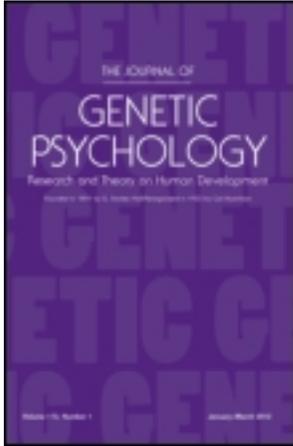


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### Adolescents' Reasoning About Parental Gender Roles

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# Adolescents' Reasoning About Parental Gender Roles

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**ABSTRACT.** In an examination of how adolescents reason about several factors related to division of childcare labor, 38 adolescents, including 20 girls ( $M$  age = 16.36 years,  $SD$  = .50) and 18 boys ( $M$  age = 16.59 years,  $SD$  = .62) were interviewed about conflicts between a mother and a father over which parent should stay home with the child, the authority of the father, and similar issues in a traditional culture. The relative income of each parent was varied. Participants considered the needs of the child most when reasoning about infants, and the right to work most frequently when reasoning about preschoolers ( $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .35$ ). The majority (71%) did not endorse the husband's authority over the wife. However, boys were more likely than girls to emphasize the mother's responsibility to the child over her right to work ( $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .23$ ). Implications for gender equity and adolescents' future goals were discussed.

**Keywords:** adolescents, gender norms, moral development

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Advances in workforce opportunities for women have been steady over the past few decades, but advances in division of labor at home have lagged behind (Hochschild & Machung, 1989), even with some recent advances in men's participation at home (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). The inequalities found at home play a role in the development of children's social and moral reasoning, including the development of a sense of justice (Okin, 1989), yet there is very little research on how children reason about gender inequalities within family relationships (except see Schuette & Killen, 2010; Sinno & Killen, 2009). The purpose

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of this study was to examine how adolescents, who are transitioning to adult roles themselves, make judgments about the distribution of work and childcare responsibilities.

Traditionally structured marriages, while certainly containing elements of equality and reciprocity, tend to perpetuate hierarchical relations of dominance and subordination within families. In their work on the transition to parenthood, Cowan and Cowan (1992) reported that the negotiation of the division of labor in the family is one of the greatest sources of conflict for new parents. Furthermore, they found that even couples who intend to share equally the childcare and housework are surprised at the rapidity with which they fall into traditional patterns after the birth of a child. Other research (Hochschild, 1989) has also shown that mothers and fathers do not share the work of the family equally, resulting in about 15 more hours of work a week for wives than their husbands when both work at home and out of the home are compared. More recently, Bianchi et al. (2006) showed evidence of improvement—men in 2000 did about twice as much childcare and housework, compared to men in 1965, but even with these increases, they still do about half as much of this work as women.

Research has shown that patterns of inequality between parents affect their children. Benin and Edwards (1990) examined the effects of inequalitarian family arrangements on the distribution of household work among children and adolescents. Their results confirm that in families where both parents work full-time, mothers average nearly twice as much unpaid family work (the second shift) as the fathers. Critically, the inequalities in the parents' division of labor were magnified in the differential amount of work required from their adolescent sons and their daughters. More egalitarian patterns of outside-the-home work arrangements were related to more *inegalitarian* gender divisions of labor within the family, for both parents and the children.

Although unequal distributions of labor within families have been well documented, there has been little research into how adolescents think about the division of childcare labor, and no research that we know of has been conducted with adolescents. In studies with children, Sinno and Killen (2009) showed that children judged that working outside the home is for both men and women, but that only women should stay home with children. Schuette and Killen (2010) also found that children sometimes endorse stereotypes within the family. However, adolescents may be more likely to make judgments that consider multiple facets related to fairness, gender roles, and the pragmatics of the family's financial situation. Adolescents have a good understanding of the content of gender norms and they recognize that women have less power than men (Neff, Cooper, & Woodruff, 2007). There is also some evidence that they are increasingly flexible about who should and who can perform gendered activities (Signorella, Bigner, & Liben, 1993). However, adolescents are also sensitive to the consequences of transgressing gender norms (Stoddard & Turiel, 1985), and some research has shown that they judge exclusion based on gender positively when it is ambiguous

(Horn, 2003) or when it can be justified as aiding group functioning (Killen & Stangor, 2001). These findings indicate that adolescents are aware of multiple features of gender norms; in the present study we examined how they coordinate many of these features in judgments of division of childcare duties.

Along with increased reasoning abilities, adolescence is a period of an individual's examination of identity and future goals. Therefore, it is important to examine adolescents' developing reasoning about division of childcare labor to understand how inequalities in the family are perpetuated. We examined adolescents' judgments about division of labor in the family as it pertains to work outside the home and the care of children. We assessed several aspects of reasoning about these issues, including fairness and welfare (moral considerations), authority and traditional roles (involving conventional considerations), and what has been referred to as informational aspects of situational contexts, including beliefs about who can best care for children (see Turiel, 2002; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987).

The moral domain is concerned with prescriptive issues of justice, rights, and welfare, and pertains to how people ought to relate to each other, whereas the conventional domain pertains to concepts of the regulation of social interactions within social systems, and the authority relations and role expectations that coordinate those interactions. An extensive body of research has shown that adolescents distinguish the moral domain from the conventional domain, (for reviews, see Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006) and Turiel (2008) and others found that in many situations judgments about moral issues need to be coordinated with judgments about conventional issues (Turiel, 2008). Concepts of morality are not defined by the existing social structure or arrangements, but are grounded in principles of justice, welfare, and rights as applied to social interactions. In contrast, judgments about conventions are contingent on social organization, rules, authority, and existing social practices.

While extensive research shows that adolescents distinguish between the moral and conventional domains according to the criteria described previously, issues related to gender roles involve both moral and conventional aspects which must be coordinated. For example, it may be that in one culture conventions dictate that mothers put the children to bed, while in another it is the fathers. Neither arrangement necessarily implies unfairness or harm, and thus is a matter of convention. However, when the moral domain is involved (and harm or unfairness exist), we expect that adolescents would consider both the moral and conventional elements of the situation, even while they reason about the two domains differently. We examined adolescents' reasoning about these issues both in a familiar context (where the location is left unstated) and in a context called "another country" to determine whether they generalize their judgments to a new context. Generalizing judgments is a characteristic of moral judgments.

Judgments of division of childcare duties include issues of fairness and gender norms, but concerns with informational assumptions made about the context also influence decisions (Asch, 1952; Wainryb, 1991), such as beliefs about who can

most effectively fill each role. In her research, Wainryb (1991) found that informational assumptions about the efficacy of certain practices can affect the way that people judge those practices. An example involves judgments about spanking of children. Those who assumed that spanking is an effective way of teaching or socializing children did not judge that type of hitting as wrong—while judging other types of hitting as wrong. With regard to the division of labor within the family and potential inequalities, it may be that, for instance, assumptions about the effectiveness of the parenting of mothers or fathers, as well as the presumed needs of children of different ages, would influence judgments about the division of labor in the family.

Finally, there is some indication that reasoning about complex situations of gender inequality may differ for boys and girls, with adolescent boys in particular endorsing more traditional arrangements and with adolescent girls being more sensitive to issues of fairness (Conry-Murray, 2009; Killen & Stangor, 2001; Neff, 2001). Therefore, gender differences in reasoning about division of childcare labor were also explored.

### *Goals and Hypotheses*

The present study was designed to examine adolescents' judgments about fairness, family roles, and informational assumptions within family contexts. We assessed adolescents' judgments about who should work outside the home and who should stay home to care for children. Specifically, situations were presented to adolescents that were designed to highlight matters of differential power, individual rights, and interpersonal concerns pertaining to the needs of children and finances of the family. We included assessments of the role of relative economic power between husbands and wives on decision making regarding work roles, the legitimacy of authority within the relationship, and the relevance of the age of the children. To explore the role of economic power, adolescents were asked to evaluate stories in which (a) parents have equal income, (b) the husband earns a higher income, and (c) the wife earns a higher income. In addition, the age of children was varied to highlight role responsibilities regarding children's needs: The children being cared for in the stories were presented as either preschool children or infants. Of particular interest was the effect that increasing the dependency and nurturing needs of the child would have on evaluations of parental responsibility within the context of the specific economic situations. Judgments regarding the need for one parent to be home with the children, the parent who should assume that role, and the legitimacy of the husband's authority in making these decisions were assessed for combinations of financial power and age of child.

During adolescence reasoning about gender becomes increasingly complex. Adolescents are more flexible than younger children in their reasoning about gender (Carter & Patterson, 1982; Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006) but they are also sensitive to the consequences of transgressing gender norms (Stoddard

& Turiel, 1985). Thus, it was expected that adolescents would be capable of accounting for several different contextual features and that the choice of which parent should stay home would vary according to relative earning power and the age of the child. While the absence of research focusing on the particular contextual information we presented precludes specific hypotheses, in general, it was expected that adolescents would consider it more important for one parent to be home full-time with infants whose dependency and nurturing needs are greater than preschool children. Financial power was also expected to be a consideration that may lead adolescents to give greater priority for work to the spouse who earns more.

Hypotheses about whether moral or conventional goals would take precedence were also exploratory. We did expect some influence of conventional norms, and we explored this directly with questions about the traditional roles of men and women in the family. However, we also expected that moral concerns would be prominent.

Based on previous research, it was expected that adolescent boys and girls would take into account both family role obligations and issues of equity. However, we also expected that boys would be more likely than girls to prioritize the needs of the child than the wife's right to work.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 38 participants, 20 girls ( $M$  age = 16.36,  $SD$  = .50; age range = 15.75–17.17 years) and 18 boys ( $M$  age = 16.59,  $SD$  = .62; age range = 15.58–17.83 years) from a high school in a community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Demographic information regarding the school district indicated that the majority of students were from middle-class backgrounds. The ethnic composition of the sample was 68% Caucasian, 16% African American, 8% Asian, and 8% mixed racial background.

### *Design and Procedures*

After obtaining informed consent, participants were interviewed individually in one or two sessions approximately 1 to 1.5 hr in length for the entire interview. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for coding. The interview was designed to examine conceptions of fairness, personal rights, gender roles, and earning power in making decisions about work and family obligations. In the interview, three stories (see Appendix for the full stories) were read to participants. The stories described a husband and wife who are in conflict about the distribution of their work roles. The stories varied with regard to the prior work arrangements, choices about one or two parents working, and the relative potential incomes of

the husband and wife. All the participants received all stories, giving the study sufficient power despite the small sample size. The order of presentation of the income story types was counterbalanced within each gender.

### *Assessments*

In one story (referred to as *equal income*), the husband works outside the home while the wife (who previously worked) has stayed home to care for their children of 3 and 5 years old. A disagreement arises when the wife decides she wants to resume her career and the husband does not want her to because he thinks that mothers should stay home with the children. The parents were presented as having the potential for earning equivalent salaries.

In a second story (father higher income), the husband works outside the home while the wife (who has the educational background to work) has stayed home to care for the children. The husband and wife agree that one parent should stay home, but disagree as to who it should be. The wife wants to pursue a career, stating that it is now her turn to work after postponing her career. The husband states that he should work because he would earn more than the wife.

In a third story (mother higher income), both husband and wife work outside the home. They then jointly decide that one parent should stay home, but disagree as to who it should be. The wife wants her husband to stay home since she earns more money, whereas the husband wants his wife to stay home because he thinks that mothers should stay home with the children.

In each story the parents were first depicted as having two children of the ages of 3 and 5 years old. Participants were posed with the following assessments to ascertain their judgments and justifications regarding whether one parent (and which one) should stay home with the children, and whether a wife should acquiesce to her husband's wishes on the matter:

1. Should one of the parents stay home with the children? Why or why not?
2. Which parent should stay home with the children? Why?
3. Would it be alright for the wife to refuse to do what her husband says? Why or why not?

Within each story two contingencies were then presented. In the first, participants were asked to consider the same situation, but with the couple having only a 6-month-old infant. Participants were then posed with the same three questions listed previously. Then a second contingency was presented to assess the generalizability of judgments. Participants were asked to consider similar situations occurring in the context of another country where there was a widely held belief (and custom) that it was a wife's role to stay at home to care for her children, and that husbands were the only ones who were supposed to work outside of the home. The significant attributes of each story regarding financial status were maintained

for these situations. The following assessments were first posed with regard to a couple with 3- and 5-year-old children and then a couple with a 6-month-old infant:

1. Is it alright for the wife to want to work when her husband doesn't want her to? Why or why not?
2. Would it be alright for the wife to refuse to do what her husband says? Why or why not?

### *Coding and Reliability*

The initial evaluations for each question were coded as either positive (1), mixed positive and negative (2), and negative responses (3). The only exception to this system occurs with the question asking which parent should stay home with the child(ren). In this case, responses were coded as mother (1), either or both parent(s) (2), and father (3). Responses indicating the either or both parents should stay home were rare and so those categories were combined.

Justifications in response to the "why or why not?" questions were coded using categories derived from previous research (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Turiel, 1983) and adapted to the responses from 20% of the interviews and then applied to the entire sample. The justification categories are listed and defined in Table 1. The personal choice category was included originally, but it did not rise to the 10% cutoff level so it is not listed in the table. Justifications were scored dichotomously, with 0 indicating the justification as not used and 1 indicating it was. When a participant used more than one justification (up to two were coded), scores were proportions.

Coding reliability was assessed through recoding 25% of the protocols by a trained second judge. Interjudge agreement in the coding of the evaluations was 89% and Cohen's kappa was .75. In the coding of the justifications, agreement was 75%, and Cohen's kappa was .66.

## **Results**

Judgments about caretaking responsibilities were analyzed using repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) by income, age of child, and sex of participant, with income and age of child as repeated measures. Justifications with 10% or more of responses were also analyzed with repeated measures ANOVAs by justification category, income, age of child, and sex of participant, with justification category, income, and age of child as repeated measures. Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa, and Smith (2001) showed that ANOVAs are robust with dichotomous data. Lunney (1970) also showed that ANOVAs are appropriate for use with dichotomous data but he warned that when sample sizes are small, there may be difficulty detecting all differences. Therefore, additional differences not detected here are

**TABLE 1. Justification Coding Categories (and Examples)**

Domain	Category	Description
Moral	Child needs	References to the importance of the child's emotional, social, or intellectual development. Includes references to age-related needs. ("The baby already has an emotional attachment to its mother, so the mother should stay home.")
	Rights–fairness	References to individual rights and issues of fairness. ("It's only fair that the mother goes back to work if she wants since she's already taken time off.")
Conventional	Social roles and expectations	References to the idea that one gender is better suited to the task of child rearing because of societal training. ("Mothers are taught how to raise children.")
	Family harmony	References to mutuality and compromise that should be part of a marital relationship. ("They have to listen to each other and come to a decision together.")
	Social hierarchy	References to social custom and authority. ("She should do what he says because that's how they do things in that country.")
Pragmatic	Financial welfare	References to the financial needs of the family. ("The mother should stay home because it's always better to have more money coming into the family—this will make life easier for everyone")

possible. Interactions were followed up with ANOVAs using restricted samples, and Bonferroni corrected significance levels. Significant main effects for income were analyzed using Bonferroni matched-pair *t* tests. All significant main effects and interactions are reported unless they were qualified by higher order interactions. However, qualified main effects that were related to a hypothesis are also reported. Interactions that were not significant in follow-up analyses were not reported. Justifications and some evaluations were coded dichotomously.

#### *Coordinating Moral, Conventional, and Informational Elements of Division of Labor*

In each of the three stories participants were asked if one of the parents should stay home with the children or the infant. Across the three stories, most

(69%) responded that one parent should stay home. However, judgments as to whether one parent should stay home differed by story (income) and the age of the children. These findings are reflected in an income by age of child interaction,  $F(2, 72) = 6.22, p < .01, \eta^2 = .15$ . As can be seen in Table 2, there were no significant differences in judgments as to whether one parent should stay home in the different income scenarios when the child was an infant (stated a parent should stay home: equal income story, 87%; father higher income story, 92%; and mother higher income story, 84%), but participants were more likely to judge that a parent of preschool children should stay home when the father (55%) or the mother (63%) earned more than when the parents have equal incomes (32%),  $F(2, 72) = 7.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ . When responding to why one parent should or should not stay home, almost all (92%) justified it with child needs (which is classified as a moral category). No other justification rose to the 10% cutoff level, so no analyses were performed on justifications for this question.

In response to the question of which parent should stay home with the children or the infant, there was a tendency to consider conventional gender roles and to apply the informational assumption that mothers are better able to care for infants. Over all the stories, 49% responded that the mother should stay home with the children, while 18% responded that either or both parents could stay home and 34% said that the father should stay home. A main effect for the age of child,  $F(1, 36) = 19.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$ , indicated that participants were more likely to endorse the mother as the caretaker of an infant ( $M = 1.60, SD = 0.58$ ), than as caretaker of preschool children ( $M = 2.09, SD = 0.45$ ). However, there was also a tendency to consider income, as shown by a main effect for income situation,  $F(2, 72) = 16.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$ , which indicated that participants were significantly more likely to endorse the father as the parent who should stay home when the mother had the higher income ( $M = 2.29, SD = 0.64$ ), as compared with

**TABLE 2. Mean Responses to the Question “Should One Parent Stay Home With the Child(ren)?” by Story Income and Child’s Age**

Age of child(ren)	Income					
	Equal		Father earns more		Mother earns more	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Infant	1.24	0.63	1.16	0.55	1.26	0.64
Preschool	2.23 <sup>a</sup>	0.91	1.86	0.99	1.64 <sup>b</sup>	0.99

*Note.* 1 = yes, 2 = yes and no, 3 = no. Means in the same row with different superscripts differ significantly at  $p < .01$ .

either when the incomes were equal ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) or when the father earned more ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ).

Justifications for which parent should stay home included references to financial welfare (38%), child needs (26%), social roles and expectations (20%) and rights–fairness (11%). These justifications differed by income situation and age of child: for income by justification,  $F(6, 108) = 12.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .41$ ; for child age by justification,  $F(3, 54) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ . Follow-up analyses indicate that the financial welfare category,  $F(2, 42) = 36.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .63$ , was most likely to be used when the mother earned more (67%), and to a lesser degree, when the father earned more (43%). It was unlikely to be used when their incomes were equal (5%). The financial welfare category was also more likely to be used when the children were preschool age than when the child was an infant (46% vs. 31%),  $F(1, 21) = 11.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .35$ . Finally, the social roles and expectations category,  $F(2, 36) = 7.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .29$ , was more likely to be used when the parents' incomes were equal (36%) than in either of the unequal situations (9% for father earns more and 14% for mother earns more), indicating that social roles are subordinated to the financial welfare of the family.

### *Reasoning About Traditional Gender Roles*

Further investigation of gender roles came from questions about the father's authority in the family. Participants were asked to evaluate the wife's refusal to obey her husband. Across the different stories, most responded that it was legitimate to challenge traditional gender roles. With regard to the question, "Is it OK for the wife to refuse to do what her husband says?" 71% responded that it was OK for the wife to refuse, while 19% indicated a mixed response, and 10% said that it was not OK for the wife to refuse. There were no age or child or income situation effects. Justifications for judgments that the wife should or should not refuse to follow the husband's request were most frequently related to the moral categories of rights–fairness (39%) and child needs (25%). The categories of family harmony (13%), and financial welfare (10%) were also used. A child age by justification interaction,  $F(3, 36) = 5.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .32$ , indicated that the child needs justification,  $F(1, 13) = 12.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .48$ , was used more when the child was an infant (42%) than when the children were preschoolers (8%).

### *Do Judgments About Gender Roles Generalize to Another Country?*

The majority of participants (56%) responded that it was acceptable for women in another country to want to work (18% stated both OK and not OK, and 26% stated it was not OK), but this was affected by the age of the child. A main effect for child's age,  $F(1, 36) = 39.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .52$ , indicated that participants were more likely to say it is OK for a woman in another country to want to work when the children were preschoolers ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) than when the child was an infant ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ).

Justifications referred almost exclusively to moral issues of rights or fairness and the welfare of the child, indicating that conventions were not a large consideration. Rights–fairness (60%) was used significantly more than any other justification,  $F(2, 11) = 22.80, p < .001, \eta^2 = .81$  (child needs, 20%; financial welfare, 10%). A child's age by justification interaction,  $F(2, 24) = 12.76, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52$ , was followed up and results indicated that justifications related to child needs were used more often with regard to an infant (36%) than with regard to preschoolers (5%),  $F(1, 12) = 19.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .62$ . Justifications related to rights–fairness were used most often when the children were preschoolers (74% for preschoolers vs. 46% for the infant),  $F(1, 12) = 10.87, p < .01, \eta^2 = .48$ .

Most participants (67%) responded that it would be all right for the wife to refuse to do what her husband says in another country (18% endorsed yes and no, and 16% stated that it was not OK to refuse). A main effect for the age of the child(ren),  $F(1, 33) = 18.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .37$ , indicated that it was judged OK to refuse for situations involving preschool children ( $M = 1.30, SD = 0.47$ ) more often than in situations involving an infant ( $M = 1.58, SD = 0.71$ ).

Justifications for the question about the wife's refusal included concerns with rights–fairness (35%), child needs (30%), and family harmony (12%). A child's age by justification interaction,  $F(2, 22) = 15.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$ , indicated that the child needs category,  $F(1, 11) = 25.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .70$ , was used most frequently when the child was an infant (52% vs. 9% for preschoolers) and the rights–fairness category,  $F(1, 11) = 8.07, p < .016, \eta^2 = .42$ , was used most frequently when the children were preschoolers (48% vs. 22% for infants). These results show that adolescents generalize their moral judgments to a traditional culture. They are concerned about fairness more than adherence to local traditions, but they also consider the needs of the family and for some, the wife's desire to work is subordinated to the welfare of the infant.

### *Sex Differences*

Several sex differences emerged from the analyses described previously. In general, these differences confirmed our hypothesis that boys would endorse traditional roles more than girls. Boys were more likely to identify the mother as the parent who should stay home ( $M = 1.60, SD = 0.29$ ),  $F(1, 36) = 10.47, p < .01, \eta^2 = .23$ , than were girls ( $M = 2.03, SD = 0.39$ ). However, girls justified judgments about who should stay home by using the child needs category more than boys (39% vs. 13%),  $F(1, 18) = 14.27, p = .001, \eta^2 = .44$ .

Other sex differences indicated that boys were more likely to judge mothers as primarily responsible for childcare when the family had an infant. In the question regarding whether it would be OK for a wife to refuse to obey her husband's wish that she do the childcare, a child's age by sex interaction  $F(1, 33) = 4.77, p < .05, \eta^2 = .13$ , indicated that boys,  $F(1, 16) = 11.27, p < .01, \eta^2 = .41$ , but not girls, saw the wife's refusal as less legitimate when their child was an infant

( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) than when the children were preschoolers ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ), as Table 3 shows. Similar effects, but for both infants and preschool age children, were found when the adolescents responded to questions about a traditional culture. There, a main effect for sex,  $F(1, 33) = 5.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ , indicated that boys ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) again saw it as less legitimate for a wife to refuse to obey her husband than girls ( $M = 1.24$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ). In addition, a child age by sex by justification interaction,  $F(2, 22) = 4.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .30$ , indicated that boys used the child's needs justification significantly more in the infant stories for this question (67%),  $F(1, 17) = 9.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .35$ , than girls (26%).

By contrast, girls appeared to consider the right of the wife to work more than boys. In the question about whether it was OK for a wife to want to work in a traditional country, girls were more likely than boys to use the rights–fairness category. A sex by justification interaction,  $F(1, 12) = 10.87$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .48$ , indicated that the rights–fairness category was used more by girls (81%) than boys (39%).

### Discussion

This research examined the reasoning of adolescents about one aspect of sex roles and fairness in the family. Adolescents made judgments about the roles that husbands and wives fulfill in the caretaking of younger and older children in relation to parents' decisions to work and their respective power to earn financially for the family. The findings showed that the adolescents take multiple features into account in making judgments about who should stay at home to care for children and who is more entitled to work outside the home: The needs and welfare of children, which are seen to vary by age, were judged by adolescents as important to the decision as to who works and who stays at home. At the same time, the

**TABLE 3. Mean Response to the Question About Whether the Wife Should Obey the Husband, by Sex and Income**

Sex	Income situation					
	Equal		Father earns more		Mother earns more	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Boys	2.14	0.68	1.92 <sup>a</sup>	0.72	2.50 <sup>b</sup>	0.54
Girls	2.64	0.49	2.75	0.39	2.78	0.48

*Note.* 1 = yes, 2 = yes and no, 3 = no. Means in the same row with different superscripts differ significantly at  $p < .01$ .

individual choices and rights of each parent and the amount of money earned were factors that were also considered.

The adolescents often based their judgments on the welfare of the family as a whole and the children in particular. With regard to caretaking of infants, adolescents were consistent in their judgments that one parent should stay home, regardless of competing concerns with parental wishes to be working or the relative income of parents. Most often, adolescents identified the mother as the parent that should stay home with an infant. However, when the children were preschool aged, income was a consideration such that having a parent who earned more money was associated with the judgment that the other parent should stay home, citing the welfare of the family to justify their judgments. It appears that informational assumptions that mothers are better suited than fathers to care for infants played a role in these judgments.

Conventional sex roles were also influential. There was a tendency to identify the mother as the best caretaker for an infant, regardless of how her earning power compared to that of her husband. While infants may be seen as having special needs that mother can uniquely fill, even when reasoning about preschool age children, the tendency to endorse the mother as caretaker was common. It seemed to be the *de facto* response, as mothers were identified as the parent who should stay home just as often when incomes were equal as when the father earned more. When the father earned more, the justification for mothers being the choice to stay home was that it was in the best financial interest of the family. But when incomes were equal, the most common justification for identifying the mother as the parent who should stay home was that it is her social role. Thus, among this sample there was a tendency to think of mothers first when child care is needed, especially when other considerations (such as earning power) do not tip the scales toward less traditional arrangements.

However adolescents did not base their judgments on conventional sex roles alone. Instead, they took into account multiple considerations, including aspects of the context that are to some degree regulated outside the family. For example, when the mother earned the higher salary, the father was more likely to be identified as the parent who should stay home. It is evident that earning power is a relevant factor for adolescents in the way they think about child care responsibilities.

The findings also indicate that the adolescents did not view husbands to have authority over their wives with regard to most of these decisions. A majority judged that the wife could legitimately refuse to do what her husband dictated. Most frequently, these judgments were based on the idea that mothers have a right to work. However, judgments about the legitimacy of the husband's authority did differ across contexts. When the children involved were infants, mothers were not afforded the same degree of autonomy in relation to their husband's directives. Although the majority still reasoned that the wife should not follow the husband's directives, some adolescents were more likely to believe that the husband's authority was legitimate when the child is an infant, giving justifications

that indicated that the needs of the child were seen as primary. These justifications may be an indication that adolescents endorsed the husband's authority because they agreed that the arrangement he was advocating would benefit the child, and not because they judged that his authority over the wife was legitimate in itself.

In general, adolescents' responses to questions about decision making in another culture closely mirrored their responses about the issues in the United States. Even in a more traditional context, the majority of participants endorsed the legitimacy of a wife's desire to work and her right to refuse to do what her husband says, and they justified these judgments most often with references to fairness and rights. This provides evidence that adolescents make moral judgments about rights and fairness even in contexts where traditional conventions might have held sway. When faced with both conventional concerns with social roles and moral issues related to fairness and the welfare of the family, participants generalized their moral concerns with the rights of the wife and the needs of the children to a culturally traditional setting. Despite that American adolescents themselves come from a tradition of male authority, which is still evident in many aspects of modern American life (Bianchi et al., 2006; Okin, 1989), the majority made judgments that advocated nontraditional arrangements even in a place where traditional family structures are more entrenched and could be seen as essential parts of culture.

Still, just as their responses to more local family dilemmas showed, the age of the child in the traditional country affected a significant number of responses: Participants endorsed the woman's right to work less when the child was an infant than when the children were older. Justifications for each of these questions indicated that the needs of the child were emphasized most when the child was an infant.

Thus, in both local and traditional settings, adolescents often endorsed nontraditional arrangements. When they endorsed traditional arrangements, it was most often because they judged those arrangements to be best for the infants. Future research should examine why adolescents believe that women are better caretakers for infants, and how other factors, including the availability of high-quality child care, would affect reasoning about nontraditional arrangements. If adolescents see women as the best caretakers for infants, it may limit the future opportunities of both girls and boys. Girls may restrict themselves to more flexible, less demanding careers, and boys may restrict their involvement with their infants, missing out on important bonding opportunities when their infants are young.

Sex differences echoed past research (Conry-Murray, 2009; Killen & Stangor, 2001; Neff, 2001), which has found that men endorse traditional roles more than women. While both groups were attuned to concerns with fairness and the family's welfare, they balanced these concerns differently with regard to husbands and wives. Adolescent boys more than adolescent girls endorsed the mother as having the responsibility to be the primary caregiver, even over and above her wish to work outside the home.

Boys were also more likely to think that the husband's authority was legitimate in some circumstances, while girls were less equivocal about the wife having the

right to decide for herself regardless of the circumstances. With regard to whether a wife can refuse to follow her husband's directives, only the boys distinguished between mothers with infants and those with preschoolers, stating that mothers of infants do not always have the right to refuse. Girls, on the other hand, consistently held that the wife did have that right, regardless of the age of their child.

Justifications for judgments about the legitimacy of the husband's authority also differed by sex. Boys were most often more likely to refer to the needs of the child or finances, while girls were more likely to view it as an issue of rights or fairness. While both sexes used each of these categories at times, girls appear to have weighed the rights of the wife to work more heavily than boys. This finding is in contradiction with the proposition that males are oriented to fairness and justice and that females are oriented to care and welfare in social relationships (Gilligan, 1982/1993). More research is needed to determine why girls may be more alert to issues of gender inequality than boys, as presumably both are involved in it. It may be that having experienced the disadvantages of traditional arrangements first-hand, girls are more sensitive to their negative effects.

The study had several limitations. We presented adolescents with scenarios that provided an overview of several complex situations, but we did not manipulate each variable within the stories separately. Instead, the adolescents judged scenarios that were not exactly parallel. In addition, the terms used in the scenarios were sometimes ambiguous. For example, different allocations of activities could be meant by full-time work and childcare work for different people. It must be noted that these terms were left to the participants to interpret. Furthermore, the assumptions about the male and female roles that participants bring may be based in part on their observations of their own families. We did not assess participants' home lives, although some research shows that this may be an important source of information for children (Sinno & Killen, 2009). Future researchers should continue to examine how informational assumptions are related to judgments in areas where terms are often defined differently.

This study highlights the ways that adolescents reason about division of childcare labor in the family. By examining the moral, conventional, and informational considerations adolescents weigh in judging division of childcare labor, the present study shows that adolescents are concerned with fairness as well as the financial and childcare needs of the family. When the children were seen as more self-sufficient (at the preschool age), the rights of the parents to work and to have an equal division of labor were predominant, but when the child was an infant, adolescents were more likely to judge the infant's needs as taking precedence over the rights of the parent, and especially the mother's right to work. Beliefs about the need for a mother and not a father to care for infants are still firmly entrenched, especially among adolescent boys. Women's earning power, which has been increasing (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005), does affect adolescents' judgments, but it has less of an effect when the family has an infant than when the children are older. It also has the most significant effect on adolescents' reasoning

when wives make more than their husbands, a relatively rare event, given the wage gap (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Still, it is clear that with regard to this complex topic adolescents are less concerned with conventional issues related to adherence to sex roles and more concerned with coordinating issues of fairness and the family's welfare.

### AUTHOR NOTES

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## APPENDIX

### Equal Income

After taking time off from her career to raise her young child/children, who are now X years old, a wife would like to begin working full-time again. Her husband does not want her to work because he thinks that mothers should be home with their children. But the wife enjoys her work and thinks that she should get back to working soon before she gets too far behind recent developments in her field. In her job, she makes the same amount of money as her husband. Still, he wants her to stay home with the children and not return to her career.

Suppose in another country they believe that women should stay home with their children. Most women do this, but there is a woman who wants to work, since she studied before having children. She and her husband have a X-year old child/children, and if the mother worked she would make the same income as her husband.

### Father Earns Higher Income

In another family, the parents agree that only one of them should work and the other should stay home with their X year old child/children, but both want to be the one working outside of the home. The wife has stayed home to care for their children for the previous years, and thinks that it is now her husband's turn to take time off from his career to be home to care for the children. She thinks that she should now get her turn to work since she has postponed her career for these years. Before having children, she had received a law degree and would now like to pursue this career. The husband thinks that he should be able to keep his job since he makes more money than the mother could, and thus could provide the family with a more comfortable standard of living.

Suppose in another country they believe that women should stay home with their child/children. Most women do this, but there is a woman who wants to work and have her husband stay home with the children. She believes that she should be able to work since she's been the one to stay home with their child/ children in the previous years. Her husband earns a higher salary than she could. They have X year old child/children.

### Mother Higher Income

A couple has young child/children, ages X. For the past 2 years they have both been working full-time, but have recently decided that for the benefit of their children, one of the parents should quit working and stay home with the children. The wife wants the husband to stay home since her salary is higher than his and she could support the family better. The husband disagrees. He thinks that the wife should quit her job and stay home since he believes that mothers should be the ones to stay home with the children and take care of the household.

Suppose in another country they believe that women should stay home with their children. Most women do this, but there is a woman who wants to work and has a job where she would make more money than her husband. They have X year old child/children.