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Getting a Job**Is There a Motherhood Penalty?**

Mothers experience disadvantages in the workplace in addition to those commonly associated with gender. Recent studies show employed mothers in the United States suffer a 5 percent per-child wage penalty on average after controlling for the usual human capital and occupational factors that affect wages (Budig and England 2001; Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003). The pay gap between mothers and nonmothers under age 35 is larger than the pay gap between men and women (Crittenden 2001), and employed mothers now account for most of the “gender gap” in wages (Glass 2004).

The disadvantages are not limited to pay. Describing a consultant as a mother leads evaluators to rate her as less competent than when she is described as not having children (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004), and visibly pregnant managers are judged as less committed to their jobs, less dependable, less authoritative, but warmer, more emotional, and more irrational than otherwise equal women managers (Halpert, Wilson, and Hickman 1993; Corse 1990). While the pattern is clear, the underlying mechanism remains opaque. Why would being a parent lead to disadvantages in the workplace for women? And why might similar disadvantages not occur for men?

This paper presents a laboratory experiment and an audit study. The laboratory experiment evaluates the hypothesis that the

“motherhood penalty” occurs because cultural understandings of motherhood lead evaluators to, perhaps unconsciously, expect mothers to be less competent and less committed to their jobs (Blair-Loy 2003; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). As a result, we argue, employers will discriminate against mothers when making hiring, promotion, and salary decisions. We do not expect fathers to experience similar workplace disadvantages since being a good father is not seen in our culture as incompatible with being a good worker (Townsend 2002). By having participants rate job applicants, we expect that applicants presented as women with children will be viewed as less competent and less committed to work, will need to present evidence that they are more qualified for the job, will be rated as less promotable, and will be offered lower starting salaries compared with otherwise similar applicants presented as women without children. While the laboratory experiment isolates and examines the mechanism of discrimination, the audit study provides external validity by evaluating whether actual employers discriminate against mothers.

Wage Penalty for Motherhood

Explanations for the motherhood wage penalty generally can be classified as worker explanations, which seek to identify differences in the traits, skills, and behaviors between

mothers and nonmothers, and discrimination explanations, which rely on the differential preference for or treatment of mothers and nonmothers. Empirical evaluations of these explanations have largely focused on the former.

Budig and England (2001) find that interruptions from work, working part-time, and decreased seniority/experience collectively explain no more than about one-third of the motherhood penalty. In addition, “mother-friendly” job characteristics (i.e., differences in the type of jobs chosen) explain very little of the penalty. Similarly, Anderson, Binder, and Krause (2003) find that human capital and occupational and household resource variables (e.g., number of adults in household) collectively account for 24 percent of the total penalty for one child and 44 percent for women with two or more children. As Budig and England (2001) conclude, the remaining wage gap likely arises either because mothers are somehow less productive at work than nonmothers or because employers discriminate against mothers (or some combination of the two processes).

Productivity and Discrimination

To distinguish between discrimination and productivity explanations, ideally one would compare the outcomes of employed mothers and nonmothers who have equal levels of workplace productivity. If differences in pay or promotion rates were found between equally productive mothers and nonmothers, this would suggest that discrimination factors were at work. However, the datasets analyzed in the previous studies lack direct measures of worker productivity. One likely reason for this is that it is inherently problematic to specify what makes someone a productive employee. This difficulty leads to another: unexplained gaps in wages between employed mothers and nonmothers can always be attributed to unmeasured productivity differences between the two groups.

To address these problems, we experimentally held constant the workplace performances and other relevant characteristics of a pair of fictitious job applicants and varied only their parental status. By holding constant workplace-relevant characteristics, differences between the ratings of mothers and nonmothers cannot be attributed to productivity or skill differences. While this design cannot rule out the possibility that productivity differences account for part of the wage penalty found in previous studies, the laboratory study will isolate a potential status-based discrimination mechanism by evaluating whether being a parent disadvantages mothers in the workplace even when no productivity differences exist between them and women without children.

Performance Expectations and Evaluations of Workplace Competence

Status Characteristics Theory

The laboratory study evaluates the theoretical claim that motherhood is a “status characteristic” that, when salient, results in biased evaluations of competence and commitment, a stricter standard for evaluating the workplace performances of mothers, and a bias against mothers in hiring, promotion, and salary decisions. A status characteristic is a categorical distinction among people, such as race or occupational status, that has attached to it widely held cultural beliefs associating greater status worthiness and competence with one category of the distinction over others (Berger et al. 1977).

Theory and empirical research suggest that ability standards are stricter for those with lower performance expectations (Foschi 1989). The logic behind this prediction is that good performances are inconsistent with expectations for lower status actors; therefore when they perform well, their performances are critically scrutinized and judged by a stricter standard compared with higher status

actors. Thus, performances of low status actors—even when “objectively” equal to that of their high status counterparts—are less likely to be judged as demonstrating task ability or competence (for a comparison of status discrimination and economic theories of statistical discrimination, see Correll and Benard 2006).

Motherhood as a Status Characteristic

To understand how motherhood might function as a devalued status characteristic in workplace settings, it is helpful to broaden the conventional usage of “performance expectations.” While researchers typically focus on the anticipated relative *competence* of group members, cultural beliefs about the relative *effort* that social groups exert in task situations can also be the basis for forming differentiated performance expectations. While it is logically difficult to understand why taking on the motherhood role should affect a person’s underlying competence, there is considerable evidence that contemporary cultural beliefs assume that employed mothers are less committed to work than nonmothers and, consequently, put less *effort* into it (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Motherhood affects perceptions of commitment because contradictory schemas govern conceptions of “family devotion” and “work devotion” (Blair-Loy 2003: 5). A cultural norm that mothers should always be on call for their children coexists in tension with another widely held normative belief in our society that the “ideal worker” be unencumbered by competing demands and “always there” for his or her employer (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Williams 2001; Blair-Loy 2003). The tension between these two roles occurs at the level of normative cultural assumptions, and not necessarily at the level of mothers’ own commitment to work. Indeed, Bielby and Bielby (1984) found no differences in the workplace commitment of mothers and nonmothers. Instead it is the

perceived tension between these two roles that leads us to suggest that motherhood is a devalued status in workplace settings.

Therefore, we predict that mothers will be rated as less competent, less committed, less suitable for hire and promotion, and deserving of lower starting salaries compared with otherwise equal women who are not mothers. In addition, we expect mothers will be judged by a harsher standard. Since being a good father is not seen as culturally incompatible with being an ideal worker (Townsend 2002), we do not expect that fathers will experience lower workplace evaluations.

The Laboratory Experiment

Paid undergraduate volunteers (84 men and 108 women) rated a pair of equally qualified, same-gender (either male or female), same-race (either African American or white) fictitious job applicants, presented as real, who differed on parental status. Since there were very few significant effects of participant gender or applicant race, we do not discuss these results here.

The Use of Undergraduates

The laboratory setting ensures sufficient control over factors that would interfere with tests of our hypotheses, such as other people in the room to prime other status characteristics, telephones, or other distractions, and it allows us to collect detailed measures to fully test our argument. By necessity we rely on a sample of undergraduates. The theory presented here implies that to the extent that employers share the belief that mothers are less committed to or competent in workplace settings, they too will subtly discriminate against mothers. Qualitative and quantitative research provides some evidence that employers share this belief (Blair-Loy 2003; Crittenden 2001; Kennelly 1999; Cleveland and Berman 1987; Cleveland 1991; Olian and Schwab 1988). The audit study, described below, will provide

more direct evidence regarding the extent to which employers discriminate against mothers.

Procedure

Participants read a description of a company that was purportedly hiring for a mid-level marketing position and examined application materials for two equally qualified applicants who differed on parental status. To increase their task orientation, participants were told that their input would impact actual hiring decisions. They then inspected each applicant's file, containing three items: a short memo, a "fact sheet," and a resume. The memos contained notes purportedly from a company human resources staff member who conducted a screening interview with the applicant. The "fact sheet" summarized relevant information about the potential employee (e.g., college GPA) not presented on the resume. The fact sheets and the resumes established that the candidates were equally productive in their past jobs and had equivalent skills and backgrounds. Prior to the actual experiment, pretesting of the two versions of the materials confirmed that the resumes were perceived to be of equivalent quality.

Experimental Manipulations

The race and gender of applicants were manipulated by altering first names on the applicant files (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003). Parental status was manipulated on the resume and on the human resources memo. The resume described one applicant as an officer in an elementary school Parent-Teacher Association, and the accompanying memo included the following phrase: "Mother/Father to Tom and Emily. Married to John/Karen." The nonparent was presented as married, but with no mention of children.

Dependent Measures

There are eight dependent measures: two that measure competence and commitment,

two that measure the ability standard participants used to judge the applicants, and four that serve as our key evaluation measures. The competence measure is a weighted average of participants' ratings of the applicants on seven-point scales ranging from "not at all" to "extremely" capable, efficient, skilled, intelligent, independent, self-confident, aggressive, and organized ($\alpha=.85$). The commitment measure comes from a single-item question that asked participants how committed they thought the applicant would be relative to other employees in similar positions at the company.

There are two ability standard items. Participants were asked: (1) what percentile the applicant would need to score on an exam diagnostic of management ability, and (2) "how many days could this applicant be late or leave early per month before you would no longer recommend him/her for management track?" We predict that mothers will be required to score in a *higher* percentile than nonmothers before being considered hireable and will be allowed *fewer* days of being late or leaving early.

There are four evaluation measures. Participants were asked: (1) to recommend a *salary* for each applicant, (2) to estimate the likelihood that an applicant would be subsequently *promoted* if hired, (3) to judge whether the applicant, if hired, should be recommended for a *management-training* course designed for those with strong advancement potential, and (4) to decide if they would recommend each applicant for *hire*. We predict that mothers will be offered lower starting salaries, will be rated as less promotable, will be less likely to be recommended for management, and will be less likely to be recommended for hire than nonmothers.

Laboratory Experiment Results:

As predicted, mothers were judged significantly less competent and committed than women without children (see Table 1, left

Table 1. Means or proportions of status, standards and evaluation variables by gender and parental status of applicant. (Standard deviations in parentheses.)

	<i>Female Applicants Mothers</i>	<i>Female Applicants Non-mothers</i>	<i>Male Applicants Fathers</i>	<i>Male Applicants Non-fathers</i>
Competence	5.19 (0.73)**	5.75 (0.58)	5.51 (0.68)	5.44 (0.66)
Commitment	67.0 (19.1)**	79.2 (15.2)	78.5** (16.3)	74.2 (18.6)
Days allowed late	3.16 (1.98)**	3.73 (2.01)	3.69** (2.55)	3.16 (1.85)
Percent score required on exam	72.4 (27.5)**	67.9 (27.7)	67.3 (32.7)	67.1 (33.0)
Salary recommended	\$137,000** (21,000)	\$148,000 (25,000)	\$150,000** (23,000)	\$144,000 (20,700)
Proportion recommend for management	.691++	.862	.936+	.851
Likelihood of promotion	2.74 (0.65)**	3.42 (0.54)	3.30* (0.62)	3.11 (0.70)
Proportion recommend for hire	.468++	.840	.734+	.617

* $p < .1$, test for difference in means between parent and non-parents

** $p < .05$, test for difference in means between parent and non-parents

+ $z < .1$, test for difference in proportion between parents and non-parents

++ $z < .05$, test for difference in proportion between parents and non-parents

Notes: 94 participants rated female applicants and 94 rated male applicants. For this table, the data for male and female subjects are pooled, as are the data by race of applicant.

side) and were held to harsher performance and punctuality standards. They were allowed significantly fewer times of being late to work and needed a significantly higher score on the management exam than nonmothers before being considered hireable. Similarly, the evaluation measures show significant and substantial penalties for motherhood. The recommended starting salary for mothers was \$11,000 (7.4 percent) less than that offered nonmothers, a significant difference. Mothers were also rated significantly less promotable and were less likely to be recommended for management. Finally, while participants recommended 84 percent of female nonmothers for hire, they recommended a significantly lower 47 percent of mothers.

Fathers were not disadvantaged, and in fact were advantaged on some of these measures. Relative to nonfathers, fathers were rated significantly more committed to their jobs, al-

lowed to be late to work significantly more times, and offered significantly higher salaries.

Multivariate Analysis

We now turn to multivariate models to evaluate the motherhood penalty hypothesis by estimating the effects of gender of applicant, parental status, and the interaction of gender of applicant with parental status on each of the eight dependent variables. We refer to the interaction term (gender of applicant \times parental status) as the "motherhood penalty interaction." Applicant race and participant gender are included in all models, and standard errors are clustered by participant ID to take into account the nonindependence of observations that results from asking participants to rate applicants in pairs. Linear regression models are used for the continuous dependent variables. Logistic regression models are estimated for the binary evaluation variables (recommend

Table 2. Estimated regression coefficients for the effects of gender, parental status and race on applicant's perceived competence and commitment. (Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by participant ID).

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Commitment</i>
Parent	0.089 (0.088)	5.15 *** (1.73)
Female applicant	0.376 *** (0.104)	5.68 ** (2.51)
African American	-0.038 (0.090)	-2.01 (2.27)
Female participant	0.060 (0.094)	-2.61 (2.26)
Motherhood interaction [^]	-0.750 *** (0.132)	-17.3 *** (2.32)
Intercept	5.42 *** (0.100)	75.8 *** (2.55)

[^] Parent * Female applicant

* p<.1

** p<.05

*** p<.001

Note: N=188 participants

for management and recommend for hire). Ordered logistic regression, with the proportional odds specification, is used for the ordered categorical evaluation variable, likelihood of promotion. Parental status, gender of applicant, gender of participant, and race of applicant are dummy variables, with parents, females, and African Americans coded as 1.

The estimated regression coefficients are presented in Tables 2–4. For all eight dependent variables, the motherhood penalty interaction is significant and in the predicted direction. This result shows strong support for the main prediction that parental status negatively impacts ratings for female, but not male, applicants.

Confirming our prediction, mothers were viewed as less competent than nonmothers. The significant, negative motherhood penalty interaction indicates that being a parent lowers the competence ratings for women, but not men (see left column, Table 2). Participants also perceived mothers as less committed than other applicants: the motherhood penalty interaction is significant and negative

in the model predicting commitment ratings (see right column, Table 2). The positive and significant main effect for parental status implies that fathers are actually rated as more committed than nonfathers.

Consistent with the status-based discrimination argument, mothers were held to a stricter performance standard (see Table 3). The motherhood interaction is significant and positive in the model predicting the required test score, while the main effects of gender of applicant and parental status are insignificant, showing that participants require mothers (but not fathers) to score higher on a test of management ability than other applicants before considering them for a job. Mothers are also held to a higher standard of punctuality, being allowed fewer days of being late.

In Table 4, the motherhood penalty interaction is significant and negative across all four models, indicating that mothers, relative to other applicants, are believed to deserve lower salaries and to be less suitable for hiring, promoting, and training for management. In the model predicting likelihood of promotion, the

Table 3. Estimated regression coefficients for the effects of gender, parental status and race on ability standard variables. (Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by participant ID.)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Days allowed late</i>	<i>Test score required (%)</i>
Parent	0.515 *** (0.137)	1.03 (0.968)
Female applicant	0.572 ** (0.294)	1.25 (4.52)
African American	-0.361 (0.294)	-4.06 (4.38)
Female participant	0.234 (0.289)	-9.44 ** (4.30)
Motherhood interaction [^]	-1.10 *** (0.213)	3.56 *** (1.21)
Intercept	3.22 *** (0.322)	73.7 *** (4.27)

[^] Parent * Female applicant

* p<.1

** p<.05

*** p<.001

Note: N=188 participants

Table 4. Estimated regression coefficients for the effects of gender, parental status and race on evaluation variables. (Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by participant ID.)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Promotion likelihood</i> (ordered logistic estimates)	<i>Mgmt training?</i> (binary logistic estimates)	<i>Hire?</i> (binary logistic estimates)	<i>Recommended salary in thousands of dollars</i> (linear estimates)
Parent	1.03 * (0.545)	0.605 * (0.321)	0.570 (0.366)	4.47 *** (1.84)
Female applicant	0.256 (0.425)	1.009 *** (0.319)	1.21 *** (0.365)	2.56 (3.18)
African American	0.309 (0.299)	-0.211 (0.218)	-0.163 (0.197)	-6.80 ** (2.94)
Female participant	0.496 * (0.298)	0.526 ** (0.226)	0.606 *** (0.199)	0.691 (2.82)
Motherhood interaction [^]	-2.14 *** (0.651)	-2.72 *** (0.426)	-2.38 *** (0.548)	-15.9 *** (2.42)
Intercept	^{^^}	4.56 *** (0.601)	0.210 (0.266)	148 (2.55)

[^] Parent * Female applicant

^{^^} Since ordered logistic regression produces multiple intercepts, we do not present them here.

* p<.1

** p<.05

*** p<.001

Note: N=188 participants

main effect of parental status is marginally significant and positive, while the motherhood penalty interaction is significant and negative, indicating that the negative effect of parental status on perceptions of promotability accrues only to women.

Consistent with previous literature on the motherhood wage penalty, mothers are offered lower starting salaries than other types of applicants, as indicated by the significant, negative coefficient for the motherhood interaction term. Childless men were recommended an average salary of approximately \$148,000. Fathers were offered a significantly higher salary of approximately \$152,000. Women without children were offered approximately \$151,000, whereas mothers were recommended a significantly lower salary of about \$139,000, or about 7.9 percent less than otherwise equal childless women.

While the motherhood penalty interaction is significant and its sign is in the predicted direction for each model, to complete our argument, we need to give evidence that motherhood disadvantages job applicants *because* it is a status characteristic. If the theory is correct, then evaluations of competence and commitment should mediate the motherhood penalty.

When the competence and commitment ratings were added as independent variables to the models (see Table 5), the negative effect of motherhood status on workplace evaluations was significantly reduced, by a magnitude of 31–46 percent. Thus, mothers are rated as less hireable, less suitable for promotion and management training, and deserving of lower salaries in part because they are believed to be less competent and less committed to paid work. Having established support for the causal mechanism with the laboratory data, we turn to the audit study to assess whether actual employers discriminate against mothers.

The Audit Study

The audit methodology combines experimental design with real-life settings. As in

laboratory experiments, audit studies isolate a characteristic (e.g., race or gender) and test for discriminatory behavior. Distinct from most laboratory studies, audit study participants are the people who make important decisions about actual applicants, such as employers conducting new employee searches. While laboratory experiments permit closer investigation of social and cognitive processes, audit studies provide greater generalizability of results.

Resumes and cover letters from a pair of fictitious, equally qualified, same-gender applicants were sent to employers advertising for marketing and business job openings in a large, northeastern city newspaper over an 18-month period of time. The same-sex pair contained one parent and one nonparent. Job openings were randomly assigned to either the male or female condition. We manipulated parental status on the resume and on the cover letter. We did not manipulate race in this study.

We monitor whether gender and parental status impact the odds that an employer will call back an applicant. Based on the 5–8 percent callback rate found in an audit study of race in hiring (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003), and to ensure that we had sufficient statistical power to evaluate the effect of parental status, we submitted 1,276 resumes and cover letters to 638 employers.

Results

The results suggest that real employers do discriminate against mothers (see Table 6). Childless women received 2.1 times as many callbacks as equally qualified mothers. This finding is similar to the laboratory experiment (see Table 1) in which childless women were recommended for hire 1.8 times more frequently than mothers. In the laboratory study, fathers were recommended for hire at a slightly *higher* rate, although the difference was only marginally significant; in the audit study, fathers were called back at a higher rate, although the difference was not significant.

Table 5. Estimated regression coefficients for the mediation of competence and commitment on the impact of parental status on workplace evaluations. (Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by participant ID.)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Promotion likelihood</i> (ordered logistic estimates)	<i>Mgmt training?</i> (binary logistic estimates)	<i>Hire?</i> (binary logistic estimates)	<i>Recommended salary in thousands of dollars</i> (linear estimates)
Competence	0.628 ** (0.295)	1.263 *** (0.281)	1.21 *** (0.258)	7.00 *** (1.99)
Commitment	0.237 *** (0.095)	0.206 ** (0.099)	0.308 *** (0.081)	1.08 (0.762)
Parent	0.901 * (0.558)	0.508 (0.340)	0.433 (0.426)	3.23 * (1.78)
Female applicant	-0.140 (0.426)	0.661 ** (0.332)	0.755 * (0.410)	-0.817 (3.31)
African American	0.374 (0.319)	-0.154 (0.237)	-0.092 (0.244)	-6.30 *** (2.86)
Female participant	0.557 * (0.316)	0.606 *** (0.236)	0.755 *** (0.254)	0.512 (2.81)
Motherhood interaction [^]	-1.34 ** (0.646)	-1.89 *** (0.437)	-1.39 ** (0.606)	-8.52 *** (2.66)
Intercept	^^	3.64 *** (0.947)	-2.09 *** (0.702)	140 (6.37)
Percent reduction of motherhood penalty	37.4 %	30.5 %	41.6 %	46.4 %

[^] Parent * Female applicant

^{^^} Since ordered logistic regression produces multiple intercepts, we do not present them here.

* p<.1

** p<.05

*** p<.001

Note: N=188 participants

Table 6. Proportions of applicants receiving callbacks by gender and parental status.

	<i>Callbacks / Total Jobs</i>	<i>Proportion Called Back</i>
Mothers	10 / 320	.0313
Childless women	21 / 320	.0656++
Fathers	16 / 318	.0503
Childless men	9 / 318	.0283

++ z <.05 Test for difference in proportions between parents and non-parents

Notes: Mothers and childless women applied to the same 320 jobs; fathers and childless men applied to the same 318 jobs.

We now consider a multivariate model for the effects of parental status, applicant gender, and the interaction of parental status and applicant gender on the odds that an applicant receives a callback from an employer. Table 7 shows the motherhood penalty interaction is significant and negative, while the main effect for parental status is insignificant, and the main effect for the female applicant variable is significant and positive. The significant negative motherhood penalty interaction term indicates that being a parent lowers the odds that a woman, but not a man, will receive a callback from employers. In sum, the audit data show that, compared with their equally qualified childless counterparts, mothers are disadvantaged when actual employers make hiring decisions.

Strengths and Limitations

While the audit study evaluates whether actual employers discriminate against mothers in the hiring process, it does not give us insight into the mechanism underlying discrimination, because it was not possible to collect employers' rankings of commitment, competence, performance standards, and other relevant variables. These limits mean that while the audit study establishes that actual employers discriminate against mothers, it cannot establish why.

By considering the results of these two companion studies simultaneously, however, we find support for the status-based discrimination mechanism using the laboratory data and see real world implications of the argument with data generated from the audit study. Further, these results are consistent with qualitative work showing that employers discriminate against mothers (Blair-Loy 2003; Crittenden 2001; Kennelly 1999) and with survey research that consistently finds a wage penalty for motherhood (Budig and England 2001; Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003). Thus, across a wide range of methodological approaches—each of which has its unique strengths and weaknesses—we find evidence

Table 7. Estimated binary logistic regression coefficients for the effects of parental status and gender on the odds of receiving a callback. (Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by job.)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Callback?</i>
Parent	0.598 (.433)
Female applicant	0.887** (.407)
Motherhood interaction [^]	-1.38** (.590)
Intercept	-3.54*** (.338)

[^] Parent *Female applicant

* p<.10

** p<.05

*** p<.001

Notes: Mothers and childless women applied to the same 320 jobs; fathers and childless men applied to the same 318 jobs, for a total of 1276 applications to 638 jobs.

that mothers experience disadvantages in workplace settings and that discrimination plays a role in producing these disadvantages.

Summary and Conclusions

This project makes two main contributions. First, it isolates and experimentally evaluates a status-based discrimination mechanism that explains some of the disadvantages mothers experience in the paid labor market. Second, it shows that real employers discriminate against mothers. The results of this study have implications for understanding some of the enduring patterns of gender inequality in paid work. Studies have documented the motherhood penalty in at least 15 countries (Harkness and Waldfogel 1999; Misra, Budig, and Moller 2005) and shown its stability over time (Avellar and Smock 2003). This study offers a partial explanation for the mechanism behind a widespread, durable phenomenon with implications for a broad segment of the population.

More generally, a gender gap in wages has persisted despite the vast movement of

women into paid labor in the United States since the early 1970s, and employed mothers account for most of this gap (Glass 2004). This study suggests that cultural beliefs about the tension between the motherhood and "ideal worker" roles may play a part in reproducing this pattern of inequality. A second enduring pattern of gender inequality is the so-called "glass ceiling," a metaphor for the barriers that restrict women's movement up the career ladder to the highest positions in organizations and firms. To the extent that employers view mothers as less committed to their jobs and less "promotable," the glass ceiling women face could be, in part, a motherhood ceiling.

Writing for the National Center for Policy Analysis, Denise Venable (2002) reports that among people ages 27 to 33 who have never had children, women's earnings approach 98 percent of men's. She concludes, "When women behave in the workplace as men do, the wage gap between them is small." Claims of unequal pay, she continues, "almost always involve comparing apples and oranges." However, since most employed men and employed women have children at some point in their lives, the most illustrative "within fruit" comparison is not the comparison of childless men to childless women, but the comparison of men with children to women with children. As the two studies reported here show, when women "behave as men do," by giving evidence of being a parent, they are discriminated against, while their male counterparts are often advantaged. Far from being an "apples to oranges" comparison, the male and female applicants who were evaluated in these studies were exactly equal by experimental design. That parental status disadvantaged only female applicants is strong evidence of discrimination.

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