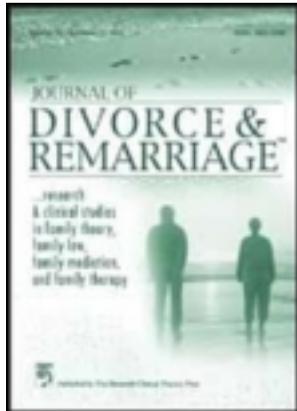


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An Examination of Gender Role Attitude Change Patterns Among Continuously Married, Divorced, and Remarried Individuals

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Gender role attitudes influence marital satisfaction and stability and are typically treated as stable traits in adulthood. Theory and retrospective studies suggest changes in the life course based on relationship histories; however, tests of these assumptions are virtually nonexistent. Analyses from a longitudinal, nationally representative U.S. sample of 590 married individuals who vary in their marital experiences revealed both period effects and distinct within-group change patterns. Over a 20-year time period all demonstrate a shift toward more egalitarian attitudes. However, contrary to retrospective accounts asserting a steep increase in egalitarian attitudes in remarriages, prospective data from men and women indicate a curvilinear pattern over time that is distinct from patterns observed for continuously married and divorced/not remarried individuals.

KEYWORDS *attitude changes, divorce, gender role, longitudinal, marriage, remarriage*

An abundance of literature exists dedicated to understanding how gender roles are socially constructed and how they influence daily life, including career goals (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004), one's decision to parent (Fan & Marini, 2000), social roles (Anderson & Johnson, 2003), and relationships throughout the course of life. In terms of relationships, gender roles have been shown

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to influence peer (Bukowski & Mesa, 2007), occupational (Kan, 2007), and parent–child relationships (Fagot & Leinbach, 1995), but it can be argued that gender roles are most clearly evident and influential within the marital context. Gender role attitudes affect many aspects of relational functioning and development including marital satisfaction (Lye & Biblarz, 1993) and marital discord and instability (Guilbert, Vacc, & Pasley, 2000).

In this study, our interest centers on whether relationship status transitions and gender role attitude changes cooccur across the life span. Research examining change in gender role attitudes in the United States typically has occurred at the macrolevel, examining changes in gender role attitudes across cohorts at a given time point or across generations (Ciabattari, 2001; Rogers & Amato, 2000). Although these types of studies are important for understanding broad cultural shifts in gender role attitudes, an understanding of microlevel influences is also needed to begin to understand the interplay between life course events and gender role attitude malleability within individuals' experiences.

Theoretically, one's identity or conception of self is typically characterized as a stable construction in adulthood (Stryker & Burke, 2000); similarly, the role sets and attitudes connected to those identities (i.e., being a wife, mother, church member, accountant, etc.) are also thought of as relatively stable. However, some identity theorists concurrently posit that these constructs can be malleable under certain circumstances. Identity disruption and role reconstruction might occur as a result of altered interpersonal interactions or intrapersonal perceptions (Pasley, Kerpelman, & Guilbert, 2001). Suggestions are that life events and transitions—including divorce and remarriage—alter an individual's assessment of roles, responsibilities, and attitudes (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). In the context of divorce and remarriage, individuals have the opportunity to redefine self, engage in new experiences, and ultimately choose another partner. Thus, life events are opportunities for development, growth, and change (Aldous, 1990). Little research has been conducted to move these ideas regarding change during the course of individual development from theory to empirical evidence, particularly in the context of divorce and remarriage.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine gender role attitude malleability prospectively across time among groups of individuals with differing marital histories. Specifically, we expected that gender role attitudes would remain relatively stable for those continuously married, and based on qualitative interviews with divorced (Walzer, 2008) and remarried individuals (Clarke, 2005), we expected that gender role attitudes would become more egalitarian over time among those who experience marital dissolution and remarriage.

We recognize, based on cognitive socialization theories, that individuals experience unique social contexts as a product of individual traits and unique life experiences. For example, factors such as sex (Kaufman, 2000),

age (Rogers & Amato, 2000), race (Kane, 2000), education (Bryant, 2003), and parenthood (Fan & Marini, 2000) have some influence on social power, interpersonal relationships, experiences, and relatedly, gender role attitudes. Therefore, these factors are considered in this study. We expect, however, that gender role attitude malleability will be similar for those with like marital status histories, accounting for social and demographic differences, as marital transitions likely produce broadly similar experiences and attitudinal changes (Hill & Hilton, 1999).

This type of research is relevant as the United States maintains one of the highest divorce rates (United Nations, 2001); therefore, the experience of movement in and out of marriage is fairly common. Our goal is to open up the dialogue and exploration of stability versus malleability in gender role attitudes across the life course in the context of significant life course events, thereby enhancing this study's relevance for researchers, clinicians, and family life educators interested in the development of gendered attitudes, specifically in the context of divorce and remarriage.

STUDIES OF GENDER ROLE ATTITUDE MALLEABILITY FROM A MACROLEVEL PERSPECTIVE

To date, the majority of studies addressing changes in gender role attitudes in marital relationships have examined cohort and period effects including generational differences and cultural shifts. Findings suggest that gender role attitudes—in general and within the marital context—have become more egalitarian over time at the macrolevel for younger cohorts (Rogers & Amato, 2000).

Further, Ciabattari's (2001) focus on period effects explored the cultural trend toward more egalitarian gender role attitudes for all age cohorts. She proposed that the feminist movement of the 1970s was a period effect experienced by all. Using several national, cross-sectional samples between 1974 and 1998, there is evidence to suggest that, on average, a notable decline in gender role traditionalism was reported for men regardless of their age. Similarly, Blee and Tickamyer (1995) found in a national, longitudinal sample of men in the United States that, on average, both subgroups reported significant overall changes in their gender role attitudes toward a more egalitarian direction between 1971 and 1981. These studies occurred during a time of pronounced macrolevel effects such as the Equal Rights Amendment (1972), Title IX (1972), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978). These events are period markers of societal shifts in views of women and subsequently gender roles. Although these studies underscore the influence of macrolevel effects, they fail to disentangle how individual life course events influence reported change in gender role attitudes.

GENDER ROLE ATTITUDE MALLEABILITY FROM A MICROLEVEL PERSPECTIVE

Meaningful life experiences and turning points in which the individual intentionally chooses to change, or less deliberately, must change to adapt to new circumstances are considered significant microlevel events. Through these events, personal identities and perceptions of self, including one's gendered lens, might be altered as individuals adapt to new experiences. Evidence is emerging to suggest that gender role attitudes change in the context of significant life course events including collegiate study (Bryant, 2003) and the transition to marriage and parenthood (Fan & Marini, 2000).

Fan and Marini (2000) examined the stability and malleability of gender role attitudes between 1979 and 1987 with a focus on significant life events such as educational achievement, employment status, entry into marriage, and birth of a child. For women, entry into marriage and leaving the labor force were associated with an increase in traditional gender role attitudes; no significant effects were found for men. Parenthood was associated with a shift in more traditional gender role attitudes for both men and women, and increased education correlated, on average, with more egalitarian attitudes for both. No systematic changes in gender role attitudes were due to maturation alone. Fan and Marini 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).

TRANSITION TO DIVORCE, SINGLEHOOD, AND REMARRIAGE

Although evidence suggests that marriage tends to promote more traditional attitudes (Fan & Marini, 2000), the influences of divorce and remarriage on gender role attitudes have received less attention. We do know that during the course of divorce, roles are likely to change (e.g., relational, parental, occupational). Hill and Hilton (1999) observed custodial parents as they coped with new roles postdivorce. During the transition to divorce, single parents had to adopt behavioral roles of both provider and caretaker as a matter of necessity regardless of their sex or previously held gender role attitudes. There was no examination, however, of whether or how gendered attitudes changed in accordance with these behavioral role changes.

One study could be found that examined changes in gender role attitudes longitudinally following divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991). Using data gathered in 1980 and 1988 from the Marital Instability over the Life Course study, Amato and Booth found that those who experienced divorce reported

more egalitarian attitudes in some domains, but not others. Specifically, participants reported more liberal views toward the “spheres of influence” typically associated with one’s sex (i.e., work outside the home and work inside the home), but attitudes did not become more egalitarian in other areas (i.e., the belief that a woman’s most important role is that of mother and the appropriateness of men earning larger salaries). From this, we have some evidence of attitudinal change toward more egalitarian views following divorce in certain domains.

Similarly, in a secondary data analysis of interviews with parents, Walzer (2008) posited that during the transition to divorce, gender role attitudes would be revised and reconstructed. From these qualitative results gathered over a 1-year period, Walzer presented themes related to “redoing” or reevaluating gender-specific roles. Often the participants’ views on paid work, family work, parental roles, and relational needs changed within the year after their separation. The assertion is that “marriage is a site of ‘doing’ gender, and for some ex-spouses, divorce is a site for ‘redoing’ gender” (Walzer, p. 18). It appears that the context of marital dissolution prompts some individuals to begin to reevaluate gendered norms. This theme of adapting and reconstructing attitudes after divorce is also found in a recent study of women in the United States. Conclusions are that for the majority of participants, “adapting to the role of being a divorcee and/or single parent involved new self-identities” (Sakraida, 2005, p. 82).

It is likely that self-identities and attitudes are again re-created if and when an individual decides to remarry, as remarriage creates a distinct marital context wherein one or both individuals have experienced the creation and termination of a marriage and postmarital singlehood. Information on gender role attitude malleability during the transition to remarriage has been explored in qualitative retrospective accounts. Smith, Goslen, Byrd, and Reece (1991) found from in-depth interviews that remarried couples—men and women—reported more egalitarian attitudes and preferred a nontraditional division of labor and power compared to their accounts of their first marriage. Similarly, Clarke (2005) conducted retrospective interviews with remarried women and found that they were more likely to endorse egalitarian gender role attitudes and behaviors that emphasize sharing, teamwork, and companionship compared to the participants’ recollections of first marital relationships. Some research has found evidence of greater “power sharing” and indications that women might actively select to remarry a spouse who endorses more egalitarian perspectives in terms of household and economic equality (Pyke, 1994; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996, cited in Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Based on this evidence, roles in remarriages seem to be based less on traditional role sets and more on negotiated agreements. Yet, there still remains a lack of prospective evidence to suggest that gender role attitudes change during the period of progression from marriage to divorce to remarriage.

THE CURRENT STUDY

This study utilizes a life course developmental framework coupled with elements of identity and role theory suggesting that gender role attitudes should be viewed within the context of societal influences as well as individual and family development (Aldous, 1990; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Thornton & Nardi, 1975). The study centers on substantiating and expanding the current literature on gender role attitude malleability, by using a prospective approach with data from a 20-year longitudinal study from 1980 to 2000 to explore changes over time in gender role attitudes based on marital histories. In particular, we extend the only prospective study of gender role attitudes following divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991) by including a broader time span and distinguishing between those who divorce and those who remarry.

Rationale for this study is based on, first, the considerable prevalence of remarriages that occur in the United States each year (Fields, 2003), and the lack of studies focused on the experience of remarrying compared to marrying. Second, within the context of marriage, gender role attitudes are found to impact relationship satisfaction and distress. Thus, there is a need to more fully understand factors that affect gender role attitudes. Examining if and how gender role attitudes change during marital dissolution and remarriage is a first step toward understanding more about the implications of the bidirectional nature of gender role attitudes and life course events and the implications these changes have for remarriages.

Accordingly, the primary purpose of this study was to assess changes in gender role attitudes among men and women in the context of differing marital status histories—continuously married, divorced and remained single, and divorced and remarried (i.e., a key proximal factor). We also consider that time-invariant characteristics (i.e., sex and race) and experiences (i.e., age, education, and parenthood) can influence the socialization of attitudes; therefore, the influence of these factors is accounted for in the analyses. The secondary purpose of this study was to explore how distal factors or period effects influence gender role attitudes by examining baseline gender role attitude change over time for the entire sample. Adding this element allowed us to place any changes observed within groups in the context of changes in gender role attitudes in general across the time period.

Hypotheses

HYPOTHESIS 1

Gender role attitudes in 1980 will be more traditional than gender role attitudes in 2000 for both men and women. In general, both married and nonmarried women tend to espouse more egalitarian gender role attitudes than men (Fan & Marini, 2000; Guilbert et al., 2000). We expected that

women would have less traditional attitudes than men at both time points, but we expect men and women to experience similar change patterns over time as period influences are shown to affect men and women similarly (e.g., Ciabattari, 2001).

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 for both men and women. We test for sex differences; however, we expect that change patterns across time will be similar for divorced men and women based on empirical studies of divorce (e.g., Walzer, 2008).

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. Again, we test for sex differences; however, we expect that change patterns across time will be similar for remarried men and women based on empirical studies of remarried men and women (e.g., Smith et al., 1991).

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. We test for sex differences; however, we expect that change patterns across time will be similar for men and women. In these analyses we controlled for factors found in the literature to influence gender role attitudes including age (Rogers & Amato, 2000), race (Kane, 2000), education (Fan & Marini, 2000), and children (Fan & Marini).

METHOD

Participants

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. Of those individuals eligible

to participate in the survey, 65% initially gave complete interviews. The sample consisted of 2,033 married persons; their spouses were not interviewed. When compared with U.S. Census data, the investigators reported that the sample was representative of married individuals with respect to age, race, household size, housing tenure, presence of children, and region of the country. Notably, participants were not given any form of compensation by the project investigators. Full procedural information is provided by Booth et al.

This study examined data from 1980, 1988, and 2000. Inclusion criteria for this study were that participants (a) had to be in first marital relationships at Time 1 (1980), (b) had to have full data in each of the three waves of data examined (1980, 1988, and 2000), and (c) did not experience a second divorce or a higher order union by Time 3 (2000). The resulting analytic sample included 590 participants. Sixty-two percent of the participants are female ($n = 367$). Ninety-three percent are European American. At Time 1, the participants ranged in age from 19 to 55 with a mean of 34.06 years ($SD = 8.60$).

Measures

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*). Mean scores were used for the analyses such that scores range from 1 to 4 with higher scores indicating more traditional attitudes. Four of the questions had to be reverse-coded. The scale was created by the original investigators based on information from prominent themes in the gender role literature pertaining to appropriate and desired roles in the home and workplace for husbands and wives. Internal consistency was demonstrated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which averaged $\alpha = .70$ across the three time points.

MARITAL EXPERIENCE

At Time 1, all of the respondents were in first marital relationships. Participants were then grouped by marital experiences based on their responses to marital status items across the study—continuously married, divorced, or divorced and remarried (see Table 1).

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Demographic variables theoretically and empirically found to influence gender role attitudes were also included in this study. Participant age was given

TABLE 1 Demographic Information Including Age, Race, Education, and Average Number of Children by Final Marital Status and Sex ($N = 590$)

	First Marriage	Divorced/Single	Divorced/Remarried
Males	$n = 185$	$n = 14$	$n = 24$
Age in 1980	36.32	28.71	28.96
Race: European American	174 (94.1%)	12 (85.7%)	22 (91.7%)
Education: Years of school	14.39	14.36	14.75
Average number of children	2.07	1.14	1.17
Females	$n = 303$	$n = 34$	$n = 30$
Age in 1980	34.23	33.32	27.87
Race: European American	282 (93.1%)	30 (88.2%)	29 (96.6%)
Education: Years of school	13.86	13.94	13.30
Average number of children	1.96	1.79	1.24

in years; race was coded as White or non-White; education was reported as years of schooling; and the total number of children was reported.

RESULTS

Prior to testing specific hypotheses, initial descriptive statistics for the Gender Role Attitude Traditionalism Scale were computed across each of the three time points (Table 2). Preliminary assumption testing was also conducted to check for independence, normality, and sphericity or equality in variance, with no serious violations noted.

To test Hypothesis 1, a mixed between-within subjects repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) was conducted to evaluate period effects represented by the change in gender role attitudes for the entire sample between 1980 and 2000 and for changes across time based on sex (i.e., the between-subject factor). As predicted, there was a statistically significant main effect for time, Wilks's Lambda = .89, $F(1, 588) = 76.33$, $p < .0001$. Mean differences from 1980 ($M = 2.29$,

TABLE 2 Gender Role Attitude Traditionalism Scale Mean Scores by Marital Status Group With Significant Between-Group Analysis of Variance Noted ($N = 590$)

Time	Full Sample ^a		Continuously Married ^b		Remarried ^c		Divorced ^d		<i>F</i>	Significance
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
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 1–4); differences in subscripts by year indicate statistically significant mean differences between the groups when controlling for sex, age, race, education, and children.

^a $N = 590$. ^b $n = 488$. ^c $n = 54$. ^d $n = 48$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

$SD = .45$) to 2000 ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .38$) suggest that on average, the entire sample reported more egalitarian attitudes in 2000 compared to 1980. The effect size calculated for the mean change indicated a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.50$). There was also a significant Time \times Sex interaction effect, Wilks's Lambda = .99, $F(1, 588) = 4.15$, $p > .05$, such that men's decrease slope in traditional attitudes across time was significantly greater than that of women over time. Although men have a greater decrease slope, post hoc analyses indicate that both women ($t = 5.20$, $p < .001$) and men ($t = 7.46$, $p < .001$) report statistically significant changes over time toward more egalitarian attitudes. Also as expected, women reported less traditional gender role attitudes than men in both 1980, $F(1, 588) = 19.38$, $p > .001$; women $M = 2.23$, $SD = .44$; men $M = 2.39$, $SD = .44$; and 2000, $F(1, 588) = 8.15$, $p > .01$; women $M = 2.11$, $SD = .36$; men $M = 2.20$, $SD = .40$. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

To test Hypothesis 2, 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 (i.e., 1980) and for changes across time based on sex (i.e., the between-subject factor). As predicted, there was a statistically significant main effect for time, Wilks's Lambda = .77, $F(1, 46) = 13.929$, $p < .001$. Mean differences from 1980 ($M = 2.22$, $SD = .43$) to 2000 ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .43$) 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 $d = 0.77$). There was no Time \times Sex interaction effect, indicating that men and women who experienced divorce changed similarly in their gender role attitudes. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

To test Hypothesis 3, a mixed between–within subjects repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to assess whether individuals in remarital relationships ($n = 54$) in 2000 reported statistically significantly different gender role attitudes in their remarital 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, Wilks's Lambda = .93, $F(1, 52) = 4.2$, $p < .05$. Evaluation of the mean scores indicates that attitudes shifted toward 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 $d = 0.38$). Again, no Time \times Sex interaction effect was detected, indicating that men and women who were divorced and remarried experienced similar gender role attitude malleability. Hypothesis 3 was supported.

To test Hypothesis 4, a mixed between–within subjects repeated measures analysis of covariance was conducted to assess group differences in

gender role attitude malleability across time among the three categories of participants based on marital experiences (those who experienced marital continuity, those who divorced and were not remarried in 2000, and those who divorced and were remarried in 2000) and by sex. Age, race, education, and children were entered as covariates. A significant Time \times 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 and Figure 1). There was not a significant three-way Time \times Marital Status \times Sex interaction effect, Wilks's Lambda = .99, $F(4, 1154) = .63$, $p = .64$, suggesting no sex differences in gender role attitude scores over time by marital status experience.

Post hoc comparisons using the least significant difference test indicated that the mean score for all groups at Time 1 (1980) were not significantly different when they were all in their first marriages. At Time 2 (1988), the continuously married group was significantly higher (i.e., more traditional) than the remarried group; the remarried and divorced groups did not differ. We note that men and women 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

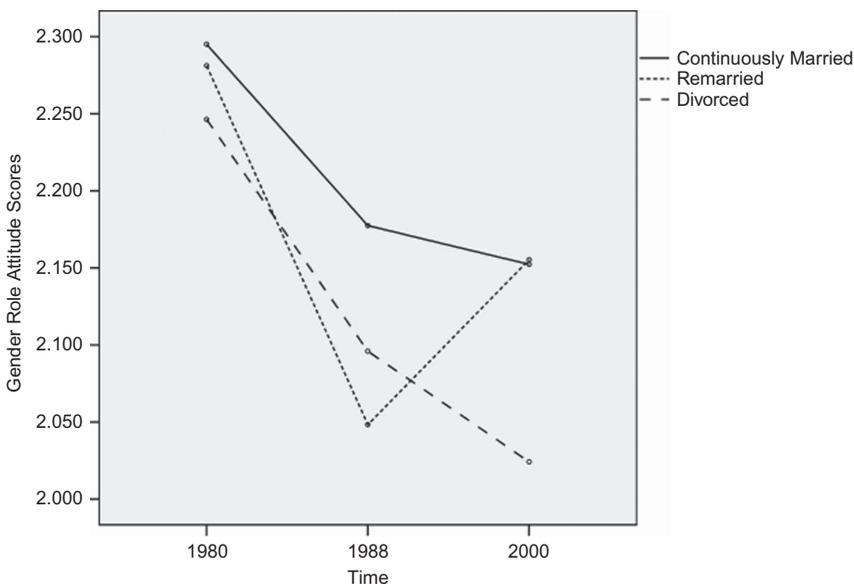


FIGURE 1 Gender role attitude traditionalism scores between 1980 and 2000 based on marital status histories accounting for sex, age, race, education, and children ($N = 590$). *Note.* The scale ranges from 1 to 4 with higher scores indicating more traditional attitudes.

role attitudes among members of the remarried group based on their marital status in 1980, $F(2, 53) = 1.24, p = .30$.

At Time 3 (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. Hypothesis 4 was partially supported; changes over time were as expected for the divorced group, but not for the remarried group.

DISCUSSION

Based on previous findings in the gender role literature and in accordance with the assumptions of role theory and identity theory, the purpose of this study was to explore gender role attitude malleability within the context of marital status transitions. The majority of findings in previous research related to gender role attitude malleability occur at the macro- or cultural level of study. Only a few have considered individual life course events (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Fan & Marini, 2000), and only one has prospectively examined changes in the context of divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991). This study examined gender role attitude change over a 20-year period for groups of individuals, distinguished by similar marital status transition experiences.

Sociological Effects on Gender Role Attitudes

Examination of gender role attitude change between 1980 and 2000 revealed significant period effects. On average, all participants reported more egalitarian gender role attitudes over the course of this 20-year period; men's gender role attitudes changed at a greater rate than women's. It is possible that significant cultural events contributed to this macrolevel or period effect on gender role attitudes including advances for women in the workforce and in politics with the appointment of the first woman to the Supreme Court in 1981, reaffirmation of a woman's right to decide on abortion (i.e., *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 1992), and even the birth of the National Fatherhood Initiative in 1994, along with cultural norm shifts that promote fathers' increased involvement in family life.

Gender Role Attitude Malleability in the Context of Marital Status Transitions

Examination of gender role attitude change over time in the context of marital status transitions revealed more egalitarian attitudes for individuals who divorced and remained single, compared to their own attitudes in first marital

relationships, and for individuals between their first marital and their remarital relationships. This is consistent with the few studies that have focused on changes for individuals who experience divorce and for those who experience a first and a subsequent marriage. Smith et al. (1991) found that individuals retrospectively comparing their first marital relationship to their remarriage reported more egalitarian gender role orientations in their remarriages than their recollection of their first marital experiences. Qualitative studies also indicate that divorced individuals report “redoing” or reevaluating gender-specific roles (Walzer, 2008). Here, we examine potential shifts longitudinally.

Although 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 divorced and not remarried in 2000. 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 remarital relationships. Those who remained continuously married showed a slight but steady decline in traditional gender role attitudes across time. This Time \times Group interaction was evident controlling for factors associated with gender role attitudes (age, race, education, and parenthood); further, this pattern of change was similar for men and women who experienced like marital status transitions.

Interestingly, in 1988, when the remarried group differed significantly from the continuously married group, a demographic profile of the remarried group revealed that the participants report diverse marital status at that time point of the study. Nearly half of individuals were still in their first marriage at the time when this group—who would all eventually divorce and remarry by the conclusion of the study—reported the most egalitarian attitudes. This group, however, did not differ in their gender attitudes based on their marital status in 1988, providing an indication of variability in the timing of attitude shifts. Without additional information, we can only speculate as to whether and why gender role attitudes might begin to shift in a more egalitarian direction prior to divorce. Hetherington and Kelly (2002) noted from their longitudinal study of divorce that “post-divorce life begins within the marriage” (p. 42), meaning that snap decisions to divorce rarely occur. Individuals experience a breakdown of the marriage and often have some time to prepare for life after marriage. This transitioning process seems to be a context for promoting some attitudinal change related

to self, the relationship, and roles within the relationship. Hetherington and Kelly additionally noted that “for many couples, the fighting is long over and a period of distancing and sadness occurs as affection, respect, and the marriage unravel” (p. 33).

This paints a picture of the couple becoming more distinct as individuals with separate—and potentially novel—attitudes about the relationship as well as discrepancies between actual and desired roles. It also suggests that the event of divorce does not necessarily dictate or begin the process of attitudinal change surrounding gender roles, but rather attitude change can occur prior to marital dissolution, and might even contribute to it. Hetherington and Kelly (2002) observed the stability/instability of traditional marriages when one or both partners alter their gender role behaviors and attitudes and noted “the Achilles heel of traditional marriage is change. . . . When one or the other partner begins to behave untraditionally, trouble follows” (p. 34).

Equally interesting is the unexpected pattern that emerged when examining the two married groups in 2000. The remarried group mean is not significantly different from the mean of the continuously married group; thus, we find a statistically significant shift in the remarried group’s gender role attitudes by 1988 and again in the opposite direction, by 2000. Although these shifts across time are modest, they do reveal a pattern of reversal not previously presented or discussed in research. Retrospective accounts in previous research indicating perceived differences in gender role attitudes between first marriage and remarriage (e.g., Clarke, 2005) could as much be capturing period effects as postdivorce effects. That is, this study shows that average gender role attitudes at a given point in time within marriage are similar, whether in a first or subsequent marriage. Although remarried individuals’ perceptions accurately describe more egalitarian gender role attitudes, it is likely that continuously married individuals would describe a similar shift. What is noteworthy is the comparatively greater elasticity in gender role attitudes over time demonstrated by the remarried group.

Those who were divorced at Time 3 became increasingly egalitarian over time and, by 2000, had significantly more egalitarian gender role attitudes than either of the married groups. Unlike the divorced and remarried group, the divorced and single group does not make a shift toward more traditional gender role attitudes. Instead, the group steadily becomes more egalitarian over time to an extent greater than that of period effects.

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) documented that men and women experience events and difficulties not expected in the years following their divorce if a remarriage does not occur. They continue to operate in less gendered roles. It is likely that the necessity of performing both “male” and “female” roles is associated with continued and enhanced egalitarian

attitudes. Those who remarry might resume some gender-specific roles and behaviors leading to an increase in traditional attitudes. This interplay of behaviors and attitudes across time, however, can only be speculated. Findings here identify a pattern of change for those who remarry that is distinct from those who do not; this study opens the way for further exploration of shifts in gender role attitudes for those who experience marital transitions. Both predictors and outcomes of different patterns of change will inform our empirical knowledge base, as well as inform practice.

Limitations

This study offers some indications that gender role attitudes are malleable at the microlevel of development, particularly in the context of marital status transitions. Limitations of the study, however, are acknowledged and some cautions in interpretations of the findings are suggested. Although the overall sample size is substantial, the subsamples of those who experienced marital status transitions are relatively small. In addition, the data collected in 1980 were representative of the U.S. population in terms of age, sex, and race; however, attrition rates differed by race and socioeconomic status. Data for these analyses were not weighted; thus, the results predominantly reflect the experiences of European American married persons.

An additional limitation of this study is that these data were collected at prescribed intervals and participants in each group varied by length of marriage, time since divorce, and time since remarriage, as well as by marital status at the midpoint. Therefore, only general patterns of change between groups are presented.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the prevalence of the experiences of divorce and remarriage in the United States and the influential nature of gender role attitudes (Fan & Marini, 2000; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004), further study of gender role attitude change in the context of marital status transitions will serve to promote understanding of the processes for altering and creating more functional within-couple gender role beliefs. Comparison studies based on marital status groups provide some useful information in describing the group profiles of individuals who experience divorce and remarriage and those who experience divorce and continued singlehood. Continued work using methods for modeling change at the individual level can reveal more of the nuances regarding timing and the context of change, as well as the implications for marital quality and stability.

In future research, examination of additional individual-level variables such as religiosity, cohabitation, and workforce participation, will be

valuable in the process of understanding how these factors influence attitudinal stability and change. Additionally, individual and relational well-being indicators can be used to investigate how certain gender role attitudes are related to individual satisfaction and relational quality and stability. To date, there is little information available addressing the functionality of certain gender role attitudes in the context of marital status transitions. That is, are certain gendered attitudes more practical or useful in enduring and flourishing during the transition to divorce as well as the transition to remarriage?

Examining congruence between gender-based attitudes and behaviors over time would also make a contribution to the literature on marital status transitions. Examining the timing, context, and order of attitudinal and behavioral change can be valuable information for researchers, therapists, and marriage educators. That is, do attitudes and behaviors change somewhat concurrently over the course of divorce and remarriage or do patterns of change in attitudes and behaviors operate more independently based on the context of the divorce or remarriage trajectory (e.g., sex of the individual, whose decision it was to divorce, parental status, length of time divorced before remarrying, etc.)? Very important, too, is the examination of the transactional dyadic process of gender role attitude and behaviors shifts among couples across marital transitions. When and how is congruence attained between couples—and how do differing patterns affect relational quality and stability?

Finally, enhancing diversity in research will broaden our understanding of gender role change patterns. Oversampling of continuously and noncontinuously married ethnic minorities will serve as a means for researchers and practitioners to better understand the potentially distinct processes of gendered attitude and behavior change across and within ethnic groups.

Practical Implications

Sex is a predominant organizing principle among cultures and societies as well as within marital relationships (Coltrane, 1998). Whether or not couples talk explicitly about gender-based roles based on their sex and their attitudes pertaining to those roles, research continues to demonstrate that gender role attitudes have considerable bearing on marital quality and relational distress. This study contributes to this body of research by first demonstrating that gender role attitudes are not fixed belief systems across individual life course development. Instead, it appears that both cultural influences and life course factors influence one's perception of appropriate or desirable gender roles. This study found that life course experiences—specifically, marital status transitions—either change the way people think about appropriate or desired gender roles or result from changes in gender role attitudes. This has important implications for service providers.

Therapists and marriage educators can utilize this information with clients by first creating an awareness of gender role attitudes within couple relationships. Role-making theory maintains that these attitudes become second nature or ingrained within the individual or the relationship. Bringing what might be implicit beliefs and assumptions into the realm of awareness might help the couple to create shared meaning about gendered roles within the marriage.

Because gender roles are a predominant feature in couple relationships, it is important for couples at any stage—premarital, newly married, or long-term marital relationships—to process their conceptualizations for appropriate or desired gender roles; however, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) discussed the importance of creating a language for couples to process gender role attitudes and assumptions, particularly for newly married couples. We suggest that actively engaging in discussion about gender roles and gendered expectations seems particularly relevant for newly remarried couples as well, given the comparatively greater flexibility shown for this group.

Because the state of the research does not allow for a “prescription” of patterns of functional gender role attitudes (i.e., we have no information from this study or consensus from others on what patterns of change over time predict individual well-being, as well as relational quality and stability), we can only emphasize the evidence that gender role attitudes can be altered in adulthood. Evidence suggests that dyadic congruence in gender role attitude is associated with greater marital quality and marital stability (Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Thus, the recognition that gender role attitudes can change might lead to efforts for greater couple congruence, and subsequently, greater relational quality.

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APPENDIX Gender Role Attitude Traditionalism Scale

After each of the following statements, indicate whether you strongly agree (1), agree (2), disagree (3), or strongly disagree (4) with each statement.

1. A woman's most important task in life should be taking care of her children.*
 2. A husband should earn a larger salary than his wife.*
 3. It should not bother the husband if a wife's job sometimes requires her to be away from home overnight.
 4. If his wife works full-time, a husband should share equally in household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and washing.
 5. If jobs are scarce, a woman whose husband can support her ought not to have a job.*
 6. A working mother can establish just as good a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
 7. Even though a wife works outside the home, the husband should be the main breadwinner and the wife should have the responsibility for the home and children.*
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*Reverse-coded.