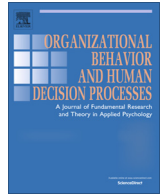




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## Who should bring home the bacon? How deterministic views of gender constrain spousal wage preferences

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the rise of dual-income households in the United States and a narrowing of the nation's gender wage gap, we find that many men and women still prefer the husband to be the primary breadwinner. To help explain intra-marital wage preferences, we argue for a new construct, *gender determinism*, which captures the extent to which a person believes gender categories dictate individual characteristics. We show that deterministic views of gender increase both intra-marital wage gap preferences and work choices that may perpetuate the gender wage gap. Our results hold in both student and non-student samples, suggesting some endurance of these beliefs. We discuss how our findings contribute to extant research on implicit person theory and gender role theory, and the implications of our findings for gender wage equity.

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## Introduction

Some argue that the era of the husband as breadwinner is dead (Salam, 2009). The latest U.S.<sup>1</sup> recession reduced male employment levels more than female employment levels ("Decline", 2011), and women now represent the majority in management, professional, and related positions (BLS, 2013a). Moreover, since 2009, wives have earned more than their husbands in almost one third of American dual-income households (BLS, 2013b), and childless women between the ages of 22 and 30 earned more than their male colleagues in many of the largest cities (Luscombe, 2010). These changes suggest that the traditional model of the U.S. family, in which the husband "brings home the bacon" and the wife "fries it up in a pan" is undergoing change.<sup>2</sup> Yet, does everyone embrace, accept, or even acknowledge this change? Societal shifts in behavior do not imply individual members similarly change their beliefs about gender-appropriate roles. Rather societal change can beget individual level heterogeneity in gender beliefs as well as an expanding gap between preferences and reality about what it means to be a

man or a woman. Individual belief heterogeneity can have implications for marriage choices (mate selection), and in a related manner, individual occupational choices and career decisions.

In this research we explore (1) whether gender differences still exist regarding present and future views of who assumes the breadwinner role in people's families and (2) if the belief that gender dictates an individual's characteristics influences intra-marital wage preferences and occupational choices. Overall, we present a novel approach to considering how beliefs about gender impact personal preferences for, and choices to enable, being the breadwinner across males and females. We propose that studying individual variance in the malleability of gender as a social category (which we term *gender determinism*), as opposed to extant research studying adherence to gender roles based on content, offers clearer insights into how these beliefs in malleability propagate an overall stickiness in people's models of gender-appropriate behavior, despite societal-level changes.

There is a rich literature on social roles and U.S. gender roles in particular (e.g., Bem, 1981; Eagly, 1987; Judge & Livingston, 2008). For example, Americans are accustomed to men being the primary wage earners in their families (Eagly & Wood, 1999) and to women being the primary caretakers (Moen & Roehling, 2005). Given that men have historically occupied the breadwinner role, people have come to believe that men, rather than women, are better able to fill this role (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), and they implicitly associate men, rather than women, with wealth (Williams, Paluck, & Spencer-Rodgers, 2010). In principle, beliefs about gender roles and resul-

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tant expectations for behavior and preferences may change when people view men and women performing out-of-role activities (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). We investigate the extent to which individual gender beliefs hinder or promote the ability of people to update their ideals about what is gender appropriate based on changes at the societal level. As society changes and more women contribute to if not support the household, will men and women change their expectations of who should fill the breadwinner role, and will their expectations depend on how they think about gender? In contrast to prior research on gender roles, which focuses on role content (specific duties for men and women), we measure gender role stability and the implication of this stability for understanding people's preferences and behaviors.

Changing wage trends in the United States offer an appealing context in which to study our questions. On the one hand, more women are becoming primary wage earners, and more men are engaging in caretaker activities (Dickler, 2012). On the other hand, a median wage gap across genders persists (Blau & Kahn, 2007; BLS, 2013b), and very few women reach the upper echelons of their organizations (Catalyst, 2012). These contrasting situations allow individual beliefs about gender to inhibit or promote acceptance of gender role changes. Drawing on implicit person theory (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), we develop the construct of *gender determinism* (GD), defined as the strength of an individual's belief that gender is a foundational force dictating a person's characteristics. By characteristics, we refer not only to stable individual differences, or personality traits, but also to behaviors, abilities, attitudes, and values. People who hold more deterministic views of gender believe that differences between men and women manifest into distinct characteristics including scientifically documented average biological differences such as strength and height but also differences with equivocal scientific support such as personality style and ideal social roles. The higher someone's GD, the more he or she views gender as influencing how someone will or should behave, possibly making it harder for that person to accept or act upon evolving gender roles.

We study people's level of acceptance to changes in gender roles by looking at their preferences for wage distribution between a husband and wife. Intra-marital wage distribution preferences are less about time availability and individual abilities than they are an indication of beliefs about work and home roles and who is best suited for each domain. Given the aforementioned content of U.S. gender roles assigning men as breadwinners and women as caretakers, the higher someone's GD, the more that person should prefer the husband to out-earn the wife.

We proceed by first discussing the traditional wage roles of men and women and the implications for intra-marital wage preferences. We explain why gender roles may lag behind current events, which may in turn explain why, on average, men and women still prefer the husband to be the primary wage earner. We follow with our proposition and defense of *gender determinism* as a previously unstudied but important construct for understanding individual preferences in the wake of shifting gender roles. We also explain why GD is useful in predicting wage preferences, above and beyond extant measures of gender roles that focused primarily on role content. We then test our predictions in a series of four studies and conclude with the theoretical and practical implications of our results.

### Traditional wage roles

Traditional U.S. gender roles dictate that men work outside the home to financially provide for their families (Judge & Livingston, 2008; Moen & Roehling, 2005) and that women work inside the home as caretakers for their families, including any children (Corrigan & Konrad, 2007; Moen & Roehling, 2005). Despite socie-

tal shifts, such as a greater percentage of women now participating in the workforce and many wives out-earning husbands (BLS, 2013b), we offer three reasons why gender roles may evolve slowly to absorb these changes. First, gender roles are socialized at an early age, such that children and young adults typically expect that men will work outside the home and that women will care for the home (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011). Gender roles are so deeply rooted in people's psyche that they may be resistant to change. Second, such early socialization means that many assumptions about gender are implicit. As noted, individuals automatically associate men with money and wealth, and estimate higher salaries for men than women (Williams et al., 2010). These subconscious connections between men and the earning role should be slower to evolve than those that are consciously articulated. Third, because gender roles are socially constructed (Eagly & Karau, 2002), they are tantamount to social norms. Collective constructions of normative behavior are slow to evolve because violation of injunctive norms usually invites social punishment rather than norm evolution (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

Recent research evidence suggests that social roles are slower to change than actual behaviors. For example, despite changes in economic conditions that have given women the ability to support themselves financially, women still find the financial prospects of potential male mates to be a critical concern (Stone, Shackelford, & Buss, 2008), and they are less likely to marry men whom they may out-earn (Bertrand, Pan, & Kamenica, 2013). Men still consider the earning potential of prospective female mates to be of little importance, instead valuing other qualities, such as physical attractiveness (Lippa, 2007). Moreover, women who do work are still expected to shoulder the burden of household responsibilities (Coltrane, 2000) and to make sure their families are properly cared for (Corrigan & Konrad, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Rosette & Tost, 2010). In fact, when women out-earn their partners, they often increase the amount of housework they perform (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003), possibly to show continued compliance to traditional social norms.

Thus, we predict that, on average, when people envision future family life, they prefer the husband to fulfill the breadwinner role and the wife the caretaker role. This implies that men must earn more than their spouse and that married women in the workforce may still prefer more than men for their spouse to earn more than they do.

**Hypothesis 1.** Women, more than men, will prefer their spouses to be the primary breadwinner.

### Deterministic views of gender

Although social role theory in general and work on U.S. gender roles in particular can explain why, on average, women and men prefer an intra-marital wage discrepancy, this literature was not developed to predict individual-level variation in gender role attachment. Society may have "consensual beliefs" about gendered activities, yet we argue that individuals can differ in their connection to these beliefs, being more or less open to adaptations in social roles. Gender determinism, a relatively stable individual difference, measures the extent to which one believes that membership in a given gender category dictates characteristics of the individual, and these beliefs should explain individual tolerance for social role changes. Our theory of gender determinism draws upon implicit person theory to explain individual variation in beliefs of the extent to which individual attributes are malleable.

Implicit person theory explains that "entitivists" consider individual attributes to be fixed traits (e.g., "I can't solve this problem because I'm not smart"), whereas "incrementalists" think individual attributes are malleable (e.g., "I haven't developed my ability

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