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# Adolescent and Adult Reasoning about Gender and Fairness in Traditional Practices in Benin, West Africa

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## Abstract

*This study examined reasoning about fairness in gender-related traditional practices in Benin, West Africa. Fifty adolescents (M = 15.7 years) and 46 adults (M = 33.4 years) were interviewed about traditional practices involving gender hierarchy. Results indicate that the majority attributed decision-making authority to a traditional authority for conventional reasons. However, the majority also judged the practices as unfair, giving moral reasons. In judgments of how to respond to unfair practices, those who advocated accepting the practices gave conventional reasons and not moral reasons. Males took the gender of the protagonist into account more than did females, and males saw traditional male authority as less alterable. No age differences were found, indicating that adults were not more enculturated than adolescents.*

*Keywords:* moral development; gender; culture

## Introduction

In situations having to do with straightforward issues of fairness and rights, people in many cultures endorse justice (e.g., in the USA, see Turiel, 1983, 2002; in Colombia, see Mensing, 2003; in Hong Kong, see Yau & Smetana, 2003; in Nigeria, see Hollos, Leis, & Turiel, 1986). At the same time, in many cultures, traditional practices may involve inequalities between groups, particularly between males and females. Inequality based on gender is pervasive throughout the world. For example, according to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (2006), women's literacy rates, income, and share of decision-making positions are significantly lower than those of men, whereas women's rates of poverty are higher. Past research on reasoning about gender hierarchy (where men are dominant and women are subordinate) in traditional cultures has examined male entitlement with regard to family decision-making (Neff, 2001; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) and traditional practices (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). This research has shown that people tend to endorse male authority in conflicts between men and women. The current study examines this apparent contradiction: why

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do people who appear to maintain a concern for moral issues, including rights, justice, and welfare, also endorse gender hierarchy?

Explanations for endorsements of gender hierarchy differ, with some cultural psychologists suggesting that hierarchy itself is seen as part of 'culture-specific aspects of a moral code' that becomes enculturated over time (Shweder et al., 1987). From this perspective, different cultures may have different moral codes. Other researchers in cultural psychology (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Triandis, 1989) suggest that some cultures are more focused on group functioning to the exclusion of individual rights. Africa presents an excellent context for examining claims about other-focused morality and culture. African cultures have been called collectivist (Triandis, 1989) and interdependent (Markus et al., 1997). And in fact, a meta-analysis found that individuals in Africa, even more than in East Asia, are distinct from Americans by being high on collectivism and low on individualism (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Thus, the present study extends previous research by examining reasoning about traditional practices in a place where collectivism is high and individualism is low.

These cultural psychology perspectives suggest that members of traditional or collectivistic cultures might endorse hierarchy if it were in the best interest of the group. If this were the case, gender hierarchy might not be seen as unfair at all. According to this view, in these cultures the 'individual is not regarded as fundamentally equal' (Markus et al., 1997, p. 41). Thus, they suggest that Africans, for example, may come to see the 'inevitability and desirability of hierarchy' (p. 35) and may consider hierarchy as a part of their moral code because it is seen as providing protection for the weak (Shweder et al., 1987).

Research from a socio-cognitive perspective (e.g., Turiel, 1983, 2002) provides a different explanation. Research from this perspective supports the idea that moral concepts related to rights, justice, and welfare are developed around the world, as all individuals interact with welfare and justice issues in their social environment (e.g., Hollos et al., 1986; Turiel, 2002; Yau & Smetana, 2003). Moral concepts provide a basis for criticism of hierarchy. However, this perspective also finds that people consider the features of each particular situation, weighing moral concerns with other factors.

Research has shown that in complex situations, both the moral and the conventional domains may be considered, along with concerns with personal prerogatives and other considerations (Turiel, Hildebrandt, & Wainryb, 1991). Thus, judgments may vary depending on the characteristics of the issue being considered. However, even in complex situations, the moral domain is judged to be distinct from conventional issues (Turiel, 1983). Unlike conventions, the moral domain is seen as unalterable and universal, and justifications in the moral domain have to do with issues of rights, justice, and welfare. Conventions are judged as distinct from morals; they include social regulations (such as norms about gender, clothing, manners, etc.) that are alterable by consensus or the dictates of authority. Conventions tend to be justified by references to societal rules, whereas moral issues are justified in terms of the consequences of acts. Research shows that children make this distinction at an early age (e.g., see Smetana, 1981), and in many different cultures (for examples in Africa, see Hollos et al., 1986; Zimba, 1994).

Gender hierarchy involves both the moral and conventional domains. It not only includes unfairness, but it also includes gender norms. Research in the USA shows that gender norms are considered conventions because they are culture-specific and alterable (Carter & Patterson, 1982; Stoddard & Turiel, 1985). Shweder et al. (1987)

challenged this notion, suggesting that gender norms and other conventions may be judged as moral in traditional cultures, because in their research, gender norms were sometimes judged as just as important as moral concerns having to do with rights, justice, and welfare. However, although people generally judge issues in the moral domain as more important than conventional concerns, importance is not a criterion used to distinguish the moral and conventional domains. Conventions, particularly gender norms, are sometimes judged to be more important than moral concerns in the USA (Stoddard & Turiel, 1985), and in hierarchical cultures (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994), even while justifications and other criteria indicate that the moral and conventional domains remain distinct.

To examine whether gender norms are judged as moral or conventional in traditional cultures, most research (Neff, 2001; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) has examined reasoning about everyday gender norms, including gender-related decisions in the family. An additional test would examine practices more closely tied to tradition, as Shweder et al. (1987) did, except using criteria that have been shown to distinguish the moral and convention domain. The current study examines traditional practices in West Africa using two methods of distinguishing moral and conventional judgments: justifications and judgments of alterability. It was expected that justifications for judgments that are critical of gender hierarchy would be based on moral reasons referring to rights, justice, and welfare, whereas judgments endorsing hierarchy would be based on conventional justifications referring to culture-specific regulations and consequences, or personal justifications referring to individual entitlement.

Judgments of alterability also test whether gender norms are judged as moral. Moral judgments are not alterable in a different cultural context, whereas conventions can be altered. Participants in the current study judged the alterability of gender hierarchy in a hypothetical culture where the gender of the authority was reversed. It was expected that judgments of fairness would not differ between the two contexts but that gender norms related to authority would be seen as alterable and therefore conventional.

A further test examined whether beliefs about hierarchy are enculturated. An examination of age differences between adolescents and adults would provide evidence for whether endorsements of traditional practices increase with increased enculturation (Shweder et al., 1987). Social cognitive research shows that by adolescence the distinction between the moral and conventional domains is firmly established (see, e.g., Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983), and therefore it was expected that no enculturation effects would be found. In fact, adults may be more skilled at balancing multiple features of situations, including concerns with gender norms and concerns with fairness. Adolescents are just beginning to understand the subtle nature of gender norms, including the repercussions of violations of gender norms (Stoddard & Turiel, 1985), which they may not consider as fully as adults.

Sex differences in adolescence also may be a factor. Previous research has found that adolescent boys in the USA tend to endorse gender norms more than girls or adults (Ruble & Martin, 1998), even when the norms are in conflict with concerns for fairness (Brose, Conry-Murray, & Turiel, 2007). Similar results have been found in India (Neff, 2001). Therefore, adolescent boys were expected to be more traditional than girls or adults. Age differences in reasoning about considerations relevant to gender hierarchy were examined to provide insight into how adolescents develop in their evaluations of this complex topic, but no specific hypotheses were formulated.

Gender hierarchy may have different meanings for males and females, considering that each benefit differently from it. Some (Gilligan, 1982/1993; Gilligan & Attenucci,

1988) have suggested that gender differences in moral reasoning indicate that women are more concerned with maintaining relationships, whereas men are more concerned with justice. This might suggest that females would be more accepting of gender norms that enforce their role in the family, whereas men would be more aware of the injustice. However, Gilligan's theory of gender differences in moral reasoning has not been empirically supported (see a meta-analysis by Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). Still, the fact that females benefit less and may be harmed more by gender hierarchy may indicate that, contrary to Gilligan's theory, females would be more sensitive to the justice issues of gender hierarchy and therefore more attuned to the moral than the conventional issues involved. This is in accordance with findings from Killen and her colleagues (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; Killen & Stangor, 1991), which show that those who have been the victims of inequality may have greater sensitivity to it.

Additional gender differences may be related to perceptions of the consequences for challenging hierarchy. Past research (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) has found that females' concerns with avoiding punishment are tied to judgments about decision-making authority. Wainryb and Turiel (1994) found that adolescent and adult women in an Arab hierarchical culture in Israel justified their endorsements of gender hierarchy with references to pragmatic concerns regarding fear of punishment for challenging traditional male authority. Therefore, the current study examines perceptions of punishment for disobedience to see whether these negative consequences are connected to endorsements of one sex or the other as decision-maker.

## **Methods**

### *Setting*

In Benin, West Africa, males and females do not share equal rights. For example, literacy rates and professional participation of men and women in government positions differ: according to the UN's Human Development report for Benin (2007), in 2003, 49 percent of men, but only 23 percent of women in Benin were literate, and in 2005, females made up less than one percent of the government ministers in Benin.

### *Participants*

Participants included 50 adolescents ( $M = 15.7$  years,  $SD = .54$ , ranging from 14–16 years) with 26 females and 24 males, and 46 adults ( $M = 33.4$  years,  $SD = 6.55$ , ranging from 23–52 years) with 22 females and 24 males. All participants were living in a medium-sized city (population 200 000) and were part of the Goun tribe. Among adults, 86 percent were married; no adolescents were married. No participant had more than an elementary school education. Participants held working-class jobs (as tailors, hairdressers, carpenters, and the like) or they were apprentices. Some were students in elementary school grades.

### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited at public markets, apprenticeship centers, and schools. Participants responded to questions in a semi-structured interview of about 30 minutes. They were interviewed in their native language (Goun) by research assistants who were

native Beninese and fluent in Goun. Both had the equivalent of master's degrees in the social sciences. The investigator trained them in the semi-structured clinical interview method (Piaget, 1947; Turiel, 1983). A male research assistant interviewed the males, and a female research assistant interviewed the females.

### *Design and Coding*

The interview consisted of four hypothetical stories dealing with a conflict between a husband and wife over whether to adhere to a traditional practice. The practices included issues of inheritance rights for (1) the children and (2) the spouse, (3) marriage of multiple spouses, and (4) arranged marriage.

There were two conditions in a between-subjects design to determine whether participants judged male authority as alterable. In one condition, the practices reflected real traditions in Benin—where women are in a subordinate position to men. Thus, these practices were: boys' inheritance of the parents' assets, inheritance of the husband's assets by his brothers instead of by the wife, polygamy, and arranged marriage for daughters. In this condition, the wife challenges the practice and suggests an alternative that preserves individual choice and equality, whereas the husband wants to follow the traditional practice. For example, in the story about inheritance of the parents' assets, the wife suggests that the couple's daughters should receive the same inheritance as the sons. See the Appendix for the full text of each story.

In the other condition, a different culture was described where women are traditionally in charge. They hold more prestigious jobs and make more money than their husbands. The husbands are in subordinate positions. The practices depicted in this condition were: girls' inheritance of their parents' assets, inheritance of the wife's assets by her sisters instead of by the husband, polyandry, and arranged marriage for sons only. Arranged marriage is practiced in Benin for both sons and daughters, but none of the other practices in this condition are practiced in Benin. In this condition, the husband challenges the practice and suggests an alternative that preserves individual choice and equality, whereas the wife wants to follow the practice. For example, the husband suggests that the couple's sons receive the same inheritance as the daughters.

Each story was followed by a series of questions. Examples continue to use the children's inheritance practice. The first question elicited a judgment of who should make the decision about whether to follow the practice and why ('According to you, who should decide if the daughters receive the same inheritance?'), coded 0 = *decide together or wife decides* and 1 = *husband decides*.

Next, three questions elicited judgments related to the practices. Firstly, there was an evaluation of the protagonist who challenges the practices ('What do you think of the opinion of the wife, who wants her daughters to receive the same inheritance as the sons?'), coded as 1 = *positive*, 2 = *mixed*, and 3 = *negative*. Next, an evaluation was elicited of the spouse who rejects the protagonist's suggestion to change the practice ('Do you think it is OK or not OK if the husband does not let his wife give the inheritance to the daughters also?'), coded as 1 = *permissible*, 2 = *mixed*, or 3 = *not permissible*. Finally, an evaluation of the practice itself was elicited with the question 'Is this practice fair?', coded as 1 = *fair*, 2 = *mixed*, or 3 = *not fair*.

For each of the four questions above, a request for a justification ('Why?' or 'Why not?') followed the evaluations. A coding scheme was developed for justifications of the questions based on past research (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983); see Table 1 for categories. For ease of analysis, rights/fairness and welfare justifications were

**Table 1. Justification Coding Categories**

Category		Description
Uncodable		Justification not given or not encompassed by other categories
Personal choice		A person's right to engage in an activity ('He earned the money so he can leave it to his sons if he likes.')
Pragmatics		Issues of logistics and planning, including financial issues ('She can't do anything because she has no money of her own.')
Moral	Rights/fairness	Comparisons implying that both should be treated similarly ('Both boys and girls are his children. They both have the same rights.')
	Welfare	Others' physical or psychological welfare or harm ('If they choose her husband for her, she will be unhappy.')
Relationship harmony		The need to maintain harmony between people and avoid disagreements. ('There will be misunderstandings.')
Conventional	Gender roles	Expectations related to gender ('She is at home to take care of the children.')
	Tradition	The ways things have been done in the past and culture specific norms ('The daughter will leave the family when she gets married but the son will stay in the family home.')
	Religion	God, the afterlife, and religious stories ('God made man first and woman was created to help man.')
	Authority	Positions of authority ('The man is the head of the household.')
Concerns with punishment		Threats of harm or punishment ('If she takes another husband, he will divorce her.')

combined into a moral category. Authority, gender roles, tradition, and religious justifications were combined in a conventional category called *authority/tradition*, because these are all considerations that vary in different cultures. These categories, along with the remaining categories (personal, pragmatic, relationship harmony and concerns with punishment) were included in analyses when they made up at least 10 percent of responses. Each of these categories were coded as 0 = *did not give the justification* and 1 = *did give the justification*.

The question was posed as to how the protagonist should respond to the practice being enforced ('If the man refuses to give the same inheritance to his daughters, what should the wife do?'). This question required participants to weigh the conventions about decision-making authority with moral concerns regarding the practices, as well as other concerns. It was coded as 1 = *accept* the spouse's decision, 2 = *compromise or*

*convince the spouse* (by discussing the issue together or imploring him/her), and 3 = *refuse* to accept the spouse's decision and do it anyway, or force the spouse to accept the protagonist's request by resorting to violence or voodoo.

Finally, concerns with punishment for disobedience ('What are the consequences to the wife if she refuses to give the inheritance just to the sons?') was coded as 1 = *negative/severely negative consequences for the protagonist* or 0 = *minimal consequences or consequences not restricted to the protagonist* (including positive or no consequences, negative consequences for both spouses and/or negative consequences to the family).

A professional translator translated the interview protocol into Goun. Interviews were tape-recorded with participants' consent. Translators, who were Beninese high school English teachers, translated and transcribed all the interviews into French or English.

### *Reliability*

A single coder coded all responses. Additional trained judges fluent in French and English coded 20 percent of the judgments and 17 percent of the justifications of the interviews to assess reliability. Inter-judge agreement (Cohen's Kappa) for judgments was .91. Justification reliability was calculated two ways. When coders agreed about the number of justifications to be coded for each response, kappa was .82. When considering both agreements and disagreements in coding as well as agreements and disagreements regarding the number of codable justifications from a particular response, kappa was .77.

## **Results**

Results were analyzed using mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with repeated measures on one or two factors. Follow-up tests used Bonferroni corrected levels of significance. Main effects and lower-order interactions that were qualified by higher-order interactions are not reported unless the main effect was hypothesized. No age differences were found in any of the analyses, and thus age will not be discussed further.

### *Decision-making Authority*

In response to the question of who should decide whether to follow the traditional practice, 69 percent of participants endorsed the authority as it was stated in the story. A 4 (story)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story as a repeated measure was conducted on judgments of whether participants endorsed the husband as the decision-maker or not. (Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa, & Smith, 2001 find that ANOVAs are robust with dichotomous data.) As hypothesized, there was a main effect for condition,  $F(1, 81) = 101.14, p < .001, \eta^2 = .55$ , which indicated that endorsements of hierarchy were alterable depending on the context. The mean proportion of participants who endorsed the husband was higher in the male-dominant condition ( $M = .82, SD = .03$ ) than in the female-dominant condition ( $M = .43, SD = .03$ ). This effect was qualified by a sex  $\times$  condition interaction,  $F(1, 81) = 235.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .74$ , which indicated that females clearly saw authority as alterable. There was a strong tendency for females to endorse the husband in the male-dominant condition and the wife in the

female-dominant condition,  $F(1, 45) = 4422.27, p < .001, \eta^2 = .99$ , whereas males were more likely to endorse the husband in both conditions,  $F(1, 40) = 6.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .14$ . Means can be found in Table 2, and Figure 1 illustrates this interaction. Finally, this effect was qualified by a sex  $\times$  condition  $\times$  story interaction,  $F(3, 219) = 9.73, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$ , revealing that males reasoning about the male-dominant condition,  $F(3, 51) = 16.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .49$ , were more likely to endorse the husband as the decision-maker for the inheritance stories (children's inheritance,  $M = .95, SD = .05$ ; spouse's inheritance,  $M = .84, SD = .09$ ) than they were for the arranged marriage story ( $M = .27, SD = .10, ps < .01$ ). The children's inheritance story also differed significantly from the polygamy story ( $M = .46, SD = .11, p < .01$ ).

It was hypothesized that conventional justifications would be used more than moral justifications. In fact, moral justifications made up less than one percent of responses and thus were excluded from the analysis. Justifications for decision-making primarily referred to the authority/tradition (59 percent) and personal concerns (33 percent) categories. To examine justifications, a 4 (story)  $\times$  2 (justification)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story and justifications as repeated measures was performed. A justification  $\times$  story interaction,  $F(3, 177) = 3.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$ , indicated that personal justifications,  $F(3, 177) = 13.16, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ , were given more frequently than authority/tradition justifications in the spouse's inheritance story, whereas the authority/tradition justification category,  $F(3, 177) = 18.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .24$ , was used more in the children's inheritance story than in the other stories. Table 3 contains the means for each story.

### *Evaluations of the Practice*

It was expected that regardless of who was endorsed as decision-maker, most participants would see the practices as unfair, that they would approve of the protagonist who challenges the practices, and disapprove of the spouse who upholds the practices. Indeed, 93 percent said the practices were not fair. Ninety-one percent endorsed the protagonists' positions challenging the practices, and 91 percent indicated that it was not permissible for the spouse to refuse the protagonists' suggestions to change the practice.

For each of these three interview questions, a 4 (story)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story as a repeated measure was conducted. There were significant sex  $\times$  condition interactions for evaluations of the fairness of the practice,  $F(1, 83) = 12.91, p < .01, \eta^2 = .14$ , for evaluations of the protagonist who challenges the practices,  $F(1, 71) = 33.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$ , and for evaluations of the spouse who rejects a more equitable alternative,  $F(1, 81) = 10.32, p < .01, \eta^2 = .11$ . Means for each of these interactions are located in Table 2. Follow-up analyses for each question indicated that males were more likely to be critical of practices in the female-dominant condition than they were in the male-dominant condition. This pattern was found in their judgments of the fairness of the practice,  $F(1, 44) = 5.68, p < .025, \eta^2 = .11$ , their evaluations of the protagonist,  $F(1, 36) = 29.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .45$ , and their evaluations of the spouse,  $F(1, 44) = 12.17, p = .001, \eta^2 = .22$ . Females tended to judge the practice as unfair, and to judge the protagonist positively and the spouse negatively in both conditions,  $ps > .05$ . For the evaluations of the protagonist, the sex  $\times$  condition interaction was qualified by a sex  $\times$  condition  $\times$  story interaction,  $F(3, 213) = 6.00, p = .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , which indicated that in the children's inheritance story, males,  $F(1, 41) = 36.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .47$ , fit the pattern described

Table 2. Means and SDs for Evaluations by Sex and Condition

Evaluations of:	Females		Males	
	Male-dominant condition	Female-dominant condition	Male-dominant condition	Female-dominant condition
Who should decide	1.00 <sub>a</sub> (.04)	.02 <sub>b</sub> (.04)	.63 <sub>a</sub> (.04)	.83 <sub>b</sub> (.04)
Fairness of practice	3.00 <sub>a</sub> (.06)	2.99 <sub>a</sub> (.05)	2.64 <sub>b</sub> (.05)	2.88 <sub>c</sub> (.05)
Protagonist challenging practice	1.00 <sub>a</sub> (.06)	1.05 <sub>a</sub> (.05)	1.61 <sub>b</sub> (.06)	1.02 <sub>a</sub> (.06)
Spouse enforcing practice	2.97 <sub>a</sub> (.06)	2.97 <sub>a</sub> (.06)	2.51 <sub>b</sub> (.06)	2.89 <sub>a</sub> (.06)
Protagonist response	2.31 <sub>a</sub> (.08)	2.04 <sub>b</sub> (.08)	1.90 <sub>b</sub> (.08)	2.30 <sub>a</sub> (.08)
Consequences for challenging hierarchy	.60 (.06)	.63 (.06)	.74 <sub>a</sub> (.06)	.52 <sub>b</sub> (.06)

*Note:* Who should decide was coded on a binomial scale with higher scores indicating that the husband should decide. Fairness was coded on a three-point scale with higher scores indicating unfairness. Protagonist challenging practice and spouse enforcing practice were coded on a three-point scale with higher scores indicating negative evaluations. Protagonist response was coded on a three-point scale with high scores indicating a response that challenges the practice. Consequences for challenging hierarchy was coded binomially with higher scores indicating that consequences would be negative. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  in Bonferroni comparisons.

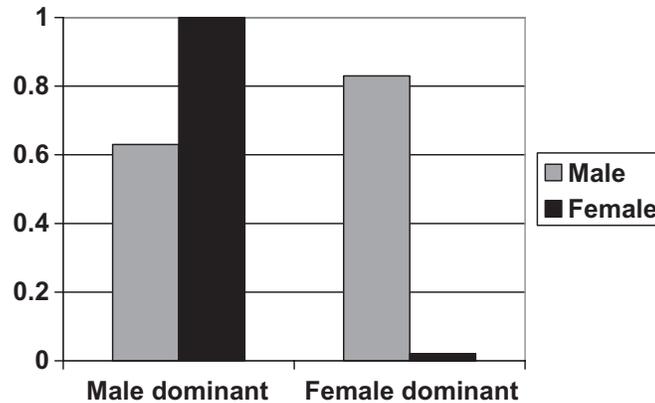


Figure 1. Proportion of Males and Females Who Endorse the Husband as Decision-maker by Condition.

above to an even greater degree. In this story, more than all other stories, males were especially critical of the female protagonist ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = .11$ ) whereas the male protagonist was judged positively ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = .11$ ).

Overall, the sex differences in judgments about the practices indicate that males predominately condemned the practices, but they were especially likely to condemn practices that negatively affected male protagonists. Women condemned the practices regardless of the sex of the protagonist.

Justifications for fairness judgments and evaluations of the protagonist's position again showed similar patterns, so they are reported together below. However, justifications of evaluations of a spouse who refuses to accept the protagonist's suggestion were much more varied, so these justifications are reported separately.

Justifications for fairness judgments and evaluations of the protagonist's position were expected to be moral and not conventional, and indeed they were primarily moral (48 percent for each question) with a significant proportion of references to relationship harmony (34 percent in the fairness question and 33 percent in the evaluation of the protagonists). In fact, the conventional category of authority/tradition justifications did not rise to the 10 percent cutoff level, and so authority/tradition was left out of these analyses. To examine moral and relationship harmony justifications, a 4 (story)  $\times$  2 (justification)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story and justifications as repeated measures was performed. Story  $\times$  justification interactions for both the fairness question,  $F(3, 123) = 20.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .34$ , and the protagonist evaluations,  $F(3, 114) = 33.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .47$ , indicated that references to relationship harmony were more frequent in the arranged marriage and polygamy stories, whereas references to moral concerns were more frequent in the inheritance stories, as the means in Table 3 show.

These interactions were qualified by higher-order interactions. Firstly, a sex  $\times$  story  $\times$  justification interaction was evident in both questions: fairness,  $F(3, 123) = 6.20$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ , and protagonist evaluations,  $F(3, 114) = 2.78$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ . However, different effects explain each interaction. Females justified their evaluations of the protagonist using the moral category more often in the children's inheritance story than males did, as mean proportions show (females,  $M = .81$ ,  $SD = .08$ ; males,  $M = .38$ ,  $SD = .12$ ). In the fairness question, the relationship harmony justification was used more for the polygamy story,  $F(1, 65) = 10.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$

Table 3. Mean Proportions (and SDs) for Justifications by Evaluations and Story

Justification	Who should decide			Spouse enforcing practice			Protagonist challenging practice			Fairness				
	C	P	A	C	P	A	C	P	A	C	P	A	S	
Authority/tradition	.65 <sub>a</sub> (.05)	.40 <sub>b</sub> (.06)	.90 <sub>c</sub> (.04)	.33 (.09)	.23 (.07)	.27 (.11)	.17 (.07)	.14 (.05)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.16 (.05)	.04 (.03)	.02 (.01)
Personal	.29 <sub>a</sub> (.05)	.45 <sub>a,c</sub> (.06)	.09 <sub>b</sub> (.04)	.03 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.31 <sub>a</sub> (.08)	.08 <sub>b</sub> (.05)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.27 (.06)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.17 (.05)
Moral	.04 (.02)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.34 <sub>a</sub> (.08)	.03 <sub>b</sub> (.02)	.06 <sub>b</sub> (.04)	.38 <sub>a</sub> (.09)	.67 <sub>a</sub> (.07)	.17 <sub>b</sub> (.05)	.30 <sub>b</sub> (.06)	.91 <sub>a</sub> (.04)	.74 <sub>a</sub> (.06)	.16 <sub>b</sub> (.05)	.25 <sub>b</sub> (.06)
Relationships	.00 (.00)	.06 (.03)	.00 (.00)	.27 <sub>a</sub> (.07)	.55 <sub>b</sub> (.08)	.42 (.08)	.34 (.09)	.12 (.04)	.76 <sub>b</sub> (.06)	.39 <sub>c</sub> (.07)	.04 (.03)	.08 <sub>a</sub> (.04)	.63 <sub>b</sub> (.06)	.56 <sub>b</sub> (.10)

Notes: Means in the same row with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  in Bonferroni comparisons. Categories with less than 10 percent of justification responses were not included in analyses.

C = children's inheritance story; P = polygamy/polyandry story; A = arranged marriage story; S = spouse's inheritance story.

and the arranged marriage story,  $F(1, 79) = 15.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$  among females (polygamy/polyandry,  $M = .75, SD = .07$ ; arranged marriage,  $M = .75, SD = .11$ ) than males (polygamy/polyandry,  $M = .33, SD = .12$ ; arranged marriage,  $M = .18, SD = .17$ ). Finally, a condition  $\times$  story  $\times$  justification interaction in the fairness justifications,  $F(1, 123) = 3.02, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$ , indicated that moral justifications were used significantly more in the arranged marriage story,  $F(1, 77) = 8.022, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10$ , when it was in the male-dominant condition ( $M = .36, SD = .08$ ) than in the female-dominant condition ( $M = .12, SD = .10$ ).

Justifications for evaluations of a spouse who refuses to accept the protagonist's challenge to traditional practices were expected to vary because this question involved both an evaluation of the authority and the authority's judgment of the practice. Indeed, the justifications for this question included relationship harmony (40 percent), authority/tradition (27 percent), moral concerns (18 percent), and personal concerns (10 percent). To examine these justifications, a 4 (story)  $\times$  4 (justification)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story and justification as repeated measures was performed. A justification  $\times$  sex interaction,  $F(3, 72) = 5.21, p < .01, \eta^2 = .18$ , indicated that the mean proportionate use of the relationship harmony category was greater for females ( $M = .56, SD = .09$ ) than males ( $M = .22, SD = .09$ ). A justification  $\times$  condition interaction,  $F(3, 72) = 2.92, p < .05, \eta^2 = .11$ , indicated that the authority/tradition category was used more in the female-dominant condition ( $M = .42, SD = .09$ ) than in the male-dominant condition ( $M = .15, SD = .07$ ). Finally, a story  $\times$  justification interaction,  $F(9, 216) = 4.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$ , indicated that moral justifications were used most frequently in the inheritance stories. Means are located in Table 3.

### *Judgments of Responses to a Refusal*

Judgments about how the protagonist should respond to the practice being enforced had a mean of 2.13 ( $SD = .04$ ) on a 1 (accept the practice) to 3 (challenge the practice) scale. A 4 (story)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story as a repeated measure was conducted on these judgments, revealing a sex  $\times$  condition interaction,  $F(1, 78) = 16.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ . Follow-up tests showed that both males,  $F(1, 40) = 7.89, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$ , and females,  $F(1, 38) = 11.36, p < .01, \eta^2 = .23$ , were less likely to recommend accepting the practice for the protagonists of their own sex. (See means in Table 2.) This interaction was qualified by a sex  $\times$  condition  $\times$  story interaction  $F(3, 234) = 4.44, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$ , which indicated that the tendency not to recommend accepting the practice for protagonists of their own sex was especially strong among males reasoning about the polyandry story in the condition where a wife wants to take multiple husbands,  $F(1, 46) = 22.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .33$ . Males were more likely to recommend challenging polyandry ( $M = 2.63, SD = .14$ ) than they were to recommend challenging polygamy ( $M = 1.57, SD = .13$ ).

It was expected that when participants advocated accepting the traditional practice, they would use conventional and not moral justifications. Overall, justifications for the protagonists' responses were related to pragmatics (30 percent), moral concerns (18 percent), authority/tradition (18 percent), relationships (15 percent), and personal concerns (13 percent). However, in the case of interest, when participants advocated accepting the practice, the means for moral justifications did not rise to the 10 percent cutoff level, providing some support for the hypothesis. As Table 4 suggests, these justifications were most often references to authority/tradition and personal. Separate

Table 4. Mean Proportion (and SDs) of Justifications by Story and Response Judgment

Story	Response	Justification					
		Authority/tradition	Personal	Pragmatic	Relationship	Moral	
Children's inheritance	Accept the practice	.67 <sub>a</sub> (.14)	.17 <sub>b</sub> (.11)	.00 (.00)	.08 (.08)	.08 (.08)	
	Compromise	.17 (.05)	.03 (.02)	.38 (.07)	.00 (.00)	.35 (.07)	
Polyandry/polygamy	Reject the practice	.44 (.13)	.00 (.00)	.06 (.06)	.19 (.10)	.38 (.13)	
	Accept the practice	.27 (.12)	.12 (.08)	.08 (.08)	.15 (.10)	.08 (.08)	
Arranged marriage	Compromise	.07 (.04)	.10 (.05)	.47 (.08)	.29 (.08)	.06 (.04)	
	Reject the practice	.08 (.08)	.08 (.08)	.08 (.08)	.63 (.14)	.04 (.04)	
Spouse's inheritance	Accept the practice	.86 <sub>a</sub> (.10)	.00 (.00)	.14 <sub>b</sub> (.10)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	
	Compromise	.22 (.07)	.15 (.06)	.39 (.09)	.20 (.07)	.04 (.04)	
Spouse's inheritance	Reject the practice	.04 (.04)	.54 (.10)	.00 (.00)	.25 (.09)	.13 (.07)	
	Accept the practice	.15 (.08)	.43 (.08)	.35 (.11)	.03 (.03)	.00 (.00)	
Spouse's inheritance	Compromise	.14 (.05)	.02 (.02)	.42 (.09)	.03 (.03)	.36 (.08)	
	Reject the practice	.07 (.05)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.02)	.12 (.06)	.72 (.08)	

Note: Means in the same row with different subscripts differ at  $p \leq .05$  in Bonferroni comparisons. Only justifications in the accept the practice category that included more than 10 percent of responses were analyzed.

repeated measures ANOVAs for each story with justification as the repeated measures (with either 2 or 3 levels, depending on the number that rose to the 10 percent cutoff level) showed that in the children's inheritance story,  $F(1, 11) = 4.71, p = .05, \eta^2 = .30$ , and the arranged marriage story,  $F(1, 10) = 13.91, p < .01, \eta^2 = .58$ , the authority/tradition justification was used more than other justifications.

### *Consequences for Disobedience*

Consequences for disobedience were expected to be more severe for female than male protagonists, with female participants expected to be most sensitive to the possibility of negative consequences. Most participants (63 percent) saw negative or severely negative consequences to the protagonist who challenged the practice. A 4 (story)  $\times$  2 (condition)  $\times$  2 (sex)  $\times$  2 (age) mixed-model ANOVA with story as a repeated measure was conducted on perceived negative consequences for disobedience. A significant sex  $\times$  condition interaction,  $F(1, 78) = 5.42, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$ , indicated that females saw negative consequences for male and female protagonists, whereas male participants were more likely to see negative consequences to the female protagonist than the male protagonist,  $F(1, 39) = 7.86, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$ , as the means in Table 2 indicate.

## **Discussion**

This study provides evidence that people in a traditional, collectivist culture in Benin, West Africa judge gender hierarchy critically. It shows that hierarchy is not seen as part of a moral code, even when the hierarchy is related to a traditional practice. In addition, participants provided evidence that they distinguish between moral issues regarding rights, justice, and welfare, and conventional issues regarding tradition and authority. At the same time, they considered the multiple features of the particular situations, including the quality of the family relationships, personal prerogatives, and both moral and conventional issues in their reasoning about traditional practices that involve gender hierarchy. Participants most often endorsed a traditional authority (who advocated adhering to traditional practices) even while their judgments about the traditional practices tended to be critical.

Several forms of evidence show that participants were not struggling to balance two competing moral principles; rather, they were balancing competing moral and conventional concerns. Most participants condemned the practices as unfair, indicating that they were critical even of traditional practices, and they approved of a protagonist who advocated challenging the practices. Their reasons for these judgments referred to direct consequences of the practices related to rights, justice, and welfare, or they referred to maintaining relationships in the family. In contrast, for the question about decision-making authority, hierarchy tended to be upheld and participants' justifications were rarely moral. Like research in other traditional communities (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994), most often these justifications were conventional, referring to general concepts of authority and tradition (e.g, many participants responded that 'the man is the head of the household'), or personal, referring to personal entitlement. References to the personal prerogatives of the authority were especially common in the inheritance stories where participants often mentioned that authorities can decide how to spend their own money as they wish. Thus, participants' justifications tended to be moral or relational when they were critical of hierarchical practices and conventional or personal when they endorsed hierarchical practices.

Despite the predominance of conventional and personal justifications, the decision-making question involved multiple considerations. Although decision-making authority is related to conventional gender norms, it also involves the moral domain. Participants could have reasoned about decision-making authority as moral if they judged that authorities have the responsibility to protect the weak, as some have suggested is true in traditional communities (Shweder et al., 1987). However, these participants justified their endorsements of husbands or traditional authorities with conventional justifications and personal prerogatives, and not moral justifications. This is also evidence that participants in this 'collectivist' culture did not judge decision-making authority based on the welfare of the group (Markus et al., 1997; Triandis, 1989). Moral justifications, including the welfare of the group, were infrequently mentioned as a justification for which spouse should decide whether to follow the practice or not.

A more complicated picture is presented in the justifications that were given for evaluations of the spouse who refuses to accept the protagonist's challenge to the practices. In this respect participants considered several issues, including the damage to the relationship that could result from refusing to consider a proposal from a spouse. They also considered authority and tradition issues, and moral concerns. From this question it is clear that both moral and conventional concerns played a part in participants' judgments.

Further evidence that the Beninese respondents made a distinction between moral and conventional judgments comes from the question of how the protagonist should respond when the dominant spouse refuses to let the protagonist challenge the practice. This question required participants to weigh both moral and conventional concerns, as well as other considerations, to decide how the protagonists should *act*. Moral justifications or justifications related to maintaining harmony in the family were only very rarely used among those who advocated accepting the practice. More often, conventional justifications were used to justify accepting the practice. These results provide further support that the hierarchy involved in the traditional practices examined here was not seen as a moral precept.

An additional criterion for the moral domain is non-alterability (Turiel, 1983). If male decision-making were part of a moral code (Shweder et al., 1987) in Benin, participants would judge males to be legitimate decision-makers regardless of the cultural context. However, participants did not see male authority as non-alterable. In the hypothetical culture where women were described as dominant, only a minority (albeit a substantial minority) of participants endorsed male authority, indicating that most judged that authority can be altered to be either male or female based on local conventions. These results are particularly striking given the predominance of male authority in Benin, a country where women are vastly underrepresented in government, filling only one percent of positions in government ministries (United Nations, 2007). These results indicate that the lack of female representation in government ministries does not reflect a belief in Benin that female authority is not legitimate.

Sex differences in judgments of decision-making authority indicated that males were less likely than females to judge male authority as alterable. Specifically, in the female-dominant condition, males were less likely than females to endorse the wife as the authority. However, although males may have been less flexible about male authority, other evidence indicates that they still did not see male authority as part of a moral code. Males' justifications for decision-making authority were not significantly different from females. That is, they tended to give conventional justifications regarding

authority and tradition, as well as justifications related to the personal prerogatives of the decision-maker, but not moral justifications. In addition, the majority of both males and females condemned the practices in both conditions.

Although both males and females judged hierarchical practices critically, there were sex differences that indicated that males were less likely to be critical of practices that benefit males and more likely to be critical of practices that harmed males. Females, on the other hand, tended to be equally critical of practices that harmed either a male or a female protagonist. These findings may be the result of self-interest, or a feeling of identification with the protagonist of the same sex as the participant. It may be that having experienced the subordinate role, females were more sensitive to the harm involved in hierarchy in their own and in hypothetical cultures, regardless of the sex of the victim. By contrast, males, accustomed to benefiting from their dominant position in relation to females, may have been sensitive to a loss of benefits for male protagonists. Further investigation of the reasons for this gender difference is necessary.

The findings related to concerns for the consequences of disobedience parallel the gender differences in many other questions: females were more likely to ignore the sex of the protagonist and spouse, whereas males considered it. Females perceived similar consequences for male vs. female protagonists. Males on the other hand tended to see more negative or severely negative consequences for female rather than male protagonists. This may be an indication that females were assuming few differences (aside from the sex of the person in power) between the male-dominant and female-dominant condition, including the power to punish. If males and females had different assumptions about the ability of the 'traditional' authorities to punish disobedience, it could be a factor in the judgments of who should make the decision about whether to follow a practice. However, judgments about punishment for disobedience were not found to be related to judgments of which spouse has decision-making authority, unlike in previous research (Conry-Murray, 2006).

Each of the practices described in the stories has unique features, and some practices were judged differently than others at times. For example, participants' justifications reflected the specific consequences that would result from each of the practices. The evaluations of the inheritance stories tended to be justified using moral reasons such as 'both boys and girls are their parents' children and they both have the same rights', whereas multiple marriages and arranged marriages were more often evaluated based on relationship harmony concerns such as 'There will be disagreements and misunderstanding between them'.

Another factor in differences in reasoning among the stories could be different considerations of the context of the practices. In the traditional (male-dominant) condition, males endorsed the husband as decision-maker in the inheritance stories more than in the other stories. This may be related to beliefs about how inheritance works. In Benin, sons inherit from their parents, but daughters are assumed to be taken care of by their husband's family. And brothers inheriting instead of wives is sometimes justified as the brother-in-law is expected to take care of her and the children. Therefore, endorsements of inheritance practices may be related to the belief that the current system in Benin ensures security for both males and females, just in different ways. However, the current study did not examine these beliefs and so this explanation remains to be tested.

Previous research (Brose et al., 2007; Neff, 2001) has found age differences among males in their reasoning about gender equity. However, among all the different stories and questions used here, no significant age differences were found, indicating that there

is not an enculturation process that leads to an acceptance of hierarchy, as some have suggested (Markus et al., 1997; Shweder et al., 1987; Triandis, 1989), at least not between adolescence and adulthood. Research outside of Africa has found that by late adolescence the concepts of rights, justice, and welfare are firmly established and that conventions and moral concerns are co-ordinated (for summaries, see Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998). Both the adolescents and adults in this study most often evaluated traditional practices using moral justifications and they justified decision-making authority most often using conventional reasons.

Future research should continue to examine reasons for sex differences in reasoning about gender hierarchy. The current research is unclear over whether self-interest fully explains the sex differences found here. An alternative explanation might be that males and females made different interpretations about the practices. For example, females might have assumed that women in a female-dominant culture would be very capable of being in charge, whereas males may not have made that assumption. It could be that males would accept female authority if women legitimately had better decision-making abilities or if women had superior strength, which allowed them to punish male disobedience. Because only wealth, job status, and tradition were manipulated between the two conditions, it is not known if other traits would result in male participants endorsing the alterability of male authority. Other assumptions about the situations should also be examined, including beliefs about the culture-specific system that may be judged as addressing the needs of both genders fairly but through different mechanisms. The role of these beliefs remains to be tested.

The data presented here were limited by the sample size, but some interesting patterns emerged in the justifications for the responses that participants advocated to traditional practices. At a descriptive level, participants appear to justify compromise with pragmatic concerns ('she has nothing, so she must implore him.') and justify refusals to go along with the practice with moral and relationship concerns. More investigation is necessary to determine when a practice is judged to merit refusal vs. acceptance, and when pragmatic concerns might lead to an avoidance of outright challenges.

Overall, this evidence indicates that the distinction between the moral and conventional is made even in regard to traditional gender-related practices in a collectivist culture. People in a traditional community do judge traditional gender-related practices as unfair, but they also consider traditional conventions, and they sometimes privilege conventional authority over moral judgments. Although they may deem gender-related conventions as important, their justifications and their ability to endorse an altered view of traditional gender roles indicates that they do not see traditional gender roles in moral terms.

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## Appendix

### *Male-dominant Condition*

*Children's Inheritance.* It has been many years since David brought Elodi to his house to be his wife. Now they have four children, two sons, and two daughters. David is a doctor and Elodi takes care of the children. Elodi wants the daughters to receive the same inheritance as the sons. David does not agree. He thinks that only the sons should receive the inheritance.

*Polygamy.* Junior brought Marguerite to his house and they have been married for many years. Junior is a businessman and Marguerite is a hairdresser. Junior met another woman that he likes. He thinks that he has the means to support two wives, and he wants to marry this second woman. Marguerite does not want Junior to take another wife.

*Arranged Marriage.* Alfred and Rosine have been married for many years since Alfred brought Rosine to live with him. Alfred is an officer in the military, and Rosine is a maid. They have a daughter who is of marriageable age. Alfred knows a man who he thinks would be a good husband for their daughter. Rosine thinks that their daughter should choose her husband herself. Alfred wants to arrange the marriage of their daughter.

*Spouse's Inheritance.* It has been many years since Emile brought Cecile to live with him. Emile is a teacher and Cecile is a seamstress. At his death, Emile wants his belongings to go to his brothers. Cecile objects to this plan because she thinks that it should be her and her children who are the beneficiaries.

### *Female-dominant Condition*

*Children's Inheritance.* Elodi and David live in a culture where it is the women who earn the majority of the money. It has been many years since Elodi brought David to live with her in order to be her husband. Now they have four children, two girls and two boys, and Elodi is a doctor and David takes care of the children. They are in a culture where only the girls receive inheritance. David wants their sons to receive the same inheritance as their daughters. Elodi does not agree, and thinks that only the girls should receive the inheritance.

*Polyandry.* In another culture where women are the head of the household, Marguerite brought Junior to live with her and they have been married many years. Marguerite is a businesswoman, and Junior is a barber. In their culture it is normal for the women to marry more than one man at a time. Marguerite has met a man that she likes. She thinks she has the means to support two husbands, and she wants to marry this second man. Junior does not want Marguerite to take another husband.

*Arranged Marriage.* Rosine and Alfred live in a culture where it is the women who make the big decisions. Rosine and Alfred have been married for many years since Rosine brought Alfred to live with her. Rosine is an officer in the military and Alfred is a housekeeper. They are in a culture where the mother chooses the wife for her son. They have a son who is of marriageable age. Rosine knows a woman and she thinks that she would be a good spouse for their son. Alfred does not want to choose the spouse of their son because he thinks their son should choose his spouse himself. Rosine wants to arrange the marriage of their son.

*Spouse's Inheritance.* Cecile and Emile live in a culture where it is the women who earn the majority of the money. It has been many years since Cecile brought Emile to live with her. Cecile is a high school teacher and Emile is a barber. According to tradition, Cecile would like, at her death, for her belongings to go to her sisters. Emile objects to this plan because he thinks that he and their children should be the beneficiaries.

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