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• Prescriptions and Punishments for Working Moms

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GENDER & WORK:

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BACKLASH AND THE DOUBLE BIND

GENDER
& WORK

PRESCRIPTIONS AND PUNISHMENTS FOR WORKING MOMS:

How Race and Work Status Affect Judgments of Mothers

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Although the gender-wage gap is narrowing for younger people (Waldfogel, 1998), working mothers still face more challenges than working fathers (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farrell, 2002). Unlike fathers, mothers suffer a substantial per-child wage penalty of 5% that cannot be attributed to human capital or occupational factors (Anderson, Binder & Krause 2003; Budig & England 2001). Converging evidence suggests that this “motherhood penalty” can be partly attributed to the contents of stereotypes about mothers. In the first part of this essay, we summarize published findings showing that, in the workplace, mothers are judged as less competent and committed than other kinds of applicants and employees, and as a result are less likely to be hired and promoted (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). This pattern of prejudice and discrimination may follow from prescribed cultural stereotypes of women as nurturing and domestic, which, in the workplace, are made more salient by mothers than by childless women.

However, the majority of studies and discussions of motherhood discrimination have been limited to perceptions and treatment of *White* mothers *in the workplace*. But race and context also appear to affect perceptions of working mothers, though these factors have received less attention. For example, do judgments of Black mothers follow the same patterns as judgments of White mothers? And how are working mothers perceived at home? In the second part of this essay, we present new data from three unpublished studies suggesting that (1) race may moderate the motherhood bias, and (2) working mothers face prejudice outside the workplace as well as at work.

The motherhood penalty is not costly only for working moms; as we discuss in our recent *Harvard Business Review* article (Williams & Cuddy, 2012), discrimination against mothers can be costly for companies as well. Family-responsibilities discrimination, a new field of employment law, has been growing as working mothers have become more likely to sue their employers for discrimination:

“According to data collected by the Center for WorkLife Law, in the United States roughly two-thirds of plaintiffs who sue in federal court on the basis of family-responsibilities discrimination prevail at trial. Their success rate is approximately twice as high as that of plaintiffs in federal employment discrimination cases in general. Meanwhile, the filing of family-responsibilities lawsuits in federal courts, state courts, and government agencies increased by almost 400% from 1998 to 2008. In short, the potential liability to companies is significant.”

Unlike White mothers, who we find are judged as less competent and capable if they work than if they do not, Black (and possibly Latina) mothers who do not work seem to experience more prejudice and discrimination than those who do work, perhaps due to conflicting sex-based and race-based role prescriptions. White mothers are expected to stay home with their children while, dating back to slavery, Black mothers have been expected to participate in the labor force. In short, Black mothers are evaluated more positively if they work, but White mothers

are evaluated more positively if they stay home. These patterns of prejudice effectively reinforce both race- and sex-based status inequalities.

Part 1: Workplace Stereotypes of Mothers

Several lines of research suggest that Americans are motivated to stereotype working moms similarly to how they stereotype housewives. The belief that women should be the primary caregivers and men the primary breadwinners is a longstanding feature of traditional American culture (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998b). To view working moms as more motherly than professional, as more nurturing than task-oriented, upholds the social structure that advances this caregiver/breadwinner ideology. Similarly, system justification theory describes how people create beliefs (i.e., stereotypes) that support the status quo and allow them to see the social system in which they live as fair and legitimate (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994).

To investigate stereotypes of mothers versus other kinds of employees, we conducted a lab experiment, in which we asked participants to tell us their impressions of several professionals, using trait ratings and behavioral intentions (Cuddy et al., 2004). Among three filler profiles of management consultants was a crucial profile that varied on only two factors: gender and whether the professional person had a child. These factors resulted in four conditions: female professional with child, female professional without child, male professional with child, and male professional without child. Participants rated the consultants on traits reflecting warmth and competence and on three discrimination proxy items (“would you hire/promote/train?”) aimed at capturing the degree to which the consultant is professionally valued or discriminated against. The comparison of a working mom to a childless working woman in a professional setting is doubly informative. First, it indicates how a working mom fares when she competes with a woman who does not have children. Second, it reveals whether female professionals are forced to make professional sacrifices when they decide to become mothers. The comparison of a working mom with a working dad might also reveal the existence of a hidden double standard regarding the balance of career and family. A two-thirds-White sample of 122 Princeton University undergraduates (72 women and 50 men) completed the questionnaire.

Participants were told they would be completing a questionnaire about how people quickly form first impressions, making important decisions from little information. They were instructed to read the profiles of three consultants at McKinsey & Company’s Manhattan office and to provide their first impressions. Two profiles were fillers, but a third operationalized the critical manipulations. This profile varied the sex of the consultant (Kate or Dan) and whether she/he was a parent (for parents, we added the sentence “Kate and her husband [Dan and his wife] recently had their first baby”), resulting in four between-participant conditions.

As we had hypothesized, results of the study showed that women lost perceived competence and gained perceived warmth when they were labeled as mothers, appearing significantly less competent than warm. In contrast to mothers, when working men were labeled as fathers they maintained perceived competence and gained perceived warmth, appearing equally warm and competent. Working dads, unlike working moms, did not lose perceived competence when they gained a child. Perhaps most noteworthy, competence ratings predicted positive behavioral intentions: participants expressed more interest in hiring, promoting, and educating consultants whom they viewed as competent—that is, consultants they did not believe were working mothers. This result echoes earlier work suggesting that agency (i.e., competence), not warmth, is associated with high-status occupations such as the management consultant job used in the current study (Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995). Thus, at least in the area of high-status occupations, the apparent boost to working mothers’ perceived warmth does not help them professionally, whereas their apparent loss in perceived competence does seem to hurt them.

The working mother fared poorly compared to the childless working woman. She was stereotyped as less competent and warmer than the woman without a child, and was less likely to be requested, promoted, and trained. Because the two profiles of the women were identical aside from the information about motherhood, our design allowed us to make a within-person before (the child) and after (the child) comparison. Our results suggest that in the workplace, working moms lose in both comparisons. Not only are they viewed as less competent and less worthy of training than their colleagues, they are also viewed as less competent than they themselves were before they had children. Merely adding information about a child caused people to view the same woman as lower on traits like capability and skill and decreased people's interest in training, hiring, and promoting her.

It is not surprising that the gain in perceived warmth for working moms failed to translate into greater work opportunities, because warmth seems not to be viewed as an important requirement for high-status jobs. Had we asked participants to complete measures of their likelihood of pursuing a friendship with the targets, it seems likely that warmth would relate to this more social behavioral intention. In fact, in a study by Operario and Fiske (2001), high-dominant interviewers (i.e., powerful employers) were more interested in socializing with applicants whom they perceived as warm but were not more likely to hire them. The perceived irrelevance of warmth to job qualifications explains why working moms experienced no gain when it came to decisions about assignments, promotions, etc. One possible explanation for the differential treatment of the working mom, despite relatively favorable trait impressions, is that her perceived warmth overshadowed her perceived competence. In other words, an unfavorable contrast ("she's so nice, too bad she's not as competent as she is nice") might have made her look like a less appealing prospect for important assignments, promotion, and training. Although working dads and working moms both gained in perceived warmth, only working moms ended up appearing significantly more warm than competent, whereas the working dad was a balanced package (and childless workers were rated as more competent than warm). Although warmth did not in itself negatively predict discrimination proxy items (suggesting that participants viewed this dimension as irrelevant, not detrimental, to assignment, promotion, and training recommendations), the dominance of the warmth dimension in perceptions of the working mom may have made her seem less well-matched to a job stereotyped as requiring only competence (and not warmth).

Correll et al. (2007) conducted a more sophisticated pair of studies on the apparent motherhood penalty. First, they ran a laboratory experiment in which participants evaluated application materials for a pair of same race, same gender, ostensibly real job applicants who were equally qualified but differed on parental status. Second, they conducted an audit study, applying materials adapted from the laboratory experiment to over six hundred real jobs and measuring call-backs from employers. Participants in the lab study rated mothers as less competent and committed to paid work (compared to other kinds of applicants) and consequently discriminated against mothers when making hiring and salary decisions, seeing them as less suitable for hiring, promotion, and training, as well as deserving lower salaries. Mothers were also held to higher performance and punctuality standards. Consistent with Cuddy et al. (2004), men were not penalized for being parents. In fact, men seem to experience a "fatherhood bonus"—benefitting from having children by being seen as more committed to paid work and being offered higher starting salaries. In the audit study, real employers called mothers back about half as often as non-mothers.

Correll et al.'s (2007) measurement of perceived job commitment sheds additional light on the motherhood penalty. Opportunity-related decisions, such as promoting or providing additional training to a worker, are likely to depend not only on the perceived ability of the individual but also on the individual's perceived commitment to the organization (and to clients) (e.g., Bielby & Bielby, 1984). Companies are understandably reluctant to invest resources in people who are unlikely to remain in the job or who are perceived to be less committed. Working moms,

in comparison to working dads or childless women, are stereotypically assumed to be more distracted by family commitments and more likely to take leaves of absence or to quit in order to devote themselves to their children. Hence, even though a woman may not suddenly be viewed as having lost her intellectual abilities as a result of having a child, she may nevertheless suddenly be perceived as a less bright prospect for promotion or the commitment of company resources. But working fathers do not suffer the same negative perception. While working moms are criticized for too little involvement at home and too much involvement at work, working dads are praised for being involved with their families (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998a). The belief that the man should be the primary breadwinner and the woman the primary caregiver is part of the fabric of traditional American cultural ideology (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998b). In the service of this cultural belief, women are believed to be less committed to work, and thus more likely to leave after having children.

In sum, when working women become mothers, they unwittingly trade perceived competence and job commitment for perceived warmth. This trade unjustly costs them professional credibility and hinders their odds of being hired, promoted, and generally supported in the workplace. Men, on the other hand, do not lose perceived competence or job commitment when they gain a child, and becoming a father may even enhance their professional opportunities. (To read about potential interventions for reducing the motherhood penalty, please see Shelley Correll's paper, "Minimizing the motherhood penalty: What works, what doesn't, and why?" in this volume.)

Part 2: Race and Context Affect Judgments of Working Mothers

Working mothers fill two central roles, *mother* and *worker*. In the first part of this essay we emphasized the role of worker and considered how it is influenced by the role of mother. We believe, however, that working mothers also face prejudice at home—in their role as mothers—and that the content and tone of that prejudice may depend on their race. Working mothers fill both their roles as mother and as worker in the face of public and political scrutiny. In the last decade, the media have pounced on the question of how mothers should spend their time, inciting the so-called "Mommy Wars" and an explosion of articles, blogs, and books on the topic. Reactions to Lisa Belkin's controversial 2003 *New York Times Magazine* article ("The Opt Out Revolution") and Anne-Marie Slaughter's provocative 2012 *Atlantic* piece ("Why Women Still Can't Have it All") clearly signal that Americans' opinions about how mothers ought to spend their time are deeply held and fiercely protected. Rick Santorum, while serving in the US Senate, said, "What happened in America so that mothers ...who leave their children in the care of someone else ... find themselves more affirmed by society? Here, we can thank the influence of radical feminism" (Santorum, 2005). Echoing these beliefs, *New Yorker* columnist Caitlin Flanagan wrote, "When a mother works, something is lost." Judith Warner, in her book *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (2005), argues that the prescription for mothers is "total motherhood" or "sacrificial motherhood"—selfless devotion to one's children—which has become a sacred ideal in American culture. Social psychological studies have shown that outside the workplace, working mothers are rated as selfish and cold (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). Books like *The Working Mother's Guilt Guide* (Hickey and Salmans, 1992) represent American mothers' awareness of this cultural value. Joanne Brudage, founder and executive director of Mothers & More, says, "All mothers feel defensive because there is nothing we can do that is right," which likely reflects the feelings of many mothers (Tanneer, 2006).

But does the same cultural standard apply to non-White mothers? Kuae Mattox, president of Mocha Moms, a support group for Black stay-at-home moms, says, "There is a stigma around being a stay-at-home mother because, unfortunately, many people do not attach the same degree of value to our role as they would a mother who works" (Akitunde, 2012). Anecdotal evidence indicates that Black mothers who choose to stay home do so in the face of extensive societal disapproval. It seems Black women believe they will face the guilt and perceived selfishness if they do not work that White women feel they will face if they do work.

We propose that race moderates motherhood discrimination, such that Black (and possibly Latina) mothers who do *not* work experience *more* prejudice and discrimination than those who *do* work, and that these forms of prejudice and discrimination also serve to legitimate the status quo. Preliminary evidence from mortgage-lending data supports such an interaction of race and parental status (Robinson, 2002); even when controlling for economic factors, White families with school-age kids are more likely to be granted FHA loans if the mother stays home with the children, while Black and Latino families are more likely to be granted FHA loans if the mother works outside the home. We propose that these forms of discriminatory behaviors in part legitimate the status quo by reinforcing different race- and sex-based status inequalities and prescriptions: (1) White mothers are expected to stay home with their children, thus legitimating sex-based status inequalities and prescriptions and (2) dating back to slavery, Black mothers are expected to participate in the labor force, thus legitimating race-based status inequalities and prescriptions. We conducted several experiments to test these hypotheses, using different methods to capture evaluations of White vs. Black working vs. stay-at-home mothers.

The first study aimed to demonstrate a race-based double standard in social evaluations of working vs. stay at home mothers via an indirect measure—recommended amount spent on a Mother’s Day gift. In the week prior to Mother’s Day, participants were contacted via email, discussion boards, and chatrooms and asked to participate in a very short survey of opinions about Mother’s Day gift-giving. A link directed them to a website where the survey was posted. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: Black working mother, Black stay-at-home mother, White working mother, or White stay-at-home mother. Participants read: “Amanda/LaQuisha Johnson and her husband, Matt/Trevon, have two children, Connor/DeShawn (age 4) and Emily/Shanice (age 2). Matt/Trevon and Amanda/LaQuisha both work full-time [OR] Matt/Trevon works full-time and Amanda/LaQuisha stays home. Matt/Trevon is taking the children to pick out a Mother’s Day gift for Amanda/LaQuisha. How much should they spend on the gift?” Participants chose from a seven point scale with the following points: \$0-\$5; \$5-\$10; \$10-\$20; \$20-\$30; \$30-\$50; \$50-\$100; and \$100 or more.

Results revealed the presence of our hypothesized double standard in evaluations of Black vs. White working vs. stay-at-home mothers. Participants recommended a somewhat more expensive gift for the Black working mother than for the Black stay-at-home mother, and a slightly less expensive gift for the White working mother than for the White stay-at-home mother. The biggest difference was here: participants recommended a vastly more expensive gift for the White stay-at-home mother than for the Black stay-at-home mother. In short, a Black mother who works is evaluated more positively than a Black mother who stays home, whereas a White mother who works is evaluated less positively than a White mother who stays home.

Using an indirect measure, Study 1 provided initial evidence that Black and White mothers are evaluated differently, depending on whether they work outside the home or stay home. In Study 2 we used a more direct measure: ratings of the extent to which the mother is hardworking/lazy. We predicted that, because of cultural prescriptions for how Black and White women should behave, people would favor the White stay-at-home mother and the Black working mother on this trait, perceiving these two moms to be harder working. We also sought to rule out the possibility that the effects observed in Study 1 were driven by differences in the inferred socioeconomic statuses of Black versus White mothers.

Study 2 participants were approached on a public beach at a lake in Ohio; 55 agreed to participate for a few dollars. Experimenters asked them if they would be willing to complete a marketing survey about baby products. They were told that it was a study of first impressions of a person who might be depicted in an advertising campaign for a new line of diapers.

On the second page of the survey (following the general instructions), participants read a brief description of a mother trying to choose a diaper brand. We manipulated two variables: the mother’s race (Black/White) and work status (works outside home/stays home), so that, as in the first study, participants were randomly assigned to read about only one of the four mothers. After reading the description, they were asked to rate the mother on a series of traits measuring how hardworking/lazy they believed she was. To control for the possibility that the effects were being driven by inferred socioeconomic differences between Black and White mothers, participants were asked to predict the annual income of the Johnson household in \$20,000 intervals (1 = less than \$20,000; 6 = more than \$100,000). Somewhat surprisingly, no significant differences were found between the estimated household income of White and Black families, though participants did assume that families with working mothers had higher incomes than families with a working father alone.

As hypothesized, while stay-at-home Black mothers were viewed as the least hardworking, stay-at-home White mothers were viewed as the most hardworking, as measured by ratings on the items skillful, capable, efficient, organized, practical, hard-working, and lazy. White mothers were rated significantly less hardworking if they worked outside the home than if they stayed home with their children, and Black mothers who stayed home were rated as significantly less hardworking than White mothers who stayed home. We find the significant difference between White stay-at-home mothers and White working mothers on the hardworking scale somewhat surprising and indicative of the power of cultural prescriptions; it seems that even though White working mothers are, in a sense, working two full-time jobs (as mother and full-time worker), they are perceived as less hardworking than White stay-at-home mothers who are, in a sense, only working one full-time job (as mother).

In the third study, we began to extend the findings of the previous studies to perceptions of and prescriptions for Black and White mothers’ parenting styles. We hypothesized that mothers would be held to different parenting standards of patience depending on their race and work status. Specifically, we predicted that in a scenario where a child is misbehaving or acting “naughty,” stereotype-deviant moms—Black stay-at-home moms and White working moms—would be held to higher standards, such that they would be expected to show more patience, less frustration, and be advised to act communally and instruct the child to share. We also predicted that stereotype-consistent mothers—Black working moms and White stay-at-home moms—would be given greater license to lose their patience and aggressively reprimand the child.

To test our predictions, we asked participants to read a short vignette about an interaction between two four-year-old children, in which one child was clearly (but not pathologically) misbehaving by doing things like knocking down the other child’s wooden-block tower and eating all of the other child’s snacks. As in the previous two experiments, we manipulated two variables—race and work status of the mom—and randomly assigned participants to read about only one of the moms. They then gave parenting advice to the mother, indicating the degree to which she should engage in certain responses to her child’s misbehavior, including “holler” and “gently but firmly encourage the child to share.” As expected, Black working mothers were told to holler significantly more than Black stay-at-home mothers; White stay-at-home mothers were told to holler more than White working mothers; White stay-at-home mothers were told to holler more than Black stay-at-home mothers; and Black working mothers were told to holler more than White working mothers. Similarly, Black stay-at-home mothers were told to encourage their children to share significantly more than were Black working mothers, and White working mothers were told more than Black working mothers to encourage their children to share. These findings replicated the well-established finding that stereotype deviants are the subjects of backlash (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). When mothers violate stereotypic prescriptions, they are considered less communally-oriented and more aggressive than if they fulfill their prescribed roles.

Discussion

Clearly, White working mothers risk being penalized for whatever choices they make: their commitment and competence as workers are questioned at work (Part 1), and their commitment and competence as mothers are questioned at home (Part 2). White mothers who stay home and fulfill societal prescriptions are seen as the ideal, apparently both as warm mothers (Part 1) and hard-working parents (Part 2). Black women seem to be under a different set of pressures than White women. Unlike White women who should sacrifice their focus and aspirations at work so that “something [won’t be] lost” for their children, Black women should sacrifice their focus on their children so that the work that needs to get done will get done. Although we do not subscribe to the belief that mothers can focus only on either work *or* children, it seems that society does and, further, deems that the focus of White women should be on parenting and the focus of Black women should be on work. And though, again, we do not support the basic premise that women can focus only on one aspect of their lives, we find the implication that the focus should be different for White and Black women particularly troubling. The fact that White women are supposed to stay home and focus solely on their children while Black women are supposed to work outside the home and focus solely on their jobs implies that White children matter and Black children do not. It also suggests that White women’s work is not as valuable as their White husbands’, whereas Black women’s work and the work of their Black husbands is equally valuable (or perhaps suggests that Black women’s work is more valued than Black men’s, e.g., Navarrete, C. D., McDonald, M. M., Molina, L. E., & Sidanius, J., 2010) but presumably less valuable than White men’s.

We hope to address many follow-up questions in our ongoing research. One factor that has been shown to be important in the activation of stereotypes about mothers is the choice a mother is perceived to have about whether to work or stay home (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). Are the effects we find driven by the image of the “welfare queen” (e.g., Monahan, Shtrulis, & Givens, 2005)—are all Black women assumed to need to work and to be living “off the government” if they do not? In other words, are Black women perceived as having no choice but to work (even if they are said to have a husband working full-time) and therefore do not suffer the penalties for working that White women (who are perceived as having a choice about whether to work or stay home if they have a husband working full-time) are subject to, causing any Black woman who does not work to be perceived as lazy (that is, not working despite needing to work)? We are also interested in examining perceptions Black participants have about Black and White working mothers, as almost all of the studies described here include mainly White participants. It is possible that these findings will reverse for Black participants (i.e., Black women staying home and White women working will be the ideals) if this finding is driven by valuing ingroup children and outgroup workers. But we doubt that and (based on anecdotal evidence) think that the belief that Black women should work may be even stronger among Black participants. We would also like to include Latina and Asian mothers in future studies.

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