

## MARITAL STATUS, GENDER, AND SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN KOREA\*

SUNI LEE  
*Ajou University*

*The present study explores the effects of marital status and gender on the subjective quality of life in Korea. The data from a national survey of 955 married or single adults are examined by performing hierarchical regression analysis. Five separate scales are used to measure the quality of life which include a single-item general happiness scale, two negative affect scales, a modified version of Life in General Scale developed by Campbell et al. (1976), and a scale measuring the sense of personal competence. The result indicates that gender is a stable predictor of the quality of life regardless of one's marital status; men are better off than women. Being married appears to affect the level of general happiness positively. Analyses with other measures of quality of life, however, suggest that the effect of marital status is moderated by gender; for men, being married negatively affects the quality of life, while the effect is positive for women. This latter finding contrasts with what had been reported in some studies conducted in the U. S. The results are highly indicative of the inequality and the division of labor based on gender.*

### INTRODUCTION

This study explores the effects of marital status and gender on the quality of life in Korea. Data from a national survey consisting of 955 cases are analysed.

Quality of life, a concept that depicts subjective well-being, forms a contrast with objective indicators of life conditions. It is a topic that attracts the attention of many researchers. One of the reasons for this attention is that subjective well-being often does not correspond to the socioeconomic conditions of life. Studies generally indicate that family life and interpersonal relationships are more closely related with the internal, affective aspects of people's lives than are the external, socioeconomic conditions, and therefore are better predictors of the quality of life. Marital status and/or marital satisfaction, in particular, are known to be the best predictors of overall quality of life (Campbell, Converse & Rogers 1976; Schuessler & Fisher 1985; Zapf et al. 1987).

The basic question I raise in this study concerns the effect of marriage on

\*This study was supported by the Korea Research Foundation.

the quality of life. From the functionalist point of view, family is the primary institution of society. Within this institution, a variety of the needs of daily life are fulfilled, including the need for psychological security, care, and affection — arguably the most important. Family is supposed to be the refuge in the modern society (Gove, Style & Hughes 1990). Being married and, therefore, having a family life can be considered to have a positive effect on subjective well-being.

On the other hand, having a family involves duties and responsibilities, including the burdens of financial support, childrearing, and household chores. As a heterogeneous group according to such characteristics as gender and age, the family harbors the potential for strain and conflict among the members, and become more a battleground than a refuge. Therefore, it is also possible that the family or marriage has a negative effect on the quality of life.

Findings from empirical studies conducted in the United States generally show that married people have a higher quality of life than those who are unmarried (single), widowed, or divorced (Campbell, Converse & Rogers 1976; Clemente & Sauer 1976; Glenn & Weaver 1981). Glenn and Weaver (1981), however, argue that the positive effect of being married has been decreasing since the 1970s. Studies also indicate that the positive relation between being married and quality of life may be much weaker among women, with some studies suggesting that, for women, life satisfaction is higher among those who are unmarried than those who are married (Bernard 1982; Gove 1972; Gove & Tudor 1978). The dominant explanation of the negative effect of being married for women has been based on the sex role hypothesis, which refers to the ungratifying nature of housework, women's primary responsibility for household chores even if they hold a job outside their home, and work overload (Gove & Tudor 1978; Kessler & McRae 1981).

Overall, the findings on the relation between marital status and the quality of life can be summarized as follows: the effect of being married, more likely to be positive in direction, interacts with gender; the positive effect of being married is more evident among men than among women. For women, it may be weakly positive, if not negative.

In this study, I attempt to assess the validity of this generalization in relation to Korean society. In this attempt, I employ a number of different measures of the subjective quality of life, as recent developments in the quality of life research suggest that individuals' subjective evaluations of life are composed of multiple dimensions. The use of multiple measures to capture differing dimensions may, therefore, help us understand the quality of life

in more analytic terms.

## QUALITY OF LIFE: THE CONCEPT

Quality of life, or subjective well-being (these terms I use interchangeably), can be defined as people's evaluative reactions to their lives.

A distinction has been drawn in the field of subjective well-being, between cognitive/evaluative judgements of life and emotional experiences concerning well-being (Diener 1984, 1994; Myers & Diener 1995). The cognitive/evaluative component includes a sense of satisfaction with life, whereas the affective component involves the global emotional response about life, most typically associated with such expressions as 'happiness'. Satisfaction is defined as an evaluative/cognitive response to life conditions, based on expectations, needs, wishes, or other reference standards. It can be global (satisfaction with life as a whole) or focused on specific life domains (satisfaction, for example, with housing, finance, interpersonal relations, etc.). Happiness is a global emotional state arising as a response to positive/negative experiences in life. Happiness and satisfaction with life are, thus, distinguished from each other and regarded as the two primary measures of the quality of life.

Pavot and Diener (1993) suggest that factors affecting satisfaction and happiness may differ. Affective responses, which are short term in nature, are more easily affected by immediate conditions, while satisfaction is more likely to consist of long term evaluations and to reflect values or purposes of life. Even though happiness and satisfaction are not clearly distinguished in real life, the benefit of measuring subjective of measuring well-being according to both cognitive and affective dimensions will be a more comprehensive and analytic understanding of quality of life.

Affective response may be further divided into positive and negative emotions. This distinction is based on the finding that even when people report positive levels of well-being, all report some level of negative affect as well. A preponderance of people report a level of subjective well-being above the neutral level, yet they also report such negative affects as stress, anxiety, or feelings of alienation. This implies that positive and negative emotions are not bipolar opposites and that positive well-being is not simply the absence of negative emotions (Diener & Emmons 1985; Zapf et al. 1987).

Based on the discussions reviewed above, subjective well-being is commonly divided into three related but distinct components: life satisfaction, the presence of frequent positive affect, and the relative absence of negative

affect.

Campbell, Converse & Rogers (1976) add yet another component of subjective well-being: a sense of personal competence or self-esteem, involving the extent to which an individual feels that he/she is in control of his/her life, rather than being subject to control by external forces.

## METHOD

### Data

The data for this study come from a national—excluding the Province of Cheju Island—sample survey conducted in April 1996 for the Korean Quality of Life Study. From the original sample of 1000 cases, 45 cases in

**TABLE 1. RESPONDENTS' ATTRIBUTES BY MARITAL STATUS AND GENDER** Count (%)

		Single Men	Single Women	Married Men	Married Women	All
Age	20s	112 (89.6)	70 (89.7)	33 (9.2)	69 (17.5)	284 (29.7)
	30s	11 (8.8)	8 (10.3)	130 (36.3)	122 (31.0)	271 (28.4)
	40s	2 (1.6)		83 (23.2)	79 (20.1)	164 (17.2)
	50s			112 (31.3)	124 (31.5)	236 (24.7)
Education Level	Elementary		1 (1.3)	28 (7.8)	64 (16.2)	93 (9.7)
	Middle	5 (4.0)	2 (2.6)	40 (11.2)	68 (17.3)	115 (12.0)
	High School	72 (57.6)	55 (70.5)	157 (43.9)	185 (47.0)	469 (49.1)
	College	48 (38.4)	20 (25.6)	133 (37.2)	77 (19.5)	278 (29.1)
Occupation	Professional	13 (10.6)	11 (14.5)	39 (11.0)	17 (4.4)	80 (8.5)
	Office	27 (22.0)	25 (32.9)	64 (18.0)	11 (2.8)	127 (13.5)
	Managerial			45 (12.7)	1 (0.3)	46 (4.9)
	Sales/Service	38 (30.9)	18 (23.7)	137 (38.6)	82 (21.0)	275 (29.1)
	Manufacturing	6 (4.9)	2 (2.6)	34 (9.6)	8 (2.1)	50 (5.3)
	Agri/Fishing	2 (1.6)	1 (1.3)	22 (6.2)	10 (2.6)	35 (3.7)
	None	37 (30.1)	19 (25.0)	14 (3.9)	261 (66.9)	331 (35.1)
Monthly Household Income (Won)	Under 1.5 mil.	44 (35.2)	31 (39.7)	132 (36.9)	144 (36.5)	351 (36.8)
	1.5-1.9 mil.	22 (17.6)	14 (17.9)	91 (25.4)	105 (26.6)	232 (24.3)
	2-3 mil.	35 (28.0)	21 (26.9)	189 (24.9)	88 (22.3)	233 (24.4)
	Over 3 mil.	24 (19.2)	12 (15.4)	46 (12.8)	57 (14.5)	139 (14.6)
Subj. Class Membership	High	2 (1.6)		6 (1.7)	8 (2.0)	16 (1.7)
	Upper Middle	36 (28.8)	35 (44.9)	118 (33.0)	123 (31.2)	312 (32.7)
	Lower Middle	62 (49.6)	32 (41.0)	180 (50.3)	203 (51.5)	477 (49.9)
	Low	25 (20.0)	11 (14.1)	54 (15.1)	60 (15.2)	150 (15.7)
All		125 (13.1)	78 (8.2)	358 (37.5)	394 (41.3)	955 (100.0)

which the respondents were widowed, divorced, or separated were excluded. The cases for analysis include 483 male and 472 female respondents. Of the male respondents 125 were unmarried (13.1% of the total cases) and 358 were married (37.5%); 78 of the female respondents were unmarried (8.2%) and 394 were married (41.3%). The overall characteristics of the respondents are as shown in Table 1.

### *Measures of Subjective Well-being*

The data include 5 different sets of measures of subjective well-being. All of the multiple-item scales are constructed by averaging the scores of each item.

1. *Measure of Positive Affect: Happiness Scale.* A single item measure of happiness is included in the data. The item reads as follows: "Taking all things together, do you feel you are happy these days?" It has 5 response categories which are "very happy," "somewhat happy," "so so," "somewhat not happy," and "not happy at all."

2. *Two Measures of Negative Affect: Anxiety Scale & Alienation Scale.* Nine items are included to measure negative affect. Five of them measure symptoms of anxiety, and the other four measure symptoms of anomie/alienation. The sets of items are almost identical to those included in Zapf and his colleagues' *The German Social Report*(1987), except that an item describing alienation at work is deleted and two items on alienation from informal interpersonal relations are included. The items are presented in Table 3. In this study, items on anxiety and anomie/alienation are treated separately to form different scales of negative affect. Each item has 5 response categories, with higher scores meaning stronger negative emotion.

3. *Evaluative Measures of the Quality of Life.* Unfortunately, an item measuring overall life satisfaction is missing in the data. Instead, a semantic differential scale with 9 items is included. The scale indicates how respondents have evaluated their lives on each item consisting of a pair of opposite adjectives that describe positive/negative states of being. The items are

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO GLOBAL HAPPINESS SCALE

						Count (%)
	Not happy at all 1	Somewhat not happy 2	So so 3	Somewhat happy 4	Very happy 5	Average Score (N=950)
All things considered, are you happy these days?	18 (1.9)	114 (12.0)	484 (50.9)	270 (28.4)	64 ( 6.7)	3.261

TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO NEGATIVE AFFECT ITEMS

	Count (%)					Average Score (N=950)
	Totally disagree 1	Somewhat disagree 2	Neutral 3	Somewhat agree 4	Totally agree 5	
I often have spells of complete exhaustion or fatigue.	47 (4.9)	140 (14.7)	203 (21.4)	444 (46.7)	116 (12.2)	3.465
I have recurring frightening thoughts.	218 (22.9)	381 (40.1)	200 (21.1)	124 (13.1)	27 (2.8)	2.327
I am constantly keyed up and jittery.	214 (22.5)	324 (34.1)	240 (25.3)	145 (15.3)	27 (2.8)	2.418
I am usually unhappy or depressed.	269 (28.3)	354 (37.3)	208 (21.9)	107 (11.3)	12 (1.3)	2.199
I often shake or tremble.	288 (30.3)	348 (36.6)	196 (20.6)	107 (11.3)	11 (1.2)	2.163
I often feel lonely.	154 (16.2)	273 (28.7)	236 (24.8)	258 (27.2)	29 (3.1)	2.721
I have no close friends.	339 (35.7)	290 (30.5)	195 (20.5)	97 (10.2)	29 (3.1)	2.144
I rarely go to social gatherings.	198 (20.8)	272 (28.6)	229 (24.1)	171 (18.0)	80 (8.4)	2.645
Things have become so complicated in the world today that I don't understand just what is going on.	133 (14.0)	272 (28.6)	282 (29.7)	198 (20.8)	65 (6.8)	2.779

identical with those included in the "Life in General" scale used in Campbell, Converse, and Rogers' study, *The Quality of American Life* (1976), except for an omission of one item. Each item has 5 response categories, with higher scores meaning positive evaluation. The items are listed in Table 4.

4. *The Sense of Personal Competence Scale.* In the data, six dichotomous items measure the sense of personal competence or control in life. The score of '1' is given to positive responses, and '0' to negative responses. The items are presented in Table 5.

**TABLE 4.** DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO LIFE IN GENERAL SCALE ITEMS

						Count (%)	
	1	2	3	4	5		Average Score (N=944)
Boring	53 (5.6)	158 (16.7)	386 (40.9)	274 (29.0)	73 (7.7)	Interesting	3.165
Miserable	22 (2.3)	63 (6.7)	399 (42.3)	358 (37.9)	102 (10.8)	Enjoyable	3.482
Hard	81 (8.6)	202 (21.4)	328 (34.7)	254 (26.9)	79 (8.3)	Easy	3.051
Useless	21 (2.2)	70 (7.4)	317 (33.6)	366 (38.8)	170 (18.0)	Worthwhile	3.629
Lonely	39 (4.1)	102 (10.8)	299 (31.7)	346 (36.7)	158 (16.7)	Friendly	3.511
Empty	26 (2.8)	109 (11.5)	395 (41.8)	324 (34.3)	90 (9.5)	Full	3.363
Discouraging	17 (1.8)	55 (5.8)	251 (26.6)	393 (41.6)	228 (24.2)	Hopeful	3.805
Tied-down	82 (8.7)	155 (16.4)	272 (28.8)	280 (29.7)	155 (16.4)	Free	3.287
Disappointing	31 (3.3)	60 (6.4)	337 (35.7)	381 (40.4)	135 (14.3)	Rewarding	3.560

### *Method of Analysis*

The objective of this study is identify patterns in the relationship between marital status and subjective quality of life in Korean society that are similar to those of in American society. The general finding in the United States indicates an interaction effect of gender and marital status: the effect of being married is positive for men. For women, the effect may be weaker or even negative.

To test for the presence of such pattern, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with an interaction term is performed. The regression model consists of a measure of subjective well-being as the dependent variable, marital status as the primary independent variable, the variable of gender and its interaction term with marital status, and control variables. Only two categories of marital status are compared, with married coded as 1 and single

**TABLE 5.** DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO THE SENSE OF PERSONAL COMPETENCE SCALE ITEMS

	Count (%)		
	No	Yes	Average Score (N=950)
My wishes are getting fulfilled in my life. (Yes = 1)	609 (64.1)	341 (35.9)	0.359
There are things that frighten me or make me worry. (No = 1)	485 (51.1)	465 (48.9)	0.511
Generally, people can be trusted. (Yes = 1)	423 (44.5)	527 (55.5)	0.555
Problems we face in our lives are too difficult to be solved. (No = 1)	560 (58.9)	390 (41.1)	0.589
I have a fair chance for success. (Yes = 1)	592 (62.3)	358 (37.7)	0.377
Relative to others, I have enjoyed life more. (Yes = 1)	621 (65.4)	329 (34.6)	0.346

as -1. Gender is also coded 1 and -1 for male and female, respectively. The interaction term is created by multiplying marital status by gender. Control variables include subjective class membership, household income, education level, and age. Subjective class membership was measured with 6 categories—upper high, lower high, upper middle, lower middle, upper low, lower low; and they were coded 6 to 1, in the same order. Household income, which was measured as an ordinal variable, was converted to a continuous variable. Education level was coded 1 through 9, starting from elementary, to middle school drop-out, middle school, high school drop-out, high school, college drop-out, junior college, college, and, finally, to graduate school.

The regression analysis is repeated for five different measures of subjective well-being.

To test the hypothesis, the significance of  $R^2$  change is observed when the interaction term is entered. In the regression analysis testing for an interaction effect, the coefficient for the interaction term indicates change in the slope of subjective well-being on marital status depending on the gender variable. The coefficients for the component 'main effects'—which are marital status and gender—in the final regression table indicate the effects of each variable on subjective well-being when the other component indepen-



dent variable equal the mean. Therefore, using the coefficients in the regression table, the slopes of subjective well-being on marital status can be compared between men and women (Friederich 1982; Jaccard, Turrisi and Wan 1990).

## RESULTS

### *The Distribution of Scores on Subjective Well-being Scales*

1. *Happiness Scale.* The average score on the happiness scale is 3.261. A preponderance of reports of positive subjective well-being are not evident in the data, even though there are slightly more positive responses than negative ones (see Table 2).

2. *Anxiety Scale & Alienation Scale.* The average scores on the anxiety and alienation scales are 2.515 and 2.572, respectively. The average scores on each item are all below the neutral point, with the exception of one. For the first item, which concerns the experience of fatigue and exhaustion, the majority of responses lie on the negative side of the neutral point (see Table 3). This result is perhaps highly indicative of the peculiar characteristic of the quality of life in Korea.

3. *Life in General Scale.* The average score of the Life in General scale is 3.428. As shown in Table 4, the preponderance of positive evaluations is somewhat more evident in the distribution of responses in most of the items.

4. *Sense of Personal Competence Scale.* The average score on this scale is 0.456 which lies beneath the neutral point of 0.5 (See Table 5).

High correlation among different scales of subjective well-being is a common result in quality of life studies. As reported in Table 6, all correlation coefficients are significant. It appears that scales of happiness, Life in General, and sense of personal competence correlate highly with one another.

**TABLE 6.** CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS AMONG SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING SCALES

	Happiness	Anxiety	Alienation	Life in General	Sense of Competence
Happiness	1.0000				
Anxiety	-.2598**	1.0000			
Alienation	-.2771*	.4638**	1.0000		
Life in General	.4940*	-.3616**	-.4352*	1.0000	
Competence	.4750**	-.2913**	-.2977**	.4100**	1.0000

\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

er. The two scales measuring negative affect correlate highly, too. The correlations between positive measures and negative measures, which are not as high, may serve as one indication of the validity of the distinction between the positive and negative affect. The Life in General scale appears to correlate most highly with other measures in general.

### *Marital Status and the Subjective Well-being*

The average scores on five scales of subjective well-being by marital status and gender are reported in Table 7. On the happiness scale, married people — regardless of their gender — scored the highest, followed by single men, and then by single women. On the anxiety scale and the alienation scale, single men appear to be in the best position in their subjective well-being by scoring the lowest. Married men, married women, and single women follow in order. On Life in General scale, single men again scored the highest. Married men and women together follow after, and single women follow last. On the personal competence scale, the order from the highest score is single men, married men, married women, and single women.

All in all, the result indicates that single men are in the most favorable position, whereas single women are in the worst position in terms of their subjective experience of well-being. The result is quite consistent throughout different scales with an exception of the happiness scale. Married men and married women are positioned somewhere in-between. The difference between married men and married women is not as dramatic, although married men do seem to be better off than married women on some measures. They do not differ much on the happiness scale or on the Life in General scale, but they do on measures of negative affect in which men score lower. These results suggest an interaction effect of gender and marital status, but in the opposite direction of what had been expected from the findings in American societies. In Korea, being married appears to have a

**TABLE 7. AVERAGE SCORES OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING SCALES BY MARITAL STATUS AND GENDER**

	Single Men	Single Women	Married Men	Married Women	All
Happiness	3.208	3.051	3.295	3.289	3.261
Anxiety	2.349	2.687	2.474	2.570	2.515
Alienation	2.422	2.750	2.490	2.661	2.572
Life in General	3.491	3.156	3.445	3.447	3.428
Competence	0.512	0.408	0.466	0.439	0.456

**TABLE 8.** REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING SCALES ON MARITAL STATUS, GENDER, THE INTERACTION TERM, AND CONTROL VARIABLES.

	Marital Status	Gender	Interaction Term	Subjective Class	Household Income	Education Level	Age
Happiness	.136 ***	.043	-.050	.179 ***	8.23E-4 **	.030	-.005
Anxiety	-.052	-.110 ***	.067 *	-.064 *	-1.26E-4	-.021	.005 <sup>+</sup>
Alienation	-.075 <sup>+</sup>	-.123 ***	.053 <sup>+</sup>	-.130 ***	-6.72E-5	-.047 **	.006 <sup>+</sup>
Life in General	.104 **	.081 **	-.096 ***	.151 ***	5.83E-4**	.041 **	-.003
Competence	.018	.031 **	-.023 *	.043 ***	2.59E-4 **	.017 **	-.002

<sup>+</sup> p<.1, \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

negative effect or, at best, a weaker positive effect for men, whereas, for women, it has a stronger positive effect.

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the interaction effect is significant for most of subjective well-being measures (see Table 8). It is significant at p<.05 level for the Life in General scale, the anxiety scale, and the sense of personal competence scale, and marginally significant for the alienation scale. For the happiness scale, however, the interaction effect is not significant. The positive effect of being married, independent from the effects of gender, is present only when the happiness scale and the Life in General scale is used.

The analysis of the effects of marital status and its interaction effect with gender on each subjective well-being measures proceeds as follows. First, being married positively affects the experience of happiness with no confounding effect of gender. Second, the evaluative response of one's life is positively affected by being married. The positive effect of being married, however, differs in magnitude depending on gender; it is stronger for women than men. The regression coefficient of marital status on the Life in General scale, indicated as .104 is the average magnitude of the effect of being married. The regression coefficient of the interaction term, which is -.096, means that the positive effect of being married will be reduced by .096 if one is male, which means that the positive effect will become almost nil. The positive effect of being married, however, should increase by the same amount for females.

Third, being married can reduce the experience of anxiety only among women. The regression coefficients indicate that, for men, the effects of marital status can be reversed, although the magnitude of the coefficient is not great ( $b = -.052 + .067 = .015$ ). A similar pattern, although marginal in statistical significance, is found between the relationship of marital status and the

experience alienation.

Fourth, the effect of marital status being reversed by gender is most evident on the sense of personal competence scale. For men, the effect of being married is negative, while, for women, it is positive.

To summarize, the effect of marital status and its interaction with gender can be characterized differently depending on which aspect of the subjective well-being is concerned. Being married is favorable to the positive affective dimension of subjective well-being. The evaluative response to life is also positively affected by being married, but the magnitude of this effect is greater for women. Being married can have an effect of reducing the experience of negative emotions for women, but not so for men. The effect of being married on the sense of personal competence is in opposite direction for men and women: men are negatively affected, whereas women are positively affected. Overall, being married has a stronger positive effect on the quality of life of women; for men, it has a weaker positive effect, if not a negative effect on the quality of life in Korea.

To add one very interesting and, perhaps, the most marked result of the analysis, there is a strong solitary effect of gender. Men consistently experience higher quality of life than women. With one exception, gender has no effect on the experience of happiness when the effect of marital status is controlled. Although the fact that women's quality of life is lower than that of men is a common finding in any quality of life study, we did not expect to find single women to be in the worst position.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study began with the goal of examining the effect of marital status on subjective well-being in Korea, and whether its effect is moderated by gender in the same pattern as found in prior studies in the U.S. The results suggest that this interaction effect is present, but working in the opposite direction.

The major findings of this study can be described in four points. First, the nature of the relation between marital status and subjective well-being, to some extent, depends upon which dimension of the quality of life is concerned. Second, for women, being married generally contributes to improvement in the subjective evaluation of the quality of life. Single women fare the worst throughout the diverse dimensions of subjective well-being. Third, for men, being married has a positive effect on the experience of positive affect and on the cognitive/evaluative response to life; it has no negative impact on the experience of negative emotions, however.

Additionally, being married has a negative effect on the sense of personal competence. Overall, single men are in the most favorable position. Fourth, gender has a strong impact on quality of life indicators, and men fare better than women. The effect of gender is more consistent and stronger in magnitude than the effect of marital status.

With the exception of the first point, all of these findings are unexpected. In a sense, they stand in sharp contrast to previous findings in other western societies. The most pressing questions are as follows. Why do single women fare worse than married women, when their objective life conditions are in no sense disadvantaged? Why are single men better off than married men?

The advantage of married women over single women may reflect the relative social status of married and single women characteristic of the Korean Society. Although the rate of female labor force participation is rising in Korea (48.3% in 1995), women continue to be seriously marginalized in the labor market (Cho 1986). The opportunity for women to obtain employment is greatly limited. Within the life cycle of a typical woman, the period of young adulthood prior to marriage would be the time of the most active search for employment and also the time of the highest experience of frustration. Married women, on the other hand, possess a potentially rewarding social status although, the sphere in which this status exists is limited to the domestic. With a cultural background of strict Confucian division of the domestic and the public, women's position in the domestic sphere is solid. The domestic role provides a secure basis for women to acquire an institutionally legitimated social status and to have a considerable degree of control over the lives of family members, even if this may eventually serve only to perpetuate the marginal status of women within the society (Cho 1986).

Two interpretations seem plausible for the explanation of why single men fare better than married men. First, because of a strong culture-based distinction between the domestic and the public as mentioned earlier, responsibilities as a provider fall heavily upon the father/husband. The position of the father/husband within a household is somewhat marginalized, however, since the mother holds the commander role within the family, as reflected in frequent reports of men concerning their sense of becoming 'money earning machines' (Ahn 1995). Therefore, even if their relative social status within the society as a whole ensures a higher quality of life, men do not experience the same advantages in marriage that women experience. Instead, they may experience heavy burdens associated with the role of provider.

The second interpretation is based on the examination of the divorce rate in Korean society. Even though the divorce rate is increasing rapidly, it is still relatively low. The proportion of the divorced population in Korea is

1.1% (in 1995), while the figure in the U.S. is 10.4% (in 1990). Nevertheless, in Korea the number of people remaining in unsatisfactory marriages is large. For this population, the effect of being married on improving the quality of life would be low. In the U.S., the probability of married people remaining in unsatisfactory marriages would be much lower. In other words, the selective bias of having a higher proportion of happy people in the married population would be stronger in the U.S. Therefore, the possibility exists that the lower quality of life among married men in Korea is merely reflective of having a comparatively large proportion of unhappily married people.

The current data do not allow for verification of the interpretations given. Further research is needed.

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**SUNI LEE** is an associate professor of sociology at Ajou University. She received her Ph. D. in sociology from Emory University. Her research interests include social psychology, family, and gender. Her recent publication includes "Home-based Telework, Family Life, and Women's Role" and "The Psycho-Social Outcomes of the Participation in Voluntary Group Activities in Korea: A Survey Analysis." Her E-mail Address is sunilee@madang.ajou.ac.kr.