

Similarity of the Relations between Marital Status and Subjective Well-Being Across Cultures

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In a sample of 59,169 persons in 42 nations, relations between marital status and subjective well-being were found to be very similar across the world. Although cultural variables were found to alter the size of certain relations between marital status and subjective well-being, the effect sizes were very small. Specifically, in terms of life satisfaction, the benefit of marriage over cohabitation was greater in collectivist than in individualist nations. In terms of positive emotions, the benefit of being married over being divorced or separated was smaller in collectivist than in individualist nations. In addition, in terms of negative emotions, the benefit of being married over being divorced or separated was smaller in nations with a high tolerance for divorce. Finally, the relations between marital status, culture, and subjective well-being did not differ by gender. Because of the small size of the effects of the cultural variables, the authors concluded that the relations between marital status and subjective well-being are very similar across the world.

SIMILARITY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MARITAL STATUS AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING ACROSS CULTURES

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Married individuals consistently report greater subjective well-being than never-married individuals, who in turn report greater subjective well-being than previously married individuals (i.e., divorced, separated, or widowed) (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; Mastekaasa, 1994a; Veenhoven, 1984). Various reasons for the benefits of marriage have been offered. Marriage may fulfill basic and universal human needs (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Henderson, 1977; Rook, 1984); it provides companionship and freedom from loneliness (Glenn, 1975). Gove et al. (1990) propose that confiding in a spouse lessens the strains encountered in life and increases one's ability to cope with these strains. In addition, they suggest that successfully fulfilling the role of spouse increases coping effectiveness because it



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enhances one's self-esteem and sense of mastery. Gove and Umberson (1985) suggest that marriage provides a strong positive sense of identity, self-worth, and mastery. Williams (1988) also concluded that the interpersonal intimacy and emotional support provided by a spouse lead to well-being. Many of the benefits of marriage may also be provided by socially approved alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitation (Glenn & Weaver, 1988; Mastekaasa, 1994b).

In addition to the benefits offered by marriage, costs related to being unmarried contribute to the effect of marital status on subjective well-being. For example, the frequency of marriage (and divorce) may affect the stress of not being married (Gibbs, 1969; Martin, 1976). That is, when most individuals in a society were married, unmarried individuals were seen as deviant from social role expectations. In such environments, single or divorced status carried a social stigma (Gibbs, 1969; Stack, 1980, 1990). On the other hand, as divorced and remaining unmarried have become more common, the stigma associated with these states has become less severe (Gibbs, 1969; Stack, 1980, 1990), which may weaken the relation between marital status and subjective well-being (Glenn & Weaver, 1988; for contradictory evidence, see Mastekaasa, 1993).

Studies of marital status effects have typically been conducted within a single country, and most frequently in Western societies. However, some investigators have speculated on possible differences between societies. Others argue that the social stigma associated with being unmarried should be smaller in nations in which not marrying is relatively common (Gibbs, 1969; Stack, 1980, 1990). However, Veenhoven (1984) found that differences in happiness between the married and the unmarried are greatest in the most modern Western countries. Mastekaasa (1994a) suggests that as the environment becomes more rational and impersonal, the emotional intimacy of marriage becomes more important.

Although cross-cultural differences in the relation between marital status and subjective well-being have been little studied, subjective well-being itself is known to vary across cultures. In particular, Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) found that the level of subjective well-being tended to be higher in individualist nations than in collectivist nations. Furthermore, the relation between subjective well-being and other variables has been found to be moderated by cultural factors. For example, Suh, Diener, Oishi, and Triandis (1998) found that emotions were stronger predictors of life satisfaction in individualistic cultures, whereas norms (social approval of high life satisfaction) and emotions were equally strong predictors of life satisfaction in collectivist cultures. In addition, life satisfaction was more strongly predicted by self-esteem in individualistic nations than in collectivist nations (Diener &

Diener, 1995). For a general overview of research on subjective well-being and culture, see Diener and Suh (2000).

The interpersonal and social nature of the processes theorized to underlie the effects of marital status on subjective well-being suggest that the relation between marital status and subjective well-being may vary in different cultures. For example, cultural variables may ameliorate or exacerbate the negative effects of divorce. Several of these theoretical processes might profitably be explored in a cross-cultural study. First, one of the most salient differences between individualism and collectivism is the role of norms related to cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. Collectivists give more weight to norms than to attitudes as determinants of social behaviors, whereas individualists give more weight to personal attitudes than to norms (Triandis, 1995, 1996). Because collectivist societies are more conservative (Schwartz, 1994), living with a significant other before marriage is not a norm in collectivist nations. Thus, in collectivist nations, the subjective well-being of people who live with a significant other may not be as high as that of married persons. Conversely, in individualist nations, it is more acceptable to live with a significant other. Thus, in individualist nations, the subjective well-being of persons who live with a significant other may be just as high as that of married persons.

Second, social and emotional support is an important mechanism through which marriage increases subjective well-being. Social support is known to differ considerably in collectivist versus individualist countries (Hofstede, 1980; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994; Triandis, 1995). Triandis (1995) found that the levels of social support available from the ingroup members are inversely related to the levels of individualism. Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988), for instance, found that collectivists were more likely to provide social support when unpleasant life events occurred to ingroup members. In addition, in a series of cross-cultural studies, Miller and her colleagues (Miller, 1994; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Miller & Luthar, 1989) demonstrated that individualistic societies emphasize a rights-based moral code, in which there is minimum interpersonal moral obligation to help others, whereas collectivist societies emphasize a duty-based moral code, in which it is a moral imperative to help ingroup members. Thus, social support from extended family members could substitute for that of a spouse among divorced or separated individuals in a collectivist culture, making the effects of marital status weaker in collectivist than in individualist countries. Third, differing societal attitudes toward divorce may lead to differing levels of subjective well-being among divorced persons. That is, a strong social stigma

attached to divorce may lower the level of subjective well-being among divorced persons more in some cultures than in others.

The large international survey presented in this article examined the universality of the relation between marital status and subjective well-being across a globally diverse sample of 42 nations, including nations from Asia, Africa, and South America. More specifically, we tested three major hypotheses that predict cultural differences. First, because of differing cultural norms in collectivist nations versus individualist nations, a social norms hypothesis predicts that in collectivist nations, the subjective well-being of persons living with a significant other would be lower than that of married persons, whereas there would not be much difference between the two categories in individualist nations. Second, because of greater levels of social support in collectivist nations than in individualist nations, a social support hypothesis predicts that the difference in subjective well-being between married and divorced persons would be less in collectivist nations than in individualist nations. Third, a social stigma hypothesis predicts that the difference in subjective well-being between married and divorced persons would be less in nations with a high tolerance of divorce than in nations with a low tolerance of divorce. Lack of support for these hypotheses would provide evidence for the universality of the relations between marital status and subjective well-being.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The World Values Survey (WVS) II data were collected between 1990 and 1993 in 43 societies, representing almost 70% of the world's population (World Values Study Group, 1994). The study covered the full range of economic, political, geographical, and cultural variations. Both national probability and quota sampling were used; quotas were assigned based on gender, age, occupation, and region. Other studies on other topics are being published from this data set. The following analyses were based on the responses of 59,169 participants (26,877 men, 28,728 women, and 61 nonrespondents) from 42 nations (see Table 1). The sample from Moscow was dropped because it was based only on an urban area. The median sample size was 1,027 per nation. The mean age of the participants was 41.9, with a standard deviation of 16.5. It should be noted that the distribution of countries around the world is not totally balanced. For example, there is only one Moslem country and only a

TABLE 1
Individualism-Collectivism (IC) Ratings, Tolerance of Divorce (TOL), and Life Satisfaction for Each Marital Status:
Living With a Significant Other (LSO), Married (MAR), and Divorced (DIV)

	<i>IC</i>	<i>TOL</i>	<i>LSO</i>			<i>MAR</i>			<i>DIV</i>			<i>N</i>
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
China	2.00	4.76	8.67	1.53	3	7.50	1.99	768	6.50	1.78	10	1,000
South Korea	2.40	4.28	4.71	7	2.81	6.90	2.40	792	5.40	2.34	38	1,251
Nigeria	3.00	4.87	7.05	2.10	43	6.66	2.63	499	6.85	3.39	13	1,001
Turkey	3.85	5.03	5.00	5.66	2	6.52	2.43	729	4.63	2.94	11	1,030
Brazil	3.90	4.87	6.68	2.43	117	7.66	2.34	900	7.07	2.51	118	1,780
Belarus	4.00	3.51	5.13	2.48	39	5.75	2.23	722	4.32	1.91	65	1,015
Estonia	4.00	5.44	5.74	2.25	76	6.22	2.04	564	4.95	2.15	101	1,008
Latvia	4.00	5.68	4.92	2.12	56	5.80	2.42	570	5.23	2.56	64	903
Lithuania	4.00	4.03	6.56	2.46	9	6.05	2.35	603	5.77	2.32	57	1,000
Mexico	4.00	4.83	6.94	2.41	56	7.57	2.09	694	6.80	2.45	86	1,531
Chile	4.15	3.27	7.74	2.55	86	7.68	2.20	813	7.39	2.42	79	1,500
Japan	4.30	4.93	6.18	2.42	17	6.67	1.64	726	5.84	2.41	13	1,011
India	4.40	2.69	7.29	2.29	7	6.80	2.26	1,692	6.36	1.80	11	2,500
Argentina	4.80	5.77	6.73	2.20	40	7.43	1.99	587	7.05	2.01	57	1,002
Bulgaria	5.00	4.52	4.86	1.35	7	5.16	2.24	753	3.69	2.14	42	1,034
Northern Ireland	5.00	4.10	10.00	NA	1	8.05	1.63	196	6.23	2.55	13	304
Poland	5.00	3.85	6.62	3.23	13	6.74	2.27	673	5.70	2.53	23	938
Romania	5.00	4.98	5.63	2.20	30	6.08	2.25	732	5.00	2.54	39	1,103
Slovenia	5.00	6.38	6.00	2.25	61	6.38	2.19	687	6.04	2.25	26	1,035
Spain	5.55	5.65	7.06	1.78	62	7.34	1.86	2,531	6.51	2.15	92	4,147

(continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

	<i>IC</i>	<i>TOL</i>	<i>LSO</i>			<i>MAR</i>			<i>DIV</i>			<i>N</i>
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
South Africa	5.75	3.76	6.24	3.05	84	7.07	2.55	1,535	6.08	2.64	104	2,736
East Germany	6.00	5.01	6.78	1.95	85	6.82	1.86	845	6.27	2.22	62	1,336
Hungary	6.00	4.96	6.34	2.56	31	6.13	2.43	692	5.70	2.49	56	999
Ireland	6.00	4.13	7.67	1.75	6	8.10	1.81	615	5.31	3.09	13	1,000
Russia	6.00	4.79	4.83	2.21	42	5.54	2.39	1,307	4.98	2.49	300	1,961
Austria	6.75	4.87	7.43	2.57	47	6.56	916	3.44	6.51	3.14	77	1,460
Italy	6.80	5.37	6.86	2.57	35	7.45	2.00	1,165	6.00	2.49	65	2,010
Norway	6.95	5.28	7.55	1.64	124	7.83	1.75	772	6.98	2.07	60	1,239
Iceland	7.00	6.25	8.23	1.44	122	8.13	1.53	676	7.11	1.91	35	702
Czech-Slovak	7.00	6.36	7.33	2.09	40	6.31	2.05	928	6.10	2.27	99	1,396
France	7.05	5.65	6.55	2.07	103	7.07	1.83	561	5.89	2.17	57	1,002
Portugal	7.05	5.02	7.11	2.47	18	7.21	2.14	703	6.40	2.98	48	1,185
Finland	7.15	7.23	7.48	2.19	58	7.72	1.81	404	7.70	1.94	23	588
Belgium	7.25	4.77	7.63	1.70	179	7.76	1.85	1,639	6.53	2.22	137	2,792
West Germany	7.35	5.74	7.22	1.71	156	7.41	1.84	1,130	5.97	2.37	113	2,101
Sweden	7.55	6.33	7.97	1.47	131	8.27	1.52	527	7.49	2.10	83	1,047
Denmark	7.70	5.91	8.35	1.71	164	8.33	1.77	528	7.11	2.52	71	1,030
Switzerland	7.90	4.76	8.19	1.74	958	8.55	1.63	50	7.58	1.98	88	1,400
Canada	8.50	5.59	7.72	2.03	127	8.08	1.58	1,049	6.85	2.27	128	1,730
Netherlands	8.50	6.20	8.00	1.51	67	7.90	1.40	576	7.07	1.40	60	1,017
Great Britain	8.95	5.18	7.43	1.89	64	7.65	1.87	901	6.99	2.13	86	1,480
United States	9.55	4.90	7.60	1.88	48	7.97	1.69	1,132	7.07	2.07	188	1,839

NOTE: Ratings were based on a 10-point scale.

few Eastern ones. However, the WVS is better than most previous data sets in the breadth of nations sampled.

MEASURES AND RATINGS

Subjective well-being (SWB) measures. SWB is viewed as a higher order construct consisting of intercorrelated components (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Stones & Kozma, 1984). Diener and his colleagues (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Lucas et al., 1996) view SWB as consisting of what a person thinks of his or her life in general and what type of emotions a person tends to feel. Thus, SWB consists of a cognitive evaluation of life (satisfaction with life in general or satisfaction with various domains of one's life) and a report of one's emotional experiences (the presence of frequent positive emotional experience and the absence of frequent negative emotional experience). The view that life satisfaction is a more cognitive aspect of SWB than happiness or emotion is also supported by Campbell (1981). Furthermore, the components of subjective well-being often have different correlates. For example, Diener and Fujita (1995) found that life satisfaction was more closely related to material resources than was affective well-being. In this study, we treat positive affect and negative affect separately because they are often uncorrelated (Diener & Emmons, 1984; Tellegen, Watson, & Clark, 1988) and have been shown to relate differently to other constructs (Diener, Smith, & Fujita, 1995). For example, extraversion correlates with positive emotions, but not with negative emotion (Costa & McCrae, 1980). For a review of the construct and correlates of SWB and of measures assessing it, see Diener et al. (1999). For the present research, therefore, we looked for items in the WVS that we could use to measure life satisfaction, positive emotions, and negative emotions.

Life satisfaction was assessed by the item, "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" The participants answered the question using a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*dissatisfied*) to 10 (*satisfied*). Emotional experience was measured by Bradburn's (1969) Affect Balance Scale. The participants indicated whether they experienced five positive and five negative emotions during the past few weeks using a yes/no format. Five positive emotions included "Particularly excited or interested in something," "Proud because someone had complimented you on something you had done," "Pleased about having accomplished something," "On top of the world/feeling that life is wonderful," and "Things are going your way." Negative emotions included "So restless you couldn't sit long in a chair," "Very lonely or remote from other people," "Bored," "Depressed or very unhappy," and "Upset because somebody criticized you." By summing

up the number of yes responses to the five items, a total score ranging from 0 to 5 was obtained for both positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA).

Individualism-collectivism (IC) ratings were obtained for each nation, when possible, by averaging the ratings provided by Triandis (personal communication, February 1996) and the factor scores obtained by Hofstede (1981). Triandis rated the degree of IC of the 42 nations on a scale ranging from 1 (*most collectivist*) to 10 (*most individualist*). His ratings were based on his extensive knowledge of IC research and on his personal observations of the behavior of people in most of the countries included in the present study. Hofstede's factor scores were converted to a 10-point scale compatible with Triandis's ratings. The correlation among the 26 nations' overlapping ratings was .78 ($p < .001$). However, a cautionary note is needed. Triandis's ratings may be confounded by having read Hofstede's ratings and because the income of some nations has changed since the time of Hofstede's ratings. Income is known to be positively associated with individualism. The rating for each nation is shown in Table 1. The mean IC rating among 42 nations was 5.69 ($SD = 1.82$).

Tolerance for divorce was measured by asking the participants to indicate to what degree they think divorce can be justified, using a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*never justified*) to 10 (*always justified*). We computed the mean tolerance for divorce for each nation and used it as an index for cultural norms for divorce (see Table 1). The mean tolerance for divorce was 5.04 ($SD = .92$). The correlation between the IC ratings and the mean tolerance for divorce was .45 ($p < .01$).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows the mean life satisfaction score for each marital status by nation from the most collectivist to the most individualist. As can be seen, in most nations the mean life satisfaction of married individuals is higher than that of the divorced. It is also clear from Table 1 that the number of people living with a significant other tends to be very small in collectivist nations compared to individualist nations. Table 2 shows the mean positive emotion score and indicates that although in most nations the mean positive emotion score of the married tends to be higher than that of the divorced, the difference tends to be small. Table 3 shows the mean negative emotion score and indicates that the mean negative emotion score of the married is substantially lower than that of the divorced.

TABLE 2
Mean Positive Emotion for Each Marital Status: Living With a Significant Other (LSO), Married (MAR), and Divorced (DIV) by Nation From the Most Collectivist to the Most Individualist Nation

<i>Nation</i>	<i>LSO</i>		<i>MAR</i>		<i>DIV</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
China	4.33	1.15	2.47	1.53	2.50	1.51
Nigeria	2.49	1.86	2.97	1.44	3.08	1.11
Turkey	3.00	0.00	3.12	1.29	3.00	1.26
Brazil	3.06	1.24	2.81	1.29	2.95	1.38
Belarus	2.23	1.46	2.18	1.31	1.88	1.34
Estonia	2.23	1.18	2.04	1.24	1.87	1.34
Latvia	2.05	1.30	1.96	1.31	2.14	1.35
Lithuania	2.44	1.13	1.90	1.22	1.83	1.17
Mexico	2.36	1.50	2.65	1.58	2.71	1.61
Chile	2.93	1.27	2.78	1.36	2.99	1.41
Japan	1.47	1.37	1.06	1.27	1.39	1.38
India	2.43	1.27	1.82	1.47	1.72	1.56
Argentina	2.55	1.20	2.43	1.39	2.44	1.39
Bulgaria	1.86	1.57	2.01	1.28	1.75	1.13
Northern Ireland	5.00	NA	2.75	1.57	1.46	1.39
Poland	3.81	1.67	2.81	1.45	2.68	1.47
Romania	2.13	1.50	2.41	1.29	2.03	1.73
Slovenia	2.24	1.43	2.41	1.23	2.23	1.07
Spain	1.77	1.38	1.60	1.42	1.66	1.50
South Africa	2.68	1.82	3.23	1.71	3.05	1.79
East Germany	3.19	1.27	3.11	1.26	2.87	1.10
Hungary	2.42	1.45	2.05	1.24	1.83	1.15
Ireland	3.83	0.75	2.94	1.58	2.08	1.71
Russia	2.09	1.71	1.79	1.32	1.37	1.30
Austria	3.34	1.29	3.00	1.31	2.97	1.45
Italy	2.28	1.44	2.05	1.40	1.93	1.45
Norway	3.20	1.44	3.22	1.39	3.02	1.50
Iceland	3.71	1.17	3.37	1.30	2.94	1.19
Czech-Slovak	1.72	1.40	1.82	1.11	2.00	1.12
France	2.38	1.48	2.33	1.48	2.18	1.34
Portugal	2.84	1.21	2.30	1.39	2.02	1.32
Finland	2.43	1.40	2.25	1.39	2.71	1.63
Belgium	2.93	1.51	2.42	1.58	2.18	1.51
West Germany	3.58	1.24	3.24	1.33	3.02	1.38
Sweden	3.69	1.19	3.71	1.15	3.59	1.27
Denmark	2.94	1.38	2.86	1.38	2.71	1.43
Switzerland	1.27	0.97	1.42	1.04	1.51	1.29
Canada	3.50	1.40	3.50	1.37	3.45	1.38

(continued)

TABLE 2 Continued

Nation	LSO		MAR		DIV	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Netherlands	3.43	1.31	2.82	1.36	2.70	1.66
Britain	3.30	1.40	2.92	1.56	2.56	1.84
United States	3.78	1.16	3.57	1.40	3.17	1.46

NOTE: Positive emotion was not assessed in South Korea. In Northern Ireland, there was only one subject who was living with a significant other, and therefore, standard deviation was not computed.

TABLE 3

Mean Negative Emotion for Each Marital Status: Living With a Significant Other (LSO), Married (MAR), and Divorced (DIV) by Nation From the Most Collectivist to the Most Individualist Nation

Nation	LSO		MAR		DIV	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
China	1.67	2.08	0.85	1.17	0.70	1.06
Nigeria	0.51	1.12	1.25	1.41	2.23	1.83
Turkey	2.50	2.12	2.45	1.48	4.09	1.14
Brazil	2.00	1.65	1.55	1.53	1.90	1.56
Belarus	1.38	1.21	1.18	1.17	1.92	1.45
Estonia	1.41	1.29	1.18	1.23	1.73	1.34
Latvia	1.39	1.56	1.01	1.17	1.22	1.30
Lithuania	1.22	1.39	1.13	1.26	1.75	1.51
Mexico	1.28	1.24	1.18	1.33	1.47	1.45
Chile	2.20	1.52	1.63	1.42	1.96	1.63
Japan	0.41	0.71	0.65	1.02	1.00	1.29
India	0.57	1.13	1.11	1.30	1.45	1.44
Argentina	1.65	1.55	1.09	1.21	1.37	1.43
Bulgaria	1.96	1.42	1.22	1.36	1.80	1.72
Northern Ireland	1.00	NA	0.94	1.14	1.62	1.50
Poland	2.29	1.61	1.21	1.38	2.01	1.61
Romania	2.12	1.70	1.46	1.34	2.25	1.41
Slovenia	1.02	1.18	0.72	1.05	1.00	1.20
South Africa	1.55	1.65	1.25	1.42	1.70	1.52
Spain	0.64	0.87	0.79	1.14	1.34	1.53
East Germany	1.75	1.36	1.63	1.32	2.39	1.30
Hungary	1.80	1.30	0.98	1.12	1.51	1.42
Ireland	0.50	0.84	0.79	1.10	1.92	1.65
Russia	1.50	1.53	1.27	1.27	1.92	1.47

(continued)

TABLE 3 Continued

Nation	LSO		MAR		DIV	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Austria	1.24	1.31	1.03	1.22	1.44	1.45
Italy	0.97	1.15	0.79	1.08	1.15	1.25
Norway	1.20	1.34	0.77	1.10	1.35	1.39
Iceland	0.90	1.08	0.68	1.07	0.91	1.31
Czech-Slovak	1.00	1.28	1.01	1.16	1.39	1.36
France	1.04	1.15	0.78	1.15	1.82	1.55
Portugal	1.11	1.45	0.91	1.18	1.25	1.48
Finland	1.43	1.38	1.07	1.39	1.04	1.30
Belgium	1.28	1.40	0.82	1.14	1.44	1.35
West Germany	1.91	1.53	1.58	1.44	2.33	1.58
Sweden	0.89	1.12	0.52	0.88	0.56	1.08
Denmark	1.12	1.26	0.70	1.02	1.49	1.41
Switzerland	0.25	0.65	0.24	0.61	0.65	1.11
Canada	1.41	1.39	0.95	1.17	1.66	1.60
Netherlands	1.36	1.47	1.03	1.11	1.40	1.56
Britain	1.63	1.45	1.17	1.23	1.43	1.38
United States	1.82	1.54	1.07	1.25	1.40	1.39

NOTE: Negative emotion was not assessed in South Korea. In Northern Ireland, there was only one subject who was living with a significant other, and therefore, standard deviation was not computed.

Data analytic strategies. To test the interaction between culture and marital status, we used a multiple regression approach. We first used contrast coding (i.e., -1 , $+1$) to compare the marital status under question, and then formed interaction terms between this contrast-coded marital status and other terms. Thus, a significant interaction between marital status and the level of individualism, for example, indicates that the effect of marital status on SWB differs across nations, depending on the level of individualism. To control for gender and age, we included these two variables in all of the following analyses.

Social norm hypothesis. First, with regard to the SWB of the married and those living with a significant other, we hypothesized that this difference should be larger in collectivist nations than in individualist nations because of the cultural norm for not allowing cohabitation before or without marriage in collectivist nations. To test this hypothesis, we performed a regression analysis predicting life satisfaction from the contrast-coded marital status (-1 = living with significant other, $+1$ = married), gender, age, the level of individualism, and interaction terms among marital status, gender, and the level of

individualism. There was a significant main effect of marital status ($B = .26, \beta = .07, p < .01$), such that the married were more satisfied with their lives than were those living with a significant other. As predicted, this main effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction between marital status and culture ($B = -.05, \beta = -.02, p < .01$). That is, the negative sign of the interaction terms indicates that the difference between the married and those living with a significant other was larger in collectivist nations than in individualist nations. We repeated the same regression analysis predicting positive emotion. There was no main effect of marital status ($B = .01, \beta = .01, ns$), nor was there a two-way interaction between marital status and the level of individualism ($B = .02, \beta = .01, ns$). In terms of negative emotion, there was a significant main effect of the marital status ($B = -.24, \beta = -.10, p < .01$), such that those who were living with a significant other experienced more negative emotions than did the married. However, there was no interaction between the marital status and the level of individualism ($B = .00, \beta = .00, ns$). These relations between marital status and culture did not differ by gender, that is, all three-way interactions were nonsignificant. In short, the social norm hypothesis was supported in terms of global life satisfaction, but was not supported in terms of emotional experiences.

Social support hypothesis. Next, with regard to the mean SWB difference between married and divorced, we hypothesized that the difference should be smaller in collectivist nations than in individualist nations. That is, we predicted a negative interaction between marital status and the level of IC. To test this hypothesis, we performed a multiple regression analysis, using the contrast coding of marital status (i.e., married = -1, divorced = +1). First, we predicted life satisfaction from marital status, the level of IC, and the interaction term between marital status and IC, controlling for gender and age. Confirming the visual inspection of Table 1, we found a significant difference between marital statuses, such that married individuals are more satisfied with their lives than the divorced ($B = -.37, \beta = -.09, p < .000$). Disconfirming the social support hypothesis, however, the difference between marital statuses was not moderated by the level of IC as indicated by the nonsignificant interaction ($B = -.00, \beta = .01, ns$). We repeated the same regression analysis predicting positive emotion. Consistent with the visual inspection of Table 2, the difference between the married and divorced in positive emotion was small but statistically significant ($B = -.06, \beta = -.02, p < .00$). Confirming our hypothesis, there was a small but statistically significant interaction between marital status and the level of IC ($B = -.03, \beta = -.01, p < .05$). That is, the difference between married and divorced in positive emotion was smaller in col-

lectivist nations than in individualist nations. Finally, we repeated the same regression analysis predicting negative emotion. Confirming the visual inspection of Table 3, the divorced individuals experienced significantly more negative emotions than did the married ($B = .27, \beta = .12, p < .000$). However, there was no interaction between the marital status and the level of IC ($B = .01, \beta = .00, ns$). These relations between marital status and culture did not differ by gender, that is, all three-way interactions were nonsignificant. In short, the social support hypothesis was not supported for life satisfaction or negative emotions. Although it was supported for positive emotions, the effect size was very small.

Social stigma hypothesis. Finally, we tested whether the difference between the married and divorced in SWB differ across nations, depending on the level of tolerance toward divorce. To test this hypothesis, we conducted the regression analysis similar to the above analysis. Instead of the level of IC, we entered tolerance toward divorce into the regression equation. Disconfirming the social stigma hypothesis, the difference between married and divorced in life satisfaction was not moderated by the level of tolerance toward divorce, as evidenced by the nonsignificant interaction between marital status and tolerance toward divorce ($B = .03, \beta = .01, ns$). Similarly, the difference in positive emotion was not moderated by the level of tolerance toward divorce as evidenced by the nonsignificant interaction ($B = .01, \beta = .01, ns$). In terms of negative emotion, however, there was a significant interaction between marital status and tolerance toward divorce, such that the difference in negative emotion between married and divorced tends to be smaller in nations with high tolerance toward divorce ($B = -.03, \beta = -.02, p < .01$). These relations between marital status and culture did not differ by gender, that is, all three-way interactions were nonsignificant. In short, the social stigma hypothesis was not supported for life satisfaction or positive emotions. Although it was supported for negative emotions, the effect size was small.

DISCUSSION

The major focus of our examination of this large international survey was on (a) whether the relation between marital status and subjective well-being varied across cultures, and (b) if cultural variations did occur, whether these variations elucidated the processes theorized to underlie past marital status effects. We chose two cultural dimensions to examine. First, IC was selected because it reflects differences in social support and differences in norms with

regard to marriage, divorce, and living with a significant other. Second, tolerance of divorce was chosen to evaluate social stigma theory.

**SOCIAL NORM HYPOTHESIS:
LIVING WITH A SIGNIFICANT OTHER VERSUS MARRIED**

We found a small measure of support for cultural differences related to cohabitation in terms of life satisfaction, but none in terms of positive or negative emotions. Overall, married persons were more satisfied with their life than those who were living with a significant other, but this difference was larger in collectivist nations than in individualist nations.

Collectivist nations tend to hold conservative values such as conformity (Schwartz, 1994). In such societies, living with someone without being married may be considered immoral and against normative expectations. Not meeting the norm, cohabitating persons in collectivist nations evaluate their lives as less satisfying than persons in individualist nations. Persons in collectivist nations tend to be sensitive to such social norms (Triandis, 1995). Behaving against the norm may cause them to evaluate their lives as more incomplete than the married persons, despite the positive emotional experiences associated with the relationship. Though speculative, the differential effects of living together between individualist and collectivist nations seem to be due to cross-cultural differences in normative expectations, social support, and the nature of romantic relationships. It should be noted that, in addition to cross-cultural differences, there could be analogous individual differences within a culture: The more collectivistic that cohabitating persons are, the less satisfied they are. The present finding suggests that subjective norms and attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and living with a significant other may influence the way in which persons evaluate their lives, but not the way in which they experience emotions. Note, however, that the effect size for life satisfaction is small. Thus, the difference in subjective well-being between married and cohabitating persons is very widespread.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT HYPOTHESIS:
MARRIED VERSUS DIVORCED**

Again, the relation between marital status and subjective well-being was fairly universal, providing little evidence for the social support hypothesis. In both individualist and collectivist nations, married persons experienced more positive emotions, and fewer negative emotions, than divorced or separated persons. The difference in positive emotion was only slightly smaller in collectivist nations than in individualist nations. To the extent that this small

effect size is meaningful, the social support process may be related to the nature of the decision to divorce. That is, in individualist cultures, the decision may be essentially personal, whereas in collectivist cultures, a decision of such magnitude may be much more family based. Thus, at the time the legal process is reached, the family, in most cases, may have already agreed that the person should end the marriage and implicitly made up their mind that he or she must be taken care of.

In contrast, the difference in life satisfaction between married and separated or divorced persons did not differ across levels of IC. Marriage entails many social roles and responsibilities across extended families in collectivist nations. Without fulfilling such roles and responsibilities, it might be difficult for divorced or separated individuals in collectivist countries to evaluate their lives as positively as those in individualist countries. Thus, social support may influence the emotional aspect of subjective well-being, but not the cognitive aspect. One of the reasons might be that social support increases the experience of positive emotions but is not enough to make persons view their lives as satisfying. It is also important to note that in collectivist nations, the covariation between emotion and life satisfaction is smaller than in individualist nations (Suh et al., 1998). Although this difference suggests that the role of social support in subjective well-being may differ across cultures, the effect size in the present study was very small. Thus, the correlation of divorce on subjective well-being is very ubiquitous.

SOCIAL STIGMA HYPOTHESIS: MARRIED VERSUS DIVORCED

Again, the relation between marital status and subjective well-being was fairly universal. The difference between married and divorced or separated persons in life satisfaction and in positive emotions did not depend on the level of tolerance for divorce, providing no support for the social stigma hypothesis. A small measure of support was found in terms of negative emotions, with the difference between married and divorced or separated persons being smaller in nations reporting a higher tolerance for divorce. Thus, like social support, attitude toward divorce may influence the emotional aspect of subjective well-being but not the cognitive aspect.

In addition, because separation and divorce are more strongly discouraged in collectivist nations, a marriage has to be worse in collectivist than in individualist nations before someone leaves the marriage. Thus, separated or divorced persons in collectivist nations were comparing their current situation to a much worse one than were those in individualist nations. This different standard of comparison may explain why the separated or divorced persons

in collectivist nations reported fewer negative emotional experiences than those persons in individualist nations. The correlation between IC and tolerance of divorce supports this hypothesis.

It is noteworthy that findings for affective well-being sometimes diverged from life satisfaction, suggesting that emotions are more affected by social support and societal attitudes than is the more cognitive life satisfaction judgment. The implication is that perceived social support may be, by nature, more emotional than cognitive. This implication and the relation between social support and subjective well-being in general may be fruitful areas for further investigation. The finding that living with someone provides the same life satisfaction benefits as marriage in individualist nations suggests that there is something about the relationship, rather than legal marriage per se, that is associated with subjective well-being. The finding that this is not true in collectivist nations suggests the need for further investigation into the relation between lifestyle and culture.

In summary, the relations that we examined between marital status and subjective well-being were found to be very widespread. Although cultural variables were found to alter the size of certain relations between marital status and subjective well-being, the effect sizes were small. Specifically, in terms of life satisfaction, the benefit of marriage over cohabitation was greater in collectivist than in individualist nations. Similarly, in terms of positive emotions, the benefit of being married over being divorced or separated was smaller in collectivist than in individualist nations. In addition, in terms of negative emotions, the benefit of being married over being divorced or separated was smaller in nations with a high tolerance for divorce. Finally, the relations between marital status, culture, and subjective well-being did not differ by gender. Because of the small size of the effects of the cultural variables, we conclude that the relations between marital status and subjective well-being are very similar across the world.

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