

Vulnerability, Resilience and Well-being of Intermarriage: An Ethnographic Approach to Korean Women

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Abstract

Korean women who immigrate into the U.S. following their American husbands face a harsh reality. A new Korean wife and American husband may find themselves in unfamiliar situations that expose their marital life to vulnerability and cause their marriage to end quickly. This study endeavors to describe the diverse patterns of inequality in the marital life of select couples, and the resilience that Korean women display in their American lives after marital crises, such as divorce. The study also explores the relationship between “social factors,” including financial status, familial relations, age, activities in the community, and the situation of “psychosocial well-being” among such Korean women. Through intensive interviews of Korean women who married American soldiers, the study shows that differences in culture, income, and the historical hierarchy inherent in the political/military relationship between South Korea and the U.S. are significant in explaining the social and psychological well-being of Korean women and their modes of survival and adaptation to life in American society. The cases analyzed in this study demonstrated that these women were weak and vulnerable socially as well as psychologically.

Keywords: Intermarriage, Korean women, well-being

Introduction

Since the war, over 100,000 Korean women have come to the U.S. as wives of servicemen. But all are stigmatized both in Korean and American communities for having married foreigners and soldiers at that...A woman who marries to a GI and comes to the U.S. might find a whole set of different difficult circumstances after she gets here. There might be anti-immigrant sentiment, racism against her as a person of color and she might find herself without job skills that she would need to take advantage of the favored opportunity for social mobility. In the end, she might end up working in a night club, in a bar, in a massage parlor, or somewhere else in the sex trade industry in the U.S (from the documentary film “Women Outside” by Takagi and Park, 1996).

Korean women who immigrate to the United States by following their American military husbands face a harsh reality. The long process of immigration into the United States causes significant changes in cultural, social, and psychological aspects of a Korean woman’s life. It involves an extensive process of adaptation requiring an intensive use of economic and social resources, in addition to great psychological and

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physical effort. This is true regardless of their views of the immigration process as positive or negative one. The stigma that has existed since the 1950 Korean War surrounds the interracial marriages between Korean women and U.S. servicemen. Yuh (2002) succinctly describes the stereotypical image of Korean military brides:

[Korean military brides] exist as stereotypes at the fringes of consciousness. For Koreans, they are the women of questionable character who married American soldiers because it was their only escape from poverty. For Americans, they are the foreigners whom red-blooded American men inexplicably married, and the “mamasans” that operate illicit black-market business in PX and commissary goods or work in massage parlors. For second generation Korean Americans, they are the women sitting alone, without husbands, during church service and fellowship, the ones they ignore because everyone else does (p.2).

Since the 1990s when South Korean society became more democratized, there appeared a number of studies on Korean military brides to American servicemen. Feminism and gender studies take into account the tradition of Confucian patriarchy in Korean society as well as Korea’s unequal political/military relations to the U.S. as the causal factors that force these Korean women into harsh situations (Sturdevant and Stolfus, 1992; Moon, 1997; Kim and Choi, 1998; Jung, 2003).¹ The studies on Korean women have extensively documented the ignorance and unresponsiveness of Korean society to the marginalization of such women and the hardship of their lives in both Korean and American society.

Nonetheless, the preceding approach focusing on the structural aspects of sociocultural (or sociopolitical) differences provides only limited insight into the social and psychological impacts of the lives of individual Korean women. The studies have failed not only to explain how specifically cultural differences and socioeconomic status influence their psychosocial well-being of their everyday lives, but also failed to understand the connection between the sexuality and ethnicity of Korean women whose national and ethnic identity become the target of appetites and aversions. Ethnicity and sexuality of Korean women collide and collude to construct harsh realities against them and, it happens over internationally different cultural and societal settings (Nagel, 2003). Many issues, therefore, remain unexamined: the identities imposed on them by both societies, the meaning of their marriage to non-Korean men, and the current condition of their psychosocial well-being. However, the most important question may well pertain to the quality of their everyday marital lives. Considering the fact that over 80 percent of the couples comprised of Korean wives and American husbands are divorced within the first three years of marriage (Takagi & Park, 1996), the following questions arise. How can we understand the existence of these women’s difficult marital lives in the U.S.? Are there any factors that have the negative impact causing the marital life to be short-lived? How do Korean women attempt to reestablish their lives after marital crises such as divorce or separation followed by estrangement and conflicts with American husbands? The current study undertakes this task by describing the patterns of the marital lives of Korean women and the process of reestablishing their lives following divorce in the context of ‘social factors’ such as socioeconomic status, familial relations, and

community participation. Through this analysis, the overall “psychosocial well-being” among Korean women married to U.S. servicemen will be presented.

Studies on Korean women of intermarriage in the U.S. and Well-being

Studies of the “psychosocial well-being” of immigrants\ have been initiated by examining the general relationship between immigrants and mental health. There have been reports on: the high level of mental disorder among Eastern European immigrants to England and the U.S. (Murphy, 1965), prevalence of depression and post traumatic stress syndrome among Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. (Flaskerd and Ahn, 1988), and the relationship between mental health and social variables such as social/cultural adaptation, family life, and income and job satisfaction among Korean American men (Hurh and Kim, 1988). Portes and Rumbaut (1996:158-167), in a historical account of research on mental health and immigrants, delineate the psychological and emotional states of ethnic groups by analyzing the mode of migration and acculturation in addition to the pivotal role of economic class. Acquiring the data for the indicators of psychosocial well-being such as physical/mental health, financial situation, roles of family members, and the status of minority women renders the construction of a model containing the effects of race, gender, and class variables (Iambrana, 1987).

This study assumes that the psychosocial well-being of a population can be better understood by the indicators of physical health, psychological disturbance such as depression (Noh and Avison, 1996), familial violence, the relationship among class, ethnicity, and gender in balance. This study defines ‘well-being’ not as the absence of mental illness or mental disorder but as self-recognized happiness and success in life.

There have been relatively few studies on Korean women married to American GI in terms of mental health or psychosocial well-being. Earlier, B. Kim’s study (1977) defined the marriage of Asian war brides as *cacogamy*² and articulated the major problems that they encounter in the process of adaptation: homesickness, difficulty in obtaining traditional Korean food, frustration and anguish in learning practical English, isolation and helplessness in rearing children in America, and the experiences of being the targets of the domestic violence. He wrote:

[the] majority of Asian women interviewed have experienced periods of isolation from their countrymen for months...Many nights and days spent in tears suicidal thoughts are not uncommon. They find their husbands to be generally insensitive or non-supportive (p.108).

Kitano and Chai (1982) remark that negative sentiments toward Korean war brides and the children of such marriages is wide-spread within Korean communities throughout America:

Historically, the Koreans suffered through the same negative Asian stereotypes that were a part of the Chinese and Japanese experience...The current Asian female stereotype is that they make good wives. The definition of “good” may include everything from being obedient, to taking care of the husband to not talking back...(p.88).

Uchida (1998) defines 'Orientalization of Asian women' as objectification through a stereotypical image developed in the historical course of immigration and U.S. military involvement in the East Asia. An oriental woman is stated to be "foreign, not a full citizen, not a Christian, and less moral, less liberated, and less equal to men," and her stereotypical image is exotic, subservient, and lecherous (p.16).

Recently, the studies on Korean women have been based on the conceptualization of patriarchal hierarchy from Confucian tradition (C. Kim, 1988; Kim and Choi, 1998; Song and Moon, 1998). Choi (1998) argues that the bodies of Korean women are offered to the metropolitan gaze while the bodies of white women are privileged to be masked by the "hyper-masculinity" and vigilance of Korean cultural practices.³ The sexual image of Korean women has been the subject of much literature, such as the short story, "*Punji*" (Land of Excrement) by Nam Chonghyon (1965), the protest Sorigut (play), "*Agu*" in the 1970s, and even the Opening Ceremony of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. From the stories "*Silver Stallion*" by Ahn Jung-hyo, which metaphorically degrades the national identity, H. Kim (1998:178) explores the social construction of the so-called "*Yanggongju*" (Yankee wife or GI brides). Among Koreans in the San Francisco Bay area, Pang (1998) found the existence of "a preferential hierarchy of choice" for a spouse: "First, Korean/Korean American, then Asian American, White, and then other racial groups, like Mexicans, and finally Blacks...for Korean Americans in general, men in particular, this interracial pattern symbolizes the unequal power" (p.130 and p.134). Within the context of patriarchal capitalism in Korea, E. Kim (1998) reports prevalence of various forms of prostitution with overtly misogynistic attitudes. H. Kim (1991) describes Korean women's lives in the 'shadow,' and Yuh (2002) shows how the prejudice generated by an image of Korean military brides as former military prostitutes has a devastating influence on their life experiences and how these women must negotiate complex racial and gender dynamics within their families and society through resistance and compliance. Given the fact that Korean American women outnumber Korean American men⁴ (Min and Song, 1998), relatively few studies have focused on these women in terms of their psychosocial well-being. Through the psychologists eyes, L. Kim (1998) observes Korean women's psychological problems: "anxiety, panic attack, depression, phobia, and somatization," and the cited sources of stress are "powerlessness, helplessness, victimization, and spousal abuse, as well as lack of support and understanding" (p.214). Korean women do not attempt to seek help from a mental health professional until their problems have been exacerbated to the point of crisis (L. Kim, 1998).

On the findings above, this study assumes the followings. Korean women married to American servicemen would have high levels of vulnerability in their marriages due to the external forces such as the political/historical hierarchical relation between South Korea and the U.S. and/or a racially discriminatory culture that embedded into the marital life. Although Korean women show a degree of resilience surviving and adjusting to their new American lives, their overall levels of psychosocial well-being would deteriorate through the influence of detrimental cultural, socioeconomic, and psychological factors such as language barrier, unfamiliar customs and attitudes, economic hardship due to the unstable income source or lack of job skills, the relative lack of support from both general society and the Korean community within the United States.

Intensive Interviews: Approach to Korean Women in the Area

The current study focused on the Riley and Geary counties in Kansas as well as the Kansas City metropolitan area. The area is an 'ethno-sexual frontier' that provides a unique social and spatial setting that "the global meets the local in the pursuit of racialized sex and romance" (Nagel, 2003:177). Notably, there are concentrations of Korean women in both counties within the vicinities of military forts.⁵ The existence of military forts provides the samples of Korean women who married to American soldiers. An estimation based on conversations with the owners of Korean groceries and Korean church leaders who have resided there for a long time is that approximately 400 to 500 Korean women live in Riley County (city of Manhattan), and roughly 500 to 600 Korean women in Geary County (Junction City). In 2000, the number of Koreans (most of them women) living in Junction City, Kansas, were 348, Fort Riley, Kansas, 45, and Manhattan, Kansas, 320 (US Census Bureau, 2000). The Korean population in Kansas City, Missouri is estimated between 5,000 and 6,000, considering the number of Korean merchants, Korean churches, grocery stores, and small goods stores in the area. This unlikely presence of Korean women in the area is the result of the "combination of military, marriage, and migration" (Nagel, 2003: 178).

Each year, around one thousand new marriages between Korean wives and American husbands are found in South Korea, where the U.S. military has stationed since the World War II (Takagi and Park, 1996).⁶ The lives of Korean women who married American soldiers provide plenty of materials demonstrating the salutogenic aspect of marching toward the goal of the "American Dream," as well as the pathogenic aspect of suffering from all manner of uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and inadaptability in the new life. Some of them experience sociocultural isolation and extreme poverty; the unilateral view of assimilation becomes increasingly implausible. The hardship and other important characteristics of Korean women who married U.S. servicemen and came across the Pacific Ocean are not yet well known. So, this study examines three aspects of the marital lives of Korean women and American husbands: motives for the marriage, equal/unequal structure within the marriage, and marital satisfaction (Roh and Schumm, 1989), overall. Then, the study describes the extent of resilience displayed by Korean women during the recovery after marital crises such as separation/divorce, and the current state of psychosocial well-being among them. Presumably, many Korean women marry American servicemen and come across the Pacific Ocean in the effort to avoid absolute poverty, or to pursue the dream of attaining American lifestyle, or to escape from their past lives. Thus, this study tries to characterize the psychosocial well-being of Korean women married to U.S. GIs by "examining the similarities and differences among the cases" (Yin, 1994). Then, it summarizes the state of the psychosocial well-being of Korean women in the last part.

The open-ended intensive interviews with a number of questions were conducted (see Addendum for major questions in the interviews). Compensating for the possibility of overstatement or intentional omission in answers, the interviewer made an effort to establish a personal rapport with the interviewee before the main interview (lasting one hour and half to two hours). Utilizing a snowball sampling; a small number of informants were recruited through Korean Churches and Oriental grocery stores. So, the current study uses two sources of data: one consists of public documents including published studies, newspaper articles, and films, and the data obtained through intensive

interviews made from 2003 to 2005. It turns out that the analyses of eleven interviewed cases are effective in capturing the “reality” of the subjects’ lives (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) than the census figures. In order to gain valid information, the researchers have been involved in the community activities of Korean churches in the vicinities of military bases. The analysis is reinforced by supplementary information from the conversations with friends and family members of interviewees, pastors and religious leaders of Korean churches, business people in the Korean communities, and articles in the news media.

Vulnerability and Failure in Marriage

Assuming that the successful immigration process for these women depends crucially on the quality of their relationships to their husbands and families, this study focuses on marital lives of Korean women. Among the seven factors linked to the well-being of Korean women (SES, language, community participation, income, Korean or husband’s family relations, marital equality, and marriage motivation), three pertain to the quality of marital life in this study. This section illustrates the four cases that ended up failing their marriages, describing the reasons for the dissolution of the marriage, the context that make the situation worse or better, and the process of recovery after the crisis.

The first case concerns Judy (pseudonym)⁷ a forty year-old Korean woman who tries to reconstruct life after a traumatic dissolution of her marriage of eighteen years. Judy was forced to abort her first baby because she had contracted a sexually transmitted disease from her husband. Her husband directed continuously insulting remarks such as “stupid” toward her in front of his friends and family. She felt that her husband needed her only for his sexual gratification. While living in his parents’ house for approximately one year after the marriage, she realized that his parents did not approve of his marriage; his mother wanted her son to marry his former girlfriend, who graduated from the same high school as him.

Feeling her life meaningless, she attempted suicide by an overdose of sedatives that she had obtained for her anxiety and insomnia from her doctor. When she woke up, she filed a suit for divorce. Her husband contested her for property for a year:

Interviewer: What do you think was the most important reason of your divorce?

Judy: I think his mother played a great role in deteriorating the relationship between my husband and I.

Interviewer: Do you think there is any possibility of a reconciliation between you and your husband?

Judy: No! The pain and the ‘emotional breakdown’ that I had suffered from for 18 years cannot be paid back by anything in the world.

She endeavors to forget her previous marriage: “I feel myself reborn and the marital life was a hell of a long experience.” Judy has recently met a new boyfriend.

The second case concerns Angela, a forty-five-year-old Korean woman who lives with her only son, Jonny, and works in a high school as a janitor. Although her income

from the job is a mere \$600 per month, Angela feels happy about the fact that she has a job that provides a regular source of income:

Interviewer: Why did you marry an American serviceman?

Angela: (without hesitation) It was because Jonny's daddy (this is the way she always refers to husband) had economically supported my family in Korea a lot. He even helped my father's farm work, and especially supported my youngest brother to continue studying and go to high school.

To the question as to why they separated, Angela replied that he never sent any money to his family after marriage, but continuously spent money without any income, so that he had to file for bankruptcy after four years of marriage in the end. Angela often faced difficulties in rearing her son, who was a high school student. One day, a school bus driver called her, saying that Jonny had been involved in a fight after school on the way home, and that if it happened again he would not let Jonny on the bus, because it had not been the first time. To Angela's inquiry of why he had fought with the other boys, Jonny never answered. Angela had no option but to call her husband in Topeka, where he now lives. The next morning, Jonny's father visited his son, and talked for nearly an hour, while Angela waited outside. Jonny's father told Angela that Jonny promised him not to fight again.

Interviewer: How do you spend time these days?

Angela: I wish to communicate well in English. I work harder these days because I want to forget loneliness. I am now enrolled in an adult learning center to study basic English. I was a Buddhist and now try to become a Christian. So, I go to an American church on Sunday.

Interviewer: Why didn't you go to a Korean church?

Angela: In Korean church, they treat so differently people with money and people without."

The third case concerns the difficult marital life of Insook (people call her 'Angie's mother'; her daughter's name is Angie) and her husband, both 35 years old. Her husband was a Military Police of U.S. Army in Korea and now is a mechanic in a small rural town. Before marriage, Insook was a electric company worker. She married in 1987, and she and her husband are now separated. Insook with anger described the experience of getting fingers broken and the near fatal incident of her neck being pushed down by her husband when they quarreled. She called the police that night, and later on, visited a Priest in a Catholic church:

Interviewer: What do you think is the most important reason for your divorce?

Insook: If I do divorce, the reason is loneliness. His families look down on me and give me humiliations. They feel shameful on me around this small town because I am a Korean. I know that he has a woman who he became to know through chatting on internet. My daughter found it accidentally and talked to me. But I cannot stand for his battery of me and even children. I feel regretful about my marriage. I didn't know enough about my husband. He is a King at home and treats me like a maiden servant.

Insook has finally divorced her husband after legal battle for custody of their three children for a year. She obtained only half-custody; the children alternate between her apartment and their father's house every other week.

The fourth case concerns a Korean woman called "Indian aunt." She married a Native Indian American that she met near a military base at Pocheon in Korea, where her parents owned a bar:

Interviewer: How do you feel about your husband?

Indian Aunt: He has neither willingness to do anything nor life goal while children are growing. He has been just lounging with his friends wasting time everyday. This way, I cannot live with him any more.

She totally controls over the household finances and she uses husband's credit cards to purchase an expensive item such as piano; her family was dependent on welfare program. After filing for divorce, she tried to expel him from her house with a court order. She was sociable with several white, black, and Korean friends in her Korean church, although she did not attend the church regularly. Months later, "Indian aunt" moved to other state with her new boyfriend.

In the four cases above, each had hierarchical husband/wife relations. The American husband commonly dominated in the decision-making process and the communications between husband and wife were one-sided and verbal abuse/physical violence toward the Korean wife occasionally accompanied. Husbands are frequently described with masculine characteristics. 'Indian aunt' is a contradictory case; her marriage continued until the moment when she decided that a separation was necessary. If an American husband's family has a negative opinion of the Korean wife and involved in their marital life, then the Korean wife finds herself driven into a situation wherein she must choose between extreme measures, such as leaving home, suicide, or separation and divorce. However, divorce was not an easy option for the Korean women in this study. For Judy, divorce was a difficult decision to make because of her son. Angela demonstrated how difficult it is for a Korean woman to live alone after separation with her inability to communicate well in English, a poor credit history, and limited job skills. After divorce, Angela and Insook benefitted from the support by American churches. In an extreme way, they show that the intermarriages of Korean women were too vulnerable to maintain it.

Loneliness and Resilience: Survival in American life

Many Korean women married American GIs, but lived with unstable marriages for decades. The unstable nature of success in their marriage is caused by loneliness and regret in the absence of mutual communication and interaction between the spouses, misunderstanding of their Americanized children, lack of support from her Korean or husband's family, limited job skills or even lack of willingness to work, unstable income, and stereotypical views of them from the Korean community, and occasional discrimination from both societies.

Yongsoon is a Korean woman in her mid-fifties. Her husband had retired from the military nearly twenty years ago, and owned an Asian grocery store. Fortunately, this small business (with some Korean food such as Kimchee) became a well-patronized and favorite store in the town for many foreign students, who sought ethnic food products. Their 29-year-marriage was relatively satisfactory and their business was doing well, allowing them to put aside some savings. Suddenly, she began to experience self-consciousness and anxiety about two years ago (from the time of interview). She felt that her husband had a paternalistic attitude and treated her like a child who does not know anything about business or even how the world operates. In reality, her husband did everything by himself, relegating her to the "traditional" task of women such as child-rearing and cooking. She simply worked as a cashier in their business and she wanted to be an equal partner in the decision-making process. Yongsoon talked about how her age seemed to weigh her down and the physical exhaustion: "I feel tired and awful in this grocery store standing here all day, everyday. Now, I wish to have my own life."

Interviewer: This kind of business job is a little bit tedious and often physically hard, but you could raise all four children sending them school and ultimately make some money just from here.

Yongsoon: Oh, yes. I know that, but I cannot but feel that way, because my children are graduating from school, so I just feel more that way.

Youngsook and her husband Michael met in an English class of a military camp in Seoul. They have been married eighteen years and now have three daughters. She told that they had been brought together by God. Michael had been divorced from a previous marriage in the U.S. He now works in the County Health Clinic as an administrative staff and Youngsook works part-time in a restaurant. She described her husband as a quiet but stingy person: "Michael's personality is OK in the military, but after retirement he is just not fitting well to the reality." Michael and Youngsook now live in his mother's house; his mother moved to a small house nearby. During the interview, the interviewer discerned that Youngsook seemed distracted and aloof.⁸ She displayed the same attitudes to her husband and children:

Interviewer: How many Korean women are living near military camp here?

Youngsook: a lot.

Interviewer: Do you know roughly how many?

Youngsook: I don't know.

Interviewer: Michael, how do you think about the idea of teaching the Korean language to your daughters?

Youngsook: They are American girls.

Michael: Youngsook, don't interrupt me! I am trying to say something.

Wansoon, who was twenty-nine years old at the time of interview, said she is not satisfied with the America life. She worries about her child, especially the possible disadvantages or discrimination that he may face in the future because of his skin color:

Interviewer: So, being unsatisfied with American life, is there a possibility of your divorce and how do you think about raising a child in American society?

Wansoon: I have not thought about it many times, but, if I face that kind of situation, then I might have to do. But now, I think I have to live here because of my child.

Interviewer: How do you think about other peoples' view of Korean women who live with American servicemen?

Wansoon: I don't mind how others think or look at me.

Regarding her financial issues, she explained her unwillingness to work in dirty conditions for meager pay while recalling her previous job in a Chinese restaurant. She said, "I go to the Korean church. It is the only one place where I can let steam off, though." Her husband, Mark Werner, tries to become fluent in the Korean language. He teaches his son the language and works as an interpreter of Korean for native English speakers in the Korean church that they attended. In a short conversation, her husband exhibited a dislike of Koreans: "Koreans have a very great wish to demonstrate what they materially have. For example, everybody, including young children, has a cell phone. They worry too much about trivial things." He also criticized that "the so-called Yoon Geum-yi case was misled by the government and media so that people don't understand correctly what is the real situation."⁹

Kyungmee Groves, a thirty-five-year old woman, was from a middle income family in Korea. She became pregnant after first two years of marriage, but she aborted the child without any discussion with her husband. His reaction was: "How could you, as a person who attends the church and prays to God, have the abortions twice?" She described herself as an ill-natured and hysterical person; "I have an admirable temper in that when I am angry, I hold nothing back." She doesn't think that the Korean church in the town has been helpful to them: "The pastor and his wife in the Korean church don't play the roles as expected." She feels that people in the church tend to treat Korean women who are married American servicemen as '*Yanggongju*' (Western sluts). But her family in Korea, especially her father, seems supportive. She recalls what her father said

years ago: "I do want you to continuously live with your husband, but when you feel that you have to divorce because of his bad treatment, e.g. if he batters you, then don't hesitate and just come back to Korea anytime." She said that she feels anxious and lonely, but she is solely responsible for her own happiness in American life.

Sarah, who was thirty one years old at the time of the interview, ran away from home in Korea when she was seventeen years old. Now, she works as a waitress in a family restaurant in Junction City. In her home, her husband is responsible for all household chores, including cleaning, cooking, and even education, except financial matters. She said in a tough manner, "It is I, not my husband, who uses fist sometimes. I batter even my husband if necessary. But actually, he's never used even a cussing word." She smoked continuously and drank several cups of coffee during the entire interview process:

Interviewer: Do you go to the Korean church?

Sarah: Of course, I go to the Korean Church because we can see people who we need to see. I know that Koreans call us 'Yang -galbo,' but I don't mind it. American men act differently than Korean men, don't ask about our past. It was my husband who had got me out the club after paying money. I feel extraordinary and thankful when I look at my husband playing with my children without any complaints in the weekend.

Interviewer: What the future of your life looks like?

Sarah: I am satisfied with the current living. Future... I don't know...I am worried about our sons, I'm not sure how to raise and educate them. I don't like the way he treats children."

Interviewer: What if your children suffer from any discrimination because of their skin color?

Sarah: That would be their destiny. If they are to get through it, then they need to get through.

Interviewer: How do you think American men or Korean men view international marriage?

Sarah: If I do live an honest life, there is nothing they have to mind. I am going to marry an American man again if I am reborn.

All five Korean women above showed difficulty in communicating in English and had a limited knowledge of American culture. Yongsoon and Youngsook, being married for a long period of time, express the most fatigue in living in a situation with only one-sided conversations and all decisions made by their husbands. Youngsook seems isolated from both her husband and three daughters. Both Kyungmee and Wansoon have revealed an anxiety about the future discrimination that their children may encounter. Jeonok, another Korean woman, recently experienced vandalism.¹⁰ Sarah, Wansoon,

and Youngsook did not hide their negative views of the Korean community: “people in the Korean church view Korean women who live with American husbands in a stereotypical way, and that money, not God, is worshiped in the commercialized Korean churches.” Wansoon, Kyungmee, and Youngsook were suffering from their limited job skills and lacking the willingness to work. They have no reliable source of income although they all graduated from college in Korea. The Korean women in this section have shown a great deal of resilience in adjusting to their marriages and immigrant life despite a diverse set of problems caused by the difficulties and loneliness.

Discussion: Well-being of Korean Women

Analysis of the data shows that conflicts caused by differing values regarding marital life, interactions among family members, parental roles, husband-wife and parent-child communication are the main factors that cause them to feel the psychological strain. Specifically, the language barrier and their economic status remain crucial in explaining the quality of marital life as well as the social and psychological well-being in their American lives. Korean women who were from the lower strata of Korean society (mostly the older generation of Korean women, who were 40s and 50s in the sample for this study), indicate that the motivation for immigration was avoidance of poverty. They showed exhaustion with living in poor conditions. Angela, Angie’s mother, and Brian’s mother to some degree, are the cases that exemplify this trend. We cannot understand Angela’s sacrifice for her family without the notion of “filial piety” that is inherent in Confucianism (C. Kim,1988).

For Judy and Angie’s mother, the consequences of divorce have been manifested in three aspects: the improved health and economic situation and psychosocial adjustment. Judy stated, “I am happier than ever.” Wansoon and Kyungmee found a motive for marriage in admiration for an American style of life, while Sarah and Youngsook in a negative view of Korean men. All four women did not marry to avoid poverty; instead, they demonstrated an individualistic and nontraditional attitude in their decision to marry and immerse themselves in American life. Some Korean women were not reluctant to express their critical view of the hierarchical and authoritarian attitudes of Korean men, compared to those of their American husbands. Three young women (Wansoon, Kyungmee, and Sarah) are uncertain about the option of divorce and the instability in raising their interracial children alone.

The eleven cases in this study commonly showed that these Korean women experienced both physical and mental weakness and vulnerability in their marriage, which affected their psychosocial well-being. Regardless of the number of years spent in the U.S., they remain marginalized in terms of socioeconomic status, and many of them suffer from psychological disturbances such as excessive loneliness, anxiety, insomnia, alcohol abuse and smoking, volatility of mood, and depression, etc. It was found that many of these women addictively watch videos of Korean soap operas and other programs in the Korean language (conversation with the owner of a Korean video shop, Mr. Song). Yongsoon, Judy, Angie’s mother, and Youngsook are the cases wherein the relationship between American husband and Korean wife is marked by inequality, while conversely “Indian aunt” and Sarah are representative of the cases wherein it is the woman who dominates.

The cases in this study showed an inconsistency in the role of the Korean church. Some found the role of the Korean church positive and graceful, but others had resentment towards a Korean church that emphasizes the magical formula of: "All you need to do is to pray more."¹¹ Wansoon, Sarah, and Kyungmee, mentioned about their feelings when they were differently looked (stigmatized?) by other Koreans in church. Regarding the cause of divorce and instability of marital life, Reverend P argued, "I came to agree with other pastors that Korean women have to be blamed more than American husbands. Korean women need to redevelop themselves in order to adjust to American society."

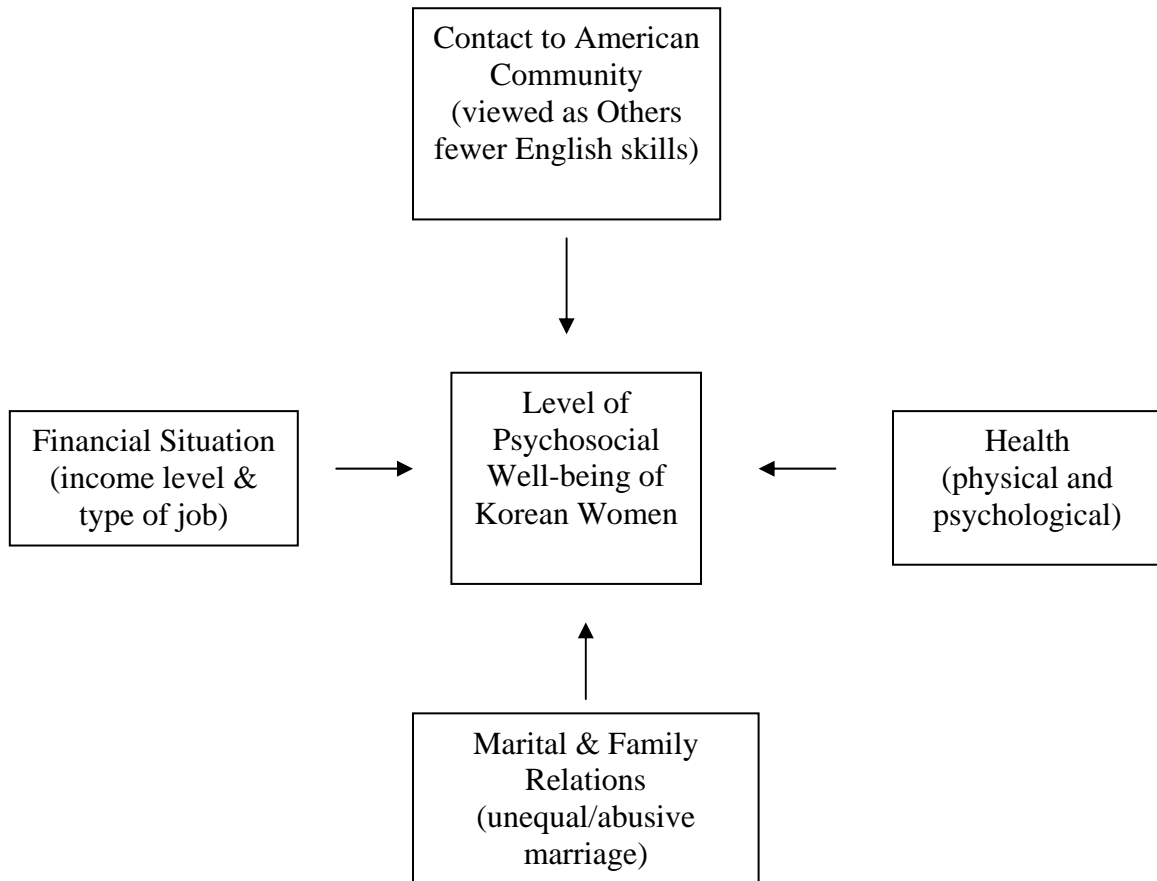
The findings of this study from the analysis of data are presented in Figure A (Determinants of Psychosocial Well-being among Korean women). Four main determinants are: marital and family relations, community participation, financial situation, and physical and psychological health. Marital and family relations that Korean women faced are identified as hierarchical and unequal. They are reminiscent of what Nagel (2003) described as in the extended time of war:

Sexual abuse and exploitation resulted when military personnel capitalized on the vulnerability of women who faced economic hardship, malnourishment, or starvation... Many women in occupied or liberated countries found sexual liaisons or prostitution preferable to the grim alternatives available for themselves and their dependent families (p.183).

Viewed as 'Others' (*YangGongju*, *Oriental women*, or maybe *Prostitutes*) by both Korean and American communities, Korean women have become "demonized and denigrated" sexual objects (Nagel, 2001). Their lives exemplify the "common stress of uprooting and arduous transplantation" (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996:157), which contributes to deteriorate the psychosocial well-being of such Korean women. More importantly, however, this study argued that Korean women married to American servicemen must be understood as survivors similar to any other early immigrants who had to utilize all of their compassion, energy, and intelligence to raise and support their families.

This study suggests that there are important avenues for the future studies of intermarriage. First, it is important to extend the findings by including American husbands and interracial children as interviewees to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of the familial and marital life of intermarried families. Furthermore, a comparison across different groups of Asian women who are married to American GIs, in terms of marital life, might enrich the current intermarriage study. Finally, the role of the Korean church as an important institution in the Korean community, that either facilitates or impedes the lives of Korean women should be surveyed and analyzed.

Figure A: Determinants of Psychosocial Well-being among Korean women



Endnotes

1. Feminism within Asian societies has been overall considered to be “Western thought” that is difficult to apply to the local context, whereas Korean society has developed its own feminist practices focusing on theatre, cinema, literature, etc. (Jung 2003). This study does not intend to delve deeply into feminist theory itself.
2. Intermarriage is defined as ‘marriage of persons from those different in-groups and out-groups other than the family which are culturally conceived as relevant to the choice of a spouse, representing to the conformity to the rules’ (Crester and Leon, 1982) and when it is involved in ‘prohibited deviation from the rules, it may be called cacogamy.’ For the conceptualization of exogamy and cacogamy, see Gordon (1964).

3. However, Cummings (1992) suggested that Korea's subordination to Japanese and American political interest contributed importantly to the development of camp town culture, prostitution, and sex tourism. The military base in the Itaewon area of Seoul has been occupied by Japan and America for most of the last century. He remarks, "one element in the Korean-American relationship has been constant: the continuous subordination of one female generation after another to the sexual servicing of American males" (p.169).
4. In the population of Korean immigrants into the U.S., women have always outnumbered men. The percentage of women was 81.4, and that of men only 18.6 in 1965. In 1989 it changed into that the percentage of men 44.6 and women 55.4. See Min and Song (1998; 51-53).
5. The higher visibility and concentration of Korean women population was earlier mentioned by B.L.Kim (1977). For the methodological analysis on the estimation of Asian war bride, see Saenz, Hwang, and Aguirre (1994).
6. The number of Korean women who married American GI's rose to approximately three thousands annually in the 1960's and '70s, then, declined steadily to below 500 after the year 2000.
7. All names of interviewees that appear in this study have been changed to maintain anonymity.
8. After the interview, Youngsook's three children asked interviewer to translate "- - -s of bitch" in Korean into English. Alarmed, the interviewer asked them where they heard that phrase, and their children answered, "Mom says it every time that she gets angry with us."
9. Yoon Geum-yi was a Korean woman who worked in a bar near Camp Casey (in Euijongboo, Korea) and was murdered by an American soldier. It became a social issue provoking Korean protests, which contributed to awaken the concern among Koreans over the unequal relations between Korea and the U.S.
10. The articles by the Associated Press, "U.S. Based Korean Prostitution Ring," argued that there are "thousands of people" and "millions of dollars" involved in the Korean prostitution network and characterized Koreans in Junction City, Kansas as a major link in the network of "Oriental others" (Daily Union, 1986).
11. Many studies on Korean churches find that it plays positive and supportive roles in the Korean- American community (Min, 1992; Kim, K. & S. Kim, 2001). Few studies were conducted on the churches' impact on the lives of Korean American women married to U.S. soldiers, which requires further theoretical conceptualization and empirical investigation. This study identified seven Korean churches in the areas where this study is conducted.

Addendum

Questions used for the interview of Korean women married to U.S. servicemen

1. Demographic information (income, education, job, age, religion, year to move to USA)
2. What was your motivation of intermarriage ? (why do you marry an American serviceman?)
3. Why do you attend the Korean church? Why do you NOT attend the Korean church?
4. How do you feel about your husband and his family in terms of their treatment of you?
5. How frequently have you contacted your own family in Korea?
6. What do you think is the most important reason for your divorce? (Is there any chance of reconciliation between you and your ex-husband?)
7. Have you experienced any physical, psychological, sexual, linguistic, or financial abuse from your husband and his family?
8. How do you spend your time after divorce?
9. What does your husband think about the idea of teaching the Korean language to your children?
10. How do you feel about raising your child/children in American society?
11. What do you think about other people's view of Korean women who live with American servicemen?
12. What does the future of your life look like?
13. How would you feel if your children suffer from any discrimination because of skin color?
14. How do you think American men and Korean men view the institution of international marriage?

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