

## Spouses' Gender Role Attitudes, Wives' Employment Status, and Mexican-Origin Husbands' Marital Satisfaction

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Hengstebeck, N., Helms, H. M., & Rodriguez, Y. (2015). Spouses' gender role attitudes, wives' employment status, and Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36 (1), 111-132. doi: 10.1177/0192513X14547416

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### **Abstract:**

Informed by Peplau's theory of roles, this study examined the complex interplay between spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status as a predictor of Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction. Dissonance between spouses' gender role attitudes toward marital roles and wives' employment status within couples was hypothesized to be inversely related to husbands' marital satisfaction. Data were gathered during in-home interviews with 120 Mexican-origin couples living in North Carolina. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses identified a three-way interaction between wives' employment and spouses' gender role attitudes, indicating that in couples with nonemployed wives, wives' more sex-typed gender role attitudes were more negatively associated with the marital satisfaction of husbands with more sex-typed attitudes than husbands with less sex-typed attitudes. Specifically, the three-way interaction showed that for couples with nonemployed wives, husbands' marital satisfaction was lowest in marital contexts in which both spouses endorsed more sex-typed gender role attitudes.

**Keywords:** gender role attitudes | Mexican immigrant couples | husbands | marital satisfaction

### **Article:**

Though the limited research on Mexican couples has expanded in recent years (e.g., Helms, Supple, & Proulx, 2011), there remains little research focusing specifically on the marital experiences and satisfaction of Mexican *husbands* following immigration to the United States. Previous research has identified spouses' gender role attitudes (i.e., level of agreement with sex-typed notions regarding marital roles) as important predictors of husbands' marital satisfaction (Falconier, 2013). Husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes vary in the extent to which they are congruent and may or may not align with actual role behavior (e.g., wives' employment; Peplau, 1983). The interaction of these factors and their association with marital satisfaction is particularly important to consider in studies addressing the marital satisfaction of

Mexican immigrant husbands (Updegraff, Crouter, Umaña-Taylor, & Cansler, 2007). For example, although Mexican-origin women are less likely to be employed and report a lower preference for employment than American women (Gonzales, 2008), following immigration, Mexican-origin women are likely to work out of economic necessity regardless of their own and their husbands' attitudes about women's employment (Baker, 2004). Among men who hold more sex-typed gender role attitudes, the challenges of immigration and their wives' necessary transition into the workplace may be negatively linked to their marital satisfaction (Falconier, 2013). The present study examines the complexities between spouses' gender role attitudes, wives' employment status, and husbands' marital satisfaction in a sample of Mexican-origin couples.

Previous research has explored the association between spouses' gender role attitudes and marital satisfaction and quality (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1995; Falconier, 2013); however, much of the research in this area has been conducted with White, middle-class couples. The research has further been limited in that very few studies have explored how *both* husbands' and wives' attitudes may be linked to marital satisfaction, though scholars have underscored its importance (e.g., Updegraff et al., 2007). Another area of research explored gender role attitudes among Mexican-origin individuals (e.g., Baca Zinn, 1980; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992), but primarily focused on women (e.g., Chavira-Prado, 1992), and only rarely examined these constructs in the context of marital satisfaction (Falconier, 2013). Gender role research has often centered on how *women's* roles are changing, with little discussion on how the uprooting of men's own "traditional" role expectations as the sole earner in the family may be uniquely related to husbands' marital satisfaction (Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990). Consideration of the necessity of wives' employment may be particularly important to understanding the experiences of immigrant couples (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). Although contemporary scholars underscore the importance of such research (Updegraff et al., 2007), the extent to which Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction varies as a function of the interaction between husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status has yet to be studied.

### **A Theoretical Model of Gender Roles in Marriage**

Peplau's (1983) framework provides a useful lens through which to explore spouses' gender role attitudes, wives' employment, and husbands' marital satisfaction. Peplau defines a role as "a consistent pattern of individual activity that is directly or indirectly interdependent with the partner" (p. 222). Peplau argues that wives' employment is a central *behavioral* domain of marital roles that is shaped in part by spouses' individual attitudes and expectations regarding marital role behavior. In Peplau's conceptualization, attitudes and expectations about how roles should be enacted comprise the *cognitive* domain of roles and may not be consistent with spouses' role behavior. Furthermore, just as discrepancies between role-related attitudes and behaviors may occur, within-couple discrepancies may also exist and reflect variation in the degree to which spouses are consistent in their endorsement of particular role-related attitudes. Peplau suggested that when discrepancies exist between wives' employment and spouses'

attitudes about the enactment of marital roles, role-related stress may result, and lead to declines in spouses' (particularly husbands') marital satisfaction. Though not always achieved, Peplau and others have suggested that consensus between role ideals and behavior, as well as within couples, is optimal for marital satisfaction (Helms, Walls, Crouter, & McHale, 2010).

Using Peplau's (1983) framework, this study explored the interaction between cognitive and behavioral aspects of roles—spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status—and Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction. Aligned with Peplau's focus on marital roles, this study examined gender role attitudes toward marital roles, or the degree to which individuals agree with gendered stereotypes about husbands and wives in marital relationships (Hoffman & Kloska, 1995). The possibility of dissonance between ideals and reality is underscored within the current study of Mexican immigrant couples, given the nonnormative nature of employment among low-income women in Mexico (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). One or both spouses' gender role attitudes may conflict with the necessity of wives' employment in the United States and may undermine husbands' marital satisfaction to the extent that husbands feel inadequate as providers.

## **Review of the Literature**

In the context of marriage, gender role attitudes refer to cognitive beliefs about husbands' and wives' primary responsibilities within and outside the home that vary from "traditional" or more sex-typed (i.e., specialized homemaker-wife and breadwinner-husband roles) to egalitarian or less sex-typed (i.e., less specialized shared roles; Hoffman & Kloska, 1995). Research on gender role attitudes and marriage among White couples found that husbands were more satisfied with their marriages when husbands endorsed less sex-typed gender-role attitudes than when they endorsed more sex-typed attitudes (Amato & Booth, 1995), and when partners had matched gender role attitudes (McHale & Crouter, 1992; Minnotte, Minnotte, Pedersen, Mannon, & Kiger, 2010). Given that gender role attitudes may be the only aspect of ethnic minority men's identities that grants them dominant status (Baca Zinn, 1980), gender role attitudes about marriage would be expected to be especially important for Mexican-origin men's marital satisfaction. The limited research has historically depicted Mexican-origin couples as endorsing more sex-typed gender role attitudes and behavior in marriage (Baca Zinn, 1980; Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). This stereotype has been especially pervasive in studies of *machismo*, which have typically portrayed Mexican-origin men as hypermasculine, chauvinistic, and prone to social deviance (e.g., Penalosa, 1968). Though more recent research has challenged stereotypes about *machismo* as negative unidimensional and universal aspects of the Mexican male *identity* (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Cervantes, 2006; Félix-Ortiz, Abreu, Briano, & Bowen, 2001), there remains little research on heterogeneity within Mexican-origin husbands' *attitudes* about the enactment of roles within their marriage. Among the limited research are several comparative studies that have found both that Mexican immigrant couples living in the United States hold *less* sex-typed attitudes (Baca Zinn, 1980) and *more* sex-typed attitudes than couples in Mexico (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Parrado &

Flippen, 2005). Because the combination of spouses' gender role attitudes toward marital roles enables the study of the marital dynamic of sex-typed role ideals and enactment within couples, consideration of both husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes and the potential link to Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction is warranted.

Further building the case for our focus on husbands, Peplau's (1983) suggestion that the interaction of spouses' attitudes and wives' employment behavior is likely a stronger predictor of husbands' marital satisfaction than wives' has received preliminary empirical support (Falconier, 2013; Minnotte et al., 2010). Indeed, studies have documented the negative effect of husbands' gender role conflict (i.e., discrepancy between their own gender role attitudes and behavior) on husbands' marital satisfaction (e.g., Campbell & Snow, 1992). In a sample of 452 White married couples, the interaction of husbands' attitudes, wives' perceptions of husbands' attitudes, and wives' employment status was examined (i.e., Vannoy & Philliber, 1992). This study found that wives' employment status interacted with husbands' attitudes in such a way that when wives were not employed, the more sex-typed husbands' attitudes were, the higher their marital quality; in contrast, when wives were employed, the more sex-typed husbands' attitudes were, the lower their marital quality. Though the interaction between spouses' attitudes and employment status was not tested, this study supports the notion that incongruence between husbands' attitudes and wives' behavior may be negatively related to husbands' marital satisfaction (Vannoy & Philliber, 1992). Applying Peplau's discussion of the interdependence of marital roles, this study's focus extends beyond a *single* partner's gender role attitudes on husbands' marital satisfaction to the *interaction* of *both* spouses' attitudes with wives' employment status.

Within Peplau's (1983) framework, wives' employment status represents the behavioral component of roles, which may or may not match either spouses' gender role attitudes. Research on the link between wives' employment and husbands' marital satisfaction has been mixed, with early studies generally finding a negative link (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1984; Ross Mirowsky & Ulbrich, 1983) and more recent studies showing wives' employment to be unrelated to husbands' marital happiness (Schoen, Rogers, & Amato, 2006). For Mexican immigrants, on arrival in the United States, husbands' inability to earn sufficient wages often necessitates wives' employment (Chavira-Prado, 1992; Fernandez Kelly, 1992). Though women's employment is not the norm in Mexico (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007), a majority (59%) of Hispanic women in the United States are employed (Gonzales, 2008). This rate is nevertheless below the labor force participation rates of American women (Montez, Angel, & Angel, 2009). It is important to note that women's employment has traditionally been discouraged among Mexicans not to subordinate women, but because motherhood is valued so highly (Esteinou, 2007). The experience of immigration, however, often demands a realignment of marital roles in which motherhood is redefined to include wives' employment (Baker, 2004). Mexican men who hold more sex-typed attitudes have been found to experience frustration with changing role behavior demands, struggle with the necessity of wives' employment, feel poorly about provider abilities, and to feel that they have less personal worth in their families when wives are employed

(Grzywacz, Rao, Gentry, Marin, & Arcury 2009). Macro social forces in the United States (e.g., men's insufficient wages) lead women to violate sex-typed behavioral role expectations that discourage wives' employment, but because women do so to help their families, sex-typed values are challenged and reinforced simultaneously (Baker, 2004). Husbands' marital satisfaction, therefore, is likely to vary based on the discrepancy between wives' employment behavior and one or both spouses' attitudes.

## **The Present Study**

The potential for diversity of experiences within Mexican families in the context of migration informs the current study of Mexican immigrant husbands' marital satisfaction and its association with the interaction between spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status (Baca Zinn, 1980; Fraga et al., 2012). Specifically, the current study examined Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction as predicted by the three-way interaction between wives' employment status, husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes, beyond the effects of dispositional and structural factors that have been empirically or theoretically linked to marital satisfaction: couples' legal marital status, husbands' years in the United States, age of firstborn child, additional adults living in the home, and spousal age gap (Casas & Ortiz, 1985; Cleary & Mechanic, 1983; Helms et al., 2011; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Markides, Roberts-Jolly, Ray, Hoppe, & Rudkin, 1999; Pyke & Adams, 2010; Rhyne, 1981). Informed by Peplau's framework and the extant literature, we hypothesized that husbands' marital satisfaction would be predicted by the interaction between spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status. The limited existing research would lead one to expect that among husbands married to employed wives, husbands would be most satisfied when they and their wives endorse less sex-typed gender role attitudes. Conversely, among husbands married to nonemployed wives, husbands in marriages in which both partners endorse more sex-typed gender role attitudes would be expected to be the most satisfied. Dissonance between attitudes and behavior was expected to be negatively related to husbands' marital satisfaction. When spouses' attitudes are mismatched, the association between husbands' marital satisfaction and the interaction of spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status is less clear based on the available literature. Theoretically, though wives' attitudes were expected to be an important contribution, we hypothesized that consistency between husbands' attitudes and wives' employment behavior would be particularly important for husbands' own marital satisfaction. This study offers the first test exploring the interaction of spouses' attitudes and wives' employment status and marital satisfaction among Mexican immigrant husbands.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedures**

The current study is based on data collected in 2007-2008 as a part of a larger study on marriage and contextual stress among Mexican immigrant couples with children living in North Carolina.

One hundred and twenty first-generation Mexican-origin couples who were (a) living together at the time of the study, (b) parents of their biological children, and (c) were legally married or were “living as married” in consensual unions were eligible for and participated in the larger study. Given the high prevalence of common law marriages in Latin American countries and that the many undocumented immigrant couples cannot legally marry in the United States, the inclusion of “living as married” couples is important to a more comprehensive definition of marriage among this population (De Vos, 1999; Helms et al., 2011; Wheeler, Updegraff, & Thayer, 2010). In addition, to be eligible for the study, at least one spouse had to be of Mexican origin, and both spouses had to be of Latin American origin. In 89% of couples, both spouses were born in Mexico. One hundred and nine husbands were born in Mexico.

Cultural insiders and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit couples within predetermined census tracts with high concentrations of Latino households. Latina project staff, social service workers, and community contacts made initial contacts with families either in families’ homes or at social service agencies that served the Latino community. During these initial contacts, families were informed of the goals of the research study, the nature of the prospective interview, and the eligibility criteria. Interested couples received a flyer with the project’s contact information. With the exception of one couple that withdrew prior to their interview, all couples that met eligibility criteria and were willing to participate were interviewed.

Data for both husbands and wives were collected during 2- to 3-hour individual in-home interviews conducted by bilingual Latina project staff. Husbands and wives responded separately to questions about their background, marital satisfaction, gender role attitudes, and employment status. To account for variations in literacy the interviewers read each survey question aloud and participants indicated their response by pointing to numbers on a response card for each scale. Interviewers then recorded participants’ responses on Scantron answer sheets. All but one interview was conducted in Spanish. Participating families received a \$50 gift card.

Of the 120 participating couples, 83 (69%) were legally married and 37 (31%) were living as married. Average ages for husbands and wives were 30 and 28 years, respectively, and there was an average spousal age gap of 3.49 years. Couples had been married or living as married for an average of seven years. Thirty-seven percent of couples had other adults living in the home, most often reporting one or two additional household members. Couples in the sample had two children, on average, and the mean firstborn’s age was six years. Wives and husbands averaged 10 and nine years of formal schooling, respectively. Husbands’ average length of time in the United States was 11 years, whereas wives’ was eight years. Ninety-eight percent of husbands and 54% of wives were employed. The average total family income was \$33,297; family income was unrelated to husbands’ marital satisfaction ( $r = .05$ ,  $p = .61$ ). Participating couples resided in small towns (55%), cities (26%), and rural areas (19%). According to 2008 Census data, 95% of couples lived in neighborhoods characterized by high poverty (i.e., ranging from a poverty rate of 19% to 32%). Forty-nine percent of couples lived in neighborhoods classified as 50%

Hispanic, 29% of couples lived in neighborhoods ranging from 10% to 25% Hispanic, and 21% resided in neighborhoods classified as less than 10% Hispanic.

## **Measures**

All measures in the study were available in both Spanish and English and had been applied in prior research with Latino populations. Staff trained in translation with local Mexican immigrant populations at the Center for New North Carolinians verified that the measures were appropriate for use with the present sample.

### ***Husbands' Marital Satisfaction***

The dependent variable, husbands' marital satisfaction, was measured using a 16-item adapted version of Huston, McHale, and Crouter's (1986) Domains of Satisfaction Scale, which was revised specifically for measuring marital satisfaction of Mexican-origin couples (Wheeler et al., 2010). Husbands were asked to rate their satisfaction in the past year from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 9 (*extremely satisfied*) across 16 domains of marriage (e.g., satisfaction with marital communication, the division of household work, family decision making, involvement with relatives, and shared cultural practices). Participants' scores were based on the average of the 16 domains; higher scores were indicative of higher marital satisfaction. The alpha for husbands' marital satisfaction was .90. The sample size for all analyses including husbands' reports of marital satisfaction was decreased by one because of a single interviewer error, in which the measure for husbands' marital satisfaction was skipped.

### ***Spouses' Gender Role Attitudes***

The six-item marital roles subscale from Hoffman and Kloska's (1995) Gender Role Attitudes Scale measured spouses' gendered attitudes toward marital roles. Several studies have confirmed the validity of the marital roles subscale specifically with Mexican American and immigrant populations, affirming the use of this subscale within the current sample population (Adams, Coltrane, & Parke, 2007; Wheeler et al., 2010). Participants were asked on a 5-point scale the extent to which they strongly disagreed to strongly agreed with statements such as "Men should make the really important decisions in the family." Participants' scores were averaged across six items; higher scores indicated more sex-typed gender role attitudes. Cronbach's alphas were .72 and .81 for wives' and husbands' gender role attitudes, respectively. Husbands endorsed more sex-typed gender role attitudes ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) than their wives ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ),  $t(119) = -2.44$ ,  $p = .02$ .

### ***Wives' Employment Status***

Wives were asked to indicate whether or not they were currently employed at the time of the interview (coded as 0 = nonemployed, 1 = employed).

### ***Structural and Dispositional Factors***

Wives' reports of age of firstborn child (measured continuously), legal marital status (coded 0 = "living as married," 1 = legally married), and additional adults living in the home (coded 0 = no additional adults, 1 = additional adults), husbands' reports of number of years in the United States (measured continuously), and spousal age gap (measured continuously as the absolute value of the difference between spouses' ages) were treated as control variables in the analyses.

## Results

Bivariate correlations among the study variables and corresponding means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Husbands' and wives' sex-typed gender role attitudes, wives' employment, and additional adults living in the home were associated with husbands' marital satisfaction. More specifically, the more husbands endorsed sex-typed attitudes about marital roles, the lower their marital satisfaction; lower levels of husbands' marital satisfaction were associated with wives' employment and additional adults in the home. The presence of additional adults in the home was less likely when couples were legally married and the longer husbands lived in the United States. Spousal age gap was greater the longer husbands had lived in the United States. Husbands' and wives' reports of gender role attitudes were correlated.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among the Study Variables ( $N = 120$ ).

Study variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Legal marital status <sup>a</sup>	—								
2. Husbands' years in the United States	.17†	—							
3. Additional adults living in home <sup>b</sup>	-.24**	-.26**	—						
4. Firstborns' age	.23*	.34***	-.16†	—					
5. Spousal age gap	-.00	.20*	.03	-.02	—				
6. Wives' employment status <sup>c</sup>	.07	.07	-.03	.08	.15	—			
7. Wives' gender role attitudes	-.10	-.01	.20*	.02	.14	.01	—		
8. Husbands' gender role attitudes	-.14	-.13	.24**	-.24*	.09	-.07	.32***	—	
9. Husbands' marital satisfaction	.06	.13	-.31**	.10	.13	-.18*	-.26**	-.23*	—
M	0.69	11.40	0.37	5.87	3.49	0.54	2.48	2.73	7.57
SD	0.46	5.26	0.48	3.88	3.47	0.50	0.92	1.02	0.96
Alpha	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.72	0.81	0.90

a. Coded as 0 = not legally married (consensual union), 1 = legally married. b. Coded as 0 = no other adults in home, 1 = additional adults in home. c. Coded as 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. † $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



A hierarchical multiple regression analysis (Table 2) was conducted to examine the hypothesized interaction between husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status, and the association with Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction beyond that explained by the control variables (i.e., couples' legal marital status, husbands' years in the United States, age of firstborn child, additional adults living in the home, and spousal age gap), the main effects of the independent variables, and the lower order interactions. For the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the five control variables were entered first, followed by the three independent variables, then all possible combinations of two-way interactions, and finally, the three-way interaction term.

**Table 2.** Regression Coefficients for Hierarchical Multiple Regression Models Predicting Husbands' Marital Satisfaction ( $N = 120$ ).

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
1. Legal marital status	-.06	.19	-.03	-.08	.18	-.04	.11	.18	-.05	-.15	.18	-.07
2. Husbands' years in the United States	-.00	.02	.01	-.00	.02	.00	.00	.02	-.01	.00	.02	.01
3. Additional adults living in home	-.61	.19	-.31**	-.49	.18	-.25**	-.46	.18	-.23*	-.50	.18	-.25**
4. Firstborns' age	.01	.02	.06	.02	.02	.07	.01	.02	.05	.01	.02	.05
5. Spousal age gap	.04	.03	.14	.06	.02	.21*	.06	.02	.22*	.06	.02	.23**
6. Wives' employment status				-.44	.16	-.23**	-.42	.16	-.22*	-.40	.16	-.21*
7. Wives' gender role attitudes				-.21	.10	-.20*	-.23	.10	-.21*	-.18	.10	-.17†
8. Husbands' gender role attitudes				-.13	.09	-.14	-.13	.09	-.13	-.10	.09	-.10
9. Wives' gender role attitudes $\times$ husbands' gender role attitudes							-.18	.09	-.18*	-.33	.11	-.33**
10. Wives' employment status $\times$ husbands' gender role attitudes							.12	.17	.06	-.81	.47	-.43†
11. Wives' employment status $\times$ wives' gender role							-.22	.20	-.11	-1.2	.51	-.57*

attitudes												
12. Wives' employment status × wives' gender role attitudes × husbands' gender role attitudes										.37	.18	.79*
R <sup>2</sup>	.12*			.23***			.27***			.30***		

†p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

A residualized centering approach was used to reduce multicollinearity in the interaction terms. This technique involved computing the interaction terms based on the variables' original metrics, regressing each interaction term onto the variables from which it was created, and saving the residual to use as the interaction term in the regression analyses (Little, Bovaird, & Widaman, 2006). This approach is superior to mean-centering approaches in that orthogonalizing ensures complete independence between the main effects and interaction terms. Significant two- and three-way interactions containing continuous variables were further explained using a probing strategy by which husbands' marital satisfaction was regressed onto high (i.e., 1 *SD* above the mean) and low (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean) levels of the independent variables (Aiken & West, 1991), beyond controls. When interactions included dichotomous variables (i.e., wives' employment status), husbands' marital satisfaction was regressed onto the two groups inherent to the dichotomous variable.

Block 1 of the regression contained the five control variables and explained 11.9% of the variance in husbands' marital satisfaction. The addition of the three independent variables (i.e., husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status) in Block 2 resulted in a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2 = .12$ ,  $F$ -change = 5.49,  $p = .001$ ). The three two-way interactions created by all combinations of the independent variables were added to the regression equation in Block 3. The addition of the two-way interaction terms did not result in a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $F$ -change = 1.55,  $p = .21$ ). The addition of the hypothesized three-way interaction between wives' employment status and husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes in Block 4 resulted in a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $F$ -change = 4.34,  $p = .04$ ).

Although the focus of this study is the three-way interaction, we will briefly discuss the main effect and lower-order findings depicted in the final regression model. First, husbands reported lower marital satisfaction when additional adults were living in the home than when there were no additional adults living in the home. Second, spousal age gap was positively associated with husbands' marital satisfaction. Third, husbands reported lower marital satisfaction when wives were employed than when their wives were not employed. Fourth, the significant two-way interaction between husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes indicated that the negative link between wives' gender role attitudes and husbands' marital satisfaction was stronger when husbands reported more sex-typed gender role attitudes ( $\beta = -.41$ ) than when husbands reported

less sex-typed gender role attitudes ( $\beta = -.07$ ). Fifth, the significant two-way interaction between wives' employment status and wives' gender role attitudes indicated that the negative relationship between wives' gender role attitudes and husbands' marital satisfaction was stronger when wives were not employed ( $\beta = -.17$ ) than when wives were employed ( $\beta = -.10$ ). Finally, all main effect and two-way interactions involving the independent variables were qualified, however, by the significant three-way interaction between husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status.

Findings from the follow-up probing of the three-way interaction revealed that the association between the interaction of husbands' and wives' attitudes and husbands' marital satisfaction was stronger when wives were not employed ( $\beta = -.40$ ) than when wives were employed ( $\beta = .03$ ). Given the small magnitude of the latter coefficient, this initial step suggested that the combination of both spouses' attitudes was salient *only* when wives were not employed. Therefore, the consecutive follow-up probes included only couples in which wives were not employed. Although this study did not explore typologies, it is notable that no couples were categorized by more (1 *SD* above the mean) sex-typed husbands married to less (1 *SD* below the mean) sex-typed, employed wives. The next step to deconstructing the three-way interaction was to further divide the couples in which wives were not employed by husbands' more (i.e., one *SD* above the mean) and less (i.e., one *SD* below the mean) sex-typed gender role attitudes. Among couples in which wives were not employed, the negative association between wives' sex-typed attitudes and husbands' marital satisfaction was stronger among more sex-typed husbands ( $\beta = -.67$ ) than less sex-typed husbands ( $\beta = -.23$ ). Thus, husbands were least satisfied when they and their wives endorsed highly sex-typed attitudes and wives were not employed.

## **Discussion**

The present study explored wives' employment and husbands' and wives' gender role attitudes as dyadic contexts within which Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction is situated. Following recommendations to explore complexities between culturally relevant predictors of marital satisfaction among Mexican-origin couples (Falconier, 2013; Updegraff et al., 2007), this study is the first test of the interaction of both spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status as a predictor of Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction. Incorporation of Peplau's (1983) theory of roles supported the inclusion of *both* spouses' gender role attitudes, wives' employment status, and husbands' marital satisfaction, and enabled a more complete understanding of the complexity of interactions between spouses' attitudes about how marital roles *should* be enacted (i.e., gender role attitudes) and the behavioral *reality* (wives' employment status) within individuals and within couples. Although this study did find support for the complex interaction between Mexican-origin spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status on husbands' marital satisfaction, the nature of the interaction was contrary to previous findings (based primarily on White couples) and what was theoretically proposed.

Based on Peplau's model, it was hypothesized that the most satisfied husbands would be either (a) less sex-typed and married to less sex-typed employed wives or (b) more sex-typed and married to more sex-typed nonemployed wives. Husbands' satisfaction was expected to be inversely related to dissonance between one or both spouses' gender role attitudes and/or wives' employment status. In contrast to theoretical predictions, although there was no significant difference in marital satisfaction between more ( $M = 7.17, SD = 0.90$ ) and less ( $M = 7.88, SD = 1.23$ ) sex-typed husbands in the multivariate model, husbands were least happy when *both* spouses held sex-typed gender role attitudes and wives were not employed (i.e., consistency between spouses, attitudes, and behavior). Husbands were happiest in their marriages when they were less sex-typed (and presumably more accepting of their wives' employment) *and* married to employed, more sex-typed wives.

Previous research suggested that husbands are more satisfied with their marriages when they hold less sex-typed gender role attitudes and when they are married to nonemployed wives (Amato & Booth, 1995; Booth et al., 1984; Ross et al., 1983). The present study found no support for a main effect association between husbands' gender role attitudes and husbands' marital satisfaction; however, it is notable that no previous research examined this relationship within the context of immigration. Consistent with earlier work on wives' employment, this study supported the finding that husbands were less satisfied when their wives were employed than when their wives were not employed. This finding, however, was qualified by the three-way interaction, which suggested that wives' employment is not universally related to lower to marital satisfaction across all configurations of spouses' gender role attitudes. As illustrated in the final model, though there were no main effects for either spouses' gender role attitudes individually, these variables were nevertheless important for husbands' marital satisfaction when considered simultaneously with wives' employment. In sum, the three-way interaction between spouses' attitudes and wives' employment explained significantly more variance in husbands' marital satisfaction than the individual variables and two-way interactions entered in previous steps, which suggests that (in support of the hypotheses) the combination of the three variables is important to a better understanding of husbands' marital satisfaction.

The significant three-way interaction in this study highlighted the importance of wives' employment status in understanding the interaction of spouses' gender role attitudes and marital satisfaction. Although the negative association between wives' employment and husbands' marital satisfaction was consistent with prior research (Booth et al., 1984; Ross et al., 1983), the three-way interaction further qualified this finding and showed that wives' employment may actually be protective of husbands' marital satisfaction in the context of particular combinations of spouses' gender role attitudes. Furthermore, the simultaneous examination of both spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment status revealed that within-couple congruence in gender role attitudes was less important for husbands' marital satisfaction than previous research with White populations would suggest (e.g., McHale & Crouter, 1992; Minnotte et al., 2010). The three configurations in which husbands were most satisfied were characterized by attitude–

behavior dissonance within couples: less sex-typed husbands married to employed, more sex-typed wives (discrepancy between wives' own attitudes and behavior); less sex-typed husbands married to nonemployed, less sex-typed wives (discrepancy between husbands' attitudes and wives' behavior); and more sex-typed husbands married to nonemployed, less sex-typed wives (discrepancy between wives' own attitudes and behavior). Taken together with the finding that the least happy husbands were in marriages consistent across spouses' attitudes and wives' employment status, dissonance between spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment may actually be protective of Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction in the context of immigration. The perceived necessity of wives' employment, husbands' support of wives' employment, spouses' decision-making strategies about wives' employment, spouses' internalized provider-role ideologies, and husbands' attitudinal flexibility to manage changing role behavior demands (Chavira-Prado, 1992; Fernandez Kelly, 1992; Grzywacz et al., 2009; Helms et al., 2010) may be particularly important in understanding Mexican-origin husbands' marital satisfaction in the context of both spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment.

Though spouses' gender role attitudes and wives' employment may reflect individual preferences, they are nevertheless situated in the larger sociocultural context of couples' immigration to the United States. In contrast to research on predominantly middle-class White couples, which emphasized consistency across spouses' attitudes and behavior as preferable for marital satisfaction (e.g., McHale & Crouter, 1992; Minnotte et al., 2010), the realities of cultural adaptation for immigrant couples might challenge consistency across spouses' attitudes and behavior as the ideal. Among Mexican-origin couples, within-couple dissonance between attitudes and behavior may be better described as flexibility, which may be more adaptive during the process of cultural adaptation than both spouses rigidly conforming to sex-typed gender role attitudes and behavior. Also, it may be that husbands do not experience all combinations of attitude-behavior dissonance similarly (e.g., Li & Caldwell, 1987). For example, given that Mexican-origin women tend to hold less sex-typed gender role attitudes than Mexican-origin men (Falconier, 2013) and that immigration often redefines women's role expectations to include wives' employment (Baker, 2004; Esteinou, 2007), dissonance between wives' gender role attitudes and wives' employment may be normative and correspondingly less salient to husbands' marital satisfaction than other types of dissonance. In addition, husbands may simply be less affected by their wives' within-person dissonance to the extent that the wives' more visible employment behavior is consistent with husbands' own gender role attitudes.

The finding that the least satisfied husbands were those in marriages with spouses who share matched sex-typed gender role attitudes and in which wives were not employed deviates from research about Mexican couples' sex-typed gender role attitudes as a Mexican cultural value protective of marriage (e.g., Penalosa, 1968). Thus, even when both spouses held matched, more sex-typed gender role attitudes and wives were not employed (which would be consistent with both spouses' more sex-typed attitudes), husbands were less satisfied with their marriages than

other husbands. In the context of immigration that often stretches spouses beyond the confines of more traditional roles, attitudinal inflexibility regarding marital roles—even when shared within couples—may undermine rather than protect husbands’ marital satisfaction.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

It is important to note several limitations to interpretations of these findings. First, although this study contributes to a very limited body of research on the marital experiences of Mexican immigrant men, the sample was nevertheless restricted to a specific population of Mexican immigrant parents living in North Carolina. The homogenous nature of the sample makes it difficult to predict generalizability to other Mexican immigrants or couples more broadly. Regardless of the population, this study highlights the need for research that incorporates greater complexity in exploring how within-person and within-couple discrepancies are linked to marital satisfaction. Building on this point, a second limitation is that this study did not explore the processes through which spouses’ gender role attitudes and wives’ employment affect marital satisfaction over time. Future research would benefit from a longitudinal design and a deeper exploration of the processes through which spouses’ gender role attitudes and wives’ employment status are linked to husbands’ marital satisfaction across the course of couples’ marriages (e.g., Falconier, 2013). Third, though gender role attitudes and *machismo* are distinct constructs, future research on Mexican-origin spouses’ marital satisfaction may benefit from the inclusion of husbands’ identification with both positive and negative dimensions of *machismo* (Pardo, Weisfeld, Hill, & Slatcher, 2013) in combination with spouses’ sex-typed gender role attitudes about the enactment of roles within their marriages. Fourth, though qualitative findings from the larger study from which the current sample was drawn would suggest that employment was a major reason for spouses’ immigration (Rodriguez, Hengstebeck, Helms, & Wood, 2013), the present study did not measure the status or circumstances of husbands’ and wives’ employment prior to immigration. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of premigration factors, such as spouses’ employment circumstances in Mexico and during the process of migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992), which may contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of spouses’ gender role attitudes, wives’ employment status, and marital satisfaction.

Peplau’s (1983) theoretical framework suggests that an examination of the affective components of roles may be promising future direction to pursue in elucidating the links between behavioral and cognitive components of marital roles and spouses’ marital satisfaction. For example, an examination of how spouses emotionally manage or affectively experience consistencies and discrepancies between spouses’ gender role attitudes and wives’ employment in their marriages may further explain how they are related to marital satisfaction. To this end, future research would benefit from the application of an Actor–Partner Interdependence Model approach (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Lederman, Macho, & Kenny, 2011) to examine actor and partner predictors of both husbands’ and wives’ marital satisfaction as well and the possibility that these associations are directly or indirectly mediated by additional factors. Finally, whether or not

similar results would be found to predict wives' marital satisfaction is an important area of future research. Despite this study's limitations, the inclusion of the combination of husbands' and wives' reports of gender role attitudes and wives' employment status as predictors of husbands' marital satisfaction were strengths of this study. In addition, this study addressed concerns of previous research on the lack of diversity in the study of relationships within subgroups of the Mexican American population (Baca Zinn, 1980; Helms et al., 2011; Updegraff et al., 2007).

## **Conclusion**

Immigration and the related sociocultural stressors amplify normative challenges and create new difficulties for couples. Knowledge of which couples' marital satisfaction may be most challenged has the potential to inform practitioners to empower couples to talk openly about their expectations, which may be especially important in the context of Mexican-origin couples' elevated divorce risk on moving to the United States (Phillips & Sweeney, 2005). The present study questions the assumption of previous research that sex-typed attitudinal and behavioral consistency within couples is protective of marital satisfaction and the underlying implication that couples should embrace or modify role expectations to achieve attitude-behavior consistency. Because the current study did not address the processes through which attitudes and wives' employment behavior are linked to marital satisfaction, a deeper understanding of dyadic contexts and the mechanisms linking them to marital quality is merited. Future research would benefit from an exploration of personal characteristics of spouses that have the potential to mediate the links between spouses' gender role attitudes, wives' employment, and husbands' marital satisfaction, including: spouses' psychological distress, aggression, expression of marital negativity, preferences for women's paid employment, work-to-family conflict, provider-role ideologies, and satisfaction with the division of labor, women's work hours, and decision making about marital roles (Campbell & Snow, 1992; Falconier, 2013; Gonzalez, 2008; Grzywacz et al., 2009; Helms et al., 2010; Minnotte et al., 2010; Ross et al., 1983; Yucel, 2012).

In conclusion, this study applied and extended Peplau's (1983) theory of roles by examining how the combination of within-person and within-couple dissonance in gender role attitudes and wives' employment status is linked to husbands' marital satisfaction, and challenges stereotypes about Mexican-origin couples as highly sex-typed or "traditional" couples. Contrary to previous research, consistency across spouses' gender role attitudes and wives employment was not protective of husbands' marital satisfaction when both spouses' held more sex-typed attitudes and wives were not employed. This study provided a multidimensional depiction of gender and marriage among Mexican-origin couples. Attention to interacting sources of influence, rather than main effects approaches, has been proposed by contemporary scholars advocating a more ecologically valid approach to the study of marriage, particularly among immigrant Mexican couples (Helms et al., 2011; Huston, 2000). The findings from the current study further underscore the importance of such an approach and echo the sentiments expressed by Urie Bronfenbrenner more than three decades ago in that "the principal main effects are likely to be interactions" (1979, p. 38).

## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to participating couples and project staff including Monsy Bonilla, Diana Escobar, Mary Julia Moore, Darlene Pitaluga, Ashley Valezquez, Jill Walls, and Claire Wood. We would also like to acknowledge Drs. Daniel Perlman and Danielle Crosby, who served on the first author's master's thesis committee and provided thoughtful feedback that contributed to this article.

## Article Notes

- **Declaration of Conflicting Interests** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
- **Funding** The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by a UNCG Regular Faculty Grant and the USDA Agricultural Research Service Award #NC07299 granted to Dr. Heather Helms, Principal Investigator.

## Notes

- **Authors' Note** Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2012 meeting of the International Association for Relationship Research in Chicago, IL and the 2013 meeting of the National Council on Family Relations in San Antonio, TX. This article is based on the first author's master's thesis, which was completed in 2013.

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