

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A study on female Korean university students' perception of male's role

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions of men held by female students in a Korean university, a place where the most liberal and exploratory discussions unfold. The study aims to examine how women perceive male's role in Korea, and thus, employs Q-methodology to understand the different types of perception of male's role. According to the results, there are a total of four types of perception: type I "dualistic norm perception," type II "superiority perception," type III "subjective perception," and type IV "gender-balanced perception." When comparing the aforementioned outcomes to feminist phase theory, type I overlaps with phase 3 of duality, and type II manifests characteristics of both the male-defined phase 1 of male dominance and phase 2 of contribution. In reality, however, the gender-balanced phase can be seen as extremely rare in the Korean society that embraces heterosexual norms. Nevertheless, the fact that type IV balanced gender is apparent in some female university students can be interpreted as an indication of change of perception toward the other sex role in Korean society.

Keywords: female university students; men role; perception; Q-methodology; feminist phase theory

1. Introduction

The world has long been influenced by patriarchies, and Korean society is no exception. In fact, in addition to patriarchy, Korean society is subject to the influence of Confucian culture and has demanded unusually differing normative perceptions of men and women^[1]. Although Korean society may seem superficially peaceful, internally, gender conflict has always been just a step away, and since the 2000s, this conflict has continued to become even more apparent^[2](pp. 3–10). Gender conflict in a patriarchal society is caused by conflicts of interest, conflicts and clashes surrounding the norms and values of gender roles, and differing perceptions of the unbalanced reality concerning inequality in gender power and resource allocation^[3]. Gender conflict manifests itself in a variety of situations, such as in opposing views and tension regarding revisions to the legal system and policy implementation, hostile hate speech in online forums such as in social media, physical and sexual abuse, digital sex crimes, and clashes during group protests^[4] (p. 135).

In the 2000s, gender conflict made way for the institutionalization of women's and gender equality policies and created a series of terms like "gender mainstreaming," "gender-sensitive policy," and "gender

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sensitivity” that are used throughout society. In 2019, the Framework Act on Gender Equality was enacted, which revised the term “sex equality” to “gender equality”. This means that gender-related negative attitudes like gender hatred and discrimination may now be regulated in Korea and that the country may support gender equality.

Korea no longer implies that women are inherently inferior to men or deserve discrimination^[5] (p. 16), and gender egalitarianism is becoming culturally prevalent in its society. According to a study on Korean men conducted by Ma (2007)^[6], 28% of all surveyed men rejected traditional stereotypes of masculinity and were highly accepting of housework divisions and emotional relationships, which were considered to be women’s territory. This reveals that a portion of Korean men already accept non-traditional masculinity. Furthermore, Kim (2019)^[5] showed that nearly 40% of male subjects in their 20s accept an equal share of household duties after marriage, demonstrating that younger Korean men are even more likely to accept non-traditional masculinity.

People in their 20s are adapting to changes related to gender in a variety of ways. Some adhere to their beliefs on superiority, others seek to maintain male authority through compassionate patriarchy using concession and compromise, and still others pursue a new form of masculinity, breaking away from the dominant masculinity demanded by the patriarchal system^[6] (pp. 34–40). Not only are youths in their 20s adapting to changes, but they are actively creating new gender norms and identities^[5] (p. 13).

Since gender equality policies have been implemented to solve problems relating to the relative inequality of women, their effects and reactions have focused on men rather than on women. How men are accepting these changes, and how their perceptions and attitudes are changing are bound to be the center of attention as they have held the superior position in the traditional patriarchal system and Confucian tradition.

Gender equality requires changes from both men and women, and thus, the perception changes in women make up half of the determining factors that lead to societal changes. In this regard, whether they want to or not, men have already been targeted for change and are forced to adjust to this reality. Compared to those men, the changes in women are likely to have a broader scope of personal choices and larger differences among individuals. Assuming that gender equality can be achieved through perception changes in the two groups, it is just as essential to pay close attention to changes in women’s perception as to men’s roles.

Therefore, by carefully observing how women view men’s roles in their daily lives and by studying the current state of gender equality in Korea, it is possible to resolve conflicts on this topic and bring about cooperation between the two genders. This study introduces and uses feminist phase theory^[8] as a basis to interpret the views of female university students on gender equality. Conceptually speaking, feminist phase theory has its roots in women’s study and is a classification system that evolved from the idea of integrating the traditions, histories, and experiences of women. This system defines women’s perception of gender in five phases: the male-dominant phase, contributive phase, dualistic phase, female-dominant phase, and gender-balanced phase.

Firstly, the male-defined phase assumes that the male experience is universal and that it can be used as a basis for generalization for all human beings. In this phase, women’s experiences are interpreted through the lens of male-centered knowledge, which values objectivity, rationality, and a degree of control. Compared to the public world of men, women’s lives are regarded as part of a private world, and their values can be neglected. In the second contributive phase, the roles of men and women are differentiated in respect to social contributions. The standards of social contributions are defined by men, and evaluations of women’s merit concern whether women fit these standards or conform to their expected roles^[9]. In the third phase of bifocality, there is a shift from the view that sees men and their standards as the norm in the gender equality perspective,

and women’s perspectives of the world appear for the first time^[10]. It seeks to define the essence of men and women by questioning how the public and private domains, impersonal and personal, inform one another and how they influence each gender. In this phase, the idea of men and women is dichotomously approached; it proposes that women and men are equal but different, and that the two can complement each other. Nevertheless, the public domain is still considered to be more valuable than the private one, and thus, women are viewed as relatively inferior and subordinate to men^[11]. In the fourth phase, labeled female-defined phase, women’s activities, and not men’s, carry significance in an attempt to reinterpret the public and private spheres through the norms of women. Furthermore, it begins to adopt a view of how women’s perception and personal experiences contribute to humanity. This new perception is the start of structural changes toward egalitarianism and manifests the expansion of women’s roles from within the home to the public sphere. Lastly, the gender-balanced phase poses questions about how women and men relate to and complement each other. It searches for intersecting points by considering the relational characteristics of men and women without distinguishing between genders. An important aspect in this phase is interpreting gender through one’s positionality and then reflecting on one’s own conditions^[12]. By definition, positionality does not see gender as an essential quality, but rather as an indicator of relational position whose effect can change depending on context. Further, it suggests that gender-related knowledge is valid only when the specific position of the knowledge holder is recognized.

Therefore, this study examines the perception of men’s roles held by female university students as these are likely to be the people capable of most liberally exploring and debating the issue.

2. Method

This research employs Q-methodology to understand the different views that female Korean university students have on men. This methodology is useful when comprehending the mind structure of a person^[13] and involves extracting a Q-sample from a Q-population, followed by selecting a P-sample and conducting a Q-sort for data analysis. The results are then interpreted and categorized. After forming a Q-population and excluding questions that were unclear, repetitive, or had multiple meanings, the Q-sample was extracted. During the Q-sort and data analysis, the extracted Q statements were classified by P sample and analyzed through the QUANL program after coding. During the interpretation and categorization stage, the analysis results were sorted, and the sorted results were then labeled according to their interpretation and categorization. The conclusion section considers the overall results of the research using Q-methodology and uses this when drawing implications^[14]. Figure 1 shows the detailed process of this study’s analysis.

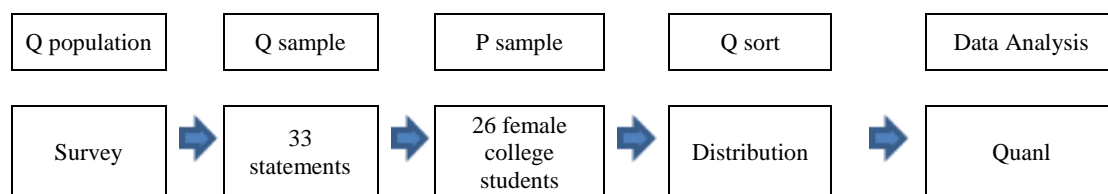


Figure 1. Research process.

2.1. Q-population

To examine the subjective views that female Korean university students have on men, the Q-population statements were formed based on the responses to a semi-structured questionnaire survey. In other words, these statements were devised based on a survey taken by students at D University that included questions like “What comes to mind when you think of men in Korea?,” “What do you think are the social roles of Korean men?,” and “What are your thoughts on Korean men?” These statements were also supplemented with results from

research in Korean on the keywords “women’s perception on men,” “gender conflicts,” “gender difference,” or “gender balance.”

2.2. Q-sample

The Q-sample consisted of 33 comprehensive and representative statements on men selected from the Q-population after excluding repetitive content (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Q Statements.

No.	Statements	No.	Statements
Q1	He is rational when working.	Q18	He should know how to take care of his physical appearance.
Q2	It is helpful to both parties when a man gives financial rights to his wife after getting married.	Q19	He is athletic.
Q3	Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women.	Q20	It is contradictory that only men enlist for military services.
Q4	He should be financially successful to gain recognition.	Q21	Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively.
Q5	He knows how to be patient.	Q22	He is authoritative.
Q6	He takes initiative and makes decisions.	Q23	He is funny.
Q7	He is a man of few words.	Q24	He should know how to defend his family.
Q8	He should support his family and carry on the family line.	Q25	He should have beliefs of his own.
Q9	He is physically strong.	Q26	He should earn more than his wife.
Q10	He must participate in family events.	Q27	He should protect women, the elderly, the weak, and children.
Q11	He looks at the bigger picture rather than the details.	Q28	It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous.
Q12	It would be nice to live as a man in our society.	Q29	He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women.
Q13	He is delicate.	Q30	He displays his emotions well.
Q14	There should be an order of rank in men’s social groups.	Q31	I believe that mothers have great influence over men’s roles.
Q15	He should not have obligatory responsibilities.	Q32	He wants to be accepted as just a person and not as a member of society.
Q16	He is ambitious.	Q33	He forms diverse relationships with others.
Q17	He does not have any special power in society.		

2.3. P-sample

The P-sample in this study consisted of 26 female students at D University. There is relatively little discussion on P-sample in Q-methodology. The object of a P-sample changes depending on the research purpose, and in general, the number can be as small as 10 people and rarely exceeds 100^[15]. Before collecting the data for the present research, its purpose and process was explained to the students, and then Q-sorting was conducted.

2.4. Q-sorting and data analysis

Q-sorting is the sorting of P- and Q-samples. After reading the 33 selected Q-sample statements, the students evaluated how each one ranked relative to one another. Through Q-sorting, such evaluations were sorted using forced distribution to normalize the distribution. As shown in **Table 2**, Q-sorting is made up of a nine-point scale, ranging from most positive (+4) to most negative (-4). The collected data were assigned points for each statement, where the statements that received the most negative score of -4 were given 1 point, and those that received the most positive score (+4) were given 9 points. These numeric values were then coded and input into a computer. The results of the P-sample from Q-sorting were processed through the QUANL program for data analysis. Principle component factor analysis was used for Q-factor analysis: Every resulting Eigen Value over 1.000 was produced as a factor, and the Z-score was employed to select the appropriate question. Interpretations of the analysis results focus on the responders that had high weighting factors in the Q-factor analysis and for each type of perception. The respondents were asked to explain the reasons for their most positive and negative responses, and interpretations are based on these explanations.

Table 2. Q-sorting distribution.

Number of Statements	2	3	4	5	5	5	4	3	2
Score	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4

3. Results

3.1. Result analysis

Table 3 summarizes the four perception types drawn from the research results, showing the Eigen Values for each type along with its cumulative value.

Table 3. Variance analysis.

Contents/Type	I	II	III	IV
Chosen Eigenvalues	8.0890	2.4304	1.7668	1.6865
Total Variance	.3111	.0935	.0680	.0649
Cumulative	.3111	.4046	.4725	.5374

The correlation between each type shows the degree of similarity between them (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Correlations.

Contents/Type	I	II	III	IV
I	1.000	.398	.493	.470
II		1.000	.317	.419
III			1.000	.455
IV				1.000

3.2. Perception characteristics

3.2.1. Factor weight

Table 5 shows the factors' weights. Type I with P=24 and a weight of 2.7573, type II with P=23 and a weight of 1.550, type III with P=15 and a weight of 1.6822, and type IV with P=19 and a weight of 1.6942 showed the largest values in their respective categories.

Table 5. The P-sample weight.

Type 1(N=7)		Type 2(N=6)	
P Sample	Weight	P Sample	Weight
P=5	.8570	P=2	.6567
P=12	.6067	P=6	.6222
P=13	1.6152	P=9	1.1814
P=16	.6743	P=11	1.0213
P=17	1.3210	P=14	.3692
P=20	.8806	P=23	1.5503
P=24	2.7573		
Type 3(N=7)		Type 4(N=6)	
P Sample	Weight	P Sample	Weight
P=7	.8683	P=1	.7506
P=10	.8715	P=3	.9783
P=15	1.6822	P=4	.7909
P=21	1.2575	P=8	.6251
P=22	.6850	P=18	.6219
P=25	1.0841	P=19	1.6942
P=26	1.1523		

3.2.2. Type I: Dualistic norm perception

Type I is defined as “dualistic norm perception,” and its characteristic is that “men and women are equal but different.” It divides gender roles equally and clearly articulates their respective roles. As shown in **Table 6**, the negatively answered statement of Q10, “He must participate in family events” ($z = -1.27$), type I views the private sphere as part of women’s role. Naturally, men’s role is found in the public sphere of social roles.

Type I is the most normative, and Q25, “He should have beliefs of his own” ($z = 1.59$) is a statement that shows such characteristics. Other statements like Q18, “He should know how to take care of his physical appearance” ($z = 1.73$); Q27, “He should protect women, the elderly, the weak, and children” ($z = 1.59$); Q24, “He should know how to defend his family” ($z = 1.30$), and Q9, “He is physically strong” ($z = 1.20$) are all statements on norms recognized to be men’s roles.

What is interesting is the sense of equality found in type I. From Q28, “It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous” ($z = 1.02$), it can be seen that type I recognizes equality by trying not to impose excessive duties on men alone. In Q12, “It would be nice to live as a man in our society” ($z = 1.75$), where the responses were most positive, type I perceives that men have relatively more advantages in the public sphere. Although it recognizes equality while maintaining the perception that being a man is more advantageous in public society, such a way of thinking may lead to a victim mentality.

The highest weighting factor of P=24 in type I summarizes the relevant students' perception as:

Our society, so far, still divides men and women and believes that the different roles given to each gender are the norm. Moreover, men have more advantages than women in our society.

Table 6. The Statements of Type 1 and Z-score (More than ±1.00).

No.	Statement	Z-score
12	It would be nice to live as a man in our society.	1.75
18	He should know how to take care of his physical appearance.	1.73
25	He should have beliefs of his own.	1.59
27	He should protect women, the elderly, the weak, and children.	1.59
24	He should know how to defend his family.	1.30
9	He is physically strong.	1.20
28	It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous.	1.02
2	It is helpful to both parties when a man gives financial rights to his wife after getting married.	-1.06
26	He should earn more than his wife.	-1.22
10	He must participate in family events.	-1.27
14	There should be an order of rank in men's social groups.	-1.42
29	He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women.	-1.46
21	Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively.	-1.71

The positive type I statement that is most different from the other types is Q17, "He does not have any special power in society" (d=1.769), and the negative statement most different from the other types is Q19, "He is athletic" (d=-1.331) (**Table 7**). From these responses, it can be understood that type I does not view men as having a special place in society nor as having special abilities like being athletic, and thus condemns privileges or unfair treatment. Nevertheless, type I students expect men to take on the socially normative role of protecting his family and the weak and do not think it is contradictory for only men to enlist in the military.

As demonstrated, "egalitarianism" and "attributing norms to men" apparent in type I students stem from their belief that while the two genders are equal, each has differing roles. According to them, a man's role is in the public sphere and men have more social advantages. thus, they regard men's role as having more value than that of women. Due to such a contradictory perception, type I is most likely to develop the aforementioned victim mentality.

Table 7. The Statements of Type 1 different from other types and Z-score (More than ±1.00).

No.	Statement	z-score	AVERAGE Z	DIFF.
17	He does not have any special power in society.			
3	Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women.	.133	-1.636	1.769
		.367	-1.098	1.465
25	He should have beliefs of his own.	1.595	.487	1.108
20	It is contradictory that only men enlist for military services.	-.932	.162	-1.094
2	It is helpful to both parties when a man gives financial rights to his wife after getting married.	-1.060	.043	-1.103
23	He is funny.	-.684	.463	-1.146
6	He takes initiative and makes decisions.	-.567	.635	-1.203
19	He is athletic.	.102	1.433	-1.331

3.2.3. Type II: Superiority perception

Type II is defined as the “superiority perception,” and its central idea is that “One who is superior is a man.” As shown in **Table 8**, the positively responded statements of Q19, “He is athletic” ($z=1.70$); Q6, “He takes initiative and makes decisions” ($z=1.44$), Q9, “He is physically strong” ($z=1.34$), and Q4, “He should be financially successful to gain recognition” ($z=1.32$) all manifest physical, temperamental, and financial abilities.

The most negatively responded to statement for type II was Q17, “He does not have any special power in society” ($z=-2.22$). These students accept that men enjoy a more privileged status in society than women, which is similar to type I. Other negative response statements were Q13, “He is delicate” ($z=-1.00$); Q3, “Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women” ($z=-1.21$); Q29, “He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women” ($z=-1.46$), and Q21, “Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively” ($z=-1.47$). It can be understood from these responses that type II students see men as superior beings to women and tend to deny feminine qualities in men and focus on men’s physical and financial abilities.

Table 8. Type 2 Statements Z-scores (More than ± 1.00).

No.	Statement	Z-score
19	He is athletic.	1.70
6	He takes initiatives and makes decisions.	1.44
9	He takes initiatives and makes decisions.	1.34
4	He should be financially successful to gain recognition.	1.32
12	It would be nice to live as a man in our society.	1.13
13	He is delicate.	-1.00
3	Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women.	-1.21
11	He looks at the bigger picture rather than the details.	-1.25
29	He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women.	-1.46
21	Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively.	-1.47
30	He displays his emotions well.	-1.78
17	He does not have any special power in society.	-2.22

One statement of type II students that was most positively different from the other types was Q26, “He should earn more than his wife” ($d=2.153$), which is a representative statement of men needing to be superior to women. Other statements like Q6, “He takes initiatives and makes decisions” ($d=1.477$), and Q4, “He should be financially successful to gain recognition” ($d=1.005$) show that type II students focus on the temperamental and financial superiority of men when viewing them. A peculiarity is that, through Q20, “It is contradictory that only men enlist for military services” ($d=1.161$), it seems that these students have a sense of gender equality. However, given their other responses, it appears that they represent the male perspective on this issue, which may be a reaction relying on the perceived superiority of men, expressing the injustice felt by men.

On the other hand, the most different negative response was to Q30, “He displays his emotions well” ($d=-2.181$). Here, type II’s view of male superiority indicates that men should hide their emotions in order to be strong and take the lead in competitions. The tendency to support male superiority was further outlined in the responses to Q29, “He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women” ($d=-1.326$), and Q17, “He does not have any special power in society” ($d=-1.373$) (**Table 9**). Type II students believe that men and women should be differentiated and that men have social privileges. It can be interpreted that such ideas rest

between the first and second phase of feminist phase theory. Type II has male-dominant views of phase 1 while also having contributing views of phase 2 towards male superiority. It accepts a world where men are dominant and believes that they are superior beings.

Table 9. The Statements of Type 2 different from other types and Z-score (More than ± 1.00).

No.	Statement	z-score	AVERAGE Z	DIFF.
26	He should earn more than his wife.	.385	-1.769	2.153
6	He takes initiatives and makes decisions.	1.442	-.035	1.477
31	I believe that mothers have great influence over men's roles.	.651	-.565	1.216
20	It is contradictory that only men enlist for military services.	.760	-.402	1.161
4	He should be financially successful to gain recognition.	1.322	.317	1.005
29	He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women.	-1.463	-.136	-1.326
17	He does not have any special power in society.	-2.223	-.851	-1.373
18	He should know how to take care of his physical appearance.	-.095	1.381	-1.476
28	It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous.	-.181	1.321	-1.502
30	He displays his emotions well.	-1.780	.401	-2.181

3.2.4. Type III: Subjective perception

Type III features “subjective perception,” which can be summarized as, “I will view men according to my standards.” “My standards” here are the subjective criteria that come from women’s perspectives, and thus, match the third phase of female dominance in feminist phase theory. The content of the statements chosen by type III breaks away from the characteristics attributed to men in the male-dominant society. As shown in Table 10, the positively responded statements Q30, “He displays his emotions well” ($z=1.42$), and Q18, “He should know how to take care of his physical appearance” ($z=1.34$), show that Type III students view men from a feminine standpoint. Furthermore, through statements like Q28, “It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous” ($z=1.38$), or Q15, “He should not have obligatory responsibilities” ($z=1.24$), it is understood that these students do not view men as superior beings to women, nor should they be responsible for them.

Moreover, in this context, the most negatively responded statements, Q26, “He should earn more than his wife” ($z=-2.10$), and Q3, “Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women” ($z=-1.46$), confirm that these students have diverged from dualistic perceptions formed under male dominance. From the statement that received the highest positive score, Q12, “It would be nice to live as a man in our society” ($z=2.30$) and the negatively responded statement Q17, “He does not have any special power in society” ($z=-1.38$), type III, like types I and II, indicate that the current public order in Korean society is favorable to men. Through such a perception, however, type III does not have a tendency to develop a victim mentality like type I nor do they wish to support the privileges of men by partaking of them. Type III students view men from their own subjective standards, focusing on the public sphere and disregarding the private one. In this respect, such a perception may originate from a sense of resistance against male dominance or of evasiveness by attempting to sidestep that dominance.

Table 10. The Statements of Type 3 and Z-score (More than ± 1.00).

No.	Statement	Z-score
12	It would be nice to live as a man in our society.	2.30
30	He displays his emotions well.	1.42
28	It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous.	1.38
18	He should know how to take care of his physical appearance.	1.34
19	He is athletic.	1.34
15	He should not have obligatory responsibilities.	1.24
22	He is authoritative.	1.06
11	He looks at the bigger picture rather than the details.	-1.04
5	He knows how to be patient.	-1.05
8	He should support his family and carry on the family line.	-1.10
17	He does not have any special power in society.	-1.38
3	Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women.	-1.46
26	He should earn more than his wife.	-2.10

The type III statement that was most positively different from the averages of other types was Q30, “He displays his emotions well” ($d=2.086$), which outlines a women-oriented perspective that emphasizes relational and emotional aspects. On the other hand, the most negatively different statement was Q4, “He should be financially successful to gain recognition” ($d=-1.636$) (Table 11). This can be interpreted to mean that type III has broken away from the male-dominant perspective that emphasizes financial contribution or achievement. Ultimately, type III embodies a subjective perception of men based on one’s own standards and moves away from views of male supremacy.

Table 11. The Statements of Type 3 different from other types and Z-score (More than ± 1.00).

No.	Statement	z-score	AVERAGE Z	DIFF.
30	He displays his emotions well.	1.420	-.666	2.086
21	Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively.	-.324	-1.784	1.460
15	He should not have obligatory responsibilities.	1.235	-.137	1.372
12	It would be nice to live as a man in our society.	2.302	1.033	1.269
22	He is authoritative.	1.059	-.027	1.086
26	He should earn more than his wife.	-2.095	-.942	-1.153
5	He knows how to be patient.	-1.054	.155	-1.209
9	He is physically strong.	-.077	1.203	-1.280
27	He should protect women, the elderly, the weak, and children.	-.130	1.220	-1.350
4	He should be financially successful to gain recognition.	-.659	.977	-1.636

3.2.5. Type IV: Gender-balanced perception

Type IV can be referred as the “gender-balanced perception” type, whose view on men is that “it may vary depending on context and relational position.” As shown in **Table 12**, given the responses to Q4, Q19, Q27, Q9, and Q18, type IV has strong views on men’s physical, temperamental, and financial abilities, and may appear similar to type II’s “superiority perception”. However, its crucial difference manifests in Q28: “It

is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous” ($z=1.56$). Type IV’s response to Q28 was strongly positive, meaning that although type II’s responses indicate that men have advantages in public society and support and accept male-dominant views, type IV upholds gender equality in duty, even if it is aware that men have social privileges. Though both parties recognize male privileges, they respond to it differently. Type IV’s response is based on a gender-balanced perception, while type II’s is founded on a male-dominant perception.

The most negatively responded statements in type IV were Q21, “Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively” ($z=-2.17$), Q26, “He should earn more than his wife” ($z=-1.99$), and Q14, “There should be an order of rank in men’s social groups” ($z=-1.67$). These statements demonstrate that type IV students hold gender-balanced views and have broken away from male-oriented or male-dominant perspectives. The characteristics of type IV are clearly articulated in its highest weighting factor, P=19, which expressed:

There are no differences between men and women, and men do not necessarily have to be responsible for the family’s livelihood, but they must protect women, the elderly and the weak, and children.

Table 12. The Statements of Type 4 and Z-score (More than ± 1.00).

No.	Statement	Z-score
28	It is not natural to have him do something difficult or dangerous.	1.56
4	He should be financially successful to gain recognition.	1.27
19	He is athletic.	1.25
27	He should protect women, the elderly, the weak and children.	1.17
9	He is physically strong.	1.06
18	He should know how to take care of his physical appearance.	1.06
17	He does not have any special power in society.	-1.31
22	He is authoritative.	-1.35
31	I believe that mothers have great influence over men’s roles.	-1.45
14	There should be an order of rank in men’s social groups.	-1.67
26	He should earn more than his wife.	-1.99
21	Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively.	-2.17

The type IV statement that was most positively different from the averages of the other types was Q29, “He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women” ($d=1.766$), while the most negatively different statement was Q22, “He is authoritative” ($d=-2.121$) (**Table 13**). Through these statements, it can be seen that type IV students hold a gender-balanced perception by not assigning privileges to men and actually rejecting the distinction between men and women. According to a gender-balanced perception, the role of men is not fixed, but is something that can be defined based on the nature of relations or circumstances.

Although type IV denies a distinction between men and women, it believes that men should feel responsible for supporting their family and fulfilling social duties. However, that responsibility is not limited to men, but applies to all human being, and should be divided among those who can carry it under given circumstances. Furthermore, type IV does not see men as authoritative figures and does not conclusively believe that the characteristics of men stem from their home environment because type IV students think that these characteristics are instead influenced by an individual’s contextual and relational position. In short, type IV respondents do not have fixed beliefs on ideas like gender roles or marriage; they believe that when roles

and duties are assigned, depending on individual circumstance, both genders should collectively carry them out as values of equality.

Table 13. The Statements of Type 4 different from other types and Z-score (More than ± 1.00).

No.	Statement	z-score	AVERAGE Z	DIFF.
29	He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women.	.856	-.910	1.766
8	He should support his family and carry on the family line.	.188	-.978	1.166
21	Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively.	-2.169	-1.169	-1.000
15	He should not have obligatory responsibilities.	-.623	.483	-1.106
12	It would be nice to live as a man in our society.	.215	1.729	-1.513
31	I believe that mothers have great influence over men’s roles.	-1.446	.134	-1.580
22	He is authoritative.	-1.346	.775	-2.121

3.26. Consensus items

Consensus items here refer to statements that were collectively agreed upon by all types. As shown in **Table 14**, there were a total of six consensus items that all four types unanimously agreed upon.

Table 14. Consensus Items.

No.	Statement	Z-score
24	He should know how to defend his family.	.73
33	He forms diverse relationships with others.	.64
16	He is ambitious.	.64
7	He is a man of few words.	-.20
13	He is delicate.	-.70
10	He must participate in family events.	-.86

4. Conclusion and implications

This study used Q-methodology to observe the characteristics of the perceptions of female university students regarding men, resulting in four types of perception: type I with “dualistic norm perception,” type II with “superiority perception,” type III with “subjective perception,” and type IV with “gender-balanced perception.”

The four types outlined in this research closely correspond to feminist phase theory. This theoretical framework, rooted in feminism, outlines the developmental stages of women's awareness^[16]. Initially introduced and advocated by Thompson (2011)^[8], its objective is to facilitate educational endeavors aimed at advancing towards an egalitarian society, refraining from viewing gender differences as discriminatory. The present study was not conducted with feminist phase theory in mind; rather, it adopted this theory when searching for interpretational theories to elucidate the responses made by the student participants. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the findings of this research are highly consistent with feminist phase theory. The results show that Western perceptions of gender equally apply to female Korean university students, despite cultural differences. This may be the effect of Korea’s education being based on active interdisciplinary exchanges formed through global networking.

When comparing the research findings to feminist phase theory as shown in **Figure 2**, type I with “dualistic norm perception” matches with the third phase, “bifocal scholarship”, in the feminist theory. Type

II with “superiority perception” displays both the first phase, “male scholarship” and the second phase, “compensatory scholarship”. It can be said that “superiority perception” manifests the compensatory phase, based on the perception of the male-defined phase. Type III with “subjective perception” matches with the fourth phase, which is “feminist scholarship”. The perception in type III does not apply the standards that are universal in male-dominant society; rather, its view on men comes from the emotional and relational characteristics of women. Lastly, type IV with “gender-balanced perception” coincides with the fifth phase, which is “multifocal or relational scholarship”. The characteristics of each type of perception are as follows.

Type II Superiority perception	Type I Dualistic norm Perception	Type III Subjective perception	Type IV gender-balanced perception
Phase 1 and Phase 2 Compensatory scholarship	Phase 3 Bifocal scholarship	Phase 4 Feminist scholarship	Phase 5 Multifocal or relational scholarship




Figure 2. The four types and feminist phase theory.

Type I students with “dualistic norm perception” believe that men and women are equal but have different roles, which is similar to phase 3, the bifocal phase, in feminist phase theory. There are three characteristics to type I. First, while it clearly distinguishes between the two genders, it also emphasizes equality. Its firm valuation of equality can be perceived in statements implying it is not natural to have men do something difficult or dangerous and that men do not have special powers in society. Second, type I is the most normative type of the five, holding that men should have their own beliefs and norms, referring to their physical, temperamental, and financial aspects. Third, this type is prone to a victim mentality as its sense of equality lies in the premise that men and women have different roles. However, from the negative response to men participating in family events, type I students have the tendency to view roles in the public sphere as belonging to men and those in the private sphere as belonging to women. In other words, they dichotomously separate the roles of men and women according to public and private domains and place higher value on public sphere roles than private ones while doing so. This idea coincides with the dualistic phase in feminist phase theory which values the public sphere over the private. However, because type I also carries a sense of equality, students holding this perception may also feel victimized by the social privileges that men enjoy.

Type II students with “superiority perception” focus on the superiority of men rather than viewing men and women dichotomously. They emphasize physical superiority through athletic ability and physical strength, temperamental superiority through the ability to take initiatives and make decisions, and masculine superiority through financial success. Their envy of male superiority is clearly outlined in their response to Q26, which states that a man should earn more than his wife. Moreover, their response to Q20, which state that it is contradictory for only men to enlist in military service, does not stem from gender equality. Rather, it can be interpreted as supporting men with a men-worshipping attitude. Such an interpretation is supported by the statements where type II students responded negatively: Q29, “He does not have a view that distinguishes between men and women,” and Q17, “He does not have any special power in society.” Type II is also the least accepting of “weaknesses” in men and shows the least preference towards men displaying feminine qualities, such as being delicate, taking care of their appearance, and showing emotion. In this aspect, type II students clearly manifest characteristics of the male-defined phase 1 and phase 2, the compensatory phase, of feminist phase theory. These students’ envy towards men is also clearly shown in P=9 of Type II, which states:

There are still more opportunities for men in Korea, and when women show bad moods, they are viewed more negatively than when men do. Also, it is easier to live as men in Korea as they are free from fears like sexual abuse when going out at night.

Since they have been exposed to the egalitarian ideas taught in college, type II students probably did not embrace male superiority without question. In P=14, type II students justify their stress from unconditionally embracing male superiority by reiterating “In addition to biological differences, there exist universal characteristics unique to each gender, and glass ceilings and walls are prevalent in workplaces. Also, women are vulnerable to violent crimes or sex crimes because they are physically weak.”

Type III students with “subjective perceptions” see men from subjective feminine viewpoints. They break away from what are considered to be masculine characteristics in a male-dominant society, refuse to recognize men as superior and tend to view them through a feminine lens. Furthermore, type III students responded positively to statements Q26, “He should earn more than his wife,” and Q3, “Apart from bathrooms, there is no need for private facilities dedicated to men or women,” which show that this group has diverged from a male-oriented dichotomy. Type III students particularly responded negatively to Q4, “Men should be financially successful to gain recognition,” demonstrating their divergence from the male-dominant view of the importance of social contributions and achievements. The aforementioned characteristics of type III overlap with the feminist perspective, which is phase 4 in the feminist phase theory.

Type IV students hold a “gender-balanced perception” that strongly recognizes the physical, temperamental, and financial superiorities of men, although they are also the only group that does not believe there are advantages to living as a man in Korean society. They do not perceive men to either be authoritative or believe that a rank of order should exist. Type IV perception embodies the idea that the perception of men may change according to contextual and relational positions. Type IV students responded most negatively to Q21, Q26, and Q14, which are about assigning certain roles separately to men and women. Statements such as “Compared to women, unmarried men are viewed more negatively,” “He should earn more than his wife,” and “There should be an order of rank in men’s social groups” were all rejected because they view men and women dichotomously and imply men to be superior.

The gender-balanced perception of type IV corresponds to the final phase, which is multifocal or relational perception in feminist phase theory. P=18 of type IV clearly demonstrates the characteristics of that phase, stating:

When it comes to marriage, it is not a discussion on whether men have things better or worse compared to women because it is not a problem of gender, but rather one related to the older generations. Compared to the past, women can earn more depending on their abilities, and it is better for anyone to avoid hard and difficult work if possible. It is essential to hold equal views on everybody since gender equality is important in today’s world.

Type IV students, therefore, interpret gender equality while dismantling the perception that differentiates between genders.

In addition to the four types, research showed that there were also shared statements among them. A statement can be interpreted differently when placed in a particular perception type because it is made by observing the whole picture, after piecing together all the responses (M. Tetreault, 2006). Therefore, the summary of the interpretational differences between types and their implications is as follows:

To begin with, statements recognizing male privileges in public society are found in types I and III, even though both types respond differently. This difference is related to equality. While there is the possibility for

type I, which strongly emphasizes equality, to develop a victim mentality due to the privileges of men in public society, type II, which rejects or does not have a sense of equality, supports men and may hope to obtain those privileges. Furthermore, type III reinterprets equality and strongly recognizes men's superiority and privileges in society. However, it focuses on the private sphere, neglecting the public sphere, by viewing men according to its subjective standards: Seemingly, type III handles male privileges by reinterpreting them through women's perceptions. Such a coping mechanism can be understood either as a sense of avoidance or as the dismantling of the male-dominant dichotomous view.

Next, types II and IV strongly recognize men's superior abilities but display differing ideas and responses, which stem from whether one dichotomously separates between men and women. Whereas type II defines men as having superior abilities, type IV simply views individual abilities. Due to this difference, type II supports male-dominant views when it comes to male privileges, but type IV believes that "a capable individual, regardless of gender, should take on duties deemed achievable," even though it is aware of male privileges in public society. In this respect, type IV advocates a reinterpreted sense of equality. Regarding men's superiority, it appears that the underlying difference between the two types occurs because type IV's response is based on a gender-balanced perception, while type II is founded on male-dominant perception.

The four types of perception drawn from the present research have implications for universities. Tetreault (2006)^[8] actually applied feminist phase theory to evaluate students and to set the direction for multicultural education. She sought to teach multicultural education through gender issues because she supported all people, regardless of gender, exercising their abilities, rather than focusing on resolving gender discrimination and inequality. Therefore, her ultimate objective coincides with the fifth phase of balanced gender in feminist phase theory. In reality, however, this phase can be seen as extremely dangerous to the Korean society that embraces heterosexual norms. Nevertheless, the fact that some female university students have a balanced gender perception may be an indication of a change in these heterosexual norms. Follow-up studies may observe how gender equality based on heterosexual norms evolves in the future and investigate which factors contribute to the formation of perception by type.

Moreover, the perception types drawn from this study may be used as diagnostic data when building a training program to improve the female university students' existing perceptions on gender.

One limitation of this study is its small sample size: The P-sample in this study included only 26 female students. Although Q methodology does not require a large number of samples, doubts can arise in that information from a small sample cannot be considered representative of the whole. In the future, it is necessary to reconfirm the results of this study through quantitative research involving a greater number of subjects and reexamine the four types of distribution.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, H.B. and S.L.; methodology, S.L.; software, S.L.; validation, H.B.; formal analysis, S.L.; investigation, S.L.; resources, S.L.; data curation, S.L.; writing—original draft preparation, H.B. and S.L.; writing—review and editing, H.B. and S.L.; visualization, H.B.; supervision, H.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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