

Gender Role Attitudes During Divorce & Remarriage: Plastic or Plaster?

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Introduction & Purpose

Gender Role Attitudes

- Conceptualized on a continuum ranging from traditional to egalitarian
 - Traditional attitudes** – Individuals typically respond to others based on stereotypical characteristics connected to their sex; tend to view marital roles as specialized and distinct often based on a husband-breadwinner/wife-mother or homemaker system with an implied differential power structure (King et al., 1981)
 - Egalitarian attitudes** – Individuals typically respond to others independent of their sex; tend to emphasize shared capacities for economic output, familial nurturance, & power relations within the relationship (King et al., 1981)
- Affect many aspects of relational functioning including marital satisfaction (Lye & Biblarz, 1993) and marital discord and instability (Guilbert, Vacc, & Pasley, 2000).

Gender Role Attitude Malleability

- At the macro-level, research has documented changes in gender role attitudes by examining cohort and period effects including generational differences and cultural shifts. Findings suggest that gender role attitudes have become more egalitarian over time for all age cohorts (Ciabattari, 2001; Rogers & Amato, 2000).
- At the individual-level, gender roles attitudes are relatively stable, but may be altered in the context of meaningful life experiences such as college, marriage, the birth of a child, & transition into & out of the workplace (Bryant, 2003; Fan & Marini, 2000)
 - Fan and Marini (2000) concluded that there is both *stability* and *malleability* in gender role attitudes to be determined as a function of events or “specific socializing experiences” the individual undergoes (p. 277).
- The study attempts to substantiate and expand the current literature on gender role attitude malleability. By using a prospective approach with data across a 20 year period (1980 to 2000), this study explores gender role attitude change based on marital status change as divorce & remarriage are hypothesized to be *specific socializing experiences* which allows individuals to “re-do” or reconceptualize gender roles (Walzer, 2008)

Method

Procedure

Secondary data analysis of a 20-year longitudinal investigation entitled Marital Instability over the Life Course was conducted (Booth, Johnson, Amato, & Silver, 2000). In 1980, investigators recruited a large, nationally representative sample of married participants between the ages of 18 and 55 in households in the continental United States (N = 2,033 married persons; their spouses were not interviewed). Follow up interviews were conducted through 2000.

Analytic Sample

N = 590; Predominantly European American (93%) females (62%) with a mean age of 34.06 years

The current study examined data from 1980, 1988, and 2000. Inclusion criteria for the current study were that participants (1) had to be in first marital relationships at time one (1980), (2) had to have full data in each of the three waves of data examined (1980, 1988, and 2000), and (3) did not experience a second divorce or a higher order union by time three (2000).

Variables of Interest

Gender Role Attitude Traditionalism. Gender role attitudes were measured by a seven-item scale in which the participants rated each statement using a 4-point scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) with higher scores indicating more traditional attitudes. $\alpha = .70$ across the 3 time points.

Marital Experience. At time one, all of the respondents were in first marital relationships. Marital status transitions were tracked across the study. Participants were then grouped by marital status – continuously married, divorced, or divorced and remarried – at the final time point (2000).

Demographic variables. Demographic variables theoretically and empirically found to influence gender role attitudes were included: participant age; race was coded as white/non-white; education was reported as years of schooling; and the total number of children reported.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Due to macro-level changes in society, gender role attitudes in 1980 will be more traditional than gender role attitudes in 2000.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who divorce will report more egalitarian attitudes when they are divorced compared to their gender role attitudes reported in their first marriage. This is based on the premise that divorce is a period of transitions and “re-doing gender” (Walzer, 2008) and is congruent with cross sectional findings.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who divorce and remarry will report more egalitarian attitudes in their remarried relationship when compared to their attitudes in their first marital relationship based on findings from retrospective and qualitative studies (Sakraida, 2005).

Hypothesis 4: Our central hypothesis is that the experience of marital status change will be related to greater gender role malleability, such that those who experience marital status change (the divorced/not remarried and the remarried groups) will demonstrate significantly less traditional gender role attitudes across time compared to the relative stability expected for individuals who remain in first marital relationships.

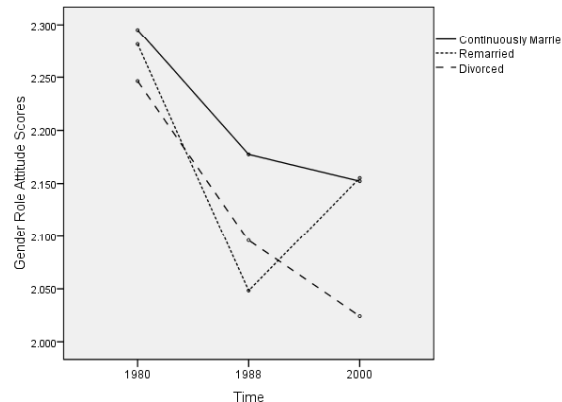
Results

Table 1. Gender role attitude traditionalism scale mean scores by marital status group with significant between-groups analysis of variance noted (N = 590).

Time	Full Sample (n = 590)		Continuously Married (n = 488)		Remarried (n = 54)		Divorced (n = 48)		F	Sig
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1980	2.29	.45	2.30	.44	2.24	.50	2.21	.43	1.13	.325
1988	2.16	.44	2.18 ^a	.43	2.01 ^b	.47	2.07	.48	4.91	.008**
2000	2.14	.38	2.16 ^a	.37	2.12 ^a	.39	2.00 ^b	.43	3.89	.021*

Note: Higher scores reflect more traditional gender role attitudes (scale ranges from 1 to 4); differences in superscripts by year indicate statistically significant mean differences between the groups when controlling for sex, age, race, education, and children. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1. Gender role attitude traditionalism scores between 1980 and 2000 based on marital status histories accounting for sex, age, race, education, and children (N=590).



Summary of Findings & Discussion

- To test hypothesis one, a mixed between-within subjects repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to evaluate period effects represented by the change in gender role attitudes for the entire sample between 1980 and 2000. As predicted, there was a statistically significant main effect for time. Mean differences from 1980 to 2000 suggest that on average, the entire sample reported more egalitarian attitudes in 2000 compared to 1980.
- To test hypothesis two, a mixed between-within subjects repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to assess whether divorced individuals ($n = 48$) in 2000 would report statistically significantly different mean level gender role attitude scores during divorced singlehood compared to their reported gender role attitudes when they were in first marital relationships. As predicted, there was a statistically significant main effect for time. Mean differences from 1980 to 2000 suggest that on average, divorced individuals reported more egalitarian attitudes compared to their earlier reports when married. The calculated effect size indicated a large shift in gender role attitudes ($Cohen's d = 0.77$). Hypothesis two was supported.
- To test hypothesis three, a mixed between-within subjects repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to assess whether individuals in remarried relationships ($n = 54$) in 2000 reported statistically significantly different gender role attitudes in their remarried relationship compared to their reported gender role attitudes when they were in first marital relationships in 1980. As predicted, there was a statistically significant main effect for time. Evaluation of the mean scores indicate that attitudes shifted towards slightly more egalitarian attitudes between first marriages ($M = 2.24, SD = .50$) and remarriages ($M = 2.11, SD = .39$). The calculated effect size indicates a modest shift ($Cohen's d = 0.38$).
- To test hypothesis four, a mixed between-within subjects repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to assess group differences in gender role attitude malleability across time among the three categories of participants based on marital experiences. Age, race, education, and children were entered as covariates. A significant time X marital status experience interaction effect was found, controlling for all else in the model, Wilks's Lambda = .97, $F(2, 585) = 9.596, p < .001$ (see Table 2). Hypothesis four was partially supported; changes over time were as expected for the divorced group, but not for the remarried group as noted in the post hoc comparisons:
 - At time one (1980), there were no significant differences across groups.
 - At time two (1988), the continuously married group was significantly higher (i.e., more traditional) than the remarried group; the remarried and divorced groups did not differ. Participants were categorized as “remarried” based on their marital status in 2000; therefore, we examined the actual marital status in 1988 of members of this group. Forty-four percent were still in first marital relationships; 26% were divorced; and 30% were remarried. An additional means comparison was conducted within this group, and controlling for all other factors, there were no statistically significant differences in gender role attitudes among members of the remarried group based on their marital status in 1980, $F(2, 53) = 1.24, p = .30$.
 - At time three (2000), the mean score for the continuously married group was significantly higher than the divorced group's mean score, but was not significantly different from the remarried group's mean score.
- While the shift in gender role attitudes between first marriage and second marriage was documented, it was clear that the magnitude of change was modest compared to the change in gender role attitudes for those who were in their first marriage in 1980 and subsequently divorced and remained single. This provided an indication that differential patterns of change could be uncovered across time between those who remarried and those who remained single after divorce. When all three groups were examined simultaneously across the three time points, those who divorced and remained single showed a steeper and consistent decline in traditional gender role attitudes. A pattern across time of a significant, albeit modest, shift toward more egalitarian gender role attitudes, followed by a shift toward more traditional gender role attitudes in 2000 was evident for those in remarried relationships. Those who remained continuously married showed a slight, but steady decline in traditional gender role attitudes across time.

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