

*Japanese Attitudes about Home and Children in Relation to
Marital Happiness across Time*

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Abstract

The current study analyzes marital happiness in conjunction with attitudes about home and children within a Japanese population over the span of 18 years. Data was taken from the International Social Survey Programme from 1994, 2002, and 2012 with a total number of 3651 participants. Research on Japanese couples demonstrates a shift in individuals marrying increasingly later in life (Retherford, Ogawa, & Matsukura, 2001). Japanese women in particular are delaying or forgoing marriage because of the societal expectations for education and work (Raymo & Iwasawa, 2005). Traditional home and family continue to be important to Japanese culture, however they are becoming less valued (Retherford, Ogawa, & Matsukura, 2001). These factors could suggest a shrinking population due to attitudes on marriage and relationships changing over time, indicating a need to determine the possible influences of these trends.

The current study examined relationship attitudes pertaining to traditional gender roles and the importance of children in marriage. The results suggest that non-married men believe that marriage is better if children are wanted and that watching children grow brings joy. In contrast, it is the married women who believe these statements significantly more than non-married women. In 1994 and 2002, married people reported that married people are generally happier than non-married people, however in 2012 the difference disappeared. Implications of these results include significant differences in the perceptions on marriage and children across the sexes and across time.

Keywords: Japan, marital happiness, children, home, relationships, marriage

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Introduction

Japan's modern views and practices on marriage and family differ markedly from the traditional family values that previously shaped Japanese society. The family was viewed as an idealized institution in which each family member contributed to the support and perpetuation of the family (Ariga, 1954). This perpetuation was carried out by family members preserving household resources and passing them on to their posterity, enabling the family lines to grow stronger with each subsequent generation (Imamura, 1990). As written in Lebra's *Japanese patterns of behavior* (as cited in L. G. Bell & Bell, 2000), the purpose of marriage in traditional Japanese culture was an institution directed towards the raising of children, with less emphasis placed on marriage being a relationship where psychological needs of partners were met. Family lines were perpetuated as two families joined in marriage, each honoring their ancestral heritage (Imamura, 1990).

In marriage, men had more privileges because of the dominant patriarchy that was strictly adhered to (Imamura, 1990). This patriarchal pattern has affected Japanese gender roles in marriage. For example, men are more likely to overestimate their wife's contribution to household chores while women are more likely to underestimate their own contribution to household chores (Kamo, 2000). Furthermore, gender roles are perpetuated as Japanese women earning high income are still expected to perform most household chores (Kaneko, et. al., 2008). There is a normative expectation that women perform the majority of the housework and care for the children (Henneck, 2003).

In the past few decades there have been growing concerns about the drastic changes of traditional attitudes and patterns of marriage and family in Japan. Using childcare centers, never marrying, cohabiting, and unmarried childbearing were all strongly discouraged under traditional Japanese family values (Rindfuss, Choe, Bumpass, & Tsuya, 2004). Traditional marriage is becoming increasingly rare in modern-day Japan. The average age of marriage for women is 29 years and 30 years for men (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2009). The marriage rate has dropped from 10 per 1,000 in 1970 to 5.3 per 1,000 in 2013. In 2010, 72% of men and 60% of women never married (Piotrowski, Kalleberg, & Rindfuss, 2015). Despite significant increase of age at marriage, marriage stability has been decreasing, and fertility levels are very low. The postponement of marriage and decline in average fertility rates may indicate that Japanese women are reluctant to enter into traditional marriage (Rindfuss, Choe, Bumpass, & Tsuya, 2004). This falling birthrate is called *Shōshika* (Ishida & Slater, 2009).

These changes are potentially due to various factors. According to contemporary research on the comparison of familial changes in Western countries and Japan, similar social pressures from Western countries also affect Japan. These social pressures include urbanization, expensive housing, increased rate of women receiving an education, employment patterns (Rindfuss, Choe, Bumpass, & Tsuya, 2004). A qualitative study focusing on Japanese women's view of marriage reflects why the marriage rate is declining. Twenty-six highly educated Japanese women attributed not marrying to inhibition of autonomy and a desire to avoid sexist men (Nemoto, 2008). More men are delaying marriage due to urbanization, expensive housing and changes in employment patterns. Work has become part-time, less secure, and scarce. As a

result, men work non-regular jobs and live with their parents through their 20s and 30s. (Piotrowski, Kalleberg, & Rindfuss, 2015).

The current study looked at some of the potential beliefs and attitudes that may further influence the current trend of the declining birthrate. While the sociological reasons have been well studied, the goal of this research was to understand what the Japanese people themselves believe about marriage and children. This research is important because determining the potential reasons behind the declining marriage and birth rate could aid the current efforts to reverse these trends and increase the Japanese population (White, 2015).

Method

Participants

There were 3,652 total participants, however the participants who were “divorced,” “widowed,” and “separated but still married,” were excluded. After the exclusions, there were 3,282 participants that were analyzed. The participants ranged in age from 18-96 years old, with a mean age of 46.13 (SD = 18.04). Of the included participants, there were 1,573 males and 1,709 females.

Materials and procedure

The data used in this study was secondary data taken from the International Social Survey Programme from 1994, 2002, and 2012 (ISSP Research Group, 2013). All questions were asked on a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” For this study, hypotheses were generated, and factorial ANOVAs were run on four different questions using Statistica (StatSoft, Inc., 2012). These questions were analyzed to compare the main effects of marital status, gender, and the interaction, and also to compare the main effects of gender, time, and the interaction.

Results

Four factorial ANOVAs were run to measure the effect of time on male and female views on four specific statements, listed below. Another four factorial ANOVAs were run to determine the effect of time on the views of those who are single and those who are married on the same four statements.

The first statement analyzed was “married people are generally happier than unmarried people.” When analyzed by marital status, both time ($F(2, 3121) = 3.91, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.003$) and marital status ($F(1, 3121) = 11.2, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.004$) were found to be significant, while the interaction was not ($F(2, 3121) = 1.99, p > .05, \eta^2 = 0.001$). The statement was then analyzed by gender where time ($F(2, 3121) = 6.73, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.004$), gender ($F(3121,1) = 37.85, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.01$), and the interaction ($F(2, 3121) = 5.06, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.003$) were all significant (refer to Figure 1.1 and 1.2).

The next statement, “people who want children ought to get married,” was first analyzed by marital status and time. Time was found to be significant ($F(2, 3154) = 27.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.017$), as well as marital status ($F(1, 3154) = 32.27, p < .001,$

$\eta^2 = 0.01$), and the interaction ($F(2, 3154) = 3.99, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.003$). When analyzed by gender and time, time ($F(2, 3154) = 22.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.014$), gender ($F(1, 3154) = 12.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.004$), and the interaction ($F(2, 3154) = 3.24, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.002$) were all found to be significant (refer to Figure 2.1 and 2.2).

The third statement, “Watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy” was first analyzed by marital status. Only marital status ($F(1, 3153) = 70.1, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.02$) was found to be significant, while both time ($F(2, 3153) = 1.16, p > .05, \eta^2 = 0.001$) and the interaction ($F(2, 3153) = .31, p > .05, \eta^2 = 0.0002$) were found to be nonsignificant. The same pattern was found when analyzed by gender, with only gender ($F(1, 3153) = 8.42, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.003$) being significant, but neither time ($F(2, 3153) = 2.56, p > .05, \eta^2 = 0.002$) nor the interaction ($F(2, 3153) = .09, p > .05, \eta^2 = 0.0$) being significant (refer to Figure 3.1 and 3.2).

The last statement, “what women really want is home and kids,” was analyzed by marital status and time. Time ($F(3046,2) = 5.58, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.004$), marital status ($F(1, 3046) = 45.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.015$), and the interaction ($F(2, 3046) = 7.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.005$), were all found to be significant. Similar results were found when gender was analyzed, with time ($F(2, 3046) = 21.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.014$), gender ($F(1, 3046) = 8.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.003$), and the interaction ($F(2, 3046) = 5.3, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.003$), all being significant (refer to Figure 4.1 and 4.2)

Discussion

In terms of marital happiness, it appears that there was a positive trend overall in the number of people who believe that those who are married are happier than those who are single. This could be due to the Japanese people’s consistency in the belief that marriage does have benefits (Kaneko et al., 2008). Interestingly, females and those who are single tended to believe this more so than males and those who are married. The overall positive trend points to a potential increase in the amount of marriages in Japan, and as a natural result, one could assume the birthrate may rise along with it.

From 2002-2012, single, married, and male respondents became much more likely to disagree with the statement “people who want children ought to get married,” though females have had a steady decline in agreement since at least 1994. This could be due to the increasing amount of females who are getting an education and entering into the workforce, as they may not find children to be the most important things to fulfil their lives as it may have been traditionally. In addition, the declining marital trends in Japan are most distinct among the women who are highly educated (Becker, 1991; Parsons, 1949). Overall, as mentioned particularly over a ten-year period, there has been a steady decline from overall agreement to overall disagreement with this particular statement, indicating a possible reason for the declining marriage rate could be a perceived lack of importance of the institution of marriage, even in the pursuit of having children.

The third question analyzed was “watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy.” Time was shown to have no effect on belief about this statement, making it consistent over the twenty years studied. Those who are single were more likely to agree than those who are married, and males were more likely to agree than females. Overall, most Japanese tended to disagree with this statement. This could be a contributing

cause to the low birthrate, however it would not contribute to the declining trend of the birth rate because time was shown to have no effect. In fact, if time has any effect, the data shows a non-significant increase from 2002 to 2012, which is contrary to what might be expected considering the other results. Interestingly, these results seem to contradict a 2008 study by Kaneko et al. which found that the marital value of “having one’s own children and family” has increased over time. These inconsistent results lead to the need for future studies to determine the underlying ideas and perhaps causes of these beliefs.

The analysis on the statement “what women really want is home and kids” revealed a steadily decreasing agreement throughout the years for married participants. However, the same trend was not demonstrated in single participants, who retained a constantly low agreement throughout the time period. Over the years, the gap between married and single participants in this statement became statistically non-existent as of the year of 2012, making their views statistically more similar than any previous year. A possible explanation of this tendency could be that Japanese people are becoming less traditional in their views about what women want. This shift is the most pronounced in highly educated and career-minded women, who are less likely to find suitably educated spouses, and when married are unhappy with the asymmetric division of labor between males and females that persists in relationships (Raymo & Iwasawa, 2005). The revealed tendency could lead to those who are married having less children even if the declining marriage rate were controlled for.

A few of the limitations of this study include the fact that the data used in these analyses being secondary data, and there being an unequal sample of married and single participants, as there were around 2,500 married participants and just under 800 single participants.

The current study dealt with marital attitudes in Japan in relation to their effect on the declining marital rate, and in turn, the declining birthrate. The sociological reasons thought to be responsible for the declining birthrate, or *Shōshika*, have been studied previously and are already known, but it was the aim of this study to better understand some of the opinions and beliefs about marriage and children in Japan that may affect the birth rate over time. For this reason, the analyses were primarily psychological in nature, and revealed some interesting diverging ideas both over time, gender, and marital status. These results have the potential to be a starting point for helping the Japanese people find ways to increase their population and begin to reverse the declining birth rate, if desired.

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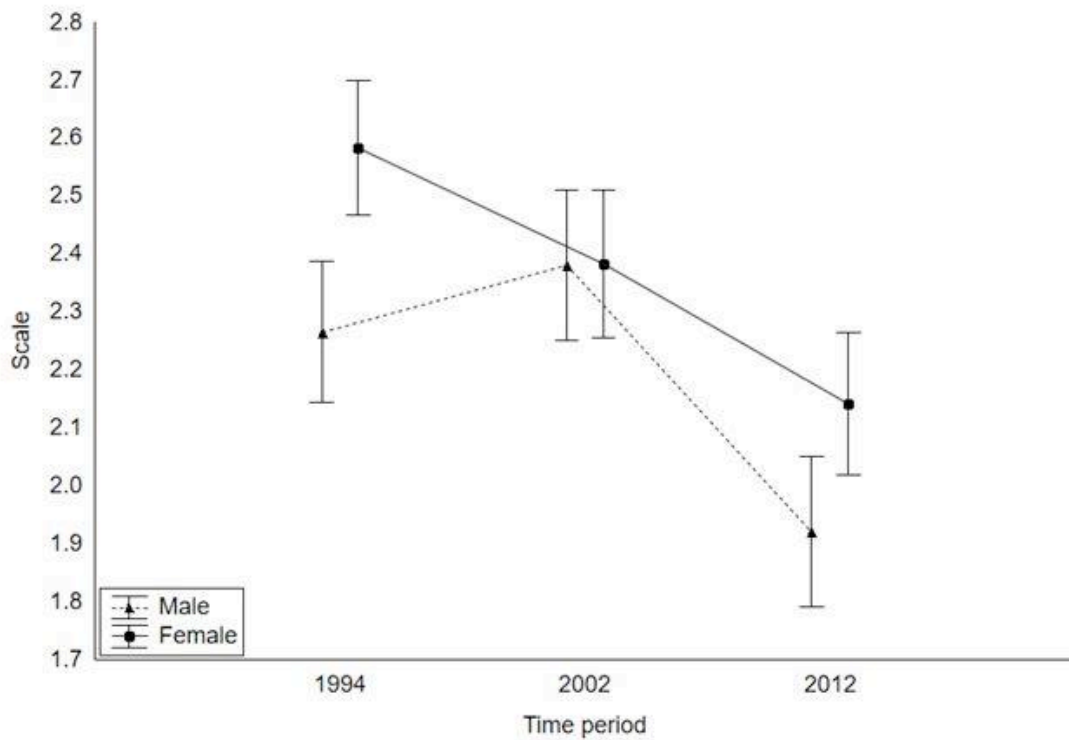


Figure 1.1. Interaction between gender and time on the statement: People who want children ought to get married.

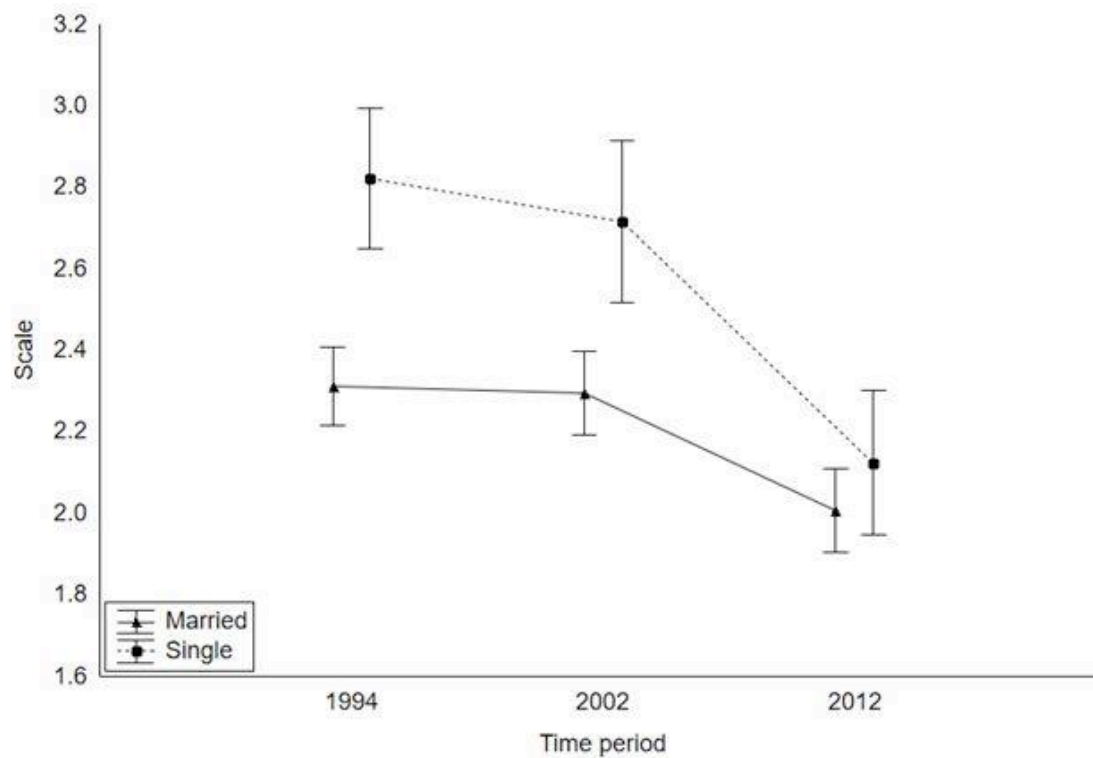


Figure 1.2 Interaction between marital status and time on the statement: People who want children ought to get married.

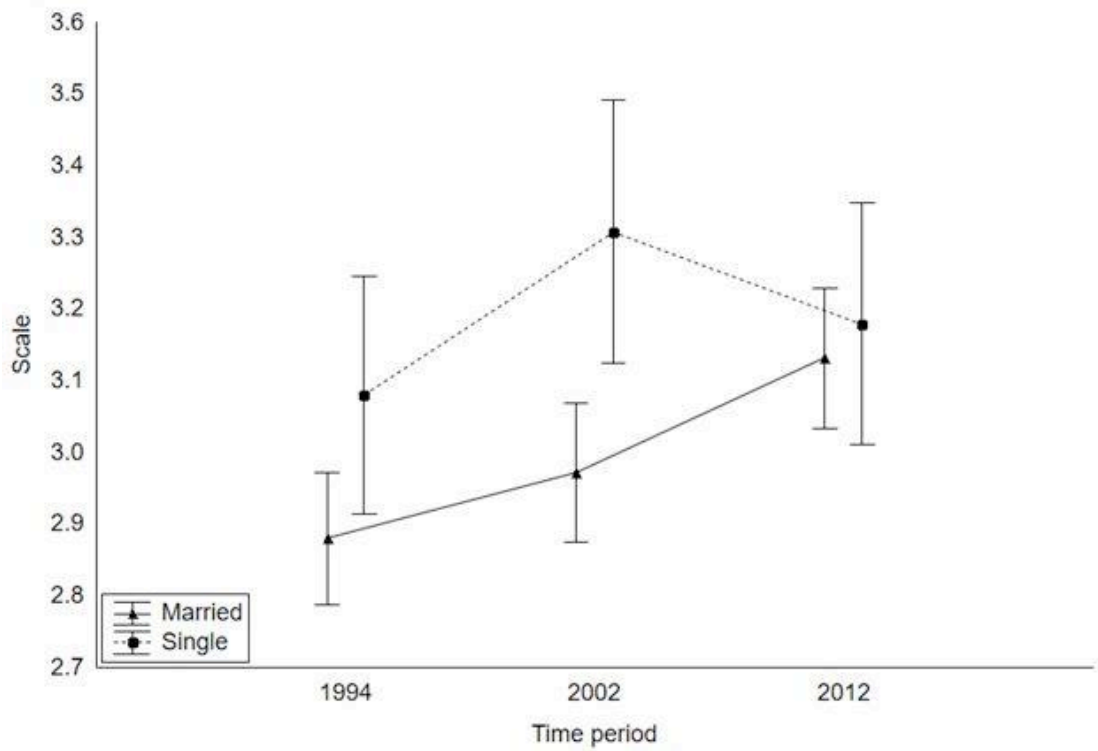


Figure 2.1 Interaction between marital status and time on the statement: Married people are generally happier.

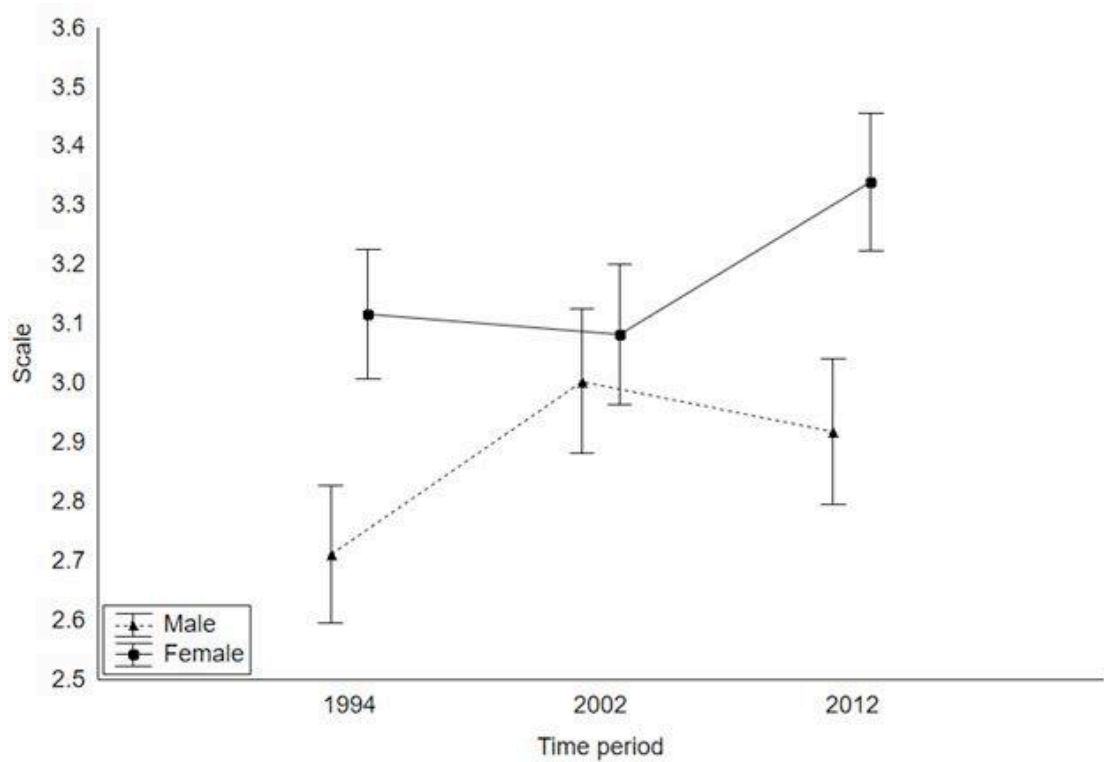


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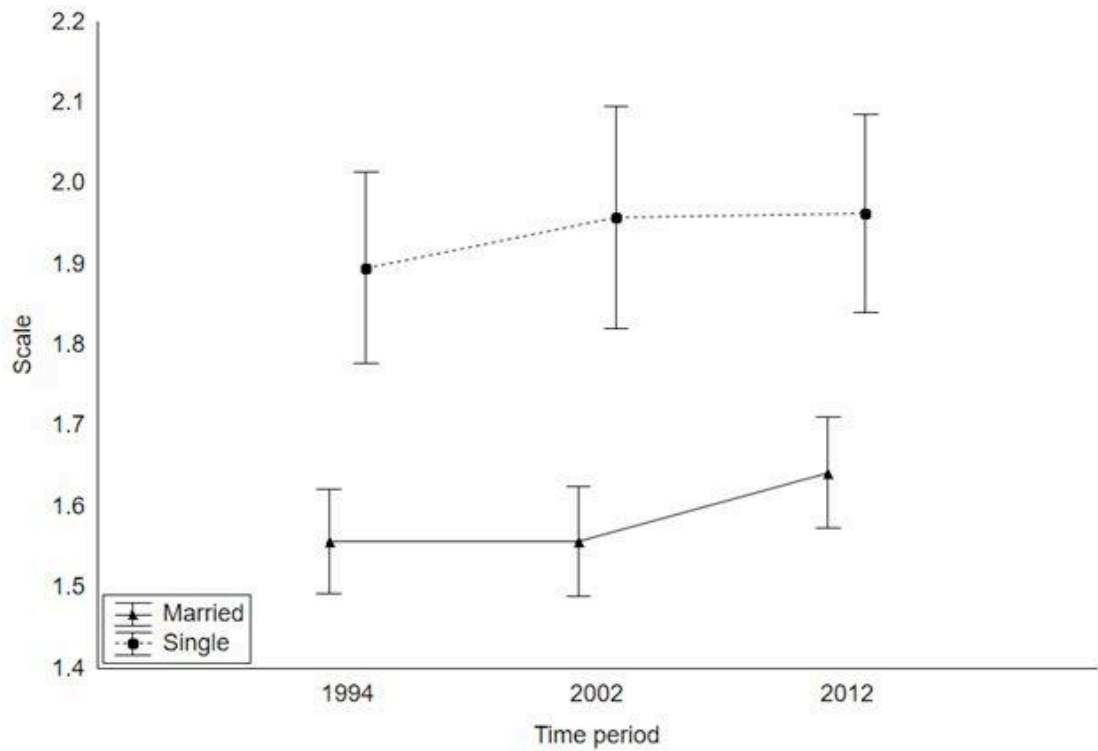


Figure 3.1 Interaction between marital status and time on the statement: Watching children grow up is life's greatest joy.

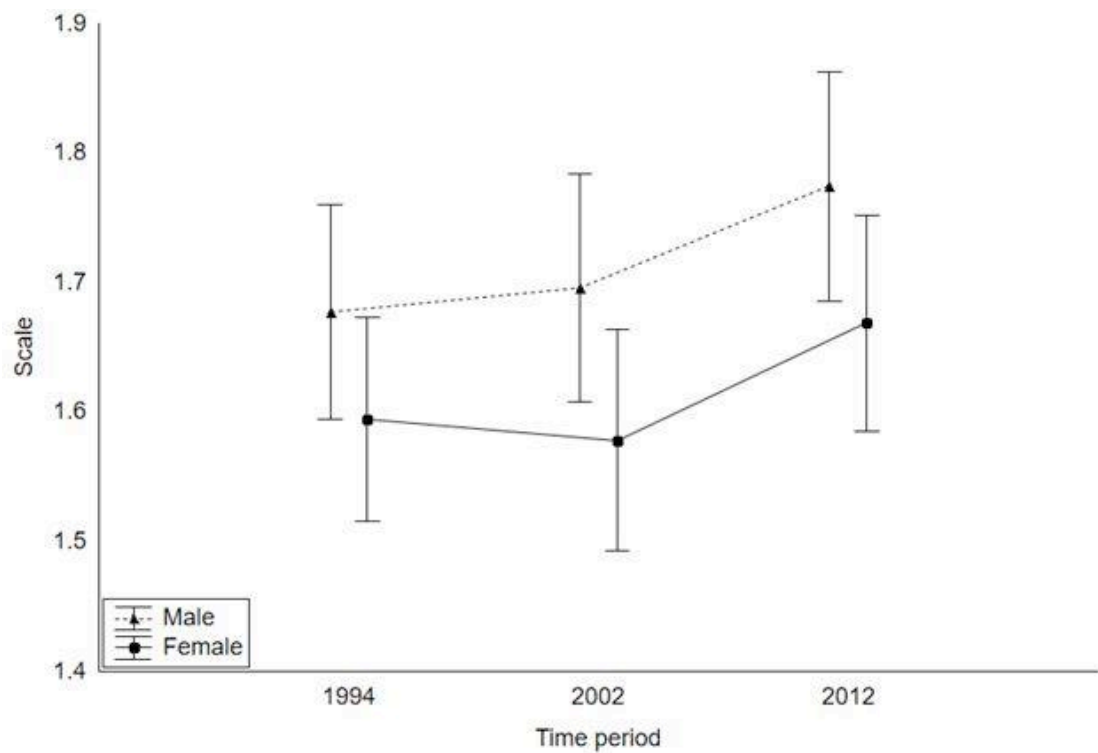


Figure 3.2 Interaction between gender and time on the statement: Watching children grow up is life's greatest joy.

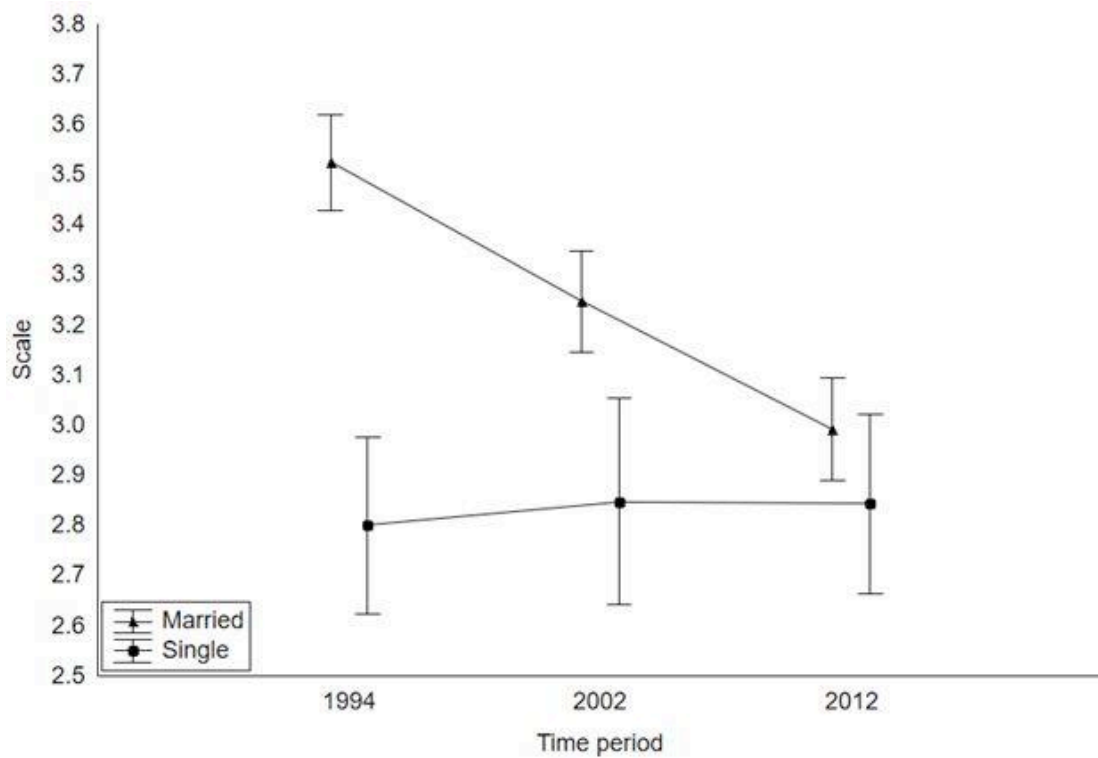


Figure 4.1 Interaction between marital status and time on the statement: What women really want is home and kids.

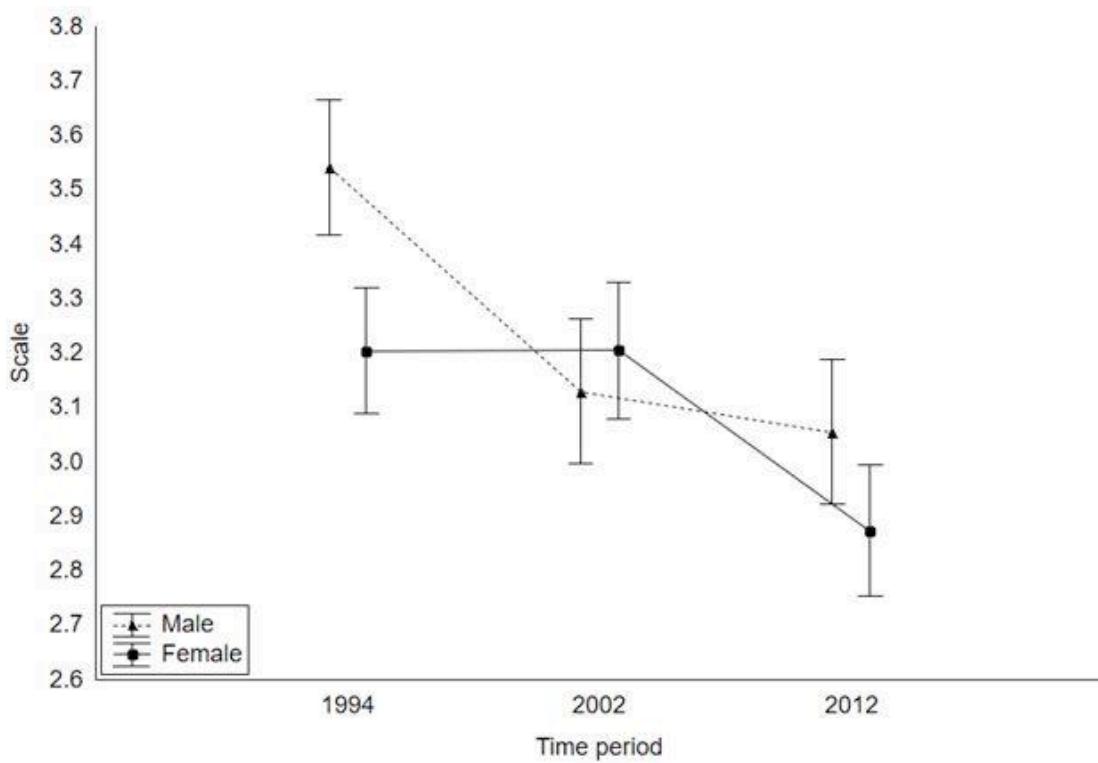


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