

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Young adults in the United States and Benin reason about gendered cultural traditions

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Abstract

This study explored emerging and young adults' reasoning about cultural practices in West Africa. American (Study 1, $n = 78$, $M = 20.76$ years) and Beninese (Study 2, $n = 93$, $M = 23.61$ years) undergraduates were surveyed about their evaluations of corporal punishment, scarification, and schooling restrictions in conditions where the practices had gender-neutral or gender-specified targets. In Study 1, the majority (69%) of American participants negatively evaluated the practices, especially when targets were female. However, the majority (73%) assumed the cultural practices were consensual. In Study 2, the majority (76%) of Beninese participants negatively evaluated the practices, and their evaluations did not vary by gender of the target. Few (10%) Beninese participants assumed the cultural practices were consensual. In both studies, emerging and young adults who initially judged practices positively changed their evaluations with a change in consent.

KEYWORDS

culture, gender, moral development

1 | INTRODUCTION

Colleges often promote diversity by suggesting that undergraduates should respect and tolerate diverse ways of life and cultural practices. At the same time, many social scientists and philosophers assert that practices entailing harm, injustice, coercion, or victimization should not be tolerated (Hatch, 1983; Nussbaum, 1998). Some cultural practices, such as corporal punishment and scarification (the practice of producing scars to identify members of a community), involve physical harm. Other cultural practices, such as restricting children from attending school, limit individuals' opportunities. How do people decide if these cultural practices should be tolerated as part of a valuing of diversity, or rejected because of moral concerns with welfare and justice? The present investigation examined how undergraduates reason about cultural practices that have gendered or gender-neutral targets and their assumptions of consent to cultural practices. We examined these issues in two studies, one in the United States (Study 1) where undergraduates evaluated practices portrayed as common in Africa and the other in the West African country of Benin (Study 2), where undergraduates judged practices commonplace in their own culture.

In both studies, undergraduates reasoned about the cultural practices of corporal punishment, scarification, and schooling restrictions, practices that are commonplace in Benin, West Africa. Schools in West Africa commonly employ corporal punishment (Talwar, Carlson, & Lee, 2011), scarification is common in sub-Saharan Africa (Ayeni, Ayeni, & Jackson, 2007), and access to schooling is often restricted for children in Africa. It is important to acknowledge that different members of the culture may develop different perspectives on practices based on their position in the culture (e.g., doing the harm or being hurt; Shaw & Wainryb, 1999). We examined reasoning from inside and outside the practices' cultural grounding in order to explore how cultural experiences with practices are related to reasoning about the practices. Given the practices' ubiquity in West Africa, Beninese undergraduates were expected to be more familiar with the beneficial and harmful consequences of these practices and to be more likely to assume they entail divergent perspectives and contested meanings than American undergraduates.

The present investigation was guided by social domain theory and research (e.g., Killen & Smetana, 2010; Smetana, 2006, 2013; Turiel, 1983, 2006, 2015) which has shown that individuals from diverse cultures judge straightforward acts involving intentional harm, injustice, or rights violations as wrong, and generalize these negative evaluations across cultural contexts. Multifaceted issues, like the cultural practices in the present investigation, bear on multiple domains and entail varying, even conflicting, concerns. Corporal punishment, scarification, and schooling restrictions entail moral concerns with harmful or unjust consequences, pragmatic concerns with efficiency, conventional concerns with group functioning, tradition, and authority, as well as personal concerns with targets' choice and prerogatives. We examined how undergraduates consider these various domains in their evaluations of cultural practices.

We focused on the reasoning of undergraduates, even though the meaning of this age group may differ in the two cultures. Arnett (2000) suggest that college students in the United States are emerging adults who have not fully taken on adult roles. This may not be the case in Benin, where the average age at first marriage for females was 20.5 in 2006 as compared to 26.9 in the United States (in 2009, United Nations, 2013). Therefore, undergraduates in Benin may be more accurately called young adults, whereas in the United States they may be emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). Nonetheless, we expected that undergraduates in both cultures were capable of considering and coordinating the various aspects of multifaceted cultural practices, including information about the potentially beneficial and harmful consequences for targets (Smetana, 2013), as well as targets' consent or lack thereof (Shaw & Wainryb, 1999, 2006). We were interested in whether emerging and young adults in college were sensitive to the possibility that the cultural practices could be contested (Perry, 1981).

Research in the United States has shown that evaluations of the acceptability of cultural practices are related to assumptions about their consensual status. Shaw and Wainryb (1999) showed that emerging adults who made tolerant evaluations of seemingly harmful or unjust cultural practices assumed that such practices were consensual and had beneficial consequences for targets. In the current study, we chose traditional practices that involve elements of harm or unfairness but with a practical purpose that could be judged as beneficial, and a consensual status that could be ambiguous. Theorists (e.g., Baumrind, 1998; Okin, 1989; Wikan, 1991) have suggested that tolerance of diverse cultural practices may be based on a belief that most people in a culture consent to such practices. However, in many studies of moral reasoning, information about consent is either not given or is communicated indirectly (see Smetana, 2013 for a review). Instead, the researcher (and presumably the participant) assumes that targets of moral violations do not consent. Yet individuals may assume that cultural practices that are commonplace and traditional are consensual, especially when judging practices foreign to them. Shaw and Wainryb (1999) revealed that American emerging adults' often believe that foreign cultures are homogeneous and that people in different positions within the social hierarchy share the same perspective on the meaning of cultural practices. To further examine the role of consent in reasoning about cultural practices, we assessed emerging and young adults' assumptions of consent and whether evaluations of cultural practices were contingent on the practices' consensual status.

Emerging and young adults may be more sensitive to the possibility of harm for traditionally vulnerable groups, like women. Traditional cultural practices often involve inequalities between groups, and inequality based on gender is pervasive (Conry-Murray, 2009a; 2009b). Despite improvements across the world, women still lag behind men. For

example, according to UNESCO (n.d.) data from 2006, the literacy rate in Benin for males (40.6%) was more than double the literacy rate for females (18.4%). However, Okin (1989) suggests that focusing on the value of cultural diversity can lead people to overlook those who have less power within cultures, including women. Thus, the present investigation examined emerging and young adults' reasoning about traditional cultural practices when the targets of the practices were female, male, or their gender was unspecified.

Finally, we explored gender differences in emerging and young adults' reasoning about cultural practices. Previous research offered mixed findings. Women have been shown to be particularly sensitive to issues bearing on women's rights (for women in West Africa, see Conry-Murray, 2009a; 2009b) and concerns with social exclusion (in the United States, see Killen & Stangor, 2001). In contrast, a comprehensive literature review (Smetana, 2013) and a metaanalysis (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000) revealed very few gender differences in moral reasoning. Accordingly, the examination of gender differences was exploratory.

Given their harmful consequences, we expected that participants would negatively evaluate corporal punishment, scarification, and restrictions on schooling. However, these practices include different potential harms and benefits as well as considerations of tradition and pragmatics. Thus, we expected that American and Beninese participants would evaluate the three practices differently and appeal to different reasons for their evaluations. We also expected that participants would evaluate practices differently based on the gender of targets. When the practices targeted women, who are typically a more vulnerable population than men in traditional cultures, as compared to when practices targeted men or both genders, we expected participants in both cultures to evaluate the practices more negatively and to give moral reasons regarding welfare and justice.

Study 1 in the United States and Study 2 in Benin, West Africa differ somewhat in methodology (in part because of the availability of computers in the United States) and sample. The Beninese sample is unusually educated for Benin. According to one source (Countries Compared by Education, 2016), in 2002 only 3.6% of young people in Benin enrolled in college within 5 years of the official age of leaving secondary school, while in the United States in 2000, 72.6% of students attended college within 5 years of high school graduation. These and other differences related to economics and culture make it impossible to directly compare the samples and therefore the surveys were not designed to be compared directly. Although we did not test cultural differences, we expected that Beninese participants would be aware of divergent perspectives and dissent regarding cultural practices, whereas American participants would be more likely to presume that most people in West Africa share perspectives and consent to cultural practices. Thus in Study 1, we expected that American participants would assume that cultural practices are consensual. In Study 2, we expected that Beninese participants would be more aware of divergent perspectives and would assume cultural practices are not consensual. Furthermore, we expected American and Beninese participants to assume that practices with female targets lacked consent more than practices with male or gender-neutral targets.

Finally, past research shows that positive evaluations of cultural practices entailing seemingly harmful consequences are based on an assumption that such practices are consensual, and thus victimless (Shaw & Wainryb, 1999). We investigated whether undergraduates' evaluations of cultural practices would change in response to an explicit change in information about targets' consent. In both studies, we examined the contingency of the participants' practice evaluations based on the consensual status of the practice. We expected noncontingent evaluations (i.e., no change in practice evaluation) to be more common among participants who negatively evaluated the practice initially perhaps because of the already salient moral concerns. For example, participants may continue to reason that schooling restrictions are unacceptable even if targets consent because of the injustice of such restrictions. By contrast, we expected contingent evaluations (i.e., a change in practice evaluation) to be more common among participants who positively evaluated the practice initially. This may be because the beneficial consequences would not outweigh the right to agency of the target who does not consent. For example, participants who positively evaluate scarification, including for pragmatic reasons related to its efficiency within the community, are expected to then change their evaluation to negative when told targets do not consent. This may be a result of moral concerns with the right to personal choice becoming salient.

2 | STUDY 1

Study 1 examined American emerging adults' evaluations of cultural practices common in West Africa. We expected that they would negatively evaluate the cultural practices for moral reasons. However, because foreign cultures are often depicted as homogeneous (Turiel, 2002, 2006) and American emerging adults assume cultural practices are consensual (Shaw & Wainryb, 1999), we expected participants would assume that people in another culture consent to practices common in that culture.

Because issues of women's rights around the world have become more prominent in the United States in recent years (e.g., Okin, 1989), emerging adults may think unfavorably of cultural practices that target women. Thus, we expected participants would make negative practice evaluations and assume a lack of consent more in conditions where the practices had female than neutral targets.

Finally, we expected that targets' consent (or lack thereof) would be related to participants' evaluations of practices. We expected positive evaluations of the practice to be contingent on consensual status more than negative evaluations of the practice, which we expected to be noncontingent on consensual status. Overall, we expected more noncontingent than contingent evaluations because participants were expected to negatively evaluate the cultural practices.

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Participants

Participants were 78 emerging adults (36 males, 42 females) attending a selective university in western New York state and recruited through the psychology participant pool. The majority of participants (55%) were college freshmen or sophomores and were on average 20.76 years old ($SD = 1.23$, range 18–24 years). Participants were primarily European-American (63%, 17% Asian, 9% Hispanic, 4% African American, 3% Biracial, and 5% other) and most were born in the United States (85%).

3.2 | Design and assessments

Participants completed a questionnaire online that first solicited demographic information (e.g., gender, age, country of origin, ethnicity). Then, participants' reasoning about the cultural practices was elicited. Practices were presented in one of two conditions which varied between subjects. In the gendered condition, participants were told the target of the cultural practice was a female ($n = 41$). In the neutral condition, the gender of the target was unspecified ($n = 38$). The characters who engaged in corporal punishment were either husbands and their wives (gendered condition) or employers and their employees (neutral condition) and the characters who engaged in scarification and schooling restrictions were parents and their teenage daughters (gendered condition) or parents and their teenagers (neutral condition). Participants were presented with three cultural practices: corporal punishment (e.g., after burning food, the target is beaten "until she falls down so that she will pay closer attention to her cooking responsibilities"), scarification (e.g., "parents use knives to cut their teenage daughters' faces in order to leave a large scar that marks their identity as a member of a tribe. The process is painful and sometimes infections occur"), and schooling restrictions (e.g., "parents do not allow their teenage daughters to go to school because parents think it is more useful for them to stay home to help with the housework and the fields"). Practices were presented as commonplace and traditional (i.e., each practice was introduced with the phrase, "In a community in West Africa, it is a common practice that. . ."). The order of presentation of the practices was counterbalanced.

Several assessments were made of participants' reasoning about the cultural practices. Participants were asked to evaluate the acceptability of the practice ("Do you think this practice is OK or not OK?"), to choose a reason for their practice evaluation ("Choose one or two reasons why you think this is OK or not OK."), and to provide their assumption regarding the consensual status of the practice ("Do you think the [target group], more often than not, consent to

this practice?"). Finally, to examine whether practice evaluations were contingent on its consensual status, branching in the online survey allowed us to ask participants who evaluated the practice to be consensual, "Suppose the [target] DID NOT consent. In that case, do you think this practice is OK or not OK?" Participants who evaluated the practice to be nonconsensual were asked, "Suppose the [target] DID consent. In that case, do you think this practice is OK or not OK?"

3.3 | Scoring

Practice evaluations were scored as 0 = 'not okay' and 1 = 'okay.' Participants were provided with a list of nine reasons for their practice evaluations, which were derived from previous scoring systems (Conry-Murray, 2009a; Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Turiel, 1983) and further elaborated from pilot testing. Reasons were categorized as *moral* (referred to fairness, individual rights, or individual welfare), *pragmatic* (referred to economic constraints, the practice working or being in the best interest of the group), *tradition* (referred to the practice's traditional nature), *personal choice* (referred to the target's personal choice), and *authority* (referred to the actor's authority to decide). Although participants were asked to select up to two reasons for their practice evaluation, we coded as many as three because some (12%) responses appealed to three reasons. The 6% of responses that appealed to more than three reasons were considered unelaborated. Because multiple reasons were allowed, responses were scored in terms of the proportional use of each reason (e.g., a response referring to two reasons scored each reason .5). Assumptions of the consensual status of the practice were scored as 0 = 'nonconsensual' and 1 = 'consensual.' Finally the contingency of the practice evaluation on the consensual status of the practice was scored as 0 = 'noncontingent' (i.e., the manipulation of the consensual status of the practice did not change the evaluation) or 1 = 'contingent' (i.e., the manipulation of the consensual status of the practice changed the evaluation; see Shaw, Wainryb, & Smetana, 2014).

4 | RESULTS

Lunney (1970) found that ANOVAs are appropriate for use with dichotomous data if the proportion of the responses in the smaller category is over .20 or the degrees of freedom are over 40. All analyses fit at least one of these conditions. For all analyses, significant interactions were analyzed using tests of simple effects and, where appropriate, Bonferroni corrected *t*-tests.

4.1 | Practice evaluations

Mean practice evaluations (see Table 1) were examined using a 2 (Participant Gender) \times 2 (Condition) \times 3 (Practice) ANOVA, with practice as a repeated measure. As expected, the majority of participants (69%) evaluated the cultural practices negatively. Evaluations varied by condition, $F(1, 74) = 6.02, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$, and practice, $F(2, 148) = 18.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$. Participants evaluated practices more negatively in the gendered than in the neutral condition, and evaluated corporal punishment more negatively than scarification and school restrictions.

4.2 | Reasons for practice evaluations

Reasons, scored as proportions (see Table 1), were analyzed with a 2 (Participant Gender) \times 2 (Condition) \times 3 (Practice) ANOVA, with practice as a repeated measure. Unelaborated responses and categories with low overall frequency (<5%; authority, other) were not analyzed. Separate ANOVAs were conducted for each reason because responses were not independent and could not be analyzed together.

4.2.1 | Moral

The majority of participants' selected reasons for their practice evaluations that referred to moral concerns with welfare and fairness. A significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 74) = 9.13, p < .01, \eta^2 = .11$, showed that, as expected, participants selected the moral reason more in the gendered than in the neutral condition. A significant main effect of

TABLE 1 Study 1: Mean practice evaluations, reasons for practice evaluations, and mean assumptions of consensual status by practice and condition (and SDs) in the United States

	Practice			Condition	
	Corporal punishment	Scarification	Schooling restrictions	Gendered	Neutral
Practice Evaluations	.06 _a (.25)	.50 _b (.50)	.37 _b (.49)	.25* (.20)	1.37* (.21)
Reasons					
Moral	.84 _a (.36)	.38 _b (.45)	.41 _b (.40)	.64* (.29)	.46* (.25)
Pragmatic	.01 _a (.06)	.03 _a (.11)	.24 _b (.32)	.06 (.09)	.12 (.13)
Tradition	.05 _a (.19)	.39 _b (.42)	.12 _a (.24)	.19 (.21)	.19 (.19)
Personal choice	.01 _a (.08)	.12 _b (.21)	.13 _b (.26)	.06 (.10)	.12 (.13)
Consensual Status	.58 _a (.50)	.83 _b (.38)	.79 _b (.41)	.70 (.33)	.76 (.26)

Note. Negative evaluations were scored as 0; positive evaluations were scored as 1. Nonconsensual was scored as 0; consensual was scored as 1. Subscripts that differ indicate that means in the same row differed at $p < .01$.

*Indicates that means in the same row differed $p < .05$ or at the appropriate Bonferroni correction level ($\alpha = .0125$ for reasons).

practice, $F(2, 148) = 42.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .37$, indicated that participants selected the moral reason more in the practice of corporal punishment than in the practices of scarification and schooling restrictions.

4.2.2 | Pragmatic

A significant main effect for practice, $F(2, 148) = 32.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .31$, indicated that participants selected the pragmatic reason more for evaluations of the practice of schooling restrictions than in the practices of corporal punishment and scarification.

4.2.3 | Tradition

A significant main effect of practice, $F(2, 148) = 30.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$, showed that participants selected the tradition reason more in the practice of scarification than in the practices of corporal punishment and schooling restrictions.

4.2.4 | Personal choice

A significant main effect of practice, $F(2, 148) = 7.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$, showed that participants selected the personal choice reason more in the practices of scarification and schooling restrictions than in corporal punishment.

4.3 | Assumption of consensual status

Mean assumptions of the consensual status of the practice were examined using a 2 (Participant Gender) \times 2 (Condition) \times 3 (Practice) ANOVA, with practice as a repeated measure. As expected, the majority of participants (73%) assumed that targets consented to the cultural practices. Assumptions varied by practice, $F(2, 148) = 9.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Participants assumed consent more for the practices of scarification and schooling restrictions than for corporal punishment. Contrary to expectations, there was no effect for condition.

4.4 | Contingency of practice evaluations

As expected, the majority of participants (67%) made noncontingent evaluations of the practices. We further expected positive practice evaluations to be contingent on consensual status more than negative practice evaluations, which we expected to be noncontingent on consensual status. We tested the contingency of evaluations of scarification and schooling restrictions because there were participants who made negative and participants who made positive evaluations of these practices (scarification = 50% negative, schooling restrictions = 37% negative). We did not test the contingency of evaluations of corporal punishment because nearly all (94%) participants evaluated it negatively.

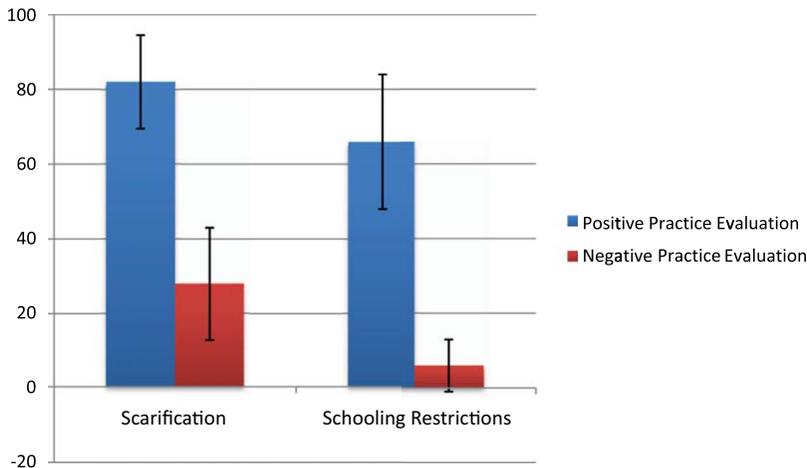


FIGURE 1 Study 1: Percentage of evaluations contingent on consensual status in the United States. Error bars show 95% confidence intervals

For scarification and schooling restrictions, mean contingency evaluations were examined using a 2 (Practice Evaluation) \times 2 (Participant Gender) \times 2 (Condition) ANOVA. For both scarification and schooling restrictions, a main effect of practice evaluation indicated that participants made more contingent evaluations when they had positively, as opposed to negatively, evaluated the practice. Specifically for scarification, $F(1, 74) = 30.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$, and schooling restrictions, $F(1, 70) = 39.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$, the mean contingency evaluation was higher for participants who positively evaluated the practice than for participants who negatively evaluated the practice. Thus positive evaluations of scarification and schooling restrictions were contingent on consensual status more than negative evaluations of these practices (see Figure 1 for means).

5 | DISCUSSION

As expected, American emerging adults evaluated the cultural practices examined in Study 1 negatively with reasons indicating that they were harmful or unfair moral violations, especially when they targeted women. These findings are consistent with previous research (Shaw & Wainryb, 1999; Wainryb, 1993) showing that emerging adults do not tolerate others' cultural practices when the practices appear to be harmful. At the same time, American emerging adults in the current study assumed the practices were consensual. The fact that the cultural practices were clearly identified as from an unfamiliar and foreign area of the world may have led our participants to see the culture as homogeneous, while at the same time they may have been sensitive to the particular harms or injustice related to each practice.

Practice evaluations varied by condition and practice. As expected, emerging adults evaluated cultural practices more positively in neutral than in gendered conditions. Cultural practices that targeted women were evaluated more negatively and reasons selected referred to moral concerns with targets' welfare. In contrast, cultural practices with gender-neutral targets were evaluated more positively and less often justified with moral concerns. Thus, American emerging adults were especially critical of cultural practices that target women. Furthermore, emerging adults were more accepting of the practices of scarification and schooling restrictions than of corporal punishment. American emerging adults reasoned that scarification was a traditional practice that provides targets with a sense of identity and community or entailed targets' choice, and schooling restrictions entailed pragmatic concerns related to community functioning (i.e., people may have had to leave school for work to provide for their families). In contrast, emerging adults reasoned that corporal punishment entailed moral concerns and harmful consequences for targets.

Consistent with previous research (Shaw & Wainryb, 1999), American emerging adults assumed the cultural practices were consensual, especially scarification and schooling restrictions. Because corporal punishment is used when targets transgress, it is perhaps unsurprising that American emerging adults assumed that targets of corporal

punishment, as compared to scarification and schooling restrictions, are unwilling participants. Yet despite evaluating the practice uniformly negative, it is noteworthy that most (58%) American emerging adults nonetheless assumed that targets of corporal punishment consented.

A goal of Study 1 was to explore the contingency of evaluations of cultural practices on targets' consent. Like Shaw and Wainryb (1999), we found that American emerging adults' evaluations of potentially harmful cultural practices are closely related to their assumptions of consent. For the practices of scarification and schooling restrictions, our findings suggest the contingency of practice evaluations on targets' consent varied according to the valence of the evaluations. Positive evaluations of the practices of scarification and schooling restrictions were contingent on consensual status more than negative evaluations. That is, most emerging adults who accepted scarification and schooling restrictions changed their initially positive evaluations to negative when told targets consent had changed. Changing targets' consent status may have made moral concerns with victimization more salient in emerging adults' reasoning. In contrast, emerging adults who rejected scarification and schooling restrictions maintained their negative evaluations regardless of consensual status. Perhaps negative evaluations were grounded on moral concerns, and therefore targets' consent (or lack thereof) was secondary to their already salient moral concerns with the practices' negative consequences for targets. These findings suggest that information about targets' consent is a necessary, though not sufficient, component of emerging adults' acceptance of seemingly harmful or unjust cultural practices. Information about targets' consent seemed most critical for emerging adults who initially reasoned that the cultural practices were acceptable and perhaps deemed them to be relatively innocuous, similar to the findings of Shaw and Wainryb (1999).

6 | STUDY 2

Study 2 examined Beninese young adults' evaluations of the practices of corporal punishment, scarification, and schooling restrictions, practices that are common and grounded in their own culture (i.e., practices were described as occurring locally, in a "village in West Africa"). Given their location, we assumed that participants would be familiar with the cultural practices depicted in the study, including practices' benefits and harms. For example, scarification is done to identify members of a tribe and may provide a sense of community, but some people are concerned about the possibility of disease when it is done with unsanitary instruments (Ayeni et al., 2007). Despite their potential familiarity with the beneficial consequences of these cultural practices, we expected Beninese young adults also to be aware of the possible harms and to negatively evaluate the practices for moral reasons. Furthermore, because Beninese participants are likely aware of dissent and contested understandings of these practices within their own culture (Nussbaum, 1998), we expected them to assume the cultural practices were nonconsensual.

We examined whether Beninese young adults' reasoning about cultural practices was impacted by targets' gender. Evidence suggests competing hypotheses. Benin is progressing but remains low on the UN gender inequality index (ranking 167 out of 187 countries; UNDP, 2011). Such entrenched gender inequality may suggest that practices that target males would be judged more negatively than those that target females. On the other hand, Beninese young adults who live with these cultural practices may recognize that they sometimes target females more than males (especially schooling restrictions), which suggests that practices that target females would be judged more negatively than those that target males.

Since past research has characterized Africa as highly collectivist as compared to other regions (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002), we investigated whether Beninese participants prioritized the needs of the group over the needs of individuals. However, given research that shows that personal agency and welfare is important in many cultures (Spiro, 1993; Turiel 2006, 2015), we expected that consent would be an important factor. Consistent with Study 1, we expected that positive practice evaluations would be contingent on consensual status more than negative practice evaluations, and we expected more noncontingent than contingent evaluations because participants were expected to negatively evaluate the cultural practices.

7 | METHOD

7.1 | Participants

Participants were 93 undergraduates (47 males, 46 females) of diverse native ethnicities, including Fon, Goun, and Adja, attending a public university in Benin, West Africa. Participants were recruited by a Beninese research assistant. Participants were on average 23.61 years old ($SD = 3.2$, range 19–36 years).

7.2 | Design and assessments

Due to technological limitations in Benin, participants completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The questionnaire was written in English and then translated into French by a Beninese research assistant fluent in English and French. It was reviewed for accuracy by the first author who reads French. French is the official language of Benin and the language of instruction in Beninese universities. The questionnaire first solicited demographic information (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity). Then, participants' reasoning about the cultural practices was elicited. Practices were presented in one of three conditions which varied between subjects. In the gendered-female condition ($n = 31$, 15 males), participants were told the target of the cultural practice was a teenage daughter. In the gendered male condition ($n = 30$, 15 males), participants were told the target was a teenage son. In the neutral condition ($n = 32$, 17 males), the targets' gender was unspecified and participants were told the target was a teenager.

Participants were presented with three cultural practices: corporal punishment (e.g., "In a village in West Africa, the teenage daughters have chores to do every day and if they don't finish them, they are punished by being hit several times"), scarification (e.g., "In a village in West Africa, parents take their teenage daughters to receive scars on their face which mark their identity as a member of their tribe"), and schooling restrictions (e.g., "In a village in West Africa, parents only allow their teenage daughters to go to school part time so they can help their parents"). The order of presentation of the practices was counterbalanced.

Several assessments were made of participants' reasoning about the cultural practices. Participants were asked to evaluate the acceptability of the practice ("Do you think this practice is OK or not OK?"), to choose a reason for their practice evaluation ("Choose up to three reasons why you think this is OK or not OK."), and to provide their assumption regarding the consensual status of the practice ("Do you think most [targets] agree to this practice?"). Finally, to examine whether practice evaluations were contingent on its consensual status, participants were told about families where the teenagers either agreed or did not agree with the practice. Different from Study 1, all participants were asked about both consent scenarios: "When the [targets] DO NOT agree with the [practice], is [the practice] OK or not OK?" and "When the [targets] AGREE with [the practice], is [the practice] OK or not OK?"

7.3 | Scoring

Practice evaluations were scored as 0 = 'not okay' and 1 = 'okay.' Participants were provided with a list of eight reasons for their practice evaluations, which were derived from previous scoring systems (Conry-Murray, 2009a; Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Turiel, 1983) and further elaborated from pilot testing. Reasons were categorized as *moral* (referred to fairness, individual rights, or individual welfare), *pragmatic* (referred to the practice working or being in the best interest of the group), *tradition* (referred to the practice's traditional nature), *personal choice* (referred to the target's personal choice), and *authority* (referred to the actor's authority to decide). Because multiple reasons were allowed, responses were scored in terms of the proportional use of each reason (e.g., a response referring to two reasons scored each reason .5). Assumptions of the consensual status of the practice were scored as 0 = 'nonconsensual' and 1 = 'consensual.' Finally, the contingency of the practice evaluation on the consensual status of the practice was scored as 0 = 'noncontingent' (i.e., the manipulation of the consensual status of the practice did not change the evaluation) or 1 = 'contingent' (i.e., the manipulation of the consensual status of the practice changed the evaluation; see Shaw et al., 2014).

TABLE 2 Study 2: Mean practice evaluation, reasons for practice evaluations, and mean assumptions of consensual status by practice (and SDs) in Benin

	Practice		
	Corporal punishment	Scarification	Schooling restrictions
Practice Evaluations	.17 _a (.38)	.50 _b (.50)	.03 _c (.18)
Reasons			
Moral	.77 _a (.39)	.44 _b (.44)	.81 _a (.35)
Pragmatic	.15 _{a,b} (.32)	.26 _a (.34)	.10 _b (.26)
Tradition	.02 _a (.09)	.14 _b (.24)	.01 _a (.05)
Personal	.02 _a (.13)	.10 _a (.24)	.01 _a (.05)
Consensual Status	.05 _a (.23)	.15 _b (.36)	.09 _{a,b} (.29)

Note. Negative evaluations were scored as 0; positive evaluations were scored as 1. Nonconsensual was scored as 0; consensual was scored as 1. Subscripts that differ indicate that means with the same row differed at $p < .05$ or at the appropriate Bonferroni correction level ($\alpha = .0125$ for reasons).

7.4 | Results

All analyses fit at least one of the conditions described by Lunney (1970) for analyzing dichotomous data with ANOVAs. For all analyses, significant interactions were analyzed using tests of simple effects and, where appropriate, Bonferroni corrected *t*-tests.

7.5 | Practice evaluations

Mean practice evaluations (see Table 2) were examined using a 2 (Participant Gender) \times 3 (Condition) \times 3 (Practice) repeated measures ANOVA, with practice as repeated measure. As expected, the majority of participants (76%) evaluated the cultural practices negatively. Evaluations varied by practice, $F(2, 172) = 43.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$. Participants evaluated all three practices differently. Scarification was judged most positively, and schooling restrictions was judged most negatively, with corporal punishment in the middle. Contrary to expectations, there were no significant effects for condition.

7.6 | Reasons for practice evaluations

Reasons, scored as proportions (see Table 2), were each analyzed with a 2 (Participant Gender) \times 3 (Condition) \times 3 (Practice) repeated measures ANOVA, with practice as repeated measure. Unelaborated responses and reasons with low overall frequency (<5%; authority) were not analyzed. Across all reasons, there were no significant effects for condition or participant gender.

7.6.1 | Moral

The majority of participants' selected reasons for their practice evaluations that referred to moral concerns with welfare and fairness. A significant main effect of practice, $F(2, 174) = 35.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$, showed that participants selected the moral reason more in the practices of corporal punishment and schooling restrictions than in the practice of scarification.

7.6.2 | Pragmatic

A significant main effect of practice, $F(2, 174) = 7.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$, showed that participants selected the pragmatic reason more in the practice of scarification than in the practice of schooling restrictions.

7.6.3 | Tradition

A significant main effect of practice, $F(2, 174) = 25.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .23$, showed that participants selected the tradition reason more in the practice of scarification than in the practices of corporal punishment and schooling restrictions, where it was rarely selected.

7.6.4 | Personal choice

No significant effects were found given Bonferroni corrected alpha levels.

7.7 | Assumption of consensual status

Mean assumptions of the consensual status of the practice (see Table 2) were examined using a 2 (Participant Gender) \times 3 (Condition) \times 3 (Practice) repeated measures ANOVA, with practice as repeated measure. As expected, nearly all (90%) participants assumed that targets do not consent to the cultural practices. Assumptions of consent varied by practice, $F(2, 170) = 3.44, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$; participants assumed the practice of corporal punishment was less consensual than the practice of scarification. There were no significant effects for condition.

7.8 | Contingency of practice evaluations

As expected, the majority of participants (62%) made noncontingent evaluations of the practices. We further expected positive practice evaluations to be contingent on consensual status more than negative practice evaluations. We tested the contingency of evaluations of scarification and corporal punishment because evaluations of these practices were split between positive and negative judgments for these practices (scarification = 50% negative, corporal punishment = 83% negative). We did not test the contingency of evaluations of schooling restrictions because nearly all (97%) participants evaluated it negatively.

For scarification and corporal punishment, mean contingency evaluations were examined using a 2 (Practice Evaluation) \times 2 (Participant Gender) \times 2 (Condition) ANOVA. For both practices, a main effect of practice evaluation indicated that participants made more contingent evaluations when they had positively, as opposed to negatively, evaluated the practice. Specifically for scarification, $F(1, 79) = 9.44, p = .003, \eta^2 = .11$, and corporal punishment, $F(1, 78) = 8.19, p = .005, \eta^2 = .10$, the mean contingency evaluation was higher for participants who positively evaluated the practice, as compared to participants who negatively evaluated the practice, as Figure 2 shows. Thus, participants' positive evaluations of scarification and corporal punishment were contingent on consensual status more than their negative evaluations of these practices.

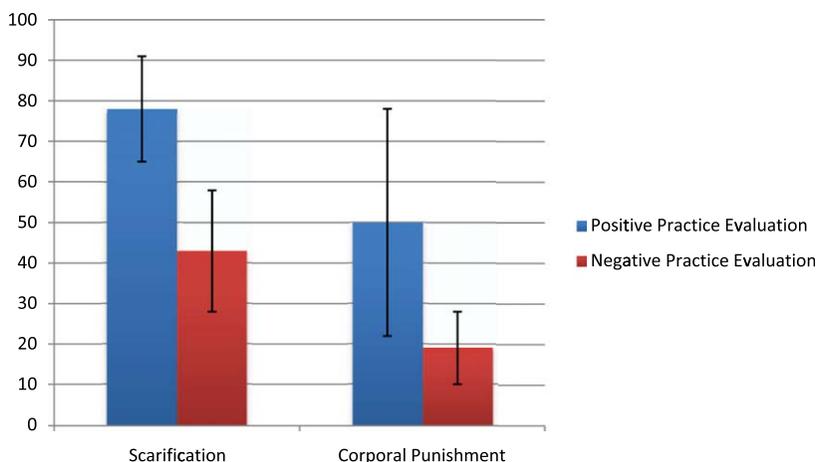


FIGURE 2 Study 2: Percentage of evaluations contingent on consensual status in Benin. Error bars show 95% confidence intervals

9 | DISCUSSION

As expected, Beninese young adults negatively evaluated the practices common in their own culture. Beninese young adults did not evaluate practices differently by condition: they evaluated practices with female, male, or gender-neutral targets similarly negatively. Despite the fact that Benin is a country with significant gender inequality, this finding suggests that Beninese young adults are not especially sensitive to targets' gender and do not regard practices that target a specific gender as a special category of discrimination (Okin, 1989).

Although the practices presented in this study are traditional in Benin and serve some potentially beneficial purpose for the community, Beninese participants rejected these practices and selected moral reasons. Benin may be considered a collectivistic culture by some (Oyserman et al., 2002) and therefore oriented toward duty and tradition, but Beninese young adults did not prioritize concerns with tradition or pragmatics over moral concerns with the harmful consequences of these practices in their reasoning about these cultural practices.

Beninese young adults evaluated the cultural practices differently, indicating that their evaluations were sensitive to the unique features of each practice. Beninese young adults generally rejected the practices of corporal punishment and schooling restrictions, and most often selected moral reasons. Yet, nearly half of Beninese participants evaluated scarification positively. Although they often cited moral concerns with the consequences of scarification, young adults also cited concerns with its efficacy or pragmatics, its traditional nature, and targets' personal choice.

Beninese young adults were most critical of schooling restrictions. As college students, our participants are among the most educated in Benin and they may be especially sensitive to cultural practices that restrict schooling. Additionally, Beninese society appears to be moving away from some traditional practices. For example, literacy rates are higher among young people than the population at large (UNICEF, 2003). In an article published by United Nations Girls Education Initiative, a Beninese mother named Céline Nambi commented "Before, girls did not go far in their studies. Today, girls have a chance and they are coming back to school" (UNGEI, 2010). These changes are also affecting practices like corporal punishment and wife beating, which are falling out of favor (UNICEF, 2003). Our finding that Beninese young adults negatively evaluated practices traditional in their own culture is consistent with this cultural change.

Nearly all (90%) of Beninese young adults assumed that members of their culture do not consent to these practices. Because corporal punishment is used when targets transgress, it is unsurprising that young adults tended to assume targets of corporal punishment were especially unwilling and coerced participants. That said, most Beninese young adults readily assumed all cultural practices lacked targets' consent.

Our findings also suggest the contingency of evaluations varied according to the valence of evaluations for the practices of scarification and corporal punishment. Participants' positive evaluations of these practices were contingent on consensual status more than their negative evaluations. That is, young adults who accepted scarification and corporal punishment changed their positive evaluations to negative when told targets' consent changed. A change in consent may have made moral concerns with victimization more salient in young adults' reasoning. In contrast, young adults who rejected scarification and corporal punishment maintained their negative evaluations regardless of consensual status. Negative evaluations may have been grounded on moral concerns, and therefore targets' consent (or lack thereof) was secondary to their already salient moral concerns with the practices' negative consequences for targets. Although we were not able to directly test which reasons were associated with contingent evaluations, the findings suggest that information about targets' consent is a necessary, though not sufficient, component of young adults' acceptance of seemingly harmful or unjust cultural practices. When practices are initially evaluated to be acceptable, information about targets' consent is critical to their subsequent negative evaluation of the practice. When practices are initially rejected, information about targets' consent is secondary to the already salient moral concerns.

10 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Comparing Study 1 and 2 directly is difficult because the practices, conditions, and the assessment of the contingency of evaluations on consensual status differed. The population of Beninese undergraduates also represents an elite group

given that postsecondary education is much rarer in Benin than in the United States. However, the parallel nature of the studies makes it possible to draw cautious conclusions about similarities and differences between the two samples.

In general, American and Beninese participants were critical of the practices: the majority of participants in both cultures negatively evaluated the practices. Yet, Americans (69% negative evaluations) were slightly less critical of the practices than the Beninese (76% negative evaluations). This finding is noteworthy considering that American participants were presented with practices that were more severe than the practices presented to the Beninese participants.

American emerging adults were more sensitive than the Beninese to the notion that practices targeting females include a special element of discrimination. By contrast, the Beninese were not sensitive to the injustice of targeting a vulnerable group, and they equally rejected practices in all conditions regardless of whether targets were female, male, or of both genders. Because Beninese young adults very frequently evaluated the cultural practices negatively, this finding may reflect a floor effect where all conditions were judged to be negative. However, American emerging adults gave different reasons for their evaluations of practices that targeted females by citing moral concerns, whereas there were no condition effects for any of the reasons cited by Beninese young adults.

A major difference in the findings between the two studies is in assumptions of consent. Whereas the majority (73%) of American participants assumed that targets consented to the practices, only a small minority (10%) of Beninese participants assumed the same. Beninese young adults seem more aware than American emerging adults of dissent and contested understandings of these practices perhaps because they commonly occur in their own culture. Despite reports of Benin as collectivistic and oriented toward harmony and maintaining traditional ways (Oyserman et al., 2002), our college-educated sample of Beninese young adults assumed targets of traditional practices do not consent. This may be a result of their education. However, it follows a trend seen in the country, where more children are attending school and becoming literate (UNICEF, 2003).

Shaw and Wainryb (1999, 2006) showed that emerging adults are capable of coordinating the multiple factors relevant in our investigation, including concerns for pragmatics, tradition, personal choice, and coercion. Thus, the finding that American emerging adults assumed that Africans consent to traditional practices that inflict harm on or restrict the freedoms of targets is problematic. American emerging adults seem to lack awareness that Africans wish to improve their social situation and often disagree with and even openly defy some of their traditional practices. This blind spot could have dramatic consequences as American emerging adults grow older and gain power, including the power to impact the aid offered to Africa.

Undergraduates in both cultures saw consent as necessary, but not sufficient, for evaluating the practices positively. That is, a practice that is evaluated as unacceptable may remain unacceptable, even if targets' consent is changed. However, a practice that is initially accepted is likely to be later rejected when targets' consent is changed. Sample size and power considerations restricted our ability to examine whether initial assumptions about consent or nonconsent were more strongly associated with changes in evaluations. We were also unable to examine whether changes in evaluations were related to specific reasons. However, for practices that were initially rejected, it is possible that the salient moral concerns may lead young adults to continue to reject the practice even if consent is present. This may be the result of a concern that people can be coerced into complying with practices that harm them (Shaw & Wainryb, 2006) or people may be unaware of potential harm that may be years away, as in the case of schooling restrictions. The idea that consent is not sufficient for a practice to be judged as acceptable is also evident in the finding that American emerging adults' evaluated the practices to be unacceptable despite assuming that targets consent. Methodologies of much previous moral development research (reviewed in Smetana, 2013) fail to give or give indirectly information on targets' consent. The findings from this investigation underscore the need to make consent information more explicit when assessing individuals' reasoning about seemingly harmful or unjust practices.

The results of both studies support the claim that people consider the specific features of multifaceted issues in their evaluations (Killen, 2016). Consistent with social domain theory research (e.g. Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 2002), participants balanced information related to the benefits and harms of the practices and the consensual status of the actors. Findings from our research also show that assumptions about consent can affect evaluations of practices (Shaw & Wainryb, 1999). Our findings extend social domain theory by showing that changes in consensual status are more

likely to impact initially positive, as compared to negative, evaluations of cultural practices. This finding suggests that consent alone is insufficient for evaluations that a practice is acceptable.

Samples in both studies included undergraduates, from a selective American liberal arts university and one of the few universities in Benin, represent an elite group within their respective countries. The rarity of college education and the older average age of our Benin sample suggest that our samples are not strictly equivalent. In addition, the use of undergraduates limits the generalizability of the findings, especially in Benin, where low literacy rates suggest that a college education is extremely atypical. Still, college-educated young adults in Benin are often well integrated into their communities since they do not form a large enough community to segregate themselves.

Future research should examine how people from diverse cultures reason about seemingly harmful cultural practices in the United States. For example, it would be interesting to explore whether people in Benin expect that Americans engage in harmful practices (e.g., plastic surgery, restrictive diets, risky sports) without coercion. Assumptions about consent were critically different between Beninese and American participants in our research, but future research will need to examine whether this difference is unique to evaluations of Beninese cultural practices or whether reasoning about cultural practices is contingent on familiarity.

The present study highlights several factors that young adults consider when evaluating cultural practices, including the beneficial and harmful consequences and the consent of those affected. For Americans, the targets' status as a member of a vulnerable group was also relevant. In both cultures, consent was an essential component of evaluations of the acceptability of cultural practices. However, most American emerging adults assumed that targets consent, whereas most Beninese young adults assumed that targets do not. Given the important role of consent in reasoning about cultural practices, it would be unfortunate if American young adults were missing information on the divergent perspectives and contested understandings within traditional cultures that is critical to having a more nuanced understanding of culture and traditional cultural practices.

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