Becoming an Adult in South Korea: Patterns and Time Trends

Hyunjoon Park

Department of Sociology/Demography

University of Pennsylvania

Current Literature of Transition to Adulthood

- Many studies of the timing, pattern, and determinants of transition to adulthood in the US and Europe

- Social-demographic approach
  - Transition "markers": completing school, entering labor force, getting married, having a child, leaving home
  - Much longer time to make the transition to adulthood today
  - Decoupling among different markers
  - Changing sequences: less orderly

- Subjective perceptions of adulthood (Arnett: Emerging Adulthood)
  - Social construction of adulthood rely much less on traditional demographic markers but more on subjective assessment such as independence or maturity

Comparative Research on Transition to Adulthood

- How cross-national variation in key institutions, such as the educational system, family system, and labor market, are responsible for different patterns in the processes of becoming an adult among European and American young people (e.g., Breen and Buchmann 2002; Cook and Furstenberg 2002).

- A growing body of literature in developing countries (e.g., Cynthia et al. 2004)

A Striking Omission: East Asian Youth

- The lack of research on East Asian youth (Japan, Korea, and Taiwan)

- Why might be interesting to look at East Asian youth?
  - The most educated population in the world; the strongest population in academic performance
  - Their parents had low levels of education in comparative perspective
  - If we are concerned about the relationship between modernization (educational expansion) and transition to adulthood, this is the most relevant sample!

This Talk -- Becoming an Adult in South Korea: Patterns and Time Trends

- Institutional and cultural forces that create a set of opportunities and constraints for decisions

- Describe transition outcomes (markers) among young people and their changes over time
  - schooling, labor market, marriage, and formation of family (household)
  - With focus on gender differences

- Discuss substantive and methodological issues in studying transition to adulthood in the Korean context

This Talk -- Becoming an Adult in South Korea: Patterns and Time Trends

- Park, Hyunjoon. "Transition to Adulthood in Korea"
  - A chapter in the volume that Marlis Buchmann is editing (a comparative project of transition to adulthood in a number of countries)

- Fussell, Elizabeth, Hyunjoon Park, and Carlos Costa Ribeiro. "Cross-Time and Cross-National Comparisons of the Transition to Adulthood: Brazil, Mexico, and South Korea, 1970-2000."
  - Presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the Population Association of America

Korean Contexts:
Features of Institutions Relevant for Transition to Adulthood

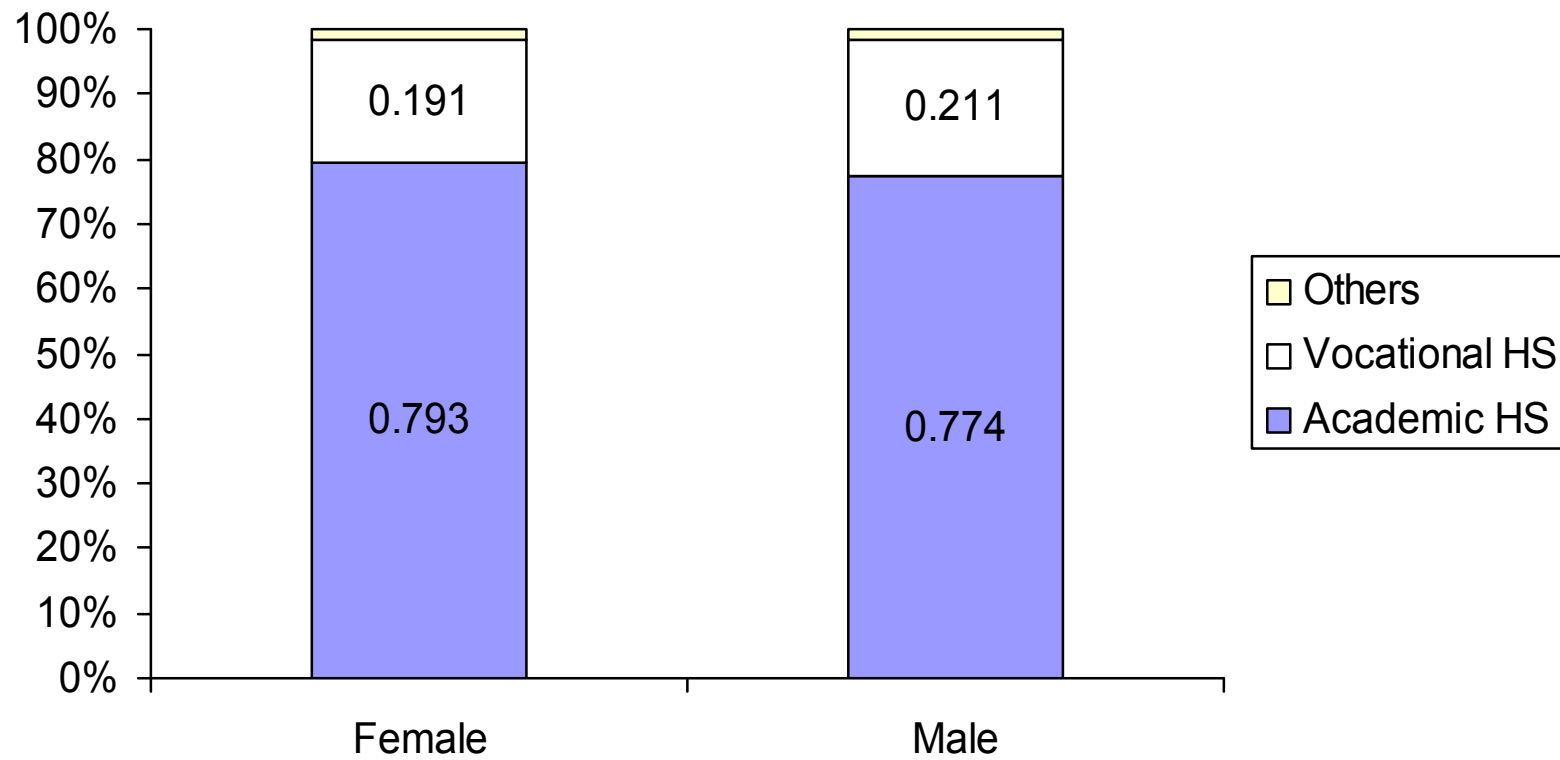# Institutions: Educational Systems

- Remarkable expansion over a generation
  - In 2004, almost all Koreans aged 25-34 had high school degree, while only 34% of aged 55-64 did
  - In 2004, Koreans aged 25-34 showed one of the highest percentages of college degrees among OECD countries
- Secondary education
  - Nearly universal enrollment up to high school
  - Academically oriented high school education: the majority of high school students attend academic high schools
  - Serious competition and preparation for national college entrance exam; private tutoring and cram schools (*Hawkwon*)
  - It is difficult to combine work and study during high schools

Institutions: Educational Systems

- Tertiary education
  - Significant expansion especially during 1990s. 80% of academic high school students go to college
  - 2-year junior college vs. 4-year university
  - Heavily rely on private colleges (tuition)
  - Korea shows the largest percentage of expenditure on tertiary education funded by family
  - Because of the effect on life change, high school students spend lots of time to prepare for national college entrance exam
  - A substantial number of students spend additional 1-3 years after high school graduation to prepare for the exam in private cram schools
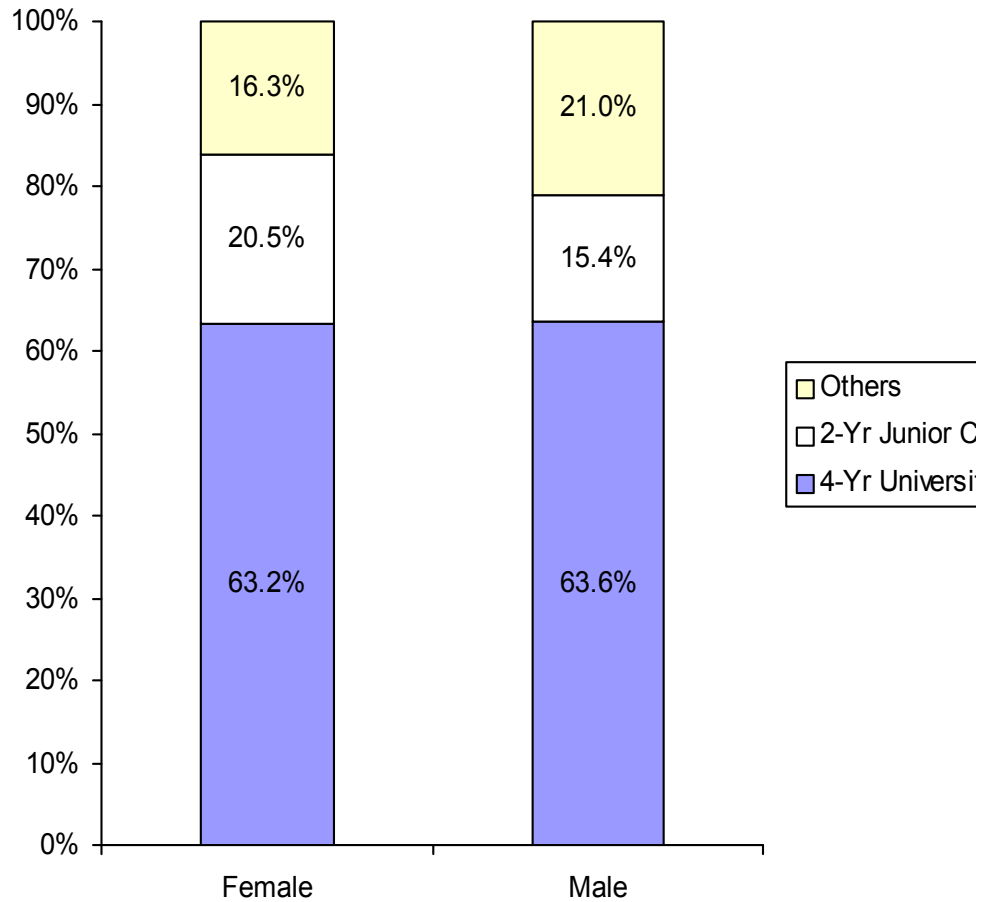
Gender Difference in Education
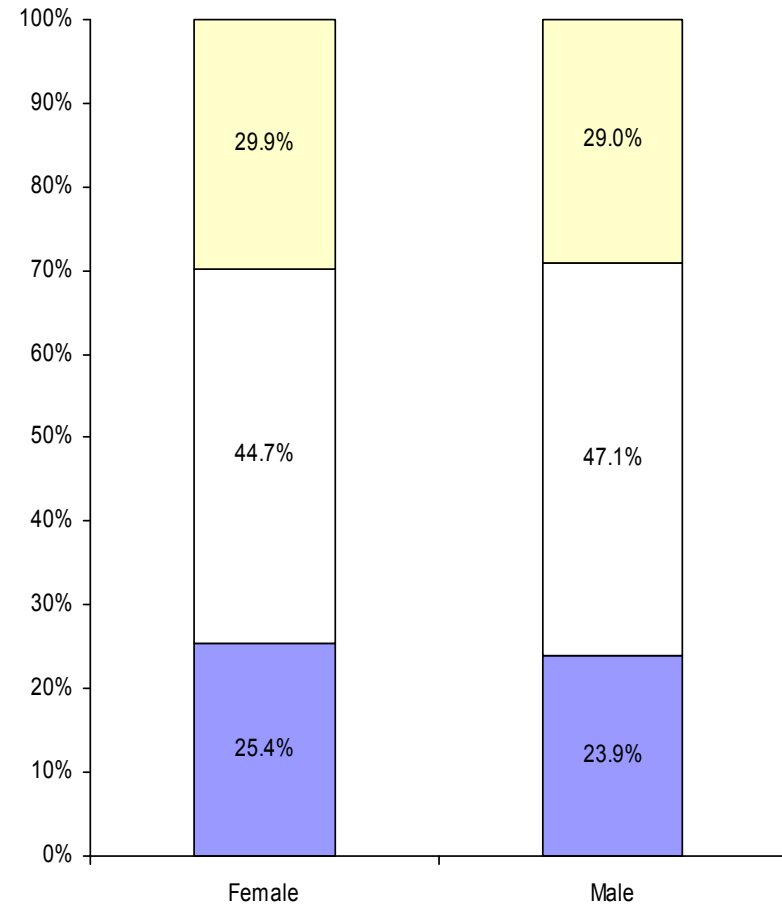
Transition of Middle School Graduates (2010)

Gender Difference in Education

### Transition of Academic High School Graduates (2010)

	Female	Male
Others	16.3%	21.0%
2-Yr Junior C	20.5%	15.4%
4-Yr Universi	63.2%	63.6%

Transition of Vocational High School Students (2010)

	Female	Male
Others	29.9%	29.0%
	44.7%	47.1%
	25.4%	23.9%

Institutions: Labor Market

- Economic crisis (Dec. 1997) and restructuring since then
  - Sharp increase of non-regular employment
  - Longer time to get the first job after school
- Clear separation between school and labor market; rare to return to school
- Significant gender differences
  - Korean young women shows comparably low levels of labor force participation
  - M-shaped pattern

% of Women Who Are Economically Active
(2005: ILO LABORSTA)
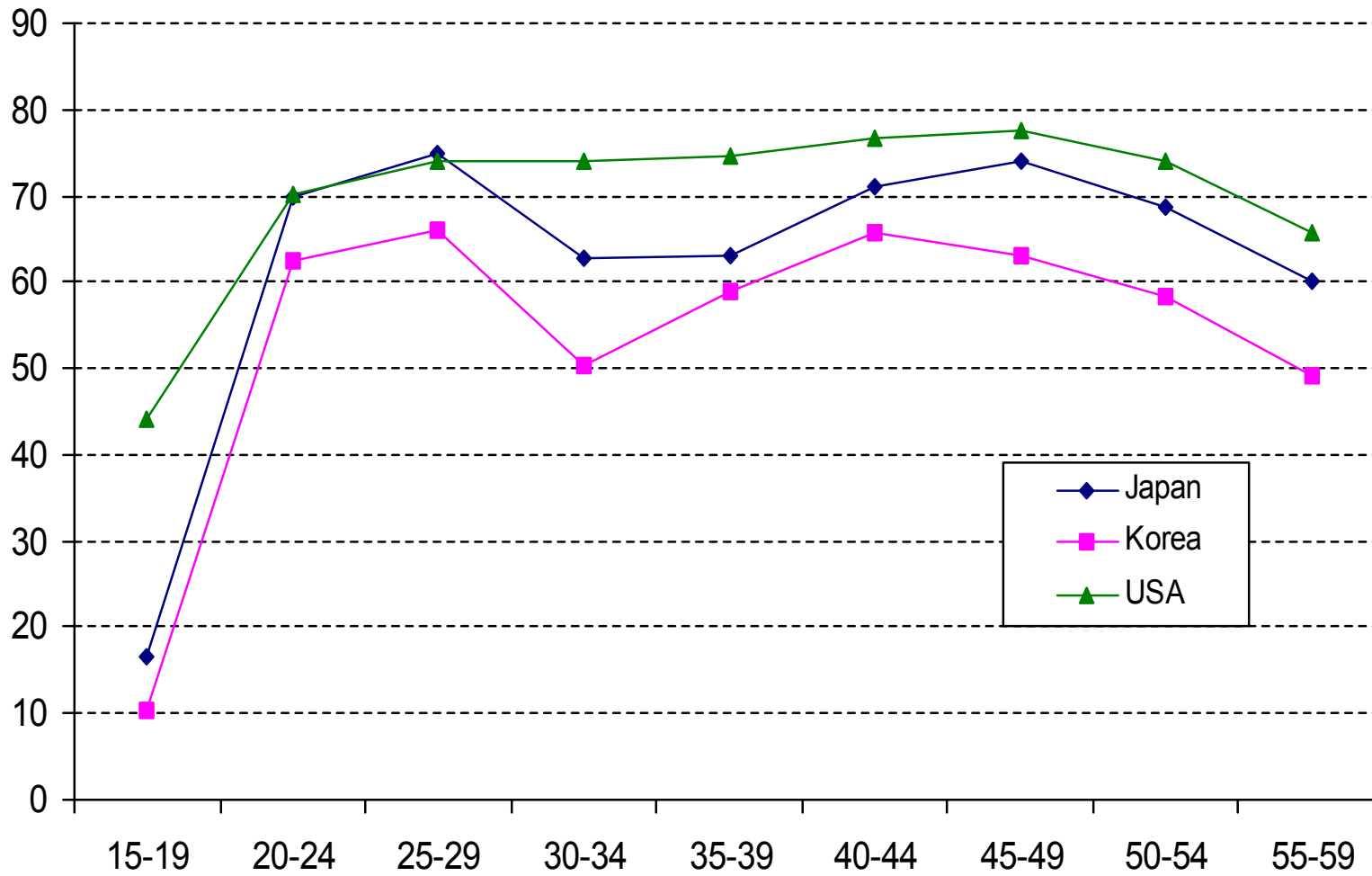
Marriage/Fertility and Cultural Norms

- Still influential patriarchic norms

- Strong sigma on childbearing outside marriage
  - Extremely low prevalence of non-marital births
  - Cohabitation is very rare

- Traditionally, (first) sons have lived together with their parents even after marriage

Study 1:
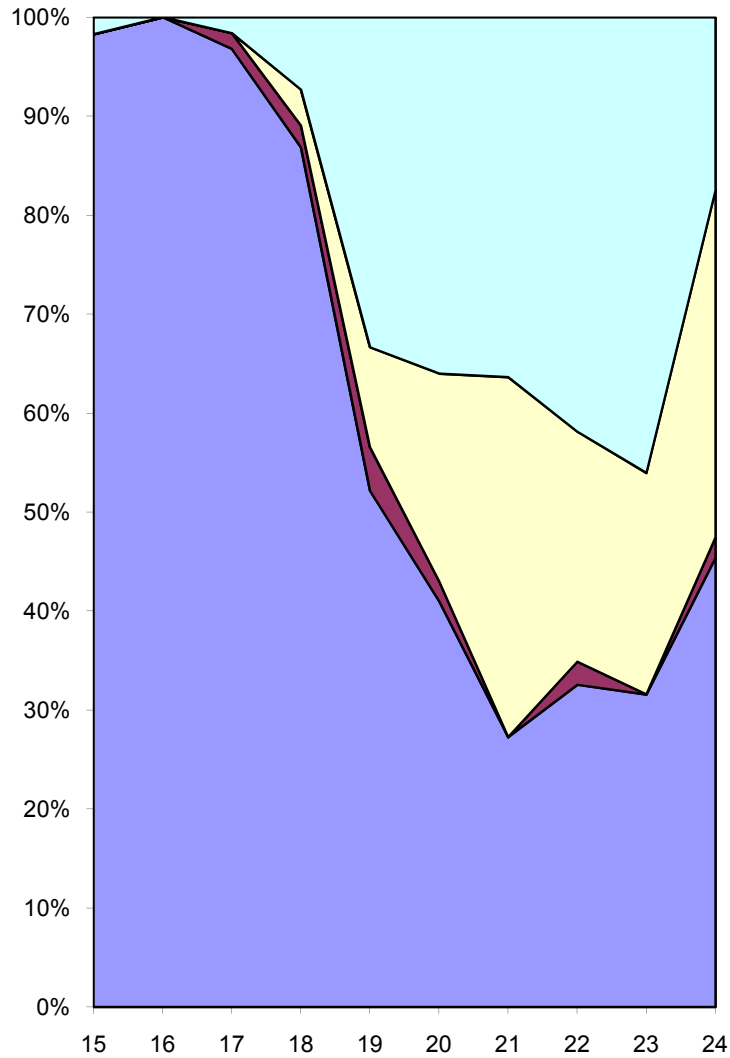# "Transition to Adulthood in Korea"

Transition to Adulthood in South Korea: Data

- Korean Labor and Income Panel Study (KLIPS)

- Longitudinal survey of a representative sample of Korean households and individuals in the household; non-rural area (data for 2000)

- Youth aged 15-29 can be selected (N=3,215 used); both who reside with their parents and who have their own household

- Regardless of their headship of household, respondents were asked of parental education and occupation when they were 14 years old.
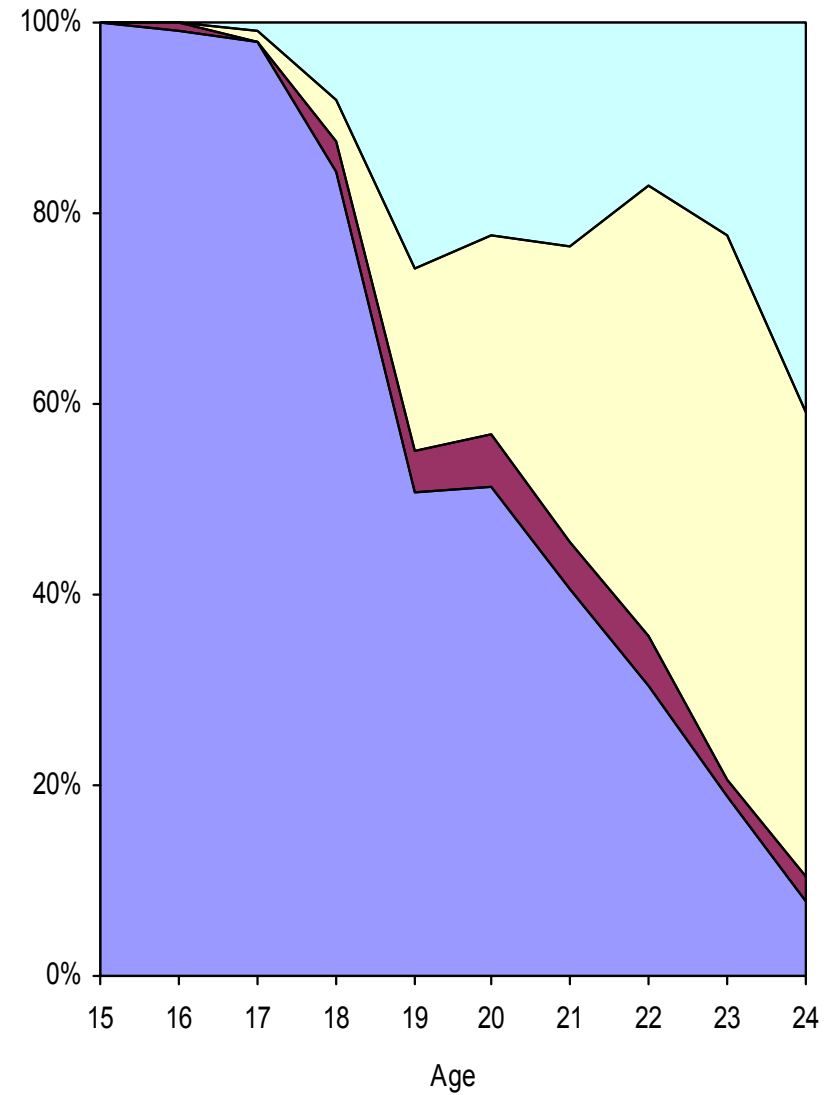
Transition Markers

- Young people's status in the productive sphere (among aged 15-24)
  - Combination of school and work status
  - 1) School only; 2) school and work; 3) work only; 4) neither in school or work

- Young people's transition to reproductive sphere (among aged 15-29)
  - Combination of marriage and household headship
  - 1) not married and not head of household (or spouse of head of household); 2) ever married and the head (or spouse) of household; 3) others (who are married or head (or spouse) of household but not both)
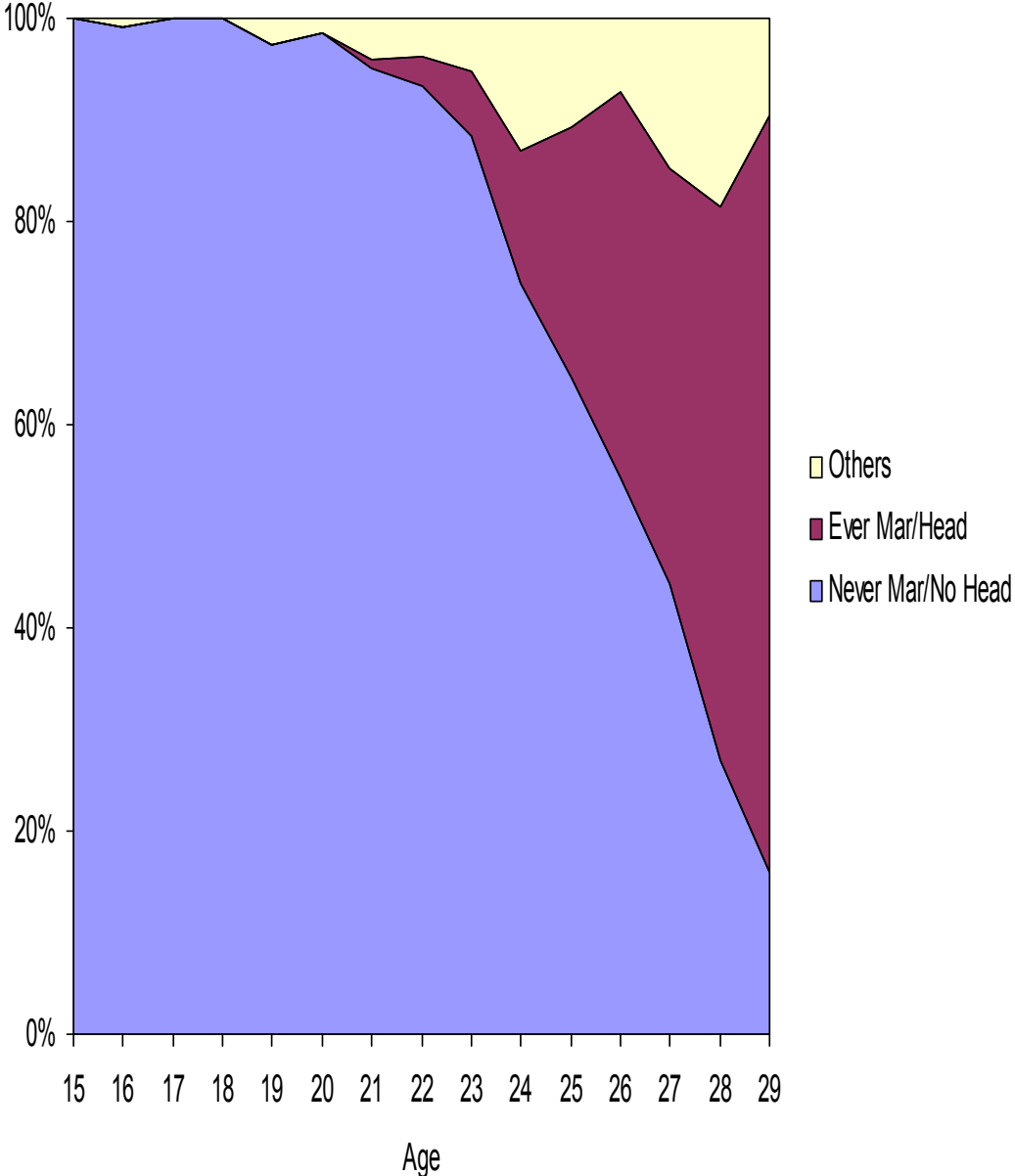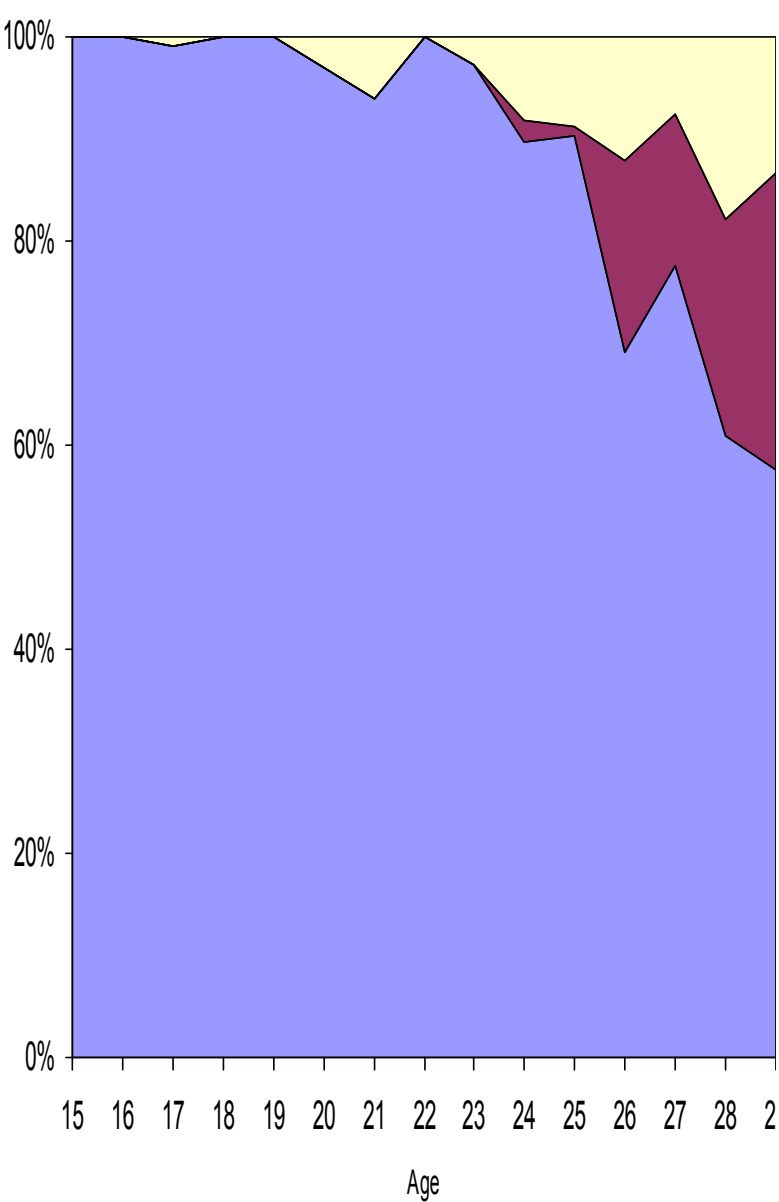
Study and Work Statuses by Age, Korea, 2000

Marital and the Household Headship Statuses, Korea 2000

Others

Ever Mar/Head

Never Mar/No Head

Age

Age

Family Background Effects on Study and Work Statuses

Table A.3. Predicted Probabilities for Study and Work Statuses, Korea 2000								
	Men				Women			
	S	S & W	W	Neither	S	S & W	W	Neither
Parental Education								
LT high school	0.651	0.019	0.108	0.222	0.483	0.037	0.268	0.212
High school	0.749	0.013	0.064	0.174	0.637	0.030	0.154	0.179
Teriary	0.819	0.029	0.059	0.092	0.731	0.070	0.105	0.094
Father's Occupation								
Unskilled	0.707	0.009	0.109	0.175	0.539	0.041	0.205	0.215
Skilled labor	0.723	0.021	0.072	0.184	0.509	0.072	0.234	0.186
Clerical/sale/service	0.739	0.025	0.069	0.167	0.639	0.037	0.166	0.158
Professional/Mang.	0.735	0.024	0.068	0.173	0.755	0.013	0.116	0.115
Note: S - only studying, W - only working, S & W - studying and working, Neither - neither studying nor working								
The predicted probabilities were calculated keeping all other covariates at their mean value. The coefficients of all								
covariates are presented in Table A.2.								

Study 2:

Cross-Time and Cross-National Comparisons of the Transition to Adulthood:

Brazil, Mexico, and South Korea, 1970-2000

(Fussell, Elizabeth, Hyunjoon Park, and Carlos Costa Ribeiro)

Cross-Time and Cross-National Comparisons

- Countries: Brazil, Mexico, and Korea

- Years: 1970 and 2000

- Census data from each country in both 1970 and 2000

- Entropy analysis measures the age specific heterogeneity in combinations of school, employment, household headship, and marital statuses

Coding of status combinations

- In school (S)   1 / 0
- In labor force (W)   1 / 0
- Household head (H)   1 / 0
- Ever-married (M)   1 / 0

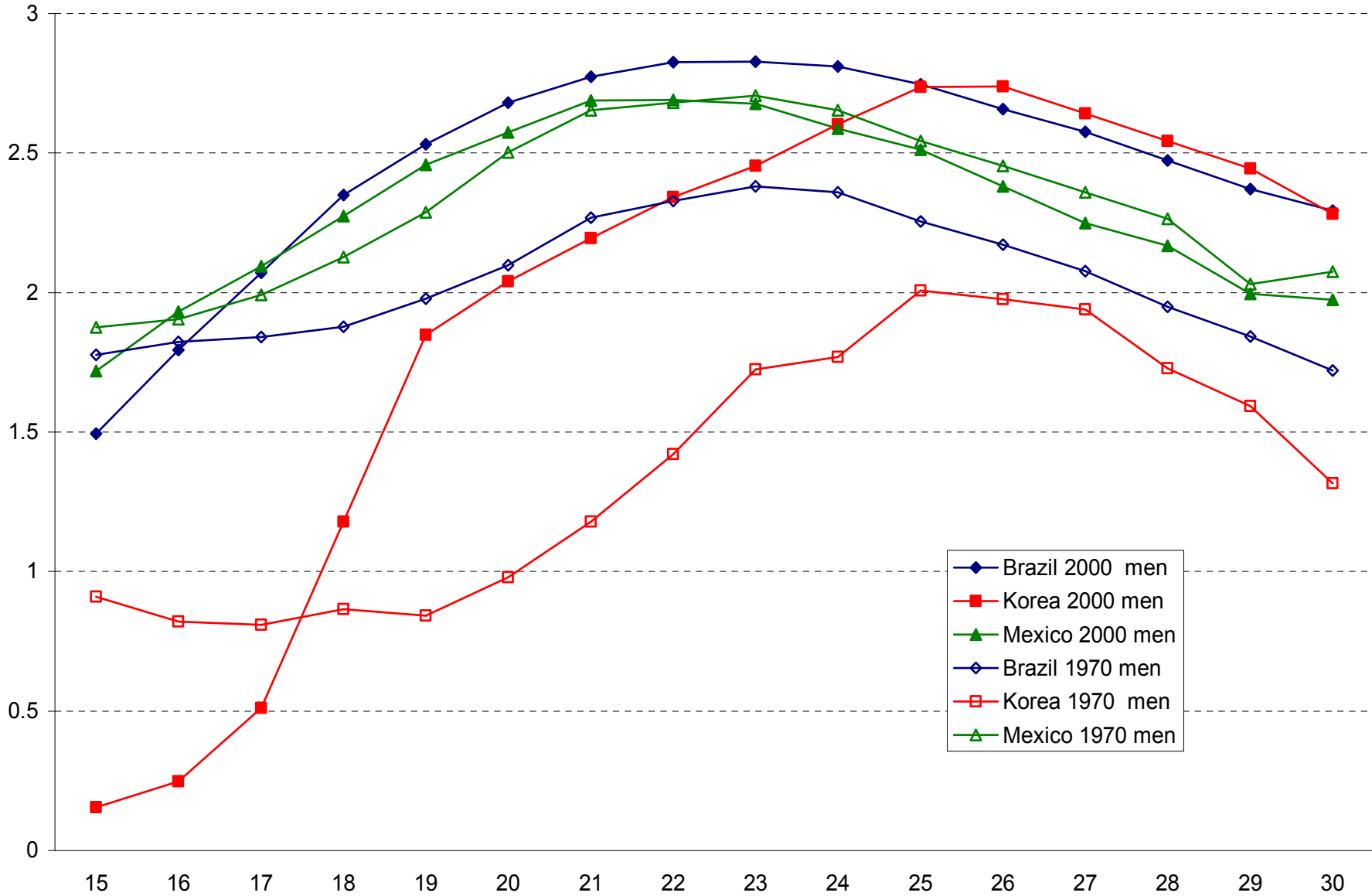- Taking into account the four markers simultaneously

- Percentages (p) of each age-gender-country group members in each of 16 status combinations
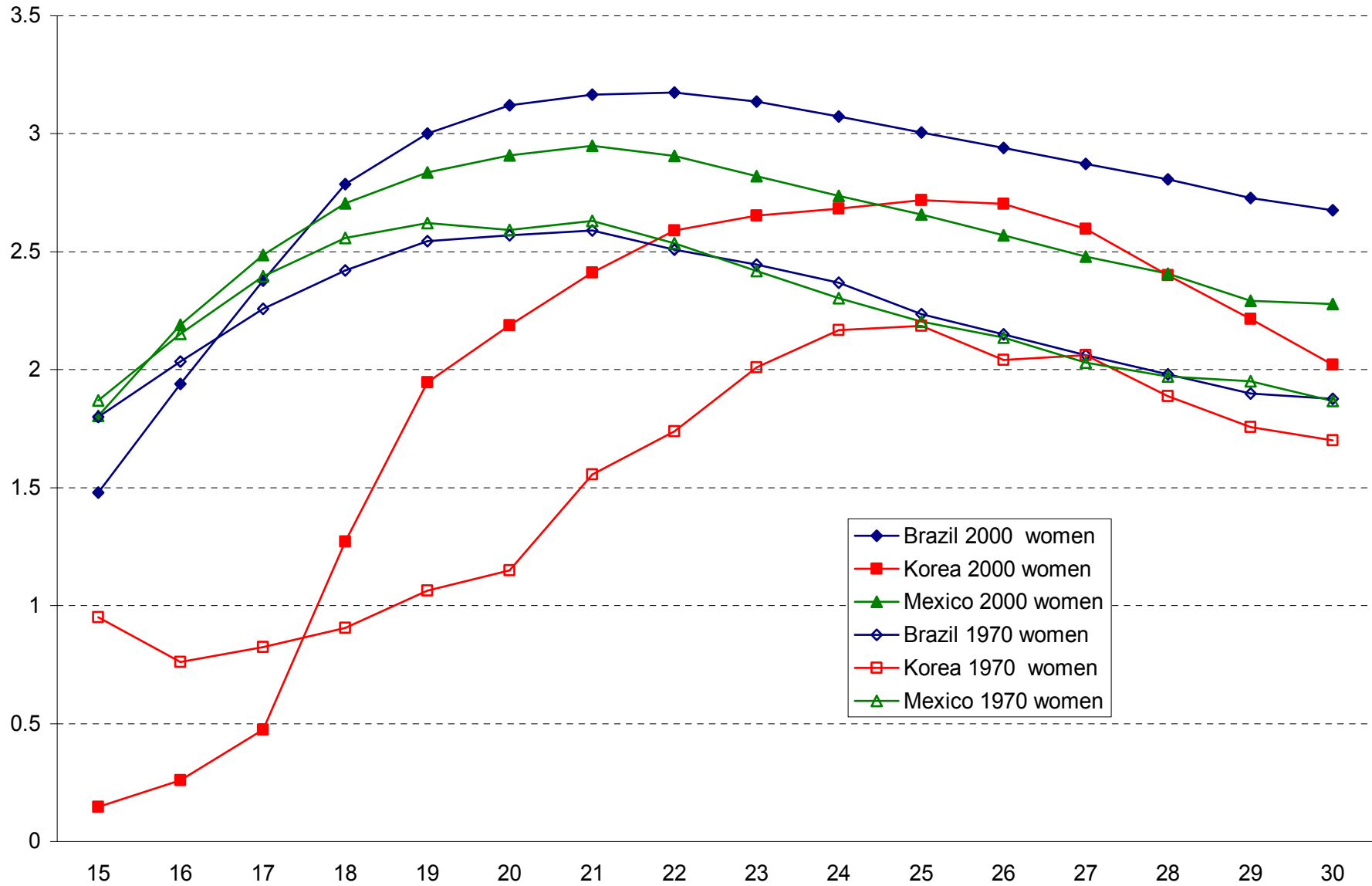
Entropy Measure of Status Heterogeneity

$$H(SWHM) = -\sum_{s \in S} \sum_{w \in W} \sum_{m \in H} \sum_{p \in M} p_{ijk}(swhm) \log_2 p_{ijk}(swhm)$$

- School, Work, Household head, Ever-Married
- i indexes age (15-30)
- j indexes gender (male or female)
- k indexes country
- Arrayed by age
- Interpretation of joint entropy: age-gender-specific status heterogeneity in each country

Brazil, Korea, Mexico, 1970 and 2000 (Men)

Brazil, Korea, Mexico, 1970 and 2000 (Women)

Legend:
- Brazil 2000 women
- Korea 2000 women
- Mexico 2000 women
- Brazil 1970 women
- Korea 1970 women
- Mexico 1970 women

Issues in Studying Transition to Adulthood (in Korea)

- How to examine different markers of transition to adulthood simultaneously and as a whole
  - Entropy analysis
  - Sequence analysis
  - Latent class models

- Longitudinal surveys that follow up respondents (especially men) after high school graduation

- Subjective perceptions of adulthood
  - Mixed methods (qualitative + quantitative)

- Systematic research on determinants, meanings, and consequences of coresidence of young adults with their parents