

MARRIAGE EAST AND WEST

by

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Key Terms

Stress Feelings  
Stress Results  
Physical Ailments  
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Suicide

unpublished report  
1989 B

See also CARGAN 1989 A  
Same study

Marriage is seen as a provider of well-being but this benefit is not equally divided according to gender. Jessie Bernard notes that marriage is actually detrimental to the health and happiness of women. On the other hand, Glenn comes to the conclusion that women exceed men in both the stress and satisfactions derived from marriages.

In order to test these differential findings and to note whether they extend beyond the western style marriage, a random sample was taken from both the Dayton, Ohio metropolitan area and the Okayama, Japan metropolitan area - areas similar in size and gender breakdown.

The findings indicate that there is little difference between the sexes regarding health factors in the Japanese and American sample but that the direction **was** in line with the Bernard and Glenn hypothesis for the American sample.

In regards to self reports of global happiness, neither category of women were more likely than their counterparts to note such. As a means of testing Bernard's belief that global happiness is over reported by women, an examination of drunkenness and suicide thoughts were also examined. However, the results were mixed: women got drunk less often than the men but were more likely to have planned and attempted suicide.

In conclusion, Glenn's belief that women were more likely to exceed men in both the stresses and satisfactions derived from marriage was not shown. In addition, if reports of alcohol consumption, **plan/attempt** at suicide and marriage comparison can be considered reflective of happiness, then support is given Bearnard's hypothesis that reported happiness by the female is not truly reflective of her happiness.

Despite its decreasing importance with respect to work, protection, education and recreation, the family is still seen as the provider of psychic well-being and as the "matrix for the development of personality" (Ackerman, 1972). However, in her book, The Future of Marriage, Jessie Bernard claims that these benefits of marriage are not equally divided between the two sexes. In her studies, she has found that certain symptoms of psychological stress are more frequent among married women than any other marital-sex category and that more husbands than wives report being very happy. **It** is these findings that led to her belief that marriage for the women is destructive and is much less or not at-all beneficial to most wives (1972:29).

Gove, in his studies, agrees with Bernard's thesis that marriage is responsible for a wide variety of emotional disorders for wives. He finds that in modern Western societies married women have noticeably higher rates of mental illness than married men; a finding not shown when comparing various types of single women with single men. In fact, these women have lower rates of mental illness than their male counterparts (1972:34).

Glenn, in a review of marital literature, finds support for the Eernard's data that marriage is more stressful for American women but not for the reported greater personal happiness for married men than the married women. **It** is these findings that led to his conclusion "that women, as a whole, exceed men in both the stress and satisfactions derived from marriage" (1975:599). However, Bernard explains this discrepancy in regard to happiness by claiming that married women's reported happiness reflects adjustment and reconciliation rather than a truly high level of psychological well-being. That is, married women have been told that they should be happy and have come to believe that they are (1979).

Glenn, counters this claim by noting that "it seems improbable that reported happiness means something essentially different for women than for men" (1975:599).

In sum, marriage has been conceptualized as a protection against psychological stress (Braito and Anderson, 1978; Perlin and Johnson, 1977 Somers, 1979) but that this protective barrier is more so for men than women (Gove, 1972) and that it may even be a detriment to the happiness of women (Bernard, 1979).

It is the above findings that led to the first two of the proposed hypotheses:

1. Among married persons, women will more likely report personal psychological stress and physical ailments.
2. Among married persons, men will more likely report personal happiness than women.

A third hypothesis can be derived from Bernard's research: self-reported claims of happiness by married women does not necessarily reflect their global happiness. Thus, the third hypothesis states that reported personal happiness will be more predictive of happiness for men than for women.

## METHOD

As a means of dealing with these questions, two surveys were conducted. In the western sampling, a probability proportionate to size cluster sample of 400 households was drawn from the Dayton Metropolitan area - an area of about 500,000 in population. The number of households in the sample area was divided by 80 in order to determine an interval number. Utilizing a random starting number, the interval number was added until all 80 blocks were selected. Utilizing another random number allowed for the selection of the five households to be interviewed in each of the 80 blocks. Refusals and "not homes" were replaced with similarly random drawings in the same block area. Since respondents were contacted in the evening or on weekends in order to ensure the inclusion of all desired categories, only fifteen households had to be replaced. The questionnaire contained 77 items and included references to lifestyle, loneliness, happiness, sexual behavior and health.

As a means of noting whether the findings were true only for a western type society or had wider application, the study was replicated in the metropolitan area of Okayama, Japan; an area of 600,000 in population and similar in demography to Dayton. However, cultural differences such as a lack of street signs led to the questionnaire being deployed on a mailed basis. A sample mailing of 750 was selected from a census list of all adults 21 or older. The returns provided 216 usable responses or 29% of the total sampling.

Since the hypotheses dealt with marital health and happiness, only the married portions of both samples were utilized for this study. For Dayton, this consisted of 132 females and 108 males and for Okayama, it was 90 females and 70 males.

In dealing with the marrieds of both countries, a demographic difference is noted. Since Japanese men and women tend to marry later in life than their

American counterparts, the Japanese female is older at the time of her first birthing. However, she has her first birthing earlier in the marriage than the American female and so both tend to have their last child at about the same age. Another similarity is seen with the percentage of the population married. The Japanese and the Americans have a similar high percentage of their population, both females and males, married with a similar age difference between the couples. (Kumagai, 1983).

## RESULTS

### HEALTH

When speaking of the health of marrieds, there are references to both psychological and physical health (Table 1). In order to measure the former, five feelings and two conditions which are reflective of psychological health were utilized. Contrary to expectations, the overall figures for stress feelings revealed no difference among the sexes in the Japanese sample. However, **there were** some interesting differences in regard to specific stress feelings. For example, only the females have feelings of despondency (5% vs. 0%), and are also slightly more likely than the males to note the related feeling of worry (7% vs. 3%). On the other hand, the Japanese men are somewhat more likely to indicate feelings of worthlessness (7% vs. 3%). The American picture is in line with expectations, the females were slightly more likely than the males to exhibit these feelings of stress (11% vs. 8%). More specifically, they were more likely than the males to note feelings of despondency (11% vs. 6%), guilt (13% vs. 7%) and worry (18% vs. 14%). The contrast between the two countries reveals that the Americans **were** far more likely than the Japanese to exhibit these feelings (10% vs. 5%). In line with the hypothesis, women were more likely than the men to note these psychological feelings (9% vs. 7%) but this was due mostly to differences among the Americans.

Although 92% of those indicating crying as a response to stress were females, this statistic probably reflects gender related response to stress. Insomnia, on the other hand, is not gender related and, in the American sampling fell into the expected pattern. Thus, American females were more likely than males to complain of **insomnia** (20% vs. 14%), while in the Japanese sampling the difference **is** not only minimal but, in fact, leans towards more males noting the ailment. (10% vs. 8%). In this second segment of the picture, the Americans again were more likely than the Japanese to note health conditions (11% vs. 5%).

One final aspect of this health picture is that of physical ailments, and the results are similar to those seen in the two previous responses. Except for stomach ulcers (10% M vs. 2% F), there is little difference between the Japanese men and women. And, again, the American women are more likely than the men to note a health factor. That is, they are slightly more likely than the men to exhibit physical ailments (16% vs. 14%) and this is especially true in regards to headaches (31% vs. 21%). Again, the Americans were more likely than the Japanese to claim a health problem (15% vs. 8%).

Summarizing the results of all the health factors, Table 1 reveals that only in the American sample, does the difference in health lie in the expected direction of married women being more likely than men to note these health items (13% vs. 10%). There is no difference among the Japanese sexes in this regard. Considering the results on the individual health factors, **it** is not surprising to see that overall, the Americans are twice as likely **as** the Japanese to note these health factors (12% vs. 6%)



## HAPPINESS

In line with the second hypothesis. Table 2 does show that males are more likely than females to claim that they are happy most of the time (87% vs. 83%). And while this was true for both countries, the differences are insignificant. Considering the findings on health, it is perhaps surprising to find that more Americans than Japanese claim happiness most of the time (88% vs. 81%) and that the American female is most likely than her Japanese counterpart to note happiness most of the time.

## RELATED FACTORS

To test Bernard's claim that the reported happiness of married women does not reflect a truly high level of psychological well being, two other aspects, believed reflective of happiness, were examined: drunkenness and contemplation or attempts at suicide. Unfortunately, the survey question on drunkenness was interpreted differently by the Japanese. However, there are various statistics which indicate that the Japanese have a high rate of alcohol consumption for both males and females. A survey by the Yoka Kaihatsu Center (Table 3) of Japan indicated that 33% of the sample drank alcohol in their homes, 25% with friends and acquaintances, 20% to celebrate special occasions, 13% in business negotiations, and 7% on other occasions (Alcohol Dependency Syndrome, 1979). This averages out to **85** liters per person per year, 70-79 liters in Okayama), (Union of Alcohol-Makers, 1986). On the other hand, very few of the Americans, male and female, claim to get drunk very often.

Turning to suicide, (Table 4), it is seen that the Japanese are more likely than the Americans to plan and attempt suicide (20% vs. 4%). Seventeen percent of the Japanese women plan suicide, while **5%** actually attempt it. These figures are in striking contrast to her American counterpart of 2% planning suicide and 3% attempting it. With the American sample, the difference in these categories of suicide is slight. Unlike the picture on health, the Americans are less

likely than the Japanese to note a negative life factor - more suicide plans (20' vs. 4%).

A final test of the Bernard's thesis may be indicated by the more specific question regarding marital happiness. In this case, the sample were asked to compare the happiness of their marriage to the marriage of their acquaintances. In this case (Table 5) the Japanese, especially the females, indicated greater dissatisfaction with their marriage than their American counterparts. Thus, 19% of the Japanese as compared to 9% of the Americans, believed that other marriages were happier than their own. Only 6% of the Japanese as compared to 17% of the Americans, believed that their marriages were happier than the marriages of their acquaintances. Although these beliefs were more likely to be held by the females as compared to their male counterparts, the differences on a sex basis are slight.

#### DISCUSSION

Support for the first hypothesis on health is shown with the western part of the study but not the eastern counterpart. The American women were more likely than American men to report higher frequencies on each segment of the health picture examined. Specifically, on only two of the ten health items - fears and stomach ulcers were males slightly more likely than females to display these health factors. However, as noted, support for the hypothesis is not shown with the Japanese sample. Except for despondency and stomach ulcers, there was very little difference between the sexes on specific items, and no difference overall.

Gove, in attempting to explain why the married women of his study had higher mental illness rates than the men, paraphrased Arnold Rose's idea that "women find their uncertainty and lack of control over their future to be frustrating" (1972:35). This frustration has, apparently, a cultural bias.

An example of this cultural influence is seen in the work ethic of modern Japan. Today, the husband works long periods of time outside of his home as breadwinner while the wife is compelled to play the role of housekeeper and caretaker of the children. In this manner she saves the husband worry over trifling matters at home. The result of these ideals is shown in a survey by the Japanese Government on items important to happiness. Seventy-one percent of the Japanese women as compared to 34% of her American counterpart believed that taking care of family matters, husband and children were more important than their own happiness. (Cabinet Secretary Office of Japan, 1983). Nor is it the social custom for her to enjoy her leisure (*Onnaodaigaku*). Both of these ideals came from traditional customs in the Tokugama Ages of Feudalism. In that period, the men (Samurai) used to work outside their homes in service to their landlords. Similarly today the Japanese treat working for their company as a public service. As in the past, it is considered a private matter as well as more important and superior than any business of the home. Despite changing from the arranged marriage to the love marriage type (Asahi Sinbum, 1984), the Japanese culture still emphasizes a marriage where the wife remains at home to take care of the house and children and the husband is the breadwinner, often working long hours and evenings to accomplish this goal. Most Japanese women today still adhere to the traditional ideas of sex-role identification (Kumagai, 1983). A sex-role identification which includes and remains in such Japanese strictures as the "wife follows to her husband" (*Fusho-Fuzui*) and that a gentleman is first and a lady second" (*Danson-Johi*). However, the Japanese wife may have less stress than the American wife since her marital expectations are more carefully proscribed within the Japanese culture plus the American wife may suffer from what Toffler calls "option-glut" (1980).

A study by Blood and Wolfe (1960) indicated that the marriage relationship in America have the following characteristics:

- a. They take part in public meetings and appearances.
- b. They know each other very well, exchanging and giving information.
- c. The wife plays a role in her husband's job and to some degree influences it.
- d. They get acquainted with one another's friends.

In comparison, in Japan:

- a. Except for special occasions couples have no such pattern of going together.
- b. The roles of husband and wife are quite independent of each other and many times are not cognizant of what the other is doing.
- c. Traditionally the wife confines her role to the home. Also the husband is not inclined to talk about business to his wife since he considers it private.
- d. There is no common ground for enjoying each other's friends and so there is no internal relationship between them. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that in a Japanese Government survey, 25% of the Japanese women were quite satisfied with their family life as compared to 60% of the American women (1983).

Despite these differing ideals surrounding marriage, a large majority of the marital categories, both east and west, claim to be happy most of the time. Thus, the cultural basis of the marriage roles for the women may mean somewhat more negative psychological feelings than for the males but, apparently, it does not displace their overall feeling of personal contentment. Nonetheless, in line with the second hypothesis, the married men were more likely than the

married females in both countries to claim being happy most of the time. But the difference is not significant.

However, on a cultural basis, the relationship between health and claims of happiness is suspect since the Americans, both females and males, were more likely to note health problems but also more likely to note being happy most of the time. It is this finding that leads us to the third hypothesis, and Bernard's claim, that reported feelings of happiness by women is a cultural imposition. If this is so, then it is necessary to examine the cultural differences regarding marriage in Japan and the U.S. and to note whether the happiness figures are suspect due to finding which may reflect unhappiness such as alcohol consumption or suicide contemplation/attempts.

It appears that there are many factors which lead to and encourage alcohol consumption. One of these is reflected in religious differences. Early Christian religious doctrines lead to closer contact and control in all spheres of activity (Sirjimate, 1953). This control in regards to alcohol was, perhaps, best emphasized with the Prohibition Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in the 1920s. On the other hand, the Asian religions of Buddhism and Shintoism do not generally exert this type of control and certainly not with alcoholism. In fact, it may even encourage alcohol consumption since priests drink alcohol openly while in training or while living in Temples ("Hanniato") and on Memorial Services (Hooji) drink with the people.

Another factor encouraging alcohol consumption is the Japanese custom of appreciating the beauty of the country and the changing seasons by drinking wine so as to give them heart-to-heart feelings. For example, in the Spring there is "wine for seeing cherry blossoms" and in Autumn, "wine for seeing the full moon" (Hanami-Sake and Tsukimi-Sake).

Another Japanese custom is to drink alcohol as a means of making things easier and more comfortable in personal contact situations (Tsukimi-Sake) - the wine for personal contact allows the Japanese to break the shell or mask of keeping own face in front of others.

As noted above, 33% of the sample surveyed by the (Yoka Kaihatsu Center) drink alcohol in their homes. This was true on an almost daily basis for both men (78%) and women (64%). These figures indicate a custom of having a drink or two everyday with dinners (Banshaku).

Finally, the above factors have led to a custom of excusing bad manners during the drinking of too much alcohol and this, in turn, probably encourages drinking.

Whether any of this customary drinking is also a reflection of unhappy marriages, or too much stress, is not possible to judge. Thus it is not possible to note whether the seemingly higher consumption of alcohol by the Japanese is a reflection of unhappiness. However, the above mentioned government study along with this study reveals that drinking alcohol frequently has been increasing rapidly for both men and women (1979).

The figures on suicide also add to the implication that the reported figures on happiness may not be what they seem, especially for the Japanese female. Thus her 22% of planned and attempted tries at suicide is strikingly high when compared to any of the other categories and especially the Americans. As noted, Japanese women have few opportunities within the marriage structure and suicide has been indicated as a reflection of powerlessness. These higher suicide thoughts and attempts for the Japanese females and males is reflected in their national statistics on suicide. Thus, the actual suicide rate for Japan is higher than for the U.S. (17.5 per 100,000 in Japan vs. 12.2 per 100,000 in the U.S.).

A final indication that Japanese females and males may not be as happy in their marriage as their American counterparts is illustrated in the "happiness" table. Careful examination shows that the Japanese are more likely than Americans to believe that their married acquaintances are happier than themselves. The Americans, on the other hand, believe that married acquaintances are less happy than themselves. This contrast is especially true for the female categories. Thus, the Japanese female does not appear to be as happy with her marriage as is the American female.

The third hypothesis states that self-reported claims of happiness by married women will not be reflective of their global happiness. The above mixed results lead to an acceptance of the third hypothesis with regard to the Japanese female. In regard to the American female the hypothesis is questionable since she does appear to be slightly happier with her marriage than her male counterpart but also slightly more likely to suffer negative health symptoms.

## CONCLUSIONS

Glenn's review regarding the global happiness of marrieds led to his findings that married women were more likely than their male counterparts to suffer psychological stress but also more likely to note global happiness. However, the findings from this study were in agreement only with the first part of Glenn's findings and that only for the American part of the sample. That is, western married women, but not the eastern married women were somewhat more likely than their male counterparts to note the negative health factors. However, neither category of women were more likely than the men to report global happiness. Thus, Glenn's belief "that women, as a whole, exceed men in

both the stress and the satisfactions derived from marriage" was not noted (1975:598). Despite this finding, it is important to note whether the percentages of global happiness reported by the females was an adjustment, as claimed by Bernard, since the differences in both health conditions and happiness claims were slight. The implications from the examination of alcohol consumption, suicide plans/attempts, and marriage comparisons leads to the conclusion that the Japanese claim of global happiness is suspect and this is especially true for the female. However, it should also be noted that most of the differences between the sexes in both the Dayton and Okayama studies were not significant and so it is important to further investigate these questions surrounding marital happiness.



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TABLE 1: HEALTH: Yes

	JAPAN				U.S.				TOTALS					
	F		M		F		M		JAPAN		U.S.		TOTALS	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
<b>STRESS FEELINGS</b>														
Dependancy	6	5	0	0	11	15	6	7	3	9	9	4		
Fears	9	8	9	6	2	3	4	4	9	3	5	6		
Guilt	2	2	4	3	13	17	7	8	3	10	9	6		
Worry	7	6	3	2	18	24	14	15	5	16	14	10		
Worthlessness	3	3	7	5	10	13	9	10	5	10	7	8		
<b>Totals</b>	5	24	5	16	11	72	8	44	5	10	9	7		
<b>STRESS CONDITIONS</b>														
Crying	3	3	0	0	8	11	1	1	2	8	6	6		
Insomnia	8	7	10	7	20	26	14	15	9	17	15	12		
<b>Totals</b>	6	10	9	7	14	37	7	16	5	11	11	7		
<b>PHYSICAL AILMENTS</b>														
Headaches	10	9	10	7	31	41	21	23	10	27	23	17		
High Blood Pressure	8	7	7	5	14	18	11	14	8	11	11	11		
Stomach Ulcers	2	2	10	7	4	5	7	8	0	5	5	8		
<b>Totals</b>	7	18	9	19	16	24	14	45	8	15	12	12		
<b>Combined Feelings</b>	5	24	5	16	11	72	8	44	5	10	9	7		
<b>Conditions</b>	6	10	5	7	14	37	7	16	5	11	11	7		
<b>Physical</b>	7	18	9	19	16	64	14	45	8	15	12	12		
<b>Grand Totals</b>	6	52	6	42	13	173	10	105	6	11	10	8		

TABLE 2: HAPPINESS

	JAPAN				U.S.				TOTALS							
	F		M		F		M		Japan		U.S.		F M			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	%	%	%	%	%		
happy	8	7	3	2	6	9	5	7	3	3	4	10	6	4	6	3
Other	12	11	15	10	13	21	9	12	6	7	8	19	13	8	10	10
Happy	80	71	82	56	81	127	86	113	91	98	88	211	81	88	83	88
TOTALS	57	89	43	68	100	157	55	132	45	108	100	240	40	60	56	44
	1.82 > .40				1.60 > .45											

TABLE 4: SUICIDE

	JAPAN				U.S.				TOTALS							
	F		M		F		M		Japan		U.S.		F M			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Never Thought	71	55	74	46	73	101	73	95	65	69	69	164	72	69	71	69
Thought About	7	5	10	6	8	11	22	29	33	35	27	64	16	24	8	27
Planned	17	13	16	10	17	23	2	3	0	0	1	3	8	6	17	1
Attempted	5	4	0	0	3	4	3	4	2	2	3	6	4	1	3	3
TOTALS	55	77	45	62	100	139	55	131	45	106	100	237	55	44	37	63
$\chi^2$	3.71 > .30				8.93 > .11											

TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF SEX AND FREQUENCY OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

	M										F										GR. TOTALS			
	EVERYDAY		4-6 TIMES PFP WEEK		1-3 TIMES PER WEEK		SOMETIMES		TOTALS		EVERYDAY		4-6 TIMES PER WEEK		1-3 TIMES PER WEEK		SOMETIMES		TOTALS					
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
SPECIAL OCCASIONS	31	53	29	16	18	20	19	27	24	116	18	4	21	3	21	13	9	21	13	41	20	160		
BUS. NEGOTIATION	32	55	20	11	17	19	9	13	21	98	18	4	0	0	7	4	1	2	3	10	13	104		
FRIENDS/ ACQUAINT.	38	66	47	26	41	45	19	27	34	164	18	4	43	6	25	15	7	16	13	41	25	201		
OTHER OCCASIONS	15	26	15	8	6	7	5	7	1	0	4	8	9	2	7	1	2	7	3	11	7	56		
AT HOME	78	135	58	32	17	19	7	10	41	196	64	14	71	10	49	30	7	16	22	70	33	265		
BEDTIME	27	47	9	5	5	5	2	3	1	3	6	0	41	9	14	2	15	9	3	7	8	27	11	88
ESCAPE	6	1	0	9	5	3	3	1	1	4	1	9	9	2	0	0	2	1	2	5	3	8	3	24
HOME PPOBLEMS	7	1	2	6	3	1	1	0	0	3	1	6	9	2	7	1	2	1	2	2	6	3	2	4
TOTALS	36	173	12	55	23	109	24	141	59	478	7	22	4	14	19	61	70	228	41	325	100	803		

Table 8: Marital Happiness as Compared to Marital Acquaintances

	JAPAN						U.S.					
	F		M		TOTALS		F		M		TOTALS	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Happier	21	18	17	11	19	29	10	13	8	9	9	22
Same	74	64	76	50	75	114	72	95	76	81	74	176
Unhappier	5	4	8	5	6	9	18	24	16	17	17	41
TOTALS	57	86	43	66	100	152	55	132	45	107	100	239
X <sup>2</sup>	.90 > .64						.43 > .81					