

“Insights into gender role ideologies from a couple-level perspective”

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Abstract

Currently, few surveys collect measures of gender role attitudes of both partners (UK’s BHPS and Understanding Society are exceptions). While surveys often include measures that capture both partners’ gender *behaviors*, gender role attitudes are often self-reported only by the respondent. Due to processes of selection into and out of union over the life course, gender gaps in gender role attitudes between women and men overall may not reflect gender gaps in gender role attitudes between partners within heterosexual unions. As attitudes and behaviors highlight distinct facets of gender inequality, this lack of data hampers our ability to understand gender dynamics in families.

A growing literature has recently begun attempts to integrate between streams of literature on gender role attitudes and family dynamics (e.g. Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015). For example, dissimilarity between partners’ gender role attitudes is found to negatively affect relationship dynamics in general (Hudde & Engelhardt, 2020), and to increase union dissolution in particular (Raz-Yurovich et al. 2022).

We propose to provide input for a research perspective that focuses on couples and between-partner differences in gender role attitudes. This perspective takes into account attitudes about fairness in gender behaviors (Arpino et al. 2015), and feelings of partners being underbenefitted/overbenefitted (Leopold 2019). Moreover, this perspective suggests that measuring consensus between partners’ gender role attitudes, as well as the size of the gap in their attitudes, will enrich our understanding of family dynamics including relationship satisfaction, childbearing and union dissolution.

As part of the couple-level perspective, we further emphasize that in survey questionnaires it is particularly important to address attitudes towards men’s roles in the domestic sphere (Okun and Raz-Yurovich 2019). We suggest considering attitudinal questions that get at whether the “blame” for the unequal division of domestic labor is put on men themselves or on the “structural constraints” of the labor market that prevent men from being more active in the home (Brinton & Oh 2019).

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