

결혼이주 여성과 한국인 여성의 결혼만족도 비교연구*

Comparison of Marital Satisfaction between Immigrant Wives and Korean Wives of Korean Men

서울대학교 아동가족학과 · 생활과학연구소

조교수 · 연구위원 그레이스정

경북대학교 아동가족학과 · 장수생활과학연구소

전임강사 · 연구위원 임지영

Department of Child Development and Family Studies · Research Institute of Human Ecology, Seoul National University

Assistant professor · Research Associate : Grace H. Chung

Department of Child & Family Studies · CBA(center for beautiful aging), Kyungpook National University

Full-time Lecturer · Research Associate : Ji Young Lim

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<Abstract>

The purpose of this study was to explore factors related to marital satisfaction among immigrant wives compared to Korean wives of Korean men. Participants included 409 immigrant wives married to Korean men and 474 Korean wives married to Korean men, both currently living in Korea. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that there were different sets of variables that predicted marital satisfaction for each group. Egalitarian decision-making was a significant predictor of marital satisfaction for immigrant wives only, whereas for Korean wives, it was the level of their depressive symptoms that was significantly but negatively associated with marital satisfaction. A wife's positive perception of her husband's communication style emerged as the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction for both Korean and immigrant wives. In addition, indicators of the cultural context of immigrant women (i.e., longer stay in Korea and greater frequency of experiencing discrimination in the past year due to their foreign appearance or status) emerged as significant predictors of immigrant wives' marital satisfaction even after taking demographic factors, depressive symptoms, and couple-level factors into account. The findings of this study contribute to existing

Corresponding Author : Ji Young Lim, Department of Child and Family Studies, College of Human Ecology, Kyungpook National University, 1370 Sankyuk Dong, Puk-ku, Daegu, 702-701, Korea Tel: +82-53-950-6211 Fax: +82-53-950-6209 E-mail: limj@knu.ac.kr

* This research was funded by the New Faculty Research Settlement Grants from Seoul National University (SNU) and Kyungpook National University (KNU), respectively, to the first author (Grace H. Chung) and the corresponding author (Ji Young Lim). We are also grateful to Gwanakgu Healthy Family Support Center (관악구건강가정지원센터) for additional support with recruitment and data collection. The earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2010 International Symposium held by SNU Multicultural Human Ecology Center.

research by (1) comparing the models of marital satisfaction for Korean wives and immigrant wives, identifying unique predictors for each group, and (2) examining the effect of cultural adaptation on the marital satisfaction of immigrant wives.

본 연구의 목적은 결혼이주여성과 한국인 여성의 결혼만족도에 영향을 미치는 요인들을 규명하는 것이다. 이를 위해 현재 한국에 거주하고 있는 409명의 결혼 이주여성과 474명의 한국인 여성을 대상으로 설문조사를 실시하였다. 위계적 회귀분석 결과, 평등한 의사결정방식은 결혼 이주여성들만의 결혼만족도를, 우울 수준은 한국인 여성들만의 결혼만족도를 설명하였다. 하지만 남편의 의사소통 양식은 결혼 이주 여성과 한국인 여성 두 집단 모두의 경우에 결혼만족도를 설명하는 가장 강력한 변수였다. 결혼 이주 여성의 경우 문화적 맥락(한국에서의 거주기간, 인종차별 경험) 또한 결혼만족도를 설명하는 중요한 변수였다. 본 연구의 결과는 결혼이주 여성과 한국인 여성의 결혼만족도를 설명하는데 있어 변수들의 상대적 영향력을 규명하고, 결혼이주 여성의 결혼만족도에 있어서 문화적 맥락 변수들의 고유한 기여점을 설명함으로써 결혼 이주 여성의 결혼만족도에 대한 이해를 돕고자 하였다.

주제어(Key Words): 결혼 만족도(marital satisfaction), 결혼 이주여성(immigrant women), 다문화 가정(interethnic/racial marriages)

I. Introduction

Over the last two decades, conjugal unions between Korean men and marriage migrant brides from Asian or other developing countries¹⁾ have emerged as an increasingly more common marital arrangement in Korea. According to the Bureau of Administrative Security (MOPAS, 2009), there are now 125,673 such interracial/ethnic couples in total, which makes up about 11.4% of the total marriages in Korea, and it is expected that their number will continue to grow. A troubling pattern, however, is that the rate of marital dissolution in this population is also steadily rising. In 2004, only 1.1% of the total divorce cases were between Korean men and their immigrant wives, but the rate went up to 6.8% by 2008. Such a trend raises a concern for the well-being of these individuals and their family units as well as the health of our society. Benefits that accrue to society when strong marriages are formed and maintained are well-documented. For instance, a longitudinal analysis of Laub, Nagin, and Sampson (1998) showed that cohesive marital bonds can function as informal social control by significantly facilitating desistance from crime among criminal offenders over time.

Given the heightened divorce rate among interethnic/racial marriages and suggested social

implications of a healthy marriage, a systematic study of marital satisfaction is vital, and an understanding of what promotes and diminishes the quality of marriages is urgently needed. The present study addresses this need by examining what predicts marital satisfaction for immigrant wives. We use a sample of Korean wives as a comparison group in order to highlight what is more or less salient to immigrant wives' subjective assessment of marriage compared to Korean wives. We also make recommendations for programs targeting interethnic/racial marriages as informed by the findings of this study.

The rationale for our comparative approach in the current study is rooted in the sociocultural context of interethnic/racial marriages in Korea that is significantly different from that of marriages between Koreans. Immigrant wives pay a high price to marry their Korean husbands by leaving their homeland and their family of origin behind to cross the border. Lack of social support and culture shock are common experiences of immigrant wives in Korea (Koo, 2007). Further, potential for misunderstanding due to language barriers is increased between them and other family members (Kim, 2009; Koo, 2007; Yang, Song, & Im, 2009). These differences between immigrant wives and Korean wives raise a possibility that what predicts marital satisfaction may be different for each group. This possibility, however, has

1) In the remainder of this paper, we use the term "immigrant wives" to denote "migrant brides from Asian or other developing countries."

not been directly explored because previous studies have only examined immigrant wives alone without a comparison group. Understanding differences between these two groups is important because it offers an empirical foundation for developing customized marriage enhancement programs for immigrant wives that highlight what is more relevant to their positive marriage experience.

In this light, the present study will examine if there are factors that predict marital satisfaction for immigrant women but not for Korean women by comparing the effect of various factors on marital satisfaction for immigrant women vs. Korean women. By examining these questions, our exploratory investigation seeks to understand the differences in what is operating to promote and diminish marital satisfaction among immigrant women compared to Korean women. The present study is the first study carried in Korea to compare these two groups in terms of their marital satisfaction.

Another gap in existing scholarship is the lack of understanding about the role of cultural adaptation in immigrant women's marital satisfaction. Overall, the cultural context in which immigrant women begin their lives as married in Korea is different from that of native Korean women and poses a number of obstacles for immigrant women's successful adaptation. Upon arrival, they find themselves in a new extended family system within a different culture, both of which use a different language and have familial customs and gender role expectations that may be different from their culture of origin (Koo, 2007). In addition, a language barrier between these women and their new family members, including their Korean husbands, makes it difficult for them to understand the needs of and expectations for each other (Kim, 2009; Koo, 2007; Yang et al., 2009) when these individuals may be their only source of practical and psychological support available in Korea.

Thus, these immigrant wives face multiple concurrent tasks, not only of getting accustomed to their new role as a wife, but also of adapting to the new environment. Given the particularity of the immigrant wives' position, the extent of, and the experiences associated with, their cultural adaptation (e.g., Korean language proficiency, level of acculturation to Korean culture, and experience

of ethnic/racial discrimination) are expected to shape their subjective experience in their own marriage. Most studies did not consider cultural adaptation variables, but the very few that did found that the indicators of greater adaptation were significantly associated with marital satisfaction (Kim, 2007). In view of its relevance and significance to immigrant wives' marital satisfaction, we aim to sharpen our understanding by examining how significant of a role cultural adaptation plays in explaining immigrant women's marital satisfaction relative to other previously reported predictors, such as demographic, psychological, and couple interaction factors.

Taken together, the present exploratory investigation addresses two important limitations in research on marital satisfaction among immigrant wives. First, we explore differences and similarities in predictors of marital satisfaction by comparing native Korean and immigrant wives who are married to Korean men. By doing so, we seek to understand what is more or less salient to marital satisfaction for immigrant wives as compared to native Korean wives, and to offer suggestions for developing marriage enhancement programs customized for immigrant wives. Second, we attempt to gain more insight into the role of cultural adaptation in immigrant wives' marital satisfaction. Specific research questions we examined are as follows:

- (1) Are different factors associated with marital satisfaction among women in interracial/ethnic marriages vs. Korean women married to Korean men?
- (2) Among immigrant wives, how significant is the role of cultural adaptation relative to other predictors of marital satisfaction?

II. Literature Review

1. Comparative Studies on Marital Satisfaction

As the number of interracial couples increases and numerous risk factors, such as higher divorce rate, have been associated with interethnic/racial marriages (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002), a body of research comparing the quality of marriage between interethnic/racial and

intraethnic couples emerged. Research findings are mixed in that some suggests that individuals in interethnic/racial marriages are less satisfied than those in intraethnic/racial marriages (e.g., Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008) while others report no meaningful differences (e.g., Moon, 2007). In a study of 148 wives and 134 husbands in Hawaii, Fu and colleagues found that interracial couples reported a lower level of marital happiness than racially homogeneous couples. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) also found that married and cohabiting interethnic couples reported lower levels of relationship quality than did partners in same-ethnic unions. However, Moon's master's thesis (2007) with 130 Korean wives and 103 Vietnamese wives who are married to Korean men found that both groups reported similar levels of marital satisfaction. Overall and within each group, the level of marital satisfaction did not vary by wives' employment status, number of children, husbands' education and income level, or family structure (i.e., nuclear vs. extended family). While these studies compared the level of marital satisfaction between interethnic/racial and intraracial marriages, there is no research that examined what is associated with marital satisfaction for interethnic/racial couples as compared to intraracial couples.

2. Past Research on Predictors of Marital Satisfaction

Sociodemographic Factors

Studies report mixed findings on the effect of sociodemographic factors on marital satisfaction. Kim (2007) and Yang and Chung (2006) found that education and number of children were not related to marital satisfaction among immigrant wives while Kwon and Cha (2006) found that low education and high annual income were significantly associated with greater marital satisfaction among immigrant wives. In the case of Korean wives, higher household income was also a significant factor (Son & You, 2008). However, unlike immigrant wives, Korean wives with more education reported greater marital satisfaction (Son & You, 2008). In terms of age, the younger the wives were, the more satisfied they were with their marriage for both immigrant (Kim, 2007) and Korean wives (Kim, 2009). In

this study, we control for these sociodemographic factors in our analysis.

Individual-Level Psychological Factors

Individual psychological well-being, such as depression (Lee & Yun, 2007; Son & You, 2008), is also consistently associated with marital satisfaction among Korean wives. However, no published study in Korea has examined its effect on immigrant wives' marital satisfaction. In the present study, we examine if the significant association between depression and marital satisfaction observed among Korean wives holds true for immigrant wives as well.

Couple-Level Factors

According to previous research, the level of positive couple interaction and husbands' efforts to understand their wives appear to be the factors that have the strongest impact on both Korean and immigrant wives' marital satisfaction. In a study by Pyo and Kwon (2009), immigrant wives' greater perception of their husbands as having an understanding personality predicted their marital satisfaction most significantly. Also, when Yang and Chung (2006) examined sociodemographic, individual, and couple factors, the level of marital adjustment (as measured by their perceived difficulty in understanding and getting along with their husbands) was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction among 150 Chinese, Japanese, and Filipina immigrant wives in rural regions of Korea. In Kim's (2007) study of marital happiness among 304 South Asian immigrant wives living in Seoul, an overall quality of family relationship was the strongest predictor for their marital happiness while the degree of husbands' efforts to understand their wives' native culture emerged as the next important factor.

Similarly, research on marital satisfaction among Korean wives highlights the significance of couple communication. Indicators of positive couple communication, such as positive communication with spouse (Hwang, 2009) and conflict resolution efficacy (Han & Hyun, 2006), were most powerful predictors of marital satisfaction, whereas behaviors that aggravate positive communication, such as expressing hostility, and ignoring and criticizing one's spouse (Kong, 2006),

were negatively associated.

Although previous research did not report the level of shared power as a significant predictor for neither Korean nor immigrant wives, there is evidence from research conducted with Asian American couples that the wives who shared decision-making with their husbands were least likely to be physically victimized by their husbands, whereas unbalanced sharing of power was significantly associated with an increase in the likelihood of physical victimization (Chung, Tucker, & Takeuchi, 2008). Findings such as this one suggest that sharing of decision-making power in marriage may be significantly related to greater marital satisfaction among wives.

In addition, there is evidence that marital satisfaction decreases for immigrant wives as the age gap increases between them and their Korean husbands (Suh & Kim 2009). Relationship with mother-in-law also appears to play a role in marital satisfaction for both Korean and immigrant wives. For instance, perceived intimacy with mother-in-law predicted immigrant wives' marital happiness (Yang, 2007) and conflict with parents-in-law decreased Korean wives' marital satisfaction (Kim, 2009). In this study, we examine whether and to what extent living with parents-in-law would influence immigrant wives' marital satisfaction.

Indicators of Cultural Context

A couple of studies reported that the indicators of cultural adaptation, such as Korean proficiency (Moon, Kim, & Sim, 2009) and low acculturation stress (Kim, 2007), were identified as additional significant factors for immigrant wives. This is consistent with research conducted in other multicultural societies, such as the U.S., in that low acculturation, as characterized by low length of stay in the U.S. and high immigrant stress, had a significant negative effect on immigrant wives' marital satisfaction (Liu, 2008). However, as Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) mentioned in their decade review of research on marital satisfaction, we still know very little about the impact of indicators of macro-context, such as racism and acculturation, upon marital satisfaction. Research shows that interracial couples encounter various social challenges, such as stereotypes and lack of relationship approval from family and friends (Karis,

2003; Killian, 2001). In addition, there is evidence that individuals in interracial marriages are less happy and more likely than individuals in racially homogenous marriages to divorce (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Heaton, 2002). Based on these findings, we speculate that the experience of racism among immigrant wives may have a negative effect on their marital satisfaction.

3. Current Study

Marriages exist in highly complex, multifaceted environments, and understanding of how these environments interact and impinge upon marriage is an important goal of marital satisfaction research (Bradbury et al., 2000). In line with this goal, we further our understanding of marital satisfaction in two folds. First, we compare predictors of marital satisfaction among Korean wives and immigrant wives in order to determine the unique factors that are more salient to immigrant wives. Given the evidence that the level of marital satisfaction is similar across various sociodemographic characteristics among Korean and immigrant wives (Moon, 2007), identifying a differential pattern in which marital satisfaction is influenced for each of these groups will be a meaningful task as a racial and ethnic make-up of families in Korea is becoming more diverse and multicultural. In addition, past research suggests that more comparative studies are needed. Recently, Kim (2007) examined the role of sociodemographic variables (age, education, length of marriage, employment state, having a child), individual variables (self-esteem, fluency in Korean), and family variables (family relation, husband's understanding of wives' mother culture, spending spare time with a husband, experience family violence) along with cultural context variable (i.e., acculturative stress) with 304 marriage immigrant women living in Seoul. The results of analyses revealed that family relation, husband's understanding of wives' mother culture, and spending spare time with a husband, experience family violence, and acculturative stress were related to marital satisfaction among marriage immigrant women. However, there was a major limitation of the study design in that there was no comparison group (i.e., Korean women) used in the study. In their critical

analyses of the past research on interracial/ethnic marriage and their children in Korea, Kwak (2008) pointed out that due to the absence of a comparison group, the past studies failed to identify unique factors predicting immigrant women's adjustment as opposed to Korean women.

Second, by examining a role of cultural adaptation relative to other predictors, we seek to clarify its significance for marital satisfaction among immigrant wives. Research over the last several years has been dedicated to identifying predictive factors for marital satisfaction such as socio-demographic characteristics, individual characteristics, and relational variables (Kim, 2007; Koo, 2007; Moon, 2007; Moon et al., 2009; Pyo & Kwon, 2009; Suh & Kim, 2009; Yang & Chung, 2006). Relatively less attention has been paid to understanding to what extent cultural context factors influence on marital satisfaction among immigrant women (Koo, 2007; Moon, 2007; Moon et al., 2009; Pyo & Kwon, 2009; Suh & Kim, 2009; Yang & Chung, 2006). It is important to track the role of cultural context in marital satisfaction of marriage immigrant women since effective intervention or education programs can be built upon a thorough understanding of their acculturation experience and its relationship with their marital satisfaction.

Taken together, existing research suggests that it is imperative to study marital satisfaction reported by marriage immigrant women with the comparison group. Also, we need to concurrently consider sociodemographic factors, individual factors, relational factors, and cultural context factors to fully understand marital satisfaction of marriage immigrant women. However, no study to date has included the aforementioned variables concurrently with the comparison group.

III. Method

1. Sample

Participants in this study included a convenient community sample of 409 immigrant wives married to Korean men and 474 Korean married women currently living in southeast region of Korea, including Daegu and rural towns in Kyungang Book Do and the northwest

region, including Seoul, Incheon, and suburban towns in Kyunggi Do. Women were recruited through schools and centers, including childcare centers, elementary, middle, and high schools, and after-school programs, Korean language schools, and multicultural family support centers.

Table 1 shows the ethnic backgrounds of immigrant wives in our sample. Their average length of living in Korea was 9.51 years ($SD = 5.65$), and they met their current husbands through religious institutions ($n = 95$), marriage agencies ($n = 72$), friends/colleagues ($n = 72$), and family/relatives ($n = 62$).

Korean wives and immigrant wives were different in some of their demographic characteristics (see Table 2). A series of t-tests revealed that Korean wives in the present study were older ($M = 39.93$, $SD = 4.43$), had more children ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .69$), had smaller age differences with their husbands ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 3.02$), and reported higher levels of educational attainment for both husband ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .75$) and themselves ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .66$) compared to immigrant wives ($M = 35.80$ and $SD = 8.24$ for age, $M = 1.85$ and $SD = 1.08$ for number of children, $M = 7.79$ and $SD = 6.99$ for age difference with husbands, $M = 4.13$ and $SD = .91$ for educational attainment of women, and $M = 4.00$ and $SD = .89$ for educational attainment of husbands).

Chi-square analyses showed that immigrant wives in our sample were more likely to live together with their parents-in-law (25.2%) in comparison to Korean women (14.3%) ($\chi^2(1) = 16.37$, $p < .001$). Household income of interethnic/racial couples was lower than Korean

(Table 1) Immigrant wives' ethnic backgrounds and length of stay in Korea
($n = 409$)

Ethnic Backgrounds	N
Chinese-Korean (조선족)	73
Chinese	58
Vietnamese	58
Filipina	43
Japanese	41
Mongolian	16
Mixed	23
Other	60
Missing	37
Total	409
	Mean (SD)
Length of Stay in Korea (years)	9.51 (5.65)

〈Table 2〉 Demographic characteristics of Korean and immigrant wives and group differences

	Korean Wives (n = 474)	Immigrant Wives (n = 409)	Group Differences
Continuous Variables	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	t
Age	39.93 (4.43)	35.80 (8.24)	-9.21***
Age Gap with Husband	2.95 (3.02)	7.79 (6.99)	11.86***
Number of Children	2.14 (.69)	1.85 (1.08)	-4.82***
Categorical Variables	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Pearson Chi-square
Husband's Education	4.42 (.75)	4.00 (.89)	53.58***
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	
None	1 (.2)	4 (1.0)	
Elementary School	7 (1.5)	20 (4.9)	
Middle School	20 (4.2)	47 (11.5)	
High School	211 (44.5)	197 (48.2)	
College	175 (36.9)	78 (19.1)	
Graduate School	22 (4.6)	10 (2.4)	
Missing	38 (8.0)	53 (13.0)	
Education (self)	4.27 (.66)	4.13 (.91)	46.96***
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	
None	0 (0)	3 (.7)	
Elementary School	7 (1.5)	12 (2.9)	
Middle School	25 (5.3)	67 (16.4)	
High School	280 (59.1)	175 (42.8)	
College	146 (30.8)	118 (28.9)	
Graduate School	9 (1.9)	17 (4.2)	
Missing	7 (1.5)	17 (4.2)	
Household Income	1.84 (.54)	1.51 (.58)	63.80***
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	
Below 24,000,000 won	82 (17.3)	111 (27.1)	
24,000,000 won ~ 74,000,000won	234 (49.4)	88 (21.5)	
Over 74,000,000 won	27 (5.7)	9 (2.2)	
Don't know	45 (9.5)	63 (15.4)	
Missing	86 (18.1)	138 (33.7)	
Live with Parents-in-law			16.37***
Yes	14.3%	25.2%	
No	85.7%	74.8%	

*** $p < .001$

couples ($\chi^2(3) = 63.80, p < .001$).

Since there were significant differences in demographic characteristics according to the group in the present study, current age of the women, number of children, age gap between husband and wife, educational level of both husband and wife, whether or not to live with parents-in-law were included in the main data analyses as control variables.

2. Measures

The present study examines the impact of several indicators previously mentioned in relevant studies on marital satisfaction. These indicators are categorized into four groups: sociodemographic factors, individual-level psychological factors, couple-level factors, and indicators of cultural context.

1) Sociodemographic factors

Current age of women, women's education level, husband's education level, financial strain, and number of children comprised sociodemographic factors in the hierarchical linear regression analyses of this present study. Information about the current age of women, education level of both women and their husband, and the number of children was obtained from the response to demographic questionnaire items.

For financial strain, three different indicators were used to assess financial strain: (1) problems paying bills, (2) problems making ends meet, and (3) behavioral responses that suggested recognition of the existence of financial difficulties. In the present study, two items adapted from Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, and Mullan (1981) to index difficulty in paying bills (from 1 =

no difficulty to 4 = a great deal of difficulty) and a report on how much money was left over at the end of each month (from 1 = some to 3 = not enough to make ends meet). The other component of economic strain involved behavioral adaptations to hardship whether they had done any of the following as a result of economic problems during the past year; (1) sold possessions or cashed in life insurance, (2) postponed major purchases, (3) postponed medical care, (4) borrowed money from friends or relatives, (5) received government assistance, (6) filed for or taken bankruptcy, or (7) fallen behind in paying bills. The summative index was created by adding the yes responses (yes = 1, no = 0). The three indicators of financial strain (paying bills, money left over, behavioral adaptations) were standardized and then summed to construct a single index of overall financial strain ($\alpha = .84$). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in this study was .91.

2) Individual-level psychological factor

Depression was included in the data analyses as an indicator of individual-level psychological factor. In order to measure participant's depression level, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was used. The CES-D includes 20 items comprising six scales reflecting major dimensions of depression: depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, psychomotor retardation, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbance. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in the present study was .87.

3) Couple-level factors

As couple-level factors, age gap with husband, co-residence with parents-in-laws, shared marital power, communication styles of both husband and wife were included in the data analyses.

Shared Marital Power. The balance of power between spouses was measured by questions adapted from Blood and Wolfe (1960). Respondents were asked to indicate who made the final decisions regarding the following issues: family entertainment, interacting with relatives, amount of money spent on food, major financial decisions such as buying a house or a car, working outside the family, and having a child. The responses for each issue

were wife only, husband only, and joint decision. This measure has demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability (Allen & Straus, 1985). The Shared Power Index was computed by summing the number of joint decisions by both spouses. The resulting index had a range of 0 to 6, which was again transformed to a 0 to 100 percentage scale by dividing the maximum score of six.

Communication Skill. Marital Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1970) was used to measure communication skills of both husband and wife. The MCI consists of 6 items and is a self-inventory type of device in which the subjects respond by checking one of five possible responses, "Always" "Usually," "Sometimes," "Seldom," and "Never." The responses to the items are scored from zero to four with a favorable response given the higher score (Bienvenu, 1970). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in the present study was .84.

4) Indicators of cultural context

As indicators of cultural context, number of years in Korea, Korean language proficiency, acculturation attitude, and perceived discrimination were included in the data analyses. The number of years in Korea was determined based on response to a demographic questionnaire item.

Language proficiency. Korean proficiency was assessed by a 4-item measure in which the respondents were asked to rate their ability to comprehend, speak, read, and write Korean. The responses were scored on a 4-point scale with higher scores indicating more proficiency in Korean.

Acculturation Attitude. The Acculturation Attitude Scale (AAS; Berry, 1997, 2003) was used to identify the process of psychological and cultural changes as a result of continuous and direct contact with Korean culture. The 30 items were randomly ordered in the scale and the responses were given on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from "strong disagreement" (1) to "strong agreement" (4). Higher scores indicated higher level of acculturation to Korean culture. Previous immigrant studies reported that the discriminant validity for different acculturation attitude scales was desirable (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989). Cronbach's alpha of the scale in the present study was .80.

Perceived Discrimination. Daily Racial Hassles (DRH; Harrell, 1997) was used to measure perceived discrimination among women from interethnic/racial marriages. The DRH subscale is part of the Racism and Life Experiences scales developed by Harrell (1997). The DRH is a self-report measure that assesses the frequency and impact of 18 micro-aggressions due to race in the past year. An example of an item is “how often because you are immigrant woman have you been ignored or not received a service in a restaurant?” Participants were asked to assess each of the 18 items regarding a) how frequently they experience each hassle and b) how much they were bothered by each hassle. The frequency of the hassles is assessed using a 6-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 (never experienced), 1 (less than a year), 2 (several times a year), 3 (once a month), 4 (several times a month) to 5 (several times a week). The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale in the present study was .91.

5) *Marital Satisfaction*

The dependent variable was marital satisfaction, which was measured by Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) (Schumm, et al., 1985). The KMS consists of

three questions tapping satisfaction about their current marital relationship. An example of the content of this questionnaire is: “How satisfied are you with your current marriage or relationship?” The response set ranged from 1 = very unsatisfied to 4 = very satisfied in the present study, and therefore an individual total score ranges from 3 to 12. Cronbach’s alpha of the scale in the present study was .95.

3. **Procedure**

All procedures followed in this study were reviewed and approved by the Internal Review Boards of Seoul National University. Since there are diverse ethnic backgrounds using different languages among the sample, Korean, English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mongolian, and Tagalo-language questionnaires needed to be developed for this project. Therefore, the instruments were translated into 6 different languages by native speakers and then a retranslation was used to confirm the appropriateness of initial translations. After completing the translation procedure, questionnaires were administered to Korean women and immigrant women individually or in groups. Women were informed about

<Table 3> Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables

	Korean Wives (n = 474)	Immigrant Wives (n = 409)	Group Differences
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	t
Marital Satisfaction	3.22(.80)	3.18(.86)	-.74
Sociodemographic Variables			
Age	39.93(4.43)	35.80(8.24)	-9.21***
Education(self)	4.27(.66)	4.13(.91)	-2.52*
Education(husband)	4.42(.75)	4.00(.89)	-7.22***
Financial Strain	.00(.64)	.02(.48)	.38
Number of Children	2.14 (.69)	1.85(1.08)	-4.82***
Individual-Level Variables			
Depression	.77(.43)	.79(.44)	.53
Couple-Level Variables			
Shared Power in Decision Making	57.19(28.74)	58.36(30.05)	.55
Age Gap with Husband	2.95(3.02)	6.86(6.52)	11.86***
Husband Communication Style	3.43(.84)	3.43(.91)	.11
Wife Communication Style	3.48(.72)	3.63(.78)	2.82**
Co-residence with Parents-in-laws	.14(.35)	.25(.44)	4.08**
Cultural Context Variables			
Number of Years in Korea		10.23(5.62)	
Daily Racial Hassles		.35(.45)	
Acculturation to Korean Culture		2.78(.31)	
Korean Language Proficiency		2.97(.83)	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

the nature of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity by the researcher, prior to the questionnaires.

IV. Results

Descriptive statistics and group differences on key variables are presented in Table 3. Table 3 shows that Korean wives and immigrant wives are demographically different but otherwise similar. The only difference was that the Korean wives reported significantly lower scores on wife communication style ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .72$) in comparison to immigrant wives ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .78$).

1. Similarities and differences in predictors of marital satisfaction among Korean wives and immigrant wives

To examine which factors (individual-level well-being, couple-level characteristics, and indicators of cultural context) are significantly associated with marital satisfaction of Korean wives and immigrant wives, we conducted hierarchical regressions analyses on these two groups. In the regression model (see Table 3), demographic variables (number of children, educational attainment of both husband and wife, current age of the woman, financial strain) were entered as control variables in the first step, followed by an indicator of individual psychological well-being (i.e., depression) and couple-level characteristics (i.e., % of shared power between spouses, co-residence with parents-in-law, age gap between a husband and a wife, communication skills of both husband and wife) as predictor variables. For immigrant wives only, indicators of cultural context (Korean language proficiency, acculturation to Korean culture, daily racial hassles, number of years living in Korea) were included in the last step of the model.

In the hierarchical multiple regression including only sociodemographic variables as independent variables, 10% of the variance was accounted for by all the independent variables in the regression model for Korean women, $F(5, 360) = 7.71$, $p < .001$, whereas 7% of the variance was accounted for by the variables for immigrant wives, $F(5, 260) = 3.83$, $p < .001$. For the model, husband's education attainment level ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$ for Korean women and $\beta = .13$, $p < .01$ for women from

interethnic/racial marriages) and financial strain ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$ for Korean women and $\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$ for women from interethnic/racial marriages) were significant predictors of marital satisfaction for both groups, but other demographic variables (current age of women and education attainment level of themselves, and number of children) were not.

The change in R^2 , resulting from the addition of the individual level factor to the model, was significant for both group, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $F(1, 259) = 14.55$, $p < .001$ (for immigrant wives), $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $F(1, 359) = 33.28$, $p < .001$ (for Korean wives). In the model, financial strain ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$ for Korean women and $\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$ for women from interethnic/racial marriages) was a significant predictor of marital satisfaction for both groups, but other demographic variables (current age of women and education attainment level of themselves, and number of children) were not. Also, husband's education attainment level was no longer significant for women from interethnic/racial marriages but remained significant for Korean women ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$). Also, depression level ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$ for Korean women and $\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$ for women from interethnic/racial marriages) was a strong predictor of marital satisfaction for both groups.

The change in R^2 , resulting from the addition of the couple level variables to the model, was significant for both group, $\Delta R^2 = .15$, $F(5, 254) = 14.55$, $p < .001$ (for immigrant wives), $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $F(5, 354) = 14.94$, $p < .001$ (for Korean wives). Separate hierarchical regression models for each group revealed that there were different sets of variables to explain marital satisfaction. For Korean women, education attainment level of themselves ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$), financial strain ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$), depression level ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$) and husbands' communication skills ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) remained significant but other demographic variables (current age of women and education attainment level of husband), % of shared power between spouses, communication skill of themselves, age gap between husband and wife, and co-residence with parents-in-law did not significantly predict marital satisfaction. The husbands' communication skill was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction among Korean wives. For immigrant

wives, current age of women ($\beta = -.20, p < .05$), educational attainment level of women ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$), financial strain ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$), % of shared power between spouses ($\beta = .14, p < .05$), communication skill of husband ($\beta = .34, p < .01$), and age differences between husband and wife ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$) remained significant, but educational attainment level of husband, number of children, depression level, communication skill of themselves, and co-residence with parents-in-law did not predict marital satisfaction for immigrant wives. Again, husbands' communication skill was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction among immigrant wives.

In summary, current age of women, % of shared power between husband and wife, and age gap between husband and wife predicted marital satisfaction only for immigrant wives. Depression was a significant predictor only for Korean wives. Women's educational attainment level, financial strain, and communication skill of husband predicted marital satisfaction for both Korean and immigrant wives.

2. The role of cultural adaptation for marital satisfaction among immigrant wives

In order to clarify the importance of cultural adaption for marital satisfaction among immigrant wives, we added the cluster of cultural context indicators (number of years living in Korea, acculturation to Korean culture, Korean proficiency, and frequency of perceived discrimination experience) to the aforementioned model. Because we assumed that cultural adaptation would explain marital satisfaction of women in interethnic/racial marriages beyond what demographic variables, individual characteristics, and relationship variables could explain, we included the indicators of cultural context in the final step. This model significantly predicted marital satisfaction and the indicators of cultural context did add significantly to the prediction of marital satisfaction for immigrant wives.

The regression model revealed that number of years living in Korea ($\beta = .26, p < .05$) and the frequency of experiencing discrimination ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$) significantly

(Table 4) Hierarchical Regression Models Predicting Marital Satisfaction among Korean and Immigrant Wives

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Korean Wives	Immigrant Wives	Korean Wives	Immigrant Wives	Korean Wives	Immigrant Wives	Korean Wives	Immigrant Wives
	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β
Sociodemographic Factors								
Age	.03	-.08	.02	-.12	.03	-.20*		-.35**
Education(self)	-.11	-.12	-.10	-.10	-.13*	-.14*		-.11
Husband Education	.18**	.13*	.16*	.11	.09	.03		.09
Financial Strain	-.25***	-.18**	-.14**	-.13*	-.14**	-.14*		-.09
Number of Children	.07	.06	.07	.05	.08	.05		-.03
Individual-Level Psychological Factors								
Depression			-.30***	-.23***	-.14**	-.11		-.08
Couple-Level Factors								
Shared Power in Decision Making					.08	.14*		.14*
Husband Communication Style					.31***	.34**		.30**
Wife Communication Style					.11	.09		.10
Age Gap					-.05	-.21*		-.13
Co-residence with Parents-in-laws					-.04	.07		.05
Indicators of Cultural Context								
Number of Years in Korea								.26*
Daily Racial Hassles								-.14*
Acculturation to Korean Culture								-.05
Korean Language Proficiency								-.08
Constant	2.48	3.42	3.02	3.96	1.67	3.32		3.68
R^2	.10	.07	.17	.12	.32	.28		.33
Adjusted R^2	.08	.05	.16	.10	.30	.25		.28
F	7.71***	3.83***	12.55***	5.72***	14.96***	8.80***		6.66***
F^2 - Change			.07	.05	.14	.15		.03
ΔF			33.28***	14.55***	14.94***	9.96***		2.97*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

predicted marital satisfaction for immigrant wives beyond the effect of demographic variables, individual characteristics, and relationship variables. Current age of women, communication skill of husband, % of shared power between spouses remained significant. The change in R^2 , resulting from the addition of the cultural context variables to the model, was significant for immigrant wives, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(4, 250) = 2.97$, $p < .05$.

As such, separate hierarchical regressions in each group's sample revealed that there were different sets of variables that explain marital satisfaction for each group (see Table 4). For immigrant wives, the number of years in Korea and the frequency of experiencing discrimination significantly explained marital satisfaction beyond the effects of demographic variables, individual well-being, and couple-level characteristics while their age, perceived communication skills of their husbands, and % of shared power between spouses remained as significant predictors of marital satisfaction.

V. Discussion

1. Main Findings

In line with previous research (Han & Hyun, 2006; Hwang, 2009; Kim, 2007; Pyo & Kwon, 2009; Yang & Chung, 2006), wives' positive perception of their husband's communication style emerged as the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction for both Korean and immigrant wives. Our finding confirms that the husbands' positive communication style exerts a significant effect on wives' marital satisfaction regardless of the racial/ethnic make-up of a marriage beyond the effect of demographic, psychological well-being, and indicators of cultural context for immigrant wives.

Aside from husbands' communication style, substantially different predictors of marital satisfaction emerged for immigrant and Korean wives although both groups reported similar levels of marital satisfaction. Particularly notable was the strong, positive effect of egalitarian decision-making on marital satisfaction for immigrant wives - the more they shared power with their husbands to make important decisions, the more satisfied they were in their marriage, - whereas for

Korean wives, it was the level of their depressive symptoms that is significantly but negatively associated with marital satisfaction rather than the perceived equality in marital relationship (which remained non-significant throughout).

In our view, these differences may be a reflection of different expectations or beliefs about marriage in general that Korean and immigrant wives hold. Given the evidence that immigrant wives tend to hold less traditional views about gender roles in marriage compared to Korean women (Koo, 2007), an actual manifestation of their expectations in their marital dynamics may significantly promote marital satisfaction.

A concept of boundary ambiguity (Boss, 1987) offers a useful insight as well. It refers to "a state when family members are uncertain in their perception of who is in or out of the family or who is performing what roles and tasks within the family system" (Boss, 1987). For instance, as immigrant wives upon arrival establish themselves within their new extended family system in a foreign country, they may experience boundary ambiguity where they may be physically present in the family but lack a sense of psychologically meaningful membership. In this context, sharing a role as a co-decision-maker with a husband may serve as an indicator that they are accepted and trusted as a member of the family, an aspect of their marriage that might be particularly meaningful and empowering for immigrant wives. Thus, we speculate that the sense of membership and trust may function as a pathway through which sharing decision-making power increases their marital satisfaction, which may be a reasonable next step in research that merits further exploration. Given that sharing decision-making remained significant even after cultural context was accounted for, the application of the concept of boundary ambiguity to understand their experience merits further empirical investigation.

It is not clear why it was an individual psychological well-being, but not shared power, that predicted marital satisfaction for Korean wives. In parallel to our earlier speculation, it might be fruitful for future research to examine what mediates the effect of depression on Korean wives' marital satisfaction and what role perceived membership and trust plays in the quality of their marriage.

As expected, indicators of immigrant women's cultural context - longer stay in Korea and greater frequency of experiencing discrimination in the past year due to their foreign appearance or status - emerged as significant predictors of immigrant wives' marital satisfaction even after taking all the other factors into account. Previous research that examined cultural adaptation as a predictor for marital adjustment tended to focus on immigrant wives' and their Korean husbands' behaviors, such as learning about wives' culture and language, and learning Korean, and less on the significance of racial/ethnic prejudice experienced in their daily lives (e.g., Kim, 2007). In this regard, our finding contributes to existing research by offering evidence that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of experiencing prejudice and discrimination and their subjective assessment of their own marriage. Although more research is needed to make a definitive statement, our study suggests that the racist attitudes and prejudice against immigrant women can be damaging enough to have a negative effect on the perceived quality of their own marriage. Identifying a mechanism through which this link operates might be a reasonable next step in our research.

Finally, the effect of demographic characteristics on marital satisfaction was similar for both groups except for the significant role of younger age in immigrant wives' marital satisfaction. The significance of husbands' high level of education disappeared for both Korean and immigrant wives once couple-level indicators, such as husband's communication style, were entered into the model, giving more weight to the importance of husband's communication style in predicting women's marital satisfaction. For immigrant wives, the effect of education and financial strain became insignificant after indicators of their cultural context were considered. Taken together, these findings suggest that while immigrant wives who are older, educated, or financially strained may be at greater risk than those who are younger, less educated, or less financially strained, their cultural context matter more for immigrant wives.

2. Strengths and Limitations

The present study contributes to the field of research

on immigrant wives in Korea in several ways. First, by comparing the models of marital satisfaction for Korean wives and immigrant wives, we were able to identify unique predictors for each group and began to address cultural differences. Second, our recruiting strategy ensured data collection from a sample of Korean and immigrant wives in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Seoul, Incheon, Kyunggi Do, Daegu, and Kyungsang Book Do. In addition, given that most previous studies sampled their participants from a community service center, we made sure to recruit women who do not utilize services as well by collecting data from both schools (e.g., childcare centers, afterschool programs for low-income and multicultural children, and elementary, middle and high schools) and community service centers (e.g., multicultural family support centers and Korean language classes). Further, our use of surveys in different languages allowed us to get input also from immigrant women who may not be familiar with Korean.

The results of the present study, however, must be interpreted carefully with a number of limitations in mind. First, our use of women's reports without the husbands' allowed for only a partial picture of marital satisfaction. It might be useful for future studies to identify unique predictors of marital satisfaction separately for wives and husbands. Second, we did not examine ethnic differences. Given that immigrant wives come from diverse cultural backgrounds, it will be important for future studies to examine which specific aspects of ethnic/cultural background may be associated with marital satisfaction. Third, we did not ask women whether it was their or their husbands' first marriage or remarriage. Possible variations in marital satisfaction by the previous marital history may be an area for future research. Finally, the nature of our cross-sectional design does not allow for a causal relationship between the variables examined and marital satisfaction. It will be important to follow a group of interracial/ethnic couples over time and identify different predictors of marital satisfaction as they proceed through different stages of the lifecycle and become more acculturated into Korean society and culture.

3. Recommendations for Practice

Findings of this study can serve as groundwork for developing effective, research-based intervention programs to promote marital satisfaction among interracial/ethnic couples. First, given that the husbands' communication skill was the most significant predictor of immigrant wives' marital satisfaction, Korean husbands' participation is crucial for marital programs to be effective. We recommend program coordinators and community leaders do active outreach to recruit and motivate Korean husbands to participate in their programs. Also, our results suggest that a program curriculum designed to enhance husbands' communication skill is needed. As we speculated that sharing decision-making may empower immigrant wives by providing them with a sense of membership and trust, encouraging Korean husbands to include their wives in family decision-making and offering them specific strategies on how it can be done may be particularly promising for strengthening their marriages. In addition, the effect of daily racial hassles reported in this study on immigrant wives' marital satisfaction points to a need for developing and implementing cultural diversity education programs targeting general public in Korea. This finding also suggests that there is a need for creating a safe space for immigrant wives to talk about such incidents and to get support from their families. For instance, it might be helpful to educate Korean husbands about the role of daily racial hassles in their wives' lives in Korea and to teach them how both husband and wife could talk about it to each other and about various ways in which Korean husbands could support their wives when such an incident actually takes place.

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접 수 일 : 2010년 11월 25일

심사시작일 : 2010년 12월 7일

게재확정일 : 2011년 4월 15일