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# Gender Role Division in Japan and Korea: The Relationship between Realities and Attitudes

Jihey Bae

## Abstract

This study examines the relation between the “attitudes” and the “realities” of gender role division and its influence on men’s mental health in Japan and Korea.

The data used in this study are *the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey* in Japan (SSM Japan 2005) and *the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey* in Korea (SSM Korea 2005). Based on general linear model, the following results were obtained: 1) Korean men experience more gaps between the attitudes and the realities of gender role division than Japanese men. This result reflects the difference in the development of gender role division in Japan and Korea. 2) In Japan, the relation between the spouse’s employment and the husband’s gender role attitudes influences the husband’s life satisfaction. But, this effect is not significant in Korea. On the basis of the previous study, these results can be interpreted that gender role attitudes have a normative characteristic as the criteria for choosing dual income in Japanese men, but not in Korean men.

## I. Introduction

Many researchers in sociology, economics, and gender theory have investigated various problems pertaining to gender role division; their studies range from an attempt to identify the linkage between gender, market, and family, to an empirical analysis on women’s employment, sharing housework/childcare, and the double burden on working married women.

These previous studies have mainly focused on women, especially with regard to the psychological distress of working women; the problem of the multiple roles adopted by working women has been the subject in those studies (Maeda 2002; Spain & Bianchi 1996). However, these studies tend to overlook the diversity of men’s experiences.

To begin with, the problem of gender role division is a phenomenon that is experienced

by both genders. Thus, one cannot expect to explore gender role division sufficiently and comprehensively enough by merely focusing on the women as the object of analysis and specializing on women's problems. Men might be excluded from the object of analysis by supposing that their roles change more gradually than women's, and men who are distressed by the multiple role accomplishment are still small in number compared to women.

However, it may not be sufficient to focus on gender role division as specifically women's problem merely from an academic perspective. In addition, this tendency creates an illusion of men who persist in adhering to the existing gender role division, although it has changed; there also exists the danger of strengthening this illusion. Therefore, this study examines the influence of gender role division, while focusing on men, who had been neglected in previous research.

In particular, the relation between the "attitudes" toward and the "realities" of gender role division are dealt with in this study. Up until now, research on gender role division has treated the attitudes and realities as separate issues. To be precise, previous research can be divided into two categories—one focusing on the realities, for example, determinants of married women's employment and factors that influence men's participation in housework and child rearing, and the other focusing on the attitudes, for example, toward a dual income family or men's roles in family participation(quoted in Matsuda 2007).

The attitudes and realities of gender role division do not necessarily correspond. Few studies have highlighted the influences of this association. As a result, the mechanism wherein the relation between the attitudes and realities affects the individual's mental health is not sufficiently examined. Therefore, in order to discuss how individuals experience gender role division and what impact that experience has on mental health, it is necessary not only to analyze the attitudes and realities as separate issues but to also analyze the relation between the two aspects.

In consideration of the limitations of such previous works, the influence of gender role division on men's mental health in Japan and Korea is examined in this study, while paying attention to the attitudes, the realities, and the relation between the two.

## **II. Development of Gender Role Division in Japan and Korea**

It is well known that a strong gender role division was formed in Japan and Korea, which pursued "the high economic growth," where a care giving role like housework/Childcare in the home was attributed to women, while the breadwinner's role was attributed to men. Men's long working hours and lack of participation in the family, and the low rate of married women's labor force participation and M-shaped curve have been frequently referred to as typical examples of the reflection of a strong gender role division in Japan and Korea. However, since the 1990s, a change has occurred.

Firstly, the attitudes, which refers to "the uninterrupted work" that is supportive of "continuing to work even after a child is born," have increased by as much as 20% from

1992 to 2007; to be precise, it was an increase of 23.4% to 43.4% (Cabinet office 2007a). In addition, a similar trend may be observed in Korea, where the ratio of the belief that considers women's employment as "unrelated to the home" has increased from 13.7% in 1991 to 47.3% in 2006 by 30% or more (Korean Women's Development Institute 2007). In these 15 years, attitudes toward gender role division have sharply moved in a more gender egalitarian direction. In particular, this tendency was more remarkable in Korea than in Japan.

A change may also be observed in the realities of gender role division. The rate of women's labor force participation in Japan and Korea has steadily risen from 1990 to 2007 (Statistics Bureau; Statistics Korea). However, the width of increase is not very large compared with the change in attitudes, with a mere 4.8% increase in Japan and a 6.4% increase in Korea. Moreover, the overall structure does not change largely, although the bottom portion of the M-curve has been rising gradually in both countries (Cabinet Office 2007b).

In short, the attitudes and realities of gender role division have changed at different rates in Japan and Korea since the 1990s. However, the realities have not reached the same level since the attitudes toward gender role division have changed very quickly. Both Korea and Japan experience a gap in the speed of change in the attitudes and realities of gender role division, and this gap is especially larger in Korea.

It is possible that such a gap at a macro level can bring about a gap between the attitudes and realities of gender role division that an individual experiences. In fact, the ratio of couples who aspire for a dual income far exceeds the ratio of real dual income couples in each country (Policy Research Institute 2000; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2001).

The following sections will mention several previous studies before conducting my own analysis.

### III. Previous Research

As already mentioned, previous research on gender role division has had a tendency to approach gender role division from two aspects: (1) the attitudes, that is, whether or not the individual agrees with gender role division and (2) the realities, that is, what are the determinants of married women's employment or men's participation in the family role.

Even though only women have been the focus of early research, there are also a few studies that have focused on men; incidentally, the results of these studies are not consistent. Some studies report that dual income has a negative influence on men's mental health, while others report a positive influence.

For instance, Burke and Weir (1976) obtained the result that the life satisfaction of men in a dual income family was lower than that of full-time housewives' husbands. Additionally, it is clarified that the wife's employment exerts a negative influence on the husband's mental health, in Rosenfield (1980) and Kessler (1982). These results have been explained from the possibility that the wife's employment increases the husband's housework load, and the

increase of the wife's income threatens the husband's identity as the "main provider." It is said, as a result, that husbands experience more distress.

However, in Booth (1977), it was revealed that the distress of full-time housewives' husbands is higher than that of husbands in a dual income family. According to Booth, it is necessary for both the husband and wife to adjust, and the couples might be stressed in this period. However, after this period, which is relatively short, the husbands' mental health is improved because of the benefits of the wives' employment, such as an increase in the household income. From such non-consistent results, it is difficult to reach a conclusion on the influence of dual income on men's mental health, as Fendrich (1984) pointed out.

It may also be noted that a consistent result was obtained from the research that analyzes the influence of dual income, by considering the men's attitudes toward their partner's employment. For example, when the husband's preference for the wife's employment does not correspond to the wife's working situation, dual income has a negative effect on his mental health, according to Ross (1983), who has focused on the husbands' preference for the wives' employment. Mirowsky (1989) reported a similar result wherein the husband's mental health is at its peak when the wife has a job, husband wishes for his wife to be employed and he participates in the housework/child care.

Comparable results are reported by some studies in Japan and Korea. Nishimura (2001) clarified that the psychological impact of the wife's employment on the husband differs according to the normative attitudes and economic power of the husband. Bae (2007), focusing directly on the relation between the attitudes and realities, reported that when the husband's attitudes and realities of gender role division do not correspond, dual income exerts a negative influence on the men's mental health. Moreover, the couple's marital satisfaction in the dual income family tends to rise when both the husband and wife have more egalitarian attitudes (Lee 2002); this tendency is particularly stronger in husbands. She interpreted this result where husband's marital satisfaction rises because he recognizes his wife's social activity (= employment) and his participation in the family role positively.

These results suggest that the necessity for considering men's attitudes toward a dual income when considering the influence of dual income. However, as mentioned earlier, in Japan and Korea, research that pays attention to the impact of relation between double income and men's attitudes on their mental health is very rare.

Therefore, this study will examine the relation between the attitudes and realities of gender role division and the influence of it on men's mental health in Japan and Korea.

## **IV. Data and Variables**

### **1. Data**

The data used in this study is *the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey* in Japan (SSM Japan 2005) and *the Social Stratification and Social Mobility Survey* in Korea (SSM Korea 2005). Men with wives younger than 60 years were the subjects in the analysis (1,482 in Japan, 474 in Korea).

### **2. Variables**

#### **2.1. Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable is life satisfaction. One item about all aspects of life was self-rated from 1 (dissatisfy) to 5 (satisfy).

#### **2.2. Independent Variables**

The independent variables used in this study are the husbands' attitudes toward gender role division and the wives' employment status.

At first, the husbands' attitudes toward gender role division were divided into two categories, —“Agree” (“Completely agree” and “Rather agree”) and “Disagree” (“Completely disagree” and “Rather disagree”)—toward the idea that “Men should work outside the home, while women should look after the family”.

Secondly, the spouse's employment status was divided into three categories—“unemployed”, “wageworker”, and “self-employed”.

The basic statistics of the variables used for the analysis are shown in Table 1.

#### **2.3. Analysis**

To begin with, the frequency of the relation between the attitudes and realities of gender role division in both countries are explored. Then, the influence of the relation between the attitudes and realities (= spouse's employment here) on men's life satisfaction in Japan and Korea, was analyzed using the general linear model.

**Table 1. Basic Statistics of the Variables**

Japan			
wife's employment status (%)	wageworker 47.3	self-employed 12.0	unemployed 40.6
gender role attitudes (%)	agree 40.1	disagree 59.9	
	M	SD	
age	47.32	10.17	
educational years	13.05	2.38	
house income(log)	6.77	0.48	
life satisfaction	3.80	1.01	
Korea			
wife's employment status (%)	wageworker 20.4	self-employed 25.6	unemployed 54.0
gender role attitudes (%)	agree 39.5	disagree 60.5	
	M	SD	
age	46.19	10.04	
educational years	11.74	3.54	
house income(log)	7.31	0.67	
life satisfaction	3.04	1.30	

## V. Results

### 1. The Relation between the Attitudes and Realities of Gender Role Division in Japan and Korea

Table 2 shows the relation between the attitudes and realities of gender role division in both countries.

In Japan, the cases where husband opposes gender role division and his spouse works as a wageworker are 32.4%, the most. In such cases, we may suppose that men's attitudes toward gender role division coincide with the reality of gender role division. And cases where husbands oppose gender role division and have self-employed spouses are only 6.1%, the fewest.

On the other hand, in Korea, cases where the spouse does not work, although husband opposes gender role division, are about 30%, the most. Contrary to Japan, in Korea, we may observe a larger number of cases where men's attitudes toward gender role division and the realities do not coincide. Moreover, situations wherein the men agree with gender role divi-

**Table 2. The Attitudes and the Reality of Gender Role Division in Japan and Korea**

	agree with gender role division			disagree with gender role division		
	wageworker	self-employed	unemployed	wageworker	self-employed	unemployed
Japan	15.1	6.1	19.1	<b>32.4</b>	7.4	19.9
Korea	5.5	10.2	24.6	14.4	15.1	<b>30.1</b>

sion but the spouses work as a wageworker can be observed in only up to 5.8% cases.

Such a difference between the two countries seems to be a natural outcome, if we consider the larger gap between the speed of change in the attitudes and the realities over gender role division in Korea than in Japan. As I mentioned before, both Korea and Japan experience a gap in the speed of change in the attitudes and realities of gender role division, and this gap is especially larger in Korea. As a result, men's attitudes toward gender role division are similar to each other in both countries (Bae 2008a), but the rate of dual incomes in Korea is lower than those in Japan (Bae 2008b).

## **2. The Influence of Gender Role Division on Men's Life Satisfaction**

Then, what influence does such a relation between the attitudes and the realities have on men's mental health? Tables 3 and 4 show the results of the general linear model, which examined this influence.

In the case of Japan (Table 3), spouse's employment has a significant effect on the men's life satisfaction in model 1. This effect does not change in model 2, by adding control variables like age, educational years, and income. In other words, the main effect of the spouse's employment is still significant. With regard to the men's life satisfaction among the three cases where the spouses do not work, are self-employed, or work as wageworkers, we may note that the means are 3.89, which is the highest, followed by 3.79, and 3.72, which is the lowest, respectively. Thus, we may conclude that dual income has a negative influence on the men's life satisfaction in Japan.

The effects of all the control variables were statistically significant, and the explanation power of the model was enhanced by adding these variables. It was evident that the influence of socio demographic factors such as age, educational years, and incomes is extremely important in men's life satisfaction.

After checking the main effect of the spouse's employment, in order to examine the influence of the relation between men's gender role attitudes and wives' employment in model 3, the interaction term between these two variables was added to Model 2. As a result, the interaction effect was statistically significant, while the main effect of the wife's employment was maintained.

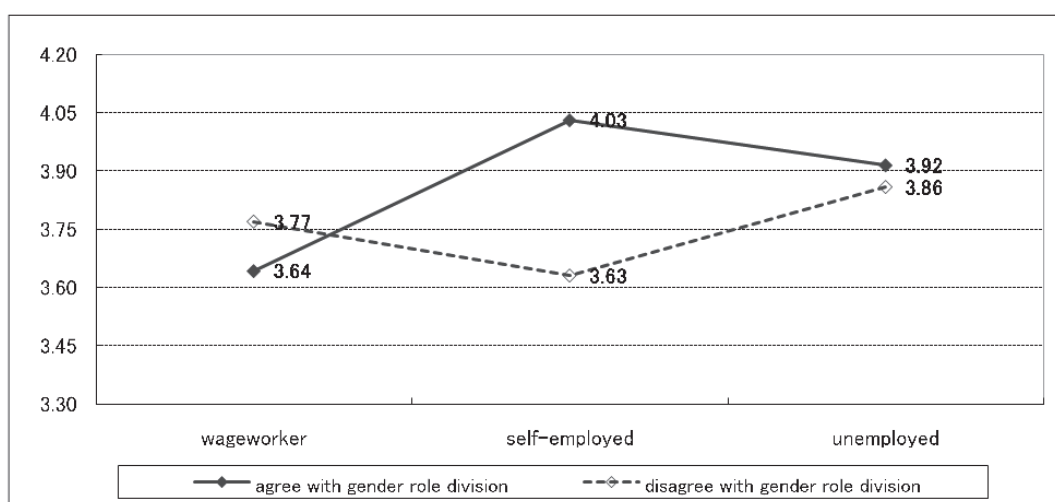


**Table 3. The Influence of the Relation between the Attitudes and the Reality on Men's Life Satisfaction (Japan)**

	model 1		model 2		model 3	
	df	F	df	F	df	F
spouse's employment status(A)	2	4.423 *	2	3.685 *	2	3.776 *
age			1	8.780 **	1	7.627 **
educational years			1	13.329 ***	1	13.512 ***
house income(log)			1	46.232 ***	1	45.755 ***
men's own gender role attitudes(B)					1	2.354
(A) × (B)					2	3.765 *
n		1475		1110		1080
Adj R <sup>2</sup>		0.006		0.066		0.068

\* &lt; .05 \*\* p &lt; .01 \*\*\* &lt; .001

Figure 1 shows this interaction effect in model 3. In the cases where the spouse does not work and works as a wageworker, man's life satisfaction is high when his attitudes correspond with the spouse's working situation. That is, if the spouse does not work, man's life satisfaction is high when he agrees with gender role division. On the other hand, if the spouse works as a wageworker, man's life satisfaction is high when he opposes gender role division.

**Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Gender Role Attitudes and Wife's Employment (Japan)**

The influence of the relation between the attitudes and realities on men's life satisfaction is the largest when the spouse is self-employed. In this case, the men's life satisfaction is high when he agrees with gender role division, while it becomes low when he opposes gender role division. The difference between the two is remarkably large compared with other cases.

When the spouse is self-employed, the difference in the men's life satisfaction by their own gender role attitudes becomes the greatest in Korea, although this effect was not statistically significant. However, the direction is contrary to Japan. In Korea, there is a tendency for the men's life satisfaction to increase when they oppose gender role division and to decrease when they agree with gender role division. This result, wherein the relation between men's gender role attitudes and their life satisfaction is reversed when the spouses are self-employed, is quite interesting. It is possible that such a result is associated with the situation where the married women choosing to be self-employed experience. Then, I explored this situation in both Japan and Korea by comparing factors such as the income, the position in employment, and the working hours, using SSM 2005 (table omitted).

As a result, in both countries, it is seen that the incomes of self-employed women are similar to those of wage working women. However, with regard to the working time, the difference was greater in Korea despite the tendency of the working time of the self-employed being longer than that of the wage worker in two countries.

Self-employed women's long working hours in Korea might exert a negative influence on men who have conservative attitudes toward gender role division because there is a large possibility of conflict between family role accomplishment and long working hours. Lee and Hirata (2001:120-121) pointed out that "a normative resistance toward married women to work outside the home" remains in Korea, and it appears as self employment when married women continue to work. However, men with conservative gender role attitudes seem to be dissatisfied with their wives' self-employment, as far as the results of this study may be seen. Therefore, the reason why several married women choose self-employment is not the result of some compromise plan as part of a "resistance by working married women", but due to other reasons.

Table 4 demonstrates the results of Korea. The result of model 1 is similar to the situation in Japan. However, when we consider the control variables in Model 2, the effect of the spouse's employment is lost. The explanation power of the model increases greatly, although the effect of the spouse's employment disappears. The socio-demographic variables exert a large influence on men's life satisfaction, and we may predict that such an influence is larger in Korea than in Japan from the size of the adjusted R square.

**Table 4. The Influence of the Relation between the Attitudes and the Reality on Men's Life Satisfaction (Korea)**

	model 1		model 2		model 3	
	df	F	df	F	df	F
spouse's employment status(A)	2	8.314 ***	2	0.973	2	1.481
age			1	10.477 **	1	10.643 **
educational years			1	17.856 ***	1	18.281 ***
house income(log)			1	16.217 ***	1	15.789 ***
men's own gender role attitudes(B)					1	3.014 †
(A) × (B)					2	1.422
n		469		446		446
Adj R <sup>2</sup>		0.030		0.188		0.195
†<10 **<01 ***<001						

For model 3, which adds the interaction between the spouses' employment and the men's gender role attitudes, the effect of interaction was not admitted. Instead, the effect of men's gender role attitudes was significant, although it was only 10%. Men's agreement with gender role division marked a higher point in life satisfaction than in the case of one who opposes gender role division.

## VI. Conclusions

This study has examined the influences of the relation between men's attitudes and realities of gender role division on their life satisfaction. The result of the analysis and the obtained findings are as follows.

Firstly, in Japan, the case where men who have an egalitarian attitude toward gender role division, and their spouses work as wagedworkers, i.e., the attitudes and realities of gender role division corresponded, is the most. On the other hand, in Korea, the case where spouses do not work, notwithstanding men themselves, have egalitarian gender role attitudes, is the most.

Such a result, where Korean men experience more gaps between the attitudes and realities of gender role division than Japanese men, is predictable from the development of gender role division in the two countries. For these 20 years, gender role attitudes have changed sharply in both Japan and Korea, but the width of change is larger in Korea than in Japan, as explored already in the second section of this study. As a result, the ratio of men who opposed gender role division was almost the same in Japan and Korea (Bae 2008a). On the other hand, married women's employment has changed relatively slowly; the realities of gender role division have not changed as quickly. The disparity of married women's employment in Japan and Korea still remains as it was (Bae 2008b).

The difference in the two countries in the relation between the attitudes and realities of

gender role division is observed not only in the distribution of the frequencies but also in its influence on men's life satisfaction. In Japan, while the spouse's employment has an effect on men's life satisfaction, the relation between the employment and the husbands' gender role attitudes also influences their life satisfaction. However, in Korea, the influence of spouse's employment on man's life satisfaction disappears when control variables are inserted into the model, and the relation with the gender role attitudes does not exert a significant influence. It is only the men's gender role attitudes, in Korea, that influences their life satisfaction, except for control variables.

A study by Ojima (2000) could serve as a reference when such a result is interpreted. He examined the relation among women's attitudes, their employment, and their life satisfaction by using SSM data in 1985 and 1995. It was reported that the effect of the realities (women's employment) on women's life satisfaction were prominent in 1995, although it had been observed that the relation between women's gender role attitudes and the realities influences their life satisfaction in 1985. In other words, in 1985, women who opposed gender role division achieved self-fulfillment by working as a practice of their own attitudes; therefore, an increase in their life satisfaction was reported. On the other hand, women who agreed with gender role division achieved greater life satisfaction when they played a domestic role as full-time housewives.

Ojima explained a different result in 1985 and 1995 as a qualitative transformation of the gender role attitudes during these ten years. In 1985, the gender role attitudes had a great significance as a norm for Japanese women, and it functioned sufficiently as a selection criterion of the action. However, this characteristic as a norm of gender role attitudes was lost in 1995. This was an era when it has no any significance to oppose gender role division, and the idea of opposing gender role division was not requested to be practiced (Ojima 2000:230-234).

The results of the Japanese men in this study are similar to those of the Japanese women in 1985. That is, life satisfaction increases in men who oppose gender role division when their spouses are wageworkers. On the other hand, life satisfaction increases for men who agree with gender role division when their spouses do not work. If we follow Ojima's interpretation, then we see that these results suggest that gender role attitudes have a normative characteristic as the criteria for choosing dual income in the Japanese men in the 2000s.

It is possible to predict that the gap between the attitudes and the realities of gender role division expands more in the future, while the individual's gender role attitudes and employment environment have changed considerably (Matsuda 2007). The results that support such a forecast are obtained from previous research.

For example, in the case of Japan, parents who live together could be an important source of the employment of married women (Bae 2008b). However, instances of cohabitation with parents and the function of childcare support by the cohabiting parents have reduced in recent years. Against the backdrop of such a situation, it may be possible to say that there are families who cannot choose a dual income even if they oppose gender role divi-

sion. On the other hand, in Japan, the husband's income still influences whether or not couples opt for dual income (Bae 2008b). To be precise, the probability of dual income increases when the husband's income is low. It is possible that the numbers of families who cannot help but opt for dual income increase due to the husband's job insecurity and low income even if the couples agree with gender role division in the face of the recent economic recession.

On the other hand, the relation between the attitudes and spouse's employment as realities has not exerted significant influence on men's life satisfaction in Korea. If we follow above-mentioned discussion, gender role attitudes are not equivalent to norms for Korean men.

However, as Ojima (2000:234) pointed out, the expression "Men should work outside the home, while women should look after the family" which was used in SSM 2005, is not a question that is relevant to the respondent's own selection. In fact, it questions whether or not society can be allowed to exist in such a state. In this respect, although men who experience a gap between the attitudes and realities of gender role division are of a greater number in Korea than in Japan, such a gap does not exert much influence on their life satisfaction, which may be because Korean men might do react appropriately to the meaning that exists within the question.

Also, the situation where the rate of married women's employment is lower than that in Japan and dual income is not the "majority" in Korea might reduce the negative influence of the gap between the attitudes and realities. It is possible for Korean men to recognize a situation which is disturbing to married women's participation in society, for instance, the incompleteness of a social system that supports the child care, and the condition that cannot be expected for parent's support, as the situation cannot solve by individual. As a result, even if a corresponding lifestyle to own gender role attitudes cannot be chosen, it is likely to be accepted as a problem of social structure.

Under such a situation, it is not easy to believe that gender role attitudes have the characteristics of norms as a selection criterion of the action for Korean men. In that case, the main effect of gender role attitudes seen in Korea might be a substitution effect of other factors. The relation to the political attitude is thought to be one factor. In fact, the tendency for men who opposed gender role division to have politically liberal attitudes was seen in the analysis by KGSS (Korean General Social Survey) data in 2003 (table omitted).

Given that the situation in Korea in 2005, for example the liberal government under President Roh Muhyun, the problem of whether or not the political attitudes and its realities are corresponding has a larger impact on Korean men than of whether or not the attitudes and realities of gender are corresponding. One of the possible interpretations is that Korean men are sensitively reactive to the situation in such a society.

In this study, based on the dearth of Japanese and Korean studies about man's experience, I examined the influence of dual income, the new type of gender role division, focusing on men. It is suggested that the impact of dual income on a man's psychological

well-being is related to the structure of the labor market as well as the realities of his life, that is, his spouse's employment status. However, with regard to the use of life satisfaction as an index for expressing psychological well-being in this study, we need to be open to the fact that it is easy to be influenced by "social desirability" (Inaba 2004). In this study, the mean and standard deviation of the life satisfaction of men in Japan and Korea (Table 1) are different from each other. From this, it is possible that the result is a reflection of the special "social desirability" in each society. Therefore, we cannot deny the possibility of obtaining different results if we use other indexes like distress said to that bias resulting from social desirability is comparatively small for a dependent variable.

In addition, there may be respondents who chose gender role attitudes to correspond with their own lifestyles in order to justify the situation in which they are placed.

Therefore, it is essential to use panel data to examine the influence of dual income by focusing on the relationship between the attitudes and realities about gender role division more closely. Such a point needs to be considered in the future.

The gap between the attitudes and realities does not cease to exist in the face of the problem of gender role division. The individual experiences a gap between the attitudes and realities in various circumstances in society regardless of sex, marital status, educational background, and so on. The political situation mentioned above is one of these several circumstances. It becomes possible to examine the influence of the social structure on the individual by analyzing the gap between the attitudes and realities in various circumstances.

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