Young Adults' Attitudes and Reasoning About Gender Roles in the Family Context

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Abstract

Although the roles of men and women in society and the workplace have undergone dramatic change, there has been comparatively less change in the family roles of men and women. This study investigated young adults' endorsements of and reasoning about gender roles in the context of the family. Participants ($N = 224$) indicated their level of agreement with six different family roles and provided open-ended reasons to support their views. Social cognitive domain theory was used as a framework to interpret their open-ended reasoning. Results showed that participants applied reasoning based on ideas of morality (fairness and well-being), social conventions, and personal choice in ways that varied by participants' gender, ethnic background (Asian or European Canadian), and the particular gender role to which they were responding. When supporting egalitarian role divisions, women were more likely to base their reasoning on morality, whereas men were more likely to rely on social conventions. In contrast, stereotypes and issues of well-being (regarding women's roles), and social conventions (regarding men's traditional roles) were used to support the maintenance of traditional role divisions. The results have implications for educators and policy makers and are discussed with a focus on how attitudes about family roles may be changed most effectively to increase egalitarian attitudes. Implications for the measurement of gender-role attitudes are also discussed.

Over the last 50 years, the roles of men and women in Western society have undergone dramatic change. However, one area in which change has been particularly slow is the family roles of men and women. Studies have repeatedly shown that women continue to perform most of the housework and child care, regardless of their employment status (Boye, 2009; Claffey & Mickelson, 2009; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007), and their earnings are seen as secondary to those of their husband, regardless of how much they earn (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Tichenor, 1999). In order to move toward a society where women are equal to men and women can take full advantage of labor force opportunities, family roles need to become more egalitarian. More equal sharing of responsibilities would not only enhance movement toward equality but would also reduce the burden currently placed on women, many of whom desire a change in the division of labor at home (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007).

Gender-role attitudes have been identified as important in promoting more egalitarian family roles between men and women (Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). By increasing egalitarian attitudes in young people, it may be possible to promote greater equality between men and women in future marriages (Wainryb, 1991). In order to promote more egalitarian attitudes, it is necessary to understand people's reasoning regarding family roles. However, research in this area is lacking. In the current study, we investigated young adults' reasoning about gender roles within the family based on their gender and ethnic background. First, we discuss prior research on gender-role attitudes, followed by a discussion of our theoretical approach in examining reasoning. Next, we discuss the role of gender and ethnic background in gender attitudes and then present our predictions and the particular family roles examined.

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The Importance of Gender-Role Attitudes

Many existing studies show that gender-role attitudes play an important role in more egalitarian sharing of family responsibilities between men and women. Specifically, more egalitarian attitudes of both men and women are associated with more equal sharing of household duties (Coltrane, 2000; Kan, 2008; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). Given that men benefit more from traditional family roles (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Therborn, 2004), it is perhaps not surprising that men hold more traditional gender-role attitudes than women (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Bilder, 1995; Baber & Tucker, 2006; Fan & Marini, 2000; Frieze et al., 2003; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011). Although increasing egalitarian attitudes would clearly benefit women and help reduce their burden (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007), men may also benefit from adopting more egalitarian attitudes. Research indicates that husbands whose attitudes become more egalitarian experience increases in marital satisfaction (Amato & Booth, 1995) and that couples who share household responsibilities equally enjoy high levels of martial satisfaction (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). Indeed, an unequal division of labor in the household often leads to tension and conflict between spouses (Hochschild, 2003). Thus, adopting more egalitarian attitudes, particularly toward family responsibilities, has the potential to promote greater equality and enhance marital quality by reducing conflict over the division of labor. Greater sharing of family responsibilities may further promote egalitarian attitudes, leading to greater increases in equality.

Increasing egalitarian attitudes toward family roles in young men and women requires an understanding of their reasons for holding particular views about these roles. However, studies investigating reasoning about family roles are largely lacking. Some researchers have examined adolescents' beliefs regarding why men and women differ and found that social explanations, such as men and women being raised differently or having different opportunities in society, were favored to explain male–female differences (Martin & Parker, 1995; Neff & Terry-Schmitt, 2002). Biological and religious explanations for male–female differences were less frequent but were associated with more traditional attitudes and the perception of greater male–female differences (Martin & Parker, 1995; Neff & Terry-Schmitt, 2002), especially among men (Neff & Terry-Schmitt, 2002). These findings are important because biological and religious factors are perceived to be more permanent and unchangeable than social factors (Martin & Parker, 1995; Neff & Terry-Schmitt, 2002), and, thus, those who attribute existing family roles to such stable forces may conclude that traditional roles best accommodate the unique natures and capabilities of men and women. However, these studies did not focus directly on family roles; instead, they focused on perceived explanations for male–female personality differences. Furthermore, adolescents were asked to select from a number of possible reasons given to them instead of freely generating their own explanations.

Some studies have examined adolescents' and young adults' acceptance of men and women taking on various family roles. These studies indicate that they approve more of mothers who stay at home with children (vs. mothers who work) and fathers who provide financial support for the family (vs. fathers who stay at home; Bridges & Orza, 1993; Riggs, 1997, 2005). Furthermore, many young adult men expect to be breadwinners, whereas young adult women expect to stay at home with their children (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011) and do more household and child care chores than men in their own futures (Askari, Liss, Erchull, Staebell, & Axelson, 2010), although these expectations are influenced by gender-role attitudes, such that more egalitarian attitudes lead to less traditional role expectations (Askari et al., 2010; Erchull, Liss, Axelson, Staebell & Askari, 2010; Kaufman, 2005). However, these studies also have not investigated young adults' reasoning regarding these roles.

In a recent developmental study, researchers investigated 7- and 10-year-old children's reasoning about gender roles directly and in an open-ended fashion (Sinno & Killen, 2009). The results showed that children found it more acceptable for mothers, rather than fathers, to stay at home with a baby, but working outside the home was seen as acceptable for both men and women. These findings are consistent with studies of children, who, from an early age, believe that it is more appropriate for men and women to adopt social roles that are consistent (vs. inconsistent) with their gender (Alfieri, Ruble, & Higgins, 1996; Bartini, 2006; Trautner et al., 2005). More importantly, examination of children's reasoning showed that they based their reasons on gender stereotypes about men's and women's capabilities (e.g., mothers know more about babies than fathers) when they argued that women should stay at home. In contrast, when they argued that both men and women can work outside the home, they based their reasons on social expectations and personal choice (Sinno & Killen, 2009).

Although children's and adolescents' approvals of gender roles are similar, children's reasoning differs considerably from young adults' reasoning (Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006; Smetana, 2006). Children's reasoning is less complex and their views regarding gender roles tend to be more rigid (Alfieri et al., 1996; Bartini, 2006; Killen et al., 2006; Trautner et al., 2005). Thus, it is also important to examine the views of young adults, who have a greater understanding of the complexity of gender roles (Alfieri et al., 1996; Killen et al., 2006) but have not yet established their own families. Their beliefs regarding family roles have direct bearing on societal gender equality in the next generation. As they move toward establishing their own families, it would be important to understand their views because those are likely to influence their expectations and the division of labor they will ultimately establish in their own homes.

Social Cognitive Domain Theory

In the current study, we relied on social cognitive domain theory (Killen, 2007; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006) as our theoretical framework to interpret young adults' reasoning regarding family roles. This theory proposes that individuals construe different types of social situations as belonging to different domains of social understanding. In the current context, we were interested in the domains under which different family roles are construed to fall. According to the theory, there are three different domains that may apply to different situations, such as gender roles in the family.

One such domain concerns concepts of morality, which are seen as universal obligations that hold across societal or cultural settings. Reasoning about moral issues is structured by concepts of fairness, justice, and harm (welfare). For example, to the extent that women are denied opportunities or disadvantaged by adherence to traditional gender roles, unequal gender-role divisions may be seen to have implications for moral notions of fairness and equality (e.g., Wainryb, 2006). Alternatively, the existence of gender roles in the family could be construed as an issue of welfare, such that the roles are believed to ensure the highest level of well-being for all family members. In this case, deviating from gender roles would be seen as actually resulting in harm for some (or all) family members. Thus, gender roles may be perceived to be an issue of morality, despite varying assumptions about the desirability of traditional or egalitarian roles.

The second domain, social conventions, involves context-specific obligations that are considered to be contingent, culturally relative, and potentially alterable by authority or social consensus (Turiel, 2006). In contrast to the moral domain, social conventions function to coordinate social interactions within social systems. Reasoning about social-conventional issues is structured by concepts of social organization, including appeals to tradition, authority, existing hierarchical social norms, and customs. When gender roles are seen as social conventions, their existence is believed to result from traditions and the organization of society. Thus, when social structures change, the appropriateness of gender roles may also be perceived to change.

Finally, some issues in social life are conceived as falling under personal jurisdiction (Nucci, 1981). Actions in the personal domain involve individuals' personal choice and autonomy, and are therefore conceived to be beyond the boundaries of social regulation. When family roles are seen as a matter of personal choice, the main idea is that it is up to each couple to decide how to divide tasks based on their preferences (instead of existing gender roles).

The way individuals apply these concepts to social reality is complex because many issues are multifaceted and may entail a mixture of moral concerns (e.g., justice), social conventions (e.g., tradition), and personal choice, requiring coordination of these different dimensions in personal judgments and reasoning (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). For example, individuals may believe that some family roles entail moral concerns (e.g., those relating to children), whereas others may be seen as matters of personal choice (e.g., division of housework) or may relate to social conventions (e.g., the male breadwinner role if men earn higher incomes). In our study, we were particularly interested in how young adults apply and weigh moral concerns, social conventions, and personal choice in their reasoning about gender roles in the family.

Reasoning, Gender, and Ethnic Background

When examining young adults' reasoning, we wanted to determine whether men and women consider gender roles to fall under different domains or weigh the domains differently in their reasoning. Prior research indicates that men hold more traditional gender-role attitudes than women (Ashmore et al., 1995; Baber & Tucker, 2006; Fan & Marini, 2000; Frieze et al., 2003; Zhang, Zheng, & Wang, 2003) and that groups in disadvantaged positions in the social hierarchy may be more likely to view issues in moral terms than those in advantaged positions (see Killen et al., 2006; Smetana, 2006, for recent reviews). Thus, men and women may have different perspectives on gender roles based on their different experiences and positions in the gender hierarchy (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). Prior research has not examined this possibility in Western nations, although research in more traditional societies, where women face greater inequality, suggests that women are more likely to criticize traditional gender roles and to do so based on ideas of fairness (Conry-Murray, 2009a, 2009b; Neff, 2001; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994).

Given the increasing ethnic diversity of North America (Statistics Canada, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), we also wanted to examine whether young adults' reasoning differs based on their ethnic background. In particular, we compared young adults from European and Asian backgrounds. We chose to focus on the latter because they represent the largest visible minority group and the fastest growing ethnic group in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008) and also are a growing ethnic group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This comparison is also of theoretical interest because of claims about differences in the orientations of many individuals from Western and Asian backgrounds regarding conceptions of self, social roles, and morality, often characterized under the rubric of individualism versus collectivism (Triandis, 1989). For example, the social reasoning of Westerners, such as Europeans and North Americans (of European background) has been characterized as primarily individualistic and emphasizing equality, autonomy, and personal choice, whereas the reasoning of many people from more collectivistic cultural backgrounds, such as societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, has been characterized as emphasizing the subordination of self to existing social roles, obedience to authority, hierarchy, and tradition (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

Many studies have shown that people from Asian backgrounds endorse more traditional gender roles than people from European backgrounds (e.g., Chang, 1999; Chia, Moore, Lam, Chuang, & Cheng, 1994). Asian adolescents are also more likely to perceive and emphasize social roles and family obligations in their familial relationships than are those from European backgrounds (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). However, prior studies have not compared the reasoning of different cultural groups regarding gender roles. Some studies have looked at reasoning regarding conflicts between husbands' and wives' personal desires and family obligations in more traditional societies, such as India (Neff, 2001), Benin in Africa (Conry-Murray, 2009a, 2009b), and among Muslim Druze women residing in Israel (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). These studies have found that the majority of participants endorsed traditional gender hierarchies and focused on personal autonomy for husbands, but on social responsibility for wives. More importantly, some participants (especially women) did criticize the traditional gender hierarchy, relying on notions of fairness and well-being. Thus, consistent with social domain theory's proposition that gender roles may be multifaceted, many individuals from traditional cultures do perceive the fairness implications associated with unequal cultural expectations, along with the importance of conformity to existing social roles. However, these studies have mainly explored conflicts between personal desires and traditional gender expectations, not the perceived reasons for the existence of gender roles. Furthermore, the views of young adults growing up in Western contexts may be very different from those who live in more traditional societies. To date, no known studies have examined the reasoning of young adults from Asian backgrounds who reside in Western nations regarding family roles for comparison with those from European backgrounds.

The Current Study

The goal of the current study was to examine young adults' reasoning regarding gender roles within the context of the family. We focused on the main family roles that have traditionally been assigned based on gender: decision making, breadwinning, housework, and child care. We presented some of the gender roles as traditional (e.g., the wife should have primary responsibility for taking care of the home and children) and others as egalitarian (e.g., a husband should share equally in household chores if his wife works full time). We chose to vary the way in which gender roles were presented because prior research has shown that the manner of item presentation can influence endorsements of egalitarian and traditional gender roles (Baber & Tucker, 2006; Braun, 2008). Given that participants are more likely to endorse egalitarian attitudes when gender roles are presented in an egalitarian form (Braun, 2008), we believed that examination of gender roles presented in the traditional form would be especially important for eliciting potential underlying assumptions and reasoning pertaining to beliefs about gender differences, as well as their corresponding implications for social roles.

Based on the prior studies we reviewed, we predict that men and young adults from Asian backgrounds will endorse more traditional gender-role divisions than women and young adults from European backgrounds. Furthermore, we expect endorsements of traditional role divisions to be supported by reasoning based primarily (although not exclusively) on social conventions, whereas endorsements of egalitarian role divisions to be supported primarily based on issues of morality (e.g., fairness, well-being). Based on the different positions of men and women in the gender hierarchy, we also expect an interaction between gender and type of reasoning. More specifically, we hypothesize that women will rely more heavily on issues of morality in their reasoning and that men will rely more heavily on social conventional reasoning.

Method

Participants

Our sample comprised 224 undergraduate students at the University of Toronto who were enrolled in a first-year introductory psychology course. Given our focus on young adults, we recruited students younger than 25 years old. In this sample, 56 (25.0%) were women of Asian backgrounds (referred to hereafter as Asian women), 51 (22.8%) were women of European backgrounds (European women), 66 (29.5%) were men of Asian backgrounds (Asian men), and 51 (22.8%) were men of European backgrounds (European men). The mean age of the participants was 18.9 years ($SD = 1.0$, range: 17.1–23.8 years).

Procedures and Design

Participants came into our laboratory in small groups and were seated away from each other. After signing a consent form, they filled out a demographics questionnaire, and then they rated and provided reasons for their ratings of gender roles (described below). We emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, that responses were anonymous, and that they should feel free to express their own opinions regarding each question. Anonymity was protected by giving participants a study number in order of arrival, which was written only on the questionnaires and could not be connected with their names. Participants put the completed questionnaires into an envelope, sealed it, and dropped it into a large bag that was only emptied at the end of each data-collection session. Participants were then debriefed individually, thanked for their time, and received course credit for their participation.

Given that we were interested in family roles (not gender roles in general) and that there is no known measure that specifically focuses on the family roles of men and women, we selected 6 items that are specifically about gendered

Table 1. Gender Role Items Used to Elicit Open-Ended Justifications

Item	Role Division	Gender Role	Source
Married women who have preschool-aged children should not work outside the home	Traditional	Preschool	Hardesty and Bokemeier (1989)
The wife should have primary responsibility for taking care of the home and children	Traditional	Homemaker	Ashmore et al. (1995)
The husband should have primary responsibility for support of the family	Traditional	Breadwinner	Ashmore et al. (1995)
A husband should share equally in household chores if his wife works full time	Egalitarian	Chores	Amato and Booth (1995)
Care of children should be shared equally by both spouses	Egalitarian	Child care	Ashmore et al. (1995)
In marriage, the husband and the wife should share decision making equally	Egalitarian	Decision making	Ashmore et al. (1995)

family roles that have been used in previous studies to assess gender-role attitudes, and we used these items to elicit students' reasoning (see Table 1). All 6 items pertained to gender roles in the family context. Half were phrased to reflect traditional gender roles; the other half, egalitarian role divisions. These items were taken verbatim from prior studies, with the exception of 1 item (decision, see Table 1), which was rephrased from the original traditional description to reflect an egalitarian division to ensure that there were equal numbers of egalitarian and traditional items. For each of the 6 items, participants first indicated their level of agreement on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) through 4 (*neither agree nor disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The ratings were recoded so that higher numbers indicated greater endorsement of egalitarian role divisions. After rating each item, participants were instructed to "please explain why you agree/disagree with the above item as clearly as you can" in order to elicit open-ended justifications for their choice. Given that our purpose was not to construct a new scale but to examine the reasoning behind selected items from a variety of scales, α reliabilities are not relevant and are not reported.

Coding of Open-Ended Responses

A justification coding system (Table 2) for coding open-ended responses was developed from a randomly selected portion of the protocols (less than 50% of the data set) and was used to code the remaining data. The codes from the full data set were included in the analyses. The coding system was based primarily on social cognitive domain theory (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006) and on the justification categories (e.g., biology, stereotypes, capability) used in previous research (Martin & Parker, 1995; Neff & Terry-Schmitt, 2002; Sinno & Killen, 2009). The categories of well-being, fairness, and simple equality represented moral justifications; those of social organization and social obligation represented social–conventional justifications; and a single category represented personal choice.

Each justification provided by participants was coded based on whether it supported a traditional role division (e.g., wives should remain primarily responsible for children) or an egalitarian role division (e.g., both husbands and wives should be equally responsible for children). The justifications provided by those who believed that traditional gender-role divisions should be maintained were coded into the categories of social obligation, social organization, stereotypes, biology, and well-being. The justifications provided by those who believed that gender roles should be divided in a more egalitarian manner were coded into the categories of simple equality, social organization, capability, fairness, biology, and well-being. Note that the justification categories of social organization, biology, and well-being could be used to support either traditional or egalitarian role divisions. Thus, for these three categories, we created two separate codes: one code representing use of the category to support egalitarian role divisions and one representing its use to support traditional role divisions (e.g., traditional well-being and egalitarian well-being). By keeping our coding categories separated based on their use to support either traditional or egalitarian role divisions, we were able to examine the types of reasons that are used to support egalitarian role divisions versus the types of reasons used to support traditional role divisions. An additional coding category represented beliefs that family responsibilities are matters of personal choice, and an "other" category for responses that could not be coded into any of the other categories was also created. If a participant's justification included two or more ideas that warranted different codes, then it received a code for each separate idea. A randomly selected subset of the questionnaires (20%) was coded by an independent coder for reliability purposes. Inter-coder agreement, expressed as Cohen's κ, was .76 for the justifications.

Results

Endorsements of Gender-Role Divisions

We first examined participants' endorsements of the different gender roles and whether these varied based on participants' gender or ethnicity. We entered participants' attitude ratings into a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA),

Table 2. Open-Ended Justification Categories for Gender Roles

Category	Description
Justifications supporting traditional role divisions	
Social obligation	Stating that the roles should be divided in a traditional way without giving further reasons why (e.g., the woman should take care of the children more)
Social organization	References to the structure of society in order to justify traditional role divisions (e.g., men should support the family because they still earn more money than women)
Stereotypes	References to stereotypes in order to justify traditional role divisions (e.g., men do not know how to cook)
Biology	References to biology in order to justify traditional role divisions (e.g., women are the birth-givers, so they should take care of their child)
Well-being	References to the well-being of the individual or family in order to justify traditional role divisions (e.g., it's best for the child if the mother stays at home)
Justifications supporting egalitarian role divisions	
Simple equality	Stating that the roles should be divided in an egalitarian way without giving further reasons why (e.g., they should share decision making equally)
Social organization	References to the structure of society in order to justify egalitarian role divisions (e.g., child care should be shared equally because both men and women now work)
Capability	References to the capabilities of men and women in order to justify egalitarian role divisions (e.g., men are also capable of taking care of children)
Fairness	References to ideas of fairness and equality in order to justify egalitarian role divisions (e.g., they should share decision making because men and women are equal)
Biology	References to biology in order to justify egalitarian role divisions (e.g., men and women both contributed an equal number of genes, so they should both take care of the child)
Well-being	References to the well-being of the individual or family in order to justify egalitarian role divisions (e.g., if they do not share decision making, they will get divorced)
Other justifications	
Personal choice	Stating that the roles should be divided according to the needs of each person or family (e.g., it should be up to the woman to decide whether she wants to work or not)
Other	Other elaborate responses that do not fit into any of the above categories (e.g., I don't know)

where gender (men vs. women) and ethnicity (European vs. Asian) were between-subject variables and the ratings for the six gender roles were entered as the within-subject repeated-measures factors. (A multivariate analysis of variance yielded the same pattern of results.) Given that the test of sphericity was significant, we report the significance levels associated with Huynh–Feldt adjustments that correct for the violation of this assumption. We also present partial η^2 values as our effect size, which indicates the proportion of the variance explained by each factor.

This analysis indicated a main effect of participant gender, $F(1, 220) = 5.37$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, a main effect of gender-role item, $F(4.20, 923) = 147.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .40$, but no significant effect of ethnicity, $F(1, 220) = 3.02$, $p = .084$. There was a significant interaction between ethnicity and gender-role item, $F(4.20, 923) = 3.56$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, but no significant interactions between gender and ethnicity, $F(1, 220) = 0.59$, $p = .44$, and between gender and gender-role item, $F(4.20, 923) = 1.43$, $p = .22$. The three-way interaction among gender, ethnicity, and gender-role item also was not significant, $F(4.20, 923) = 0.89$, $p = .47$. To interpret the main effect of gender, we examined the means for women and men. As expected, women ($M = 5.50$, $SE = .09$) endorsed egalitarian gender roles more widely than men did ($M = 5.22$, $SE = .08$).

Given that the main effect of gender-role item was qualified by an interaction between ethnicity and gender-role item,

we conducted pairwise comparisons, first comparing the endorsements of each gender-role item within each ethnic group, and then comparing each role item between the two ethnic groups (see Table 3 for mean ratings and standard errors by ethnicity). Comparisons of the gender-role items within each ethnic group indicated that among both Asians and Europeans, endorsements of the three egalitarian roles (i.e., decision making, child care, and chores) did not differ from one another and all three were endorsed significantly more than the three traditional roles (i.e., preschool, homemaker, breadwinner). Endorsements of the three traditional roles did not differ from one another.

Comparisons of each gender-role item between the two ethnic groups revealed only one significant difference between them: Asian participants had significantly more traditional attitudes regarding the breadwinner role than European participants. These findings provide only partial support for our hypothesis that Asian young adults would hold more traditional attitudes than European young adults.

Justifications for Gender Roles

Analysis strategy. We examined the frequency of use of each coding category for each gender-role item based on participant gender and ethnic background. We performed log-linear analysis with four factors: gender, ethnicity,

Table 3. Mean Ratings and Standard Errors of the Gender Roles Items by Ethnic Background

	Asian		European		Overall	
Gender role items	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE
Egalitarian items						
Decision making	6.39	.12	6.40	.13	6.40	.09
Child care	6.41	.11	6.31	.11	6.36	.08
Chores	6.34	.11	6.49	.12	6.42	.08
Traditional items						
Homemaker	4.38	.16	4.90	.18	4.64	.12
Preschool	4.22	.16	4.13	.18	4.18	.12
Breadwinner	3.81$_a$	.17	4.57$_b$	.19	4.19	.13

Note. Means with different subscripts across rows are significantly different.

Table 4. Total Frequency of Use of Each Code by Gender-Role Item

Code category	Decision	Child Care	Chores	Homemaker	Preschool	Breadwinner
Codes supporting traditional role divisions						
Social obligation	6	4	2	12	3	**27**
Social organization	13	10	4	18	6	**48**
Stereotype	5	12	4	**43**	21	**29**
Biology	0	5	0	20	7	4
Well-being	1	2	0	7	65	9
Codes supporting egalitarian role divisions						
Simple equality	**31**	22	**50**	**31**	12	**34**
Social organization	**51**	21	**74**	**29**	82	22
Capability	10	7	18	16	30	**32**
Fairness	**78**	16	**66**	**30**	12	15
Biology	1	**49**	2	11	1	4
Well-being	71	**114**	47	24	19	10
Other codes						
Personal choice	2	10	4	**46**	55	**30**
Other	0	0	1	1	0	1

Note. Frequencies representing more than 10% of responses for the gender role are bolded.

gender-role item, and justification code (see Table 4 for overall code frequencies for each gender-role item). In log-linear analysis, researchers begin with a saturated model (i.e., a model that includes all main effects and all possible interactions), which fits the data perfectly (i.e., all expected frequencies equal the observed frequencies; Howell, 2007). Then the technique of backward elimination is used, in which the highest order interaction is eliminated first (in our case, the four-way interaction) and model fit is inspected again. If this does not result in a significant decrease in model fit, further interactions are eliminated, one by one, until it is no longer possible to eliminate an effect without a significant decline in model fit. The models tested are hierarchical; that is, when an interaction term is included, its corresponding main effects and lower order interactions are also included. Thus, in the final model, the highest interactions that remain need to be interpreted (similar to ANOVA where main effects are qualified if interactions are significant).

In order to interpret the results of log-linear analysis, researchers commonly rely on conditional odds and odds ratios (Howell, 2007). Conditional odds represent, in our case, the probability of using a particular justification category divided by the probability of not using the category, given membership in a particular group, such as being male or female (see Grimes & Schulz, 2008, for a brief but clear explanation of odds and odds ratios). Once conditional odds have been calculated for each group (e.g., men and women), the odds ratio represents the ratio of the odds of one group compared to the odds of the other group using the given justification category.

Model fit. Using this technique, the final model had good fit, likelihood ratio $G^2 = 119.06$, $df = 143$, $p = .928$, and included the two-way interaction between ethnicity and justification code and the three-way interaction among gender, gender-role item, and justification code (plus all main effects and all two-way interactions corresponding to the three-way interaction).

Ethnic comparisons of justifications. In order to interpret the Ethnicity × Justification code interaction, we calculated the

Table 5. Conditional Odds and Odds Ratios Comparing Use of Justification Codes across Ethnic Groups

Justification Codes	Odds Ratio	Asian Odds	European Odds
Supporting traditional role divisions			
Stereotypes	1.39	.08	.06
Social organization	1.32	.07	.05
Well-being	1.21	.06	.05
Social obligation	1.19	.04	.03
Biology	.72	.02	.03
Supporting egalitarian role divisions			
Well-being	1.14	.22	.19
Social organization	.84	.18	.22
Fairness	1.28	.16	.13
Simple equality	.92	.12	.13
Personal choice	.70	.08	.12
Capability	.60	.06	.09
Biology	1.17	.05	.04

Note. An odds ratio greater than 1 means Asians used the justification code more frequently, whereas odds ratios under 1 mean greater use of the code by Europeans.

Table 6. Conditional Odds and Odds Ratios Comparing Use of Justification Codes Across Genders for the Traditional Items

Justification Codes	Odds Ratio	Female Odds	Male Odds
Homemaker: Supporting traditional-role divisions			
Stereotypes	1.06	.18	.17
Homemaker: Supporting egalitarian-role divisions			
Personal choice	.90	.18	.20
Simple equality	.37	.07	.18
Fairness	1.84	.15	.08
Preschool: Supporting traditional-role divisions			
Well-being	1.05	.27	.26
Preschool: Supporting egalitarian-role divisions			
Social organization	.94	.34	.37
Personal choice	1.05	.22	.21
Capabilities	2.16	.15	.07
Breadwinner: Supporting traditional-role divisions			
Social organization	.84	.20	.24
Social obligation	.57	.08	.15
Breadwinner: Supporting egalitarian-role divisions			
Simple equality	1.03	.15	.15
Capabilities	1.37	.16	.12
Personal choice	2.23	.18	.08

Note. An odds ratio greater than 1 means women used the justification code more frequently, whereas odds ratios under 1 mean greater use of the code by men.

conditional odds of each justification code being used (i.e., use of the given code compared to use of all of the other justification codes) for each ethnic group separately. We then calculated the odds ratios for each justification code comparing the ethnic groups (see Table 5). When supporting the maintenance of traditional gender-role divisions, Asian participants were more likely to use all of the traditional justification codes than European participants—except for biology, on which Europeans relied more frequently. When supporting egalitarian gender-role divisions, Asian participants were more likely to refer to fairness, biology, and well-being than Europeans, who were more likely to refer to men's and women's capabilities, egalitarian social organization, and personal choice. There were no differences in references to simple equality.

Gender comparisons for justifying traditional roles. In order to interpret the Participant Gender × Gender Role Item × Justification Code interaction, we computed the conditional odds of using each code for each role (i.e., the use of the code for the given role vs. the use of the other codes for the same role) separately for men and women because our main interest was in comparing the genders in their use of the different justification categories for each of the family roles. For the justification codes that had the highest conditional odds of being used for a role (conditional odds greater than .15), we calculated the odds ratios to compare men and women. We first present results for the justifications given in response to roles with traditional phrasing, followed by the results for the justifications given in response to the roles that were phrased to reflect egalitarian divisions (see Table 1 for roles).

For the homemaker role, justifications were varied, with some supporting traditional and others an egalitarian role division (see Table 6). When endorsing the maintenance of the traditional homemaker role, men and women most frequently—and equally—relied on stereotypes to support their views. However, when supporting an egalitarian role division, men relied primarily on simple equality, whereas women relied mainly on fairness. Many men and women also argued that the homemaker role is a matter of personal choice.

For the preschool role, justifications were also varied (Table 6). When men and women argued that women *should* stay at home, they based their reasons on well-being. When they argued that women should *not* stay at home, they often referred to egalitarian social organization, but women also often referred to men's capabilities. In addition, many men and women argued that staying home with a child was a matter of personal choice.

For the breadwinner role, both egalitarian and traditional justifications were frequently used (Table 6). When supporting the maintenance of the traditional male breadwinner role, men and women relied on traditional social organization, but men also often referred to social obligations. When supporting a more egalitarian role division both men and women relied on simple equality, but women also often referred to women's capabilities or argued that the breadwinner role should be a matter of choice.

Gender comparisons for justifying egalitarian roles. We present the justifications given in response to the egalitarian gender-role items next (see Table 7). For the role of decision making, both men and women supported an egalitarian role division between spouses. Although both men and women often based

Table 7. Conditional Odds and Odds Ratios Comparing Use of Justification Codes Across Genders for the Egalitarian Items

Justification Codes	Odds Ratio	Female Odds	Male Odds
Decision: Supporting egalitarian-role divisions			
Fairness	1.65	.52	.31
Well-being	1.29	.41	.31
Social organization	.52	.16	.31
Child Care: Supporting egalitarian-role divisions			
Well-being	1.46	.87	.60
Biology	1.00	.22	.22
Chores: Supporting egalitarian-role divisions			
Social organization	.64	.29	.46
Fairness	1.62	.40	.25
Simple equality	.80	.20	.25
Well-being	.75	.18	.24

Note. An odds ratio greater than 1 means women used the justification code more frequently, whereas odds ratios under 1 mean greater use of the code by men.

their arguments on issues of fairness and well-being, women were more likely to use these justifications, whereas men were more likely to rely on egalitarian social organization. For the child care role, most participants argued for an equal role division. Both men and women relied on well-being and biology in their reasoning, although women were more likely to rely on well-being than men. For the role regarding chores, most justifications supported an egalitarian role division between spouses. Although both men and women used the same types of justifications to support egalitarian sharing of chores, women were more likely to rely on fairness, whereas men were more likely to rely on egalitarian social organization, well-being, and simple equality in their reasoning.

Discussion

In order to promote more egalitarian gender roles, it is important to begin to understand people's reasoning behind holding traditional and egalitarian gender-role attitudes. In the current study, we aimed to take the first steps toward this understanding by examining young adults' reasoning regarding family roles based on their gender and ethnic background. Results showed that reasoning differs based on gender, ethnic background, and the particular gender role under consideration. We review the main findings and discuss implications for attitude-change efforts.

Analysis of participants' endorsements of gender roles indicated that men held more traditional attitudes regarding family roles than women. This finding is consistent with other work showing that, in general, men are more traditional than women (Ashmore et al., 1995; Baber & Tucker, 2006; Fan & Marini, 2000; Frieze et al., 2003; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011). However, we found only partial support for our prediction of ethnic differences; ethnic differences emerged only with regard to the traditional male breadwinner role. Young adults from Asian backgrounds endorsed the male breadwinner role more than young adults from European backgrounds. Overall, young adults of both Asian and European ethnicity showed relatively high levels of support for egalitarian gender roles, although as found in previous research (Baber & Tucker, 2006; Braun, 2008), this support varied based on the phrasing of the roles. Roles phrased in an egalitarian manner elicited higher egalitarian attitudes.

As expected, justifications used differed based on the particular gender role and participants' gender. For example, the vast majority of justifications given for the three egalitarian roles (decision making, chores, child care) supported equal sharing between spouses. However, in endorsing greater equality, men tended to focus more on egalitarian social conventions (e.g., women working leaves less time for housework and men need to share in these duties), whereas women were more focused directly on issues of morality, such as fairness (e.g., unfair if women have to do all the chores) and well-being (e.g., sharing child care benefits the children). These findings indicate that, consistent with social cognitive domain theory, gender roles are multifaceted and can be construed under different domains of understanding (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). How the different domains were weighed by young adults seemed to depend to some degree on their gender—likely a result of the different positions men and women have traditionally held within gender hierarchies and their consequent different experiences and perspectives on gender roles (Neff, 2001; Turiel, 2006). For women, concerns related to the moral domain were most salient, probably because they shoulder the disadvantages associated with inequality (Therborn, 2004). In contrast, men's reasoning reflected—in addition to concerns with fairness and equality—a greater focus on social conventions, such as their new social roles in an increasingly egalitarian social organization (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Therborn, 2004). For some men, these new responsibilities and social expectations may also conflict with personal prerogatives they previously enjoyed under an older, more hierarchical, social organization (cf. Conry-Murray, 2009a, 2009b; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994, for similar gender differences in reasoning found in more traditional cultures).

Interestingly, when young adults reasoned about the traditional gender roles, justifications supported both egalitarian and traditional role divisions, which varied by the specific role under consideration. In general, when supporting more egalitarian gender roles, young adults most often referred to increasingly egalitarian social conventions (e.g., availability of day care and associated egalitarian norms and expectations). Women were also particularly likely to refer to issues of capability and fairness. They argued that men are also capable of taking care of children and that women are capable of financially supporting their families. Women were also particularly likely to argue that the female homemaker role was an issue of fairness. These results again suggest that many young adults are aware of social conventional influences on gender roles, such as the ongoing changes in society

that aim to establish increasingly egalitarian social structures and associated conventional expectations (Amato et al., 2003; Askari et al., 2010; Therborn, 2004). However, women were also focused on moral concerns of fairness and the capabilities of men and women in their justifications, reflecting the fact that their primary roles are tied to the family—where the least change has occurred.

In contrast, when young adults supported the maintenance of the traditional gender roles, men and women used similar types of reasoning. Justifications regarding women's roles were primarily based on stereotypes and issues of well-being. More specifically, they argued that children's well-being benefits if women stay at home and that women are more capable of taking on responsibility for the home and children than men are. In contrast, reasoning regarding men's breadwinner role was based primarily on social conventional reasoning, especially for men. For example, participants often argued that men can get better jobs and earn more than women, and men also argued that it is men's social obligation to support the family. The reliance on social conventions and stereotypes shows that this type of reasoning is an enduring rationale for maintaining traditional role divisions, at least in some circumstances (Bigler, Arthur, Hughes, & Patterson, 2008; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Sinno & Killen, 2009). It is possible that the male role was seen more in social-conventional terms because women's participation in the work force is now widely accepted (Fan & Marini, 2000; Lyonette, Kaufman, & Crompton, 2011; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007) and that the continuing resistance to seeing men's and women's incomes as equally important (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Tichenor, 1999) may be justified by a focus on social organization that still often prevents women from earning as much as men do.

Many young adults also argued that whether men and women maintain these traditional roles is a matter of personal choice and that each family should decide how roles should be divided based on their unique situations and preferences. This finding reflects that some young adults believe that gender roles do not fall under the domains of morality and social conventions, but rather fall under personal jurisdiction (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 2006). Furthermore, it also corresponds with social experiences of greater egalitarianism, openness, individualism, and freedom of personal choice (Amato et al., 2003; Therborn, 2004; Triandis, 1989).

It is interesting that both those who argued for the traditional roles and those who argued for more egalitarian roles referred to the abilities of men and women. More specifically, those who argued for the traditional roles argued that women are more capable of taking care of the home and children than men are, whereas those who argued for egalitarian role divisions, especially women, argued that men are just as capable as women are in taking care of children and that women are as capable as men are in financially supporting their families. These findings are in line with the tenets of social role theory, which proposes that people have a tendency to attribute traits

to others that are consistent with their social roles (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Eagly & Wood, 1999). In this case, those who see housework and child care as the appropriate roles for women attribute traits to women that are consistent with the fulfillment of these roles, whereas those who see women's and men's roles as similar attribute similar traits to men and women.

In addition to these gender differences, we found differences in reasoning based on ethnic background. These ethnic differences were overall differences in types of justification, rather than specific to particular gender roles. This pattern of similar role beliefs may be because reasoning regarding specific roles may be dominated by gender differences, given that across societies, women are the ones who are disadvantaged by family roles (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Therborn, 2004). However, overall ethnic differences in the types of justifications still emerged, likely because these family roles are embedded within different social contexts (Therborn, 2004; Triandis, 1989). In particular, when supporting traditional role divisions, those from Asian backgrounds were more likely than those from European backgrounds to refer to existing social conventions and corresponding gender stereotypes. They also more often saw traditional gender roles as beneficial for individual and familial well-being. In contrast, young adults from European backgrounds were more likely than those from Asian backgrounds to justify traditional gender roles in terms of biological differences between men and women. A contrasting pattern was found in reasons supporting egalitarian role divisions, where Asian young adults were more likely to appeal to biology and fairness, whereas those from European backgrounds were more likely to appeal to egalitarian social conventions and corresponding capabilities of men and women or to personal choice.

Although these findings may seem paradoxical, it is important to consider how ethnicity may intersect with different types of social experiences and corresponding assumptions about what may be socially or biologically "normative." Social role theory (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 1999) can again provide a framework of interpretation. Family structures and social life within Asian cultural settings place greater emphasis on adherence to prescribed social roles and thus have more traditional ascribed roles for men and women (Therborn, 2004; Triandis, 1989; Zhang et al., 2003). Given this setting, Asian young adults can readily rely on social conventions to support traditional roles and may also attribute stereotypical traits to men and women that are in accordance with these roles (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Eagly & Wood, 1999). Thus, when they disagree with traditional roles, they look elsewhere by referring to ideas of fairness, well-being, and biology. In contrasts, European young adults experience more egalitarian role divisions (Therborn, 2004) and can refer to egalitarian social conventions or personal choice to support egalitarian gender roles. They also come to attribute traits and capabilities to men and women that correspond to these roles (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Eagly & Wood, 1999). Thus,

European young adults who hold more traditional attitudes may have to look elsewhere, such as to purported biological differences between men and women.

A noteworthy finding was that roles phrased to reflect egalitarian gender roles hardly elicited any justifications that disagreed with egalitarian sharing. This was not, however, because participants were always, or generally, highly egalitarian; indeed, many participants endorsed traditional role divisions in response to the traditional items. These findings correspond to other research showing that when measuring gender-role attitudes, individuals are more likely to support gender equality when items are phrased in an egalitarian manner than when they are phrased to highlight traditional gender roles (Baber & Tucker, 2006; Braun, 2008). An important implication is that where individuals fall on the traditional-egalitarian dimension may be, at least in part, a function of the phrasing of the particular items included in an attitude assessment (Braun, 2008). Thus, care should be exercised in measuring gender-role attitudes because items capturing traditional roles seem to discriminate better between egalitarian and traditional people. However, for those who believe that roles should be a matter of personal choice, traditional measures of gender-role attitudes are problematic and their ratings may not reflect their views accurately (Braun, 2008). These findings highlight the important contribution that can be made by assessments of the different types of reasoning underlying gender attitudes.

Although our study yielded important insights into young adults' reasoning regarding family roles, it is worth noting some limitations of our study. Our sample consisted of young European and Asian adults who were university undergraduates, who tend to have higher educational and socioeconomic levels and to be more egalitarian than the general population. In future work, it will be important to examine the ideas of others who have lower levels of education and come from lower socioeconomic statuses, as well as other ethnicities. Moreover, it is important to extend this new investigation to individuals who are older or who have established families in order to account for the impact of life experience on gender-role attitudes. Also, the particular gender roles we considered do not represent all family roles. Future work should also examine other family roles and gender roles from a broader context.

Finally, our findings also have implications for educational efforts to foster more egalitarian gender attitudes in youth. Our findings indicate that reasoning regarding gender roles is multifaceted: issues of social convention, morality, and personal choice are all considered depending on the particular gender role under discussion and the gender and ethnic background of individuals. Although we found general group differences, there was also considerable variation within groups, indicating that reasoning about gender roles involves complex attempts to coordinate a variety of issues. Given the mix of gender and ethnic groups in most educational settings (e.g., classrooms), the best approach to increase egalitarian attitudes may be to address the topic of family roles in its full complexity, discussing all three domains from both traditional and egalitarian perspectives.

Toward this end, psychological research can be used in discussions of gender roles in educational settings. For example, research shows that high-quality day care has beneficial effects on children's development (Melhuish, 2001), which provides evidence refuting the belief that children can only develop optimally at home with their mother. Research can also provide valuable information regarding social conventional issues, along with the implied capabilities of men and women. For example, research shows that men are just as effective as women at taking care of children when they become primary caregivers (Hochschild, 2003; Walzer, 1998) and that women are fully capable of performing well in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Empirical research can therefore contribute to fostering more egalitarian attitudes in young people, potentially leading to greater gender equality in society and families. As Western society continues to change, and empirical or factual assumptions change, associated moral evaluations often follow suit, and so people's perceptions of gender roles will also change (Wainryb, 1991). This cycle would make it possible to move toward the establishment of a more equal and fair society, which would benefit both men and women.

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