counsellor as an activity acceptable to her gender role. More than just entertaining the idea, Eun-ji completed undergraduate and postgraduate theology degrees and a diploma course in counselling. However, she describes her inability to apply for a position in terms of having the wrong qualifications and a lack of any ‘particular paid work experience’. This introduces new barriers to labour market participation and a notion of great specificity: not this degree but that degree, not this experience but that experience. Rather than theology (in which she studied specific counselling subjects), she states that advertisements require qualifications in ‘psychology or social work’.
At the time of interview, Eun-ji performed casual, voluntary and unpaid work which included ‘particular’ (or relevant) counselling activities for Relationships Australia. Despite these activities and qualifications towards a counselling role, Eun-ji finds it impossible to apply for a position. She bespeaks the broken educational promise when she says, ‘Even though I have two Australian degrees, these degrees have not given me jobs’. At issue here is a literal and absolute reading of particular advertisements for particular positions, where any requirement at variance with Eun-ji’s resume prevents her from applying for the position. With no experience of negotiating the Australian labour market, Eun-ji does not consider that her qualifications may be equivalent to those requested, that she may be able to ‘sell herself’, or that she may be able to focus upon a sector of the labour market to which her qualifications are directly applicable. Eun-ji also refers to the educational promise in terms of her sons, whom she mentions in terms of their universities and degrees. This educational promise and the search for the perfect qualification and the right type of experience is indicative of an idealised human capital theory approach to understanding the labour market, and displays its ongoing utility. While attempting to understand why her Australian degrees have not resulted in job opportunities may be regarded as a critique of human capital theory, her alternative explanation represents its utility for her, despite her experience.

The counselling role that Eun-ji aspires to is not only an extension of a traditional gender role but one specifically defined as a ‘Christian family counsellor’. Not only does this appeal directly to the realm of the Korean Christian church and its attendant philosophies and roles for women, but it also encompasses the realm of acceptable activities for a middle class Korean woman. Eun-ji describes the interaction of a number of identified needs in her hopes to become a counsellor: the need to ‘help others’; the need to have something with which to fill her time usefully; the need to do something that is itself more important than the money she might be paid for doing it; the need to dignify her activities with tertiary qualifications; the need to discharge her own family obligations before pursuing labour market activity; and the need to incorporate her Christian faith with any labour market or voluntary activity. These personally stated needs act as boundaries or requirements in negotiating a labour market role that is suitable and
acceptable to a tertiary educated, middle class, husband-supported, Korean migrant mother. Thus the role of Christian counsellor is a highly negotiated labour market role for the KMW.

5.2.4 Summary

Eun-ji’s life story reveals a very complex relationship to the first grand narrative, which is simultaneously rendered irrelevant by her lack of desire to ever participate in the labour market. Also, her preference to perform a traditional role as wife and mother is refuted by her need to satisfy her mother-in-law in applying for a position she did not want. Eun-ji’s story does not support the second grand narrative as she has never looked for work on her own behalf, and the English language has therefore not limited her labour market activities in Australia. Grand narrative applicable microstoria reveal that Eun-ji is disappointed by finding her academically sufficient English less so with ‘ordinary Australians’ and takes upon herself a double burden of responsibility for both understanding and being understood in English. Eun-ji’s stated aspirations to become a counsellor are revealed in the microstoria to represent a highly negotiated position satisfying the ‘needs’ of a tertiary-educated, middle class, Christian Korean mother who is financially supported by her provider husband. Eun-ji finds most useful a human capital model of the labour market in telling her stories of herself and her family, and her struggle is told more in terms of her appropriate role as a KMW than her realisation of human capital in the labour market.

5.3 Discussion

Gender and cultural issues in the labour market for the KMW in this group are expressed beyond the rendering irrelevant or refutation of the grand narratives outlined above. Each of the life stories in this chapter reveals a variation of how gender and cultural factors can become covert and insidious. This is achieved through the echoes of the traditional roles of wife and mother, which may appear to have been displaced but are merely
reinterpreted in a modern labour market context. Young-hee speaks of her adult daughter’s Australian job in matter-of-fact terms, devoid of any gender sensibility or value. However, when describing her daughter as simultaneously performing a traditional wife and mother role, she expresses pride and pleasure. If anything, her daughter’s labour market participation gives even greater value to her traditional home duties, so that these duties are performed ‘in addition’ to going to work. Young-hee describes her pride in her daughter fulfilling the role of daughter-in-law to the satisfaction of her parents-in-law in a way that privileges this traditional role over any other. Where labour market participation is and was unthinkable to her, she accepts it in her daughter, but only applauds her activities that fulfil the traditional gender role. Thus a change in cultural context (Australia) and in generation impacts positively upon the thinkability of labour market participation but does not see a corresponding reduction in the obligations or value of the traditional gender role. That is, no matter whether labour market participation is regarded as possible, desirable, necessary or virtuous by Young-hee, the traditional gender role remains preferred and unaltered.

Eun-ji reveals another example of the strength and pervasiveness of the traditional gender role. In addition to describing her Saturday teaching as ‘not work’ and revealing how filial piety can lead to labour market participation rather than prevent it, this KMW reveals a complex set of criteria for a ‘decent’ job. The ‘decent’ job involves aspects of caring for and ‘helping’ other people, and reiterates many of the notions of being a good wife and wise mother, although outside the home. It is important that her children have grown and entered tertiary education, both as evidence that she has executed her first duty as wife and mother successfully and in order for her to be free to pursue further activities. Thus, her role as mother has both qualified and released her to pursue a counselling career, the chosen activity of a number of KMW in this study. In this example, the traditional gender role is refashioned within the labour market, to blur the distinction between ‘career woman’ and ‘homemaker’. Counselling is presented here not only as a role for which a traditional KMW is qualified and suitable, but as simultaneously supportive of traditional values and gender roles: it is a compromise between the public and private spheres, and the contemporary and the traditional.
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However, the compromise is deceptive as it evidences the introduction of labour market possibility with no corresponding change in the traditional gender role of wife and mother.

In the case of Eun-ji, gender and cultural barriers are irrelevant. However, the relationship between the irrelevances of the first grand narrative is of a different and deeper nature than that of the second grand narrative. This analysis argues that the notion and presence of barriers to labour market participation are rendered irrelevant where there is no need or desire to participate in the labour market. Need and desire may be considered as the motivators for Eun-ji, where a ‘need’ to participate is an external motivator generated by circumstance and a ‘desire’ to participate is an internal motivator generated from within Eun-ji herself. Either motivators may exist simultaneously, neither may exist, or one may override the other. In the case of Eun-ji, in which satisfaction with and acceptance of the traditional role of wife and mother exists in conjunction with financial security, no motivators are evident and no barriers may be discerned. Therefore, in cases such as these, any proposition addressing labour market barriers, on whatever grounds, is immediately rendered irrelevant. While this is consistent, consideration must be taken of the role of gender and culture in impacting on the need or desire to participate in the labour market. Economic realities are a strong factor in the need to participate and where these are not a factor, desire comes to the fore as the defining factor of whether barriers to participation exist. This desire, or lack thereof, is strongly connected in the first interview with Young-hee to a notion of a gender role which is, in turn, deeply culturally embedded. Thus not only are gender and cultural barriers irrelevant to this KMW, but they are also irrelevant because of gender and cultural phenomena. This case illustrates that gender and cultural constructions may, in some circumstances, constitute barriers to labour market participation but, in others, as here, eliminate those barriers or render them irrelevant.

Eun-ji reveals a duality of response to the first grand narrative, simultaneously rendering it irrelevant and refuting it. It is firstly rendered irrelevant in the same way Young-hee renders it irrelevant, eschewing any form of labour market participation as unwelcome
and unnecessary. While Eun-ji steps away from this to express some consideration of an ideal labour market role at different points in the interview, the conceptualisation of ‘no barrier to that which one does not need or wish to achieve’ remains available to her when useful. At other points, the first grand narrative is denied. This includes applying for a position not out of personal desire or financial necessity but out of filial obligation to her mother-in-law. Although she did not win the position, she engaged in teaching activities that were at odds with her lack of desire to work outside the home. A paradox is evident for Eun-ji in a traditional gender role that proscribes labour market activity for a middle class KMW and demands filial piety, when filial piety involves labour market participation. Eun-ji approaches this paradox by defining her paid activities as ‘not work’, ‘more social than work’ and infrequent and enjoyable. In defining her paid activities this way and as a response to the wishes of her mother-in-law, she manages to maintain both her traditional gender role and participate in the labour market. Thus, she is not prevented from labour market participation by gender and cultural barriers and is indeed pushed into it, and the first grand narrative is ultimately refuted. Nevertheless, the paradoxical nature of this refutation must be remembered. In addition, the ability to simultaneously, or alternately, provide competing responses to the first grand narrative is significant.

Neither of the two interviews included in this chapter support the second grand narrative. In the case of Young-hee, the notion of any labour market participation ever, in any country, is outside the realms of possibility and completely unthinkable. As such, there can be no barriers to labour market participation in the conception of Young-hee, and any English language barrier is not only refuted but rendered irrelevant. With no need or desire to participate in the labour market, no barrier to participation can be said to exist, as one cannot be said to be hindered in doing something that one has no interest in doing. Thus, for some KMW, both grand narratives may be meaningless, as neither the labour market nor barriers to their (hypothetical) participation in it hold any relevance to their lives.
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For Eun-ji it is less easy to regard English language barriers as entirely irrelevant or unthinkable, as she describes a complex and conflicting conception of labour market participation. This is more relevant to the first grand narrative. Although Eun-ji describes a complex negotiation of competing factors that may finally allow and facilitate only a specific type of labour market activity under specific conditions, she does conceive of possible labour market participation, however seriously, at some time in the future, and has taken some steps towards it. In expressing an aspiration towards a labour market role, the notion of a barrier to achieving it becomes a possibility or is spoken into existence. Nevertheless, Eun-ji did not seek any labour market position in this regard and thus discovered no barriers through attempt and failure to access the labour market. That is, no perceived barrier has been externally confirmed in the labour market. Eun-ji explains her lack of attempt to participate in the labour market, despite some (equivocal) aspiration, on the grounds of perceived barriers that were as yet untested. In preventing any attempt to pursue a position, these perceived but untested barriers are rendered present and functional as barriers. However, in describing why she had not pursued or applied for any positions in her chosen role, the English language is not amongst her reasons for believing she would be unsuccessful. These reasons/barriers are covered further below as grand narrative independent microstoria. Therefore, Eun-ji refutes the second grand narrative of English language barriers.

As noted above, neither of the KMW interviewed in this chapter refer to the English language as a barrier to labour market participation. Microstoria nevertheless reveal several issues surrounding the English language and related impacts upon these KMW. Young-hee perceives her English language skills to be low and also describes her vicarious experience of her husband’s labour market experience. Describing her husband’s English proficiency as high, she relates how his English language difference was perceived but denied by employers and, reported by Young-hee, as an inability to perform under pressure. She also relates how her husband was cheated of workplace entitlements as his English difference was confused with stupidity or incompetence. These stories evidence the usefulness of segmentation theory of the labour market, to reveal how human capital theory is ideal rather than always real.
While Young-hee did not desire or need to participate in the Australian labour market herself, these related vicarious experiences serve to reinforce her position of desiring not to participate, so that she ‘thanks God’ that she did not need to participate. The internal and external motivators (desire and need) are both subjective and objective, and may change over time. Should Young-hee find herself subject to a labour market motivator, the notion of a barrier ceases to be irrelevant and becomes real for her. Although no barriers may be said to exist at one point in time, latent barriers may be discerned in the interviews in an awareness of the problems faced by other Koreans speaking English in the Australian labour market. These latent barriers may be called into existence by the appearance of a labour market motivator. Vicarious experience thus performs two functions: first, to support a lack of desire to participate, thereby maintaining the irrelevance of any barrier; and second, to provide a cache of potential barriers should a motivator arise. With regard to herself, Young-hee appeals to the utility of a human capital model, where her perceived poor English would inevitably prevent any labour market participation.

Eun-ji reveals another set of English language issues, beginning with the disappointment of finding that two Australian university degrees and a vocational diploma, all conducted in the English language, did not make this KMW confident in speaking with ‘ordinary Australians’ (outside an academic classroom). Again, the human capital model is invoked as the promise or ideal of equitable labour market opportunity. Eun-ji exhibited academically proven and ‘functional’ English language skills (organising housing and schooling in Australia for her family), but expresses frustration that while she was sure she was understood by ‘ordinary Australians’, she could not understand them outside an academic or ‘functional’ context. Both statements of whether she does understand or is understood are impossible to measure and involve a high degree of subjective perception, and are applicable to speakers of any language(s). Her certainty that she is understood relates to a perception that she delivers grammatically sound and clearly pronounced messages in English, such as are rewarded in academic and ‘functional’ contexts. Understanding, however, on a social level, involves more than messages, words and
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grammar, and includes meaning, context, humour and relationships that are both cultural and extra to the English language itself. Within the interaction of human communication, Eun-ji takes on a double burden of responsibility for both understanding and being understood. When she feels that the communication is unsuccessful, such as a joke, for example, she defines this as her responsibility as the non-native English speaker. In her chosen field of counselling, human communication is at a premium. While Eun-ji does not describe the English language as the limiting factor in her pursuing a counselling career, it is predictable that the communication issues that she attributes to English language difference could become significant were she to pursue the career. Their absence as claimed labour market barriers at the time of interview does not, therefore, entirely discount her awareness of them and their latent existence.

Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis reveals that marriage and motherhood are the most significant factors in the lives of the KMW in this chapter, constituting much more than labour market barriers. Marriage and motherhood are the shapers of their life stories. Labour market participation is either impossible, unthinkable or a highly negotiated possibility that supports the traditional gender role and takes into account three other main factors. These factors are firstly, the position of the KMW as middle class women; secondly, the desirability of tertiary education and its promise; and finally, the need to align any extra-domestic activities with the Christian faith. Being middle class impacts on the particular interpretation of the role of wife and mother and the level of obligation to participate in her husband’s leisure activities. Financial resources do or do not enable the KMW to participate in activities outside the home. Tertiary education is an acceptable activity outside the home that may be regarded more in terms of personal development than industrial or vocational training, and the university and the church provide safe and acceptable institutions for KMW to be outside the home.


5.4 Conclusion

KMW in Group I define themselves very quickly as uninterested in labour market participation, with an immediate impact upon the relevance of the grand narratives. This chapter is unique in this study in that all types of narrative analysis may be applied to reveal a full and complex understanding of the labour market relevance and relationship to these KMW. Grand narrative analysis has necessitated an examination of the nature of the relevance of labour market barriers for Group I. As a result, this chapter has introduced the notion of internal and/or external labour market motivators (desire and/or need to participate) as precondition(s) for the ontology or existence of a barrier to participation. This means that the grand narratives can only be meaningfully addressed when labour market motivators are present. Refutation of the grand narratives, in the form of subverting or ‘overcoming’ the proposed barriers, evidences their existence in the negative, also only occurring when motivators are present. In the absence of motivators, grand narratives are rendered irrelevant and meaningless in constructing a narrative of non-labour market participation. Grand narrative analysis in this chapter reveals the possibility of simultaneously rendering the grand narrative propositions irrelevant and denying at least one proposition. Thus, while the grand narratives may be disproved or rendered irrelevant in their own terms at a particular time and for a particular KMW, they remain available and understood, and are accepted discourses that may be used at other times.

Human capital and segmentation theories are evidenced as useful in relating the labour market experiences of KMW themselves or of their husbands, children and friends. Human capital theory is most useful in explaining straightforward success stories or the perceived hopelessness of attempting the Australian labour market, ‘even if they wanted to’. Segmentation theory is useful for explaining more complex negative labour market experiences that are repeated across organisations.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis is also evident in this chapter, bringing into focus related aspects of gender and culture and English language impacts upon
labour market participation. This microstoria analysis shows that KMW can vicariously
experience, through family members, that English language difference may be interpreted
as incompetence or stupidity in the Australian labour market, reinforcing any desire not
to participate and thereby recalling the grand narrative. These microstoria also reveal the
double burden of communication that may be felt by the non-native English-speaking
KMW, who takes all responsibility for being understood and for understanding. In
addition, English language skills that are sufficient for postgraduate Australian university
performance are shown to be insufficient for ‘ordinary’ social exchange. While no
English language barriers are cited in the grand narrative analysis, grand narrative
applicable microstoria show the possibility of latent barriers should any motivators arise
in the future. Grand narrative applicable microstoria reveals that, in terms of gender and
cultural issues, regardless of labour market possibility or desirability, the traditional
female role for the KMW remains necessary and unchanged. Further, any labour market
activity for this group is likely to be an extension of the traditional role rather than an
alternative to it.

Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis reveal that, aside from taking into
consideration the extended traditional role of wife and mother as caring and nurturing,
once children have grown, the KMW must also satisfy other requirements in any form of
extra-domestic activity. These include honouring the requirements of her class,
dignifying her activity with some form of tertiary study, and aligning her activities with
her Christian faith. Thus any labour market activity represents a highly negotiated role
that encompasses the traditional gender role in addition to other socially acceptable
female spheres of activity.

The following chapter examines the stories of KMW in Group II, who were career
oriented but do not participate in the paid market in Australia.
Chapter 6

Group II: Career-Oriented but Do Not Participate in the Paid Market

This chapter analyses the life stories of members of Group II, constituted by nine KMW who were willing to work in Australia and regard themselves as essentially career oriented but who for some reason do not participate in the local labour market despite this desire. The reasons for this non-participation may vary from perceived external barriers to recognised internal struggles. This group may be described by the statement: ‘I want to work in Australia but I can’t’. Within this group, consideration of the impact of material circumstances arises, prompting the question, ‘what is it that makes these KMW career oriented and what is it that prevents them from realising this desire?’ Like Group I, Group II members are more likely to have entered Australia as dependants of their skilled husbands. KMW who arrived as dependants are unlikely to have been subject to skills audits, English language proficiency and assets testing. Their husbands are likely to have arrived in Australia with secure and stable employment pre-arranged or to have found such employment shortly after arrival.

All of the KMW in this group were middle class university graduates. All were married to men employed as professionals in their fields and all arrived as dependant applicants on their husband’s skilled migration visas or married Korean men who already lived in Australia. Two of the KMW in this group had married and worked in Korea prior to migration to Australia but either did not work upon migration or did not work at the time of the interview for this research. Despite these commonalities, Group II members revealed a number of different barriers to their Australian labour market participation. These barriers vary from access to childcare and caring responsibilities for their parents-in-law to English language proficiency. Labour market barriers relating to the first grand narrative of gender and cultural factors were likely to change over time, to be more or
less difficult to negotiate when children are younger or undertaking important examinations or family members are ill.

Three example stories are examined here for the narratives employed by KMW who were thwarted in their desire to work in Australia. Kong-ji would have liked to work in Australia but did not do so because of childcare commitments. Sun-jung was similarly career oriented but upon graduation and marriage, found herself in Australia looking after her ill parents-in-law while her husband went to work. During this time she had two children and her caring responsibilities expanded to prevent any further study or career activity. Yung-ok, a professional woman with two university degrees and Korean work experience, did not attempt to find work in Australia, citing English language problems as an insurmountable barrier.

This chapter analyses the life stories of Group II using grand narrative and microstoria analysis to test the veracity of the propositions and the utility of their theoretical bases. Each story is transcribed and translated into English and then analysed for evidence of the grand narratives. Depending upon whether they are refuted or supported, analysis then follows in terms of microstoria, whether it be applicable to the grand narrative or independent to the grand narrative. A short summary of each analysis is presented and the chapter concludes with an overall discussion of the relevant propositions and other issues. Finally, a conclusion is made as to which type of analysis is more useful for each of the grand narratives.

### 6.1 Yung-ok’s story

*My family arrived at Sydney in 1986. I have a daughter and a son. Originally we wanted to emigrate to the UK, but when we got some information about Australia we decided to come here. My husband was a professor in a university. He was involved in some kind of politics, you know, against the government at that time, and he couldn’t continue to live in Korea. He had no choice but to leave. So we shopped around for countries to*
move to. He came to Australia to investigate before my family came out here. When he came to Australia, he already had a job in a government department and he bought a house for us. When we arrived in Sydney, we did not have many problems since my husband had organised everything for us.

I have a university degree from Korea, majoring in Educational Psychology. After finishing university, I went on to study at postgraduate level. Then I worked as a youth co-ordinator in the YMCA in Korea. After I married, I still worked. I liked working with youth and I wanted to work all the time. My parents always told me that ‘you have to have a good job when you graduate from university’. My mother looked after my children while I worked. One day, my husband — who was a lecturer in a university at that time — left for America to study. I had to work and support my family. After a few years he came back, but I still worked because I enjoyed the work very much.

When I arrived in Australia, I enrolled in an AMES course. I met several Korean migrant women there and we were really the same kind of women. We were all university graduates with professional husbands, middle class women with children. After class, we often visited each other’s homes and had a good time — we still get together on a regular basis.

Our main problem has been our children’s education, particularly my daughter, who was in year 8 when we arrived in Australia. She had problems with her English — when she was in Korea, she was top in all her school subjects, but in Australia she struggled with her English and had a hard time. My son, who was relatively young — he was only in year 1 in primary school — did not have many problems with English.

After my daughter graduated from university, she got a job at a bank and she worked there for one year, but she didn’t like it because she felt her English and social skills were not good enough. Whenever her Australian colleagues made a joke, she couldn’t understand the context of the stories and she wasn’t sure how to respond. Since my daughter herself enjoys talking and joking, she felt left out at work. While she was at the
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bank, she completed her Masters and then she left and went back to Korea to work. Now she is enjoying working in Korea and she doesn’t have to worry about her poor English. She says that if she came back to Australia to work, she wouldn’t have the same problems because now she is older and more experienced. She says that she used to think that all her problems were related to her language problems, but now that she understands working life better, she thinks she could cope better. I hope she comes back to work here.

After successfully completing my English course, I was accepted to study fashion at TAFE. I topped the class and won an award for my designs. In terms of work, I did not dare to think about getting a job even though I have a lot of work experience and expertise in Korea. I never think about getting a job in Australia because of my poor English. I didn’t pursue a career in fashion design because I was too worried about English and age barriers. Instead, I made a lot of things and donated them to the church or community for fundraising.

One of my friends worked in a company where nearly everyone was Anglo-Australian. One day, my friend resigned from the company after five years of working. I asked her why she resigned. She answered that she was sick of running to the toilet whenever the phone rang, so she resigned. I know she was joking but I understand how stressful it was for her to speak over the phone in English. I experienced some of that when I worked for the counselling office. I just didn’t want to answer the phone. Speaking wasn’t too bad, but listening over the phone was really hard. Whenever my friend answered the phone, and the caller said ‘pardon?’, she blamed her English listening skills.

I worked in a Korean counselling company for two years, but I don’t think that I really worked in Australia. My clients were all Korean and I had to contact Australian institutions like the immigration department or schools for them. But I don’t think this is really working in Australia. It looks like I am working in Korea, with Korean parents and Korean students. Working in Australia means speaking in English. Even though I paid tax in Australia on my earnings, I was not really properly working here. I didn’t feel proud of my job or like I had a career in Australia — it was more like just doing
something. I could continue this job, but when my son started year 12, I thought I had better stay home to support his study and I resigned from work.

Besides this, I organised a group of women to help Korean women who are in trouble. My husband taught them on a regular basis in TAFE (he is a qualified counsellor and social educator in Australia). Our group meets regularly and holds seminars or conferences. We do telephone counselling through the week. Every Saturday, I teach English to Korean elderly people. I am doing a pottery course at TAFE. I will be finished by the end of this year. I will get another diploma in TAFE.

6.1.1 Grand Narratives

Yung-ok’s life story supports the first grand narrative of the gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation, as Yung-ok describes herself resigning from her ‘unreal’ labour market position as a counsellor to provide full-time mothering to her son until he finished high school. When in Korea, Yung-ok had worked while her own mother had fulfilled the traditional gender role of mother. In Australia, Yung-ok’s activities as a youth counsellor were appropriate for a middle class, educated Korean mother and did not conflict to a great degree with her traditional gender and class position. Yung-ok negotiated her different possibilities within the network of the discourses outlined above to arrive at a role that combines her voluntary and caring work suitable to a wife of her age, her class and her education, and sits within the confines of the Korean community. In counselling other Korean women, she does not regard herself as having a job or participating in the labour market although she had a role. While remuneration may be helpful in defining whether an activity is labour market participation or not, it is insufficient for providing the meaning and social rewards that Yung-ok as a middle class Korean woman expects of her efforts.

While Yung-ok is educated and experienced in the Korean labour market, she describes her husband as a ‘qualified counsellor and social educator in Australia’, a conception she does not hold of herself at the time of interview. Yung-ok’s husband achieved a higher
level of recognition and financial return within the Australian government and university system, based upon his American qualifications and experience in addition to those he gained in Korea. During this time, the care and rearing of children remained the responsibility of Yung-ok and her own mother, and were never his responsibility. The division of childcare tasks along gender lines continued when in Australia. The choice to migrate to Australia because of her husband’s political disagreement with the Korean government and for the benefit of her children, rather than in terms of her own aspirations, evidences a traditional ‘good wife and wise mother’ discourse.

The second grand narrative is also supported by Yung-ok as she enrolled and excelled in English and the fashion design course at TAFE in Australia, but did not gain sufficient confidence to attempt to compete in the Australian labour market. She continued to regard her English as weak and a barrier to labour market participation. Despite her considerable existing Korean work experience and postgraduate qualifications, Yung-ok was unable to conceive of looking for work in Australia. Unlike KMW in Group I, Yung-ok has a strong background in labour market participation, beginning with parental support for her participation and an enjoyment of work, repeated several times. Although she does not directly state that she would like to participate in the Australian labour market, this combination of experience, qualifications and enjoyment of past work in combination with a belief that she could never get a job in Australia places her in Group II. In addition, her community and voluntary activities at the time of interview and her past (work?) activities in Australia reveal that Yung-ok, to a large degree, defines herself into this group and does so on the basis of English language usage.

Yung-ok refers directly to English language barriers as insurmountable, stating that she did ‘not even think about getting a job in Australia because of my poor English’, and revealing how the perception of a barrier is sufficient to prevent any attempts to test whether it exists independently of the speaker. Thus, Yung-ok speaks the English language barrier to labour market participation in Australia into existence, a discursive practice of power in which she is both participant and victim. Yung-ok participates in the construction of this barrier by relating the Australian labour market experiences of her
daughter and her friend. As both Yung-ok’s daughter and friend participated in the Australian labour market, the English language barrier did not constitute a barrier to access and negotiation for them and they refute the grand narrative. Their stories are addressed below as grand narrative applicable microstoria as they nevertheless impact upon Yung-ok’s idea of an English language barrier.

Yung-ok’s life story poses the question of how labour market participation should be defined, whether it only includes paid work, tasks of a specific nature, roles that require qualifications, and so on. For Yung-ok ‘working in Australia means speaking in English’ and her role in which her income was taxed, her experience and qualifications were drawn upon, and she existed within an organisation and performed necessary tasks as demanded, does not qualify in her mind as labour market participation. Because her ‘clients’ were Korean and she spoke to them in Korean, she ‘was not properly working here’ and did not ‘feel proud of my job or like I had a career — it was more like just doing something’. The same work with similar people in Korea was ‘real’, but this value was lost in Australia. Thus for Yung-ok, labour market participation means a career rather than a job, and one that involves acceptance into mainstream Australian organisations, outside the Korean community, and identified by speaking in English. This story utilises an organisational theory approach, privileging the notion of affiliation in its own right over role or human capital ideals.

6.1.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

As noted above, Yung-ok’s life story supports both grand narratives, and two aspects of Yung-ok’s acceptance of the notion of an English language barrier are significant in this story. Firstly, Yung-ok describes the experiences of her daughter in relation to English language difficulties in Australia, thus drawing upon the narratives of those close to her and applying their experiences to herself. Yung-ok describes her daughter as top of her class in Korea, but struggling in an Australian high school because ‘she had problems with her English’. Despite an Australian university education and the procurement of a position in a bank in Australia, Yung-ok describes her daughter as unsatisfied ‘because
her English and social skills were not good enough’. After completing a postgraduate qualification, Yung-ok’s daughter returned to Korea where ‘she doesn’t have to worry about her poor English’.

Both Yung-ok and her reported story of her daughter’s thoughts identify workplace issues as beyond the English language, but their initial reaction to workplace difficulties was to attribute them to ‘poor English’. Recognition or a change of attitude to believe that not ‘all her problems were related to her language problems... now that she understands working life better, she thinks she could cope better’, serves to modify the grand narrative only after Yung-ok’s daughter has left Australia to try other work environments. Despite this modification, Yung-ok states that her daughter enjoys working in Korea and ‘doesn’t have to worry about her poor English’, presenting an ongoing perception of workplace dissatisfaction for Koreans in Australia as necessarily and intrinsically linked to the English language. Objectively, Yung-ok’s daughter possessed the qualifications, experience and English language skills to perform the tasks of an Australian job, but her unhappiness at being unable to joke or enjoy the social aspects of work tends to be categorised as an English language problem.

The English language barrier may in this way be created by both the individual KMW, who defines it as large and the source of most stress and difference, and the workplace, where it is significant for entry. However, English language difference in this story is not a barrier to labour market participation and performance, but to fitting in with the social aspects of Australian labour market organisations. The initial focus upon English as a necessary skill appeals to the human capital theory of the labour market, but the change to focusing upon social interaction, comfort and acceptance of one who has been educated in Australia, points to a stronger organisational theory utility.

The second aspect is described by Yung-ok through the experience of her friend, another KMW and one whose experience Yung-ok says she understands. Yung-ok’s friend is described as working for an Australian company for five years, achieving both labour market entry and a significant work experience history. Related in a humorous tone, the
story nevertheless reveals that the English language barrier can be invoked at any time to explain stress or resignation from a position. The negative impact of communication technology, in this case the telephone, serves to compound the grand narrative of the English language barrier, rather than alleviate it. In this life story, a KMW may perform a labour market role adequately for years and then resign when general stress or unhappiness in the workplace becomes too great and the English language barrier is shown to remain as a ready explanation in the perception of the KMW. Although the perception of the English language barrier may not prevent Australian labour market access or negotiation, it is a permanent point of difference and remains a barrier that can never be entirely overcome, merely temporarily set aside.

The relevance of the story of her friend is that it is one that has meaning for Yung-ok, revealing the network of narratives within the Korean community addressing KMW and work in Australia. In particular, the story describes problems arising from the interaction of language and technology that remove the possibility of non-verbal language and thus depersonalise the interaction. While this has immediate and obvious impacts upon non-native speakers of English, this is a part of a wider Australian and global discourse of communications crisis, concerning the industrial changes away from face-to-face communication in general and towards telephonic and electronic communication. The provision of information lines and automated telephone menus is frustrating for English-speaking Australian-born clients and service providers as well as migrants with language differences. The English language barrier may be exacerbated in a period in the history of communication technology development that de-emphasises personal interaction and emphasises technological and economic performance or efficiency.

6.1.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Yung-ok’s life story reveals a number of microstoria that involve or cross over the issues raised in the grand narratives, but presents them as parts of differently conceived stories or logic. Yung-ok begins her story by recounting the shared decision-making process of deciding to leave Korea and to which country she and her husband would move. In this
case, Yung-ok uses the plural pronoun ‘we’ to indicate a consensual agreement between her and her husband. Yung-ok had worked in Korea prior to migration to Australia and had not fulfilled the role of full-time housewife. Upon arrival in Australia, Yung-ok did not need to negotiate many of the family’s immediate settlement needs as her husband had already arranged housing, schools and other needs. Yung-ok refers to the role of her parents and mother in particular in helping her to achieve this status in her marriage. Yung-ok’s parents had appealed to the discourse of educational promise and a ‘good job’ — one that was not dirty, dangerous or degrading, but rewarding, respected and requiring qualifications. The presence and assistance of Yung-ok’s mother enabled Yung-ok to both work and have children, and to support her husband financially when he went to America to study. This too was illustrative of the discourse of educational promise and individual sacrifice to ensure the achievement of a chosen family member in order to improve the status and economic position of the family as a whole.

This discourse of educational promise is continued in Yung-ok’s story about her children: their ability to succeed at Australian high schools is her greatest concern. This is the topic she discussed with other women whom she defined as ‘like her’ — middle class, educated Korean migrant women with educational ambitions for their children in Australia. For Yung-ok, this discourse was so compelling that it intersects with that of the ‘good wife and wise mother’, to define her role as the facilitator, motivator and visionary for both her husband’s and her children’s educations and futures. Yung-ok’s own educational background in educational psychology was significant here, as was her husband’s role in universities and her parents’ attitudes. Yung-ok’s work as a youth counsellor is similarly an extension of this service in improving the prospects of others, an appropriate role for an educated mother in Korea. However, her first duty is to her children, and she resigns from her counselling role in Australia when her son reaches his final year of high school in order to provide him full-time motherly support.

This evidences a youth discourse, a strong element of the Korean approach to education and learning. In this discourse, the most effective and important learning is done during youth, even prior to entering university. Entering university is the endpoint of a long,
competitive struggle for limited positions in a highly stratified higher education system, where the reputation of the institution (and concomitant alumni networks) is often more important than the subject studied or the grades achieved. Thus, achievement at primary/elementary and high schools is all important and parental support is a key to ultimate success. At 35, in Korean pedagogical discourse, Yung-ok considers herself beyond learning the fundamentals of a career and only able to learn sufficient skills at the level of a hobby or some form of intellectual entertainment. This kind of learning is recognised by Yung-ok as more social in function and will show results in voluntary contributions to the community. Yung-ok’s fundamental study in educational psychology intersects with cultural beliefs to instil these beliefs and to limit her conceptions of her possibilities.

The discourse of ‘unreal work’ and minority groups as inferior to the mainstream intersects with those of the Korean youth and educational promise discourses in an Australian context. For Yung-ok, the work that she did in Korea loses status in Australia not only because it is not conducted in the language of the majority (English) but also because of the relative value of youth work and educational services in the Australian community and labour market. The role of a teacher in Korean society is regarded as highly skilled and accordingly rewarded financially. The educational promise is broken in the move to Australia: what was a ‘good job’ conferring respect and status upon the jobholder in Korea becomes ‘unreal’ and less than satisfying in Australia.

Yung-ok discusses the counselling work she performed in Australia in terms of ‘unreal work’. For Yung-ok, ‘real work’ involves speaking English and working with mainstream Australians. The same work with the same people in Korea was ‘real’, but this value is lost in an Australian context. Similarly, she regarded Korean migrants who work in Korean companies in Australia as not ‘really’ participating in the Australian labour market and life, indicative of an organisational theory approach to the labour market. She acknowledges that this ‘unreal work’ fulfils functions of providing income, paying taxes and providing social contacts and links, but these are all inferior and secondary to fulfilling the same functions with ‘real work’. This evidences a desire to be
recognised and participate in mainstream and community life beyond survival needs, and
appeals to a higher level of interaction and belonging. This desire is indicative of the
discourse of educational promise, in which the labour market provides not only financial
sustenance, but status, identity and higher purpose.

6.1.4 Summary

Yung-ok’s life story supports both grand narratives as Yung-ok chooses not to participate
in the Australian labour market at the time of interview on the basis of her wish to
provide her son with a full-time mother. While she has performed roles requiring
qualifications and which are paid in Australia, she regards work that does not involve the
sole use of the English language and mainstream English-speaking Australians as
‘unreal’ and ‘unrewarding’. Her stories of her friend and her daughter reveal that she
believes that the English language may not only provide a barrier to accessing the
mainstream Australian labour market, but also may lead to social isolation within
organisations and stress. The English language barrier may be spoken into existence
through vicarious experience, may be invoked at any time despite experience to the
contrary, and is exacerbated by communication technology.

Yung-ok’s microstoria were numerous and begin with that of marriage. She did not
discuss anything prior to marriage, but the decision to migrate was based upon the
situation of her husband. Yung-ok’s concerns were primarily for her children and their
ability to fulfil the educational promise. This draws upon the ‘good wife and wise
mother’ discourse. Within her story of the labour market, Yung-ok refers to her
husband’s needs and situation as dictating her labour market involvement, in addition to
her parents’ expectations. Yung-ok pursues purpose and social interaction at TAFE, but
does not pursue a career because of perceived English language and age barriers. She
describes her counselling work, again an extension of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ role,
as ‘unreal’ work because it did not involve English. Yung-ok refers to association with
minority groups as less desirable than being a part of the mainstream. Organisational
theory appears to be the most relevant to Yung-ok’s story on this basis.
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6.2 Kong-ji’s story

I came to Australia in 1986 as an overseas student. I studied English for one year. I met my husband in Australia — he was Korean–Australian — and then I returned to Korea and completed my university degree. After finishing university, I worked for one year as an administrator at my Korean university, and then I married and came to Australia and had my children. I have a son in year 9 and one in year 5. I majored in administration at university. When my first son was two years old, I took an examination to be a public officer with the federal government. I worked as a public officer for three years.

When I first started working in Australia, English caused me a lot of problems. At that time, the examination was easy, and a lot of immigrants applied and got positions in the government. Most of my colleagues had only completed year 10 and sometimes year 12. When I applied for the position, I already knew that it was far lower than my qualifications but I accepted the situation because my English was not as good as Australian-born staff. I thought that my weak English language skills would be compensated for with my qualifications and experience.

Most of the Australian people who worked there were much younger than the non-English-speaking background people — they had a much longer work history compared with me and other non-English-speaking background people. Most NESB people were university graduates with no local work experience. I worked with Filipino, Chinese, Vietnamese — these people were very kind to me and they helped me a lot when I first started work. During the first months I was scared of the telephone. Whenever the phone rang my nerves would start running. I worked in the personnel department and I could learn the work very quickly. I found that Asian workers were diligent and intelligent and usually had university qualifications but were doing work not much higher than high school level.
One of my supervisors was very hard on me — for example, whenever I presented my reports to her, she was always pointing out my mistakes. In fact, the reports were very simple to write and everything was standardised — you could not make a mistake — all you had to do was replace staff names and salaries with other staff names and salaries. But she still criticised my work as incompetent. I felt that she looked down on me and ignored me. Then I found out that her husband was a non-English-speaking background migrant and that his English was not that good. I felt funny that she had a non-English-speaking background husband and she ignored me — it was an uneasy feeling for a long time. We had a Christmas party and we had to take our partners, and I went with my husband whose English was good. He finished his high school and university in Sydney. He majored in computer science. The supervisor talked a lot with my husband — they talked about me and she learnt a lot about me. After that party, her attitude toward me changed a lot. It was so obvious — everybody noticed the change. Someone in the office asked me, ‘Since the Christmas party, Sophia’s attitude to you has changed so much, what did you do to her?’ I felt so uneasy about her attitude. I thought to myself, ‘When I was in Korea, I was respected and I had a much higher position than you. Because my English is worse than yours and I work under your supervision, it does not mean you can abuse me’.

While I was working for the government for three years, I learned a lot of English in the workplace. Because of the nature of the job, I had to write a lot of English and someone was always checking my English and teaching me so that my English improved a lot.

Every morning, before I came to work, I took my elder son to a childcare centre in the city and after work I had to pick him up. When I was pregnant with my second son, we thought this was all too hard. Also, my first son was going to start kindergarten. So we considered several different options, but we decided that it would be best if I stayed at home and looked after the children full time. At that time, the government offered a very good package if you chose redundancy. It was a big lump sum of money. We calculated our expenses and decided to take the option. So I left the job. But the position I left was reasonably senior and the salary was good and I enjoyed it so much. I miss that job.
I have just completed a welfare course at TAFE and am doing volunteer work for my community, my children’s schools and the church. I am looking forward to getting a full-time job when my second child becomes a high school student. He is still in year 5 in primary school — I have to pick him up from the school and do a lot of things for him. Even though sometimes he comes home by himself, I want to be there when he gets home from school.

I am so busy every day doing voluntary work while the children are at school. After I pick them up from school, I have to look after them and do a lot of housework. I hope I can find a good job when my second son starts high school. But I don’t want to have a full-time job. Only two or three days would be enough with a family.

6.2.1 Grand Narratives

Kong-ji’s life story supports the first grand narrative of the gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation as Kong-ji describes herself resigning from her work for her two young children. Despite her proven ability to secure and negotiate labour market participation in Australia and her expressed desire to do so, Kong-ji does not participate in the labour market because she chooses or needs to stay home and take care of her school-aged children, supporting the first grand narrative. Kong-ji graduated from a Korean university and worked for one year before coming to Australia, where marriage and the birth of her first son delayed her labour market participation. She then continued her career with the Australian public service before it was again interrupted by the birth of a child and financial constraints. It is the progress of her sons through school that dictates when Kong-ji can return to work and under what conditions. She says that she would like to have a part-time job once her second son starts high school as ‘only two or three days would be enough with a family’. At another time, Kong-ji says she would like a full-time job when her son begins high school. Kong-ji describes how she was singly responsible (by using the singular personal pronoun ‘I’) for organising the childcare and
transportation for her first son while pregnant with her second child and working full-time.

The decision for her to take a redundancy payment and stay at home in the traditional wife and mother role is described as an economic decision reached in consultation with her husband. Despite this consultation, the impacts of migration, childbirth and other family demands appear to have a disproportional impact upon Kong-ji’s career and life when compared with her husband. Kong-ji does not lament or resent the greater impact upon her life, her ‘natural acceptance’ reflecting the traditional Korean discourse of the ‘good wife and wise mother’. It is possible for Kong-ji to be a mother and participate in the labour market, but the advantages of performing the dual role were not realised in economic terms and she resigned from a job she later missed.

While performing the traditional role and while her sons are at school during the day, Kong-ji describes studying welfare at TAFE and performing voluntary activities for the Korean community, church and her sons’ schools. These unpaid activities represent an acceptable extension of the traditional gender role, providing social interaction and purpose but not intruding upon domestic responsibilities.

Kong-ji outlines her Australian work experience and how her workplace English language improved through experience and feedback, refuting the second grand narrative. This is not to state that Kong-ji experienced no problems that she felt were English language related in the workplace, but that these were not the reasons at the time of interview for her lack of labour market participation. She states that she looks ‘forward to getting a full-time’ and ‘good job’ in the future, after her son finishes high school, providing the basis for including her in Group II.
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6.2.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

As noted above, Kong-ji’s life story supports the first proposition, as gender and cultural barriers prevent her labour market participation because of her caring responsibilities. In terms of the second proposition, the grand narrative of an English language barrier, Kong-ji does not attribute any difficulties in accessing the Australian labour market to English. However, she does describe English, and particularly her non-native Australian English, as the source of compromise, stress and underemployment. Kong-ji tells a detailed story that appeals to several discourses and conceptions of the workings of the Australian labour market.

Kong-ji draws upon human capital theory in describing as a matter of fact the necessary compromise of her qualifications on the basis of English language skills. Like many of the KMW in this research, Kong-ji describes her English skills as weak and lowering her overall labour market value. She says, ‘When I applied for the position, I already knew that it was far lower than my qualifications but I accepted the situation because my English was not as good as Australian-born staff’. She describes working alongside Australians who had not finished high school or completed any tertiary education, evaluating and comparing on the basis of documented and achieved skill levels. At this point in her story, she presents her human capital compromise as unfortunate but reasonable.

However, Kong-ji goes on to tell a story of university educated, ‘diligent and intelligent Asian workers … doing work not much higher than high school level’ alongside Australians with less education but longer local work experience. While this still involves a human capital premise of compromised value on the grounds of cultural or racial difference, Kong-ji’s recognition of the disproportionately negative realisation of the objectively higher human capital of Asian migrants reflects more of a segmentation approach to the labour market. This represents a more collective awareness of trends in the labour market and a shift from focusing upon her own inadequacies under a human capital model to identifying an entire class of workers apparently misplaced or
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compromised in the labour market. In telling this part of her life story, Kong-ji uses the term ‘NESB’ or non-English-speaking background to describe her underemployed Asian colleagues. The use of the term ‘NESB’ positions Kong-ji’s public sector work experience in the decade of the 1990s, when it was accepted and used in bureaucratic policy, publications and discourse.

Kong-ji describes learning and improving her English through work, but she also describes an organisational environment, the public sector, that struggles with linguistic difference despite policies aimed at creating greater equality of opportunity for employees such as Kong-ji. The term ‘NESB’ has since been updated to ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ (CALD) in recognition of the ethnocentric etymology of the term NESB, as part of a policy of ‘productive diversity’. This policy professes to appreciate and harvest cultural and linguistic diversity in the workplace rather than fulfil quotas of assisting linguistically ‘disadvantaged’ or inferior workers to participate in the labour market. Regardless of how substantive this change is, it is reflective of a need to move away from the NESB term and its function of embedding a sense of identified disadvantage or inferiority based on any linguistic background other than English. Kong-ji’s life story evidences a discourse characterised by acceptance of (English) linguistic inferiority or ‘otherness’ and a concomitant compromise of labour market value in line with NESB notions of the time. That is, Kong-ji accepted and included herself in the category of ‘NESB’, the identification with which formed part of her story of underemployment.

Kong-ji also describes frustration and resentment in the workplace in terms of an English language difference perceived by one of her supervisors, but one that she feels is pedantic and unnecessary. Kong-ji expresses a feeling of being ‘abused’ by the supervisor and states that she was more respected in Korea, with a higher position. This suggests an organisational discourse, in which the rules of affiliation and progress are based in the organisation and perhaps arbitrary. Kong-ji describes her supervisor as being ‘very hard on me ... always pointing out my mistakes ... the reports were very simple to write and everything was standardised — you could not make a mistake. But still she criticised my
work as incompetent’. Overall, Kong-ji draws upon numerous terms and discourses to describe the experience of being a KMW in the Australian labour market to tell a complex and multi-faceted story in which labour market participation is possible, but acceptance and respect are more difficult to find. Both segmentation and human capital theories prove useful to her in describing her experiences and observations.

6.2.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Kong-ji organises her life story as one beginning with marriage and childbirth. Migration and labour market participation exist within the larger framework of her position in the nuclear family as wife and mother. Migration and Australian labour market participation are contextualised and justified in relation to Kong-ji’s marriage to her Korean–Australian husband. Kong-ji refers to the effects of parenthood on her lifestyle and career, and repeatedly refers to her children’s ages and academic progress, dictating their level of need for her and her obligations to them. Kong-ji applies the notion of educational promise to both herself and her children, describing herself as arriving in Australia as a student, attending TAFE, assessing the academic standing of her colleagues, and placing value upon herself as a labour market participant. Thus the microstoria of the compromised educational and Western promise and the idea of labour market value are at all times deeply connected to Kong-ji’s place and role in her family.

Kong-ji refers repeatedly to the notion of the educational promise: the belief that education will lead to a career that is well rewarded and offers equality of opportunity, as per the ideal human capital model. She also refers to the Western promise: the idea that Western workplaces are objectively meritorious in the way employees are organised and appreciated and that Western educations are more valuable in this context. This is outlined above in her description of the compromise necessary for university educated Asian migrants to accept that they will be valued at a similar level to Australian high school graduates. Kong-ji refers to her colleagues in terms of the level of education they had achieved — ‘only year 10 or year 12’ — assessing and testing the educational promise and evaluating worth on the basis of education, English language and labour
market experience. This involves a belief in ‘labour market value’ and organisation and how values (such as English language or experience) may reduce or heighten values ascribed through education/qualifications. This may be referred to as the compromised educational promise, and a compromise that Kong-ji does not wish her sons to have to make.

6.2.4 Summary

Kong-ji’s life story supports the first grand narrative as she is not in paid work at the time of interview because of her role as a caring mother, but she refutes the second grand narrative of English language barriers. Kong-ji is educated and has sufficient work experience in Australia to fuel her hope to work again in Australia when her children are older and require less of her attention. Although she has worked in Australia and describes being able to communicate and develop her English language skills, she identifies past issues in the workplace she regards as an unnecessary focus upon English language difference that has little impact upon the performance of work. Kong-ji also describes migrants as compensating for their English language difference with higher education and qualification levels than their Australian colleagues. Kong-ji alternately draws upon all three models for understanding labour markets: human capital, segmentation and organisational theories.

6.3 Sun-jung’s story

*My husband came to Australia in the 1980s with the mindset of a 1980s Korean man. I came here in 1992. Between 1980 and 1990, Korean culture and ways of thinking changed dramatically but my husband’s ideas stopped changing as soon as he arrived in Australia in the 1980s. It was very difficult to live with someone who was still living in the 1980s in his head. Korea is still changing every day, but my husband never seems to recognise it, even though he is an academic in Australia.*
My mother-in-law had cancer for longer than ten years and I had to look after her as full-time carer while I looked after my two young children. Since my mother-in-law passed away, I have had to care for my ill father-in-law. I do not have a paid job — my responsibilities are to look after my children, my parents-in-law and do the domestic work. My husband’s job is bringing money to the family, but he tried to help me as much as possible.

As soon as I finished my postgraduate studies, I married him. My parents and his parents had been friends for a long time — it was a kind of arranged marriage.

When I married him, he was a doctoral student in Australia, so I came here as his bride. I did not attend English courses — I didn’t think that it was necessary and I thought my English was good enough to survive. I didn’t have any friends or relatives in Australia and I don’t take part in any meetings or clubs or religious organisations. I do not go to church. Often I feel isolated, particularly whenever I have problems with my husband. Whenever I felt depressed, I used to go to a coffee shop and just have a cup of coffee — it was all I could do. I felt powerless. I could only go to a coffee shop... that’s all I could do... I cried. I tried to write letters to my family in Korea, but I didn’t want them to worry about me. Every day I wrote them letters that I never sent. It helped me to lessen my depression.

When my children started kindergarten and school, I met many parents whom I could make friends with and my life got better. I volunteered at the school canteen and library and I made friends there. All of this is during school hours, while the children are at school. After school, I am busy with all the housework.

I think a lot about going back to uni to improve my English and get a job. Practically, I can’t now my father-in-law is sick. I have to stay at home all day with him except for taking the children to school and picking them up. I still look forward to returning to my study and becoming a career woman. I have just enrolled in an English course at TAFE to improve my English so that I can return to study.
6.3.1 Grand Narratives

Sung-jung’s life story strongly and directly supports the first grand narrative of gender and cultural barriers: any desire to participate in the Australian labour market is prevented by her family obligations. She describes her husband as a ‘1980s Korean man’, unable to move from a historical notion of gender roles ‘even though he is an academic’. Sun-jung describes ‘Korean culture and ways of thinking’ as progressing socially but migration to Australia as locking her husband into a singular conception of his role as father and provider and her role as mother, wife and daughter-in-law. Sun-jung narrates her story of a Korean university education followed by an arranged marriage, migration to Australia as a bride, the birth of two children and caring for her ill mother-in-law and then father-in-law. She presents these caring roles as non-negotiable and ongoing, and any other activities such as assisting in her children’s school libraries or canteens, must be done within school hours and as her caring role permits. She says she would like to get a job but ‘practically, I can’t now my father-in-law is sick. I have to stay at home all day with him except for taking the children to school and picking them up’. Therefore, Sun-jung supports the first grand narrative.

Sun-jung’s story also offers support for the second grand narrative and appeals to a human capital notion of the labour market. Sun-jung has never looked for or been offered paid work in Korea or Australia but does express a desire to ‘go back to uni to improve my English and get a job’, providing the basis for her inclusion in Group II. The connection between education, English language and the ability to secure a position in the Australian labour market is unquestioned for Sun-jung. She describes enrolling ‘in an English course at TAFE to improve my English so that I can return to study’, revealing the logic and plotline that education is necessary to improve English language skills, which are necessary to undertake further education, which is then necessary for finding a job. Sun-jung explains that, unlike most of the KMW in this study, she did not attend English language classes upon arrival in Australia as she thought them unnecessary and that her ‘English was good enough to survive’. While the English language barrier is not Sun-jung’s primary barrier to labour market participation, her acknowledgement that she would approach finding a job in the future through first attending English language
classes serves to support the second grand narrative. That is, Sun-jung defines English
language study in Australia as a necessary precondition for ultimate labour market
participation.

6.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Sun-jung begins her life story with her migration and appeals to a discourse of
sociocultural change and development. She refers to her husband’s inability to make
change and ‘move with the times’, and his confusion about social development in Korea.
She describes her frustration with what she regarded as his confusion and stagnation and
is surprised that he should be this way as he was ‘an academic’. The reference to
academia implies that she respects academics as being both intelligent and aware of
social change — perhaps at the forefront of it. As she was not an academic herself, she
was frustrated that she was the interpreter of social change for her husband, who was both
paid and respected as an academic.

Sun-jung’s husband attended an Australian high school and university, leaving Korea in
his early teens. Sun-jung believed that she was coming to a modern, liberated country to
marry a liberated and open-minded modern man who would share and understand her
cultural background. It was difficult to examine this in a verbal context: this aspect of
Sun-jung’s narrative was evident in her tone and facial expressions during the interview.
Sun-jung assumed that the researcher would immediately identify as a fellow Korean
migrant with the discourse of the Western promise of liberation, tolerance and
(post)modernity, particularly for women. This expectation of understanding, enhanced
possibilities and alternative ways of living (the Western promise) combined with the
academic promise above, so that Sun-jung was disappointed to find two promises broken
at the same time.

Despite Sun-jung’s appeal to the academic and the Western promises, she described
herself in the Korean discourse of ‘good wife, wise mother’. Her study plans and
activities were curtailed by her need to look after her sick mother-in-law, then her sick
father-in-law and her two children. To provide context: Sun-jung’s husband was the younger of two sons. In Korean culture, the responsibility of caring for parents would normally fall to the first son. The first son, in this case, was also married to a Korean migrant woman and has two children, but refused to look after his parents. When Sun-jung married her husband, she moved into his family home and found herself with traditional caring responsibilities of her husband’s parents. Sun-jung described herself as suffering social isolation as a result of her filial responsibilities and her lack of social activity. She refers to the church and religion as possible sources of social sustenance but did not use them.

Sun-jung refers to her husband’s job as providing for the family. This is part of the complex discourse of labour market participation and of roles and service provision within a family. Sun-jung’s husband earns a wage and has a ‘job’ in this case, as well as providing financial resources for the family. Sun-jung has roles and responsibilities, but no ‘job’ as such in this discourse. She is housekeeper, cook, cleaner, chauffeur and nurse for the family, but has ‘no job’. In addition, she refers to voluntary activities she undertook at her children’s school library and canteen. These activities had proven helpful in addressing her problems of social isolation, but she regarded them as roles rather than jobs.

Sun-jung refers to her aspirations to improve her English through study at TAFE, to return to university, and to become a ‘career woman’, with jobs rather than roles and making her own money. These appeals to the discourse of educational promise and human capital theory, that with English and Australian qualifications a job will be forthcoming, and none will be available without these. In addition, the acquisition of further education would constitute Sun-jung as more of an ‘academic’ in her own right, with the qualifications and confidence to demand further exploration of her role as a woman. Achievement of qualifications and associated English language study is not solely about labour market participation, but the right to think and behave independently.
Chapter 6: Career-Oriented but Do Not Participate in the Paid Market

The interview with Sun-jung provides an illustration of the ways in which discourses may be considered as promises: ways of articulating and explaining phenomena that limit and offer opportunities. Sun-jung refers to these promises — the educated and aware academic, the liberated and (post)modern western country and the qualifications and skills that lead to a job — but remained entrenched in the traditional modes of femininity — the good wife and wise mother (and caring daughter-in-law) and the fulfiller of roles but not jobs.

6.3.3 Summary

Both grand narratives are supported in Sun-jung’s life story, although the first grand narrative is much stronger in its absolute and unchangeable limitation upon Sun-jung’s activities. Sung-jung relates a number of stories, many of which rely heavily on the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse. She begins with a web of stories, journeying from migration, marriage and the Western promise to disillusionment with her husband and his difficulties in coping with change. She refers to her husband in terms of the provider husband discourse and in terms of her expectation of the educational (human capital ideal) and the Western promises: the promise of a more tolerant and aware academic husband who would understand her. Her husband’s family obligations become her own, as they were passed from her brother-in-law to her husband to herself, where they remained, supported by the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse. Sun-jung refers to the academic and Western promises/subnarratives in her labour market aspirations, and to the impact of looking after her children and in-laws. Her story of her social life is characterised by combating social isolation through voluntary activities, which prove useful socially but which she regards as roles, not jobs.

6.4 Discussion

The three example stories from the nine KMW in this group support the proposition that gender and cultural factors constitute barriers to labour market participation in Australia.
Chapter 6: Career-Oriented but Do Not Participate in the Paid Market

All have two children and are solely responsible for all domestic and childcare tasks while their husbands provide income. All wish to participate in the labour market and hold Korean university qualifications. As noted above, one has performed a paid role but does not regard it as ‘real work’ in Australia; one has worked in the public sector but resigned in order to take care of her children full time; and the other has not had the opportunity to seek work due to constant caring roles for her husband, children and parents-in-law. This is the stronger of the two barriers for this group, and exists first and foremost before the first barrier can be negotiated or considered. This grand narrative reverberates through the stories of this group to reveal that labour market positions are not always possible and acceptable for KMW. If and when they are, they must be appropriate to a wife of a certain age, class and education, and are often likely to be extensions of home-caring roles.

The discourse of the ‘good wife and wise mother’ is ever present and as much a concept for the husbands of these KMW as for the women themselves. Migration to Australia may interrupt social development of this notion: Koreans in Korea may have a more updated or flexible notion of the traditional female role than Koreans in Australia. Finally, there was an aspect of hope for the future, expressed as a desire to work, that recognises that the demands of a traditional female role may wax and wane and be a greater barrier at some times in the life of a KMW than at others.

Sun-jung supports both the first and second grand narratives, the first as the fundamental barrier, one that can only be addressed when her roles as wife/daughter-in-law and mother are satisfactorily discharged. She expresses a desire to be independent and to make her own money, and says that the path to this goal begins with the first step of English language classes at TAFE. The plan proceeds to further education and a labour market position or the notion of a ‘career woman’, and all appears to begin with and hinge upon the acquisition of English language skills. No mention of a specific career path or industry is made, but the link to the English language is considered an a priori truth, and therefore an essential aspect of achievement of this goal. As an essential
aspect, it is also a potential barrier and the second grand narrative is supported, evidencing a human capital approach to the labour market.

Kong-ji supports the first grand narrative but refutes the second grand narrative by virtue of her previous labour market activities in the public sector in Australia. While she does not identify the English language as a barrier to her labour market participation, she does provide microstoria that reveal ongoing issues once access has been achieved, and which are further outlined in grand narrative applicable microstoria. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis is useful for discussing points or subtleties arising despite the refutation of a grand narrative. In this chapter, this is apparent only in relation to the second grand narrative of English language barriers. There are three points that will be made here.

The first point is raised in a story told about the daughter of Yung-ok in this chapter and defines the social aspect of labour market organisations as a considerable factor of working life. Yung-ok’s story describes how the English language barrier may not be a barrier to accessing and negotiating a labour market position, nor to performing the tasks of the work or even gaining access to promotional opportunities, but may be understood as preventing social inclusion and appreciation in a labour market organisation. In this story, Yung-ok’s daughter returned to Korea to find greater job satisfaction and recognised that a part of her problem in Australia may have been ‘coping with working life’ and not necessarily a language problem. It is possible to interpret this, perhaps, as an issue of workplace culture and to consider it in terms of the first grand narrative. However, in this chapter the researcher has chosen to consider it in terms of English language to highlight the subjective notion of the English language barrier and the way in which it may be invoked at any time, even by Yung-ok’s daughter with considerable English language skills developed in Australian high schools and university. It is also regarded in terms of organisational theory, in which affiliation is of primary concern.

The second point is raised in Yung-ok’s story of a friend who managed to hold a position in the mainstream labour market for five years before finding the stress of
communicating in English too great to continue. This once again highlights how the barrier may appear to have been overcome or not to exist but then be invoked later, as a permanent point of difference or source of stress that will never disappear or become irrelevant in the perception of the KMW. In order to keep the role for five years, the KMW must have been competent in performing the necessary tasks and have developed coping strategies for workplace issues. This story also highlights the role of communication technology in exacerbating this sense of difference and stress and depersonalising human communication.

A third point is the mitigating or balancing effect that English language difference may have upon the ‘labour market value’ or ‘human capital’ of the KMW and migrants in general, suggesting a segmentation theory approach to the labour market. Kong-ji describes the trade-off between overseas university qualifications and non-native English language, so that the tertiary educated KMW with limited work experience is likely to find the same labour market value as an Australian high school graduate with local work experience, a trade-off in which human capital value is modified by cultural or racial difference, a segmentation theory consideration. This is described as an unchangeable frustration that must be accepted. Kong-ji also describes how she feels she was reminded of her English language difference in a way that was pedantic and irrelevant to her job. Thus, English language difference is likely to be read as inferiority in the workplace, which, in this story is linked to underemployment, over-supervision and frustration, in an organisational understanding of the labour market. This KMW also employs the term non-English-speaking background (NESB), to describe both herself and the public sector of the 1990s, revealing the ethnocentric terminology and policies of the time. This is not to suggest that this has substantively changed in the public sector, but reveals how taxonomies and titles are internalised and accepted as tools of discourse. Here, identification with and adoption of the NESB term is related to the concept of the (perceived) trade-off between tertiary qualifications and English language difference and resultant underemployment.
The life stories of the three KMW in this chapter are consistent in their employment of microstoria addressing plots outside the grand narratives. All three presented their life stories in terms of personal journeys through marriage, migration and motherhood, into which labour market participation was a temporary fit, if at all. In this way, these KMW illustrate a notion of circular time for women as compared with a more linear male career progression model: women’s careers must give way to other demands at different times in their lives and according to the demands of their families. While this is addressed by the first grand narrative, it has wider impacts and includes the conception of having roles but not jobs, responsibilities but not careers.

A number of other points are raised in the microstoria that provide a context in which labour market participation was desired but complicated. The first of these is the educational promise (human capital theory), that tertiary education is rewarded with labour market positions that befit the status of a middle class Korean woman or her children. This relates to a conception of class that is specific to these women: all were tertiary educated and in a position to be fully financially supported by their husbands. As such, not all labour market roles are open to them, and tasks that are dirty, dangerous or degrading (3Ds) presented unacceptable labour market options. Labour market participation involves not only the discourse of financial need or independence, but also concepts of status, identity and purpose. That is, any position worthy of a KMW in this group must be respected, rewarding and require qualifications. For one, the path to any labour market participation, which she does not define, is unquestionably through further education, accepting the educational promise as both necessary and true and thereby the utility of human capital theory.

A second notion of promise that is evidenced in the microstoria is one of belief in objective meritocracy and equality of opportunity in the West. This Western promise combines with the educational promise to value Western education more highly and provide a promised path to acceptable labour market participation. KMW may apply these promises to themselves or to their children. The application of all notions of promise and future to children rather than KMW themselves is indicative of a Korean
belief that all significant training and learning occurs by the age of twenty and effective adult education is rare. Thus age is invoked as another barrier to learning/training for a new career. One KMW describes her husband as an academic in Australia who is trapped in thinking in the ways of a Korean man in Korea in the 1980s. This evidences how migration can interfere with the Western and educational promises, placing the KMW and her husband neither in Korea nor in Australia, but in a situation that does not progress in terms of gender roles.

Migration may also see a downgrading of jobs or roles that were acceptable to the KMW when in Korea but are unacceptable in Australia. One reason given for this is that the same role may have existed in mainstream life in Korea, but in Australia becomes confined to the Korean community. The KMW who is concerned with status and roles befitting her class and qualifications finds confinement to her ethnic community to be ‘unreal’ work and represents no ‘real’ acceptance by Australian society or the labour market. Another reason for the downgrading may be that particular roles are less highly respected or valued than they are in Korea, in an alternative hierarchy of labour market participation.

6.5 Conclusion

The KMW in this chapter are limited in their Australian labour market by considerations relating to the first grand narrative in the first instance. Responsibilities as wives, daughters and mothers prevent or limit any labour market participation for long periods, but allow scope to imagine labour market participation at some point in the past or future. As all of the KMW in this chapter are middle class, tertiary educated and financially supported by their husbands, they are unlikely to consider all types of jobs and wish to work in one that is rewarding, respected and requires qualifications. All are, or have been, prepared to take on further education in Australia to help them achieve a labour market position they would find acceptable and all adhere in some way to the educational
promise of labour market recognition and the Western promise of meritocracy and equality of opportunity.

The English language barrier is secondary to the gender/culture barrier to labour market participation for KMW in this group. The English language barrier is shown to exist simply because it is thought to, and that it can be spoken into existence. This may be through the vicarious experience and discourses of other KMW, which are sufficient in themselves to create the notion of a barrier for the listening KMW. The English language barrier is also shown to be transitory and able to be invoked at any time, even after five years of labour market participation. The English language barrier may be invoked to include and explain feelings of social isolation in a wider, communicative notion, and may be exacerbated by stress, individuals or communication technology. All of these aspects of the English language barrier exist at a different level from that of adequate linguistic skill to perform a task. In describing the English language related beliefs and experiences, human capital theory was the most useful model for Group II, but segmentation theory and organisational theory could also be evidenced in their stories, particularly in modifying human capital value on the basis of cultural or racial difference.

Analysis of Group II is thus most useful and revealing in terms of grand narratives when discussing the first grand narrative of gender and culture. However, in terms of the English language barrier, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis is more useful for exploring and understanding this more mercurial barrier. While children may grow up and domestic responsibilities ease over time, the English language barrier may be invoked at any time to cover a wide range of subjectively identified workplace issues. This suggests that the differences in the natures of the barriers referred to in the grand narratives lend themselves to different forms of analysis. The following chapter examines the stories of KMW in Group III, who were not career oriented but do participate in the paid market in Australia.
Chapter 7

Group III: Not Career-Oriented but Participate in Paid Labour Market

This chapter analyses the life stories of members of Group III, constituted by eight KMW who dutifully perform paid work in Australia not of their own choosing. Members of this group may regard themselves as not career-oriented but obliged to participate in the labour market by circumstance. They participate in the labour market in order to earn money and support their families and often their husband’s businesses. Members of this group may also regard themselves as career-oriented but obliged to fulfil roles not of their own choosing or to their liking or skills. A discourse of career that involves notions of personal realisation or independence may not be relevant for these KMW. Thus KMW in Group III may be willing to participate in the labour market in general or in theory but either are obliged to perform the role that they hold or do not identify the role as ‘their’ career. This group may be described by the (imagined) statement ‘I don’t particularly want to work in my Australian job, but I have to’.

Within this group, consideration of material circumstances gives rise to the question of what it is that makes these KMW need to work and why they dislike their Australian jobs. All of the KMW in Group III arrived in Australia as dependants of their husbands. These KMW were not required to have or evidence any particular skills or assets and were entitled to limited English language training upon arrival (510 hours). As fully supported dependants, these wives were less likely to need to search for paid employment. However, the majority of Group III KMW contributes to their husbands’ businesses in some capacity, whether or not they regard themselves as participating in the Australian labour market. All eight KMW in this group were involved in their husbands’ businesses regardless of their own wishes and aspirations. The majority of KMW in this
group accept their need and obligation to work, but do not find it liberating or rewarding any personal sense.

This chapter analyses the life stories of three KMW in Group III as representative of the group, using two types of microstoria analysis. As all three KMW in this chapter have participated, or do participate, in the Australian labour market, the grand narratives are refuted through the successful access and negotiation of paid positions and no grand narrative analysis is included here. However, initial refutation of the grand narratives does not mean that all labour market experiences associated with gender and culture and English language are resolved or dissipated. Ongoing issues related to each of the grand narratives are discussed in terms of microstoria that are relevant or applicable to each of the two grand narratives, and then in terms of microstoria that remain outside the grand narratives (grand narrative independent microstoria). Each story is transcribed and translated into English before applying the two forms of microstoria analysis and providing a brief summary. This is followed by a discussion of the consistencies and themes of the three stories and a conclusion addressing the usefulness of antenarrative analysis types.

7.1 Gyung-suk’s story

When we arrived in Sydney, we found that we were not ready to be independent. We had had such a protected life in Korea and we were not ready to respond to this new life.

We arrived in Sydney in April 1996. We enjoyed it very much for the first three months. After three months we started to worry about our future. I had always thought that my English was good, but it did not work out to be that way. I attended AMES for six months, but I couldn’t see any improvement. I have two girls - my eldest daughter, Min-ji, was 13 years old and my younger daughter, Ji-sung, was 9 years old. Min-ji was academically top in her school in Korea, but she had a hard time at her high school in Sydney. Because of her poor English, she wasn’t doing as well at school as she was used to. Min-ji wanted to go back to Korea so did I. I couldn’t see any bright future in
Australia. After six months of living in Sydney, I decided to go back to Korea looking for a business or any other options. I left my children and husband behind. When I arrived in Korea, Korea was such a strange place to me that I thought it would be too hard to adjust to being there again. Living in Australia for only six months really changed my ways of seeing and thinking – it was so funny. I rang my husband to say that we had to stay in Australia and that even if we came back to Korea, life would not be easy.

Then I came back to Sydney and we made up our minds to stay in Australia forever. First, we bought a house and we looked seriously for a business. It took one and a half years to find this business, a health food shop. My husband knew that he didn’t want to work for other people. He had worked all his life until he was 45 for other people, and now he wanted to work for himself.

With limited English and limited information, it was not easy to find a good business. Eventually, we bought this health food shop. We are happy about this. Most of our customers are Australian - Anglo Australian - and they are very polite and even though our English is not good, the customers are patient and kind.

I am so glad we are in Australia, particularly when I think of Min-ji. She started a dentistry course in university this year. When we started the business five years ago, she was only in year 9, but I had to work in the shop with my husband, so Min-ji had to look after the housework and mind her younger sister. After school, Min-ji came home, cleaned the house and prepared dinner and looked after her sister’s homework while she did her own homework. I felt very sorry for her. I never did any housework when I was a teenager but my little daughter had to do all the housework and even look after her sister. It was heartbreaking to me. [Mi-sook tearful] However, she did very well in school even though she struggled with her English. She still has no confidence in her English. She got a place in the dentistry course in Adelaide University saying that ‘I have now become a princess - I don’t have to do any more housework’.
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Now my younger daughter Ji-sung is in year 8 and she often has to stay at the shop with me until we close and she hates it. She doesn’t like staying at the shop even though there is a private room for her. I try not to stay at the shop as much as possible, but often I have to. I feel very sorry for her.

When I was in Korea, I was a full-time housewife - I stayed at home and looked after the children and managed family financial matters. I thought that was a woman’s role. I always thought about my husband’s feelings first and told my children, ‘Your father is the most important – you must do as he tells you’.

One reason we left Korea was that I only have two daughters and no son. In Korea it is very important for a woman to have a son. As my husband is the eldest son, it was very hard for him in Korea to have no son. I felt that I had not fulfilled my duty as a wife, even though my mother-in-law was kind and did not put any pressure on me. My husband also felt that our daughters would be disadvantaged in Korea and he talked about how Australian women have equal power to Australian men. In this sense I am very satisfied with life in Australia.

Our business is registered in both my name and my husband’s. I work about six hours and my husband works about ten hours a day. We open from Monday to Saturday. English is our greatest barrier. We wanted to have a business in mainstream society. English is most difficult in relation to customers and wholesale and those sorts of things. When a wholesale company sends us product information, we have to read and understand it completely and also we have to seek more information from other sources. Also we have to explain our products to our customers, and we have to listen very carefully to what their needs are. We tried to have a business with minimum English but we end up using one of most hard expert English.
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7.1.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

The first grand narrative of gender and cultural barrier is rendered irrelevant by Gyung-suk’s labour market activities but echoes through the microstoria. Gyung-suk refers to her life in Korea where she understood her role as a woman to be that of the ‘good wife and wise mother’, in which she stayed at home overseeing financial matters and teaching her daughters deference to their father. In Australia, this role was transferred in some ways to her older daughter and Gyung-suk expresses sadness that her work means that she is unable to provide the traditional support to her daughters. Gyung-suk describes her older daughter taking care of her younger daughter and performing housework until she is able to go to university and escape domesticity. Nevertheless, Gyung-suk privileges her labour market activity over traditional domestic roles because the family needs to survive. In Korea, Gyung-suk did not engage in paid work outside the home, as it was culturally appropriate and accepted for her to fulfil the tradition ‘good wife, wise mother’ role. In Australia, Gyung-suk is able to explore another role and work with her husband, at the expense of her traditional female Korean role. Thus the traditional role is mutable across contexts and does not necessarily prevent the KMW from participating in the Australian labour market.

Gyung-suk’s story is relevant to the second grand narrative in that she identifies ongoing issues in the workplace that she describes as relating to her proficiency in using the English language. As she is self-employed, the second grand narrative appears to be refuted, but relevant microstoria remain evident. Gyung-suk and her husband decided that they would work for themselves in their own small business, meaning that their access to the labour market was dependent upon themselves in the first instance and not on achieving acceptance by, or affiliation with, an organisation in the Australian labour market. Effective use of the English language is important for Gyung-suk in a utilitarian sense: for negotiating the procurement of a business, for the exchange of wholesale goods and for communicating product information to customers in her health food shop. There is no organisational hierarchy or social environment that Gyung-suk struggles to understand, infiltrate or enjoy.
Gyung-suk engages in a discourse of self-evaluation of her English language proficiency or ‘goodness’, which is typical for this group and in negative terms. Migration to Australia involved a lowering of Gyung-suk’s estimation of her English language abilities and she said, ‘I had always thought that my English was good, but it did not work out to be that way’. The English language knowledge and use that had served Gyung-suk in Korea and built her confidence she perceived was not accepted or understood in the Australian context. The resultant lowering of her confidence saw Gyung-suk attempt to study English for six months with no discernible improvement to herself. The lowering of confidence, the lack of improvement and her daughter’s problems at high school in Australia (which she attributed to English language difference) were sufficient for Gyung-suk to rethink migrating to Australia. Human capital theory may be invoked here to describe the reality of her misperception of her English language ability, but human cultural capital critique is more comprehensive and satisfactory in describing the downgrading of an apparently sufficient skill when placed in a new context. The valuation is not, therefore, in the skill but in the culture that judges it. Gyung-suk accepts this re-evaluation of her linguistic skill, losing her confidence.

Resolving to remain in Australia, unsatisfied with language courses and with a husband who wanted to work for himself, Gyung-suk was forced to enter the labour market despite her perceived language barrier. Gyung-suk states that this was not easy ‘with limited English and limited information’ and that her mainstream, Australian English-speaking customers are ‘patient and kind’ even though her ‘English is not good’. Gyung-suk thus evidences a story and attitude of gratitude for her acceptance and the patience and willingness of her customers to make efforts to communicate with her. Such an attitude is indicative of a segmentation approach to the labour market, in which outsiders should be grateful for inclusion. Gyung-suk also describes herself as struggling with what she calls ‘expert English’: this includes highly specialised loci of English language vocabulary, such as localised business language, legal language and medical and alternative healing languages. These specialised languages are not normally spoken by all native English language speakers, and it would be expected that any person would struggle with their specific and unusual vocabularies. Nevertheless, Gyung-suk presents
her struggle with ‘expert’ English as being particular to her and her husband on the basis of being migrants.

Despite these hurdles, Gyung-suk does manage to co-own and run a small business with her husband, to negotiate with a variety of stakeholders and to conduct most of her activities in the English language. This leads to the question of whether Gyung-suk has broken through an English language barrier or whether it did, in fact, ever exists for her. Gyung-suk’s story shows that she is able to perform and operate in an English-speaking environment despite her Korean background and her difference. However, it is unlikely that she would have the confidence in her English language ability to apply for, let alone win, a similar or equivalent position within an Australian labour market organisation. While Gyung-suk’s story appears to refute the second proposition on the basis that she is active in the labour market, microstoria analysis reveals that the proposition may be modified to take into account the different dynamics of different scenarios for KMW. That is, fluency in the English language may form a barrier to labour market participation if Gyung-suk is seeking to gain access to a pre-existing organisation but does not if she has the resources to start her own organisation. The English language barrier therefore disappears in creating one’s own organisation and is otherwise a phenomenon of existing labour market organisations, providing a basis for exclusion. In this sense, a ‘barrier’ must mean something that cannot be overcome: although Gyung-suk experiences English language difficulties at work, she manages to find solutions to those problems and maintain her business, and the barrier disappears.

7.1.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Gyung-suk’s life story reveals a number of microstories that stand outside the purview of the grand narratives. The microstory of independence is immediately and most strongly invoked in Gyung-suk’s life story. Here, independence refers to a separation, even isolation, from Korean family, society and language. In Australia, Gyung-suk and her family were pioneers. Gyung-suk referred to their lives in Korea as being ‘protected’, so that migration was in itself a form of growing up and ‘leaving the nest’ in this story's
conceptualisation. Already married and with children upon arrival in Australia, many would have regarded her as already ‘independent’, but Gyung-suk described her family as being ‘naïve’ at this time, evoking associations with adolescence, struggle and maturation to adulthood. Gyung-suk referred to her husband breaking out of the childlike (in this conceptualisation) employer/employee relationship (in which the employer has a somewhat parental status) to ‘work for himself’ in a labour market expression of the independence microstory. To leave the protected, secure, parental relationship of employment in a company in Korea to start a business alone and in mainstream English-speaking Australia is presented as courageous and a ‘coming of age’. Difficulties with the English language, cultural differences, few networks and little information represent challenges to overcome in an almost heroic determination to survive on one’s own terms. The migration process and the establishment of an unsupported business in the free market in Australia are related in terms of a rite of passage towards the goal of independence in the Western world.

Gyung-suk describes this rite of passage as difficult, explaining that she lost confidence in the project when she discovered that her English language skills did not equip her for the project as well as she had believed. She refers to attending AMES English language classes for six months, seeing no improvement and also seeing her older daughter experience difficulties at high school on the basis of English language skills. This may be regarded as a parallel to the ‘six-month promise’ frequently offered by Korean parents to teenage children anxious about migrating to Australia: within six months, their English will have improved sufficiently to ensure they are free from significant language difficulty. In this case, Gyung-suk, betrayed by the failure of the promise and concerned for the family’s future, decided to return to Korea and to forsake the project of independence. This theme of the broken promise, or the unrealised expectation, is repeated throughout her life story. However, she was surprised to find upon her return to Korea that her sense of isolation or being ‘outside’ society in Australia was also evident in Korea. Her embarkation on the independence project had led her far enough away from Korean society that she was felt she was unable to return to Korea and was thereby forced to continue towards independence in Australia.
The promise of a better future in the West, or the Western promise, provides another microstory. Gyung-suk explains that it was opportunity for their daughters that motivated her and her husband to migrate to Australia, where ‘Australian women have equal power to Australian men’. In Australia, this microstory claims, girls have the same educational opportunities as boys, which, under a meritocratic, human capital system, will be realised as equal employment opportunities. This perceived equality of opportunity for women in Australia combined with the embarrassment of Gyung-suk in not fulfilling her wifely duty and producing a son in Korea are also aspects of the liberation and independence project of Gyung-suk and her family. In Australia, Gyung-suk would be relieved of the cultural pressure to produce sons and would not have to defend herself as a good wife and wise mother. For Gyung-suk and her husband, staying in patriarchal Korea represented disadvantage for their daughters and no matter the struggle, a more equal future was possible for them in Australia. These gender and cultural issues are significant in the push to migrate and essential aspects of Gyung-suk’s story but they remain outside the considerations of the first grand narratives as they do not appear to impede labour market participation and, indeed, anticipate it.

Moving the family to Australia had major impacts upon the lives of Gyung-suk’s teenage daughters, de jure adolescents in the independence project of their parents. Not only did they struggle with English, but one took on the additional responsibilities of childcare and housework and the other spent much of her out-of-school time at her parents’ place of work. Gyung-suk expressed sadness over this difference from her own childhood in which she could always stay home after school under the care of her mother. Gyung-suk describes her older daughter in fairytale terms, as a princess or Cinderella, forced to serve other people, patiently awaiting her own opportunities. Here again is the notion of the unfulfilled promise, of children who suffer despite the rewards of the West.

Gyung-suk’s story reveals several microstories: the independence project, the six-month promise, the educational promise of children, the Western promise and the good wife and wise mother.
Chapter 7: Not Career-Oriented but Participate in Paid Labour Market

7.1.3 Summary

Gender and cultural issues in the microstoria do not support the first grand narrative and argue that roles specific to women, wives and mothers can change for an individual in different circumstances. Gyung-suk tells a story of change across countries, moving from a traditional ‘good wife, wise mother’ role in Korea to a working life as the co-owner of a small business in Australia. In Australia, although independent of Korea, she experiences guilt because she finds herself unable to give her children as much time and attention as she would like. Considerations such as the desire to perform family roles more and better while working are unaddressed by propositional thought and emerge only in microstoria analysis.

Gyung-suk experiences daily difficulties with the English language and describes these as her ‘greatest barrier’, making communication with customers and wholesalers difficult and time-consuming. Nevertheless, she manages to survive in her business with her husband and to find solutions to communication problems. Therefore, the English language does not constitute a barrier to Gyung-suk’s participation in the Australian labour market (albeit at times a frustration) but does constitute a barrier to her attempts to be accepted by a labour market organisation. In this way, the second proposition may be modified to understand the English language barrier to be a phenomenon of becoming affiliated with established organisations in the Australian labour market. English language ability is therefore more an aspect of social acceptance and replication of the status quo than an indication of ability to perform a task, a notion supported by human cultural capital critique. The microstoria thus serve to modify the grand narrative, to show that the notion of ‘barrier’ is context-related and a factor of labour market organisations’ practices of power, particularly exclusion.

Further microstoria analysis beyond the propositions reveals notions of an independence project, a six-month promise, better futures for children and a belief in Australia as offering a society in which men and women are equal and human capital is rewarded.
7.2 Jin-seng’s story

I have two adult children - my son is 30 years old and my daughter is 27. My husband passed away five years ago. Our family came to Australia twenty years ago. When we came to Sydney for the first time, we were not migrants. One of the largest Korean companies sent my husband to establish an overseas branch office in Sydney. He established a branch office in Sydney and worked very hard. After five years of work in Sydney, he had completed his task and we had to go back to company headquarters in Korea. Then we went back to Korea, but my husband resigned from the company and we immigrated to Australia as business migrants. Life as migrants is very different from our previous Sydney life as overseas posters. When we came here with my husband as head of the branch office, we had a very comfortable life, which we really enjoyed. But the life of independent migrants is very hard.

I was a high school teacher in Korea. I worked for ten years after I got married, so I had work experience before I came to Australia. After we arrived in Sydney as migrants in 1983, my husband started a business, and his business went very well and I had to work for his business. I did not want to become involved in my husband’s business but he forced me to. Business was booming and we opened several branches – we just got bigger and bigger. Then my husband decided to enter into a partnership with a big company. The company collapsed, all our money was gone and we lost everything, even our house.

Then my husband started to get sick and I had to go to work. I was the manager of a fashion outlet. I worked for five years but it was so hard with my limited English. All different kinds of people I had to serve, and it was tiring. So I retired from my job. When I migrated to Australia, I wanted to do my own things not with my husband. Then I completed a tourism course at TAFE, hoping that one day maybe I could have my own travel agency but to get a travel agent’s licence, I needed two years’ work experience. I could not find any travel agency which would offer me a job. Australian travel agencies would not hire me because of my accent. Travel agencies that were operated by Koreans
did not want to hire me for fear that I would leave and take clients with me to start my own business. They didn’t want to train a future competitor. As a result of all of this, it was impossible for me to get the experience I needed and I gave up on my dream of having my own travel agency.

After my husband got better, he started his new business again. By that time, my son was in his second year of his university course and when he saw how we were struggling with our business, he suspended his studies to help his father’s business. I heard that some members of our community said that we were bad parents – that we made our son stop studying so he could help us with our business. But it wasn’t us that wanted it – it was our son who wanted to help.

After a few years of hard work, my husband found a good export business to Korea. The company is in Sydney. He only took orders from companies in Korea to give to the Australian companies - the companies did all their own shipping and the rest of it. But he needed to travel a lot between cities in Australia and between Korea and Sydney. He was suffering with diabetes for a long time and while he was travelling, he did not look after himself very well and often forgot to take his medication. While he was on a business trip in Korea, he had a heart attack and he died.

To support my children’s education, I tried very hard, not only with the academic side of their lives but also the social aspects. My husband realised that throughout his study in Korea and all the elite courses, he did not much enjoy his social life and friends, since academic achievement was so important in Korea. He thought that he missed out. He told our children that academic achievement isn’t so important - you have to balance it with your social life. My son joined the boy scouts – which he really enjoyed - and made a lot of friends and learned leadership. My daughter didn’t want to join the girl scouts – she is rather quiet and likes music.

In terms of the work that Korean migrant women do, they work for survival. I don’t think that you can call what they do a career or an occupation. The sort of work they do is
unskilled and very low paid – the sorts of things nobody else wants to do. Korean women don’t have job-hunting skills and they don’t have the right skills for Australia. All they can do here is manual work, the work that they would never do in Korea where they would have a helper. At the moment, I work as a carer and do voluntary work in the Korean community. I like to help other people.

7.2.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

The first grand narrative of a gender and cultural barrier is rendered irrelevant by Jin-seng’s life story description of her labour market activities through her microstoria. With reference to the first proposition, in terms of gender and culture, Jin-seng describes her work activities with her husband as something she ‘had to do’ against her will. It is unclear from the microstoria whether Jin-seng’s obligation to assist her husband in business was a matter of survival and necessity or one of wifely duty. In the situation where Jin-seng’s husband became ill and she ‘had to go to work’, the need to survive is clear. However, when her husband’s company was growing and becoming more successful, she describes her husband as ‘forcing’ her to work with him. His ability to exert any force or sense of obligation upon Jin-seng exists within the power of the marital relationship and Jin-seng’s position in that relationship. Despite helping her husband in ‘his’ business, which she never refers to as ‘their/our’ business, Jin-seng had her own aspirations for ‘doing her own things’ and resented becoming involved in her husband’s work.

Jin-seng did not assume the traditional role of a Korean woman when she was able to step away from it and was able to conceive of her own career and participation but found herself unable to refuse her husband assistance when it was demanded. The first grand narrative is thus not only refuted but inverted in Jin-seng’s life story to show that traditional allegiances and expectations can force labour market participation, rather than constitute a barrier to it. In Jin-seng’s case, she describes herself as at times forced to work in a business that was not her own, lacking the time and opportunity to look after her children as a full-time mother. Jin-seng also describes her knowledge of the Korean
community’s disapproval of her son suspending his tertiary studies to help in his father’s business when traditionally his studies should take precedence over all else. In this context she mentions that she and her husband are called ‘bad parents’ and that both are subject to this cultural discourse.

Jin-seng has an Australian work history, assisting in her husband’s businesses at various times, managing a retail fashion outlet and performing voluntary and caring tasks in the Korean community. While it would have been necessary for Jin-seng to use the English language in all of these roles, her five years as the manager of a fashion outlet represents the greatest acceptance into the pre-existing and mainstream Australian labour market. Acquisition of this position means that Jin-seng’s story refutes the second grand narrative in the first instance. Jin-seng claims that the job was ‘so hard with ...limited English’ that she retired. However, she also mentions that serving ‘all different kinds of people ... was tiring’ and it must be remembered that she remained in the job for five years. This suggests that the issue was, firstly, not only one of English language frustration but of suitability for the type of work and, secondly, that the difficulty was not insurmountable and her position was sustainable for a considerable period. Frustrations with the English language did not prevent Jin-seng from accessing or negotiating the Australian labour market but they provided a framework within which to explain her leaving one position.

Despite the factual refutation of the first grand narrative outlined above, microstoria reveals how English figures in preventing Jin-seng from achieving her labour market goals. Jin-seng describes her desire to become a travel agent and her inability to gain the necessary work experience to open her own business. She states that ‘Australian travel agencies would not hire me because of my accent’. She also describes Korean travel agencies as reticent to hire her for fear of losing clients to her should she set up her own business. Accent in itself does not indicate a lower level of English language skill but a conspicuous difference from the Australian accent. Where it is improbable to attribute inability to access the labour market to her English language skills (Korean travel agencies), Jin-seng offers an alternative reason but a reason that could equally apply to the Australian travel agencies. These grey areas in regard to English language skill and
the Australian labour market highlight the possibility of subjective attribution of failure to access the labour market to English language barriers. Subjectively, Jin-seng finds English language difference a useful and realistic explanation for her labour market disappointments and difficulties, evidencing the utility of the grand narrative of English language barriers.

The impact of this microstoria upon the second grand narrative is to clarify the subjective notion of a ‘barrier’. To a large degree, barriers may be defined by the person who is unsuccessful in achieving what she wishes to achieve, and their articulation is sufficient for them to become real to the speaker. Once conceptualised as objective truth, the barrier is functional in preventing the speaker from pursuing her desired success and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy or rationalisation. The barrier is also a shifting phenomenon and may exist in some situations to explain a failure to achieve an outcome but not exist in other situations when the outcome is achieved. Thus a barrier is not always a barrier and is only useful as an idea and a cause when failure or disappointment requires explanation.

### 7.2.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Several microstories that are independent of the grand narratives are identifiable in Jin-seng’s story. These include her own independence project, the importance of status, educational promise for her children, the hope of a better life in the West (the Western promise) and an understanding of the value and types of work available to migrant women in Australia (labour market segmentation).

Jin-seng begins her story with a comparison between life in Australia as a temporary resident supported by a Korean company, financially, socially and in other ways, and life as an ‘independent’ business migrant. She describes her husband’s decision to return to Australia as a business migrant after his five years of temporary residence finished. There is no evidence of the decision to migrate being consensual or welcome on her part, but it should be noted that Jin-seng was reserved throughout the interview and conscious
of her position in the Korean community in Sydney. While she does not go into detail here, the difference between being a Korean company-supported temporary resident and a business migrant is one of having housing, status, schooling, government interactions and supportive social networks provided without request.

While supported temporary residence was comfortable and desirable in many ways, the heroic struggle for independence, in ‘making it on one’s own’, is spoken of highly. A part of this discourse is revealed in an unwillingness to interact too much with the Korean community as this could prevent or hold one back from achieving the project of independence, made all the more heroic by its difficulties. Jin-seng arrived in Australia with ten years’ experience as a teacher, postdating marriage. At the time she did this, this was unusual in Korea and it would have been more common for her to stay at home and look after her children. Thus Jin-seng’s individual independence project had begun some time before migrating to Australia. In Jin-seng’s story, the educational promise and the Western promise are both evident, for her and her son. The discourse of independence continues with her adult children, who live with her and express shame at this. Although her children are educated, employed and financially independent, independence in this sense means moving out of the parental home. Jin-seng describes the Korean tradition of only moving out of the parental home to begin one’s own family home, unlike Western patterns of flatting with friends or living alone. In this conceptualisation, except for periods of study, life is always within a family unit and home, whether it be as a child, spouse or parent.

The discourses of educational and Western promises and filial obligation are evident in Jin-seng’s story of her son suspending his studies to assist with his father’s business. Jin-seng expresses sadness that her son interrupted his studies and refers to community disapproval that she and her husband were ‘bad parents’ for not placing their son’s education first. Jin-seng also describes her awareness of the importance of supporting her children in developing social skills and a social life beyond the educational promise. Jin-seng refers to a ‘life balance’ of friends and achievements not often otherwise referred to in this study.
Jin-seng describes her current work as caring and voluntary, descriptions most often applied to a gender-based notion of ‘women’s work’. This type of work is often done outside the family home, sometimes for money and sometimes unpaid, and is in many ways an extension of the wife and mother role. Jin-seng refers to KMW in Australia as being without careers, marketable skills or the ability to source positions. She describes them as only working because they have to, in poorly paid and unskilled jobs that they would never have done in Korea. This is the discourse of the labour market in which skills, networks and connections have currency and the market defines the possibilities of the individual and there is limited individual agency. In this way, Jin-seng testifies to the utility of the human capital grand narrative while she offers a critique of its inability to adequately employ or recognise the skills of KMW.

### 7.2.3 Summary

Jin-seng’s story reveals complexities within the grand narratives that are useful in modifying how they are understood. Jin-seng’s microstoria offer a rebuttal of the first grand narrative, countering the concept that cultural and gender issues (most commonly traditional wife and mother roles) will prevent labour market participation commensurable with the KMW’s perceived skills.

Firstly, Jin-seng’s labour market participation reveals that she is able to access the Australian labour market and maintain a position for at least five years, whatever her English language level. In terms of the second grand narrative, Jin-seng’s microstoria reveal that the notion of the English language as a barrier to labour market participation is highly subjective and variable. Difficulties with, or discrimination on the basis of difference in the English language may be perceived as preventing access in one situation or industry but not in another, and may also be invoked as an explanation when other reasons for lack of access are unclear. This leads to recognition of the role of the individual in identifying and ascribing barriers to labour market participation, and that articulation is all that is necessary to realise a barrier. The knowledge that the English language may constitute a barrier to migrant participation in the labour market means that
a discourse exists that may be used whenever convenient and ignored when not, an unsteady utility.

Microstoria independent of the propositional factors reveal an independence project and a belief in the objective meritocracy of the Western human capital ideal, and the observation that migrant women experience a downward mobility upon migration. The broken promise of the West is experienced and resolved as the promise being only relevant to children educated in Australia.

7.3 Eun-sook’s story

My family immigrated to Australia in 1987 as business migrants. I had a son at the time of migration and now I have three more children. After arriving in Australia, my husband started his own business. While he was busy with his business, I got a job at TIS [Translating & Interpreting Service] on a casual basis. All TIS jobs were casual jobs. I often had to do face to face interpreting. I was so busy. I think that maybe I was the busiest member of TIS. I continued this job from 1990 to 1997. I resigned from the job because I was getting busier closer to completing my Master’s degree and my research work at university and with the children.

I graduated from university in Korea with a degree majoring in childhood education. After leaving university, I worked as a youth teen co-ordinator in Busan. After a year of work experience, I left Korea for America to study at Youth With A Mission DTS [Discipleship Training School] in Hawaii where I met my husband. We married. After we migrated to Australia, I got a Masters of Education and a Masters of Linguistics degree at university. Then I enrolled in a PhD in Queensland University. I have submitted my PhD thesis and I am waiting for the result. I worked for two years as a Research Assistant at the university and taught Korean for three years and worked for a private company as a translator for five years while I was also studying and working with TIS.
Before I came to Australia, for five and half years of married life, I worked as a full-time housewife and I had to do all the housework. After arriving in Brisbane, my husband started his own business. He established a very big factory. He was very busy doing his work and I stayed at home with the children. There were a lot of Korean people who did not speak good English and I started to help them with my English language skills and I became a translator and interpreter for them and I enjoyed helping them. I did not regard it as a job, but ‘helping people’.

My husband’s business went from bad to worse, because he made bad deals and people he trusted betrayed him. He lost everything except our house. He became very ill and had to stay in bed all day. And my ‘helping people’ hobby became my real job to support my family. When I came to Australia, I had only one son, but after three years I had three more children. When my husband was sick, I needed money. So I enrolled in a PhD to receive a scholarship and I did research work and after work, I did my interpreter work. I went to bed every night about 1am and got up at 6 am. It continued for more than five years. After three years, my husband became better - he could look after the children at home and could do some housework.

Eventually, I became sick and my mother had to come from Korea to look after my family. She stayed with us for more than six months until I got better. My husband tried to find employment, but he did not have any particular skills because all his experience was in management. No one wanted to employ him. Then he enrolled in university while he was looking for work. And the university recognised his ability and the university offered him a PhD scholarship and he completed his degree and he got a position in a university in Korea.

While my husband was sick, I don’t remember how many different jobs I had, I think, maybe more than 18 different kinds of job. While I worked, my husband helped me a lot. I found he did more housework than I did. In Australia, I proved to myself and my husband that I could do more than housework – I could also do social and academic work.
Now I am in Korea, I do not have to work for money. I feel that I am blessed that I can spend time with my family at home. I can be a real mother – not a woman who is tired and exhausted at work - and stay at home all the time, cook for the children and family, look after their homework and listen to their stories. I know that these are the most valuable things. I would like to enjoy this blessed moment for few more years, until my children grow up.

My work is always related to the Korean language. I did not have any particular problems because of my lack of English. I do not think that I was discriminated against because of my race, but I felt that I was privileged being able to speak Korean. Because of my work, I often had to go to court or to police stations. They were so kind, and I felt that Anglo-Australian people were kinder to me because I was a woman.

7.3.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Eun-sook’s life story renders the first grand narrative of gender and cultural barrier irrelevant to her labour market activities. With regard to the first grand narrative of gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation, Eun-sook prefers to stay at home with her children in a traditional role, in addition to doing volunteer work and ‘helping people’ rather than working in labour market organizations. Eun-sook’s story tells of her movement between roles in the home, the community, academe and the paid labour market. This movement is highly dependent upon the financial and health circumstances of her husband, whose illness and business failure leads her to turn her English language ‘helping’ hobby into a source of financial support for the family. When necessary for the family’s survival, Eun-sook could perform to a high level in Australia and identified no issues arising from her gender or culture to prevent her from participating in the labour market. She could draw upon her knowledge, background and skills to achieve highly when necessary, but would happily cease all extra-domestic activities when once again in a financial position to do so. In this way, Eun-sook manages to maintain the traditional Korean ideals of womanhood, as wife and mother,
particularly in relation to Confucian and Christian ideals of uncomplaining endurance, diligence and self-sacrifice, but not to allow these to prevent her from participating in the labour market in Australia. When she is unable to perform this role through illness, her own mother assists, in the role seen as always performed by the women of the family. Nevertheless, additional roles or opportunities outside the home do not release Eun-sook from her traditional gender-based obligations.

Eun-sook manages to balance her traditional Korean motherhood role with her Australian labour market performer role on the pivot of financial necessity. When in need, she can step in to provide and when her husband is able to provide, she may return to the home but ultimately she prefers to stay in the home or do volunteer work. Eun-sook expresses no personal desire to participate in the labour market but claims to find no impediments to doing so when circumstances sanction participation. Thus, gender and culture are factors that impact upon Eun-sook’s options and activities whether she is working in the labour market in Australia or managing the home in Korea. Gender and cultural factors are interpreted differently in different locations. They may result in a highly domesticated life in Korea (indicating class, status and a preferred way of life there) but may push Eun-sook into a life outside the home in Australia (where she indicates a sense of hard work, competence, achievement, being in demand and survival skills). In Korea, Eun-sook does not engage in the labour market so that she can stay with her children. In Australia, her story is the opposite.

Eun-sook’s story refutes the second grand narrative in that it tells of an Australian experience involving a large number of labour market positions and also of a relatively high level of English language proficiency. Eun-sook’s English language is of a high enough level that she can work as a translator and interpreter, that she can teach Korean in Australia and that she can undertake postgraduate studies in an Australian university using English. Eun-sook states that she does not feel discriminated against on the basis of her English language skills but feels privileged to be able to speak Korean.
Despite Eun-sook’s apparently extremely active labour market participation in Australia, consideration must be given to the nature of that participation. Speaking of ‘casual jobs’, hobbies that become jobs and ‘more than 18 different kinds of job’, Eun-sook outlines a profile of part-time and impermanent jobs most often in service industries. While some are described in terms of translating, teaching or researching, others are not mentioned in specific terms. Eun-sook did not pursue a single career within an Australian labour market organisation and does not describe negotiating the labour market in any way. Instead, her story tells of ‘picking up work’ on the basis of any skills she has, much as an itinerant worker does. While she does not relate this work pattern to the English language, English is the source of much of her employment and is hence intrinsically linked to the labour market opportunities and patterns that she experiences in Australia. This draws attention to the English language in the Australian labour market as the source of both opportunity and limitation, at once necessary but of limited value.

7.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Microstoria that are independent of the grand narratives reveal three aspects of labour market conceptualisation and participation. Firstly, the Western promise opens new possibilities and roles for Eun-sook, but a return to Korea sees a return to her original role, revealing the Western promise to be located firmly within the West. Eun-sook expresses no disappointment or frustration in moving between roles and countries but accepts opportunity when she can and enjoys traditionalism when she can. This adaptability is the second aspect. The third aspect is that of the educational promise (a human capital theory notion), which for Eun-sook includes status and a means of dignifying labour market participation.

Eun-sook also refers to the discourse of the Western promise in discovering that she can ‘do more than housework’ and realises a hitherto unseen potential in a new context. Her story illustrates the notion of ‘when in Rome’ to a high degree, indicating the level of adaptation that KMW may realise on migrating to Australia but that this adaptation is specific to time, place and circumstance and may change again upon returning to Korea.
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Eun-sook’s work and study load led her to great achievements in Australia but she did not lament the loss of these activities on returning to Korean housewifery and motherhood. Moving between the two roles as she moves between the two countries, Eun-sook’s story is illustrative of a notion of circular time for women, operating as needed and capable, rather than a linear career progression more characteristic of a male linear work pattern. Her reference to her own mother coming to Australia to help her while Eun-sook was ill is also illustrative of this notion of women adapting and responding as necessary, competently and successfully but without personal desire to achieve particular labour market outcomes beyond financial ones.

Also strongly evident in Eun-sook’s story was the human capital educational promise: further study as the pathway to better jobs. In this story, mention of hardship is minimised and both she and her husband appeared to gain entry to Australian universities and access to scholarships and doctorate degrees very easily. This may be considered in conjunction with the vagueness with which Eun-sook refers to her numerous other jobs. Study is a way of dignifying labour market participation and activities outside the home for Eun-sook, and bespeaks a Korean notion of class, face and suitability of activities. In Korea, her financial resources are greater and the range of suitable roles outside of the home is placed within community and voluntary sectors. When in Australia and under financial pressure, the range of activities in the labour market widens but the notion of roles acceptable to her status or class remains.

7.3.3 Summary

Eun-sook’s story refutes both grand narratives, and neither gender and cultural nor English language factors prevent her from participating in the Australian labour market. Indeed, it is Eun-sook’s linguistic skills and her interpretation of her gender role in Australia that propel her into the labour market, despite no initial plans to do so. Nevertheless, Eun-sook remains the site of numerous competing discourses that involve a complex negotiation between what is necessary and what is acceptable. Issues including gender, culture, class, education and the Western promise are evident in her story and
impact upon the way and the extent to which she engages with and in the Australian labour market. Although she does participate in many ways, Eun-sook does not ultimately pursue a singular career through an Australian labour market organisation, nor does she express any desire or expectation to do so.

7.4 Discussion

The three life stories in this chapter all refute the grand narrative of gender and culture and English language barriers, as all three KMW manage to secure paid positions in Australia in which they use the English language as their primary means of communication. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis provides a modification of the understanding of a ‘barrier’ and presents subtler stories of the impacts of language, gender and culture upon labour market experience of KMW. Microstoria that are independent of these notions reveal a strong discourse relating to independence and the human capital ideals of the West and how they are understood when not borne out by experience.

A belief that a KMW is inferior or not competitive will prevent any attempts to enter an organisation and become a barrier merely by belief. Thus, the notion of a barrier must be understood as any belief that prevents a KMW from attempting to participate in the labour market. In working in her own business, a KMW appears to have overcome all barriers but has in fact only hidden the barrier to participating in existing labour market organisations. For these KMW, the second proposition may be modified to understand the English language barrier to be a phenomenon of established organisations in the Australian labour market, and more an aspect of social acceptance and replication of the status quo than an indication of ability to perform a task. Jin-seng’s life story illustrates how individuals may rationalise rejection from the labour market (in this case Australian and Korean travel agencies) differently, constructing notions of barriers when the real reasons remain unknown. Thus barriers to labour market participation must be seen as
constructed from both within and without a KMW, existing independently of her because she believes them to exist.

Microstoria analysis in this chapter finds all three KMW participating in the labour market, suggesting that they do not experience gender or cultural barriers to labour market participation in Australia. None planned to enter the labour market but found that they were able to reconcile their perceptions of themselves as wives and mothers with working in Australia. However, the nature of that participation yields a deeper analysis of the relationship between gender and culture and the KMW in the Australian labour market. The difference between the KMW who becomes involved in her husband’s business on the basis of filial piety and the KMW who translates and interprets in order to provide financial support while pursuing further studies is one of class and expectation. This provides its own limitations and opportunities in the Australian labour market, and constitutes a form of historical and cultural barrier or delimiter to labour market participation in Australia, created before the KMW arrives in Australia. For the women in this group in particular, labour market participation is acceptable, possible, necessary or forced if not personally desirable, at different times in their lives, and their obligations as wives and mothers are drivers in that participation.

As noted, two of the three ceased their labour market activities as soon as they were in a financial position to do so, exhibiting the adaptability to move between roles as paid labour market participants and stay-at-home mothers and volunteer workers. This is characteristic of a notion of circular time for women, as a non-linear progression that may repeat itself in a response to the vagaries and circumstances of life rather than a paradigm of individual control of career and vision for the future. This is ultimately related to the roles of these KMW as wives and mothers and to the types of work that are available to migrant women in the Australian labour market. One KMW in this group describes caring and voluntary work as ‘migrant women’s work’, an extension of the role of wife and mother beyond the home, revealing a notion best explained by the human cultural capital critique.
Microstoria analysis also reveals that English language skills may simultaneously provide the source of employment and ensure that it is part-time, casual and ad hoc. This describes the fraught and ironic relationship that a KMW may hold with the English language: linguistic expertise may provide employment opportunities but those opportunities will be circumscribed as despite their demand, their labour market value remains low. Thus acquisition of the lingua franca (the English language) is a double-edged sword, offering both opportunity and limitation. While the English language may not appear to be a barrier to labour market participation, a fuller analysis will question the nature of the labour market participation of a KMW and examine the role of the value and use of the English language within that participation.

Microstoria that stand apart from the grand narratives are surprisingly consistent within this group considering the different labour market experiences and situations in which these KMW found themselves. The Western promise is first and foremost of these: an ideal that life in Australia is more equal for women and offers opportunities for personal and career exploration that are rarely found in Korea. This illustrates the utility of the human capital model of the labour market for these KMW. The idea of a ‘better life in the West’ is one that is easily translated into a service for the futures of children: one father is keen that his daughters are able to take advantage of what he perceives to be a more equal society between men and women. The better life necessarily involves a Western education instructed in English, and the struggle to realise both promises involves hard work and sacrifice on the part of the KMW and her husband. Children similarly take on additional responsibilities, such as parenting younger siblings, in order to achieve liberation and equality of opportunity in a human capital ideal. One way of discussing a family’s efforts to move away from a secure and supported life in Korea towards being successful migrants in Australia is in terms of an independence project. Migration, the establishment of a business and the separation from traditional support networks are aspects of a rite of passage towards independence in the West.

Within these promises and goals, beliefs emerge such as the six-month promise. The six-month promise is used to allay fears that new Korean migrants, especially children, will
struggle with joining society and using the English language. It offers reassurance that those six months in Australia are sufficient to learn enough English to survive. In stories such as these, it appears that six months are sufficient to make return to Korea difficult or undesirable and to force KMW and their families to continue in Australia once the promise has proven false. Disenchantment and the realisation of difficulty followed by a resolution to survive and to ensure that children realise some of the Western promise is a common story that echoes stories of pioneering heroism and sacrifice.

7.5 Conclusion

While both grand narratives are refuted, much more remains to be said for this group in terms of labour market disadvantage. Grand narrative applicable microstoria reveal that the two identified barriers continue to reverberate in the experiences and choices of the KMW despite and beyond their labour market participation. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis in this chapter introduces an essential discussion on how and by whom ‘barriers’ are conceived, constructed and broken. Gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation may better be regarded as shapers of participation, as the participation is already apparent amongst this group. For the KMW in this chapter, labour market participation is not liberation or personal realisation but a necessity that is both financial and filial. While necessity may ensure that each of the KMW in this chapter does participate in the labour market and ‘overcomes’ any imagined or real barriers to participation, it may also force her into performing work that is far below her potential, qualifications or expectations. Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis points to themes of the promises of equality of opportunity in the West and from a Western education and the independence project of many KMW to survive on their own terms and in their own businesses in Australia.

In regard to assessing the usefulness of the different types of narrative analysis used here, grand narrative analysis is not useful as the immediate refutation of both grand narratives by all members of Group III allows no further exploration. However, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis is helpful for discussing both grand narrative
propositions, and grand narrative independent microstoria is equally useful for discussing numerous further aspects of labour market participation that arise in the interviews. The following chapter examines the stories of KMW in Group IV, who were not career-oriented prior to Australia but became career-oriented after arrival in Australia.
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Chapter 8

Group IV: Career-Oriented (Post Migration)

This chapter analyses the life stories of members of Group IV, constituted by eight KMW who were not career-oriented prior to migration to Australia but became career-oriented after arrival in Australia. Group IV includes four KMW who had little or no real work experience before migrating to Australia but also had some kind of tertiary qualifications. Four of the group arrived in Australia as teenagers, with little choice but to attend high school and university in Australian English and with no possibility of work experience prior to immigration. In short, some of the group discovered a hitherto unknown desire and opportunity to participate in the labour market, while others were removed from an environment in which not working in the labour market was not unusual for women and brought up in one where the opposite held true.

For Group IV members, the story tends to be positive and exciting, involving notions of reinvention, liberation and discovery. Rather than finding their children to be the sites and focus of all future and possibility, these KMW have found new identities, roles and purposes in their Australian success stories. At the same time, for those in the group who were brought to Australia as dependants of their parents while still in school and who have not married and had children, the issues and experiences are different. Initial elation at escaping the rigid and demanding Korean school curricula and examination regimes for a less demanding and more enjoyable Australian secondary school education is soon met with the realisation that a sense of cultural and linguistic difference remains long after a so-called ‘settling in period’ has elapsed. Issues of belonging, making friends and achieving promotion and successful communication pervade their stories as a constant concern.
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The first proposition is difficult to discuss for this group as two KMW do not yet have children and their experiences of motherhood are vicarious. Discussion of the intersection of labour market segmentation along gender lines remains relevant nonetheless to show KMW in roles that are typically female and offering few career progression opportunities. A wide range of microstoria that are independent of the grand narrative propositions is evidenced in these stories, including the difficulty of speaking out against oppression without embracing the discourse of the victim.

The KMW in this group exhibit a high level of Australian English language proficiency, because either they are linguists by vocation or they have studied in English language institutions for considerable periods. Given their generally high level of English language ability, it might be expected that the KMW in this group had little to discuss in terms of the second proposition. However, the following stories and analyses reveal the complexities and difficulties of the term ‘English language’ as being a subjective measure of skill, a skill that is meant to cover other skills and a skill that is both essential yet poorly rewarded in the Australian labour market. They also reveal the role of confidence, job type and organisational context in the perceptions of the KMW as to whether her English language skills are adequate or significant in the workplace.

The three stories analysed in this chapter are examined in terms of the grand narrative propositions arising from the literature review, despite the fact that all the KMW were employed and thereby appear to refute the propositions. Even though all three KMW in this chapter were employed, the issues established in the grand narratives do not entirely disappear and are evident in their microstoria. Each story is transcribed, translated into English and analysed for microstoria that relate to the grand narratives, supporting, modifying or refuting them, and then for microstoria that remain outside the conceptualisation of the grand narratives. Each story is analysed in turn, followed by an overall summary of the relevant propositions and an evaluation of the usefulness of the types of narrative analysis. While the group includes eight members, only three representative stories are included here as adequate to illustrate the findings of the two forms of microstoria analysis (applicable to the grand narratives and independent of the
grand narratives). However, the conclusion and discussion remain informed by the silent members whose specific responses are considered as a part of the group in the discussion and conclusion.

8.1 Eun-sun’s story

I came to Australia in 1987 with my husband and two children. After I graduated from university, I worked as a bilingual officer in Korea for two years. Then I married and stayed at home. I did not particularly think about getting a job and my parents-in-law and my husband did not encourage me to have a job. Therefore, I stayed at home, doing housework and looking after children. It was not an exciting life for me but it was OK. I spent seven years as a full-time homemaker in Korea. One day, my mother-in-law asked me to emigrate to a Western country such as America, since all her relatives were in the USA and she thought that Western countries were better for her grandchildren and for her son - my husband. My mother-in-law thought that my English was better than my husband’s, so she told me that I should be the principal applicant, and I did what she asked me to do. I applied as a skilled migrant and my husband as a dependant.

When we arrived in Sydney, my husband got a job. He went to work everyday and my children went to school. I was so bored at home. So I started attending an interpreting course at TAFE. Since I had worked as a bilingual officer in Korea, it was easy for me. I finished the course and I became a professional interpreter. I was busy since there were not enough Korean-English interpreters in Australia. While I was busy with my work, my husband became demanding. His written English and comprehension was good but he was never confident with his spoken English and he often had trouble in understanding what other people were saying to him. Whenever he had to deal with complex issues, he asked me to do it. He got frustrated very often. He did not like me to talk to other people, and he didn’t like to see me change, as I was getting independent and active. When I was in Korea, I was fully dependent on him. In Australia, I have my own job and my own career and his own weakness in spoken English made him even more frustrated.
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The negative aspect of assisting the Korean community in this way was that I became privy to many of the personal concerns and issues of my clients and it was difficult to cope psychologically with the burden of emotion and information. Problems of domestic violence, sexual abuse and ignorance of Australian law, norms and women’s issues within the Australian Korean community caused me particular problems. As a professional, I was supposed to be objective and impartial, I was not able to offer advice or opinion, and I felt frustrated and like I wasn’t able to help.

In 1992, when Australia started going into recession, my husband lost his job. Then he started his own business, but his lack of experience in business, his over-ambition and the wrong choice of partner meant that the business failed. I had to support his business with my wage - we lost our house and we had nothing. I had to work for money day and night and even on the weekend. Finally, he asked me open a business at the local market with him, which was hard to accept, since I had a professional job - who wants to go to sell things in the market? I did not work with him. He started to get angry with me and he did try various things but whatever he did failed. One day, he decided go back to Korea, and he left. He got a good job in his previous company with a high position in Korea. He asked me go back to Korea with him, but I didn’t want to go and my two daughters didn’t want to go back either. Every two or three months we visited each other but our emotions grew colder. He blamed me for changing and after five years of separated life between Korea and Australia, I finally divorced him. And I remarried with my two children. I am very happy now.

When I came to Australia, I did not particularly expect anything - we came here with a very naïve attitude. I did not expect to work in a paid job, and my husband did not think he was going to have problems with his spoken English. He was one of the elite men in Korea and he was so confident in himself. However, when he arrived in Australia, everything was different to the way he had thought and what he thought of himself. No one respected him as an elite man. It was a real shock for him. While he worked as an employee, he often had trouble understanding his colleagues’ English during coffee
breaks or lunch times or social functions. It made him frustrated all the time. Because of his business failure and the fact that I had to support the family financially, life in Australia was very hard for him to accept. He regarded himself as a failure and he blamed me for my personality changing. I had to survive and I had to pretend to be emotionally strong in front of my two children - I did not want to show my weakness to my children.

I still work as an interpreter and I will work for my children to support them financially. I went to New York last year for my work, and I met some of my old friends. Most of them talk about their children’s academic success and not their own lives but I am very satisfied with my career. If I had not come to Australia, I would have lived as a good housewife and good mother. Maybe I never would have thought about getting a job, but my immigration experience made me work in paid job and recognise my potential talent. I like to help people with my talent. It is good. I don’t think I am experiencing any discrimination or disadvantage in my work place. I feel that I am very lucky to be in Australia.

The problem is that it is a dead-end job. As a professional interpreter and translator, there is just no career ladder. For the first three years, you progress up a scale of professional recognition and higher pay. However, after three years that all stops. That means that after 20 years you are earning the same money as someone who has been working in the job for three years. I earn $20 to $30 an hour in the public sector but if I work privately, I earn $450 to $500 for two to three hours. I did a lot of work outside of the public sector but many translators who only work for the public sector have difficulty financially and from a career perspective. We can’t see any promotion or better prospects. We say that the majority of interpreters are migrants and we have no power to talk about our wages. We have unions but the union does nothing to improve our conditions. Also, the majority of interpreters are women, so no one cares about our wages or conditions. If we had more white men in the industry, it would be different. All interpreters have a non-Anglo background. Despite our tertiary education and great experience, we can’t progress. Our pay is no better than nurses’. I did a lot of private
interpreting and translating work after work. I got much more money after work, often more than 20 times the money I receive from work.

I think Korean women fit into Australia very quickly because most aspects of life here are good for women. But it’s more difficult for Korean men. In Korea, they do not have to do anything to be recognised by their families or society. Because he is a son, a husband and a man, society respects him because he is male. However, in Australia, he has to earn everything with his efforts. Korean men have to try hard to show their love to their children, help with domestic work and participate in school activities. In Australia, for Korean men, nothing is free. For Korean men, even though they have a job in mainstream society, that work is only a job; the work is usually not linked to social activities or making friends. You work in your workplace and you get a salary - that is all. You do not make any friends in your workplace. In Korea, often we can befriend colleagues and sometimes we can become family friends. In Korea, we take long lunchtimes but here most people take a sandwich and eat it in the park.

It seems that Korean men in Australia have their masculinity removed. For Korean men, masculinity is very important. That is maleness, whatever it means. In Korea, if you are male, you are everything but as soon as you arrive in Australia, your masculinity starts disappearing. In Australia, no one respects you just because you are a man. You have to try hard to earn other people’s respect. So Korean men find themselves very troubled in Australia.

Because I speak good English, I had to organise everything in Australia. My husband was reluctant to make contact with English-speaking people, since he was not quite confident of his listening skills. He used to say, ‘This is an important matter - what would happen if I misheard or misunderstood? - you do it’.

When my husband returned to Korea, my two daughters did not want to return to Korea, despite their good relationship with their father. My elder daughter did not want to go
back to her Korean school which she hated. At that time, my elder daughter was in high school and my second daughter was in year 5 in primary school.

8.1.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Eun-sun’s life story illustrates a set of issues that are relevant to the grand narratives, even though her successful acquisition of employment appears to refute them. These ongoing issues reveal the intersection of gender and cultural and English language issues in the labour market to create a web of disempowerment for the KMW and the ironic role of the English language as a signifier of difference in Australia.

Eun-sun’s story illustrates a shifting gender role in response to migration, necessity and possibility. Despite the recognition that her English language skills (and therefore human capital) were greater than her husband’s, it was only Eun-sun’s husband who sought and found work upon their arrival. The institutional expression of applied human capital theory, evidenced in Eun-sun applying as the principal applicant on her migration applicant and her husband as secondary applicant, was immediately reversed by the traditional gender role of the woman at home. However, later, when her husband had experienced numerous failures in the labour market, Eun-sun finds no difficulties in leaving the home to participate in the labour market based on any traditional Korean gender paradigm. Rather, she finds limitations upon the extent and rewards of her career based on an institutionalised gender division and stifling of opportunity. In fact, the Korean ‘good wife, wise mother’ paradigm finds a positive labour market participation expression for Eun-sun in Australia. For Eun-sun, finding herself home alone while her husband went to work and her children to school, labour market participation was both desirable and possible. Later, when her husband lost his job, Eun-sun took on the financial responsibility for the family, conscious of providing both money and a strong example to her children. Drawing upon the ‘wise mother’ aspect of the traditional Korean gender discourse for women, saying ‘I had to survive and I had to pretend to be emotionally strong in front of my two children ... I will work for my children’, Eun-sun finds justification for working where other KMW may find limitation. While satisfied
with her decision to work, she describes herself as not meeting her Korean gender role, saying ‘If I had not come to Australia, I would have lived as a good housewife and good mother’. Thus Eun-sun modifies her notion of what is involved in motherhood, opting for the role of a labour market participant and provider over a stay-at-home carer.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria addressing the first proposition, gender and cultural impacts upon labour market participation, are immediately apparent in Eun-sun’s description of translating and interpreting as peopled by ‘non-Anglo’ women migrants with little bargaining power and unhelpful unions. She says, ‘If we had more white men in the industry it would be different ... despite our tertiary education and experience, we can’t progress. Our pay is no better than nurses.’ The reference to ‘nurses’ (for which we may read ‘women’), as opposed to ‘doctors’ (for which we may read ‘men’), for example, reveals an awareness of Australian labour market segmentation on gender lines. More significantly, Eun-sun’s statement reveals the irony of simultaneous insistence and devaluation (‘despite … education and experience, we can’t progress’) alongside the casting of her profession into the realm of poorly valued women’s work. Not only is translating and interpreting women’s work but it is also migrant, ‘non-Anglo’ work, revealing a third level of disadvantage. These cultural and gender issues are those of the Australian socio-political environment and labour market, and do not refer to any particular Korean context. While being a KMW plants Eun-sun firmly within the triple disadvantage nexus, it does not acknowledge her unique cultural background and presents her as victim rather than victor over a foreign language and a traditional gender role.

With regard to English language barriers to labour market participation, Eun-sun’s experience is a shining example of a KMW who has fashioned a career from bridging the difference between the Korean and English languages. Eun-sun’s objectively measured and institutionally recognised English language skills are of a high order, as the only path to an official (or ‘accredited’) translating and interpreting position in Australia is through the expensive, lengthy and difficult examination process of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). Eun-sun does not refer to the expense or process of accreditation, describing her course as easy and making no mention
of the examination. Contrary to perceptions of KMW struggling with the English language, Eun-sun says ‘it was easy for me’, refusing to accept any English language barrier. Eun-sun presents herself as an experienced English language specialist and does not regard herself as in any way linguistically disadvantaged in the Australian labour market or society.

With (nationally accredited) English language skills as her labour market asset rather than disadvantage, Eun-sun immediately refutes the second grand narrative. It appears that she is neither unable to access the labour market nor disadvantaged by her English language skills. It also appears that it is possible to overcome an English language barrier through study and recognised linguistic skill, as though ‘English language’ were merely a ‘skill set’ rather than a highly codified signifier of unalienable difference. However, Eun-sun’s English language skills, consciously addressed, studied and examined, provide her entry into a profession that captures and relies upon these skills but offers little career advancement and poor financial returns. She describes working for the Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS) in ironical terms, where the designated essential skill is ultimately poorly rewarded. Eun-sun said, ‘The problem is that it is a dead-end job ... after 20 years you are earning the same money as someone who has been working the job for three years’. In refuting the grand narrative, in showing that KMW can learn and use the English language and enter the Australian labour market, Eun-sun also points out that all that is involved in doing so simultaneously and inherently entrenches her within the lower echelons of the Australian labour market. That is, Eun-sun can walk through the door but she is unlikely to move past the ground floor: her glass ceiling is institutionally lowered by Australian government insistence upon, but simultaneous devaluation of, English language skills and migrant services.

In analysis of the role of English language skills in Eun-sun’s Australian career, the irony of simultaneous insistence and devaluation must be regarded in global and institutionalised economic and cultural contexts. Should Eun-sun return to Korea to perform translation and interpreting work, her status and financial reward would greatly increase. In Australia, Eun-sun said, ‘I earn $20 to $30 an hour in the public sector but if
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*I work privately I earn $450 to $500 for two to three hours*. Eun-sun can earn much more money privately and independently if she effectively moves out of the Australian mainstream and into the Korean community. The Korean community will value and reward these skills where mainstream Australian society and government will regard them in terms of ‘migrant services’ and welfare. In casting cross-cultural communication as a welfare service (with a low economic value) rather than a socially and economically valuable exchange, the English language market of translating and interpreting joins the ranks of domestic workers, child and aged care workers and other forms of community work. In effect, it becomes the ‘women’s work’ of the Australian labour market. KMW find the double disadvantage of becoming locked within linguistically (English language-based) defined women’s work and being subject to institutionalised conceptions and limitations that will never allow them status, reward or to (meaning)fully use their skills.

This situation accords most closely with a segmentation theory of the labour market in the simplest terms but a more thorough explanation could be made with the human cultural capital critique. Segmentation theory indicates that, as a migrant woman, Eun-sun is likely to be caught in one of the lower rungs of the labour market and to find it very difficult to progress any higher due to embedded structural barriers. While this appears to hold true for Eun-sun, it disregards any human capital she might have and renders it difficult to discuss. As English language skill here represents essential human capital in which Eun-sun has made significant investment and achievement, and is the subject of the first proposition, its discussion is necessary. The human cultural capital critique acknowledges Eun-sun’s English language investment but indicates it will be devalued upon being ‘transferred’ from Korea to Australia where cultural revaluation defines translating and interpreting as ‘migrant women’s work’ of limited status and opportunity.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria in Eun-sun’s life story refute both propositions: Eun-sun is not prevented from participating in the Australian labour market on the basis of her gender or cultural limitations or her English language proficiency. However, the work that she can do, the career progress that she can make, the social status she can be
accorded and the financial reward and recognition she can receive are all tightly controlled and limited. They are limited by an Australian labour market that devalues linguistic skill, diverse cultures and social services that are defined as non-economic and women’s work, as best described by human cultural capital theory.

8.1.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Eun-sun’s story evidences a wide variety of grand narrative independent microstoria. These include: the downgrading of housewifery and masculinity involved in migration from Korea to Australia; the appropriation of storylines usually used for children; specific workplace culture issues; the place of the Korean community in Australia for the KMW; and the difficulty of acknowledging institutionalised discrimination without embracing ‘victimhood’.

Eun-sun begins her story with a self-presentation in the discourse of the good wife and wise mother. Despite her university education, she did not pursue her career after marriage, satisfied to stay at home completing domestic tasks and responding to the wishes of her husband and parents-in-law. While she admits it was ‘not exciting’, she does not express any objection to the role. Later, in Sydney, she found the same role boring. Some of this boredom may be attributed to her children growing older and thus attending school during the day, leaving her home alone, but some must be attributed to the difference in housewifery between Korea and Australia. In Korea, housewifery included highly skilled and social tasks such as networking, investing, purchasing and negotiating family business, alongside her own social activities and community participation. In Australia, her housewifery is a more menial set of tasks based in the home, providing few social networks or opportunities for learning new skills for Eun-sun, and Eun-sun embraces the hitherto unknown Western notion of the ‘bored housewife’. The devaluation of housewifery is part of a larger cultural valuation of work difference between Korea and Australia. The move to Australia sees a downgrading of many female roles, from teaching to translating and interpreting, as well as housewifery.
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Eun-sun employs the discourse of culture shock, positive and liberating for her, negative and limiting for her husband. Although Eun-sun was able to reinvent herself in Australia, her husband was not. In his case, the discourse of change did not involve progress and discovery but frustration and withdrawal. The difference in their responses to a new environment and new challenges resulted in divorce, a cultural as well as physical separation. Eun-sun describes their changes in terms of personality, self-respect, failure, shock and weakness, and also satisfaction and recognition of talent. Eun-sun refers to their ‘naïve attitudes’ at the time of arrival in Australia, their expectations of government support and their lack of planning in the experienced voice of retrospective sense making. This in itself appeals to the discourse of growing up through becoming independent in a Western country, the ‘coming of age’ discourse.

Eun-sun’s migration story is told in the discourse of the good daughter-in-law, responding to the wishes of her husband’s mother. Eun-sun does not mention how she felt about the idea of migrating to another country, or whether she expressed any argument or agreement when presented with the idea. The suggestion is that the request could not be refused, and her migration was in acquiescence rather than from any personal drive or desire. Eun-sun refers to the rationale of her mother-in-law in making this migration request, appealing to the ‘Western promise’ of a better life and the human capital ‘educational promise’ of a lucrative English-speaking future for her children. Eun-sun also refers to a competition between her relatives to succeed beyond Korea and to make a place in the West, a competition to provide the ‘best future’ for her children. As a good mother, wise wife and obedient daughter-in-law, she would sacrifice any personal ambition or plan for her children’s futures.

While Eun-sun responded to family pressure to move to Australia, once in Australia she shifted from the discourses that had moved her. Eun-sun chose to remain in Australia and marry an Australian man when her husband returned to Korea, forsaking her duty towards her first husband. She mentions travelling to New York to meet Korean women friends whose discussion revolved around their children’s success but not their own. She said, ‘I am very satisfied with my career, which I never would have discovered if I had
 stayed in Korea’. Eun-sun embraces the terms of a new discourse of individual satisfaction and achievement, encompassing the processes of change and progress. In this way, Eun-sun appropriates for herself the story that had been intended for her children.

Eun-sun describes her husband’s sense of failure in several terms. Firstly, she describes his inability to accept his apparent drop in status and lack of recognition, particularly his discomfort with being called by his first name. Secondly, she describes his unease with being financially dependent on his wife whose English language skills served her well in Australia. Rather than attend English language classes to both learn linguistic skills and grasp cultural differences, he continued to attempt to start a number of unsuccessful businesses. Eun-sun refers to the impact of migration to Australia on gender roles, describing life in Australia as ‘good for Korean women but more difficult for Korean men’. These appeals to the male equivalent of the good wife, wise mother discourse, a discourse of masculine superiority and privilege. Eun-sun combines the two gender discourses with the discourse of the Western promise to describe her perception of Australia as a place where (Korean) men have to ‘earn respect’ and where their masculinity ‘disappears’.

Eun-sun appeals to the discourse of career when relating both her and her husband’s employment experiences in Australia. She refers to a ‘dead-end job’, the public and private sectors, unions, labour market segmentation into poorly paid positions for qualified migrant women, financial incentives, wage negotiation and creative input and recognition. She compares her wage to that of nurses and speaks of the desire to be involved in decision making. This discourse also includes the notions of underemployment, blue- and white-collar workers and institutionalised discrimination. Another aspect of this discourse is that of workplace culture in Korea and in Australia. Eun-sun refers to her husband’s Australian company only using his skills, not his ideas, providing no social life or other form of reward. Eun-sun explains that Australian workplaces are only for completing tasks, earning money and then going home, whereas Korean workplaces are social centres where men ‘live’ and are respected and recognised
as individuals. This downgrading of the workplace experience for men in the move from Korea to Australia is the other face of the downgrading of women’s roles upon migration to Australia.

Despite identifying these Australian labour market issues, Eun-sun states that she does not recognise any discrimination in her workplace, quickly followed by the statement that she is lucky to be in Australia. There is a sense here that identifying discrimination will place her in the disempowered role of the victim and may be read as a difficulty that could present her as a troublemaker or ingrate. The statements are positive but countered by her discussions of the nature of her industry. The interview as a whole defies the propositional thought and narrative analysis of this research as Eun-sun resists, consciously or otherwise, regarding herself as a disadvantaged migrant woman, typified as poor, with broken English and backward cultural norms. Eun-sun presents an outgoing, positive, ambitious, articulate, aware and highly skilled image of a migrant woman as an alternative. The conundrum is how to avoid the characterisation of the KMW as victim or negatively typified and presents her as strong and resourceful without ignoring institutionalised disadvantage.

A final discourse evident in Eun-sun’s story is one of community engagement or extension of the woman’s nurturing role outside the home. Eun-sun displays ambivalence towards the Korean community in Australia. On the one hand, it provides contacts, employment opportunities and a sense of worth or contribution. On the other, it is emotionally draining and provides a challenge to maintain privacy and discretion and as much an obligation as an opportunity. Eun-sun draws upon the discourse of professional ethics in describing her frustrations in working within her own community, regarding herself as compromised by the personal and cultural connection she shares with other Korean Australians. Finally, her feelings of frustration with her own community and her inability to change it led her to leave and engage with mainstream Australia more fully. In this way, the Korean community in Australia comprises a source of both support and restriction for new entrants. For Eun-sun, the community was a good starting point for engagement in Australian life but leaving it represented real engagement. That is,
community engagement may result in a form of labour market segmentation that precludes a wider employability.

8.1.3 Summary

Eun-sun’s story refutes both grand narratives in the first instance as she has entered the Australian labour market and done so on the strength of her English language skills. However, those skills entrench her in an institutionalised and ironic environment that simultaneously insists upon and devalues English language proficiency and cross-cultural knowledge. While in Korea, traditional gender roles prevented her from exploring labour market options, but the removal or change of these upon migration to Australia opened up to her a new career and self-conception. Once in Australia, traditional gender roles recede in significance for Eun-sun, and labour market segmentation along gender lines and the concomitant devaluing of social services as women’s work come the fore. While Australian gender and cultural issues in the labour market do not prevent Eun-sun from entering the labour market, they limit her earnings, progression and opportunities according to human cultural capital theory.

Eun-sun’s story appears to be one of successfully overcoming all barriers, finding creative and productive solutions, embracing new opportunities and reinventing or reinterpreting traditional paradigms in ways that are liberating, empowering and lucrative. She expresses no regret, guilt or confusion and appears to be the role model of the KMW, inverting the propositional thought of the literature review. Eun-sun resists the grand narratives and any associated sense of the ‘poor migrant woman’, only presenting issues in terms of Australian industrial relations and social values. However, this story highlights the problem of how to acknowledge limitation and discrimination without appearing hopeless or negative.
8.2 Sue’s story

When I came to Australia in 1989, I was in year 10 and 16 years old. When my parents told me about emigrating to Australia, I was so happy because it meant I wouldn’t have to study so hard for university entrance exams. My brother and I were very excited! He was in year 12 then. The university entrance exam in Korea is so hard and, also, for my brother if he stayed in Korea, he would have had to do mandatory military service, and he hated that idea. My father had a big company in Korea, so he came here as a business migrant. For business, my parents often travelled overseas and they thought that emigration would be good for us and could give us better opportunities. My brother and I had no idea about foreign countries. When my parents asked us for our opinions about emigration to Australia, we couldn’t say anything at all since the decision was already made and our feelings weren’t going to make any difference. We had no part in the decision, really.

After we arrived in Australia and while my parents looked for business opportunities, my brother and I went to a special English school for migrant high school students. The school was a lot of fun because there were children from all over the world. I was able to leave the preparatory school after six months to go to a normal high school - before my brother. When I started high school, I was the only Korean student and I couldn’t speak any English. I was so lonely and scared. When I started school in Korea, I just followed my brother and whenever I had any questions, I just asked him. However, he was still in English school and I had to solve all my problems by myself with my poor English. I was so shy and I had no friends to eat lunch with, so I didn’t eat lunch for a month. I walked about the school by myself during lunchtime and recess.

After about a month, one year 10 girl asked me whether I would like to join her group which made me very happy, and I joined the group and I started to enjoy my school life. The group was very helpful - we discussed our studies and invited each other to our homes. When I was in high school, I always had English problems - I do not mean that I had difficulty in English as a subject since I had always had one of the highest marks in
the class, but I felt isolated from my classmates at lunchtime or recess. When they talked about their social lives, it was so completely different to what I was experiencing at home or Korean church or with Korean friends. Often I couldn’t understand what they were talking about... and what they were laughing about...or laughing at.... I couldn’t laugh with them. I had other Asian friends, so it was OK. I went to university and majored in biology. It took me five years to complete my degree since I had to support myself with part-time work. I got a lot of work experience then - from take-away to office work. It helped me to get a decent job after finishing uni. After I graduated, I worked for a Korean company called LG in Sydney for three years and after that, I got a job with the Colonial Bank in Sydney. Even though I did not have an economics or commerce degree, the bank initially accepted my work experience as a qualification and a director told me that they would train me, and that I would move up from an entry-level position within six months. During the six months I learned many things about the work and after six months they gave me a position I wanted and offered me a scholarship when they learned that I had enrolled in a Masters of Commerce. I am happy about my job now.

A lot of my friends work for their parents and work in Korea. Some of them ask me what advice I’d give to a Korean who wanted to migrate to Australia. I think it depends on a person’s age and why they are coming here. I would recommend it if the person wanted to immigrate to Australia for their children. However, I would not recommend it for a person who was very career-minded. If you are older than 25, your ability to improve your English language skills is very limited. Without proper language skills, your chances of promotion are poor, and positions that are more senior are much more competitive. I do not think that it is possible for Korean migrants to succeed in Australian companies ... to move up the career ladder. Of course, it depends on a person’s skills or profession. If one has very specific skills or profession, it is a different story. However, English is still important. If I was the director of a company, I would employ people of ethnic backgrounds as managers, but I couldn’t have anybody in meetings who had an English language problem. If you come to Australia, not for personal career success but to become materially rich in the market, you can be happy with the environment and the nice people. The Australian lifestyle is like the real good
life. In Korea, even on the weekend, if a manager requests you to come to work, you have no choice but to agree. In Australia, this wouldn’t happen...

English is usually OK if I’m working on an ongoing project that I’m familiar with, but I have difficulty understanding new projects introduced quickly by telephone. If I were a native speaker, I would not have this irritating problem. When I manage a project, I have to lead meetings and sometimes I have to prepare what I am going to say in advance. I even write down all the sentences I am going to say. For the first three months, this was very frightening. Now it is better but I still do not like public speaking or presenting at meetings. Telephone conferences give me headaches – I miss a lot and I have to confirm and reconfirm. Even in face-to-face meetings, I have problems with how quickly the subject can change and I often don’t get a chance to express myself before people have moved on to a new issue.

After these unsuccessful communication experiences, I tell myself that I still have an English language problem. Sometimes, in emergencies, I wish I could explain myself quickly and clearly. I think that if I was working in Korean, maybe I could handle the matter more effectively. It is frustrating. Also, after work, no one asks me to go to the pub or anywhere else. I can see that they invite each other except me. I feel left out and out of touch when they talk about their social lives or holidays. It is not just my personality. It reminds me of when I was at uni, when I only sat with the Korean students in break times.

8.2.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Sue’s life story does not support the first proposition of gender and cultural barriers to labour market entry and negotiation. This is for two reasons: firstly, that she is employed and secondly, that without children her domestic burden is not a factor for her in the same way as it is for other KMW in this study. Studying and working in Australia from her teenage years before marrying, albeit to a Korean migrant husband, Sue does not conceive of staying at home as a fully supported housewife and expects to be (and is)
rewarded for her studies and to be financially self-sufficient. How the introduction of children into her life would influence her career is not discussed here. Nevertheless, it would go too far to suggest that these issues had been finally solved in this case and that gender and cultural impacts upon Sue’s labour market participation will not be a consideration for her in the future.

In terms of cultural difference and organisational theory, Sue describes her university and workplace experiences as socially marginalising. In both these contexts, and for a time at high school, Sue found herself uninvited to lunch or after work drinks, unable to share humour and excluded from the social aspects of the organisations of which she was a member. Although affiliated with these organisations, her human capital recognised and accepted, Sue describes an affiliation that does not extend to the social aspects of organisational belonging.

Similarly, Sue’s story cannot support the proposition that an English language barrier is likely to be a barrier to her finding and negotiating access into the Australian labour market. Sue’s story tells of her experiences of a workplace that promises promotion and supports her financially to pursue further studies to enhance her career. Having studied at an Australian high school and then university, her English language skills are close to those of a native speaker and her accent is Australian rather than British or American. This combination of labour market entry, opportunity and localised and proficient English language skills suggests therefore that the second proposition is entirely refuted by Sue’s experiences.

However, Sue defines English language issues as the source of her greatest frustrations and difficulties in the workplace. For Sue this is not a problem of access or negotiation of conditions but one she defines from the outset in terms of social acceptance. She said, ‘I always had English problems – I don’t mean that I had difficulty in English as a subject … but I felt isolated … at lunch time or recess … I couldn’t laugh with [my classmates].’ Sue mentions having other Asian friends with whom she was presumably able to laugh and feel a sense of connection. Sue’s story shows that, for some, ‘English
problems’ are less about language and more about cultural difference and lack of common knowledge and experience. Sue also presents the English language as a barrier to promotion for migrants, saying that ‘without proper language skills, your chances of promotion are poor and more senior positions are much more competitive’. She does not define what she means by ‘proper’ language skills but says that despite wishing to hire ethnically diverse managers hypothetically, she could not have ‘anybody in meetings who had an English language problem’. For Sue, her undefined notion of ‘proper English’ prevents career progression for Korean migrants and it is unthinkable to her that linguistic diversity may be overcome organisationally. In this story, Sue tells us that racially diverse faces (physical appearances) may access high labour market positions in Australia but not linguistically diverse aspirants.

Sue migrated to Australia as a teenager and attended an English language preparatory school before moving to an Australian mainstream high school. From here, she was successful in gaining a place at an Australian university where she completed a degree in an English language medium. Despite this participation and confirmation of her English language ability and the apparent ease with which she acquired a position in a large company, Sue claims that English language is the most difficult factor in her work. This low self-assessment despite objective high assessment is evidenced throughout Sue’s story, revealing that KMW are poor advocates of their own English language skills. Sue worked part time and casually during her tertiary studies and does not refer to any language problems in these jobs. However, English language barriers became apparent to her once she embarked upon a full-time and professional career in mainstream Australian society and in a highly structured and hierarchical organisation. In particular, Sue finds her skills of representation, presentation, negotiation and project management insufficient within the organisational context of the bank. Sue describes her perceived skills deficiency as a function of her English language proficiency rather than part of a larger communicative issue, and expresses the opinion that she would be able to perform much better in the Korean language. Objectively, Sue might be described as fluent and proficient in the Australian variant of the English language; however, subjectively, she is dissatisfied with and frustrated by her English language skills.
Sue notes the impact of certain types of technology upon her work performance in relation to English language concerns, particularly the telephone. However, she also notes that face-to-face communication causes her comprehension problems. While English language skills are certainly a factor in effective communication, however, they may not be sufficient in themselves to explain larger communication issues. Sue describes herself repeatedly as ‘still’ having an English language problem, referring to an ongoing perception of linguistic difference and inferiority, starting with her linguistic difference in studying in an Australian high school. Even the acquisition of an Australian university degree has not given Sue confidence in her ability to communicate in English. She identifies her perceived weakness in the English language as the barrier to her developing other skills such as organisational comprehension and ready action. Therefore, the proposition of the grand narrative of the English language barrier is refuted by Sue’s entry, and negotiation of that entry, into the Australian labour market but remains an issue in her understanding of her larger labour market project. The utility of the human capital logic of the second proposition is apparent, despite the refutation of the proposition itself.

8.2.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Sue’s story focuses upon her experiences and definitions of issues relating to the English language as it is used in Australia. As she is proficient in Australian English, employed and enjoys promotional and study opportunities in her work, she does not support the first grand narrative, and it would seem that the English language issues she relates fit neatly into grand narrative applicable microstoria. However, Sue’s notion of what can be described as an English language problem is unique in this study and moves into a conceptualisation of identity and personality, rather than just a tool for communication or a human capital skill.

Sue’s reference to her personality - ‘it’s not just my personality’- points to the extent to which language allows and constructs identity and impacts upon the perception of self in
Chapter 8: Career-Oriented (Post Migration)

the work context. Sue’s story indicates that there are a number of language functions that are necessary for satisfying and productive workplace communication beyond the English lexicon, grammar and pronunciation. These include social and personal interaction and the language of organisations. Sue recognises that aspects of her communication are personality-related and others are linguistically and culturally determined, and endeavours to draw a distinction between the two. Most significantly and regardless of where the distinction is made, Sue appears to regard the problem deterministically, as unchangeable and beyond her control.

Sue’s deterministic and mechanistic attitude is evidenced in a number of statements of inevitable causal effects: ‘If you are older than 25, your ability to improve your English language skills is very limited. Without proper language skills, your chances of promotion are low… if one has very specific skills… it is a different story … if a manager requests … you have no choice’. Sue describes Australia as a place where it is unthinkable that an employee might be pressured to work on the weekend, where the lifestyle is comfortable and pleasant and financial success is possible, much like the brochures her father brought home before Sue’s family migrated to Australia. Australia also represents freedom from difficult and competitive Korean university examinations and strict military service. In this ‘Western paradise’ model, however, Sue does not feel that she truly belongs and that it is impossible for Korean migrants to reach high positions in Australian companies. One way of circumventing this labour market career progression, Sue notes, is for Korean migrants to work in family companies or return to Korea for work. Notably, Sue is referring to her own friends, those who have completed secondary and tertiary education in the medium of English and the cultural environment of Australia and have some kind of local work experience, rather than newly arrived migrants. Australia is presented in terms of the paradise to which Sue escaped, but which frustrates her by stifling her potential.

Within this story of ‘escape to paradise’, Sue reveals a notion of being rescued and protected. She says that when told of the decision to migrate to Australia, she and her brother ‘couldn’t say anything at all’, that at school she ‘just followed [her] brother’, that
she ‘didn’t eat lunch for a month’ until a ‘year 10 girl asked [her] ... to join her group’, that ‘a director told [her] that they would train [her]’ and that ‘they gave [her] a position’. At work, she feels ‘left out’ because ‘no one asks [her] to go to the pub’ and does not see herself as a social instigator. Sue also mentions difficulties in leading projects at work in terms of English language difficulties - ‘if I was a native speaker, I wouldn’t have this irritating problem’- but presents herself consistently as an individual who follows others and is frustrated when not led as she wishes. The first and second grand narratives are refuted but Sue’s story shows that ‘English language issues’ can be interpreted to include a host of personal identity and communication concerns and social struggles within workplace organisational structures. While these communicative issues are beyond the scope of the English language barriers referred to in the second proposition, KMW may be more likely to ascribe them to a perceived or past English language difference or ‘problem’.

### 8.2.3 Summary

Sue’s life story rejects the first proposition of gender and culture barriers and the second proposition of English language barriers at face value. Her story moves beyond concepts of labour market entry and opportunity and she does not have childcare responsibilities to manage. Despite her apparent disqualification from the research topic, Sue’s story may be seen as indicative of both the limiting nature of the propositions that are used to analyse her related experience and the way in which apparent disqualification can drive larger issues underground to become covert and insidious.

Sue does not mention any specific gender role issues. This is most probably attributable to the fact that she is married and without children, and has no caring responsibilities towards her parents or other family. However, it would be dangerous to infer from this that these issues have no relevance to her life choices or that they will not have a future effect upon her labour market participation. At this point, Sue appears to have escaped the demands of motherhood and is free to explore her labour market activities but her future is yet to be revealed. Whether it is possible or ultimately desirable for Sue to
eschew motherhood and domesticity in order to participate in the labour market is a question uncatered for in the first proposition.

Microstoria analysis reveals an extended conception of English language that affects Sue’s sense of self, acceptance and wellbeing in the workplace. While these are not barriers to her entry or to her current participation, it is conceivable that ongoing negative experiences in the workplace which Sue attributes to English language difference or weakness may in time discourage Sue from pursuing her career. If the most common alternative to labour market participation is stay-at-home motherhood, this may be misread in the future as a gender or cultural barrier to women at work. Rather, Sue finds organisational issues of acceptance, inclusion and confidence to be her key workplace issues. Working within the existing paradigms of KMW difference and labour market barriers, these issues are, in Sue’s case, roughly wrapped in limiting propositional thought. Focusing only on the grand narratives as they are stated cannot reveal these larger issues of acceptance and ease in the workplace and their impacts upon labour market participation.

Like Eun-sun, Sue did not confront any English language problems at interviews for her job until she achieved a higher position in her workplace. When English language problems did emerge, they presented in ways much more subtle than mere linguistic proficiency. Unsuccessful communication at work reminds her of being ‘at uni, when I only sat with the Korean students in break times’, an ongoing sense of isolation. ‘English language barriers’ are used as a catch-all cause by Sue to refer to her cultural, social and personal growth issues within an organisational context. It is particularly difficult here to separate linguistic issues from personality type and wider workplace satisfaction issues. Nevertheless, Sue does procure employment and achieve speedy promotion and acknowledgement by her employers. Microstoria analysis of Sue’s story negates the second proposition and begs another thought that approaches a wider conceptualisation of the role of language in organisational inclusion.
Chapter 8: Career-Oriented (Post Migration)

Sue is the youngest of the KMW in this study and has the greatest labour market value in terms of her English, local qualifications and work experience and remaining work life. Sue’s microstoria analysis reveals an awareness and avoidance of the issues that are faced by older KMW in the Australian labour market. She appears to be free of the constraints of the typified KMW but evidences a range of subtler, universal workplace issues that she interprets as related to being a KMW. As being a KMW is an immutable condition, characterising organisational acceptance and behaviour as related to being a KMW renders these issues also unchangeable. Sue’s story, more than any other in this research, asks for an alternative conception of the impacts of labour market organisations upon KMW who arrive in Australia as teenagers.

8.3 Monica’s story

When I came to Australia, I was 14 years old. I had just started high school in Korea. I have a younger sister and a younger brother. One day my parents told us that we were going to move to Australia. I was very happy because I had to study so hard in Korea and I knew that if you go to overseas you do not have to study that hard. However, I began to worry about my English and how I could cope with schoolwork without any English skills. My father told me not to worry because children could learn perfect English in six months. I trusted him.

When I arrived in Sydney, I was enrolled in an English school for migrant children and it was so relaxing and enjoyable. The way of learning English was fun, with pop songs and drawing and drama. I wrote letters to my friends in Korea telling them how much fun school was. I just waited for the six months to pass, expecting that that day my English would be perfect. Finally, the six months finished and my English was not very different from before. I was so disappointed with myself and complained to my father about my poor English. But by then it was too late – we were already here and I just had to keep trying.
I started studying at a high school, which was a very good experience and I got along well with the Australian students. I did not experience any discrimination or different treatment from other students or teachers. Everybody tried to help me in all sorts of ways. I enjoyed my high school life in Australia and I didn’t have any Korean friends in high school. When I started university, though, that all changed. It seemed as if all the Korean and Chinese students gathered. Senior Korean students helped new Korean students. I met many Korean students at uni and I didn’t have many white Australian friends. But I still I kept in touch with my friends from high school.

I studied Korean and history at university, and I did my honours. I wanted to become a teacher and I enrolled in an Education degree and I got the teaching qualification. I taught as a casual teacher and I became interested in migrant youth. I worked as a Korean community worker for two years and I decided to study psychology at uni. I enrolled in a Masters in educational psychology, I obtained good marks and I am doing an EdD now. I resigned from my job as a community worker to marry and I was hoping that I would become a full-time housewife and part-time student. After marriage, we stayed with my husband’s parents as he is the only son and my parents-in-law wanted us to stay with them. It did not take long to realise that I had to work outside of home. Since my parents-in-law both stayed at home all day, it was not wise staying at home and I was thinking of finding a job. One of my friends who worked in the police force informed me that there was a job available. Even though I was reluctant to work in the police force, I applied and got the job as an ethnic community liaison officer, ECLO. I am very happy with what I am doing at moment but I am too busy.

I am very interested in doing work with immigrant children - there is a lot of conflict between parents and their children. Even amongst youth there are problems for people who came here as children and people who were born here. Particularly, I often find that immigrant youth face problems with their parents such as not being able to meet their parents’ expectations academically or socially. Often immigrant parents encourage their children to study very hard but children still do not do so well at school. Parents say things like ‘I sacrificed so many things for your academic and social success and I
work so hard for you. How you can behave like this?’. The youth answer back saying that ‘I did not ask you to bring me to Australia and I did not ask you to sacrifice anything for me. I did not ask anything of you, why you are angry at me and blaming me?’

Most Korean immigrants came to Australia for their children, but the gap between children and parents is so wide. In particular, cultural differences between the parents and their children are so complex – it’s not just a generation gap. I would like to find out how we could overcome this problem.

I have a sister who is a year younger than I am. She finished university here and went to Korea for work. She met her husband there and married in Korea. She really likes Korea and she doesn’t want to return to Australia. She is very adventurous and competitive and so she thinks Korea is good for her. When she got pregnant, she asked my mother to look after her baby while she worked and my mother agreed. However, after a week of baby-sitting, my mother didn’t want the job and my sister found a nanny. When my mother got a job as a saleswoman, my sister was so ashamed of my mother that she tried persuade my mother to quit the job and she told her parents-in-law that my mother was doing some research in a university. Now that my mother has a job in a famous hotel, my sister has told her parents-in-law about the job. She is very different from me. Often my sister criticises my mother for working, saying, ‘All the women in your age in Korea stay at home and only enjoy travel and golf. Since you do not need more money, why do you work and make me lose face?’.

Whenever my mother heard my sister say this kind of thing, she used to get very upset and ring me from Korea to talk about it. I’d tell her, ‘Mum, I am so proud of you. You can do whatever you like. Do not worry about what she saying about your work. To find work at your age, you must be proud of yourself and you should enjoy it’. And she’d say, ‘You make me very comfortable and you’re the only one who understands me. I don’t like staying at home looking after the house and meeting friends and gossiping. I would hate that kind of life’.
My parents-in-law immigrated to Australia as business migrants and when they arrived, my father-in-law found a good business which suited him. Then he returned to Korea and ran his business there while my mother-in-law looked after my husband when he was young. Now my father-in-law is retired and plays golf with his friends and my mother-in-law goes out with him.

8.3.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

With a position as an Ethnic Community Liaison Officer, Monica immediately refutes both grand narratives. Monica finds that gender and culture impact upon the work activities of Korean women and that this remains a part of her life, if mainly through her mother and sister rather than herself directly. Monica makes no mention of English language skills in terms of barriers to labour market participation and indeed mentions no barriers to her own labour market participation at all. She said, ‘Even though I was reluctant … I applied and got the job’, revealing an ease and confidence in accessing the Australian labour market, facilitated by a friend.

Monica describes more barriers to labour market participation in relation to gender and cultural issues, though not all of them directly in relation to herself. Of herself, she tells us that she ‘resigned from [her] job as a community worker to marry’ and become ‘a full-time housewife and part-time student’. While the state of marriage initially meant a natural and possible exit from the labour market for Monica, she found that the prospect of staying at home with her Korean parents-in-law dire enough to seek work. Monica’s labour market participation is a response to her domestic situation in which the role of housewife was already performed by her mother-in-law and where she would have little purpose. The decision to live with her husband’s parents was based upon traditional gender understandings, in which the male’s family is privileged over the female’s family.

Monica’s story of her mother and sister is revealing in terms of gender and cultural limitations. Monica describes her mother as a mature, middle class woman who is bored by her traditional gender role ‘staying home looking after the house and meeting friends...
and gossiping’ and chooses instead to go to work. She describes her sister as being embarrassed by their mother’s labour market activities, causing her sister to ‘lose face’ and to pretend their mother is studying at university. Monica draws a sharp distinction between her attitudes and those of her sister. Her story of her mother and sister back in Korea illustrates the forces at play between cultures, generations and individual personalities. Monica relates telling her mother that she ‘can do whatever she likes’, that she should be proud and enjoy herself, employing a discourse of purpose, personal satisfaction and independence in direct contrast to the traditional ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse. Monica’s attitude and choice of words is indicative of her own nurturing and caring role in the labour market, one dominated by women. Her mother is pulled between her two daughters, showing the power of social and family attitudes and pressures to conform to accepted roles for women of particular means, ages and classes.

Monica evidences no lack of confidence in her English language skills at present, and is more concerned with understanding her clients and performing her role as an ethnic community liaison officer well. Describing herself as ‘happy but too busy’, Monica outlines her role with migrant youth and their issues, none of which is specifically related to English language issues. Monica’s position exists within a linguistically and culturally tolerant institutional environment (the police force constitutes a highly accountable and legislated public service organisation) and it is her difference from mainstream Australia that is valued and the source of her employment. Monica focuses upon her wider communicative skills, beyond those strictly defined as English language skills, of empathy, tolerance and interest in other people when discussing her role. When describing the complex interaction of cultural and generational problems for migrant youth, Monica said, ‘I would like to find out how we can overcome this problem’. For roles such as this that are personally rewarding in the sense of directly helping other people, the tasks, challenges and achievements appear to subsume any feelings of linguistic inadequacy. This combination of drive, attitude, role and organisational context means that Monica identifies no English language barriers to her labour market participation in Australia.
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Monica also draws a distinction between the attitudes and activities of her mother and those of her parents-in-law. She describes her husband’s parents as living traditional older lives of retirement, housework, saunas and golf, a lifestyle that signifies affluence, success and social conformity within the family. In this story, it is inconceivable to Monica’s sister that this lifestyle would not be preferred by anyone who could afford to maintain it. This illustrates those different aspects of traditional gender roles may be taken up by different family members whether in Korea or Australia. For some Korean women, such as Monica’s sister and mother-in-law, traditional roles after marriage continue to limit the desirability and possibility of labour market participation. For others, such as her mother and herself, labour market participation is both desirable and possible. Culture and gender roles are differently experienced, understood and internalised by different KMW, each drawing different aspects from a common pool, uniquely combining them with Australian practices.

Monica’s grand narrative applicable microstoria do not support the notion of an English language barrier to labour market participation in any way. Similarly, notions of gender and cultural barriers are relatively unsupported here for Monica herself but find expression in Monica’s story of her mother and sister.

8.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Monica tends to speak more about the problems of others rather than herself, albeit that her sensitivity to and awareness of their particular issues are informed by her own background and experience. Whether they be family members or ‘clients’ she encounters in her work, Monica presents herself as well placed to interpret the issues of other KMW or migrant children. Stories of child migration and pressure to perform and integrate form the basis of her grand narrative independent microstoria.

The most apparent alternative story that Monica tells is that of the relationship between migrant parents and their children. Monica describes her trepidation in coming to Australia in terms of her English language skills and the ‘six-month promise’. This
promise is often made to children by Korean migrant parents, reassuring them that after six months their English will not pose any problems. Upon finding that her English language skills did not dramatically improve at the six-month point, Monica describes her disappointment and philosophy: ‘but by then it was too late – we were already here and I just had to keep trying’. The ‘six-month promise’ is part of a larger myth that children learn the English language quickly and easily and adjust to migration better than their parents, and forms part of the larger conception that migration to Australia is ‘for’ children. By the time Korean migrant children discover that the promise is unsound, they are entrenched within a new country and school system, far behind in the Korean curriculum, and it is ‘too late’ to go back to Korea. This exists within the larger tale of the ‘escape to paradise’ that is presented to migrant children by their parents.

Monica describes her interest in the way migration ‘for’ children exacerbate the generation gap and further complicates culture and gender issues. She describes parental aspirations in terms of the academic and the social, and the pressure placed upon migrant children to perform to their parents’ expectations. Monica uses the words ‘sacrifice’, ‘success’ and ‘hard work’ in relating how migrant Korean parents speak to and ‘encourage’ their children, and the sense of obligation and responsibility migrant children feel while trying to settle in Australia.

Finally, Monica describes how full integration into the mainstream -‘I didn’t have any Korean friends in high school’- in one place and at one time may give way in other environments such as university where ‘it seemed as if all the Korean and Chinese students gathered together ... and I didn’t have many white Australian friends’. While Monica is not describing discrimination nor does she use any terms of blame, she notes a ‘natural’ though bemusing cultural recognition and coming together of Asian migrant children. While these issues are not specifically discussed in terms of barriers to labour market participation, they describe complicating life factors for migrant children to which Monica is sensitive and from which she has constructed an identity and a career. The construction of identity and career from an alternative background to the mainstream is a
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positive expression of how difference may become useful and viable in the labour market or more correctly, here, in an environment that values cultural diversity.

8.3.3 Summary

Monica describes more issues for KMW who migrate to Australia as teenagers or children in terms of social and intergenerational terms than labour market barriers. For Monica, English language barriers are not significant to her own labour market access or participation, where her personally fulfilling role and tolerant organisational context allow these to recede in importance. Monica does not feel in competition with mainstream, native English-speaking Australians to keep her job and explores a nurturing and caring female role in an environment that values her cultural difference. Her attitudes and work possibilities are impacted upon by her domestic situation and she is aware of competing labour market values for Korean women within her family. Therefore, analysis of Monica’s microstoria does not support the second proposition of the grand narrative but there is some relevance to the first proposition in relation to her close, but overseas, female family members.

8.4 Discussion

As all three women in this chapter are employed in Australia, none supports the first proposition that the gender and cultural barrier prevents them from accessing and negotiating the labour market. However, Eun-sun chooses to reinterpret the ‘wise mother’ role to allow her to participate in the labour market, provide financially for her family and offer a strong role model of female activity for her children. Both Sue and Monica arrived in Australia as teenagers and neither has children and is thus less likely to recognise and identify traditional Korean gender roles for themselves. Monica recognises these in her family, amongst her sister, mother and parents-in-law, and sees the traditional role for women as limiting and without purpose. While prepared to stay at home as a full-time housewife, she was not prepared to stay at home without any role if tasks were
performed by her mother-in-law. Monica employs a discourse of purpose, personal satisfaction and independence in direct contrast to the traditional ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse. Monica’s attitude and choice of words is indicative of her own nurturing and caring role in the labour market, one dominated by women.

The second proposition, the relevance of the English language to the Australian careers of these three KMW, is discussed in distinctly different terms, evidencing three points: (1) the subjectivity of self-analysis of English language ability; (2) the personal interpretation of what is meant by the term ‘the English language’; and (3) the significance of role and working environment upon the first two points.

Eun-sun is an example of a KMW who is not only objectively proficient in the English language and translation/interpreting but reliant upon them to ensure for herself a position in the labour market. Her experience rejects the second proposition and, on one level, her English language skills are her greatest labour market asset. However, she describes the same skills that grant her labour market entry as being the limiting factor in her career opportunities and earning potential within her translating/interpreting position. This presents an ironical relationship with English: necessary and useful for labour market participation but finding poor rewards in its own right. While a lack of English language skills may prevent labour market access, specialising or becoming expert in English language skills will not be well rewarded in the Australian labour market either, suffering negative ‘transference’ across cultures as suggested by human cultural capital theory.

Similarly, Sue does not find that English language or any other issues prevent her from procuring or negotiating employment in Australia. However, Sue describes frustration at feeling less competent at workplace communication than she would like to be, finding her skills of representation, presentation, negotiation and project management insufficient within the organisational context of the bank where she works. Sue sees her problems in these areas as a sign of her English language proficiency rather than part of a larger communication issue and expresses the opinion that she would be able to perform much better in the Korean language. She also describes communication technology, such as
teleconferences, as deepening her communication problems. Sue may be described as experiencing ‘language problems’ rather than specific ‘English language problems’, revealing a conflation of the two ideas.

Monica makes no mention of English language skills in terms of barriers to labour market participation and is much more confident than Sue in her ability to communicate both generally and specifically in the English language. Nevertheless, and without conducting external language testing, Sue appears to have a stronger command of the English language than Monica, with a more sophisticated vocabulary, range of registers for different situations and clearer pronunciation. In terms of their roles and organisations, Sue feels that she is being assessed and her company sees no value in her cultural diversity while Monica feels that she assesses others and that her cultural diversity is both valued and useful for performing her job. Monica works within the context of assisting culturally diverse migrants and feels her English language skills are strong enough to do her job well. Her role as an ethnic community liaison officer exists within a linguistically and culturally tolerant paradigm and her wider communicative skills, beyond those strictly defined as English language skills, of empathy and tolerance are valued and highlighted in both the role and the organisation in which she is employed. Notions and experiences of the significance of English language skills in communicative practice vary between roles and organisational cultures in the labour market, in addition to individual perceptions of their scope and importance.

Both Eun-sun and Monica work within ‘women’s industries’ where few men do similar tasks, and even fewer white, native English-speaking men are seen. Their issues are thus those of Australian labour market segmentation rather than a specific argument between Australian and Korean cultures or notions of gender. In terms of gender and cultural impacts upon labour market participation, Eun-sun notes that the profession of translating and interpreting is subject to Australian labour market segmentation along gender lines. While she is not limited in participating in the labour market by any traditional gender role, she finds limitations upon the extent and rewards of her career based on institutionalised gender division and stifling of opportunity. Like Eun-sun, Monica finds
her work on the basis of her cultural difference and finds that as an ethnic liaison officer and youth counsellor she is subject to labour market segmentation along gender lines.

In all three life stories, the concept of ‘migrating for the children’ is iterated as a story of parental sacrifice and coercion to secure opportunity for children. Children, in turn, experience an obligation to succeed and disillusionment in the promise of escape from ‘examination hell’ in Korea to freedom and fun in Australia, where the West is best. By the time the promise is shattered, after the first six months, it is too late for the children to return to Korea where they have lost too much ground and they must persevere and endure their new situation. Issues of generational difference serve to complicate cultural and linguistic difference for KMW who migrate as children. One KMW in this group appropriates for herself the discourse of opportunity and freedom in Australia that was intended for her children. Although not career-oriented before migration to Australia, she describes migration and labour market participation as liberating and positive, in a larger ‘coming of age’ story.

Other grand narrative independent microstoria encompass issues of the downgrading of the housewifery role upon migration to Australia and general workplace culture differences between Korea and Australia. Mechanistic and deterministic constructions of workplace reality are presented, where the workplace may be considered essentially male, English language-based, monocultural, young, outgoing and unmarried. The more satisfied KMW tend to be in roles that involve nurturing or caring and are based on and benefit from cultural and linguistic difference rather than competing in the mainstream where difference is a disadvantage at worst, irrelevant at best.

The role of personality and attitude in relation to communication and social integration is also raised here. This may be considered as much an aspect of temperament and identity as a function of migration or the Australian labour market. Issues such as personality and parental impacts echo through the ways in which the KMW in this group discuss what they consider to be English language problems and are in many ways difficult to separate clearly. They are, however, significant in hearing the microstoria that these grand
narratives do not consider or address. This reiterates the earlier point of the subjectivity of assessment of self and position in the labour market and society in general, and that not all KMW will consider themselves as victims facing insurmountable barriers nor will they necessarily identify workplace issues in terms relative to their difference from white English-speaking Australian men.

8.5 Conclusion

The stories and analyses in this chapter refute the grand narratives from the outset, as labour market access and negotiation have already been achieved. Grand narrative applicable microstoria in this chapter reveals a greater level of complexity in discussing the ‘English language barrier’ and beg further clarification of what is meant here. The factors to be taken into consideration include subjectivity of assessment, relevance to role and organisation, value in the Australian labour market and the difference between ‘language’ or communication and ‘the English language’. A significant point is made here that linguistic difference intersects with gender to ensure that English language skills are firstly essential, secondly poorly valued andthirdly designated as ‘women’s work’, particularly in relation to translating and interpreting and community liaison. This moves into grand narrative applicable microstoria of the second proposition of gender and cultural barriers, which are specific here to the Australian labour market rather than an argument between Korean and Australian cultures or gender roles.

The characteristic of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ as a core Korean gender role is less evidenced amongst this group. One KMW reinterprets the role to say that her labour market participation provides financial sustenance and a positive role model for her children, and thus may be construed in terms of being a ‘wise mother’. Neither of the other KMW in this chapter has children and thus appears to have no issues in this regard, although one can talk of her sister and mother in these terms. It would be pre-emptive to consider these questions resolved or irrelevant to these women but they are not in evidence at this time in their lives.
Grand narrative independent microstoria reveals a large range of issues in this chapter. Perhaps the most significant is that of the difficulty of how to speak of (articulate) the problems of inequity and institutionalised devaluing and discrimination without employing a discourse of victimhood. One way of circumventing this is not to speak about oneself but to speak of friends or family members who have experienced negative discrimination or limitations, while still presenting the self as strong, resilient, resourceful and able to overcome or minimise those barriers. KMW may actively resist categorisation as disadvantaged based on their cultural background, gender or language, rendering these issues difficult to discuss. Other issues include those of the promises given to children migrating to Australia, the downgrading of roles, masculinity and workplaces that are part of the migration experience from Korea and the place of the Korean community as both positive and negative for the KMW.

Thus, in the situation where both grand narratives are refuted, further and more revealing discussion of labour market barriers can only be facilitated by the use of microstoria analysis. In this chapter, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis provides a useful tool for examining the English language barrier to labour market participation. The first grand narrative of gender and culture barriers is less easily grasped for KMW in Group IV and neither level of narrative analysis is greatly helpful here. A number of labour market considerations and issues are raised in the chapter that remain beyond the purview of the grand narratives, and grand narrative independent microstoria analysis provides a useful avenue of exploration. The following chapter examines the stories of KMW in Group V who were career-oriented prior to migration to Australia.
Chapter 9: Career-Oriented (Pre-Migration)

Chapter 9

Group V: Career-Oriented (Pre-migration)

This chapter focuses on the experiences of Group V, the most career-oriented and active in the research sample. Group V is constituted by six KMW, each of whom was employed on a full-time basis in a professional capacity (a position requiring tertiary qualifications) at the time of this research. Group V includes KMW who were career-oriented prior to migration to Australia and have fulfilled their aspirations to participate in the Australian labour market. All six members of this group had work experience in Korea or elsewhere and wished to continue their work in Australia. Four of the six KMW of this group arrived in Australia as principal applicants in migration terms: an IT worker, a flight attendant, a childcare director and a nurse. All members were married with two children, and all took responsibility for home and childcare tasks in addition to performing their labour market roles. As each member had successfully gained access to the Australian labour market, they appear to have overcome or avoided the barriers to the labour market that feature in the two propositions.

In participating in the labour market while being mothers, Group V KMW also appear to have overcome any limiting notions of Korean women who must stay in the home and perform domestic or caring duties only. As all members of the group had two children, their labour market activity may simply be regarded as evidence that these traditional roles and strictures on the basis of culture and gender have been overcome. However, four of the six only managed to perform the roles of housekeeper, mother and employee with the help of their own mothers who came to Australia for this specific purpose. Working outside the home is only possible once the KMW has found a childcare and domestic solution from her own resources, and the workload is not redistributed across the gender divide. While she is working, the smooth running of the household and
upbringing of the children remain the responsibility of the KMW who must constantly juggle these two spheres of activity.

Initially, each story is analysed in terms of the grand narratives identified in the literature review. To recap, the first grand narrative, or proposition, states that gender and cultural issues will create significant barriers and the second grand narrative posits that KMW will experience barriers in accessing and negotiating the Australian labour market on the basis of their English language skills. As all the KMW in Group V are or have been active in the labour market the grand narratives are immediately refuted.

While the group includes six members, only three representative stories are included here as adequate to illustrate the findings of the two forms of narrative analysis. However, the conclusion and discussion remain informed by the silent members whose specific responses are considered as a part of the group. Each transcribed and translated story is first analysed in terms of grand narrative applicable microstoria. Next, the story is analysed in terms of grand narrative independent microstoria for issues beyond the propositions. The findings of these analyses are then summarised in a discussion.

9.1 Ji-won’s story

*I came to Australia in 1989 as a QANTAS flight attendant. The QANTAS recruitment officer came to Korea and I applied for the job. At that time, I was working as a guest relations officer in an international hotel – the Hyatt. I had to wait one year for the whole immigration process before I could come to Australia. I did not particularly choose to come to Australia but one day I read a newspaper and found that there were opportunities to get overseas jobs. I did not want to stay in Korea and I wanted to go overseas to explore my future career. My parents were not rich and I did not have any good family back-ups or relatives who could support my career. As you know, in Korea, if we do not have a good background or social network, it is hard to succeed in our careers. So I was looking for a chance to go to overseas and when I read the advertisement, I thought it was a very good chance and I applied for the job and I got it.*
When I got the job, QANTAS did all the processing for my immigration to Australia, which I did not expect, and I was very lucky have a job and permanent residence in Australia. I really wanted to study in Australia but I have never had any chance. At that time, most Koreans interested in moving overseas wanted to emigrate to America, and some of my relatives live there. Maybe if I had got a job in America, it might have been better, but I came to Australia for my fortune. When I first came here, I felt there was very big difference between Korea and Australia.

When I arrived in Australia, I stayed with other new QANTAS recruits. I received training with new staff and the company gave us a lot of time to explore Sydney. One of the induction staff told me that there was a suburb called Campsie and that I should never go there, as many Koreans lived there and it was very dangerous. When I heard this I was so upset and I knew that he cared about me and he did not want to put me in a dangerous situation. But I was so upset by his comment that I went to Campsie at night all by myself. I had a bad experience with some drunken Australians and some who had taken drugs. After I went, I thought about the staff trainer’s comments about Koreans again. If he had told us that Sydney was very dangerous at night and we should be careful, I wouldn’t have got so upset. But he focused on Campsie and the number of Koreans who lived there. It made my face red and hurt my pride. I knew that he cared about me but I could not accept his simple comments. It was hard to take.

Twelve other new Korean recruits started with me and more than half left not long after because they were so lonely. Staffs in QANTAS are very sensitive about racist comments - when staffs want to talk about a particular race, they often would say, ‘I am going to make a joke about a Pakistani - does anybody object?’ If there was no objection, they would tell the joke. The nature of the industry means that they have to handle these things very carefully and staffs have to be aware of the issues. Sometimes, if someone was offended by something somebody else on staff said, they would approach the person and gets an apology. Of course, Anglo-Saxons ignore coloured people, particularly the ones who cause trouble.
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When I started work here, my first problem was English. I had learned American English from my American English teacher and I had worked in an American hotel in Korea. I am a Korean woman, and I speak English with an American accent. I feel that Asian women with American accents have barriers to being understood and making friends in the workplace. This is not only my own experience - when I talked to other Korean staff they said they felt the same way. Most of us learned American English and some were also trained by Americans. Most Korean staff had difficulty with the differences between American and Australian English. Often when Australian staffs talk about certain places in Australia and cultural or historical events, there is no way to understand what they are talking about unless someone explains because we do not know enough about Australia.

I cannot say that I speak very good English. I am still not confident with my spoken English but because of urgency and necessity, I have to speak English all the time. I still have a strong Korean and American accent. I think that my language skills relate to my personality - I am a very straightforward person. If I think that something is right, I pursue it regardless of what other people might say. How you deal with things is more important than your English language skills. But if you are not confident in your English, you do not pursue what you want to.

When I came to Australia and I felt that people treated me badly, I thought it was because I was Korean, but after I fully understood English and those circumstances, I realized that I was not treated badly because of my ethnic background; I was treated badly because I made mistakes. I do not think that most people treat other people according to their ethnic background, but more on an individual basis. It you are bad, you would not expect good treatment from anybody. However, I think that people laugh at me behind my back or privately - I cannot help that. Even though it has happened to me in Australia, I can understand that it happens in all human societies.

Self-confidence is most important regardless of where you live. If you are self-confident, regardless of your English language skills, you will be happy wherever you go. I do not
think it is a problem with English - it is something to do with your personality. If you lose your self-confidence, you will suffer wherever you live.

Australian men seem to naturally and totally accept the fact that men stay at home and look after children and do housework. I do not know whether it really does or does not matter to them, but from the outside it seems that Australians accept this role change very well. If the wife makes more money, the husband can stay at home and look after the children, which I think is very good. But for most Koreans, it is hard to accept men staying at home and looking after children and doing housework, even if the wife makes much more money than her husband. Chinese men are much better than Korean men at doing housework and looking after their children.

When I had my first daughter, my mother had to come from Korea to look after her while I went to work. And she had to continue to stay here when I had my second daughter, and she is still here looking after my children so that I can go to work.

9.1.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Ji-won’s life story refutes the first proposition as she participates in the labour market but Ji-won illustrates a set of issues are relevant to the grand narratives, even though her successful acquisition of employment appears to refute them. Ji-won does not appeal directly to the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse of traditional Korea, rendering her unique in this study. Rather than discussing her own role as wife and mother, she prefers to turn the topic to the role of the husband and father and does not do so in traditional Korean terms of the husband provider. In her case, Ji-won provides the financial resources for the family and is frustrated that her husband is unable to contribute more in the home and family. Although Ji-won is able to explore a reversal of traditional Korean roles, she finds her husband unable to be as receptive to change. In saying ‘If the wife makes more money, the [Anglo Australian] husband can stay at home and look after the children, which I think is good ... But for most Koreans, it is hard to accept men staying at home ... ’, Ji-won reveals a discourses in which the KMW is caught between two
cultures and straddles two roles. In this discourse, the Ji-won sees being Korean as the factor that places her in a traditional role of housewife and sole carer mother.

Ji-won is the sole carer for her children and is unable to negotiate domestic assistance from her husband, placing her unwillingly in the traditional wife and mother role. This is not to suggest she is an unwilling mother but that she aspires to a more equal and similar sharing of tasks and roles within her marriage that she sees as impossible because her husband is Korean. Like other KMW in this study, she relies upon the support of her mother fulfilling a traditional role in order for her to be able to access the labour market. While Ji-won appears to have overcome the gender role barrier to the labour market, the issue remains and the solution is less than satisfactory, still a problem of the female domain in the family.

Ji-won’s story evidences the relevance of the second grand narrative directly in her statement that ‘when I started working here, my first problem was English’. It is both the ‘first’ problem and the source of many others. Ji-won describes the significance of English language skills not simply as a functional labour market tool but as a complex interplay of work, social, geographical, cultural and historical knowledge. She discusses difficulties arising from learning American English and workplace culture and trying to apply it to the Australian labour market. Ji-won points to her American accent and lack of knowledge of Australian history, geography and culture as ‘English language problems’ that cause her and other Asian women social difficulties in an Australian workplace. In saying that ‘most Korean staff had difficulties with the differences between American and Australian English’ Ji-won points to a difference between two types of English. She is not describing a strictly linguistic difference but a difference of context and local knowledge. Ji-won thus uses ‘English language skills’ as an umbrella term to include her feelings of difference, ignorance and isolation, despite her objective English language proficiency.

Ji-won describes herself as using the English language through necessity, meaning she is functional in using it, but as feeling isolated and disadvantaged because she uses a less
accepted English language variant in a particular locale: American English in Australia. Ji-won says, ‘I feel Asian women with American accents have barriers to being understood and making friends in the workplace’, revealing a desire to do more than perform a role, to be understood and to make friends. Meaningful labour market participation for Ji-won includes the need for organisational social acceptance and connection, which she perceives to be prevented by her American and Korean accents. The organisational environment that Ji-won describes is one in which English language barriers are created and defined by mainstream Australians in terms of cultural ideals designed to exclude forms of difference. Ji-won suggests that American accents from non-Asian women cause few difficulties and that the problem is one of compounding visual and aural difference. However, Ji-won also describes her work environment as one in which ‘staff are very sensitive about racist comments ... they have to handle these things very carefully... and ... have to be aware of the issues’, revealing a superficial and conflicting acceptance of difference in the workplace.

While the problem of labour market affiliation has been overcome, English language issues remain a prominent disadvantage in her descriptions of her Australian labour market experience. However, it is English language which is different from the mainstream local Australian English (the wrong type of English) rather than English language weakness (poor English) that she refers to here. ‘Wrong’ English does not prevent her from getting a job but makes it more difficult for her to belong socially in the workplace, and the greater the difference from the Australian mainstream she looks, the less English language difference is tolerated. English language barriers are discussed here in terms of the politics of difference as opposed to objective skills deficiency, highlighting the utility of human cultural capital theory over human capital theory in this case. English language discrimination must therefore be recognised as locally produced in the Australian work environment (despite apparent policies of antidiscrimination), finding expression in a refusal to accept an alternative English variety, such as Korean-American English.
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9.1.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

A simple summation of Ji-won’s Australian labour market experience tells us that she experiences some isolation and social disadvantage because her English language differs from mainstream Australian English and that she undertakes a double burden of childcare and workplace activities in order to participate in the labour market. While these factors complicate her working life and are significant, they do not account for the wider context in which Ji-won expects, plans and fights to work in Australia.

Ji-won begins her story with an explanation of the vehicles, motivations and restrictions involved in coming to Australia. Evident here is the Western promise: the sense of a wealthier, freer and better life in an English-speaking, capitalist, Western liberal democracy. Ji-won describes her initial and even ongoing preference for America over Australia as a place where things might be better and her problems fewer. The preference for America is linked in her story to the presence of some of her relatives in America and learning English and how to be a flight attendant from Americans, so that America is the key reference point for imagining the Western promise. The apparent discourse is thus one in which ‘West is best’ and ‘America is the (best of the) West’. Australia does not generally figure in this conception of the West and is not even considered in this story until a job opportunity arises.

Ji-won is consistently career-oriented and, despite being married with children, she discusses her career and social status far more than her domestic life. The ‘West is best’ discourse relates directly to her career motivation, as ‘making it’ in the West in terms of a career is her ultimate aim. Ji-won describes her limitations in Korea in terms of a lack of family connections and money from which she is liberated in the West/Australia. These unsurmountable limitations in Korea may be understood in terms of ‘guan-gei’ (관계), a highly structured business, social, political and family network system, including class hierarchies and roles. Thus career success in the West/Australia is also freedom from ‘guan-gei’, a double achievement. Ji-won is concerned to work for large, internationally recognised companies (QANTAS, The Hyatt), aiming to work for ‘the best of the West’.
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Ji-won’s primary discourses of ‘West is best’ and career aspiration provide the framework in which her other stories make sense. While she aspires to the freedom, success and lifestyle of the West, she is dismayed to be warned about dangerous areas in Sydney with proportionally high Korean populations. The warning, which she feels to be racist and hurts her Korean pride, comes from a respected workplace trainer whom Ji-won describes as well intentioned and ‘caring’. Ji-won describes the Australian workplace in terms usually reserved for the family, the trainer discussed more in a brotherly or fatherly way. The story links together notions of Asian enclaves, danger and drugs in particular Sydney suburbs in a typically racist conception of difference and danger. While Ji-won is annoyed by the identified racism, she later condemns Australian Koreans for not participating to a greater degree in mainstream Australian society. Ji-won thus describes racism and cultural difference both in terms of the mainstream and the minority making greater efforts towards each other, and as a phenomenon extant in all societies, not just Australia. This may be considered in terms of the everchanging assimilation/integration/multiculturalism/racism discourse.

Ji-won refers to the QANTAS work culture within this discourse of racism, understanding and effort. She describes the protocols surrounding the telling of humorous stories and jokes using cultural/racial descriptors, including requesting permission to tell a joke and seeking an apology if offence may be given. However, despite these observed protocols, she notes that ‘Anglo-Saxons’ ‘always ignore coloured people’, especially the ‘ones who cause trouble’. Here is a double-edged sword, in which ‘Anglo-Saxons’ are simultaneously condemned and understood for apparently racist activities, in which ‘coloured people’ are both victims and troublemakers. Ji-won has a developed sense of political correctness and a workplace code of behaviour, arising from the nature of her workplace and its clients and her role in serving them.

When discussing her colleagues, Ji-won continually refers to them as ‘recruits’, ‘staff’, ‘trainer’ etc. rather than as women, friends or people with whom she has interpersonal relationships. She also describes her English language differences in terms of a lack of mutual understanding and suggests a desire to be more personally involved and
connected to the mainstream work culture. For Ji-won, success and self-assurance are greater goals than English language proficiency. She contextualises the role of language within the individual as part of a wider question of identity, personality and esteem. For the career-oriented, freedom-seeking Ji-won, as she presents herself, it is attitude and personality that are essential for survival and the key to coping with English language issues as a migrant in Australia. Her statements ‘How you deal with things is more important than your English language skills. But if you are not confident in your English, you do not pursue what you want to do ... I do not think it is a problem with English – it is something to do with your personality’ well describe the complex relationship between linguistic proficiency, attitude and expectation, and self-confidence. Thus English language proficiency is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for personally meaningful Australian labour market participation.

Ji-won describes Australian and Chinese men as more willing to perform domestic and nurturing/caring roles than Korean men. Indeed, Ji-won describes Australian men as ‘naturally and totally’ accepting these roles, an assertion that would find much argument in Australian society. This assertion is made in cultural rather than temporal terms, comparing men of different cultures rather than societies in particular historical periods: Ji-won does not compare the attitudes of Australian or Korean men of the early 21st century to those of their grandfathers, for example. Attitudinal differences may be equally indicative of sociohistorical development, class differences etc. within cultures but Ji-won presents these in cultural terms alone, appealing to a discourse of cultural relativism and Orientalism.

9.1.3 Summary

In all of the microstories in Ji-won’s life story, she expresses numerous and competing understandings. For Ji-won, traditional gender roles require both genders to change for either to make a successful transition, and some cultures appear to adapt more readily to this than others. For Ji-Won, English language barriers are more involved than mere
technical proficiency and are impacted upon by the politics of difference and personality issues, affecting self-confidence levels.

For Ji-won, labour market participation is about more than securing a job and earning money, and requires communication skills and character for personal meaning. In terms of English language barriers, domestic roles and racism/cultural acceptance, Ji-won sees individuals in general and herself in particular as simultaneously subject to greater social forces than themselves and still ultimately responsible through attitude and action for their own positions. Thus, for Ji-won, KMW are both victims and perpetrators of their own situations, indicating an ongoing struggle with an Orientalist discourse.

9.2 Hyun-sun’s story

In December 1983 we arrived in Sydney with our two children. Because we both had computer programming skills, long work experience and higher job status in Korea, it made it easy to get a visa... At the end of January 1984, my husband bought a ‘Sydney Morning Herald’ looking for a job... For a computer programmer, new skills and information are vital. Despite his English, he studied all the time, which made him a success, and many people recognized his ability and wanted to work with him. Now he is working as a contractor. He wanted to have his own business - he was succeeding. Being a contract worker is stressful sometimes but it has already been fifteen years and most of his contracts are with the government sector. I hope he is OK. Sometimes it is a risk.

I decided to learn English first. I thought my English was very good but it did not take long to realize how poor my English really was. I enrolled with AMES (Adult Migrant English Services) and I left my two children - at that time they were 2 and 3 - at a childcare centre. When I picked them up after English class, the staff told me that they had cried the whole day, wanting mum. So I stopped going to the class. I stayed at home with my two children for two years and I did not think about getting a job in Australia since my English was going from bad to worse... One day, one of my friends who was
much less experienced than I was with computers managed to find herself a job. This came as a very big shock to me and I thought that if she could get a job then so could I... (laugh) I started teaching myself English at home, rewrote my resume and memorized all of it. Then I started looking for work and I got three interviews and, finally, a job as a computer programmer.

The job I had was really good and the company was internationally well known. They recognized my qualifications and work experience in Korea, and the salary was also very good. I worked very hard and was promoted to a senior position with my salary increased accordingly. Even though my English was not good, the company treated me very well and I appreciated it, which made me work harder. I enjoyed the very high salary and self-achievement but I soon became tired and easily sick... Because of the company’s generous salary, I always went beyond my physical ability and, as a result, became stressed. The introduction of email increased my stress levels until they became unbearable... When we started using email, there was no more face-to-face communication and I had a great deal of difficulty understanding what I was being asked to do or what was going on... It was a very stressful task for me... I was in a senior manager position - I did not want to make any stupid writing mistakes but I often made mistakes with articles and prepositions.

My weight went down to 45kg and I couldn’t stand it anymore. I resigned. The company I worked for was so generous if you worked hard, but it was very strict about productivity. If you had problems with your work, they sacked you immediately. I saw a few people sacked within one hour of arrival one morning. Whenever I saw someone sacked, I got very scared.

In the nature of computer work, you must update your skills and information all the time. I often had to attend training programs but I would miss what the trainer was saying. There was never any time to ask questions because the trainer went so fast and everybody was focusing on their own learning. After the training, I would have to report to the company about the training or give a presentation at a meeting. It was another source of
stress too. After a full day of work, I had to pick up my two children up from day care, and then I had to prepare dinner for the family and look after my children’s homework. It was so hard. It was after one and half years of starting my successful job that finally I resigned.

I stayed at home and slowly recovered, but I needed money to support my family. My husband’s income was good but it was not enough to support four people and save for our future. I applied for a job in a government department. I had several very long and strict interviews and, finally, got a job…My choice was right. The job was so easy, and the environment was so friendly with good benefits and holidays. If I did not use my holidays, I was compensated with money. I enjoyed the job very much. I only wanted to work for two or three years but eventually I worked for eight and half years…

9.2.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Hyun-sun’s life story supports the first proposition on gender and cultural barriers as she was able to find and secure a position but left her position against her own will in order to fulfil childcare responsibilities. In addition, she stopped her English study in order to take care of her children. Although Hyun-sun mentions the success of her husband in the Australian labour market, she does not refer to any shared responsibility for domestic tasks. Rather, Hyun-sun’s husband is able to continue studying and to develop his English skills in order to be successful in his career. This discourse of unquestioned female duties to the family despite other activities may be regarded as resulting from culturally and temporally embedded notions of gender-based work. Filial piety and obligation are also referred to in terms of sending money back to the extended family in Korea (not included above), despite the stresses and hardships Hyun-sun was experiencing in Australia, evidencing a discourse of ‘face’ and martyrdom, of being the ‘good daughter-in-law and daughter’. In securing a position, Hyun-sun appears to negate the first grand narrative but her case reveals that initial entry should not be regarded as complete or final and that the KMW may lose her labour market position on the basis of gender/cultural roles at any time.
Hyun-sun’s story refutes the second proposition, English language barriers, as she participated in the labour market until her childcare became issue. Hyun-sun’s story reveals an understanding of the significance of English language skills for migrants in Australia as being of the first order, in line with propositional thought of the literature review. She says: ‘I decided to learn English first’. She then describes her unpleasant surprise in finding that her English was not as good as she had thought: ‘how poor my English really was’. Strong academic achievement in English language as a university subject in Korea was not borne out in Hyun-sun’s ability to communicate in Australia. The realisation that her English language skills were insufficient for the Australian workplace led her to enrol in migrant-specific English classes which she quickly abandoned in order to take care of her young children full-time. After two years of extremely limited interaction with English-speaking Australians, Hyun-sun reviewed her English at home, rewriting her resume and memorising it. While adequate to assist her in procuring a position in the labour market, Hyun-sun’s English language problems became the source of so much stress that they were the basis of her resignation and search for an alternative workplace. Thus while the grand narrative of English language barriers to labour market participation is denied in Hyun-sun’s story, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis reveals ongoing issues attributed to English language in the workplace.

With regard specifically to workplace culture, Hyun-sun describes her private sector employer in terms that are familiar to Koreans but less so to Australians. She describes interviews and workplaces as ‘strict’, evoking a sense of the authoritarian and unchallengeable, focused upon discipline. She also describes her salary and first employer in terms of great ‘generosity’, which in combination with ‘strictness’, suggests a paternal relationship of obligation, obedience and appreciation. In Korean workplace culture, women refrain from mentioning their children or childcare issues at all at work as this may be regarded as unprofessional ‘chatter’. Hyun-sun is subservient both in the home and the workplace, with little flexibility for each sphere and role of her life to accommodate the other.
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Within a high-paced, productivity-based working environment, Hyun-sun found that she struggled to understand and keep up with meetings and training sessions and that presentations to colleagues caused her a great deal of stress. Communication technology, rather than assisting her communication, caused Hyun-sun even more stress as she was concerned about the grammatical correctness of e-mails. E-mail slowed Hyun-sun’s communication production as she focused on not ‘making any stupid writing mistakes’ and denied her the social/physical clues and messages of face-to-face communication. For Hyun-sun, e-mails placed a spotlight upon her weakest skill, and her sense of the seniority of her position made it impossible for her to acknowledge her concerns with her employers or seek assistance from them. Hyun-sun describes a situation in which the non-native English speaker is far more concerned and diligent in regard to linguistic correctness, at the expense of communicative expediency, than the native speaker, who casually allows errors to exist. This combination of technology, stress, seniority and the fear of making mistakes may be described as a form of English language paranoia. Hyun-sun says, ‘Even though my English was not good, the company treated me very well and I appreciated it, which made me work harder’, revealing a causal link between English language paranoia, labour market gratitude and, to some degree, self-inflicted stress.

When Hyun-sun’s English language stress became too great, she resigned, recovered from a nervous collapse and then found further employment in the government sector. It is unlikely that Hyun-sun’s English language abilities objectively improved in this time but her English language paranoia is not mentioned in terms of her government position. This may be a function of a more highly legislated, secure and ethnically diverse workplace in addition to a reduction in salary, stress and a change in attitude and experience on Hyun-sun’s part. When the job was easier, the environment friendlier and holidays more available, Hyun-sun’s English language issues appeared to recede, despite little change in her linguistic proficiency. English language issues did not prevent Hyun-sun from gaining access to the Australian labour market but under conditions of pressure, they were the platform that buckled and the source of illness. Hyun-sun says of her move into the government sector that ‘my choice was right... the job was so easy ... the
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*environment so friendly ... I enjoyed the job very much*. The workplace culture in the public sector impacted positively upon Hyun-sun’s own perception of her English language skills, and the issues mentioned above appear to have been resolved or minimised, notable now only in their absence. The relevant applicable microstoria reveal, however, that issues attributed to the English language continue beyond labour market entry and are of greater impact in some workplaces than others.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria are thus evident in the constraints faced by Hyun-sun in negotiating a career in Australia as a KMW with a home, husband and children and a poor perception of her own English language abilities.

### 9.2.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

The above analysis reveals that Hyun-sun experienced great personal suffering and difficulty in the Australian labour market in the name of her English language skills, albeit to some degree self-exacerbated, and that she experienced other difficulties in juggling her domestic and labour market responsibilities. Hyun-sun’s story is particularly revealing in highlighting the differences between the public and private sectors and their impacts upon her assessment of her English language skills. While these experiences are readily categorised and discussed in terms applicable to the grand narratives, the grand narratives are insufficient in contextualising and understanding why Hyun-sun experienced such great stress, chose such work environments and persisted in the Australian labour market.

Both Hyun-sun and her husband entered Australia with the *'high expectations' bred of confidence and success*. This confidence and success is measurable in terms of academic achievement (qualifications), workplace achievement and recognition in Korea (experience) and the knowledge that their area of expertise, Information Technology, was in great demand in the global labour market (marketable skills). Terms or notions such as ‘qualifications’, ‘experience’ and ‘marketable’ or ‘transferable skills’ constitute the overarching discourse of skilled labour market participation and human capital theory.
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‘Participation’ in this context refers to securing employment and becoming a full-time employee rather than developing entrepreneurial skills or engaging in unpaid or community work. Hyun-sun repeatedly refers to the need to ‘update skills’ and ‘keep abreast of industry developments in order to fulfil work commitments’. This discourse of labour market participation includes a commitment to both the employer and to the industry and a sense of worth or value in a competitive market place.

Hyun-sun engages with this discourse to a high degree, confident that by fulfilling the criteria or terms of the discourse she and her husband would be successful in their attempts to find highly skilled positions in the Australian labour market. When Hyun-sun learned that her friend, whom she regarded to be of lower worth in terms of the labour market discourse, had secured a position and thereby recognition in the Australian labour market, she was spurred to action from a sense of injustice. Hyun-sun says: ‘If she could get a job then so could I’. Not only has she accepted and engaged with the labour market discourse to a high degree to fulfil its criteria but she also regards it as an objective and fair measure of the ‘worth’ of an individual in the labour market. Rather than question the fairness of the system or the difference in circumstances between her and her friend, she regards the system as necessarily able to offer her a better position than the one her friend achieved.

Confidence of success may be regarded as a function of discourse fulfilment and thereby a sense of belonging. By achieving the qualifications, skills and experience thresholds, gaining the necessary points to pass the skilled migration test and receiving their visas, Hyun-sun and her husband matched and fulfilled the discourse of selection applied by the Australian government. They had also applied to migrate to Canada in the belief that their transferable, up-to-the-minute technical skill base would serve them well in any Western country. Hyun-sun and her husband believe in an objective meritocratic model of labour market opportunity as being a key difference between the known Korean labour market and all unknown Western labour markets. This may be seen as part of the larger ‘West is best’ discourse, in which the imaginary world of the West is unknown but desired. The decision to migrate to Australia was based upon the timeliness of visa
processing and approval rather than an analysis or awareness of the Australian labour market as one example of a Western labour market.

Notions of Western and Korean labour markets are part of a wider discourse of internationalism, or the ‘best of the West’. Internationalism in this context refers to ideas of a ‘global market place’, ‘internationally recognised and demanded skills’, large multinational companies with numerous regional headquarters across the globe, prestige, familiarity (‘household names’), fierce competition, high productivity demands, the potential for high salaries and promotional opportunities and operation within an American economic system. The high sense of ‘worth’ Hyun-sun understood herself to hold would be realised through a well-paid position in a large multinational companies, in which she would work hard and experience great stress. In Hyun-sun’s conception of this competitive environment, the employer’s obligations extend no further than monetary reward and employees fulfil productivity obligations. This operates in concert with Hyun-sun’s cultural conception of the paternal workplace as outlined in the grand narratives above. Hyun-sun was frightened of losing her position and thereby her sense of worth in the labour market, and was unable to approach her employers for assistance with her English language problems in sending emails.

While confident to engage in a wide international or global labour market, Hyun-sun maintained her own cultural discourse of Korean workplace and social behaviour. Hyun-sun says: ‘Since I was in a management position, I did not want to embarrass myself by making any stupid grammatical mistakes...’ The conceptualisation that acknowledging an individual training need is embarrassing or a sign of weakness is part of a wider cultural discourse that encompasses sociolinguistic difference (or feelings of linguistic inferiority) and an appreciation of hierarchy. The notion of ‘face’ is important here, and Hyun-sun was concerned that any sign of weakness would be judged by her employer as indicative of a greater inability to perform in her position. Hyun-sun accepted that her English language skills were limited and attempted to overcome these limitations through memorisation techniques. She says: ‘I rewrote my resume and memorised all of it’. Memorisation of a short English script was successful in assisting Hyun-sun to pass the
interview and win her position but was insufficient to allow her to actively engage in training sessions and use email effectively in the workplace.

Hyun-sun’s approach to taking responsibility for her English language problems may be regarded as arising from the Korean national approach to English language education and education as a whole. The Korean approach to education of Hyun-sun’s student experience encouraged memorisation or rote learning and discouraged active questioning, discovery or suggestions of alternative modes of learning or achieving objectives. Thus, Hyun-sun does not mention the use of performance appraisals as a way of exploring employer support nor does she make suggestions for alternative ways of working that could have assisted with her language barrier problem. Hyun-sun does not regard her problems in this position as a function of any form of discrimination, exploitation or any other negative dynamic external to herself. Her enduring attitude is one of gratitude, respect and submission before her employer. Rather than being outraged by the quick and public dismissal of colleagues, Hyun-sun is frightened and tries to work harder to please her employer. This may be regarded as a discourse of industrial relations awareness.

After suffering a nervous collapse and exiting the labour force for a period, Hyun-sun engaged with a lifestyle-work discourse. In choosing to work for the public sector, she chose a job that was lower paid but was easier and friendlier and gave her the flexibility to work to live rather than live to work. This discourse includes notions of holidays, balance and quality of life, industrial relations, stress management and workplace policies that value, support and report on staff cultural diversity and security. The shift from Hyun-sun’s initial international skilled labour market participation discourse to a lifestyle-work discourse represents a shift from transposing Korean workplace notions onto an Australian context to adopting the discourse of the workplace in which she found herself.
9.2.3 Summary

Hyun-sun’s life story supports the first proposition, on gender and cultural barriers, as she left her work in order to take care of her two young children but Hyun-sun’s story immediately refutes the second proposition, English language barriers, as she participated in the labour market. However, the microstoria reveal that despite Hyun-sun herself believing that her English was less than competent, she was able to successfully pass job interviews and gain and negotiate employment. However, once the initial hurdle had been surmounted, after a few months of employment English language insecurity and difference emerged as the source of great stress and illness in the workplace. In Hyun-sun’s case, communication technology exacerbated this problem. In other workplaces, with less pressure and greater acknowledgement of family demands, the English language problem seemed to recede (in that it was no longer worthy of mention).

This story reveals the ongoing issues of the double duties of a working wife and mother and the issues of transplanting ‘strict’ and paternal Korean workplace values and protocols into the Australian work environment in which negotiation is key. Hyun-sun also describes in some detail the discourses of international labour exchange, skills capital and a belief in human capital theory/meritocracy. Despite her belief in meritocracy as a characteristic of unknown but desired Western employment, Hyun-sun is unable to break free of her Korean conceptions of the ‘company’ workplace even within Australia. Her ongoing engagement with an imagined Western reality, her own difference and replication of Korean conceptions reveal her to be trapped within an Orientalist discourse. Her move into the government sector sees her embrace a lifestyle discourse in which holidays and the social environment become significant factors over salary and hierarchy.
9.3 Sun-myung’s story

I left Korea for Saudi Arabia in 1987, where I met my husband before moving to Singapore together. At that time, the Australian embassy in Singapore held educational promotional seminars. I went to one and decided to come to Australia to study for a Bachelor’s degree. I arrived in Australia as an overseas student with my husband and son. Even though I was an overseas student, I was lucky as I got a job and free accommodation for my family. During the day, I studied at university and at night, I worked as a matron in a nursing home. My son was 4 years old. After school, he had to come home by himself and he had to unlock the door by himself. I had to train him to live independently. Because of this, my mother came to Australia to look after my son.

After I completed my Bachelor degree, I obtained a job as a head nurse and became a permanent resident. My overseas work experience helped me to mix into the Australian hospital system and culture. Sometimes there were educational programs for promotional opportunities and I felt that I was not given the chance to participate in those programs; but I think these things happen in every human organization - some people are liked, some are not. I feel that nurses from Hong Kong are little bit difficult to deal with. They think that they are better than nurses from other Asian countries because their English is better, and their British colonisation experience makes them much more familiar with the Australian culture.

In my experience, Asian nurses are the most hostile to other Asian nurses - I think that it is some kind of power game. They do want to hold hegemony I guess. My promotion came more slowly than other Australian nurses’ did. One reason for this was that I had not stayed in one position long enough and moved to different sections in which I was interested. I do not feel any discrimination for my lack of promotion but I often feel bad about the way I have been treated. One of my Korean nurse friends worked in an Australian hospital for more than 20 years and left because she felt strongly discriminated against. She now has a sushi shop in the city. Now she is very happy because she says she is not treated like a second class citizen anymore. Some Korean
women do not understand why my friend gave up work in the hospital to become a shopkeeper...

Now I work in mental health for NESB (Non-English-Speaking Background) migrants. My main role is supporting the carers of NESB people who have mental health problems. I am researching their needs and difficulties in performing their caring roles. There are services that are available for mainstream carers but I must address the different issues...

My type of work is mainly done by women – it is the nature of the occupation. Because of this, I do not experience discrimination but sometimes I do feel discriminated against because of my race or English language. Maybe I am little bit sensitive about these issues. Maybe I am overreacting...

I am a member of the Korean Science Association. Whenever we have meetings, I feel a strong sexist attitude. A female has never been president of the association, even though females work more actively than males in the association. There are times I do not want to be involved in the association but I feel some kind of commitment to attend meetings and to participate. Female members do all the work and male members get the high positions. In most Korean groups or associations, the males are always at the top and the females can only get to third or fourth position, even though there are more females than males. I am very uncomfortable with these things. In Korean society, a person’s title is very important – it is what you write on your name card and how people address you - so it is very competitive to be a president of a certain group.

When I deal with Australian mainstream society, particularly in my profession, I do not feel any discrimination because I am a woman. But when I deal with Korean people, I have to try hard to constantly remember that I am a woman and whom I am talking to, whether it is a man or a woman. I am expected to behave like a woman and to not offend others.
9.3.1 Grand narrative applicable microstoria.

Although Sun-myung’s life story refutes the first proposition, grand narratives of gender and culture barriers abound for her beneath an apparently smooth surface of labour market entry success. Grand narrative applicable microstoria reveal that apparently ‘solved’ issues, such as childcare, are not indicative of equitable responsibility sharing and that the solutions remain the sole responsibility of the KMW. Should her solution fail, her labour market participation ends. Sun-myung describes her situation of studying at university by day and working as a nursing home matron by night while being the mother of a four-year-old. While her childcare responsibilities did not prevent her from accessing the labour market, it is only by shifting those responsibilities to her own mother that she is freed to pursue her career and study. Childcare responsibilities remain a gender issue, solved by women where possible. Had Sun-myung’s mother been unable to assist her with these responsibilities, her labour market participation would have been thwarted. The fact that she was in a position to draw upon her mother’s assistance, through circumstance and fortune, means that the grand narrative appears to be disproved when it is merely driven underground or backwards a generation. She mentions teaching her child to live independently from a very young age but that her mother came to Australia to assist her with the care of her son. There is no mention made of Sun-myung’s husband or his role in sharing domestic and caring duties or of any negotiation regarding these.

For Sun-myung, the care of her son is her problem, solved by the intervention of her mother, rendering it the problem of ‘the women of the family’. In saying ‘my son’ and ‘I had to train him’, Sun-myung reveals a sense of her unshared responsibility with her husband for her son: she does not say ‘our son’ or ‘we had to train him’. Sharing the responsibility with her mother is, for Sun-myung, more practical and realistic but also thinkable and sayable. In saying ‘because of this, my mother came to Australia to look after my son’, Sun-myung reveals a discourse of shared female resources for childcare where none is apparent for male family members. In this discourse, it is unthinkable for Sun-myung to discuss her husband’s lack of childcare or to suggest that her father might
equally have come to Australia to assist, while it appears natural and appropriate for her own mother to step into the role. Thus while Sun-myung manages to both study and work full time with a small child, not referring to the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse in her own right, her activities are only possible with the ongoing assistance of her own mother in that same (prolonged and extended) role on Sun-myung’s behalf.

Another aspect of gender roles is revealed in Sun-myung’s description of nursing as ‘mainly done by women – it is the nature of the occupation’. She describes discrimination in terms of race and English language skills but not in terms of any overt or recognisable sexism. In saying that ‘because of [the female-dominated occupation] I do not experience discrimination’, Sun-myung suggests that gender-based discrimination is confined within the particular workplace. She does not mention any form of labour market segmentation or make any statement that nurses are poorly paid, overworked or undersupported in comparison to occupations in which there is a greater male participation. Nor does Sun-myung question that nursing is a generally female occupation: it is both unthinkable and unsayable to suggest that nursing might be ‘naturally’ performed by men and that nurses might be paid as much as engineers, for example. Just as Sun-myung employs a discourse which does not facilitate a questioning of gender roles in the home, this is also evident in her descriptions of her workplace. While not appearing to conform to the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse, Sun-myung remains firmly within its boundaries.

Despite no identification of gender-based discrimination in the workplace, Sun-myung passionately identifies sexist attitudes within her Korean community group. Here she perceives that ‘female members do all the work and male members get the high positions ... even though there are more females than males’. Sun-myung describes her anger at this injustice which is obvious to her but continues her association with the group through a feeling of ‘some kind of commitment’. She does not speak of ‘women and men’ in her community groups but ‘female members and male members’, defining each in terms of their biological sex and their roles as group constituents. When discussing her workplace, the word ‘nurse’ could be supplanted by the word ‘woman’ with little change
in meaning, illustrating that the nursing role in her discourse inherently involves the caring and lower status of ‘women’s work’. Within the Korean Science Association, outside the realms of the gender-defined workplace or home, Sun-myung defines members in terms of biological and associated power difference. In the community group, Sun-myung steps free of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse to query gender roles and apparent inequality. Sun-myung’s strongest experience of sexual discrimination in Australia is thus within the context of her own Korean community. She states this directly: ‘When I deal with Australian mainstream society, I do not feel any discrimination because I am a woman … but when I deal with Korean people … I remember that I am a woman … I am expected to behave like a woman and not to offend others’. This is similar to Sun-myung’s experience of inter-Asian racism amongst nurses in Australia in that it is experienced to the greatest degree within the minority group(s) rather than in relation to mainstream society.

Sun-myung’s story refutes the second grand narrative since Sun-myung does not describe any problems accessing or negotiating the entry into paid work in Australia with her nursing qualifications. However, grand narrative applicable microstoria are evident in the details of Sun-myung’s difficulties in her workplace that she attributes to her English language difference. Sun-myung describes discrimination and workplace difficulties that arise from the combination of her obvious and identifiable ethnicity and the nature of her English language. Sun-myung describes a pecking order of Asian nurses in which the cultural and historical proximity of the English language strain is a deciding factor. In this hierarchy, the British English taught to Hong Kong nurses is regarded as culturally closer and more relevant to Australia than the American English taught to Korean or other Asian nurses. She says, ‘nurses from Hong Kong … think they are better … because their English is better, and their British colonisation experience makes them much more familiar with the Australian culture’. Rather than English language proficiency and labour market entry issues, acceptance and status are defined in terms of English language difference, including a historical and cultural sense of the English type beyond mere functionalism. Thus while the second grand narrative is denied, labour
market issues continue and find expression through the politics of difference (racism) and in the guise of preferred English language types.

9.3.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

Sun-myung’s story illustrates a set of labour market beliefs and experiences that supports Australian workplace cultures and organisational philosophy despite the considerable workload she undertakes. That is, she accepts the inequitable workload as a fact of life. As the head of the family, it appears from her story that all domestic and extra domestic responsibilities fall into her role. Sun-myung thus seeks not only to balance paid and unpaid tasks in and outside the home but also to balance her beliefs about Australian fairness with her experienced reality as an educated migrant woman.

Sun-myung constructs herself first and foremost as an international student, travelled and intelligent with marketable skills, opportunities and the driving force of her own destiny. She speaks of deciding to move to and arriving in Australia ‘to study for a Bachelor’s degree ... as an overseas student with my husband and my son’. Upon arrival she ‘got a job and free accommodation for my family’, evidencing a discourse in which she makes the family decisions and is responsible for their daily lives. This reflects the notions of principal applicant and dependants that formed the basis of her Australian visa. She defines herself in terms of her visa subclass and status (principal applicant, student visa) and her family in terms her dependants (secondary applicants). This conceptualisation confers upon her the responsibility of the family as a whole. She says: ‘after I completed my Bachelor degree, I obtained a job as a head nurse and became a permanent resident’, displaying a strong awareness of and affiliation with the migration process and its connection to her education and employment status. In this discourse, the grant of permanent residence validates and signposts Sun-myung’s linear conception of progress and achievement in her life.

Sun-myung continually draws upon a discourse of status, hierarchy, power, politics and position. This includes her status as a university graduate, permanent resident and her
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relation to Hong Kong nurses. She speaks of Hong Kong nurses as wanting ‘to hold hegemony’. She speaks of her Korean friend who leaves nursing and is ‘very happy because ... she is not treated like a second-class citizen’. She says of her community group that ‘a female has never been president of the association ... the females can only get to third or fourth position’. Sun-myung also describes the significance of status in Korean society, where ‘a person’s title is very important - it is what you write on your name card and how people address you’. This is indicative of the migrant story of striving to ‘making it big’ in the West, liberating herself from the restrictions and paradigms of Korea but ultimately measuring her success in Korean terms of recognition and remaining within those paradigms she seeks to escape.

The identification of discrimination and irrational hierarchies within Korean and Asian communities and staff groups by Sun-myung is very strong in comparison to her sense of any discrimination in general Australian society and workplaces. She describes her lack of opportunity to participate in programs relevant to promotion in terms of ‘not being given the chance’ but overall explains her slow promotion in Australia as the result of not staying in one position ‘long enough’ and not being popular. She says that she does not ‘feel any discrimination’, but feels ‘bad about that way I have been treated’. Unsure as to whether she is responsible for her own status or subject to discrimination in the workplace, she decides that ‘these things happen in every human organisation – some people are liked, some are not’ and that she is perhaps ‘a little bit sensitive about these issues ... maybe...overreacting’. Certainly, Sun-myung does not subject the Australian workplace to the same scrutiny, critique and discourses to which she subjects her Korean community. Identified issues are mitigated and offset by expressions of self-doubt and the possibility that she does not fully understand the environment. This concern about difference and resulting feelings of inferiority evidence an existent Orientalist (or Occidentalist) discourse of domination, mystery and the unspoken.

Sun-myung’s basis for not fully understanding the Australian workplace is partially linguistic and partially cultural, as highlighted by the Asian nurse hierarchy outlined above. She describes her choice to specialise in researching the needs and difficulties of
carers of linguistically diverse migrants diagnosed as mentally ill. She says ‘there are services ... for mainstream carers, but I must address the different issues’, acknowledging the impact of linguistic/cultural isolation upon the mental wellbeing of both patients and carers. Sun-myung refers to these patients in bureaucratic terminology: NESB, referring to government, the welfare state, the hospital system and an academic background. Her interest and language suggest a sense of social responsibility and professional integrity, a need to contribute at a high level the results of her own experiences and opportunities, both to help others and realise her own potential.

9.3.3 Summary

Sun-myung’s life story refutes the first proposition as she participates in the Australian labour market. Sun-myung is not prevented from participating in the Australian labour market but remains bound by the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse in her workplace and home, and particularly to her childcare responsibilities, but is able to question gender roles within the Korean community. Her domestic gender issues are much like those of any other Australian woman but she is more aware of her specific cultural gender issues. In terms of microstoria, Sun-myung is driven by power and status, belief in meritocracy as fair and just, social responsibility and professional integrity and a fraught relationship with the Korean community. Sun-myung’s story reveals most strongly the negative experiences and frustrations that are often evident within minority groups in which the limitations and social structures which members often left their own countries to escape are replicated.

Sun-myung’s story refutes the second proposition as she participates in the labour market. However, she experiences English language difficulties in terms of a hierarchy of English language types, with Hong Kong British English more accepted than Korean American English. These difficulties are both in terms of promotion and in social integration in the workplace. Therefore, Sun-myung’s microstoria immediately disprove the second grand narrative of English language barriers to entering the labour market but
provide evidence that the issue remains for her and that entry is only the first step to labour market participation.

Thus Sun-myung’s microstoria are applicable to both grand narratives, despite her labour market participation disproving them, as they evidence ongoing issues beyond entry. The grand narratives are thus not relevant for Sun-myung in their current form but their issues remain. The danger in disproving the grand narratives is to suggest that the barriers no longer exist. The grand narrative applicable microstoria acknowledge that the barriers have become more covert, and thus more difficult to identify and address.

9.4 Discussion

The three interviews included this chapter highlight the role of microstoria in qualifying the two propositions. The life stories of the members of Group V denied the first grand narrative, suggesting that gender and cultural labour market entry issues are not relevant here. Grand narrative applicable microstoria expose a complex interplay of ongoing gender and culture issues for the KMW, once she has a position, that continue to threaten her longevity in the position or her career path. While widely conceived and purposely undefined to allow a maximum of realities and expressions, gender and culture issues emerge in this chapter to signify a relatively small range of issues. ‘Gender’ issues may be understood in terms of childcare, an issue which is not limited to Korean women but finds particular expression in the ‘good wife, wise mother’ discourse. ‘Culture’ may be understood in terms of Australian workplace culture, Korean workplace culture, family culture and the prevailing political/ economic culture.

In traditional terms, the ‘good wife and wise mother’ would not participate in the labour market at all and would rely upon the male members of her family for financial support. Labour market participation may be allowed but as a personal indulgence that must be additional to the satisfactory performance of all traditional tasks in the home. The KMW in this group reveal tensions in trying to step outside this limiting paradigm and achieve various levels of success in doing so. The desire and willingness to participate in the
labour market are still unlikely to be met with a concomitant redistribution of household and childcare tasks with the KMW’s husband. In order to be both mother and employee, the KMW often relies upon the support of her own mother which, while it releases the KMW for labour market activity, does little to step away from the ‘good wife, wise mother’ paradigm. Childcare and domestic responsibilities remain fully serviced by female family members, with little uptake by male members. It is unthinkable for fathers or husbands to perform these roles in this discourse and without ongoing, extended family female support, labour market participation are impossible.

The ‘good wife, wise mother’ role, and its attendant ‘provider husband’ role, may be regarded as cultural and extending beyond the home. While the KMW may find a childcare solution through her own mother, the inherent issue of the inability to address the gender role and its restrictions finds further expression in the workplace. The KMW in this group describe an attitude of submission, gratitude and respect for their employers, a relationship perceived in almost paternal terms, replicating Korean workplace culture and a traditional Korean female gender position in the Australian workplace. One KMW featured in this chapter in particular evokes a sense of her employer as a benevolent dictator to whom she is obedient, beholden and appreciative and to whom she regards mention of her domestic responsibilities or communication issues as unprofessional, bothersome and a loss of ‘face’. The result is an inability to negotiate terms or support and a silent endurance of a double burden. This inability or unwillingness to acknowledge and negotiate learning needs and solutions with an employer is indicative of Korean education systems and workplace cultures, where ‘face’ is important, authority unquestioned and creativity and self-expression discouraged.

Discrimination on the basis of sex or race/culture is mentioned by members of this group, often in almost contradictory terms. Mainstream Australia is simultaneously condemned and understood for the way in which ‘it’ treats KMW/Asian migrants, who in turn are presented as both victims and troublemakers / perpetrators of their own suffering. Racial and cultural discrimination is described by one KMW as strongest within Asian sub-communities, vying with each other for a sense of greater ‘closeness’ in status to
mainstream Australia. Direct sexual discrimination is described by another (silent) KMW as most apparent within her Korean community group. The community group appears to be one sphere in which a KMW who cannot otherwise escape the ‘good wife, wise mother’ paradigm is able to more openly question the appropriateness and justice of gender roles. None of these issues prevents entry into the Australian labour market for these KMW but provides sources of distress and limits promotional opportunities and causes them to seek alternative workplaces or groups.

The second grand narrative suggests that KMW’s acquisition of a job in which the English language is the medium of communication means that the KMW has overcome barriers arising from the role and value of English language proficiency in the workplace. As all the women in this group have acquired positions in which they must communicate in the English language, the grand narrative would suggest that those barriers ceased to hold any relevance to this group.

However, the life stories in this chapter reveal that English language issues constitute real and perceived barriers to employment progression, career paths and further career opportunity. The continuing discussion of English language and communication issues for the KMW after she has accessed the labour market reveals that access is only the first step and that inequity and disadvantage become hidden and covert in a conceptualisation that focuses solely on initial labour market access rather than further, complete or equitable access. The absence of the notion of equity in the first and second grand narrative is significant in highlighting the limited and superficial academic discourse of migrant labour market participation. For migrant women, equity once inside the labour market remains outside the boundaries of possible discussion, as the discussion is bound by the notion of labour market access. In addition, the microstoria evident in these stories reveal that such a simplistic and limited conceptualisation of initial labour market access in English language terms has the effect of situating all responsibility for communication and labour market acceptance upon the KMW and does not recognise the place of workplace culture and social norms in discriminating against difference rather than incompetence. Further, the microstoria show that workplaces may regard difference
as itself a form of incompetence, and ‘competence’ as meaning ‘the same as the majority’. Thus, for the KMW in the Australian labour market many questions of equity are subordinated to or subsumed under the issues of access.

In sum, the second grand narrative applicable microstoria in this chapter qualify the second proposition in the following ways. First, these microstories reveal ongoing issues in being accepted into the workplace as ‘full’ members with equal opportunities after access has been achieved. Next, the subjectivity of the notion of English language ‘skill’ is brought to the fore, in addition to the understanding that this subjective evaluation is mutable across roles, organisations (including workplace cultures) and contexts. This mutable and subjective evaluation of English language skill is directly connected to, and expressed in, KMW’s experiences of their identity, confidence and mental health. The ‘English language’ is also shown in this microstoria to be a phenomenon that is, in itself and a priori, already embedded with notions and values of difference and discrimination, especially for Asian migrant women who are likely to be placed on the lower echelons. Finally, the microstoria reveal that the second proposition posits the KMW as responsible for her own labour market disadvantage in Australia on the basis of a difference she can never overcome by herself. That is, the second proposition describes labour market disadvantage for the KMW in terms of her English language skills rather than the environment which evaluates them.

While both grand narratives are denied by the stories of the KMW in this group, sufficient grand narrative applicable microstoria are evident to highlight potential barriers for others and limitations once the initial barrier has been overcome or penetrated. Grand narrative applicable microstoria reveal that ‘English ain’t English’, and that the language barrier is multifarious and subjective and impacted upon by workplaces and the politics of difference. They also reveal gender and cultural barriers to ongoing and unimpeded Australian labour market participation in issues such as childcare (hidden by other female support), sexism within the Korean community and workplace and family cultures.
Grand narrative independent microstoria step away from the parameters of the grand narratives, allowing labour market participation to be discussed in terms chosen by the KMW, often those of identity, self-worth, fantasies and philosophical beliefs. These fantasies, philosophies and attitudes have great bearing upon the motivations, aspirations, ideals, expectations and coping strategies (or ‘endurance’ in Korean parlance and language) of the KMW. While these find unique and individual expression in each KMW in this group, they often spring from shared and understood mythologies of East and West, migration, success (including recognition and reward), workplace order and honour, and freedom in paradise.

Grand narrative independent microstoria reveal how KMW make sense of their Australian labour market experiences. In understanding how KMW speak their lives to themselves and the mythologies and discourses in which they speak, grand narrative-independent microstoria open the possibility of hearing the ‘other’s’ perspective. Rather than confirming or modifying existing understandings, grand narrative independent microstoria provide the vehicle for true cultural exchange and the possibility of more effective communication. They attempt to understand situations from within the experience of the KMW rather than to observe them externally from such a highly defined position that it is impossible to account for anything as yet unknown. In allowing for the unknown and the new, grand narrative independent microstoria analysis provides an important balancing function (resistance) in relation to grand narrative applicable microstoria. It may also provide the material for the development of an entirely new grand narrative for test and discussion.

The grand narratives and the grand narrative applicable microstoria present the KMW as a victim or sufferer of levels of disadvantage, stating that she is likely to experience difficulty on the basis of defined differences from the Australian mainstream (‘barriers’). Neither of those (grand narrative) differences is necessarily a hindrance to performance in the labour market. Difference may not be positive or negative in its own right until social norms and practices imbue that difference with value and significance. Here, the Australian mainstream labour market regards the particular linguistic, gender and social
differences of the KMW as negative. Neither of those differences is easily addressed or changed: a KMW may improve her English language skills but she can never become a native speaker, nor can she change her gender or culture. Similarly, she is unlikely to be able to change Australian workplace culture. By defining difference as disadvantage and identifying immutable differences for the KMW as a priori linked to labour market disadvantage, the KMW is categorised as unchangeably disadvantaged. Success for the KMW is then defined as her overcoming her disadvantage and minimising her difference from the mainstream. Acquisition of a labour market position reveals a level of acceptance into the mainstream Australian labour market but not a total and complete acceptance. As the victim, and the ‘other’, the KMW is always immutably different and every success is a victory over that difference. She is accepted despite her difference and no matter her victories, she is always considered as different from the mainstream and thereby disadvantaged.

Grand narrative independent microstoria offer an insight into the labour market discourse and predetermined barriers for those who struggle not only with linguistic, racial and cultural difference, in addition to gender expectations, but with a conceptualisation that they are disadvantaged in Australia and always struggling. The struggle is thus with the ways in which KMW are categorised and discussed, forcing them into a position of overcoming what cannot be changed. Both the grand narrative and grand narrative-applicable microstoria analyses lock the KMW into responding in terms immediately defined by categories that do not allow her to escape those categories. As outlined above, the arbitrary nature of those categories (immutable disadvantage/difference that is ultimately unrelated to workplace performance) are so limiting and immovable as to allow little beyond self-reinforcing statements. Any example or description of difficulty experienced in terms of those identified differences legitimises the categories. Silence, however, does not serve to delegitimise the categories but to suggest that the notion of difference and disadvantage has been overcome. Thus the KMW is caught in a bind in which if she speaks she defines herself as a victim who can never be anything else and, if she does not speak, all problems appear to have disappeared.
In comparison to other groups in this research, KMW in this group focused the least upon marriage as a key point in the genesis of their Australian labour market participation. This group focused more upon career aspirations, felt a greater sense of individual agency and explored labour market issues in greater depth and nuance than their domestic lives. One emerging common thread or belief, sometimes explicitly stated and at other times implicitly underpinning their narratives, is that personality and attitude are the defining features of labour market (and other) success for KMW in Australia. Thus labour market success, which includes entry, promotion, recognition and reward, is a personal victory of attitude, resources and philosophy. There is very little of the victim in this conceptualisation and in this group. Rather than finding barriers, the grand narrative propositions could be entirely rethought to state that this group of KMW will not be daunted by English, gender, culture or any other issues.

Within these life stories, mention of personality and attitude links notions of identity and self worth to labour market participation. The English language barrier discourse may become subsumed under this alternative discourse, to present a larger conception of communication/self-expression success or failure. In this conception, it is possible to overcome English language inadequacies by focusing upon the greater communication project and outcomes rather than the humiliation of producing an incorrect utterance. However, the ability to forget or not worry about mistakes and to get on with the job may be not only a matter of personality and attitude but also a function of the type of role and the organisational culture in which the KMW finds herself in Australia. Within this conception of identity construction through satisfying communication and social interaction, the KMW is focused upon realising herself rather than finding a job, although labour market participation is helpful or destructive in her project.

One silent member of the group describes all migrants as suffering inferiority complexes, trying to upgrade themselves to integrate with mainstream Australian society. This fits with the discourses of ‘escaping to paradise’ and ‘West is best’, in which success in Australia is both success in its own right and escape from the restrictive class-bound life of Korea. Within this discourse, America is the embodiment of imagined Western
paradise but Australia will do (but not without some disappointment). Dissatisfaction with the known Korean labour market may lead to high expectations of the imagined ideal of the unknown Western labour market. Thus a KMW may accept that social connections and other unidentifiable factors may impact upon her labour market options in Korea but expect that qualifications, experience and skills in high demand will automatically ensure a ‘good job’ in a Western labour market. A belief in untrammelled meritocracy and true equality of opportunity in Australia is evidenced in some of these narratives. One KMW expresses the belief that no Australian workers are asked and expected to do weekend overtime work; indeed that it is unthinkable in Australia, unlike in Korea. Similarly, one KMW in this group describes Australian men as ‘naturally and totally’ accepting an equal share of domestic work as compared to Korean men. Both conceptions of the Australian labour market and division of domestic work between the sexes appear idealistic and located within paradise.

Other evident discourses may be considered as a ‘life/work cycle’. These include notions of linear progress and reward, followed by periods of non-participation in the labour market or periods spent in Korea as non-working mothers, interspersed with periods of work in Australia, exhibiting a practice of more circular time. This includes a lifestyle discourse, in which the desire to work hard for great rewards and status in internationally recognised companies while struggling with domestic responsibilities is offset by a desire to live an easier life with less pressure, less status and less money.

9.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the strongest messages from this analysis are revealed through microstoria analysis. These microstoria reveal the two propositions to be misaligned with the KMW life-stories examined. They are rendered inaccurate by virtue of the fact that all members of the group had managed to successfully enter the labour market in Australia. The literature review and the resultant propositions present an almost hopeless struggle against unchangeable factors and differences. However, for those KMW who achieve labour market entry, the question appears to have been answered and equity achieved.
Chapter 9: Career-Oriented (Pre-Migration)

Grand narrative applicable microstoria reveal complexities in the notions of ‘gender/culture barriers’ and ‘English language barriers’. The complexities involved in the English language barrier to labour market participation are described and qualified to make it clear that not only is language embedded within cultural/social context but perceptions of self-worth, identity and status are functionally related to communicative success. In addition, KMW remain entrapped by traditional gender roles both at home and at work in Australia. Thus, ‘English language’ should be replaced with a wider conception of communicative issues, and gender roles may be more specifically described in the Korean context as the ‘good wife, wise mother’.

Microstoria analysis reveals the competing and particular Korean issues of community, migration, class, attitude and philosophy that impact upon labour market interpretations and possibilities for these KMW. This provides the necessary balancing influence to ensure that KMW are not presented simply as victims of communicative and gender/cultural issues, against which there is no place for personal approach and efficacy. This microstoria analysis provides an alternative conception of the roles of language, culture, motherhood and employment in the identity construction of the KMW as a person. The issues raised in this analysis serve as a reminder that for KMW, as for many women, labour market participation is just one aspect of a life journey that changes direction and scope over time and involves numerous personal and competing factors.

As both grand narratives are refuted by all members of this group, grand narrative analysis yields little understanding or information of labour market barriers for KMW. Microstoria analysis is useful in both its forms in the research in this chapter. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis is fruitful for exploring both grand narratives but are particularly so for the second grand narrative of English language barriers. Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis is also very useful here and reveals a complex and rich pattern of issues relevant to the KMW in the Australian labour market.
Chapter 9: Career-Oriented (Pre-Migration)

The next chapter will provide the analytical support for achieving the aim of the research, which is to critique and develop a more inclusive approach to understanding NESB migrant workers in the Australian labour market than currently prevail.
Chapter 10

Narrative Analysis of Two Propositions

This chapter provides the analytical support for achieving the aim of the research, which is to critique theoretical presuppositions and to develop a more inclusive approach to understanding NESB migrant workers in the Australian labour market than prevails. Two grand narratives and their associated propositions were described in Chapters 2 and 3. Drawing on the results outlined in Chapters 5 to 9, each of these propositions is discussed in terms of how accurately it matches the experiences of Korean migrant women (KMW). As such, this chapter provides a test of each proposition. In doing so it critiques the theories that underpin them and discusses the implications of its findings for developing a better theoretical understanding of NESB migrant women in the Australian labour market.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part relates to the first proposition concerning gender and cultural barriers; the second part relates to the second proposition concerning English language barriers. Each proposition is discussed according to the type of antenarrative analysis employed, firstly grand narrative and secondly microstoria analysis. Grand narrative analysis treats the propositions as master stories of LMD for KMW and searches for evidence of confirmation, refutation or indications of irrelevance. Where the proposition is shown to be refuted or irrelevant, the associated theory that the proposition relies upon may also be regarded as problematised and/or disproved. However, in many cases it is possible that, while a proposition may be found to inaccurately account for the experiences of KMW, it may nevertheless retain a degree of utility for understanding their life stories. This combination of a lack of support for the proposition but an enduring invocation of its associated theory demands that the proposition be reconsidered, so as to explain and describe more adequately labour market experiences for KMW. These alternative understandings represent the next step of analysis: microstoria analysis.
Chapter 10: Narrative Analysis of Two Propositions

The microstoria analysis used in this chapter is referred to as grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis as it remains focused upon issues related to the two propositions. It is used to re-examine the life stories of KMW for evidence of issues raised in each proposition as per grand narrative analysis, but the results are not so rigidly confined within the terms of the propositions. Where grand narrative analysis directly questions in a closed fashion the veracity and relevance of each proposition, microstoria analysis asks in an open fashion how these issues of gender, culture and English language difference are experienced in the Australian labour market by the sample group. This type of antenarrative analysis remains relevant to the propositions but aims to find a wider, subtler, more individual expression of experience. Alternative experiences of the issues raised in the propositions give rise to new stories, or microstories and these are identified and named. These microstories provide the basis for alternative understandings, allowing reconsideration of the propositions to be further developed in Chapter 11. Four microstories are identified in this chapter for each proposition, as shown in Table 10.1.

**Table 10.1: Grand Narrative Applicable Microstoria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition I</th>
<th>Proposition II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housework and childcare are women’s responsibilities</td>
<td>English, it’s my problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class women do ‘decent’ women’s jobs</td>
<td>My workplace problems are English problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market participation depends upon family circumstances</td>
<td>Communication technology exacerbates my English problems in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which culture?</td>
<td>Good English gets me a bad job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.1 Proposition 1 and Grand Narrative Analysis

The first proposition is premised upon segmentation theory applied to the Australian labour market, in which individuals are regarded as members of groups occupying positions on a hierarchy of value according to gender, class and race/ethnicity/cultural difference (Inglis & Stromback 1984; Castles et al. 1988; King 1988; Pettman 1992). An allocated position impacts upon the labour market opportunities and rewards that an individual is likely to experience. In this theory, white, middle class, native English-speaking males occupy the highest echelon, under which sit their female counterparts, and so on down through different cultural/ethnic groups, until indigenous men and women provide the lowest echelons of the model (King 1988; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988; Chapman & Iredale 1990; Collins 1991; Nott 1999). KMW in this conception sit below their male counterparts, above indigenous groups and below white Australian groups. The combination of physical, cultural and linguistic differences of a KMW compared with a white Australian male are likely to be compounded and experienced as labour market disadvantage.

Grand narrative analysis of the first proposition therefore asks whether or not this is true or useful for the KMW in this research sample. Because this research employs narrative analysis as its key tool, it is the perspectives of the KMW in the sample group that are examined. This means that two KMW might explain a similar experience of labour market disadvantage in different terms: one appealing to a segmentation theory approach of embedded racism and sexism (Bacchi 1990; Collins 1991; Pettman 1992; Castle et al. 1996; Nott 1999) and another to a human capital approach of inadequate skills (Mincer 1974; Becker 1975; Psacharopoulos 1996). This research accepts that the truths of labour market disadvantage may be difficult to ultimately establish, but searches for evidence of current grand narratives as useful in explaining experience. That is, it is not the truth of the grand narrative so much as the truth of its utility to the individual that this research seeks to deliver.
Chapter 10: Narrative Analysis of Two Propositions

The first proposition is described as different in nature to the second proposition and more difficult to support or refute completely, in that it focuses upon a wider and highly interpretive notion of ‘identity’ rather than particular designated skills. Notions such as gender, culture, sexism and racism remain difficult to define and their boundaries are constantly shifting. In addition, progress in these areas is generally made as collectives, and the individual is conceptualised as a victim with little unique agency against the larger segmented social structure (Game 1984; Markus & Rickfels 1985; de Lepervanche 1989; Pettman 1992; Nott 1999; Castles 2000). Grand narrative analysis therefore searches for examples of KMW explaining labour market disadvantage in terms of their identities as members of a group that is not the highest echelon in a segmented labour market.

Grand narrative analysis is used to examine the KMW life stories of members of all five groups participating in the study. It shows that Group II KMW, who are ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ are the only group that ostensibly and directly support the first proposition of gender and cultural barriers, as shown in Chapter 6.

With regard to the first proposition of gender and cultural barriers, Group IV KMW, who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and Group V KMW, who were ‘career oriented in Korea and Australia’ refute the proposition by virtue of their Australian labour market participation. Group I KMW, who was ‘never career oriented’, finds it irrelevant. Group I KMW is different from Group II KMW who wants to participate in the labour market but cannot do that because of their caring role for their children and parents-in-law. Also Group I KMW are different from Group III KMW, who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’ because of their family circumstances. Here, however, the analysis reveals that Group I KMW who were ‘never career oriented’ indicate a degree of ‘hidden’ support, despite appearing to find it irrelevant. Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’ appear to refute the first proposition but also provide evidence of ‘hidden’ support.
Chapter 10: Narrative Analysis of Two Propositions

The Group I KMW, for whom the first grand narrative is rendered irrelevant, experienced no barriers to participation. However, the segmentation consideration of the relationship of gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation is more complex and more deeply embedded than that of human capital considerations. Gender and cultural phenomena may be the source of the lack of desire and need to participate in the labour market, or even the possibility of considering it (Han 1985; Yun 1987; Palley 1992; Park 1996; Cho 1998; Hampson 2000). A Group I KMW who regards labour market participation as shameful or outside the scope of her possible world does so on the basis of her identity as a middle class Korean wife and mother with a nominal education, the legacy of parental expectations, and a husband who embraces and performs the role of provider (see Kim 1988; Palley 1992; Park 1996; Hampson 2000).

The lack of desire or aspiration to participate in the workforce represents not only a cultural difference, but also the relevance of time in history, when social norms for the middle class did not embrace the likelihood of married women’s participation in the labour market (Han 1985; Yun 1987; Palley 1992; Park 1996). Moving across cultures, time and space, she discovered that the role for which she had been groomed did not exist in Australia, where her social participation became limited to volunteer groups and the church. The social phenomena and circumstances that presented barriers to labour market participation in Australia for KMW in Group I who were ‘never career oriented’ include culture, class, time in history, education and the financial resources of their husbands. Combined with these, traditional Korean notions of obedience to fathers and husbands as a feminine virtue ensure these KMW are unlikely either to wish to, or to attempt to seek an alternative lifestyle, such as one that includes labour market participation (Han 1985; Kim 1988; Choi 1994; Palley 1994; Cho 1998).

While a KMW may see no barriers to participation, the greatest and most insidious barrier lies in her accepted social construction in regard to gender and culture, a construction which may not allow participation to ever be considered. For KMW in Group I who were ‘never career oriented’, the gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation are rooted in their Korean past and carried with them to Australia.
where they remain unaltered. This supports the studies of Kim et al. (1992) and Shim (1999) describing the role of women and status in Korean society. Group I KMW who is ‘never career oriented’ therefore appear to find the first proposition irrelevant, but on closer examination support it. For this group, the proposition of labour market participation is unthinkable, but it is unthinkable precisely because of gender and cultural constructions. This proves a necessary difficulty in the construction of the first proposition: the position of groups in a segmented labour market may become so accepted and embedded that barriers to participation for certain groups may not be able to be discussed.

KMW in Group I, who were ‘never career oriented’, reveal an even more complex relationship with the first grand narrative in that they alternately find it irrelevant (i.e. with embedded support) and refute it. In the case of one group member, she describes a paradox of traditional gender and cultural demands where filial piety (the wishes of her mother-in-law) became the motivator for labour market activity. As she herself did not wish to work, or to embody any of the social messages created by working when married, but was obliged through her role as wife and daughter-in-law, she performs a feat of complex logic in order to come to terms with working for money. In order to satisfy her mother-in-law as per her filial duty through performing a skilled, paid and taxed role outside the home and yet not regard herself as a ‘working wife’, she describes the role as ‘not work’. This life story reflects accurately Palley’s (1994) and Hampson’s (2000) characterisations of the impact of Korea’s rapid political and socioeconomic development upon the opportunities for women still constrained by traditional Confucian thought, struggling with competing imperatives of necessity and historical femininity. This reveals an ongoing utility of segmentation theory for describing non-participation in the labour market, even when that non-participation may be by choice, and how the grand narrative may lose utility and be discarded when describing participation in some other chosen activity.

Chapter 6 examined the life stories of KMW in Group II, who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’. All three KMW highlighted in this chapter
affirmed the first grand narrative. By definition, the members of this group experience thwarted or unfulfilled desire to participate in the labour market, and in this research gender and cultural factors are strongly represented as reasons for non-participation (Choi 1994; Shim 1999; Hampson 2000). It is conceivable that there will come a time for Group II KMW when children are grown up, parents no longer require ongoing day-to-day assistance and the gender role may allow participation in the labour market. However, by this time they will be middle aged, with outdated qualifications and no or outdated labour market experience. Ueno (1994) writes that the result of this is that they are likely to be ‘cast into an inferior labour market’ or confined to voluntary activities.

Group II KMW who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ illustrate that the first grand narrative is the stronger of the two, and underlies all labour market decisions and possibilities in the first instance, but changes in impact over time. The first segmentation grand narrative must allow labour market participation at all, let alone delimiting types of acceptable roles, before the second human capital grand narrative may even be considered. Neither theory is complete in itself, each providing some for some aspect that the other ignores. As mentioned in Chapter 5, for KMW in Group I (‘never career oriented’) positions must be appropriate to a wife of a certain class, age and education once domestic duties have been discharged. Group I is constituted by the oldest KMW in the research sample and depicts the impact of importing traditional gender and cultural norms from one historical point in Korean cultural life to another in Australia as one of labour market unthinkable (Park 1976; Han 1985; Hampson 2000). Group II (‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’) is constituted by younger women with younger children and more recent education, and exposes the impacts of a universal gender issue of responsibility for childcare and filial duty. This group so strongly supports the grand narrative that no grand narrative applicable microstoria may be identified for them.

Chapter 7 examined the stories of KMW in Group III, who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’. Two of the three KMW featured appear to refute the first proposition by virtue of performing tasks in their husbands’ businesses, tasks which
contribute to the viability and financial success of those ventures. In this sense, they may regard themselves to be ‘working wives’ who are active members of the commercial world and undertake responsibilities outside the home and beyond child, parent and community care. However, in terms of organisational studies, these KMW have not attempted to become affiliated with mainstream Australian labour market organisations. Their work activities represent their wifely duty to their husbands rather than the application of their qualifications and interests to the Australian labour market. Despite their revenue-generating activities outside the home, these KMW cannot be described as satisfied or active affiliates of the Australian labour market, experiencing equality of opportunity. KMW in Group III are neither able to stay home as full-time mothers or housewives nor to attempt to participate in the mainstream labour market, placing them firmly between the first two and the last two groups. This is a result of the combination of gender and cultural roles, financial circumstances and the careers of their husbands, all segmentation realities that they are unable to change by themselves.

As shown in Chapters 8 and 9, KMW in Groups IV, who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and V, who were ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ — that is, KMW who either have participated or do participate in the Australian labour market — report no barriers to labour market access and thereby refute the proposition from the outset, contradicting its utility entirely. This is not to suggest that KMW who have entered the Australian labour market are immune to the labour market restrictions and impediments of gender and cultural phenomena, but these ongoing issues are examined as grand narrative applicable microstoria.

### 10.2 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Grand narrative applicable microstoria move beyond analysing the life stories of KMW in order to look for evidence to support or refute the segmentation theory grand narrative. Instead, this analysis type examines the life stories for evidence of shared stories relevant to the proposition, offering a subtler and more open space for discussion of the impact of gender, race and culture on the labour market experiences of KMW, and the utility of the
theory. Four microstories of the experience of gender and culture in the lives and labour market roles of KMW are identified: ‘Housework and childcare are women’s responsibilities’; ‘Middle class women do “decent” women’s jobs’; ‘Labour market participation depends on family circumstances’; and ‘Which culture?’.

10.2.1 Housework and childcare are women’s responsibilities

This microstory presents KMW as almost solely responsible for household tasks and particularly responsible for all child-rearing tasks. As shown in Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, the entire sample group all talked in terms relevant to this microstory, except KMW who did not have any children. This is a function of both gender and culture as per the segmentation model and the possibility of labour market participation may or may not be facilitated or allowed in moving to Australia. For some, the move to Australia opens new possibilities where life in Korea had proscribed any thoughts of labour market activities outside the home. Some maintain the same role regardless of country of residence and others may enjoy labour market participation but find that motherhood curtails their careers, despite reasonable salaries. Engagement with this microstory is most strongly exhibited through the acceptance and articulation of gender roles and the woman’s place in the home, commonly referred to in Korean as the ‘good wife and wise mother’ (Han 1985; Yun 1987; Ueno 1994; Park 1996; Shim 1999; Hampson 2000). The role of housewife and carer is described as natural and unpaid by many of the KMW in this study, a characteristic of the utility of a segmentation approach to society.

As described in Chapter 7, Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’ in this microstory, however, find that migration to Australia, deterioration of the health of their husbands, and financial failure may require that KMW seek work outside the home. In these cases, traditional gender roles are not entirely exchanged: domestic work performed by their husbands is regarded as ‘helping the KMW’ (Park 1996; Yun 1998, 1999; Shim 1999). No mention is made of husbands performing caring work. While the next generation and a new country of residence sees a change in the thinkability of labour market participation for KMW, no corresponding
reduction in the obligations of value of the traditional female role is in evidence. As per
the writing of Ueno (1994), while labour market perceptions and possibilities may change
for the KMW over time, the traditional role of the good wife and wise mother remains
unaltered and fundamental (Han 1985; Palley 1994; Choi 1994; Shim 1999; Hampson
2000). This illustrates the problem of segmentation theory in allowing little movement in
response to circumstantial demands, and how traditional segmentation realities may
continue to exist despite and alongside apparent changes. As Choi (1994) writes, Korean
female functions remain unchanged despite structural changes.

The presentation of traditional male and female roles remaining essentially unchanged
despite some change in activities is noticeable in many of the life stories of KMW.
Various logics are applied to explain how the roles may remain untouched despite the
change in activities. For example, a cultural relativist argument may be brought into
play, suggesting that these traditional roles are particularly or more strongly entrenched
for Koreans than other peoples (Choi 1994; Cho 1998). Another logic that is used to
explain the impermeability of the roles is to downplay or withhold recognition of labour
market participation in favour of approbation of domestic duties (Kim 1988; Choi 1994;
Palley 1994).

Another way of facilitating labour market participation of the KMW in Australia without
damaging or altering traditional gender roles is through the assistance of other women
in the family. This is done by importing the KMW’s own mother, often for a limited period
of time, to assist particularly with childcare, and does not require any modification of
traditional roles. This means that the KMW may participate in the labour market but she
will remain responsible for organising all aspects of childcare. This may be done by
deferral to others, but the performer of childcare is always a female member of the
family.

This microstory tells of KMW who must first and foremost ensure that the house and
family are cared for in their traditional gender roles as ‘good wives and wise mothers’
(Han 1985; Kim 1987; Yun 1987; Park 1996; Mun &Yun 2000). Once these
responsibilities have been taken care of, they may or may not be able to participate in the labour market, but this is the fundamental microstory of KMW in Australia. Some of the KMW in this study are not represented here, which may be explained by them not yet having children and leaving the question of the balance of home and family largely untested. Thus KMW are not necessarily prevented from labour market participation because of being Korean women, but they maintain a double burden of responsibility if they do participate in the labour market. Segmentation theory is inadequate, and limited in utility for explaining their experiences, but continues to resonate nonetheless.

10.2.2 Labour Market Participation Depends on Family Circumstances

The second microstory identified from the life stories of the KMW in this study builds upon the first microstory, accepting both that home and family care will remain largely the KMW’s responsibility but that these demands will change over time. As shown in Chapters 6 and 7, Group II KMW who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ and Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’ all talked in terms relevant to this microstory. As children mature, leave or start school, parents recover health or pass away, and husbands succeed or fail in business, many KMW find they have more or less opportunity to participate in activities outside the home. This involves the notion of circular time for all women, accepting that labour market participation may occur at different times and in different ways, and that any exit and return is likely to involve reduced opportunity. This supports the findings of Game and Pringle (1979) and Poole (1984) that women in Australia are constrained by invisible constraints and spend time reproducing and supporting the workforce. This means that women in Australia who perform tasks that support the wellbeing of husbands and children are contributing to the workforce by sustaining other workers. It is their domestic support that facilitates the labour market participation of their family members.

This issue further touches upon Ueno’s (1994) writing concerning the fate of middle aged women returning to work after preparing their children for labour market participation to find themselves ‘cast into an inferior labour market’, where the only opportunities may be
voluntary or community based. One KMW response evident here is to make virtuous the fluctuating ‘revolving door’ nature of much of their labour market participation, participating at some times and not at others rather than pursuing linear career development. This is also the subject of the third microstory below.

The life stories of KMW in Groups II and III reveal this microstory as illustrating the changing and moving circumstances surrounding KMW in Australia. An alternative feminine virtue appears to be constructed amongst this group, which values adaptation and responsiveness, and ability to support the family in any necessary way at any time and to then move on when circumstances change (Mun & Yun 2000; Ahn, Lim, Jung & Lee 2001). This microstory also reinterprets the role of the ‘wise mother’ to allow her to participate in the labour market and provide financially for her children rather than performing domestic tasks. This microstory describes KMW as always involved in the labour market to some degree, either directly participating at the moment or supporting and training the labour market value and possibilities of husbands and children, reflecting the views of Curthoys (1979, 1985). This critiques the segmentation theory of the labour market by questioning how the labour market should be defined and considering a wider range of socially significant activities as contributions to social cohesion and national productivity. In highlighting female roles in families as both flexible and essential, this microstory acknowledges the utility of segmentation theory for describing lower female values, but argues that it is ultimately inadequate if women provide essential family support and economic participation to support others into the labour market.

10.2.3 Middle class women must do ‘decent’ women’s jobs

The third microstory also invokes the traditional role of the ‘good wife and wise mother’, taking care of the health and wellbeing of her family, and introduces an aspect of status. As exposed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, Group I KMW who were ‘never career oriented’, Group II KMW who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’, and Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’, almost all talked in terms relevant to this microstory. For the middle class KMW, work
undertaken outside the home should involve the values and activities of her traditional role and be performed in a ‘professional and respectable’ or ‘decent’ environment (Cho 1997; Mun & Yun 2001). While the Korean male value is concerned primarily with earning the maximum he can in order to fulfil his role as provider, the KMW describes the types of jobs she will do in terms that will not conflict with her traditional gender role, and indeed extend it beyond the home (Palley 1994; Cho 1998). As noted above, this may be regarded as making virtuous the community and voluntary roles that may only be open to KMW returning to work after periods of childcare. However, even non-voluntary or community jobs are discussed in terms of being ‘decent’ or ‘good’. Most often, the virtuous compromise is found in teaching or counselling, and sometimes in translating/interpreting work or volunteer activities. A discourse of mothering, nurturing and helping as appropriate for a woman is ever present, extending traditionally womanly virtues and talents to those in need, in and outside the home.

While it may be thinkable to participate in the labour market, this is on the provision that that participation is unambitious, beneficial to society or to the KMW’s personal development and where payment appears to be something of a gesture. This supports Yi’s (1998) view that male work is regarded as more important than female work and is the source of social mobility for women. It also supports Kim’s (1992) assertions that middle class Korean wives who work are stigmatised, and Shim’s (1999) findings that women’s paid work is trivialised as self-development.

When financially supported by her husband, a KMW has no obligation to work but is mindful of maintaining her social position: a ‘middle class burden’. For KMW whose husbands establish businesses and require their support, the demands of filial piety and servitude to their husbands are balanced by not suffering the indignity of having to perform such work for somebody outside the family. Nevertheless, these women are the most likely to resent their jobs, which may involve manual work, long hours and tasks beneath their social expectations. Some KMW find themselves pulled between the demands of filial piety and their social expectations, forced either to choose or compromise.
For KMW who need to contribute finances to the family in order to survive, jobs such as translating and interpreting draw upon her social capital and allow her to maintain her self-esteem in performing an educated and acceptable labour market role (Palley 1994; Cho 1998). However, the cultural and economic value of translation and interpreting ensure that these KMW are trapped into a ‘feminine’ segment of the labour market that is often part-time, casual or itinerant and limited in earning capacity. Thus the KMW who overcomes the ‘middle class burden’ through linguistic proficiency finds herself performing the ‘women’s work’ of the Australian labour market. This microstory supports a segmentation theory of the labour market, albeit adding the complexity of class considerations to the female gender position.

10.2.4 Which culture?

The life stories of KMW in this study describe numerous situations and understandings that may be regarded as indicative of life within different organisational cultures: Korean workplace culture, Australian workplace culture, community culture, family culture and the prevailing political and economic culture. Group IV KMW who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and Group V KMW who were ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’, almost all talked in terms relevant to this microstory. Whichever ‘culture’ the KMW might be describing at one particular moment involves an aspect of gender and of hierarchy.

This microstory reveals that the traditional Korean female gender role continues to be played out in workplaces in Australia. For example, a Group IV KMW who was ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ describes her workplace in terms that indicate patriarchal sensibilities, and in which she employs the language and attitudes of submission, gratitude and respect. This KMW also describes the mention of domestic responsibilities or her communication concerns as unprofessional, bothersome to her employer and demeaning to herself. The result of this is an inability to negotiate employment terms that allow the KMW to perform the tasks she needs to or to achieve a
realistic work/life balance. This may be regarded as an aspect of a (perhaps now bygone) Korean education that, from childhood, did not allow the asking of questions and humiliated those who spoke out to or against elders or superiors (Han 1985; Park 1996).

Cultural difference or distance can also impact upon the KMW experience in the workplace. Some KMW simultaneously condemn and understand Australian workplaces for their treatment of migrant Korean women as both victims and troublemakers (Game 1984; Thornton 1990; Collins 1991; Viviani 1992; Nott 1999). These KMW describe their experiences of racial discrimination as strongest within Asian sub-communities, each fighting for a position of proximity to the Australian mainstream. Similarly, they describe sexual discrimination as most apparent within Korean community groups and organisations.

Thus, a KMW who participates in Korean community, an Australian labour market organisation, and performs home duties and family responsibilities may find herself experiencing a gendered position in several different ‘cultures’ in any one day. Focusing on the labour market, different cultures may be seen in different industries, roles and sectors. For example, one KMW describes the impact of moving from a private sector organisation, where competition and productivity demands saw her describe her workplace in patriarchal terms, to the public sector where she felt more comfortable and stayed for a longer period.

This microstory is helpful in exposing organisational culture to be as significant as ethnically based culture and recognising that organisational culture varies across industries, roles and individual organisations (Frost 1987; Deetz 1992; Alvesson & Deetz 2000; Alvesson 2004). KMW move between numerous cultures, constantly negotiating their positions as women, at times more equal or powerful and at others silenced or unrecognised. The utility of the notion of cultural difference in segmentation theory is at once recognised and problematised: its significance is illustrated in numerous ways by KMW in this sample group, but the breadth of its expression means that it cannot be simply discussed or addressed. The notion of culture remains undefined and readily
becomes an indicator of disadvantage and difference from a nominated mainstream, rather than a satisfactory explanation.

### 10.2.5 Proposition 1: Interpreting the Results

This proposition is rooted in segmentation theory that regards KMW as positioned lower on a labour market hierarchy than white, Australian-born males. Grand narrative analysis illustrates that this position is not sufficient to prevent all labour market participation, but that the nature of that participation is likely to be fractured, compromised and responsive to other demands, particularly nurturing and domestic tasks.

Group II KMW who was ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ is the only group that outwardly supports the first proposition. It is otherwise refuted by Group IV KMW who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and Group V KMW who were ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’. It is also found irrelevant by Group I KMW who were ‘never career oriented’ and apparently refuted but covertly supported by Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’. Given that only one of the five groups supports the proposition, its utility and the segmentation grand narrative upon which it is based must be questioned. The segmentation grand narrative is revealed to continue to hold some utility and relevance for some KMW at particular times, but is not exclusively drawn upon to explain labour market disadvantage. This grand narrative analysis shows that gender and cultural issues change over time for KMW to allow certain types of behaviour and activity at some times and not at others, and are not always barriers so much as restraints and considerations. This analysis presents gender and cultural issues for KMW in Australia as either outright prohibitive, covertly preventative or negotiable. This broader range of possible impacts of belonging to a group that occupies one particular segment of the labour market is best explicated through grand narrative applicable microstoria.

Four grand narrative applicable microstoria are identified here, together telling a shared story of KMW as responsible for all housework and domestic tasks regardless of other
activities and contributions to the family, mindful of the symbolic impact of their activities upon the ‘face’ of the family around whom their lives are determined, and living within a range of cultures beyond being a Korean woman. Most of all this suggests that Korean women struggle with traditional Korean demands upon women which are unchanged in Australia, and that Australian workplaces and society constitute cultures that complicate their positions. Therefore, traditional gender demands combine with current Australian practices to create a complex web of inequality for KMW. These microstories provide evidence for the ongoing utility and relevance of segmentation theory in discussing KMW in the Australian labour market, but highlight the complexities and inadequacies of a simplistic understanding of the theory.

Where grand narrative analysis disproves the proposition overall, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis offers alternative understandings of the proposition which is discussed in Chapter 11.

10.3 Proposition 2 and Grand Narrative Analysis

The second proposition is based upon a human capital theory conceptualisation of the Australian labour market, in which individuals ideally realise the returns of their investment in skill development and qualification acquisition in the form of labour market opportunities (Mincer 1974; Becker 1975; Psacharopolous 1996). Rooted in notions of objective and measurable merit, human capital theory presents these skills as independent of race, culture or gender and theoretically achievable by members of all social groups with access to training and education. English language competence is regarded in this theory in terms of a skill that can be acquired and is justified as necessary for communication in Australian workplaces. According to this theory, those who do not have strong English language skills are likely to find fewer opportunities in the Australian labour market and this situation may be improved by developing stronger English language skills (Stromback 1988; Wooden 1994; Watson 1996; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002).
Grand narrative analysis of the second proposition asks whether or not it is true that for the KMW in this research sample a lack of English language skills leads to fewer opportunities. The immediate problem is in defining what ‘strong English language skills’ are and who is in a position to decide this. Perhaps this could be defined with regard to English language test results, the assessment of employers or the impressions of the KMW in this study of their own English language abilities. Without a single, unproblematic measurement and measurer of English language skill, it is the questioning of the skill, the suggestion of a lack thereof that becomes significant. Native speakers of English, whatever their communicative talents, do not have to defend their English language abilities while those of other native languages are essentially categorised as non-English-speaking-background (NESB). As non-native speakers of English, NESB migrants are always vulnerable to the charge of inadequate English language skills regardless of their linguistic achievements. NESB migrants are therefore subject to linguistic assessment and a questioning of overall communicative ability in a way that native English speakers in Australia are not. In this way, human capital theory embeds covert discrimination against NESB migrants within its own terms, even while it denies it in appealing to a concept of attainable merit over birthright.

This research contends that any NESB migrant in Australia is subject to linguistic interrogation and suspicion, and as the ideal of competence is that of the native English speaker, will always be found wanting. As such, no attempt at an objective measurement of English language skill is made here, although reference to achievements in Australian educational institutions may be made to provide evidence of the use of English by KMW in the sample group. Rather, the decision is made to regard all the KMW in the sample group as NESB migrants and therefore without ‘strong’ (i.e., native) English language skills. This decision is taken in recognition of the role of language in maintaining the dominance of particular groups in society (see Said 1978; Bourdieu 1991). Those KMW who do find labour market positions in Australia therefore refute the proposition from the outset. For those who do not find labour market positions, the question is then whether this is a function of the proposition, or whether other factors are significant. As
mentioned for the first proposition, under examination is the utility of the proposition in describing experience, so the question relies upon the perception of the KMW of her English language ability and how important it is to her labour market participation.

Grand narrative analysis shows that only Group II KMW who was ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ appears to support the second proposition that English language is a barrier to participation in the labour market. Group IV KMW who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and Group V KMW who were ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ refute the proposition by virtue of their Australian labour market participation. Group I KMW who were ‘never career oriented’ and Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’ find it irrelevant as other factors such as their family financial circumstances and husband’s sickness come to the fore in describing labour market issues.

Group I KMW who were ‘never career oriented’ do not describe English language barriers as preventing them from accessing the Australian labour market since they do not espouse any substantial interest, need or desire to participate in it. Without any interest in labour market participation, the notion of barriers or difficulties is rendered irrelevant. If labour market participation represents a form of voluntary affiliation in civil society and the KMW does not need or wish to volunteer, it is difficult to consider their life stories as either confirming or refuting either proposition. It would not be true for either Group I or Group III KMW to say that English language ability, or lack thereof, prevents them from finding positions in the Australian labour market. Group I KMW who do not wish to participate in the labour market despite their qualifications and human capital provide an argument against the neoclassical human capital theory that typifies labour market participation and productivity gains as the success story of migration policy and the realisation of human investment in education (Bourdieu 1981, 1984, 1991; Nee & Sanders 2001). Rather, the question of barriers in labour market affiliation on the basis of insufficient human capital is irrelevant. Nevertheless, at least one of the life stories displays a recognition and acceptance of a human capital relationship between labour market affiliation and English language proficiency. This suggests that while the logic of
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the proposition cannot be said to hold true in terms of primary causality, evidence of the acceptance of the human capital grand narrative is apparent. This acceptance is discussed in more detail through microstoria analysis below.

As shown in Chapter 6, Group II KMW who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ are interested in participating in the labour market, but two of the three women whose life stories are examined in that chapter describe English language barriers as frustrating their attempts at participation, as per the human capital approach. The third woman is not interested in participating at the moment but may be at some time in the future, so all three women provide evidence of confirmation of the second proposition. A KMW in this group describes performing a regular, skilled, paid and taxed activity that she does not regard as labour market participation because she conducted her tasks in the Korean language. Group II KMW provide support for Bourdieu’s concepts of domination through the language of the mainstream (Bourdieu 1991, 2000), so that tasks not performed in English are devalued by society as a whole, including those who perform them. Rather than arguing for the status of her non-English-based position to be improved, this KMW describes her tasks, and therefore her NESB clients, as ‘unreal’. In this way, evidence is provided of the ‘euphemised, legitimised fraud’ of demanding English to be the medium of communication that is accepted as natural and justified by dominant and dominated groups alike (Bourdieu 1991). This provides a further critique of the notion of English proficiency as a human capital consideration, in which the objective human capital is mediated by cultural revaluation, sometimes referred to as human cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991; Nee & Sanders 2001).

Non-native Australian English does not prevent the KMW from becoming affiliated, but regulates and limits the level at which she will be recognised and remunerated, and who her immediate colleagues will be. A KMW describes the social contract in which she accepts the trade-off and devaluation of qualifications and experience as factual, unchangeable and the status quo, an expression in line with human cultural capital theory. English language difference in this group is described as directly associated with under-
employment and over supervision, especially in relation to pedantic, arbitrary or irrelevant issues. This experience of the lower value of Korean qualifications in the Australian labour market substantiates Iredale’s (1993) claims that qualifications are subject to a hierarchy of preferences by country, in which Asian qualifications are often disregarded. This may also be considered in terms of the institutionalised racism described by Pettman (1992) and as a reaction to globalisation (Castles & Vasta 1996).

Another Group II KMW describes English language classes as the essential first step in a future strategy towards achieving a position in the Australian labour market. No other strategies are discussed, and the link between English language classes and employment is not elaborated: there is an implicit belief that labour market participation requires English language skills and that studying English is a necessary precondition for labour market affiliation. For this KMW, English is the only barrier to labour market affiliation that she imagines once her parenting duties have been fulfilled.

The narratives of Group II KMW describe English language barriers to desired labour market participation and thus reflect arguments (Hawthorne 1994; Watson 1996; Collins 1996; Young 1997; Creese & Kambere 2002) that NESB migrant women are likely to experience higher levels of labour market disadvantage than other Australian women or men on the basis of their linguistic difference. These KMW have chosen to withdraw from the labour market as they define it, rather than describe themselves as unemployed or to become self-employed, and are thus rendered statistically invisible. These KMW subjectively regard their English language skills as insufficient for labour market affiliation. This perception is supported by evidence in the literature that the primary barrier for NESB women being accepted by employers is the employer’s assessment of pronunciation as a significant indicator of communicative ability (Hawthorne 1994; Watson 1996; Young 1997). The literature describes the focus on English language as throwing the responsibility of disadvantage onto the migrant, particularly women prevented by home duties (not recognised as labour market affiliation) from furthering their English studies (Alcorso 1991). The Group II KMW who was ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ has accepted this responsibility and do not
challenge the validity of a focus upon English as a labour market precondition for affiliation. They aspire to professional or semi-professional roles, signifiers of higher levels of affiliation, more likely to be subject to competition and thereby to employer preferences for applicants who can ‘sell’ themselves in English.

As revealed in Chapter 7, Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’ participate in their husband’s businesses, assisting in some capacity, whether or not they regard themselves as participants in the Australian labour force. This again highlights the distinction between the performance of work activities that support families, either financially or otherwise, and Australian labour market affiliation. Where affiliation refers to symbolic and mutual recognition of KMW by mainstream civil society, the Group III KMW must be regarded as unaffiliated despite their long hours and the necessity of their work. These KMW express no link between their English language skills and their lack of attempts to become affiliated with the Australian labour market. For Group III KMW, as for Group I KMW, the second proposition of an English language barrier is thus irrelevant, as it is not possible to describe affiliation difficulties on the basis of English as either confirmed or refuted. This does not mean that they do not experience English-language-related difficulties in their day-to-day work, and these are addressed as grand narrative applicable microstoria.

Evidenced in Chapters 8 and 9, Group IV KMW who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and Group V KMW who were ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ are already affiliated with the Australian labour market. This fact of affiliation refutes the proposition from the outset and their human capital investment appears to be realised. However, issues beyond initial acceptance by labour market organisations for members of these groups continue and give the lie to human capital theory as adequate. These ongoing issues are further discussed as grand narrative applicable microstoria below.
10.4 Grand narrative applicable microstoria

Grand narrative applicable microstoria allow exploration of the insidious and covert issues that continue beyond labour market access or affiliation, and accept that while a KMW may now be in paid employment, she may have experienced English language barriers in the past. This section also gives consideration to expressions of English language issues for KMW who express no need or desire to participate, but who, should they suddenly find themselves needing or wishing to work, may draw upon vicarious and latent barriers, and KMW who wish to participate in society on some basis other than the labour market. These microstories illustrate how the human capital grand narrative continues to be useful to KMW in explaining labour market disadvantage despite achieving labour market affiliation, or a rejection of affiliation.

Four microstories are identified in this section, accepting that there is some crossover between them but that they provide the neatest summation of major issues identified through microstoria analysis regarding English language and the Australian labour market. The four microstories are ‘English, it’s my problem’; ‘My workplace problems are English problems’; ‘Communication technology exacerbates my English problems in the workplace’; and ‘Good English gets me a bad job’. It should be remembered that the pronoun (‘me’) in these microstory titles refers to a generalised KMW drawn from individual life stories.

10.4.1 English, it’s my problem

This microstory includes two concepts or expressions: self-assessment of English language ability as low and an acceptance of the full responsibility of the burden of two-way communication. In this microstory, English is referred to as both problematic and located within the KMW: ‘my problem’. This is indicative of Game’s (1984), Thornton’s (1990) and Nott’s (1999) critiques of human capital theory as blaming the victim, which is then accepted by the victim as her rightful responsibility. With regard to the
‘problem’, members of all five groups of KMW examined in the study self-assess their English language skills to be poor or low, regardless of any objective measure. This universal assessment is regardless of the need or desire to participate in the labour market. This self-assessment may be affected by the vicarious negative experience of family members in the labour market whom they feel to have stronger English language skills than themselves. Vicarious experience builds and reinforces ideas of English language barriers and issues in Australian workplaces, with two significant impacts. The first is to ensure that the KMW is unlikely to develop a desire to participate in the Australian labour market. Without any desire to participate, the notion of a barrier is rendered irrelevant. However, should a need or desire to participate develop, the second impact is an existing cache of already understood barriers to labour market participation, currently latent, but able to be invoked at any time. When the vicarious experience is through their husband, who is better educated, more experienced and more competent in English, the KMW is likely to believe that if her husband has difficulties, she would have even greater difficulties. This belief is not unreasonable in light of literature and statistics which repeatedly show male earnings, rates and levels of labour market participation in real numbers to be higher than that of women, and of NESB migrant women to be even lower, as per segmentation theory (Inglis & Stromback 1984; Wooden & Robertson 1989; Collins 1996; Watson 1996).

In Chapter 5, a Group I KMW who was ‘never career oriented’ describes her own English as a barrier for which she holds all responsibility. She describes her English language skills as sufficient to allow her to acquire a postgraduate qualification at an Australian university, but insufficient for general, mainstream social interactions, including humour. Disappointed that her apparently proven English language ability did not ensure satisfying communication, this KMW defines the double burden of two-way communication as resting wholly with the non-native English speaker (see Colic-Peisker 2002; Creese & Kambere 2002).

This description of two-way communication as a one-way problem is in accordance with the views of O’Loughlin and Watson (1997) that English language skills are
overemphasised and that this highlights a misplaced focus upon the defined ‘weaknesses’ of certain individuals rather than systemic social problems (Colic-Peisker 2002; Creese & Kambere 2002). The individual KMW who has made considerable attempts to learn English remains outside the mainstream despite her achievements, solely responsible for her difference. Realisation of the returns on investment and achievement in an apparently objective skill is more problematic than human capital theory suggests, when the social experience remains one of exclusion and inferiority. A Group V KMW who was ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ describes her different accent, geographical and historical knowledge as her problem, linguistic difference heralding cultural difference and misfit, again illustrating the cultural modification of human capital.

The double burden of communication is borne by a KMW seeking to maintain her position in the labour market organisation, for whom communication skills display a ‘right’ to a position and permit participation in social and collegiate activities (Young 1997; Colic-Peisker 2002; Creese & Kambere 2002). Many KMW in this research describe their English language skills as directly related to not ‘fitting in’ in the workplace, and that this barrier to social participation is also a barrier to labour market participation. This includes social activities such as after-work drinks or lunch companions, as well as social interaction at the water cooler or the photocopier. One KMW with previous work experience describes English language difference and a resulting lack of social inclusion as a major difficulty in coping with working life, despite having attended university in Australia.

In this microstory, barriers that are specifically language related and those which might equally be related to other factors, such as organisational hierarchies or workplace cultures are not delineated: all workplace difficulties are associated with difference from other colleagues, a difference most obvious in English language difference (Tait et al. 1990; Eveline 1994; Watson 1996; Burnett 1998). This attribution of English language difference as the singular and unapproachable source of social disadvantage reiterates findings in the literature regarding NESB migrants: focusing upon linguistic difference de-emphasises numerous other factors of difference, such as age, gender, cultural
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background and appearance, as per the segmentation model (Hawthorne 1994; Watson 1996; Collins 1996). ‘Proper language skills’ may be regarded here as a euphemism for being Australian born.

The double burden of communication carries with it both low self-assessment of English skills and assessment by others in the workplace. KMW describe having their English language skills constantly evaluated by supervisors, colleagues, clients, managers and performance reviewers, on points often not relevant to the performance of tasks. None of these informal language assessors were qualified assessors and all were subject to political, economic and structural workplace realities, neither disinterested nor objective. The phenomenon of policing the marginalised to maintain the dominant culture under the guise of genuine communicative requirements is addressed by Bourdieu (1992) and in the discussion of Orientalism by Said (1978). Even in the absence of negative feedback, many KMW describe feeling assessed as having poor English and incorporating this into a self-assessment of poor linguistic skills and therefore lower order claims to social and labour market inclusion. English language ability cannot be satisfactorily considered an objective skill, and its formulation as a human capital consideration divorced from segmentation realities provides little scope for meaningful discussion of the experience of a NESB migrant in Australia.

10.4.2 My workplace problems are English problems

The life stories of virtually all the KMW who participate in the labour market are relevant to this microstory, in particular Group III KMW who were ‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’, those in Group IV KMW who were ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and those in Group V KMW who were ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’. One of these KMW reflects on how a KMW may cope with the stresses of communicating in English in her workplace, often with clients or customers, for an extended period (five years) and then find them too difficult to cope with and resign. It appears that in these situations coping skills are worn down (Hawthorne 1994; Watson 1996). Regardless of how many years of experience attest to her ability to
perform a job using English to communicate with mainstream Australians, this KMW describes English as the main problem. Although the arduousness of the work is described in terms of the ‘different kinds of people’ to be served, English remains the complicating, insurmountable issue. Another KMW defines her lack of knowledge of specialised medical and pharmaceutical vocabularies as an English language difficulty in her work, revealing once again how English language skill constitutes an ill-defined, umbrella term, within which other issues are obscured. A KMW may find herself working within a specific industry, involving technical or specialised vocabularies unfamiliar to many native English speakers. In this situation, one KMW describes her English as poor because she may not know specific terms, where a native speaker would not have defined this as an English language problem but one of industrial knowledge.

As per the nature of problems, they are discussed only when noticed and otherwise disappear. A Group V KMW who was ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ describes numerous workplace problems of English-language-related shame, difficulty and exclusion in one role and organisation but not in another, despite no objective change in her linguistic ability. After working for a competitive IT company and suffering a nervous and physical collapse due to work stress, much of which she relates to English problems, she decided to take a less stressful position in the public service, where her English problems appear to have receded. For a Group IV KMW who was ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’, with similar or even lower English language abilities, English is not mentioned as a workplace difficulty, and the challenges of her role are significant. The nature of her role is nurturing and rewarding in terms other than economic or of organisational progression. It is the lack of mention of English-related differences that is noteworthy here in the context of a public organisation, a role of social significance and a client base of similarly non-native English speakers and their children.

This microstory provides evidence of the utility of the proposition in describing and explaining labour market difficulties. Even KMW with no need or desire to participate in the labour market recognise its utility and contribute relevant stories. However, evidence of utility does not prove the proposition to be true, merely that the grand narrative is
widely understood and internalised, and its prevalence creates a self-fulfilment of itself. If KMW subscribe to this theory and believe that their English is always inferior, all workplace issues may be regarded through this lens of self-perceived linguistic inferiority (Said 1978). This highlights once again the insidious nature of human capital theory in providing a simplistic explanation for the workplace difficulties of NESB migrants.

10.4.3 Communication Technology exacerbates my English problems in the Workplace

Many KMW describe their workplace difficulties related to the use of the telephone or email. More than half of Group II KMW (‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’), Group IV KMW (‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’) and Group V KMW (‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’) talked in terms relevant to this microstory. This microstory is another complicating factor in the ongoing effort to communicate in English, described in terms of communication technology that mediates human-to-human interaction through telephonic or electronic devices. Rapid communication technology advances of the last decade and changes to organisational practices have seen greater import placed upon cultural linguistic competence in the workplace (Cope & Kalantzis 1997). The disadvantage of communication technology such as email and teleconferencing is that it provides less extra-linguistic information (such as body language) and creates more stress in the KMW’s communicative endeavour.

This microstory represents a current exacerbation of the considerations raised in the preceding two microstories. Cope and Kalantzis (1997) provide a relevant argument that a shift away from the traditional and formal memo and notice towards faster and informal email communication impacts negatively upon NESB migrant workers. The speed and informality facilitated by technology can make daily exchanges more difficult for these workers, requiring higher levels of cultural linguistic skill. This microstory supports their argument.
10.4.4 Good English gets me a bad job

Of the KMW whose life stories were examined in Group III (‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’) and Group IV (‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’), more than half talked in terms relevant to this microstory. Many of the sample group reveal that high levels of tested and acknowledged English language proficiency will qualify a KMW for labour market positions within Australian organisations, as per the values of human capital theory. However, segmentation theory becomes justified as it is shown that those ‘won’ positions are likely to be itinerant, casual, ad hoc, part-time, lacking in career or salary progression and performed mainly by women (Alcorso 1991; Collins 1996; Watson 1996).

This situation reflects the segmentation of the Australian labour market described by Collins (Collins 1978, 1996; Chapman & Miller 1985; Castles et al. 1986; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988), placing NESB women only above indigenous Australians in labour market terms. While these roles require qualifications, responsibility, skills and training as characteristic of the ‘primary labour market’, they are poorly paid, over-represented by migrant women and offer few career prospects as per the ‘secondary labour market’.

This supports Castles and Miller’s (1993) finding that higher standards of education and English language are not sufficient for the NESB immigrant to gain access to the primary labour market. Alcorso and Harrison (1993) also point to NESB migrant women as most vulnerable to industrial relations changes and award restructuring. In this literature all NESB migrant women are lumped together regardless of their English language proficiency, country of origin, qualifications and their different work and life experiences.

The irony of proficiency in a skill (English language) that is both an essential criterion for labour market access in Australia and the delimiting factor in career progression and conditions is addressed by Bourdieu (1992). The concurrent insistence upon, and devaluation of, English language skills may be considered in terms of Bourdieu’s description of a dominant culture that justifies dividing and stratifying groups in the name
of the communication function. In this way, English language becomes both the tool for unification with the mainstream and for separation, defining all sub-cultures in terms of their distance from the native English speaker. This is particularly illustrated in the stories describing a hierarchy of Englishes from Australian to British and American and other ‘native’ Englishes, to the second-hand English as a second language of Asia (see Creese & Kambere 2002). Thus for KMW there is not so much an issue of ‘poor’ English but ‘wrong’ or ‘distant’ English, and KMW find their physical difference from the mainstream compounds this distance.

The achievement of a qualification specifically addressing English language proficiency (such as NAATI accreditation) is insufficient to overcome the tendency towards self-assessment of English language skills as ‘poor’ or inadequate. KMW reveal that their estimation of their own English language skills as low is linked to a lack of financial reward and career progression. English language skills are not measured by KMW in terms of their objective linguistic skill or comprehension, but in terms of their experiences of labour market opportunities and values. In line with Bourdieu’s (1992) observation, this indicates an awareness that the true skill is to be a native English speaker, and increased English language proficiency serves to highlight rather than reduce the distance from the dominant culture. This is perhaps best considered in terms of a human cultural capital critique, giving the lie to objective notions of English language skill.

10.4.5 Proposition 2: Interpreting the Results

This second proposition is rooted in human capital theory that regards KMW as the beneficiaries of their investment in skills development, including English language proficiency. Grand narrative analysis reveals that English language difference from the Australian mainstream is not sufficient to prevent all labour market participation, apparently disproving the proposition overall. However, the impact of linguistic difference upon the workplace experiences of KMW in Australia is generally negative and secondary to the performance of tasks. Further, the combination of linguistic,
physical and gender differences may ensure KMW remain within particular sectors of the labour market, often with limited career progression or financial reward.

Only one out of the five groups, Group II who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’, confirms the second proposition, all others either refuting or finding it irrelevant. This finding must question the utility of studies and statistics based on human capital theory that focus upon English language skill as an objective and meaningful explanation of labour market barriers for KMW or NESB migrants. Human capital theory is found to have very high utility amongst the members of the sample group in describing experience and justifying decisions and perceptions, but closer examination reveals that the utility is not based in necessary truth. In this way, the human capital grand narrative constitutes a highly subscribed fiction, which reinforces it as an a priori truth. This analysis presents English language skills as impossible to objectively measure or achieves, as they are consistently revalued by cultural concerns, the segmentation realities that human capital theory denies. As linguistic difference is the hallmark of ‘otherness’, English language skills are shown to symbolically embrace a large range of issues related to cultural acceptance and belonging (Bourdieu 1984, 1991; Cope & Kalantzis 1997; Nee & Sanders 2001). These are explored in detail through grand narrative applicable microstoria.

With regard to microstoria, the research reveals a number of generalisable understandings or microstories, concerning KMW and English language barriers and/or issues in the Australian labour market. These are examined by the nature of each microstory rather than by research groups and provide a richer and more meaningful discussion of the complex place of English language difference in the Australian labour market than grand narrative analysis. Overall, four microstories are identified. Together, these microstories reveal English to be experienced and described as a personal problem for the KMW from which all workplace problems stem, made worse through communication technology and limiting the KMW to positions in which she has little career path. The utility of human capital conceptualisations remains high, while other factors are described that suggest a missing cultural evaluation component.
10.5 Discussion and Conclusion

Only one of the five groups, Group II KMW (‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’) supports each proposition and therefore its theoretical base, and it is the same group of aspirant labour market participants that supports both. For all other groups, KMW who do not wish or need to participate, or who already do participate, the question of barriers and theories of inequality seems moot. However, members of these groups have much to reveal of the utility of the two theories in explaining their experiences, choices and perceptions. Overall, both propositions are refuted or rendered irrelevant but significant evidence of the utility of the recognised grand narratives of segmentation and human capital theories is discovered. This means that KMW draw upon available notions in both grand narrative theories as neither adequately describes their experiences.

Although efforts have been made here to find whether the proposition of gender and cultural difficulties in becoming affiliated members of the Australian labour market is supported or not, and thereby the utility of segmentation theory, the impact of gender and culture upon KMW is revealed to be so complex and embedded within their lives that it is evident in even their ability to conceive of labour market participation. Similarly, ‘culture’ is found to describe a much wider set of social norms and relations than merely being ‘Korean’ or ‘Australian’. Examination of this proposition is most revealing through microstoria where the myriad permutations of the factors a KMW must negotiate in order to participate as she would wish in the Australian labour market are expounded. Narrative analysis in this study reveals KMW as individuals who draw upon the utility of segmentation theory as gender/culture constraints and identities from a common pool, but choose and combine them differently. Overall, considerable utility is evidenced, but it is so uniquely and diversely applied that it verges on covering everything and meaning little.
The utility of human capital theory in the discussion of English language barriers is universally evidenced among the sample group, even though the second proposition is not supported overall. The English language barriers to labour market participation experienced by these KMW cannot be simply understood in terms of English language competency and the ability to secure a paid position. These women are, on the whole, highly competent users of the English language and found little difficulty in finding jobs in Australia. In general, those who had not found jobs were either uninterested in doing so or interested in finding a job at some future point but not at the moment. Only one of the five groups, Group II KMW who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’, directly supported the proposition that English language skills constituted a barrier to labour market participation.

However, this apparently high linguistic competence and labour market participation rate should not disguise the more subtle and complex links between linguistic difference and under-employment. The great majority of KMW in the research self-assessed their English skills as low and described themselves as limited in the workplace, frustrated by lack of opportunity for advancement and social inclusion, job security, reward and recognition. Many workplace difficulties were described in terms of exclusion and linked to a sense of ‘otherness’ signposted by a different (not Australian) English. In the terms of organisational studies, therefore, labour market affiliation is facilitated by English language proficiency, but the degree of affiliation is limited by English language difference.

As only one of the five groups, Group II (‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’), affirms both propositions, the overall utility of the propositions must be questioned. The common aspect of the propositions are a simplistic notion of a ‘barrier’ that posits that KMW will want to participate in the labour market and that they will be prevented from doing so. However, as recognised through the research taxonomy, not all KMW do or can think of labour market participation as a desirable state, and the great majority are less prevented than they are limited in labour market organisations. Grand narrative applicable microstoria prove useful in creating a space in which the experiences
of language, gender and culture may be discussed in a holistic way, uninhibited by determinative statements. Therefore, while grand narrative applicable microstoria acknowledge that gender, culture and English language skills are consistent sources of frustration and limitation for KMW, they do not propose that they are simply solved for KMW through learning English or altering aspects of their domestic situations. It is not so much that the propositions are wrong as that they are too simple and require explanation. Possible explanations and accounts based upon these grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis are discussed in Chapter 11. Chapter 11 also examines the results of grand narrative independent microstorias in order to move beyond existing propositions and alternative understandings of KMW in the Australian labour market.
Chapter 11

Beyond the Existing Propositions

This chapter begins with an overview of the findings of the antenarrative analysis of Chapter 10 and the implications of these findings for current theoretical models. These findings reveal unresolved issues and limitations of the established theoretical nexus that shapes current discussion of labour market disadvantage. More specifically, the findings show that current discussion of labour market disadvantage for Korean migrant women lead to unfounded but powerful and prevalent assumptions with regard to their labour market value and mobility. This emanates from their being defined as ‘different’ from the recognised dominant group — white, tertiary-educated, English-speaking males — within the labour market. Acknowledgement of the failure of existing theory to provide a satisfactory understanding of labour market value and mobility leads to a discussion on the problematic conceptualisation of barriers as defined by difference and the significance of incorporating concepts addressing the problem of difference, such as that of Orientalism and authorised discourse.

These failings provide a foundation for pursuing an alternative, more satisfactory understanding of labour market disadvantage for KMW in Australia through grand narrative independent microstoria analysis of their life stories. Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis provide a space for the stories in this research to be heard independently and apart from the strictures of the already identified grand narratives (the propositions and their concomitant theories) and according to their own naturally occurring organisational themes. These grand narrative independent microstoria analysis are ideally free of current conceptions and taxonomies in the available literature and stand apart from it. Their analysis provides alternative explanations and accounts of KMW’s discrimination in the Australian labour market, explanations that do not fit within the existing theoretical nexus and are more concerned
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with issues pertaining to identity construction and their impact on labour market participation for KMW. This chapter concludes by arguing that the issues of identity construction, as identified through grand narrative independent microstoira analysis should be considered in future studies of the labour market.

11.1 Limitations of Existing Propositions

This section summarises the findings of Chapter 10 where they relate to segmentation theory and human capital theory. Each of the existing propositions is shown to be deficient in accounting for the labour market experiences of KMW in Australia. It is argued that the human cultural capital critique goes some way to redressing the deficiencies by combining and harnessing the explanatory power of each. However, in achieving this, the human cultural capital critique remains locked within the terms of naturalised but unexplored understandings of difference, so that while it appears to address the failings of segmentation and human capital theory, it in fact offers limited new insights and understandings into the labour market position of KMW.

The first proposition of gender and cultural barriers is premised upon segmentation theory, criticised for presenting an unchangeable and hopeless scenario for the individual who cannot improve their ascribed position in a labour market hierarchy (Collins 1978, 1990, 1991; Campbell et al. 1991; Pettman 1992; Fincher et al. 1993; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1998). Human capital theory provides an alternative conception, in which individual investment in skills and learning is ideally rewarded in the labour market regardless of other factors, providing hope for the individual to improve their position (Mincer 1974; Becker 1975; Psacharopoulos 1996). As noted in Chapter 10, grand narrative analysis reveals that the proposition of gender and cultural barriers to labour market participation based on segmentation theory is not supported overall for KMW. In an argument between the two theories, this leads to the question of whether the human capital approach would be more accurate for describing KMW experiences, rendering gender and culture invisible and irrelevant. However, grand narrative applicable
microstoria reveals that sufficient evidence of ongoing negative labour market impacts of gender and culture mean that segmentation theory maintains some utility beyond the strict confines of the first proposition.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria of the first proposition in Chapter 10 describe KMW as responsible for childcare and household tasks, conscious of the restrictions of being a middle class woman when considering positions in the labour market, subject to the demands and circumstances of her family, and pulled between numerous domestic, workplace, Australian and Korean cultural relationships, possibilities and roles. These microstories serve to describe limitations and shapers of the nature of any labour market participation KMW may undertake. That labour market participation may be part-time, casual, for limited periods or in industries with limited progression. Nevertheless, the point remains that KMW do manage to negotiate these situations and do, overall, find labour market opportunities in Australia bearing some relationship to their human capital investments, particularly those with Australian qualifications. This provides evidence of the utility of human capital theory.

The segmentation proposition is thus refuted by virtue of any labour market participation, but grand narrative applicable microstoria mitigate against an entirely human capital approach that denies the significance of gender and cultural factors. This finds that KMW negotiate segmentation realities arising from largely unchangeable/difficult-to-change gender and cultural positions to realise some return on their human capital investments. The human cultural capital critique becomes useful here, taking both theoretical approaches into account and presenting the KMW as negotiating one to achieve the other. In this conception, human capital is revalued according to cultural values, and KMW are most likely to find the demands and responsibilities conferred upon them by gender to reduce their human capital value.

The second proposition of English language barriers is premised upon human capital theory, criticised for ignoring the socially and institutionally embedded and covert practices of discrimination on the basis of difference, as recognised by segmentation
theory (Thornton 1990; Collins 1991, 1996; Vasta & Castles 1995; Castles et al. 1996; Nott 1999). In presenting the notion of humans as investors in human capital through the acquisition of skills and qualifications, skills are presented as objectively measurable, necessary for work tasks, and achievable by those who choose to invest in them. As noted in Chapter 10, grand narrative analysis reveals that the proposition of English language barriers to labour market participation based on human capital theory is not supported overall for KMW. In an argument between the two theories, this leads to the question of whether a segmentation approach would be more accurate for describing KMW experiences, considering English language not as a skill but as a signifier of difference.

The second proposition differs in nature from the first proposition in that it is intrinsically based upon the apparently changeable and achievable. Many, if not all, the KMW in this study have achieved considerable English language proficiency, some even to the level of becoming accredited translators and interpreters. Chapters 6 and 10 find that only one of five groups within the sample group, Group II KMW who were ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’, supported the proposition, and all others managed to participate in the labour market if they so wished or needed. Therefore, KMW’s investments in English language skills are generally rewarded in the Australian labour market according to grand narrative analysis and, while the proposition is disproved, the utility of human capital theory is defended. At issue here is a conception arising from the literature review that as NESB migrants, KMW will not have English language skills.

However, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis reveals labour market difficulties based upon notions of the English language either prevent consideration of labour market participation for KMW or continue to have negative impacts once in the labour market. English language difference rather than proficiency represents a segmentation theory approach to the labour market, arguing that high proficiency for a non-native speaker will always signify cultural difference from dominant native English language speakers (Hawthorne 1994; Collins 1996; Harris 1996; Watson 1996; Nee & Sanders 2001; Creese & Kambere 2002; Ho 2004). According to segmentation theory
conceptions, even though linguistic proficiency may be changeable and achievable, a KMW will never be a native speaker and her position on a labour market hierarchy will reflect this.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria for the second proposition describe KMW as regarding English language communication as entirely their own problem, guilty of difference and responsible for eliminating it. They present KMW as regarding that a wide range of workplace issues fall under the English language umbrella, which becomes a ready explanation for all organisational and communicative problems. Communication technology is presented as exacerbating these problems, and English is described as both necessary for labour market acceptance but poorly rewarded in its own right (Cope & Kalantzis 1997). The English language, unlike driving or hairdressing, is found to be a subjectively valued phenomenon inadequately considered as a human capital skill.

The proposition is thus refuted as KMW are shown to have considerable English language proficiency or ‘skill’. The human capital theory upon which the proposition is based is found useful and vindicated through grand narrative analysis, but Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis argues against a completely human capital approach. Microstoria analysis finds that KMW suffer negative expressions of English language difference more indicative of segmentation realities than human capital ideals, despite their apparent labour market returns. KMW are found to have achieved one (the human capital skill) but continue to battle the other (a labour market segmented according to racial difference). Here again the human cultural capital critique of the labour market, arguing that human capital will be revalued according to cultural values, provides an explanatory bridge (Bourdieu 1984, 1991; Cope & Kalantzis 1997; Nee & Sanders 2001; Ho 2004).

Each proposition is shown to be based upon one theory, simply argued using grand narrative analysis, and constructively critiqued using grand narrative applicable microstoria. The sum of these two types of antenarrative analysis finds that each theory is best criticised by the other and that neither is sufficient in itself. This finding is in line
with the human cultural capital critique of the labour market, accepting each as offering some utility but warning against the entire acceptance of either. As outlined in Chapter 2, the human cultural capital critique of the labour market states that privileged groups will value their own cultural traits highly and devalue other, foreign cultural traits (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1991; Cope & Kalantzis 1997), creating a transferability gap in moving qualifications and skills from one culture to another (Stomback 1987; Beggs & Chapman 1987; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988; Campbell et al. 1991; Collins 1991; Fincher et al. 1993). This enculturation or revaluation of skills exists within a human capital grand narrative that creates a myth of objectivity and meritocracy against which a KMW with non-native English battles despite her investment in her human capital (see Blandy et al. 1977; Evans & Kelley 1986; Wooden 1994).

This finding of the utility of the human cultural capital critique in bridging the deficiencies of segmentation and human capital theories argues that human cultural capital is a necessary concept in discussing the Australian labour market and represents an important aspect of labour market opportunity. However, it must be acknowledged that human capital is deployed and valued in culturally specific contexts that change and revalue that capital, as conceptualised by segmentation theory understandings of difference and domination. Further, domestic, cultural and gender-based demands impact disproportionately on some members of society, particularly women, who must negotiate these before they can even attempt to find the allocated value of their human capital in the labour market (Collins 1989, 1996; Poiner & Wills 1991; Vasta & Castles 1996). This argues that the segmentation theory notion of the lower social and labour market positions of women and NESB migrants are useful and necessary concepts in discussing the Australian labour market. The human cultural capital critique therefore offers some utility for considering KMW labour market disadvantage.

This research argues that these concepts alone are inadequate for explaining the labour market experiences of KMW in Australia. While the human cultural capital critique provides a utilitarian bridge between much existing literature and theory, it does not question or argue the terms of the theories it bridges. Little space is provided for
alternative understandings or considerations, or for discussion of the problem of difference. Rather, difference is accepted as a negative factor in revaluing human capital that continues to be regarded as essentially linked to labour market opportunity.

Antenarrative analysis thus far has remained firmly within the bounds of this particular theoretical nexus, asking how difference from the dominant white, Australian-born, native English-speaking male is experienced by KMW in the labour market. In an attempt to step outside this nexus and provide an alternative conception of the labour market, another type of antenarrative analysis has been applied to the life stories of the KMW in this research. This grand narrative independent microstoria analysis is used to explore and present alternative explanations and accounts of labour market experiences of KMW in the Australian labour market that do not fit with the existing theory and acknowledge the problem of naturalised and unexplored notions of difference.

11.2 Grand narrative independent microstoria

This section analyses the life stories of KMW in all five sample groups in the study in order to present alternative explanations of KMW discrimination in the Australian labour market to those described above. These alternatives are significant in providing a way forward for understanding KMW and labour market disadvantage in Australia, based upon their experiences and expression rather than on the self-perpetuating terms of the labour market. This way forward facilitates new knowledge that is built upon individual expression rather than the problematised face of labour market inequality. It explores individual experience and identity construction from the position of the KMW, rather than from the position of the mainstream Australian viewing the KMW as different or a member of a subordinate category. Issues of naturalised and unexplored difference are the subject of writers on Orientalism, as introduced in Chapter 2. These are further explored below as significant in presenting alternative conceptions of the labour market.
In attempting to provide a more humane and individually based alternative to current literature, grand narrative independent microstoria analysis avoids asking how the problematised KMW is different from, and does not belong to, normative Australian labour market organisations (as conceived or explained by the existing theoretical nexus). That is, it does not focus upon unchangeable low positions on a labour market hierarchy, the necessary investment in lacking human capital, or the combination of the two. These conceptions posit KMW as the subjects of pity or blame, struggling against identified barriers to achieving equality in the Australian labour market. The notion of a barrier constitutes a self-perpetuating term of the labour market and figures in both propositions as established from existing literature. To propose an alternative understanding of Australian labour market experience for KMW, the conceptual issues of the ‘barriers’ must be considered as a signifier of the prevailing theoretical nexus that delimits current academic discussion.

11.2.1 Orientalism and Authorised Discourse

The study of Orientalism is an exploration of how knowledge is constructed and represented in order to further the subjugation of the Oriental by the Occident. This study represents academic inquiry and knowledge construction regarding the Oriental in an Occidental context that must be considered in Orientalist terms. Said (1978) writes that the theory of the first decade of the twentieth century regarding the relationship between East and West was simple and effective.

There are Westerns, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power (Said 1978: 36).

However, current practices and theories are not so simply and effectively described, and practices of domination are covert and less easily identified. Said (1978) argues that the traditional academic split of knowledge into sociocultural knowledge and political
knowledge should be abandoned and that the two should be regarded as cooperating in Western domination of the East. As such, this may be regarded as acknowledging the interplay of racism, sexism, history, law, geopolitics, economics, culture, education and academic knowledge construction. The labour market may be regarded as comprising a sphere of socioeconomic practices that further and maintain this domination. For Said, Orientals have been made or constructed through textual, social and political practices to appear inferior and in need of Western corrective analysis and guidance.

The preceding section has examined the utility of the human cultural capital critique in addressing the deficiencies of the prevailing segmentation and human capital theories of the labour market. For Butler (1990), knowledge production is not a quest for ‘truth’, but for an ‘authorised discourse’. In this sense, the utility of human cultural capital theory may be regarded as qualifying it as an authorised discourse in which future knowledge production will occur and Orientalist practices may be disguised. Butler writes that the quest for an authorised discourse conceals the subject, which becomes ‘fragile and always at risk of being deconstructed’ (Butler 1990: 5). Foucault (1976, 1979, 1982) argues that the essential character of a ‘privileged’ discourse is that it appears to enable the user or speaker to speak to the ‘truth’ while also concealing that speaker’s investments in a network of power and knowledge. Foucault argues that disciplinary power places the subjects which it identifies, both allowing them to become subjects worthy of attention and name and also identifying a position for them in the power-knowledge network.

For Foucault, disciplinary power classifies and positions along a scale and around a norm. Through naming and social judgement, it becomes an unfortunate reality that should not exist and is unjustified. By naming an individual as a type of ‘NESB’, she is identified against the norm of other English-speaking, white women and separated from other English-speaking, white, middle class women’s problems in the labour market. By naming an individual ‘NESB’ or ‘Asian’, she is therefore positioned below other English-speaking white women. However, for Foucault, there are no victims and power exists everywhere, with everyone imposing upon others in some way. Indeed, there has been a
feminist interpretation of Foucault’s theory to encourage KMW to think of themselves not as victims, but to take responsibility for their own positions in the power network and to actively use their power to change their situations (Game 1984; Nott 1999). To become a victim is to be classified as helpless and in need of state aid. In this way, there is what Foucault (1979: 226) refers to as a double meaning of the ‘subject’: ‘to be a subject is to be subjugated but also to have one’s identity defined by a conscience or self-knowledge, adopting a concept of the self’.

The KMW in this conceptualisation remains discussed and problematised by the West, and vulnerable to reconstruction in which she has no say. The authorisation or privileging of the human cultural critique contains unquestioned norms, values and hierarchies that reproduce and disguise existing practices of domination. Therefore, alternative understandings should be presented and explored to prevent the authorisation of human cultural capital theory by default. Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis is used here to provide an opportunity for KMW to authorise their own discourse of the Australian labour market and to present an alternative understanding beyond the problem of not being the ‘norm’.

11.2.2 Conceptual Problems of ‘Barriers’

The two grand narratives define the KMW as either overcoming, or being overcome by, barriers to labour market participation. These barriers are clearly and quickly identifiable as the differences between the typified mainstream Australian labour market and the KMW. Thus, the grand narratives present a conceptualisation in which the KMW struggles to overcome differences from the mainstream. Simultaneously, in their construction, the propositions validate and naturalise the idea that difference is a barrier to equality in the labour market. In so doing, the propositions may be regarded as conflating description with explanation, assuming a necessary link between difference and disadvantage.
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Three points should be made about these differences: first, that these differences often have little real impact on the performance of job tasks themselves, suggesting the link is not necessarily the case. Second, they are, on the whole, immutable. While it may be possible for a KMW to improve her level of English language skill, she can never become a native, local speaker and she is unlikely to be able to change her gender or the cultures she lives within, suggesting the link is a dead end or unarguable discussion. Third, these unchangeable and often performance–irrelevant differences are regarded as negatives in terms of social acceptance in the workplace, suggesting the link is socioculturally embedded rather than logically or biologically so. In total, the use of the notion of a barrier as defined by difference from a select group serves to obscure a logically flawed assumption that identifies certain characteristics as the necessary indicators of labour market domination. It is akin to stating that women face greater labour market disadvantage than men because they are not men.

Labour market participation in Australia therefore represents a level of social acceptance despite the differences of the KMW, in addition to a functional economic labour exchange. However, this affiliation is not complete, and reminders of difference are regularly described by KMW. Rather than overcoming difference, KMW in this research describe permeating the overall barrier of difference to some degree, more or less, at different times in their lives. In this way, barriers are the product and phenomena of society and the labour market which then impinge upon individuals.

However, barriers are also created, accepted and reinforced by the individual. To a large degree, barriers may be defined by the person who is unsuccessful in achieving what they wish to achieve, and their articulation is sufficient for them to become real barriers to the speaker. Once conceptualised as objective truth, the barrier is functional in preventing the speaker from pursuing her desired success and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy or rationalisation. The barrier is also a shifting phenomenon and may exist in some situations to explain a failure to achieve an outcome, but not exist in other situations when the outcome is achieved. Thus a barrier is not always a barrier and is only useful as an idea and a cause when failure or disappointment needs an explanation.
For example, barriers, or discrimination on the basis of difference, with regard to the English language may be perceived as preventing access in one situation or industry but not in another, and may also be invoked as an explanation when other reasons for lack of access are unclear. This leads to the recognition of the role of the individual in identifying and ascribing barriers to labour market participation, and that articulation is all that is necessary to realise a barrier. The knowledge that the English language may constitute a barrier to migrant participation in the labour market means that a discourse exists that may be used whenever convenient, and ignored when not.

As revealed in earlier chapters, KMW themselves readily describe labour market disadvantage in terms of linguistic or gender or cultural difference, revealing the ongoing utility of the notion of barriers as defined by difference. This research finds that many KMW describe those categories of disadvantage broadly, with difficult-to-define boundaries, so that a wide range of workplace difficulties may be simply summed up as ‘my English problem’ or ‘because I’m an Asian woman’. This illustrates how conceptualisations of the function of difference are embraced as meaningful explanations by those who are the subjects of description, the ‘different’. Said (1978) outlines this historical and political practice in his thesis on Orientalism as a process of describing or categorising the ‘other’ as ‘lamentably alien’ and ‘in need of correction’. Bourdieu (1991) articulates this process through his concepts of how categories or classes distinguish themselves through the articulation of characteristic differences. This articulation ‘reproduces overt political taxonomies in misrecognisable forms’ resulting in ‘the fictitious integration of society’ and ‘apathy and false consciousness in dominated groups’ (Bourdieu 1991: 167). Awareness of the political and linguistic modus operandi of Orientalism by the researcher does not release the KMW in this research from it, and previous chapters highlight how KMW participate in their own alienation construction.

The following analysis looks at how and whether labour market participation suits or fits into the normative lives of KMW, rather than how the KMW must change to fit the labour market. This analysis describes and tells the story of those norms, told across
countries, down through families and within educational, domestic and workplace contexts. Here, any labour market participation at all is regarded in terms of how it serves the greater life goals of the KMW and is never an end in itself. These life goals of better futures and self-development are not considered in any of the previous literature, which tends to describe KMW as fulfillers of roles or tasks, sufferers of difference and beneficiaries of equality-of-opportunity advances. Two microstories are identified here, although there may be others that may be found. The two that have been chosen present stories of KMW not as victims or sufferers but in control of their own destinies: ‘Better futures in Australia’ and ‘Developing myself’.

11.2.3 Better Futures in Australia

The first independent microstory tells of migration to Australia justified in terms of better socioenvironmental futures for themselves, their husbands and their children. Women in all five groups in the study talked in terms relevant to this microstory. Some of the KMW in this research are themselves the children of parents who migrated to Australia and the beneficiaries of this ‘gift of the future’. Regardless of whether the KMW in question is the mother or the child of the story, the story remains the same: Australia offers a less stressful education conducted in English which will lead to a better future in a country characterised by untrammelled meritocracy in an unpolluted, vast landscape in which a quality life–work balance is highly regarded. This story involves a number of factors, including whether futures are considered simply as labour market opportunities or more broadly as lifestyle choices; the fantasy of gender equality in the home and the labour market; and the experiences of children subject to their parents’ belief in the ‘better futures’ microstory. Two notions are significant here: the promise of the Western paradise and the educational promise.

The first factor in this microstory is a description of Korea as a society in which socioeconomic advancement is largely dependent upon pre-existing social relationships and hierarchies (Lee, M. 1997; Lett 1997; Cho, H.J. 1998; Yi 1998). Western countries such as Australia, in this microstory, promise opportunities on the basis of merit and
talent, rather than established cronyism. In this notion of a Western paradise, human capital theory holds true and migration to Australia represents the potential fulfilment of educational investment that is thwarted in Korea. In this microstory, Korea is characterised by labour market barriers to women that Australia is not. A Korean woman in Korea who wishes to experience career success but is without family connections may describe migration as her best career move.

Not all KMW migrate to Australia in order to find greater career opportunities or success. Some find hitherto unavailable and even undesired opportunity by chance along the way, and then find that they enjoy it. Whether the KMW actively seeks or otherwise stumbles across greater opportunities in Australia does not alter the microstory of better futures in Australia. While some KMW draw upon this microstory for themselves (as above) or for their children, the premise of the story remains. Many of the KMW in this research appreciate this microstory and apply it to their children to a greater degree than to themselves. Here, a KMW may identify and invoke barriers with regard to herself but not for her children, revealing the problematic of the notion of ‘barriers’ described above.

Another KMW recommends migration to Australia in the interests of children’s futures but for quality of life rather than career success. While this displaces the idea of financial opportunity and success in this microstory, it provides an alternative that maintains the concept of the better future in Australia. This reveals how Australia represents a paradise of opportunity, but that conceptions of what constitutes that opportunity may vary from individual to individual. KMW who migrate to Australia in a conscious effort to improve their children’s or their husband’s futures may do so from their own desires, or from pressure exerted by the extended family in Korea. Another aspect of this microstory is the supposed gender equality of Australian meritocracy, education and life, again in contrast to the way in which Korea is described.

This notion or fantasy of comparative gender equality in Australia is referred to in relation to domestic tasks and alternative experiences of masculinity between Korea and Australia. KMW describe women in Australia as not only experiencing greater
opportunities on the basis of merit and regardless of gender in the labour market, but also experiencing a more equitable share of domestic and childcare tasks.

Thus far, this microstory of the better futures has been largely described from the perspective of the KMW as mother rather than the KMW as daughter. KMW who migrate to Australia as children often do so as the subjects of the microstory but have their own aspects to add. The first aspect is positive, describing escape from study regimes, examinations and military service, illustrating the conception of the more relaxed and comfortable Western paradise. However, a negative aspect of the KMW daughter experience of the better futures microstory is in terms of leaving friends in Korea, fitting into school social life in Australia and struggling with learning English. A common story told to KMW daughters by their parents is that of the six-month promise: six months in Australia is sufficient for children to speak English like a native speaker.

The six-month period figures again as the period of time after which return to Korea becomes too difficult and the KMW must forge ahead in Australia. A Group III KMW (‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’) describes initially losing her dream of a better future in Australia when it was unrealised after six months, returning to Korea and then regaining the dream and returning to Australia. This microstory of better futures is evident in all of the life stories of the KMW in this research, whether they are describing themselves, their husbands, children, sisters or friends. It presents the KMW as striving to improve her and her family’s life situation, be it socioeconomic or in terms of quality of life. In this microstory, Korea is portrayed as socially backwards and highly competitive with limited opportunities, and Australia is described as progressive in gender relations and equality, comfortable, fair and meritocratic. In focusing upon opportunity and better futures, this microstory encompasses labour market participation goals and experiences of KMW in Australia but is much larger than labour market participation alone.

For the KMW who will realise her better future through the success of her children, questions of labour market affiliation are often irrelevant and she has in many ways
already achieved her goal by migrating to Australia. Her belief in the superiority of Australia over Korea as a place to bring up her children is sufficiently strong that, once in Australia, she is satisfied to watch her children’s labour market affiliation. Other KMW assist their husbands as necessary or continue their already established careers, with time out for childcare or gaining further qualifications. KMW who arrive as children, for whom the sacrifices are made, embrace labour market participation as the outcome of Australian education. These KMW may describe an ongoing sense of social difference but live out the family story of a better future in Australia. Overall, this group of 33 KMW show a wide range of attitudes and availability to becoming affiliated with the Australian labour market, and may or may not do so in different ways and at different times. The belief in and hope for a better life in Australia compared with Korea, however, remains a constant theme and guiding life principle.

### 11.2.4 Developing myself

This microstory tells of a focus upon development of the self rather than the search for external opportunities for socioeconomic success. The majority of KMW in Group I (‘never career oriented’), Group II (‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’), Group III (‘not career oriented but participate in the labour market’) and Group IV (‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’) provided experiences relevant to this microstory. It involves three main aspects: ‘helping’ rather than ‘working’; the independence project; and the role of personality and attitude in life endeavours. Self-development of the KMW may involve labour market participation but is less likely to be described as a job and more likely to be described in terms of how her activities are helpful to others and improve her capacity for empathy. One Group IV KMW (‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’), who works as an Ethnic Community Liaison Officer with the police, described her job as a challenge in helping others. Another Group IV KMW describes her translating and interpreting as an enjoyable social service rather than a labour market activity. A Group III KMW describes helping and enjoying other people in the Korean community as a more correct description of her activities than ‘work’. Group I KMW in the research who are not affiliated with the labour market speak of
organised social activities outside the home that develop themselves and others. Most commonly, this is described as ‘counselling’ and describes a strong network of KMW providing interpersonal support.

An activity that does not conflict with helping or counselling activities and provides opportunity for personal development is higher education, generally through university or technical colleges. Several KMW described pursuing some form of further education to improve themselves while participating in some form of counselling. As a part of helping others and developing one’s own knowledge and wisdom (rather than labour market value), church activities are often described by KMW in this research. These activities are often unpaid and performed while children are at school and husbands away.

For KMW who work with their husbands, the microstory of personal development is in the form of an independence project: this begins with migration and separation from Korean support networks and is realised through establishment of a business and surviving in Australia on one’s own terms. It involves creating one’s own organisation, in which social acceptance or labour market affiliation does not have to be negotiated. Although it involves labour market participation, the achievement is primarily one of personal development and realisation.

Personality and attitude are strong themes in the personal development microstory, important for success in all endeavours, not just the labour market. Self-confidence, personality and happiness in the life stories are often described negatively and related to English difference. A Group I KMW who was ‘never career oriented’ illustrates the conceptual problems of the English language barrier as described above, and how this ‘barrier’ may be constructed or deconstructed through language and identity. These life stories reveal a progression in personal development, from attributing all workplace and social disappointments to English to recognising other factors in working with others. A Group II KMW who is ‘career oriented but does not participate in the labour market’ describes the experience of her daughter who, although educated from high school to
postgraduate level in Australia, experienced unhappiness in her position in a bank as she did not feel included socially. Convinced that her problems were linguistic, she returned to work in Korea. Another KMW reveals an ongoing awareness of personal development and a change in perception of disadvantage and difficulty in Australia on the basis of race and language.

The microstory of self-development is evident in many of the life stories in this research, whether the KMW is a participant in the Australian labour market or not. It presents the KMW as motivated more by helping others and developing herself than achieving social status or financial success, although this may vary over time. In this microstory, KMW are presented as ever changing and describing similar situations differently as they develop as people. Church, education, language, personal growth and attitude figure strongly in this microstory, and the labour market constitutes but one arena in which this microstory is played out. With the potential to constantly grow and change, KMW resist determinative propositions that allow little scope for alternative experience or interpretations thereof.

This microstory also acknowledges the impact of confidence and identity construction upon the quality of labour market experience, and in particular notes the significance of confidence in perceiving linguistic disadvantage. Self-development in this sense means more than the acquisition of human capital or skills, such as English language proficiency. It includes developing strength of character and confidence to mobilise those skills and to maximise their utility. This microstory privileges the efficacy of the individual rather than generalised concepts of the labour market and society at large: two KMW with the same human cultural capital value may view and experience the Australian labour market very differently by virtue of their personalities, attitudes, confidence and resultant behaviours. This microstory therefore illustrates the conceptual problems of the notion of particular ‘barriers’, such as English language proficiency, to labour market participation.
11.3 Grand narrative independent microstoria: Interpreting the Results

Grand narrative independent microstoria reveals two microstories: ‘Better futures in Australia’ and ‘Developing myself’. Other grand narrative independent microstoria may be identifiable by other analysts, but these two have been chosen for their repeated relevance throughout the life stories of all the KMW in this research.

KMW in all five groups in the study talked in terms of ‘better futures in Australia’ and described the dream of seizing external opportunities to improve their lives and their family’s lives in the future. This microstory includes not only educational and labour market opportunities but also the chance to live in a country where men and women are equal and share domestic tasks, and labour market positions are won on the basis of merit. In this microstory, children who migrate to Australia escape rigorous examinations and study regimes and possible military service in Korea, and are promised that their English will be ‘perfect’ after six months in Australia. After six months, it is difficult to return to Korea and the dream of the better future must be pursued. While the reality is often different — children do not learn Australian English so quickly and never perfectly, men in Australia do not perform half of all domestic tasks, and labour market organisations define merit in their own terms — this microstory remains at the core. Many of the disappointments described in the life stories of KMW may be understood to be where this microstory goes awry, but it is this constructive dream of a better life in Australia that motivates and sustains KMW despite adversity and disappointment.

‘Developing myself’ describes the internal or psychological development of KMW and offers a complementary microstory to ‘Better futures in Australia’. This microstory looks to the spiritual, communal and empathic aspects of the life story of a KMW and describes how the desire to contribute to society by helping people is more highly regarded than the mere idea of participating in the labour market. Some manage to achieve both, and some
move between volunteer work in the church or community at one time and labour market participation at another. This microstory involves a story of growing up, becoming independent and taking responsibility for oneself, and may be part of starting a business, an alternative organisation to those already existing. It also includes the role of personality, attitude and philosophy in understanding and interpreting situations and events. In this microstory, the KMW ideally moves to positions of positivity and self-awareness over blame or lack (as suggested by human capital conceptions) and hopelessness (as suggested by segmentation conceptions).

Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis attempts to avoid confusing description with explanation: it does not describe difference and identify disadvantage as its logical consequence. As noted above, this begins with an awareness of the constructive impacts of discourse and involves not using terms such as ‘barriers’ that are associated with self-evident difference from the identified dominant members of the labour market. This is not to argue that KMW do not suffer racism, sexism or linguistic exclusion, but that to focus solely upon difference provides no alternative understanding of labour market experience. By focusing upon shared themes and storytelling structures, the nature of labour market affiliation from the perspective of KMW is exposed. Both these microstories describe KMW as active, positive protagonists and perceivers in their own life stories in contrast to the microstoria arising from the existing grand narratives of segmentation and human capital. In these microstories, KMW are defined by purpose and goals rather than immutable differences that provide accepted sources of disadvantage.

Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis presents KMW as striving to improve their lives, whether in labour market organisations, family businesses, part-time jobs, church, educational institutions, with children, or contributing in the community. KMW define their lives in terms of prospects in the outside world and in terms of their own personal development, accepting that what may appear to them to be discrimination at one time may years later be understood differently. Labour market experiences figure strongly in both microstories, representing both external and internal opportunities and
development in KMW’s life stories. These microstories provide an alternative understanding of KMW in the Australian labour market.

**11.4 Alternative Understandings**

The provision of alternative understandings of the experiences of KMW in the Australian labour market is not without recognition of the failings of the already identified propositions and the theoretical nexus from which they are constructed. These alternative understandings are shaped by attempting to reconceptualise the issues raised by this nexus of theory and critique rather than by attempting to resolve them in, and thereby reinforce, their existing terms. It is thus helpful to summarise the issues the proposition should avoid or refute so as to identify what should be addressed and in what terms.

The failings of the identified propositions are described in this chapter and in Chapter 10. A significant critique of segmentation theory exists in its determinative effect in that KMW will never be able to rise above their low position as female NESB migrants in a segmented labour market. This presents a hopeless situation that cannot allow change other than by slow and minimally effective legislation introduction and defence. Human capital theory allows the individual to improve her status and condition in the labour market, but focuses all responsibility and blame for failure upon the individual, assuming that human capital is a natural, justified and objective concept for an ideal labour market. The human cultural capital critique argues that both theories are useful and that neither is sufficient, in that human capital investments are accorded differing values according to existing social hierarchies. This critique completes the existing nexus of theory of the labour market, but remains focused upon the problem of difference and of ‘fixing’ both the alien KMW and the practices of the labour market so that she can become economically productive in Australian society. The danger is that this apparently complete critique will become an authorised discourse that prevents discussion of other factors of identity and domination.
Alternative understandings of the labour market are ideally free of the nexus of existing theory, provided with an awareness of the inherent identity construction that they present and beginning with what they should not present. They should not present the KMW as necessarily uneducated or linguistically weak or lacking. They should not present the KMW as less productive because she is female or because she operates in many cultures. They should not present traditional female roles as irrelevant to the labour market, national economy or society. They should acknowledge that activities such as child rearing, caring for family members and voluntary and community assistance contribute to the health and wellbeing of the larger labour market pool. They should not accept a causal and necessary link between difference and lower labour market or socioeconomic value. However, they should accept that prevailing grand narratives offer utility to the KMW in explaining the experience of being ‘other’ as lowering her labour market opportunities. They should provide that the maintenance of these explanations serves to embed, disguise and naturalise the logically flawed assumptions upon which they are premised. They should recognise the role of identity and individual agency in conceptualising and constructing ‘barriers’ to labour market participation in the context of the society in which the individual operates, and that the individual may participate in her own alienation construction.

These understandings should provide scope for the individual to strive for and improve her own opportunities in the labour market, and question and hold the labour market accountable for its myths and practices. In addition, they should account for the powerfully constructive dream of better futures that motivates KMW, and the commitment of individuals to contribute to society through helping others, caring roles, communitarian beliefs and the role of positive attitudes. They also need to consider that KMW struggle against categorisation as ‘other’ in striving to improve their lives through labour market participation. This statement includes all who ‘categorise’, whether they be KMW or mainstream Australians or academics, and recognises that labour market participation is one aspect or strategy of many for the universal project of KMW improving their lives. They should include the struggle against Bourdieu’s (1991) notion
of ‘apathy and false consciousness’ that may result from categorisation as ‘marginal’, ‘other’ or ‘inferior’. These concerns should be taken into account in future studies.

Developed from the findings of grand narrative independent microstoria analysis, these understandings are free from existing taxonomies and conceptions and are more concerned with issues pertaining to identity construction and its impacts on labour market participation for KMW. They present the KMW as protagonist in her ideal story of a better future for herself and her family in a Western paradise of untrammelled meritocracy and a comfortable work/life balance and environment. They de-emphasise direct labour market participation as an end in its own right and emphasise labour market participation as one strategy or activity that contributes to a better life, possible or significant at some times, more or less so at others. They highlight the role of the KMW in promoting and assisting the labour market participation of members of her family, an indirect form of labour market participation. This is an aspect of an identity constructed from historical, cultural and individual interpretations of what is appropriate, desirable and possible.

11.5 Conclusion

Contrary to the assumptions embedded in the two existing propositions this study has examined, the research has found that gender, culture and English language skills are not sufficient explanations for the nature of labour market participation of KMW in Australia. Many KMW’s experiences and concerns with regard to the labour market are either unsatisfactorily or entirely unaddressed by existing theories. This chapter argues that while the human cultural capital critique offers a more satisfactory conceptualisation of labour market disadvantage than either segmentation or human capital theories, it remains within a problematic theoretical nexus based upon embedded notions of difference and discrimination. This is illustrated through its terms and notions, such as that of the ‘barrier’, which serves to naturalise and obscure discriminatory practices. Grand narrative independent microstoria analysis and an awareness of the failings of
existing propositions provide alternative understandings of the Australian labour market from the perspective of the KMW which should be taken into consideration in future research. The following chapter provides a concluding discussion for this research.
Chapter 12: Conclusions

chapter 12

Conclusions

The purpose of this study has been to examine Korean migrant women’s experiences of the Australian labour market. A review of existing literature provided an understanding of KMW as members of subsets of other labour market groups — migrants, Asians, women — all of which were described as experiencing labour market disadvantage in comparison with a dominant, mainstream labour market group. This dominant group was described as middle class, tertiary-educated, unburdened by domestic responsibilities, white, native English-speaking, Australian-born men (Collins 1978; Inglis & Stromback 1984; Chapman & Miller 1985; Castles et al. 1996; Watson 1996; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1998; Cobb-Clark 2001a, 2001b; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002). From this literature, two propositions were drawn, stating that KMW were likely to experience labour market disadvantage or barriers as a function of their differences from the dominant group and their membership of ‘other’, less socially valued, groups. This chapter reiterates the propositions derived from the literature review as well as the justifications for, and significance of, the research. It also provides an overview of the results of the application of narrative analysis research methods. Finally, the implications for future studies are discussed.

Two propositions were drawn from the literature. These took into account two significant theories of the labour market: segmentation theory and human capital theory. Where segmentation theory argues that unchangeable gender and racial/cultural differences have the greatest impact upon labour market value (Collins 1991, 1996; Pettman 1992; Castles et al. 1996; Vasta & Castles 1996), human capital theory describes the labour market value of individuals as based upon apparently objective and attainable skills (Mincer 1974; Becker 1975; Psacharopoulos 1996).
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As described in Chapter 2, Australian employment organisational cultures (Hawthorne 1994; Collins 1996; Watson 1996; Pettman 1996) and traditional family and class demands in Korea (Han 1985; Kim 1988; Palley 1994; Choi 1994; Park 1996; Cho 1998; Hampson 2000) mean that Korean women juggle numerous competing factors which serve to limit both their desire and opportunities to participate in labour market organisations. Disproportionate responsibilities placed upon women, whether they work outside the home or not, make outside work less desirable and more tiring. Husbands may be shamed by their wives working and be unwilling to help in the home, and family demands may prohibit or limit certain extra-domestic activities. This finds the KMW who wishes to work in Australia struggling to meet the challenges posed by her family responsibilities and her position in the labour market and leads to the following proposition:

*In line with the grand narrative of segmentation theory, Korean migrant women will experience barriers to labour market participation in Australia due to the triple burden of racism, sexism and cultural difference.*

Language (in this case, English language) is a powerful tool in maintaining the power differential between the dominant incumbent and the marginalised newcomer (Foucault 1976; Clegg 1989; Bourdieu 1991), and its use in Australian immigration history is well documented as a gate-keeping technique (Jupp 1988; Collins 1991; Viviani 1992; Jayasuriya & Pookong 1999). It is readily absorbed by human capital theories of the labour market as a justifiable skill deficiency that explains non-affiliation. These observations, which are borne out by statistics of the overall labour market participation of Asian and non-English-speaking-background migrants (Cobb-Clark 2001a, 2001b; Richardson et al. 2001, 2002), led to the following proposition:

*In line with the grand narrative of human capital theory, Korean migrant women without strong English language skills will experience barriers to accessing and negotiating the Australian labour market.*
12.1 Results of Narrative Analysis

Grand narrative analysis of the two propositions identified above reveals that overall neither is supported in the life stories of KMW collected for this research. Nevertheless, for each proposition, points of relevance were still identified and these were explored through grand narrative applicable microstoria. This form of analysis found that the impacts of gender and culture vary over time for KMW, do not always prevent labour market participation, and are experienced in terms of identity within a gendered Australian labour market. It also found that these KMW are objectively skilled in the English language but experience ongoing feelings of inferiority described in terms of English language difference and experienced as social isolation and limited opportunities within the workplace. Each proposition is examined in turn before a discussion of alternative understandings is presented.

12.1.1 Analysis of Proposition I

According to grand narrative analysis, only one of five groups within the sample group of KMW appears to support the first proposition: those defined as ‘never career oriented’ by virtue of not working in Australia. However, closer examination reveals that that support is qualified by the finding that gender and cultural barrier is irrelevant to KMW with no wish to participate. Those defined as ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ refute the proposition from the outset by virtue of their Australian labour market participation. However, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis reveals a degree of ‘hidden’ support. Those defined as ‘not career oriented but participating in the labour market’ appear to refute the first proposition but also provide evidence of ‘hidden’ support.

Analysis of grand narrative applicable microstoria revealed four microstories of KMW’s experience relevant to the first proposition: ‘Housework and childcare are women’s responsibilities’; ‘Middle class women do “decent” women’s jobs’; ‘Everything depends on the family’; and ‘Which culture?’. These four microstories revealed an overall
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relationship of shifting factors requiring ongoing negotiation rather than straightforward support or refutation of the proposition. Examination of the sample group narratives with regard to gender and cultural barriers revealed that the role of mother, and in particular responsibility for childcare, either prevented or impacted upon the labour market participation of all sample group respondents with children at some time in their lives. However, for the majority of the sample group, labour market participation was facilitated or allowed when children went to school, left home or when their own mothers provided unpaid childcare assistance, so that the impact of gender roles upon labour market possibilities changed over time and according to circumstance.

Gender and culture were revealed to permeate KMW’s sense of identity and were not experienced as separate phenomena but as a compound experience. Certain Korean-specific sensibilities were described, such as the ongoing reverberations of Confucian ideals and categories, and a general pool of gendered cultural possibilities and options was identified. However, each KMW in the sample group drew from this common pool differently. In each KMW’s case, her interpretation of her (gendered and cultured) self was mediated by individual personality, motivation, gender/era, class and family circumstances. From this emerges the understanding that experience and interpretation of gendered culture are unique to the individual (my culture is what I say it is) and changes with time and circumstance. It also emerges from this that ‘gender and culture’ are broad and fluid categories which cover many but satisfactorily fit few. To this need to be added the impacts of a gendered Australian labour market.

Further, the limitations placed upon the activities of KMW by gender/culture are pre-eminent and determine whether any other barriers are experienced. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis reveals that gendered cultural positions for KMW may be so powerful as to prevent even the thought of labour market participation, let alone the desire to participate or the conceptualisation of any barriers to participation. The position of a middle class, educated and married Korean mother may be sufficient in itself to limit discussion or consideration of labour market activity. For others, labour market participation may be considered or attempted once domestic duties are discharged.
Therefore, the first proposition contains the primary considerations for a KMW before any other barriers may be considered, such as English language difference, for example.

12.1.2 Analysis of Proposition 2

Grand narrative analysis of KMW’s narratives with regard to the second proposition revealed that only one of five groups within the sample group of KMW described themselves as unable to participate in the labour market because of their English language proficiency. Two KMW defined as ‘career oriented but do not participate in the labour market’ with no history of participation had other reasons for their non-participation: caring roles within the family. KMW defined as ‘career oriented after arrival in Australia’ and ‘career oriented before arrival in Australia’ refuted the proposition at once by virtue of their Australian labour market participation. KMW defined as ‘never career oriented’ and ‘not career oriented, but participate in the labour market’ found it irrelevant as their non-participation or their unwilling participation did not involve overcoming an English language barrier. Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis revealed that despite the overall refutation of the second proposition, significant issues related to the experience of English language difference were characteristic of much KMW’s labour market participation.

For the majority of KMW in this study, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis revealed that English language difference had not totally prevented labour market participation, but that it had limited opportunities once KMW became employed, and impacted negatively upon their experiences of the labour market. Four microstories were identified here as presenting a more complete and subtle understanding of English language issues for KMW in Australian workplaces than that of the proposition. These were: ‘English, it’s my problem’; ‘my workplace problems are English problems’; ‘communication technology exacerbates my English problems in the workplace’; and ‘good English gets me a bad job’.
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Despite objectively high and proven levels of English language proficiency, all KMW in the study rated their proficiency as low or inadequate. In the sample group, conceptions of definitions of English language skill varied greatly, from knowledge of geography, history, negotiation skills, humour, technical vocabularies and slang to pronunciation. In general, KMW in this study described their perceived English language inferiority as a valid labour market problem for which they bore sole responsibility and which could be neither questioned nor overcome. This described English language inferiority was most often experienced as a feeling of social isolation in the workplace rather than a hindrance to the performance of work tasks. A perception of English language inferiority was significant in the identity construction of KMW, who described themselves and their characters in terms of their lack of confidence in their English language skills. A reflection of global economic and historical hierarchies and power networks was evident through different types (accents and origins) of English language (Hawthorne 1994; Watson 1996; Collins 1996; Creese & Kambere 2002) supporting a human cultural capital theory that source countries’ relationships to Britain impact upon the experience of a NESB migrant in Australia. Negative experiences in relation to linguistic issues were more marked in mainstream private sector organisations and competitive, market-oriented roles than in public sector organisations and human services roles. Communication technology had a further negative impact upon KMW’s labour market experiences, serving to highlight, record and subject to scrutiny their linguistic difference (Cope & Kalantzis 1997).

In conclusion, English language was revealed not as a skill but as a signifier of belonging and acceptance (affiliation) in and by the Australian labour market, where differences led to varying levels of social and economic exclusion and to identity constructions of ‘otherness’ or inferiority. As no non-native speaker could become a native speaker, difference and distance between the KMW and the dominant mainstream culture would always exist, and that distance became more, not less, apparent the more proficient the speaker grew.
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These findings illustrate that many current discussions of English language skill in relation to KMW in particular or migrants in general in the Australian labour market focus upon the KMW/migrant as a problem, and simultaneously naturalise and hide the insistence upon native English language rather than functional English. That this is accepted by KMW themselves reflects the politics of domination of subcultures through language, much written about by linguistic and social equity theorists. The implication of this is that academic discourse concerning KMW/migrant participation in the labour market should embrace a wider range of disciplines than is currently evidenced.

12.2 Alternative Understandings

Extending narrative analysis beyond the existing two propositions of this study in the form of grand narrative independent microstoria analysis reveals alternative conceptions of the place of labour market participation in the lives of KMW. Alternative narrative constructions and discourses privilege otherwise unexamined positions and beliefs of the respondents. These include an understanding of KMW as having roles rather than careers, aspirations for a better life, and fantasies of the West (Australia) that include belief in untrammelled meritocracy, gender equality and the ability of children to quickly become near-native speakers of English. Notions of age barriers, independence projects and inferiority complexes of migrants are described as well as the importance of academic and church institutions through the life stories of KMW. While some of these issues are touched on in the discussion of the propositions, their significance is distorted by the academic process, which imposes an artificial focus drawn from existing literature rather than the reality at hand. These new discourses and stories illustrate the potential of an alternative approach to future studies in this area.

From the common themes of the life stories of the sample group, two grand narrative independent microstories — ‘Better Futures in Australia’ and ‘Developing myself’ — are defined, describing labour market participation as one aspect of a better life rather than a singular aim, acknowledging that all sample group KMW strive and work towards more and better opportunities for themselves and their families but not all aspire to becoming
affiliates of Australian labour market organisations. These alternative understandings of KMW’s experiences in the Australian labour market also incorporate a resistance to the first two grand narratives in stating that it is not linguistic, gender or cultural differences *per se* that the KMW struggles against in achieving equality of opportunity in the labour market. Rather, she struggles against the concept of difference in the categorisation of herself as ‘other’. This means that it is irrelevant whether the difference is linguistic or gender-based, and exploration of how different forms of exclusion are expressed do little to approach the problem of rendering an individual irredeemably different. Alternative understandings also resist presenting the KMW as victim, and include the possibility that she may participate in the categorisation of herself as justifiably excluded on one basis of difference or another. The struggle is thus not only with mainstream social, academic, institutional or organisational practices and conceptualisations, but with her own. This highlights the insidious and powerful nature of exclusion based on difference, accepted even by those deemed to be different as justified, natural and unchangeable.

Alternative understandings provide scope for the individual to strive for and improve her own opportunities in the labour market, and question and hold the labour market accountable for its myths and practices. In addition, they provide for the powerfully constructive dream of better futures that motivates KMW, and the commitment of individuals to contribute to society through helping others, caring roles, communitarian beliefs and the role of a positive attitude. This recognises that labour market participation is one aspect or strategy of many for the universal project of KMW improving their lives.

12.3 The Significance of the Research

The research findings demonstrate the restrictive and limiting terms of propositions that reflect similarly restrictive and limiting theories of the labour market. The fact that the research is able to make these observations and then go on to construct alternative, more meaningful understandings of KMW’s labour market participation, is largely due to its use of microstoria analysis — a more productive form of antenarrative analysis than grand narrative analysis. In sum, issues arise for discussion here as a result of grand
narrative applicable microstoria analysis. These include labour market equity as an ongoing issue beyond labour market access and the experience / conceptualisation of English language difference as opposed to weakness. These issues are experienced as factors in the identity construction of an individual, both by Australian society and the KMW herself. This section begins with the significance and implications for this research regarding narrative analysis methods, followed by implications for discussing equity beyond labour market access, issues of English language difference rather than weakness in the Australian labour market and finally, the impacts of these upon identity construction.

12.3.1 The Significance and Implications of Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis formed the primary tool of examination and enquiry in this research to test existing knowledge and present new knowledge or new directions for further study. It is innovative and groundbreaking as it includes several types of narrative analysis which are complementary and evolutionary: grand narrative analysis tested existing knowledge but highlighted issues that required another type of narrative analysis to explore more fruitfully. Productive exploration of these issues led to recognition that a third type of narrative analysis, free of newly recognised constraints, was necessary to provide an alternative conceptualisation of labour market experiences for KMW in Australia. This three-step process is instructive in acknowledging the significance of the construction of propositional thought and the assumptions that it contains. In this study, it ensured both academic rigour and awareness while providing scope for organic development from the research interviews. Most significantly, narrative analysis permitted the voice of the individual to be a significant aspect in shaping knowledge, including the language and experiences of KMW in a discussion about KMW.

Grand narrative analysis provided a focused and direct test of identified propositions based upon existing theories of the labour market that moved beyond statistical interpretation to the quality of individual experience. Where existing studies provide information regarding labour market participation rates, education levels, age groups or
numbers of children, few consider the motivations and identities of the individuals they seek to describe. These studies present a simplistic picture of the labour market experiences of Asian or NESB migrants in Australia and do not account for unpaid community participation, support of other labour market participants or ongoing issues of underemployment, covert discrimination or individual agency. Grand narrative analysis serves here to test propositional thought derived from existing theoretical understandings, terms and dominant discourses. Academic discourses and data collection can, in the name of simplicity, present stories of society and individuals that appear to be common sense and authorised, supported by concrete research data, but in fact adequately fit very few of the subjects they seek to describe.

The experiences of the KMW in this research quickly fell outside these terms: grand narrative analysis revealed that not all KMW wish to work in the paid labour market while others do hold paid positions, yet current conceptions do not address these groups. The failings of the propositions were most apparent in the notion of barriers as based upon difference to an identified norm and realised in the notion of identity. Grand narrative analysis found that only one of five groups within the larger sample group supported both propositions. This group included only KMW defined by the unreal work in Australia, inherently based upon the notion of a barrier and of thwarted desire. Four other groups, by far the majority, did not fit this definition and did not identify themselves as unsuccessful labour market aspirants. A focus upon one small group of KMW disregarded all others and their activities that were unpaid or not within labour market organisations. It also denied the role of KMW in supporting others in the labour market. Further, for those who did participate in the labour market, issues of inequality and disadvantage were regarded as overcome by virtue of labour market entry and hidden in labour market participation rates.

Acknowledgement of the restrictive nature of propositional thought and grand narrative analysis led to the use of more fruitful and revealing grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis, but ultimately suggested that this too was limited. In these more nuanced and detailed considerations, segmentation theory and human capital theory were
both revealed as inadequate, though utilitarian at times. The utility of the human cultural capital critique as a bridge between the two theories was highlighted by this form of analysis. However, while accounting for a wider range of experience and conceptualisation than grand narrative analysis, grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis remained locked within the issues raised by the propositions and remained tied to signposts of difference from the white Australian male worker. Simultaneously, such analysis remained locked within the nexus of prevailing theoretical paradigms of segmentation theory (gender and culture), human capital theory (English language proficiency) and the responsive human cultural capital critique. It offered a greater understanding of the established terms of difference but did not offer an alternative understanding for discussing KMW and the Australian labour market. This suggested the need to develop alternative understandings of KMW experiences of the labour market that avoided the failings of the propositions and hence the use of grand narrative independent microstoria analysis.

Alternative understandings were developed in this research through the application of a third level of antenarrative analysis in the form of grand narrative independent microstoria. Offering a new conceptualisation, this is the most instructive for the direction of future research but is presented with an awareness of the weaknesses and deficiencies of current concepts, terms, theories and critiques of theories of the labour market. The process of examining each life story three times with different types of antenarrative analysis is therefore both innovative and thorough, guarding against simplistic conclusions or the reiteration of current understandings.

Without using narrative analysis it would have been impossible to reveal the alternative understandings of the labour market experiences of KMW beyond the existing two propositions and the group of unsuccessful labour market aspirants. The combination of several forms of narrative analysis provided the tools for beginning from a position of existing knowledge and, through questioning and further exploration arriving at a position of an alternative understanding that both recognised but was not limited by the
failings of current understandings. The inadequacies of some existing understandings as revealed through this analytical process are outlined below.

12.3.2 Equity not just Access

Grand narrative analysis revealed that neither of the two propositions was supported overall, with only a small minority of respondents confirming their somewhat limited utility. However, this does not mean that the barriers of gender, culture and the English language have been definitively overcome or solved or disappeared. Rather, evidence of ongoing negative experiences in the workplace related to these issues was revealed through grand narrative applicable microstoria. The use of this form of narrative analysis provided the opportunity to explore issues of equity in the workplace that continued beyond initial access. This warned against regarding labour market access as a sufficient indicator of equity in the Australian labour market for KMW, as quantitative studies are likely to suggest.

Grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis revealed that most KMW interviewed for this research described workplace difficulties in terms of their difference from other Australians in the workplace. These issues of equity or workplace difficulties included linguistic difference and a sense of ease and acceptance in hierarchical labour market organisations, in addition to promotion and training opportunities. The justification of exclusion or limitation based upon difference, and its utility as an authorised explanation, is thus perpetuated by KMW, embedding the link between difference and lower opportunity as presented by segmentation theory.

In analysing the descriptions of these KMW’s Australian work experience, the research revealed that the negative perception of ‘different’ English and cultural background was not only accepted as ‘natural’ by the perpetrating dominant group (employers, colleagues, recruitment consultants), but also by KMW themselves. Although the KMW described their frustrations, disappointments and difficulties with cognisance of their ‘difference’, the great majority did not describe themselves as outraged victims of systemic injustice, but as individuals coping with particular, matter-of-fact difficulties. KMW tended to
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regard their difference as their own responsibility, as their own fault, even if it could never be overcome. That difference can never be overcome is itself a truism, and is part of the social and economic contract that the KMW agrees to in migrating to Australia.

The analysis of workplace difficulties is, as acknowledged above, framed and focused by existing literature and the ensuing propositions. Both propositions, and much literature, focus upon the biologically determined or socioculturally embedded differences of one group (KMW) from the idealised dominant, mainstream group (Alcorso 1991; Campbell et al. 1991; Collins 1991; Fincher et al. 1993; Young 1997; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1998). The dominant group is described not by its ideals or talents but by its characteristics: middle class, tertiary-educated, unburdened by domestic responsibilities, white, native English-speaking, Australian-born men (Game 1984; Thornton 1990; Castles 1996; Nott 1999). In so doing, a self-perpetuating logic is created: that difference from the dominant group will be experienced as either non-acceptance or limited acceptance into the organisations of the dominant group (Gramsci 1971; Foucault 1977; Said 1978, 1995; Barreto & McIntosh 1985; Bourdieu 1991).

Grand narrative analysis and grand narrative applicable microstoria analysis both focused upon difference as the source of inequity or disadvantage for KMW in accessing and participating in the Australian labour market. This research has argued that difference is experienced in negative terms and continues to provide explanatory utility for KMW describing workplace issues. This is well illustrated through the described experiences involving technically proficient but differently accented English in the workplace.

This research revealed that high levels of English language proficiency will never be high enough, and that KMW internalised a feeling of social inferiority and lack of competitiveness on the basis of this signpost of difference. To continue to discuss issues of English language proficiency or barriers, or to categorise and collect information on Non-English-Speaking Background or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse individuals, reinforces a power relationship obscured in the name of communication. These terms and categories create false idols and false barriers. The categories are in terms of
difference from the dominant group, and their use and study can only reveal permutations of the experience of marginalisation by reiterating the marginalising mechanism. The individuals within the category thus become problematised, rather than the categories themselves. Bourdieu (1991: 167) writes that the function of communication is concealed, and the creation of hierarchies of labour market affiliation and ease of participation on the basis of difference is legitimised in the name of the English language.

Other false barriers are similarly created in discussions of gender and culture, in which difference from the dominant group is once again heralded as a justification for position within a hierarchy that pays little homage to objective ability, despite claims to meritocratic principles. For Korean (or Asian) women with different English and children, the intersection of categorisations ensures that it is unthinkable that they can ever be members of the dominant group. They are defined out of the dominant group. While their status and opportunities may be improved, it cannot be without a corresponding elevation of the circumstances of the dominant group.

12.3.3 Identity

This research reveals how the application of theory and propositional thought constructs categories and identities, many of which are either untrue or inadequate for describing labour market outcomes. Typified as homebound and with limited or poor English, KMW in this research resisted the assumptions inherent in the propositions regarding their skills and human capital. However, the research showed that many KMW believed their English to be poor, their human capital compromised and themselves inferior in the mainstream Australian labour market. In short, the thesis demonstrated that KMW in Australia are given little scope to participate in their own identity construction in the formulation of new knowledge and often remained the subjects rather than the authors of their own identities in academic production. Innovative use of grand narrative independent microstoria analysis revealed that the identity of KMW may be subject to a host of factors that are open and contingent, beyond the borders of segmentation and
human capital theories. This is in line with a point made by Wilmot (2003: 85) in regard to worker identity in general. He has emphasised that their identity remains open and contingent. There are other determinations of their identity — gender, communal, religious, etc. arising from other structures of subordination that compete for their identifications.

As described above, the construction of identity of KMW in Australia is heavily impacted by perceptions and conceptions of difference from the nominated dominant group of white Australian males. This research has provided in-depth narrative analysis to expose the sociolinguistic mechanisms through which KMW identity is constructed and maintained, often in contradiction to their skills or abilities.

12.4 Further Research and Policy Implications

Much social, labour market and migration policy is based upon principles of economic efficiency and the realisation of returns upon human capital, to the degree that it has become a ‘common sense’ political discourse. Migrants are selected for human capital that will be realised in terms of national productivity measured through statistics addressing labour market participation. This research has argued that both segmentation and human capital theories of the labour market are inadequate, and while they are improved by the human cultural capital critique, they remain locked in a nexus based upon naturalised discrimination on the basis of difference. In addition, they focus upon the notion of access to the labour market, rather than equity within it, and ignore any activities outside the purview of labour market organisations.

The problem with human capital theory is that most KMW will not experience full returns on their human capital investment, or will find labour market positions but
face ongoing issues of exclusion and discrimination that are rendered undiscussable by virtue of the fact that they have been employed. Policies of multiculturalism and productive diversity constitute hypocrisy to basic questions of labour market access but have done little to address ongoing experience of difference as inferiority and social exclusion. Significant frustration and disappointment are experienced by KMW who arrive in Australia believing in unrestricted meritocracy, to find that their human capital is much depleted by cultural difference. The economic argument that justifies the entry of the highly skilled migrants over other migrants is not followed through in labour market practices and an essential promise is broken.

Organisations must be regarded as sites of culture, in which competition for positions and acceptance amongst individuals of similar human capital will ultimately be decided by other preferences. These preferential practices and their acceptance should be made clear and visible and constitute a more realistic critique of the operations of the Australian labour market. Without such studies and critique, claims of equal employment opportunity, multiculturalism and productive diversity are simply political, social and economic ideals. Future studies that problematise the cultures of labour market organisations rather than migrants with high expectations, high human capital and irredeemable difference should be pursued. These studies should endeavour to create a political space in which the insistence of logical positivist arguments based on ‘the bottom line’ and causal links to qualifications and skills may be shown to be faulty and insincere.

The discussion of barriers to economic productivity on the basis of difference also hides the productivity of KMW in performing community, voluntary and domestic caring and counselling roles that facilitate the economic productivity of others. Only certain activities are recognised and valued. A significant implication for policy makers is the need to recognise the voluntary, unpaid, helping and caring work and activities performed by many migrant women, isolated and unheard. These activities have been recognised in this research through narrative analysis techniques where other research techniques ignore this sphere of activity. This work is conducted in school libraries and canteens,
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homes, community groups, church meetings, by telephone and in small businesses, and provides considerable benefit to children, parents, friends, new migrants and others. KMW may be very busy offering assistance and guidance to others while maintaining a home and traditional roles, but be described as unemployed and unimportant. The extent and value of this work are unrecorded, unrewarded and unrecognised, yet the work adds much to the cohesion and humanity of a society. There is little language for these activities compared with the large vocabulary for describing economic and organisational social interaction.

KMW contribute to the Australian labour market in numerous ways that are unrecognised by current labour market theories of segmentation, human capital and human cultural capital, or by research techniques relying upon narrow statistical data or limited exploration of issues defined in terms of difference from white Australian males. This research has explored these prevailing theories using thorough and innovative antenarrative analysis tools. In so doing, it has demonstrated that KMW’s identity is wider and more diverse than current conceptions allow and that future research must consider the constructive and discriminatory effects of a wider set of contextual factors than have hitherto been studied.

The research has found that KMW in this research group are highly proficient in the English language and are often highly educated and skilled regardless of their membership of the NESB migrant women category. They have been given little space or voice in Australian academic literature, reflecting an ongoing ignorance of Asian women in Australian workplaces. They remain identified in terms of difference and responsible for the majority of domestic and childcare tasks. In total, KMW are subject to numerous forms of subordination in Australian workplaces and society that cannot be adequately explained in terms of their human capital or their gender and cultural difference. The covert nature of the politics of difference within labour market organisations makes exclusionary practices more difficult to identify and discuss. Future studies must address the construction of identity inherent in notions such as human capital and recognise the
use of narrative analysis techniques in providing knowledge of the experiences of non-dominant groups in the Australian labour market.
Appendices

Appendix 1

Research Questionnaire: Demographic Details of Participant

1. Age:
   a. 15-24 ( )  b. 25-34 ( )  c. 35-44 ( )  d. 45-55 ( )  e. 56+

2. Marital status:
   a. never married ( )  b. Married ( )  c. separated ( )  d. other ( )

3. Number of children:
   a. none ( )  b. 1-2 children  c. 3-4 children  d. 5+

4. Education (self):
   a. high school ( )  b. vocational certificate or diploma ( )  c. undergraduate degree ( )  d. postgraduate degree ( )

5. Education (spouse):
   a. high school ( )  b. vocational certificate or diploma ( )  c. undergraduate degree ( )  d. postgraduate degree ( )

6. Qualification/major (self)
   a. Skilled/vocational qualification ( )
   b. Professional qualifications ( )
   c. Business, economy, management major ( )
   d. Arts/humanity major ( )
   e. Other ( ), please specify:
Appendices

7. Qualification/ major (spouse)
   a. Skilled/vocational qualification (  )
   b. Professional qualification (  )
   c. Business, economy, management major (  )
   d. Arts/ humanity major (  )
   e. Other (  )

8. Did you work in Korea?   Yes (  ) No (  )

9. If you answered yes in question 8, how many years of work experience do you have?
   a. less than 1 year (  ) b. 1-2years (  ) c.3-5years (  ) d. 5years + (  )

10. Present occupation:
    Self:
    Spouse:

11. English language ability:
    a. none (  ) b. need assistance for some things (  ) c. adequate for most needs (  )
    d. can watch TV/listen to radio in English and understand (  )

12. How do you access news or information?
    a. Through English language newspaper (  )
    b. Through mainstream TV or Radio (  )
    c. Through Korean newspapers published in Korea (  )
    d. Through Korean media in Australia (  )
    e. Through the Internet (Korean language) (  )
    f. Through the Internet (English) (  )
    g. Word of mouth (  )
    I. Other, (  ) please, specify:
13. Time in Australia:
   a. less than 1 year (   ) b. 1-2 years (   ) c. 3-5 years (   ) d. 8-15 years (   )
   e. 15+years

14. Family income
   a. less than $25k (   ) b. $26k-40k (   ) c. $41-60k (   )
   d. $60k-80k (   ) e. $80k-100k (   ) f. $100k+ (   )

15. Education in Australia
   a. AMES (   ) b. TAFE (   ) c. Undergraduate (   ) d. Postgraduate (   )

*Length of time you have studied in Australia? : Please specify (years):
Appendix 2

Interview Schedule:

1. Why did you decide to immigrate to Australia?
2. What did you know of Australia before you came here?
3. Where did you get your information about Australia from before you came here?
4. How useful was the information about Australia you obtained before you came here in helping you to prepare for your move to Australia?
5. What would you tell a Korean woman thinking of immigrating to Australia who asked for your advice?
6. In what ways is your life in Australia as good as you expected?
7. In what ways is your life in Australia not as good as you expected?
8. Do you have a paid job in Australia?
9. Do you like it?
10. How did you find your job?
11. a. Would you like to have a job?
   b. Explain why you would or would not like to have a job.
12. a. If you are working, would you like to have a different job to the one you have now?
   b. Explain why you would or would not like to have a different job.
13. How have you dealt with any problems or difficulties that you have experienced working in Australia?
14. What else could help you deal with any problems or difficulties that you have experienced while working in Australia?

15. In what ways is working in Australia different to working in Korea?

16. In what ways is working in Australia the same as working in Korea?

17. Have you heard of anti-discrimination legislation in Australia?

18. If you have a job, how did you find this job?

19. a. Have you ever been to Centrelink in order to find work?
   b. If so, what was your experience of Centrelink?

20. If you have not used Centrelink to find work, why is this?

21. a. Have you participated in any job seeker programs?
   b. If so, what was your experience of these programs?

22. If you have not participated in a job seeker program in order to find work, why is this?

23. a. Have you ever used an employment agency to find work?
   b. If so, what was your experience of this agency?

24. If you have not used an employment agency to find work, why is this?
## Appendix 3

### Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumed Name</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Occupation in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun-myung</td>
<td>05/02/2002</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-sun</td>
<td>06/02/2002</td>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ji-won</td>
<td>07/02/2002</td>
<td>Flight attendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eun-sun</td>
<td>03/03/2002</td>
<td>Interpreter/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suk-kyung</td>
<td>04/03/2002</td>
<td>Director of childcare centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong-ja</td>
<td>05/03/2002</td>
<td>Help husband business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eun-sook</td>
<td>11/03/2002</td>
<td>Interpreter/translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin-seng</td>
<td>12/03/2002</td>
<td>Help husband business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bok-hee</td>
<td>13/03/2002</td>
<td>Own business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>02/04/2002</td>
<td>Own business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyung-suk</td>
<td>03/04/2002</td>
<td>Help husband business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kong-ji</td>
<td>04/04/2002</td>
<td>Volunteer work/casual teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yung-ok</td>
<td>15/04/2002</td>
<td>Volunteer work/housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ji-hyun</td>
<td>16/04/2002</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young-hee</td>
<td>17/04/2002</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-young</td>
<td>18/04/2002</td>
<td>Welfare worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ju-young</td>
<td>05/05/2002</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung-jung</td>
<td>06/05/2002</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myung-hwa</td>
<td>07/05/2002</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>05/09/2002</td>
<td>Own Consulting business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>06/09/2002</td>
<td>Employee/bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>07/09/2002</td>
<td>Employee/bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suk-young</td>
<td>11/10/2002</td>
<td>Ethnic liaison officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>12/10/2002</td>
<td>Ethnic liaison officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>13/10/2002</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jung-sun</td>
<td>11/12/2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Augunes</td>
<td>12/12/2002</td>
<td>Volunteer worker/housewife</td>
</tr>
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<td>In-suk</td>
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<td>05/01/2003</td>
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<td>06/01/2003</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
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<td>Sung-mo</td>
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<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
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<td>Kwang-mo</td>
<td>08/01/2003</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-in</td>
<td>09/01/2003</td>
<td>Piano teacher/volunteer worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4

SUBJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Research Project

Title: Labour Market Experiences of Korean Women in Sydney

(1) What is the study about?

This study examines why immigrants, particularly Asian/Korean background migrants experience disadvantages in searching for a job in Australia. The study will be conducted to fulfil the requirements for a PhD degree. The final bound thesis will be available in the University of Sydney library.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being carried out in Work and Organisational Studies, School of Faculty of Economics and business, The University of Sydney, under the supervision of Dr Suzanne Jamieson.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves direct face to face interviews with audio-tapes.

(4) How much will the study take?

The study will be taken about four years, but your participation will be about two hours.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary, you are not under any obligation to consent.

(6) Will anyone else know the results of my tests?

No. Confidentiality will be ensure by not identifying any particular individual in the results.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

It will not benefit direct to you, however, it will be of indirect benefit for wider Australian society.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell anyone about the study.

(9) What if there’s a problem?

If there is any problem occurs you can contact the Manager for Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager for Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4
Appendix 5

CONSENT FORM

I,……………………………. give consent to my participation in the research project
Name (please print)

TITLE: Labour Market Experiences of Korean Immigrant women in Sydney.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction;

2. I have read the Subject Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with family and/or friends.

3. I am aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the project;

4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my treatment or my relationships with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

5. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way which reveals my identity.

6. I understand that if there is any problem occurs I can contact the Manager for Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney.

Signed:………………………………………….Date:…………………………

Name:…………………………………………..

Witness:………………………………………….Date:…………………………

Name:………………………………………….
**Bibliography**

ABS see Australian Bureau of Statistics


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