

**Gender role attitudes through the prism of religion/religiosity:  
An application of normative social justice theory**

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Introduction

In this paper, we argue that normative social justice theory, as applied to the context of partnerships, provides a theoretical foundation for the further development of typologies of gender role attitudes in the domestic sphere. The social justice literature is useful in the family context, as it explicitly considers normative justice principles (how benefits and burdens should be distributed – in this context – between partners) as well as the character of gender relations in the partnership (the social relationship under consideration). Moreover, the justice literature is relevant to understanding how gender role attitudes may vary across religion and religiosity population groups, as these groups may differ according to social understandings of partnerships, endowments and comparison groups.

Analyzing data from the 2009 and 2019 Israel Social Survey (ISS), we examine the associations between, on the one hand, perceptions of partnership type – based on the characteristics that are deemed important for a “successful” partnership – and, on the other hand, gender role attitudes, based on attitudes towards women’s and men’s roles in the domestic sphere and in the labor market. Moreover, we leverage the heterogeneity in religion and religiosity in the data to examine how social groups differ with respect to their subjective understandings of partnership types and gender role attitudes, and to test whether understandings of partnership types mediate some of the relationship between religion/religiosity and gender role attitudes.

Change and Diversity in Gender Relations, Gender Roles and Gender Role Attitudes

Since the mid-20th Century, ideal gender relations in advanced societies are no longer predominantly characterized as breadwinner-homemaker families, with husbands having the authority within families, and with partners seeking satisfaction from the fulfillment of their social roles. Ideal couple relationships have evolved to partnerships emphasizing the importance of each partner supporting the self-fulfillment of the other, open communications and emotional gratification. Along with these shifts in gender relations have been dramatic changes in women’s and men’s gender roles, characterized by: (1) women devoting more time to activities in the paid labor market while men devote less; (2) women reducing the time they spend on housework, with men modestly increasing theirs; (3) both women and men increasing their time spent on caring for children (Bianchi et al. 2012). Trends in leisure time for both men and women show no consistent pattern of change over time (Raz-Yurovich 2022).

Along with these changes, there has been increasing flux and lack of consensus regarding gender role attitudes (GRA), which are the focus of this study. GRA are important in part because they serve as critical determinants of further change in women’s and men’s labor market participation,

earnings, occupational and educational attainment, and demographic change within families. Moreover, a lack of social consensus regarding GRA may contribute to lack of common understandings in diverse populations about social values, as well as increasing social inequality. Recent research on GRA has emphasized that rather than considering GRA in a unidimensional continuum from “traditional” to “egalitarian”, it may be more useful to look at GRA as multidimensional (Knight & Brinton 2017; Grunow et al. 2018). The evolution of different types of egalitarian GRA challenges a more simplistic understanding of decline in “traditional” GRA, and raises the need for a better theoretical understanding of complex gender ideologies and types of gender egalitarianism.

### GRA and social justice theory

We argue that the theoretical foundations of GRA can be understood via an application of theory of normative justice attitudes, as follows. Normative justice attitudes refer to the rules or principles of how benefits or burdens should be distributed. Four basic *justice principles* can be distinguished: (1) *equality*, which requires that everyone should receive the same rights or the same share of benefits and burdens; (2) merit or contribution (*equity*), which requires that individual efforts and achievements should be rewarded proportionately; (3) entitlement (*desert*), whose decisive distribution criteria are innate or ascribed characteristics (e.g. origin, gender); and (4) *need*, which aims to ensure a minimum or adequate satisfaction of basic needs (Hülle et al. 2018). Moreover, normative justice attitudes have a contextual reference: the validity of the four justice principles is tied to a particular type of social relationship (Fiske 1993; Miller 1999). Following Fiske's suggestion, four ideal-typical models of social relations can be distinguished: (1) *equality matching*, people are seen as independent individuals who are equal to each other: "People are separate but equal"; (2) *market pricing*, relationships with other people and their actions and resources are instrumental, i.e. one enters into them or evaluates them according to the benefits one can gain from them (Fiske 1993: 13ff.); (3) *authority relationships*, relationships are hierarchical and asymmetrical ; (4) *communal sharing* shared membership of a close group subordinate individual identities to the group identity and there are no boundaries between individuals and the group. In the real world, these models are combined "to construct complex and varied personal relationships, roles, groups, institutions and societies" (Fiske 1993: 41).

Fiske (1993) suggests that the application of the principles in each context is to be understood as shared knowledge, i.e. they arise logically from the contexts. Their function is to resolve distributional conflicts in such a way that the resulting distributions are consistent with the logic of the particular type of social relationship and thus serve to stabilize the social relationship. In this sense, the principle of *equality* applies in *equality matching* relationships in which the members recognize each other as equal; the principle of equity applies in *market pricing* - economic exchange relationships in which everyone wants to realize the greatest possible benefit for themselves; the principle of *entitlement* applies in *hierarchical relationships*; the principle of *need* applies in *communal* social associations - long-term relationships in which the individual is firmly integrated into a community. This means that the normative ideas about a fair distribution of benefits and burdens in a partnership or family are also guided by the members' understanding of the nature of the social relationship.

### Religion/religiosity and GRA

We examine GRA by religion and religiosity settings to leverage differences across these groups in the way the social relationships in partnerships and families are understood. Religious affiliation and greater religiosity are often understood as associated with more “traditional” GRA

within the family among Christian, Muslim and Jewish populations in developed societies (DeRose et al. 2021; Glass & Jacobs 2005; Glas 2023). The underlying rationale is that religion conveys norms of family control and hierarchical gender relations that emphasize women's primary role in the family and their status as unequal to that of men (Goldscheider 1999). However, in light of changes over the last few decades in family behavior, including the rise of women's education and the economic need for two-income families among most population groups, the relationship between religiosity and GRA regarding the domestic sphere may be evolving. There is empirical evidence for a decoupling of religiosity and traditional gender attitudes, which differs across religious denominations and follows quite different mechanisms in men and women (van Klingereren & Spierings 2020). Interestingly, change may be coming from the behavior of men. Men's increasing involvement in childcare in most Western societies was noted above, and it is possible that this development is particularly pronounced among religious men, whose familial values may promote their own involvement in family life and domestic labor (Denton 2004; DeRose et al. 2021; Goldscheider et al. 2014; Gull and Geist 2020).

### Data and Methods

The empirical basis are samples taken from the 2009 and 2019 waves of the Israel Social Surveys (ISS), which include a detailed module on family life and religious observance. The ISS are conducted annually by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS) on a changing sample of men and women aged 20 and over..

Population diversity within Israel in terms of religion and religiosity will be analyzed in the research. We perform analyses separately by gender, as patterns may differ for women and men. The age range is limited to 25 to 49 in order to reflect major segments of the life course during which women and men are engaged in the process of family building, and during which dual emphases are placed on family and labor market activity. The samples of women and men total roughly 3000 each.

We begin by developing typologies of understandings of relationship types, based on survey responses to the question, "In your opinion, what are the three main factors necessary for a successful partnership in the long run": (1) mutual loyalty; (2) mutual respect and appreciation; (3) support and good listening; (4) shared beliefs and opinions; (5) economic security; (6) raising children; (7) love; (8) preventing loneliness; (9) sexual relations; (10) convenience. Using factor analysis, we build typologies of relationship types based on the combinations of factors cited as important. We also incorporate within-person differences in answers to questionnaire items regarding "the ideal age for women to begin a family" and "the ideal age for men to begin a family", in order to proxy the respondent's views as to the hierarchical nature of gender relations based on age. We investigate how religion/religiosity group differences are associated with these subjective relationship types.

Then, we measure gender role attitudes based on survey responses to an item concerning the degree of agreement/disagreement (on a 5-point scale) with the statement that "when both partners work, they should share household labor equally". We investigate how religion/religiosity group differences are associated with responses to this item.

In the third stage, we consider the relationships between the typologies of relationship type and gender role attitudes, and also test whether the relationship between religion and religiosity and gender role attitudes are mediated by relationship type. We have developed several research hypotheses. For example, if respondents believe that fulfilling roles/needs (e.g. bringing up kids

(women), having economic security (men) are most important, this could be consistent with seeing the partnership as a means to fulfilling these functions and as an “exchange” type relationship (e.g. marriage for economic security or marriage to have children). Such a view of partnership might be consistent with **equity**. If a respondent feels that support, listening and/or love are most important, then this view may be consistent with a relationship based on open communication, self-fulfillment, and emotional gratification, and in turn, consistent with the equality view of distributing burdens and benefits. **Hierarchy** is consistent with large ideal age gaps between men and women at marriage/family building. A focus on economic security might also be consistent with communal support/**need for** women and men.

### Preliminary Findings

Preliminary findings indicate that Muslims hold less egalitarian gender role attitudes than Jews, and that in terms of relational models, Muslims view their partnerships as more instrumental and hierarchical in nature, and place less emphasis on love. Our key finding is that group differences in how partnerships are viewed mediate part of the ethnic/religion differences in gender role attitudes, but only among men. Findings are discussed and future research along these lines is considered in a larger project underway.

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