

**THE IMPACT OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON GENDER-ROLE ATTITUDES
OF ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR MOTHERS**

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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study examines gender-role stereotypes of 90 divorced, 89 remarried, and 927 married mothers, and relates them to the gender-role stereotypes, occupational goals, and plans for marriage and family formation of their adolescent children (568 boys and 538 girls) in seventh and tenth grades. Boys were significantly more likely to have traditional values than girls in both seventh and tenth grades. Children whose mothers had highly traditional stereotypes were themselves significantly more stereotyped at both grades than children whose mothers reported low gender-role traditionality. Marital status was a significant predictor of mothers' gender-role attitudes: married mothers were the most traditional and divorced mothers were the least. In addition, while maternal marital status was not a predictor of seventh grade children's traditionality, there was a significant difference between children in different family types in tenth grade, with children in divorced families being the least traditional. The potential contribution of growing up with a single mother will be discussed.

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Until recently, researchers have viewed the family as incomplete following divorce. This prevailing negative conceptualization has biased the current knowledge base about the impact of divorce by leading researchers to concentrate on negative outcomes. In particular, key variables of adolescent development, such as occupational plans and values, and perceived importance of financial independence, have received little attention. This omission is particularly important because during the high school years, the development of occupational aspirations is a major component of identity development. This study examines the impact of family structure on gender-role stereotypes, which have been found to influence these aspirations. It focuses on the relationship between marital status and maternal gender-role values, and on the impact of those maternal values on adolescents' attitudes.

Work and family are domains in which there are distinct gender-role prescriptions for adolescents to follow. Reviews of sex differences in adolescent goals (Eccles, 1987; Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Marini, 1978) indicate that occupational choices at this age are still highly sex-stereotyped. While the past decade has seen a decrease in girls' aspirations to traditionally female jobs, occupational plans of high school seniors still parallel the existing segregation in the labor force (Gerstein, Lichtman, & Barokas, 1988; Herzog, 1982). The persistence of this finding is especially interesting in light of the fact that girls are increasingly

faced with incentives such as the growing numbers of mother-headed households to develop skills for secure employment.

If aspirations are predictive of later adult attainment, it is important to consider the factors that influence these goals. Traditionality of gender-role stereotypes has been shown to be related to plans for work, marriage, and parenthood (Herzog & Bachman, 1982). Thus, socialization of traditional or non-traditional gender-roles by parents could influence occupational aspirations. Daughters in female-headed households have been found to aspire to less traditional occupations (Waite & Berryman, 1985), but no work has related these aspirations to maternal stereotypes. Divorced women have been found to have a higher level of equality in their marriage role perceptions than married women (Maxwell & Andress, 1982). If divorced mothers are less traditional in their gender-role values and expectations than married or remarried mothers, their children's aspirations may also be less traditional.

METHODS

Subjects

This longitudinal study examines gender-role stereotypes of 90 divorced, 89 remarried, and 927 married mothers (still married to the target child's father), and relates them to the gender-role stereotypes of their adolescent children. The sample includes 568 male and 538 female students who were in the seventh grade in 1983-1984. The schools from which students were selected were in 12 middle to lower middle income school districts. Families were recruited with a permission letter distributed in the students' sixth grade math classes. The tenth grade

follow-up in the spring of 1988 included a selected subsample of 6 districts with 254 of these male and 260 of these female students.

Measures

Student and parent attitudes were assessed using questionnaires consisting of seven-point Likert items and open-ended questions to assess attitudes and expectations. The parents' questionnaires were constructed to parallel the children's as much as possible.

The gender-role stereotyping scores are composites of items dealing with beliefs about how family and work roles differ by gender, such as "It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." The child traditionality score from the seventh grade student questionnaire combines three four-point Likert items. The mean score is 7.7 for girls and 8.1 for boys, and scores range from 3-12 ($\alpha=.60$). The maternal traditionality score consists of five seven-point Likert items. Mothers' mean score is 15.4 and scores range from 5-33 ($\alpha=.76$). The child traditionality score from the tenth grade student questionnaire combines five seven-point Likert items answered when the children were in seventh grade. The children's tenth grade mean score is 14.0 for girls and 18.6 for boys, and ranges from 7-35 ($\alpha=.68$). See appendix for these measures.

Occupational expectations and aspirations, as well as plans for marriage and family formation were also gathered from each student. Occupational expectations and aspirations were asked using two open-ended questions: "If you could have any job you wanted, what job would

you like to have when you are 30?" and "What specific job do you think you will actually have when you are 30?" Standard U.S. Occupational Classification codes were used and each answer was sex-typed. Sex-typing of occupations was done by using percentages based on the 1980 U.S. Census Bureau's information on occupations by sex and total race (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1982). If the Census Bureau recorded 70% or more of one gender holding a particular job, then the job was coded as being sex-typed for that gender. Jobs not occupied by at least 70% of male or female workers were typed as gender-neutral.

RESULTS

Analysis of variance was used to examine group differences in traditional values. Boys were significantly more likely to have traditional values than girls, in both seventh and tenth grades. More interestingly, children with mothers who have highly traditional gender-role stereotypes were themselves significantly more stereotyped than children whose mothers reported low gender-role traditionality (see Figures 1 and 2). In fact, regression analyses indicate that maternal traditionality is a stronger predictor of gender-role stereotyping than child sex in seventh grade. For correlations between maternal and child traditionality scores, see Table 1.

Futhermore, marital status was a significant predictor of mothers' traditional attitudes. Married mothers were the most stereotyped, divorced mothers were the least, and remarried mothers fell in between (see Figure 3). While maternal marital status did not have a significant

effect on child traditionality in seventh grade, there was a significant difference in tenth grade, with children of divorced mothers being the least traditional (see Figure 4).

In addition to general stereotypes, the students reported their personal preferences for the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood. The amount of time each student planned to work after having children (full time, part time, or not at all) was assessed in seventh grade. A substantial minority of girls (45%) endorsed the most traditional choice not to work at all, and only 6% plan to work full time. Girls' responses on this item were also positively related to maternal stereotyping. The most non-traditional choice for girls on this item is not planning to have children. Only 8% of the daughters of still-married mothers endorsed this choice, compared to 17% of the girls with divorced mothers and 13% of those with remarried mothers.

In tenth grade attitudes toward parenting were assessed in a slightly different way. Students were asked if they were to take time off to have children, what age would the children be when they would return to work. Girls responses to this item were positively related to maternal traditionality as well as to maternal marital status. Daughters of less traditional mothers planned to return to work sooner than daughters of more traditional mothers. Girls with divorced mothers planned to return to work before girls with married mothers.

Traditionality of specific occupational aspirations was significantly different for boys and girls, with boys being more likely to list jobs

traditionally occupied by males. However, no differences were found for sex-type of specific occupational goals or expectations between children in different family types.

DISCUSSION

When children from single and two-parent homes are compared, differences are found in gender-role stereotypes and in girls' plans for integrating family and work roles: children of divorced mothers are less traditional than children of married mothers. However, these differences do not extend to the traditionality of their specific occupational preferences in seventh or tenth grade.

Since gender-role values are important in the development of career and family plans, differential socialization of gender roles by mothers with high or low traditional values could have an eventual impact on occupational aspirations. Mothers with less traditional gender-role values may emphasize the importance of financial independence to their daughters, and expect and encourage them to aspire to higher status occupations than mothers with highly traditional values.

Specifically, since divorced mothers were found to have less traditional attitudes, and their children also had less traditional values in the 10th grade, living with a single mother may influence the traditionality of children's occupational values. While this study did not find a difference in the traditionality of specific occupational

preferences, it may be that current differences in gender-role values will translate into later differences in traditionality of job choices.

In the occupational domain, non-traditional values could prove advantageous, especially for girls aspiring to achieve financial independence as adults. Daughters of divorced mothers may be more likely to place greater value on economic independence and occupational success. These values, in turn, may lead them to aspire to higher-paying, less gender-typical jobs, and may place them at an advantage in the labor market over their peers with more traditional mothers.

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Table 1. Correlations Between Mother's and Children's Gender Role Traditionality

Gender of Child	Marital Status of Mother			
	Married	Remarried	Divorced	
7th Grade Female	.29 *** (n=436)	.36 * (n=41)	.27 (n=50)	
10th Grade Female	.30 *** (n=210)	-.07 (n=19)	.28 (n=28)	
7th Grade Male	.33 *** (n=460)	-.16 (n=47)	.10 (n=36)	
10th Grade Male	.21 ** (n=207)	-.11 (n=15)	.62 ** (n=19)	

* p < .05
 ** p < .01
 *** p < .001

Figure 1. Child's Traditionality at Seventh Grade

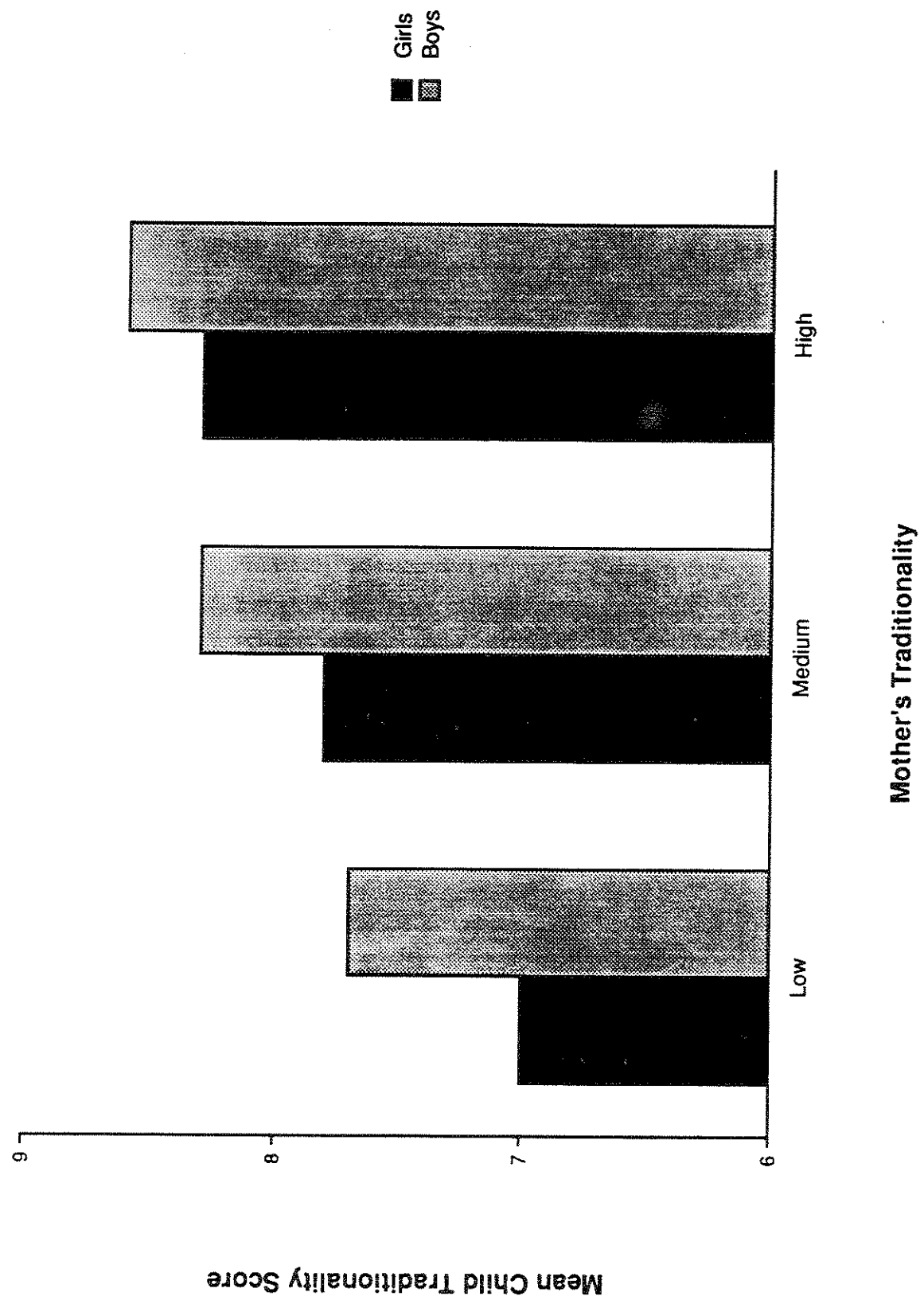


Figure 2. Child's Traditionality at Tenth Grade

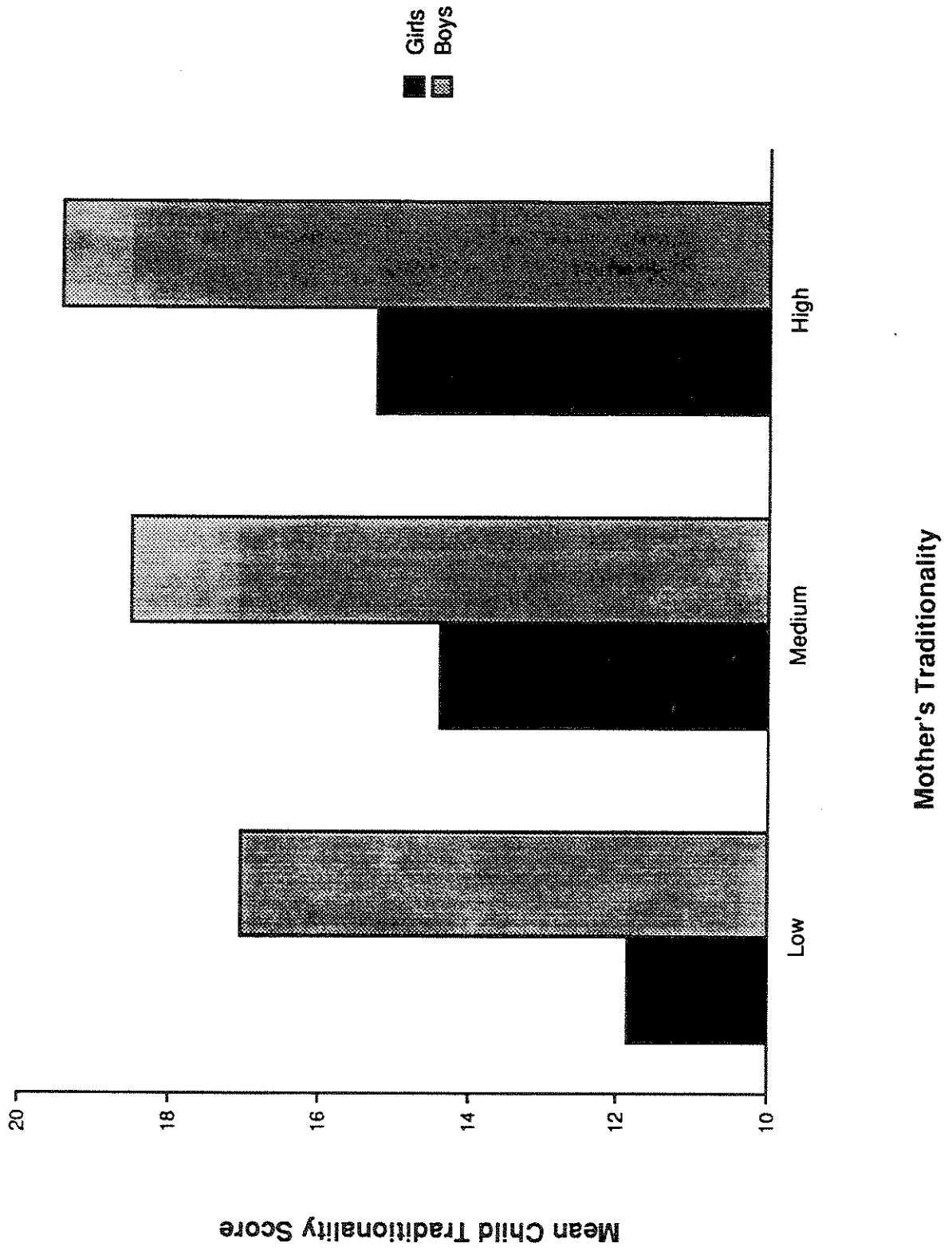


Figure 3. Mother's Traditionality by Marital Status

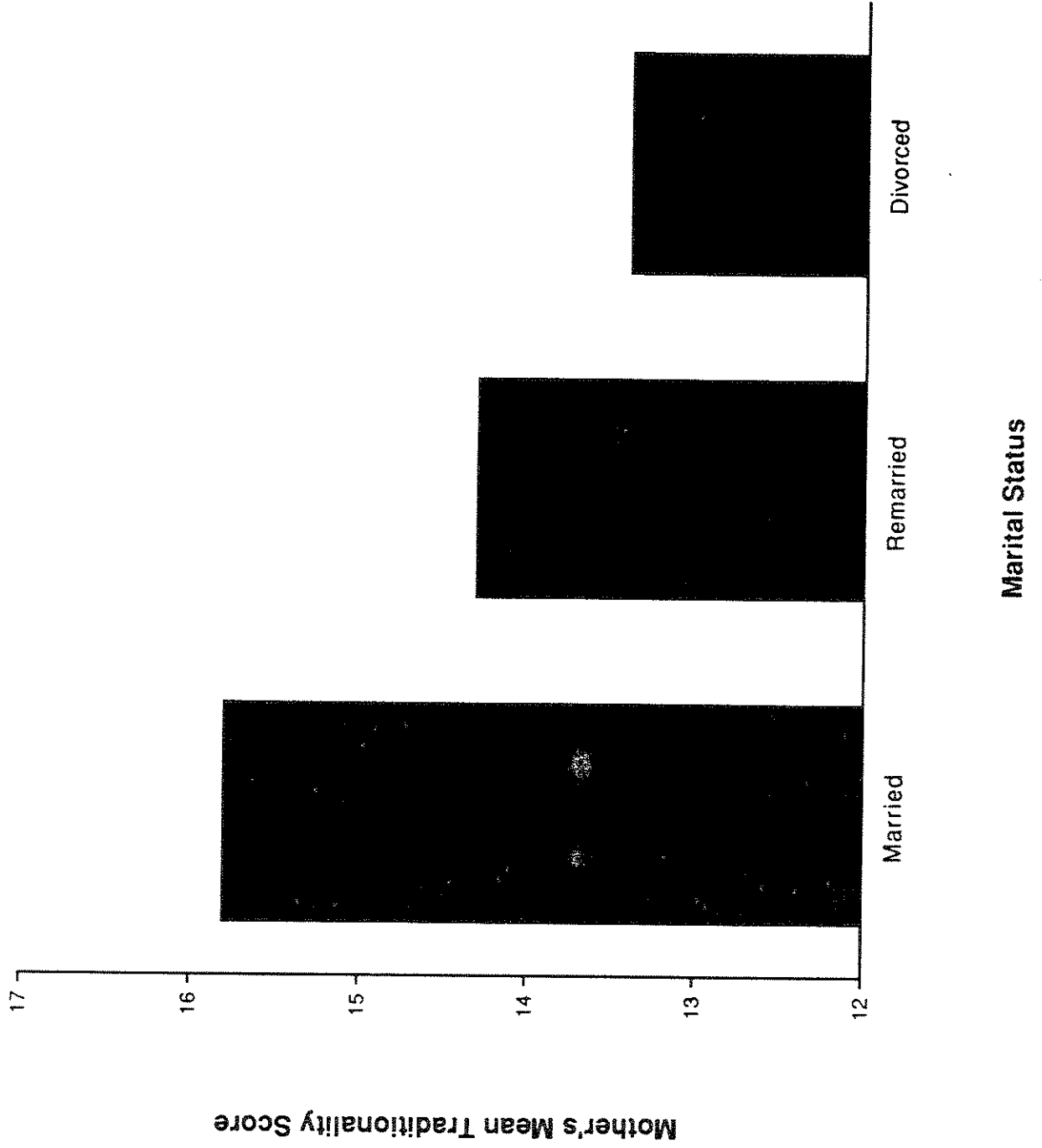
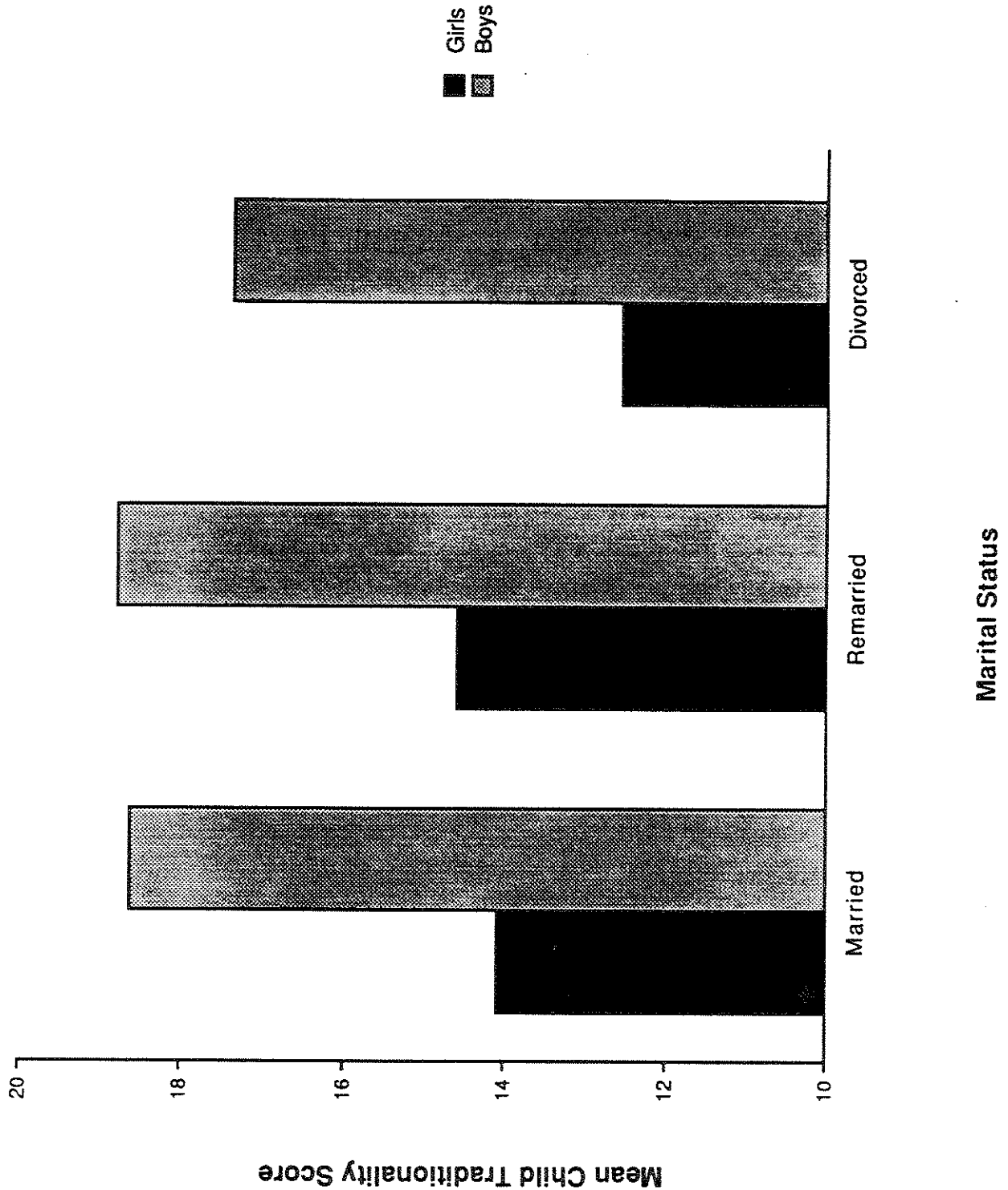


Figure 4. Child's Traditionality in Tenth Grade by Maternal Marital Status



APPENDIX

Items included in composite score of traditionality for mother and children.

Mothers

(These items use this seven-point Likert Scale)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

- 1) It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the "breadwinner" outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
- 2) Babies and young children are likely to suffer if the mother works outside the home.
- 3) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
- 4) It is just as important for girls to be prepared to support themselves and their families as it is for boys to be prepared to support themselves and their families.
- 5) Women who aren't willing to take some time off from their careers probably shouldn't have children.

Children

(These items use this four-point Likert Scale)

strongly disagree		disagree		agree		strongly agree
1		2		3		4

- 1) All in all, it is better for the family if the husband provides most of the family's money and the wife takes care of the home and the family.
- 2) It is okay for mothers of babies and young children to have a full time career.
- 3) Babies and young children need to have their mothers around most of the day.

