Ethnicity, Acculturation, and Religiosity as Predictors of Female College Students’ Role Expectations

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The present study was designed to examine ethnicity, acculturation, and religiosity as predictors of European American and Korean American evangelical female college students’ role expectations. Fifty-seven European American and 37 Korean American single women, who ranged in age from 17 to 24 years, completed a demographic questionnaire, a role expectation measure, three religiosity measures, and an acculturation measure. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between fundamentalism and role-sharing expectations for European American women and a significant positive correlation between level of acculturation and role-sharing expectations for Korean American women. The results suggest that fundamentalism is a stronger predictor of role expectations than religious commitment in European American women and that acculturation is a more accurate predictor of role expectations than generation in the United States among Korean American women.

KEY WORDS: gender roles; acculturation; religiosity; ethnicity.

Gender roles are socially constructed; therefore, standards and expectations of gender roles differ from culture to culture. Cultural forces operate among ethnic groups as well as within smaller subcultures/groups to generate particular norms and gender role expectations. Moreover, in a multiethnic culture such as the United States, variations within ethnic groups exist due to immigrants’ level of acculturation. Thus, gender roles are influenced by multiple sources across culture and time, and they cannot be understood outside the context of particular ethnicities, societies, and social settings (Ferdman, 1999).

Researchers have considered various predictors of gender role expectations. Among the examined variables (i.e., race, ethnicity, education, family income, father’s education, mother’s education and employment status, length of mother’s employment, region of the country, and degree of religiosity), mother’s work history (Bridges & Etaugh, 1996; Tsuzuki & Matsui, 1997; Willetts-Bloom & Nock, 1994), religiosity (Etaugh, 1989; Morgan, 1987; Willetts-Bloom & Nock, 1994), and ethnicity (Bridges & Etaugh, 1996; Etaugh, 1989) have been shown to be strong predictors of college students’ expectation of their own marital and maternal roles, particularly in relation to employment.

The significant findings of ethnicity and religiosity are consistent with the theoretical understanding of how cultural norms of the broader ethnic group as well as the subgroup impact gender role expectations. However, studies of different ethnicities have predominantly focused on comparisons of European Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics, which has limited our understanding of ethnic differences that exist in a multiethnic setting such as the United States. In the few existing studies of Korean Americans (Kim, 1998; Lim, 1997; Min, 1997; Moon & Song, 1998) traditional gender role practices prevail despite the equal labor participation of Korean American women and men. However, younger Korean American women with higher...
levels of acculturation endorse more egalitarian gender role views. Thus, an examination of the level of acculturation is critical to the comparative analyses between ethnic groups.

Studies on the impact of religion have been focused on religion in general, which encompasses a broad range of religious orientations/beliefs. Thus researchers have not taken into consideration the variations that exist within religious groups. In addition to focusing on religious groups in general, researchers interested in the influence of religion on gender roles have usually utilized a single measure to assess religiosity. According to Woodberry and Smith (1998), multiple religiosity measures are needed to assess the impact of religion comprehensively. In the present study, fundamentalism, internalization, and spiritual commitment were assessed.

The term religious fundamentalism describes a rigid, dogmatic, and reactionary style of religious belief, and it should not be confused with religious orthodoxy or adherence to a certain set of beliefs. Although religions that have an authoritarian structure, that is, that posit an absolute authority that provides a central set of beliefs, may attract and encourage a fundamentalistic way of holding to those beliefs, empirical studies demonstrate that they are, in fact, separate though related constructs (Kirkpatrick, Hood, & Hartz, 1991). Consequently, although the present sample of evangelical Christians hold to a relatively homogenous set of centralized beliefs (orthodoxy), it is expected that they will demonstrate variability in their way of holding those beliefs (fundamentalism).

Internalization refers to the process of transforming an external regulation or value into an internal one (Hinebaugh-Igoe, 1999). Commitment, in addition to addressing adherence to religious beliefs, refers to the priority given to religious matters in life and to efforts to live out religious beliefs. Studying these variables in conjunction can illuminate aspects of religiosity that are related to gender roles and expectations. Given the closed mindset characteristic of fundamentalism, it is plausible that this aspect of religiosity is associated with traditional gender roles, and, in fact, fundamentalism may be a confounding factor in studies that have demonstrated connections between religiosity and gender roles.

Researchers have also neglected potential ways in which religion and ethnicity may interact in forming gender role expectations. In contrast with the predominantly Buddhist culture of Korea, studies in the United States have suggested that approximately 70% of the Korean American population attend an ethnic Christian church on a weekly basis (Chae, Foley, Concepcion, & Arora, 2004). The overlap in religious belief between many Korean Americans and many European Americans allows us to explore whether religiosity variables differ in their influence on gender roles between ethnic groups.

The present study was designed to expand the research on ethnicity and religiosity by (a) comparing European American and Korean American women’s gender role expectations and the factors that contribute to them, taking into account the impact of acculturation in the Korean American sample, and (b) utilizing multiple religiosity variables, including the previously unstudied variable of fundamentalism, to examine the influence of religion on gender role expectations in evangelical Christians. Evangelical Christians are a group of conservative Christians who distinguish themselves from more conservative Protestant groups, by virtue of their engagement with, rather than separatism from, modern society (Gallagher & Smith, 1999). They can be distinguished from less conservative Protestant groups by evangelical’s emphasis on the need for a spiritual rebirth, on the inerrancy of the Bible, and on spiritual piety (Balmer, 1989).

These research goals were guided by the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** (a) Fundamentalism would correlate positively with traditional role expectations and negatively with role-sharing expectations; (b) greater internalization would correlate positively with traditional role expectations and negatively with role-sharing expectations; (c) greater religious commitment would correlate positively with traditional role expectations and negatively with role-sharing expectations. Fundamentalism was also expected to emerge as the strongest predictor of role-sharing expectations.

**Hypothesis 2:** A comparison of European Americans, First Generation Korean Americans, 1.5 Generation Korean Americans (students who were born in Korea but raised partly in Korea and partly in the United States), and Second Generation Korean Americans was expected to show that European American women would differ significantly from the First Generation Korean Americans in their role expectations. Specifically, European Americans would be more favorable toward egalitarian role expectations than would First Generation Korean Americans.