

Mexican-Origin Couples' Gender Roles: A Dyadic and Mixed Method Approach

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ABSTRACT

Within marital relationships, gender role attitudes refer to wives' and husbands' beliefs about their primary household responsibilities that vary from "traditional" (i.e., more sex-typed) to egalitarian (i.e., less sex-typed; Hoffman & Kloska, 1995). Although several studies have theorized about gendered family roles among Mexican-origin couples (Cervantes, 2006; Hengstebeck et al., 2015), existing literature has not considered how cultural orientation may play a role in explaining variation in Mexican immigrant husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes. For example, the extent to which husbands and wives are more Mexican, Anglo, or bi-culturally oriented may impact gender role attitudes. In addition, familism—a key Latino cultural value which underscores family cohesion, obligations, and interdependence (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002)—is likely to impact gender role attitudes and interact with spouses' cultural orientation. Utilizing a sample of 120 Mexican-origin couples, the current study implemented dyadic and mixed-method approaches to examine the linkages between spouses' cultural orientation, familism values, and gender role attitudes. Implications for supporting Latino immigrant couples are discussed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PLAN OF ANALYSIS

Two primary questions guided our analyses:

- (1) Are husbands' and wives' cultural orientation associated with their own and their spouses' gender role attitudes?
- (2) Do spouses' familism values moderate the links between husbands' and wives' cultural orientation and their own and their spouses' gender role attitudes?

Analyses included the application of an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus Version 7.31 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2015). (Note: Legal marital status was included as a control for all model paths.) Qualitative data for a subset of spouses were examined to further address research questions and clarify quantitative findings.

SAMPLE

Data were collected from 120 Mexican-origin couples (240 individuals) in 2007-2008 via 2-3 hour in-home interviews by bilingual Latina project staff. Recruitment was supported by cultural insiders and social service agencies in pre-determined census tract locations in a southeastern state. All interviews but one were conducted in Spanish.

- For most couples, both spouses were born in Mexico (89%).
- Marital Status: 69% legally married, 31% living as married (consensual unions)
- Marriage Location: 79% married in the U.S., 21% married in Mexico
- 95% of couples in this sample lived in neighborhoods characterized by high poverty.

	M	SD	Range
Age (in years)			
Wives	28.13	5.46	18 – 47
Husbands	30.33	5.79	18 – 48
First born (in years)	5.87	3.88	0.08 – 13.64
Years in the US			
Wives	8.81	4.41	<1 – 22
Husbands	11.40	5.26	2 – 27
Nuclear Family Size	4.07	0.92	3 – 7
Education (in years)			
Wives	9.66	3.17	0 – 16
Husbands	9.01	3.18	1 – 18
Work Hours (per week)			
Employed Wives (54%)	38.21	6.35	16 – 60
Employed Husbands (98%)	43.15	8.01	20 – 80
Income (annual)			
Family	\$33,297	\$12,725	\$8,000 – \$83,400

MEASURES

Construct (# of Items; α)	Sample Item	Response Scale
Mexican Orientation (17; $\alpha=.79/.75$) Cuéllar, et al., 1995	I associate with Mexicans and/or Mexican Americans.	1=not at all, 5=extremely often/almost always
Anglo Orientation (13; $\alpha=.87/.84$) Cuéllar, et al., 1995	My friends now are of Anglo origin.	1=not at all, 5=extremely often/ almost always
Gender Role Attitudes (13; $\alpha=.80/.84$) Hoffman & Kloska, 1995	For a woman, taking care of the children is the main thing but for a man, his job is.	1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree
Familism Values (16; $\alpha=.72/.68$) Knight et al., 2010	Parents should teach their children that the family always comes first.	1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree

Note: (α) is presented as husbands/wives values; Cultural Orientation was created as a function of Anglo minus Mexican orientations with higher values indicating a greater Anglo orientation and lower values indicating a greater Mexican orientation. Additionally, higher gender role attitude values indicated more sex-typed, "traditional" attitudes.

FINDINGS

Table 1

Unstandardized and Standardized Factor Loadings and Significance Levels for significant and approaching significant Model Parameters (Standard errors in parentheses, $N=120$). GR = Gender Role Attitudes

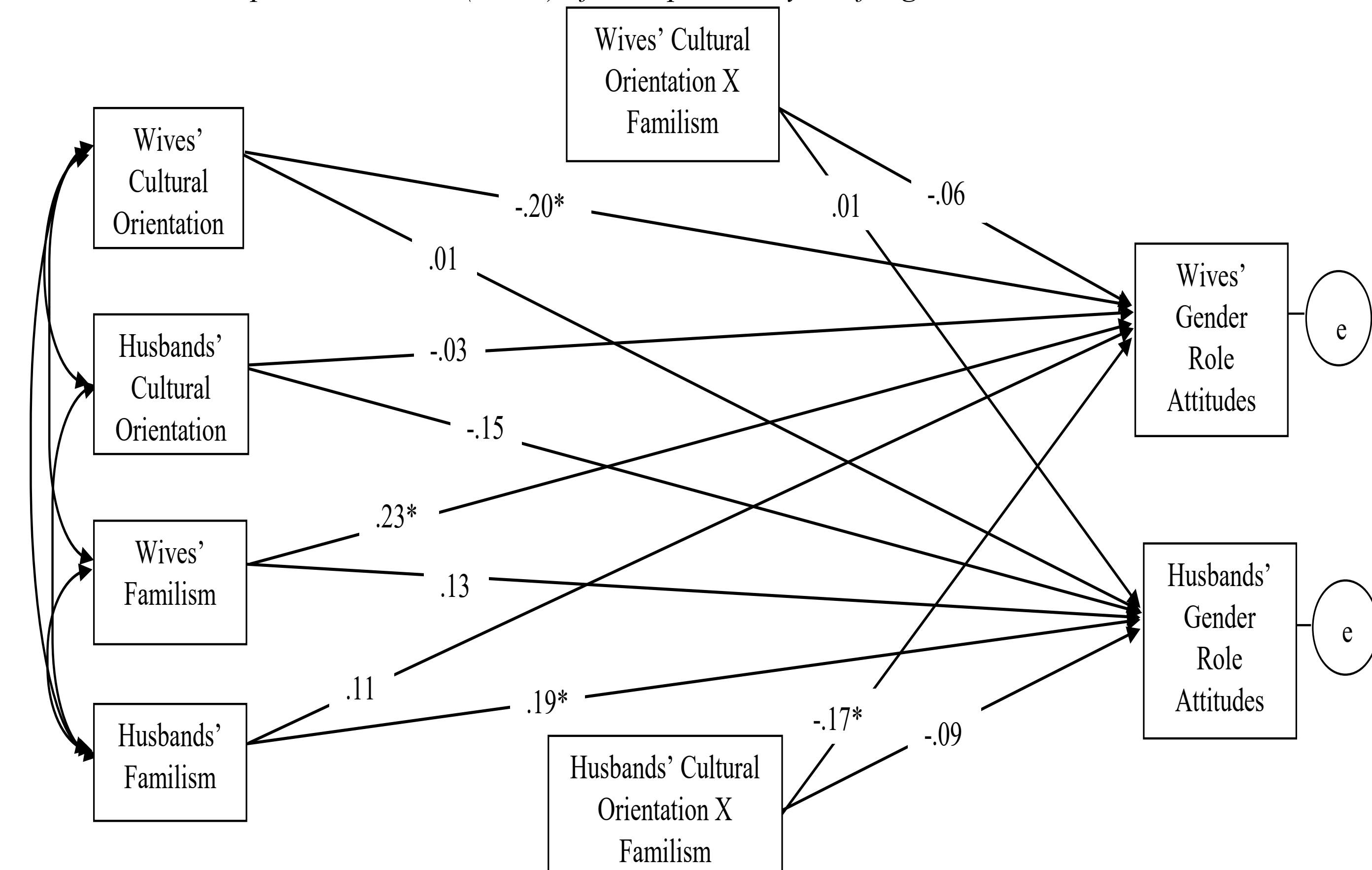
Parameter Estimate	B	β	p
Structural Model Actor Associations			
W Cultural Orientation \rightarrow W GR Attitudes	-.19	-.20 (.09)	.02
H Cultural Orientation \rightarrow H GR Attitudes	-.15	-.15 (.10)	.13
W Familism Values \rightarrow W GR Attitudes	.46	.23 (.09)	.00
H Familism Values \rightarrow H GR Attitudes	.51	.19 (.09)	.03
W Orientation X Fam Values \rightarrow W GR Attitudes	-.13	-.06 (.09)	.49
H Orientation X Fam Values \rightarrow H GR Attitudes	.26	.09 (.10)	.31
Structural Model Partner Associations			
W Cultural Orientation \rightarrow H GR Attitudes	.01	.01 (.09)	.95
H Cultural Orientation \rightarrow W GR Attitudes	-.03	-.03 (.09)	.72
W Familism Values \rightarrow H GR Attitudes	.27	.13 (.09)	.15
H Familism Values \rightarrow W GR Attitudes	.28	.11 (.09)	.20
W Orientation X Fam Values \rightarrow H GR Attitudes	.03	.01 (.89)	.88
H Orientation X Fam Values \rightarrow W GR Attitudes	-.49	-.17 (.08)	.04
Covariance of Husband with Wife Reports			
Cultural Orientation	.25	.34	.00
Familism Values	.01	.06	.48
Gender Role Attitudes	.18	.30	.00

- Quantitative analyses (Shown in Table 1) revealed actor effects linking familism values to gender role attitudes for both husbands and wives. That is, the higher spouses' own familism values, the more "traditional" (i.e., sex-typed) their attitudes about marital roles.
- Actor effects were also found linking wives' cultural orientation to their own gender role attitudes, such that the more Anglo oriented, the less "traditional" wives' attitudes.
- In addition, husbands' familism values moderated the partner effect between husbands' cultural orientation and their wives' gender role attitudes. Specifically, husbands' cultural orientation was negatively associated with wives' gender role attitudes only for husbands who reported relatively higher levels of familism. This finding suggest that when husbands strongly endorse familism values, the more Anglo oriented they are, the less traditional their wives' attitudes about gendered marital roles. Among husbands reporting low levels of familism values, the association between husbands' cultural orientation and wives' gender role attitudes was non-significant.

MODEL

Figure 1

Actor Partner Interdependence model (APIM) of SEM path analysis of regressions



Note. Standardized regression coefficients shown. Model fit was excellent ($\chi^2 = 14.97$ (ns); CFI = .91, RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .05) * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

SPOUSES' OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

We examined spouses' open-ended responses for a subset of spouses selected based on their familism values and cultural orientation scores. Interview questions focused on family roles and marriage in the context of parenting in the United States.

- Anglo cultural orientation was linked to less traditional gender role attitudes among wives:

"We got closer [after having our first child]. [We] think about money more and how to save money. [We have] more things to talk about during the day." –A 22-year-old mother of one child

- High levels of familism were related to more traditional gender role attitudes among wives:

"I feel that I do not have time to talk to my husband because I have to take care of the baby. My husband does not help with chores around the house." –A 25-year-old mother of one child

"He became the man of the house. He worries about our family, especially our daughter. [He's] more responsible." –A 27-year-old mother of one child

- Husbands' high levels of familism coupled with an Anglo cultural orientation was associated with less traditional gender roles among their wives:

"We have less time for each other; we had to learn how to divide our time between us and our children. Various aspects experienced a change; more communication, more responsibilities to divide among ourselves . . ." –A 32-year-old mother of two children

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- We found a **significant actor effect between cultural orientation and gender role attitudes for wives only**. More specifically, wives' cultural orientation was linked to wives' gender role attitudes such that the more Anglo oriented, the less "traditional" wives' attitudes.
- We found **significant actor effects for both wives and husbands linking familism values to gender role attitudes**. That is, the higher spouses' own familism values, the more "traditional" their attitudes about gendered marital roles.
- **An interaction was found which showed a partner effect linking husbands' cultural orientation to wives' gender role attitudes as a function of husbands' familism values**. In marriages where husbands scored low on familism values, husbands' cultural orientation was not significantly associated with their wives' gender role attitudes. In marriages where husbands espoused high levels of familism, the more Anglo husbands' cultural orientation, the less traditional wives' gender role attitudes.
- **This study advances a more complex depiction of the historically prevailing, and relatively simplistic, depictions of Latinos as "traditional" in their gender role attitudes**. Our findings demonstrate within-group variability among a low-income sample of Mexican-origin couples and suggest that spouses' gender role attitudes vary as part of a complex interaction between spouse's own and – in some cases – their partner's cultural orientations and familism values.
- **Understanding factors that contribute to spouses' gender role attitudes are important because previous literature has shown that the most resilient couples are likely to embrace role flexibility in the context of immigration** (Glick, 2010; Helms, et al., 2018; Hengstebeck et al., 2015). Spouses who hold more "traditional" (i.e., sex-typed) gender roles may limit their capacity for connection in marriage, whereas more flexible gender role attitudes are likely to be beneficial to couples during the process of immigration. In sum, these findings underscore the possibility for practitioners to frame discussions of gendered attitudes about marital roles in the context of the positive aspects of familism that has the potential to protect couples as they navigate marriage in the context of immigration.

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