

Ideology Shapes How Workers Perceive and React to Workplace Discrimination: An
Experimental Study on Parenthood Discrimination

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ABSTRACT

Employers use ideologically-tinged rhetoric to justify workplace discrimination. We argue that workers will be less likely to label biased treatment against them as discriminatory when they subscribe to those ideologies as well. We tested this prediction and the consequences of labeling for work attitudes and performance using an experiment that assigned parents to a low-status position in a work group, varying whether the decision invoked biased, ideological assumptions about parenthood. As expected, ideology drove mothers' (but not fathers') labeling. Mothers were less likely to label biased treatment against them as discriminatory when they were conservative and when they subscribed to separate spheres and ideal worker ideologies. Mothers who labeled their treatment as discriminatory had more negative work attitudes than those who did not, but also tended to appeal the decision. Ideology thus shapes whether people label discrimination when it occurs as well as their subsequent work attitudes and justice-seeking behaviors.

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace discrimination—differential treatment on the job based on irrelevant aspects of one’s background—is widespread and has an array of severe consequences for those it affects (Jones et al 2016; Phelan and Link 2015; Schmitt et al 2014). Much existing research on discrimination approaches the problem either as an event at the market interface (e.g., hiring discrimination; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Koch, D’Mello, and Sackett 2015; Pager and Western 2012; Quillian 2006), or as a persistent, ambient feature of marginalized communities’ experiences (e.g. Phelan and Link 2015). But to its targets, workplace discrimination is not always a black box hidden from view, nor is it always a diffuse atmosphere of hostility or incivility. Rather, it often involves concrete events in which targeted people are allocated fewer rewards and resources or excluded from valued opportunities by specific, known decision-makers (Rosçigno 2007; Light, Rosçigno, and Kalev 2011; Koch et al 2015; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019). Further, these events are not always self-evidently discriminatory since social and legal norms may prevent decision-makers (e.g., managers or supervisors) from expressing overt hostility or prejudice toward workers. Employers often instead engage in a relational process of justification in which they use ideological rhetoric to legitimate their decisions to employees and third parties (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019).

By appealing to ideologies which workers themselves often see as valid, decision-makers seek to ‘hide’ discriminatory actions in plain sight. It is thus not at all certain that victims of workplace discrimination will label it as such, or that they will seek redress. The outcomes of discrimination, like detrimental effects on well-being or attitudes about work, and attempts to

redress it, likely depend on how workers' own ideological viewpoints align with the rhetoric used by employers to justify discrimination. Yet, as detailed more fully below, it is difficult to know from prior work whether and how ideology shapes experiences of discrimination.

This research addresses three questions about whether and how ideology influences worker interpretations and reactions to employer discrimination, focusing on differential treatment by parental status (Correll et al 2007; Gough and Noonan 2013; Rudman and Mescher 2013). To what extent do targets of workplace parenthood discrimination label their (biased vs. non-biased) treatment discrimination? Do workers' beliefs in legitimating ideologies (political conservatism, traditional gender ideology, and ideal worker norms) affect their tendencies to label biased treatment as discrimination? How do the effects of biased treatment on work attitudes and behaviors depend on whether workers label that treatment discrimination? Below we introduce arguments and hypotheses to address these questions. We then test these hypotheses in a new web-based pilot study and experiment with total N=1,102 parents.

Parenthood Discrimination

We examine parenthood discrimination because much gender inequality is associated specifically with the transition to motherhood (Correll et al 2007; Gough and Noonan 2013). Motherhood is a status characteristic associated with beliefs about mothers' lower competence and reliability, which leads to discrimination against mothers even when they present evidence of commitment equal to fathers (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Correll et al 2007). The 'motherhood penalty' is associated with hiring biases, workplace mistreatment, lower income, slower career advancement, being pushed into more 'feminine' jobs, and even dropping out of paid work entirely (Gough and Noonan 2013; Stone 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2019; Williams and Dempsey 2018).

In addition to its social relevance, motherhood discrimination also provides us with a useful counterfactual: fatherhood discrimination. In contrast to mothers, having children typically *improves* workplace standing and outcomes for fathers. Especially in professional occupations, employers tend to assume that parenthood makes fathers more committed to work (Behrdahl et al 2018; Correll et al 2007), leading to ‘fatherhood premia’ like more pay and promotion opportunities (Gough and Noonan 2013; Petersen, Penner, and Høgenes 2014). Fathers experience these benefits even though they also face pressure to focus on work over family and experience stigma when they seek work flexibility (O’Connor and Cech 2018; Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al 2013).

Given that mothers are subject to stereotypes and ideologies that devalue their full involvement in the workplace, and face more harmful discrimination as a result (Correll et al 2007), we expect that mothers will be more vigilant and attuned to discrimination in workplace interactions and thus more likely than fathers to label biased treatment based on parenthood as discrimination. Importantly, however, we expect that the tendency for mothers to perceive and label biased treatment as discrimination will depend on the (mis)alignment of mothers’ ideological frames with rhetoric used by managers.

Given the comparative absence of discrimination against fathers, we are less certain how they will react to discrimination. Thus, while our core arguments and hypotheses center on motherhood discrimination, the experimental setting we employ allows us to study fathers as a counterfactual. In so doing, we can assess whether reactions to parenthood discrimination are primarily limited to mothers, who are more likely to be subjected to parenthood discrimination or are more general and affect anyone who experiences parenthood discrimination. Further, the

inclusion of fathers allows us to better assess the force of cultural ideologies which limit mothers' (but not fathers') involvement at work.

Gender and Ideal Worker Ideologies

Employers frequently justify motherhood discrimination through appeals to gendered beliefs about men and women's roles in the workplace vs home, or "separate spheres gender ideology", as well as beliefs about "ideal workers." In "separate spheres" ideology, a person must choose between devotion to either work or family life, and mothers and fathers are seen as naturally suited for family and work, respectively (Acker 1990; Blair-Loy 2003; Davis and Greenstein 2009; Stone 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2018). 'Ideal worker' ideology is strongly related to gender ideology, since the ideal worker is seen as one without family care responsibilities, or whose family responsibilities are taken care of by someone else, especially a stay-at-home spouse (Acker 1990). The ideal worker is expected to be fully devoted to work and to not let family responsibilities undermine their availability for work (Acker 1990; Blair-Loy 2003; Cha 2010; Cha and Weeden 2014).

Both separate spheres and ideal worker ideologies are culturally dominant. Though belief in separate spheres ideology has declined, it remains impactful in part because a sizeable fraction of people, especially political conservatives, still subscribe to traditional gender roles (Davis and Greenstein 2009; Shu and Meagher 2017). Its persistence also stems from a continuing belief that women make better caretakers, which leads to specialization in cisgender heterosexual couples who need both income and childcare (Cha and Weeden 2014; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Meanwhile, ideal worker norms have become entrenched, especially in professional occupations that demand ever-increasing levels of overwork and work availability (Blair-Loy 2003; Cha 2010; Cha and Weeden 2014).

Even when individuals do not personally subscribe to them, these ideologies can still constrain them because they are conventional beliefs in many work settings (Correll et al 2017; Munsch, Ridgeway, and Williams 2014). Workers, especially women, often adjust their work aspirations and preferences based on their perceptions of gendered social norms and resistance to female leadership (Fisk 2018; Fisk and Overton 2019; Munsch et al 2014). Workers must also contend with an unequal balance of power in which the goals and ideologies of workplace decision-makers count for more than those of workers, an issue we turn to next.

Employers' Use of Ideology to Legitimate Discrimination

When engaging in workplace discrimination, decision-makers like supervisors and managers often use discursive strategies to legitimate their decisions to third parties and targets of their discrimination (Light et al 2011; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019; O'Connor and Kmec 2020). For example, a worker being passed over for a promotion may receive a cursory justification from a supervisor, or a manager singling out a worker for punishment may accuse them (with or without evidence) of violating attendance policies (Byron and Rosçigno 2014).

Critically, employers rarely justify their decisions through outright prejudice or hostility, even when a decision is clearly biased or discriminatory (Bielby 2000). Instead, employers rely on ideological frameworks to justify their decision. One strategy is *symbolic vilification*, in which employers define targeted workers as problematic, less worthy, or potentially dangerous (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Light et al 2011; Rosçigno 2011). Employers symbolically vilify mothers specifically by casting doubt on their reliability or competence, even before they have given birth (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Correll et al 2007). These accusations are often made even when a worker has not presented clear signs of unreliability or incompetence, since work

performance is often hazily defined and hard to measure, and workplace policies are often enforced in an inconsistent and biased manner (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Rosçigno 2011).

A second strategy is *symbolic amplification*, in which employers elevate the needs of the organization over those of the worker (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Light et al 2011; Rosçigno 2011). It can include appeals to the organization's need for efficiency and profit over providing leave or other worker benefits. Employers also point to the existence of nominal anti-discrimination policies as evidence that an employee could not have been discriminated against (Byron and Rosçigno 2014).

Both strategies rely on ideology to provide facially legitimate justifications for discrimination. In the case of parenthood discrimination, these justifications mask underlying bias: rhetoric about parents' reliability and commitment often stems not from demonstrated lack of reliability or commitment, but from assumptions derived from gender stereotypes and ideology (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Correll et al 2007; O'Connor and Kmec 2020; Rosçigno 2007, 2011; Stone 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2018). Likewise, arguments about the overriding need for commitment, even to the exclusion of more flexible arrangements like leave or reduced hours, stem in part from ideal worker ideology (Acker 1990).

An indicator of the force of these ideologies is that they legitimate discrimination in the eyes of outside observers (O'Connor and Kmec 2020), including courts and regulators (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Rosçigno 2007). And since powerful actors in organizations use their positions to instill their own ideologies and goals into organizational cultures and workers (Hallett 2003; Rosçigno 2011), it is likely that some employees may then see discriminatory decisions justified in these terms as acceptable, even when they are personally disadvantaged by them (Kaiser and Major 2006).

Objective versus Labeled Discrimination

Workers' interpretations of discriminatory events affect how they react and, as a result, what social scientists know about discrimination. In general, researchers only find out about discriminatory experiences when research respondents report them on self-report measures. As others have noted (Kaiser and Major 2006; Quillian 2006), this makes it hard for researchers to parse accurately reported instances of discrimination from "false positives" (cases of proper treatment that are reported as discrimination) or "false negatives" (cases of discrimination that are reported as proper treatment). Since false positive reports of discrimination are likely much rarer than false negatives (Kaiser and Major 2006), discrimination is likely under-reported.

Based on prior work, we argue that ideology plays an important role in under-reporting of discrimination. Prior studies have focused on how ideology shapes the perceived prevalence of discrimination and the extent to which perceptions of discrimination threaten a person's worldview. That is, the worldview of a person who believes strongly that individual outcomes are based primarily on merit will tend to be threatened by information that one's own or others' opportunities are hampered by discrimination (Major et al 2007). Thus, to preserve the integrity of their worldviews, people may (re)frame discrimination as stemming from legitimate processes, downplay the impact of discrimination, or simply be less apt to realize that an action might be discriminatory (Major et al 2007; Stangor et al 2003). Research suggests that ideology plays this role for third-party observers (Major et al 2002, 2007; O'Connor and Kmec 2020), but we do not know whether ideology loses its force when it collides with the self-interest of targets of discrimination in specific discriminatory decisions. If a substantial number of workers who are discriminated against view it as legitimate or do not label it discrimination, then existing research

not only under-estimates discrimination levels, but also leads to a skewed impression of how it is experienced by its targets and the extent of its consequences.

It matters whether workers perceive discrimination as such because it will guide whether they experience the “indirect” effects of discrimination, in addition to its direct effects (Stangor et al 2003). That is, discrimination’s direct effects occur whether the target realizes it or not. For example, if a supervisor withholds a promotion from a pregnant woman, her workplace advancement and material resources decrease no matter how she labels that treatment. But many outcomes are indirect and depend on whether the worker experiences and labels their treatment as discriminatory (Stangor et al 2003). Self-report data shows that those who label their treatment as discriminatory experience unambiguously negative consequences for mental and physical wellbeing (Jones et al 2016; Lewis, Cogburn, and Williams 2015; Phelan and Link 2015; Schmitt et al 2014), as well as work attachment and intentions to leave their current job (Jones et al 2016). However, in the absence of labeling their treatment as discriminatory, it is unclear how workers will think and act.

How Workers Who Don’t Label Discrimination May Differ From Those Who Do

Will workers who do not label biased decisions as discrimination experience the same effects as those who do? One possibility is that these workers will experience stress from losing a reward, position, or opportunity, but not the added stress of viewing themselves and their groups as targets of stigma and prejudice. Indeed, as noted above, not perceiving discrimination can help maintain positive self-regard and a worldview that outcomes are merited (Kaiser and Major 2006; Major et al 2007; Stangor et al 2003). Workers who do not label biased treatment as discrimination may therefore be indistinguishable from those who experience undesirable

outcomes for non-biased reasons, e.g., a worker denied a promotion in favor of a clearly more qualified peer.

Alternatively, if employees believe more strongly in the legitimating ideologies employers use to justify decisions, they may experience *more positive* outcomes from discrimination than those who merely experience a benignly negative (i.e., non-discriminatory) outcome. This is in part because workers are not always given full explanations for the decisions that affect them at work. Compared to that baseline ambiguity and lack of information, a justification that uses separate spheres or ideal worker ideologies may seem – to a person who subscribes to those ideologies – especially fair and valid. And since perceptions of procedural justice are linked to positive attitudes about work (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt et al 2013), these workers may be *more* satisfied and committed to work than those who receive a benign but vague or incomplete justification.

Workers may also behave differently depending on whether they label biased decisions as discriminatory or not. In line with Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty scheme, once a person has decided that an incident is discriminatory, they can leave the situation where discrimination has occurred by opting out of further work, speak out and try to obtain redress of the issue, or attempt to cope without leaving or trying to change the situation (e.g., when those actions would be costly or provoke severe backlash). Those who label their treatment as discrimination should be more likely to either speak up or exit a situation than those who do not label their treatment discrimination. Since practices that go unchallenged tend to become socially legitimate and expected (Correll et al 2017; Ridgeway and Correll 2004), any discriminatory practice that is not opposed by targets or third parties are more likely to become entrenched. The stakes of labeling biased treatment against oneself or others as discrimination are thus high.

STUDY OVERVIEW

We designed a simulated work situation that varied whether an assignment to a low-status work role was due to parenthood bias or a more neutral cause. Figure 1 outlines the full experimental procedure. Manipulating discrimination directly allowed us to investigate how workers label discriminatory work assignments and the consequences of those labeling behaviors on their work attitudes and behaviors. Meta-analyses show that organizational behaviors observed in simulated experiments tend to correspond to behaviors in field studies (Mitchell 2012; Vanhove and Harms 2015).

[Figure 1 here]

We conducted a pilot (N=355) and full experiment (N=747) that employed a similar design. For both studies, we recruited samples of parents from Mechanical Turk (Litman and Robinson 2021) to participate in a study of management skills. Over the course of the experiment, participants were assigned by an “Evaluator” to a low status role in a work group. The decision was justified by either generally acceptable logistical issues (control condition) or rhetoric based on stereotypes about parenting and work commitment (bias condition).

Afterward, we measured participants’ attitudes about the Evaluator’s decision and what factors, including bias and discrimination, they thought were relevant to the decision, allowing us to test whether participants had different attitudes and behaviors depending on whether they experienced objective bias and whether they labeled their treatment as parenthood discrimination. Thereafter, participants completed an ostensibly work relevant task that measured task performance, how much they valued the task, their interest in related tasks, and their expectations regarding future work with the group. Finally, we gave participants opportunities to opt out of the future group interaction (exit) or to appeal the Evaluator’s decision (voice).

HYPOTHESES

Based on the arguments outlined above, we test four hypotheses. First, we expect that more participants will label the outcome (not being assigned to the high-value Coordinator role) as parenthood discrimination in the bias condition than in the control condition.

***H1:** More participants in the bias condition will label treatment as parenthood discrimination than in the control condition.*

In the remaining hypotheses, we specifically examine differences within the bias condition based on participants' labeling behavior. Table 1 shows the key groups of participants based on experimental condition and labeling behavior.

[Table 1 here]

We expect that mothers will be less likely to label a biased decision as parenthood discrimination (Cell 3 vs 2) when they believe more strongly in ideologies that legitimate that decision. We test this hypothesis using three types of ideology: political orientation, separate spheres ideology, and ideal worker ideology. We focus on mothers because these ideologies emphasize mothers' roles as primary caregivers and thus make work-family conflict especially salient for mothers. Given that these ideologies do not justify or provide cover for biased treatment *against* fathers, we do not expect ideology to matter for fathers targeted by parenthood discrimination.

We include political orientation because conservatism is linked to various ideologies, like gender and meritocratic ideology (Cech 2017; Cotter et al 2011; Shu and Meagher 2017) that tend to legitimate differential treatment. Separate spheres ideology should also reduce the chance of labeling bias as discrimination because it paints the forced choice of family vs work, and the gendered stereotypes of those domains, as necessary and valid (Acker 1990; Davis and

Greenstein 2009; O'Connor and Kmec 2020). Mothers who believe more in separate spheres ideology should therefore be more likely to interpret a biased decision framed by gendered stereotypes about parents as reasonable and legitimate, even if they are disadvantaged by it. Likewise, we expect that mothers who subscribe to an ideal worker ideology (Acker 1990; Blair-Loy 2003; Cha 2010) will be less likely than mothers who do not to see biased decisions as discrimination.

***H2:** For mothers, conservatism (**H2a**), separate spheres ideology (**H2b**), and ideal worker ideology (**H2c**) will be associated with a lower likelihood of labeling parenthood discrimination in the bias condition.*

Next, following prior work (Jones et al. 2016), we expect that participants in the bias condition will differ from each other on a range of outcomes (see boxes 5-7 in Fig. 1) depending on whether they label biased treatment as discriminatory (Cell 3 vs 2).

***H3:** Participants in the bias condition who label the decision as discriminatory (Cell 3) will have worse task performance, more negative task attitudes, work attachment, and expectations about future treatment than those in the bias condition who do not label their treatment as discriminatory (Cell 2).*

In addition to comparing the two groups of participants in the bias condition to each other, we also compare each to participants in the control condition (Cell 1) to identify whether differences between labeling groups is due more to negative effects on those labeling discrimination vs positive effects on those not labeling discrimination.

Finally, we examine participants behavioral responses to bias, namely whether they voice their concerns through an appeal process and/or exit the workplace by opting out of a future group task. We predict that participants who label discrimination in the bias condition (Cell 3)

will be more likely to either appeal or opt out of work than those in the bias condition who do not label their treatment as discrimination (Cell 2). As with Hypothesis 3, we will also compare outcomes for these groups in the bias condition against the control in order to identify the direction of any effects we observe.

H4. *Participants in the bias condition who label their treatment as discrimination (Cell 3) will be more likely to appeal the decision (H4a) and opt out of a future work group (H4b) than participants in the bias condition who do not label their treatment as discrimination (Cell 2).*

METHOD

Sample Characteristics

We conducted a pilot (N=355) and full experiment (N=747). Their methods were similar, so we describe the procedure of the full experiment while noting the points at which the pilot differed. We sampled parents from Mechanical Turk using the Turkprime (subsequently rebranded as CloudResearch) platform for administering mTurk studies (Litman and Robinson 2021). This allowed us to take advantage of the platform's data quality features, including blocking duplicate IP addresses and suspicious geocode locations, and excluding the most active 10% of mTurk workers (Litman and Robinson 2021). Participants who reported not having children on our demographics form at the beginning of the study were immediately excluded from participation since our Turkprime qualifications should have allowed only workers with young children to view the study link.

The experiments themselves included attention, comprehension, and manipulation checks. Participants were required to answer questions scattered throughout the study about our cover story, study procedure, task characteristics, and the outcome of the Evaluator's decision.

At the end of the study, participants were asked several indirect text response questions to elicit suspicion and other comments about the study.

Exclusion rates were satisfactory: we excluded 43 (12.1%) participants in the pilot, and 121 (16.3%) in the full experiment for data quality reasons or suspicion.¹ Exclusion rates did not differ significantly by condition (control=14.7%, bias=17.7%, diff=3.0%, SE=2.7%, $p=ns$). We analyze the remaining 312 (pilot) and 626 (experiment) participants.

PROCEDURE

Demographics and Moderators

As shown in Box 1 of Figure 1, after providing consent, participants filled out a demographics form and several filler attitude scales. In the full experiment, but not the pilot, scales measuring our moderator variables were interspersed with the filler scales.² Demographics included measures of the number of children participants had, the age of their youngest child, relationship status, and political orientation.

Appendix Tables A1 and A2 provide full demographics for each experiment. Participants tended to be in their late 20s to early 40s. About a quarter were non-White, half had a college degree, four in five worked full- or part-time, and 80%-90% were married or partnered. In the pilot, the median age of participants' youngest child was six. In the full experiment we employed an additional restriction that allowed us to target participants with younger children, resulting in a median youngest child age of four. In both samples the median number of children was two. Both samples had similar numbers of liberal and conservative participants.

Table 2 details how we measured three moderators: political orientation, separate spheres gender ideology, and the availability pay norm. The availability pay norm measures a key component of ideal worker ideology: the idea that workers ideally should be available for

overtime and outside of standard work hours as the organization requires. The availability norm measure was administered alongside several other pay norm measures to reduce potential suspicion. The ideology measures correlated with each other, but not strongly enough to be combined into a single measure (mean r among mothers=.16; mean r among fathers=.34).

[Table 2 here]

Cover Story

We described the study as part of the development of a general-purpose management skills test, the Adaptive Management Exercise (AME), for an “industry partner” (Box 2 of Figure 1). The AME was described as a group task where participants would discuss workplace dilemmas and find the best solutions. There were two roles in the group AME: the high-status Coordinator, with more responsibility, higher base pay, and higher bonus pay; and the low status Worker, with less responsibility, and lower base and bonus pay. As detailed below, this allowed us to model a workplace hiring or promotion scenario, with a supervisor reviewing a worker’s capabilities and deciding whether to give them a higher status position or leave them in a lower status position. Thus, the Evaluator’s decision had real stakes: being assigned the Worker role would mean exclusion from a lucrative and edifying opportunity and having to continue work in a lower-status, less desirable role.

We told participants that the purpose of the session was to obtain more information about them so that an Evaluator, described as an HR manager working with the researcher’s industry partner, could place them into one of the two roles later in the session. Participants would then go through a “trial run” of the AME by themselves and would earn a bonus based on their performance. (In fact, all participants were paid the full bonus.) A later session would then ostensibly be scheduled for the group AME.

In both the pilot and full experiment, interest was high and most participants preferred the Coordinator role (Appendix Tables A1 and A2). There were no gender differences in the pilot, but mothers in the full experiment were slightly more interested than fathers (5.93 vs 5.68, $\text{diff}=.25$, $\text{SE}=.10$, $p<.05$).

Manipulation

Next, in Box 3 of Figure 1, participants were told that their information had been sent to the Evaluator, who would make their decision and provide a brief explanation within a few minutes. After a short wait, participants were randomly shown one of two responses. Participants were always assigned to the Worker role, but we varied whether the Evaluator explained their decision in logistics-oriented terms (control), or by implying that the participants' family would detract from their competence and reliability (bias). The control response read:

“Looking over your responses to the questionnaires, you look pretty good. A lot of other participants also look good, though, and we need people for both the Coordinator and Worker roles. I assigned you to the Worker role because that’s who we need more of at the moment.”

The biased response added explanations appealing to beliefs about parenthood.

“Looking over your responses to the questionnaires, you look pretty good. A lot of other participants also look good, though, and we need people for both the Coordinator and Worker roles. The group AME may also take a significant amount of time, so we want to select people for the Coordinator role who we're sure will be available and able to focus on the AME without being distracted by things like outside personal or family responsibilities (family is important, but that also means it can be a source of

distraction). Based on your questionnaire responses, those factors mean it's better that I assign you to the Worker role.”

To ensure that participants read the justification, a page timer held them on the Evaluator response page for 45 seconds.

The biased justification is based on comments documented in qualitative research about mothers in the workplace (Byron and Roscigno 2014; Stone 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2018). The justification casts doubt on the participant’s commitment (symbolic vilification) and places the focus on the needs of the organization, i.e., availability (symbolic amplification). However, it is not overtly hostile. We made this choice for two reasons. First, even when discrimination is rooted in hostile prejudice, this fact is rarely part of the “official” explanations that supervisors and managers provide to workers or third parties (Bielby 2000; Byron and Roscigno 2014; Roscigno 2007, 2011). Second, motherhood discrimination often has a paternalistic character: when excluding mothers from workplace opportunities, decision-makers often express concern for the worker’s ability to adequately care for their children while working while pressuring them out of desirable work and away from flexible work arrangements (Stone 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2018).

Approval of Evaluator’s Decision

After the manipulation, in Box 4 of Figure 1, we asked participants how much they approved of the Evaluator’s decision and how reasonable, fair, justified, and biased it was.³ Later, they were asked to rate their experience with the Evaluator from .5 to 5 stars in increments of half a star. A scale incorporating all these items was reliable in both experiments (pilot $\alpha=.88$, full experiment $\alpha=.91$), but since the star rating had a different range, we used a one-factor confirmatory factor analysis (Appendix Tables A3 and A6) to generate standardized factor scores.

Labeling the Decision as Parenthood Discrimination

In the pilot, we measured how participants interpreted the Evaluator's decision by asking them to explain in response to an open-ended question why they thought the Evaluator made their decision. We coded responses (0, 1) based on whether they mentioned that their family was a factor in the decision.

In the full experiment we replaced this open-ended response measure with several questions that unobtrusively tapped into whether participants attributed their outcome to parenthood discrimination (Figure 2). First, participants were asked "how important do you think each of the following were in the Evaluator's decision?" followed by eight 7-point Likert items, including "bias or discrimination against me" and "my personal characteristics (age, parental status, etc.)," along with six other explanations of the decision.

Participants who responded that 'personal characteristics' were at least somewhat important were then shown a second page with the item: "In the previous question, you selected "My personal characteristics" as a factor that was at least "somewhat important" in the Evaluator's decision. Please check below all the information that you think affected the Evaluator's decision." They selected from ten checkboxes for various demographic factors, crucially including "my being a parent."

[Figure 2 here]

Since the discrimination implemented in our experiment is defined by an appeal to parenthood specifically, citing either perceived discrimination alone or the relevance of parenthood alone does not clearly identify a person as perceiving parenthood discrimination. We therefore coded participants as labeling parenthood discrimination only if they said that

discrimination was at least ‘somewhat important’ in the decision *and* that ‘my being a parent’ was a factor. All others were coded as not labeling their treatment as parenthood discrimination.

Trial AME

Next, participants completed the ‘trial AME’ (Box 5 of Figure 1), which consisted of five business-themed questions assessing logical reasoning. In the pilot, these questions were taken from a previous study of gender and status processes (Lucas 2003) and did not have correct answers. In the full experiment, we used five LSAT questions. Since LSAT questions have correct answers, we scored participants’ performance.

Task and Work Attitudes

After the trial AME, in Box 6 of Figure 1, we assessed participants’ attitudes about the task and their expectations about the future group interaction. We asked how well they thought they performed, how difficult it was, and three questions asking how enjoyable, interesting, and fun the task was (full experiment $\alpha=.91$).⁴

We then asked participants about the (ostensibly) upcoming group AME. One item asked how much they were looking forward to the group AME and two items asked how much status they expected to have in the group (“how much do you think your ideas will be valued and listened to during the group-interaction AME?” and “how much influence do you think you will have over decisions in the group-interaction AME?”; full experiment $\alpha=.86$).⁵ Two items assessed general interest in the task domain by asking how interested they would be in activities and jobs involving the same skills (pilot $\alpha=.89$, full experiment $\alpha=.88$).

Behaviors

As shown in Box 7 of Figure 1, the study concluded with several behavioral measures. In the first, we gave participants the chance to appeal the Evaluator’s decision to assign them the

Worker role. Participants who appeal the decision are clearly seeking redress (voice). We then gave participants the chance to opt out of the upcoming group interaction (exit) in exchange for the full bonus in the current session. Participants who opt out may do so for a variety of reasons, but an effect of condition on this variable would indicate that the experience of discrimination led at least some participants to exit the ‘workplace.’ Finally, participants were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and approved for payment. All participants received the full base pay and the maximum bonus.

Analysis Strategy

Our hypotheses about the impacts of discrimination hinge on whether there are detectable differences between participants who experience biased treatment and clearly label it as such and participants who experience biased treatment but do not label it discrimination. We therefore focused our analyses for Hypotheses 3 and 4 on the contrast between the labeling and non-labeling groups in the bias condition. In our main experiment, power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al 2009) shows that we have 80% power to detect differences of about $d=.45$ between these two groups of participants in the bias condition. We then compare these outcomes against the control condition primarily to determine the direction of the effect for each group, relative to a non-discriminatory baseline. Since we treat fathers as a “counterfactual” comparison for discrimination against a typically advantaged group, we conduct separate analyses for mothers and fathers.

PILOT RESULTS

Our pilot was primarily designed to assess our procedures, but it also offers a preliminary test of Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4. We found strong support for Hypothesis 1. (Appendix Tables A4 and A5 provide full details.) No participants in the control condition indicated in their open-ended

responses that family may have played a role in the Evaluator's decision. In the bias condition, about a fifth of fathers (22.4%, SE=6.2%) and a third of mothers (33.3%, SE=4.7%) did so. While mothers were more likely to recognize the role of family than fathers, this difference is not statistically significant (diff=11.9%, SE=7.8%, $p=ns$). These results support Hypotheses 1.

We also found preliminary evidence that participants who explicitly mentioned family in their reactions were affected differently from those who did not (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Compared to participants in the bias condition who did not mention family, those who did had much lower approval of the Evaluator's decision (mothers: $b=-1.64$, SE=.17, $p<.001$; fathers: $b=-1.15$, SE=.24, $p<.001$), lower affect (mothers: $b=-1.99$, SE=.31, $p<.001$; fathers: $b=-.95$, SE=.40, $p<.05$), and were more likely to appeal the decision (mothers: $b=.42$, SE=.09, $p<.001$; fathers: $b=.58$, SE=.15, $p<.001$). Among mothers, those mentioning family also valued the AME less ($b=-.57$, SE=.26, $p<.05$), expected to have less status in the group AME ($b=-.84$, SE=.27, $p<.01$), and looked forward to the group AME less ($b=-.64$, SE=.30, $p<.05$) than participants in the bias condition who did not mention family in their reactions. Comparing these effects against the control condition indicates that for both mothers and fathers these effects are driven by the parents mentioning family, while those not mentioning family have outcomes similar to those in the control condition.

The pilot shows that many parents did *not* explicitly label the Evaluator's decision as parenthood discrimination. Further, negative outcomes were concentrated among those who explicitly noted that the Evaluator justified their decision by referencing their family. Given these promising results, we designed the main experiment to formally test the hypotheses with a larger sample and improved measures.

EXPERIMENT RESULTS

Labeling Discrimination

Our main experiment used an improved measure of how participants labeled the Evaluator's decision: participants were coded as labeling the decision as parenthood discrimination if they indicated that "bias or discrimination against me" was at least somewhat important *and* that "My being a parent" was a factor in the decision. Using this measure, and consistent with the pilot and prior work arguing that people often minimize or do not recognize biased treatment as discrimination (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Kaiser and Major 2006; Light et al 2011; O'Connor and Kmec 2020; Quillian 2006), only a third of participants in the bias condition (36.9% of mothers, 34.7% of fathers; diff=2.3%, SE=5.5%, $p=ns$) saw the Evaluator's decision as parenthood discrimination. This was far more than in the control condition, where 'false positive' reports of discrimination were very low (3.1% of mothers, 7.6% of fathers).⁶

Those who labeled the decision as parenthood discrimination had lower approval of the decision than those who did not apply that label (mothers: $b=-1.15$, $SE=.14$, $p<.001$; fathers: $b=-1.00$, $SE=.15$, $p<.001$), and lower affect (mothers: $b=-1.18$, $SE=.22$, $p<.001$; fathers: $b=-.76$, $SE=.21$, $p<.001$). Comparing these groups against the control shows that this was driven exclusively by the participants labeling discrimination, while those not doing so had outcomes similar to controls.

These findings support Hypothesis 1. However, they also show that even in the face of clear evidence that the Evaluator's decision was motivated by unsupported assumptions about how family responsibilities would affect the participant's reliability and capability, most mothers and fathers did not label the treatment as parenthood discrimination.

How Ideology Affects Who Labels Discrimination

Hypothesis 2 argues that mothers will be less likely to label discrimination in the bias condition when they are more conservative, believe more in separate spheres ideology, and believe that worker pay is justified by work availability. Because these ideologies were not salient in the Evaluator's control explanation and perceived discrimination was extremely low in the control condition, we focus on effects of ideology in the bias condition. We estimated effects on the chance of labeling parenthood discrimination using linear probability models.⁷ We address findings for mothers first, then compare them against findings for fathers. Appendix Table A9 provides full detail.

Conservatism

Conservative mothers were less likely than liberal mothers to label discrimination in the bias condition ($b=-.05$, $SE=.02$, $p<.05$), supporting Hypothesis 2a. This effect was sizeable: nearly half (43%) of more progressive mothers (with -1 SD conservatism) labeled the decision as parenthood discrimination, but less than a third (24%) of conservative mothers (with +1 conservatism) did so.

Separate Spheres Ideology

Consistent with H2b, we find that mothers in the bias condition who believed more strongly in separate spheres ideology were less likely to label biased treatment as parenthood discrimination ($b=-.06$, $SE=.02$, $p<.01$). Put another way, more than four in ten (45%) of mothers with -1 SD belief in separate spheres ideology labeled parenthood discrimination, compared to less than a third (22%) of those with +1 SD belief.

Ideal Worker Norms

Hypothesis 2c argues that mothers will be less likely to label discrimination in the bias condition when they believe more strongly in ideal worker norms, as indicated by greater belief in worker availability pay norms. Parenthood discrimination, including the justification given by the Evaluator in our bias condition, frequently appeals to concerns about availability (Byron and Roscigno 2014; Stone 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2018). As predicted, mothers tended to label biased treatment as discrimination less often when they subscribed more strongly to the view that workers ought to be rewarded for being able to work long hours and put in work outside of typical work hours ($b=-.07$, $SE=.02$, $p<.001$). There was a large difference between stronger believers (+1 SD) in the availability norm, who only had a one in four chance of labeling discrimination (21%), and less strong believers, who had a one in two chance of doing so (49%).

Fathers and Ideology

In contrast to the impacts of ideology on mothers' tendency to label biased treatment as discrimination, we found no effects of ideology on the chance that fathers label bias as parenthood discrimination. Neither conservatism ($b=-.002$, $SE=.02$, $p=ns$), separate spheres ideology ($b=-.03$, $SE=.02$, $p=ns$), nor belief in the availability pay norm ($b=-.02$, $SE=.02$, $p=ns$) significantly impacted labeling by fathers in the bias condition.

Ideology Summary

Overall, results support Hypothesis 2. Mothers were less likely to label bias as discrimination when they were more conservative, believed more in separate spheres gender ideology, and believed that worker pay is justified by their availability for work. These results show that

ideology frames whether mothers interpret the Evaluator's bias as either parenthood discrimination or an acceptable decision.

As expected, these effects are specific to mothers. No ideology variable affected fathers' labeling behaviors. This makes sense, since the ideologies we investigated emphasize mothers' and fathers' roles as caregivers and breadwinners respectively. Thus, questioning a father's commitment to work due to childcare obligations would be contradict the tenets of, for instance, separate spheres ideology, which typically advantage men at work (Petersen, Penner, and Høgnæs 2014).

Labeling and Discrimination's Outcomes

Next, we analyze how the attitudes and behaviors of participants differed depending on whether they labeled the Evaluator's biased decision as discrimination. In this section, we focus first on comparing the outcomes between these two groups in the bias condition, and then compare those outcomes against participants in the control condition. Tables 3 and 4 provide full details on the relevant contrasts.

[Table 3 here]

[Table 4 here]

Task Performance

We first assess whether participants who labeled their treatment as discriminatory performed differently on the task than those who did not. Since the AME in the main experiment had correct answers, we first tested for effects on overall score. In contrast to Hypothesis 3, we find that mothers who believed they were discriminated against performed *better* on the AME than those who did not (67.6% vs 57.2% diff=10.4%, SE=4.0%, $p < .05$). Mean performance in the control condition (60.1%) fell between the two groups in the treatment condition, showing that

the difference was due to smaller (not statistically significant), opposing effects on both labeling groups that pushed them away from the control group mean. We find no such effect for fathers, who scored similarly regardless of condition and labeling behavior.

We do not have little evidence that those who labeled their treatment as discrimination differed from others in perceived difficulty or self-assessed performance. Mothers assessed difficulty and their own performance similarly regardless of their labeling behaviors and condition. Fathers did not vary in how difficult they saw the task as being, but fathers who labeled discrimination were more likely to think that they performed well than those who did not label discrimination ($b=.45$, $SE=.21$, $p<.05$), contrary to their actual scores.

Overall, we find no support for Hypothesis 3 for task performance outcomes. If anything, mothers who labeled their treatment as discriminatory performed *better* on the subsequent work task than those who did not. Although we caution against making too much of an unpredicted finding, we take up possible explanations in the Discussion.

Work Attitudes

We found much stronger support for Hypothesis 3 for mothers' work attitudes. Mothers labeling discrimination tended to see the AME as less interesting, fun, and enjoyable ($b=-.58$, $SE=.23$, $p<.05$) and were less interested in jobs and activities that involved the same skills as the AME ($b=-.48$, $SE=.22$, $p<.05$) than those who did not label the Evaluator's bias as discrimination. These mothers also had lower expectations about the group AME: they expected to have less status ($b=-.57$, $SE=.20$, $p<.01$) and looked forward to the group task less ($b=-.53$, $SE=.23$, $p<.05$).

Comparing these groups against the control condition, we find that, across the four variables, these differences stemmed just as much from positive effects on those not labeling

discrimination as from negative effects on those who do label discrimination. More generally, the contrasts vs the control condition were smaller and less reliably significant than the contrasts between the two labeling groups in the bias condition.⁸ Importantly, these effects were specific to mothers. Fathers tended to see the AME as similarly interesting, fun, and enjoyable, were as interested in related activities and jobs, expected similar levels of status, and tended to look forward to the group task equally, regardless of condition and labeling behavior.

Overall, these analyses support Hypothesis 3 for mothers, and show that results are specific to mothers. Mothers who labeled the Evaluator's decision parenthood discrimination tended to value the task less and expected to have less status in a future task than mothers who did not label the decision discrimination. The results clearly show large differences between the participants in the bias condition who perceive discrimination and those who don't, with those perceiving discrimination having worse outcomes. Further, we found that these differences were driven by positive effects on those not perceiving discrimination, relative to the control condition, as well as negative effects on those perceiving discrimination. No such effects emerged for fathers.

Parenthood bias tends to reduce work attachment among mothers who perceive and label it as discrimination and increase it among those who don't. This provides strong support to the role of ideology: mothers, but not fathers, apply an ideological toolkit that helps them interpret bias against them as either discrimination or a legitimate decision. This interpretation helps explain the gender differences in effects: mothers may be more affected by discrimination than fathers because they are more likely to tie the Evaluator's decision to broader ideological frameworks.

Exit and Voice: Appealing Discriminatory Decisions, or Opting Out?

Given that a participant has experienced parenthood discrimination, what do they do about it? Do they take action to try to address the injustice (H4a), or are they more likely to opt out of future work (H4b)? We gave participants the option to appeal the Evaluator's decision, then an opportunity to opt out of the upcoming (ostensible) group task in exchange for a higher bonus in the current task.

Among mothers, we found no significant difference in the chance of appealing based on labeling. However, comparing these against the control condition we find that the mothers who labeled discrimination appealed at a significantly higher rate than those in the control condition ($b=.19$, $SE=.06$, $p<.01$). Mothers who did not label discrimination appealed at a slightly but non-significantly higher rate than controls ($b=.10$, $SE=.05$, $p=ns$). Since both effects were in the same direction, the difference between them was smaller and not statistically significant. However, we find no evidence that mothers opted out at different rates based on condition or labeling. Overall, this provides some evidence for Hypothesis 4a and no evidence for Hypothesis 4b among mothers.

A different trend appeared for fathers. Fathers in the bias condition who labeled discrimination were more likely to appeal the decision than those who did not ($b=.30$, $SE=.08$, $p<.001$). Comparing against the control, we find that this occurred because fathers who did not label discrimination were significantly *less* likely to appeal than fathers in the control condition ($b=-.17$, $SE=.06$, $p<.01$), while labeling discrimination was associated with a smaller, non-significant increase in the chance of appealing ($b=.13$, $SE=.07$, $p=ns$). But, as with mothers, fathers did not opt out at different rates across conditions or labeling groups. Overall, we find no support for Hypothesis 4a or 4b regarding fathers.

In sum, bias affected mothers' and fathers' behavioral responses very differently. Discrimination tended to increase the chance that mothers, especially those labeling it as discrimination, appealed the decision. However, the primary outcome of discrimination for fathers was to reduce the chance that those not labeling it as such appealed, while the increase in appeals among those labeling discrimination was not statistically significant. In short, mothers reacted to discrimination by raising their voice, while fathers reacted more by lowering theirs.

DISCUSSION

This study placed parents in a simulated work situation where they would ostensibly be assigned by a workplace supervisor ("Evaluator") to either a high- or low-status position in a workgroup. All participants received the low status position, with only the justification varying. In the control condition, the Evaluator gave non-biased logistical justifications. Based on findings from qualitative work (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Stone 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2018), the Evaluator in the bias condition offered justifications based on stereotypes about family responsibilities and reliability linked to separate spheres and ideal worker ideologies. We assessed how this bias affected participants' labeling of the decision as discrimination, how ideology predicted these labels, and the consequences for a range of workplace related outcomes.

Our research yielded three main conclusions. First, we found virtually no "false positives" (identifying discrimination where it did not exist, in the control condition) and many "false negatives" (not labeling objectively discriminatory treatment as such in the bias condition). Indeed, only about a third of participants labeled the biased decision as discrimination despite clear evidence that it was driven by unwarranted assumptions about how participants' families would affect their reliability. This supports arguments that self-report data

on discrimination likely significantly under-estimates the prevalence of discrimination (Kaiser and Major 2006).

Second, as predicted, ideology influenced mothers' (but not fathers') tendency to label biased treatment as discriminatory. We identified three important ideologies. First, compared to progressivism, political conservatism is broadly characterized by a stronger belief in the justice of existing power arrangements (Cech 2017), as well as greater gender traditionalism and friendlier attitudes towards business. We thus predicted, and found, that more conservative mothers would be less likely to label Evaluator bias as discrimination.

Next, separate spheres ideology holds that work and family roles both demand full devotion and are thus incompatible. It also portrays women as more suited to family roles and men to work or 'breadwinner' roles. This leads to the assumption that mothers are more distracted by family than fathers. We hypothesized that mothers who subscribe to these ideologies would be more likely to see Evaluator bias based on this reasoning as legitimate and reasonable, rather than discriminatory.

Likewise, we argued that belief in ideal worker ideology would make participants less apt to identify bias as discrimination. This is because discriminatory decisions often amplify the needs of the discriminatory organization (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Rosçigno 2011) using concepts drawn from ideal worker ideology, including the belief that workers should always be on call for work (Acker 1990; Cha 2010). We expected that mothers would be less likely to label bias as discrimination when they agreed that worker availability is a valid basis for pay. Consistent with our hypotheses, mothers were less likely to label the Evaluator's biased decision as discrimination when they were more conservative, believed more in separate spheres

ideology, and thought that availability outside normal work hours was a valid basis for pay. In contrast, fathers' labeling behaviors were unrelated to ideology.

Employers often cloak discrimination in ideologically-tinged rhetoric aimed at legitimating their aims and decisions (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Hallett 2003; Rosçigno 2011; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019), and our results show that this rhetoric is more likely to succeed when the ideologies of more vulnerable workers (i.e. mothers) align with it. Given the power of organizational decisionmakers to define 'conventional thought' in the organization (Hallett 2003; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019), this may indicate a process in which decision-makers use their power to promote ideologies that they can use to discriminate against workers.

Third, whether workers (specifically mothers) label a biased decision as discrimination plays a key role in whether they experience negative or positive psychological and behavioral outcomes. Mothers in the bias condition who labeled their treatment as discrimination tended to value their work less, be less interested in related work, and anticipate lower status in a work group than mothers who did not believe they had been discriminated against. All three findings point to ways in which discrimination can crowd out motivation and attachment to work.

Contrary to our predictions, mothers who labeled bias against them as discriminatory tended to perform *better* on a work task than those who did not. Caution is certainly warranted in interpreting unexpected effects. Nevertheless, this finding makes sense in light of arguments asserting that, because women and other marginalized groups are held to stricter standards, they must perform even better than members of advantaged groups simply to attain the same outcomes (Correll et al 2007; Fisk and Overton 2019; Williams and Dempsey 2018). The mothers in our study who perceived discrimination against them may have therefore taken the

Evaluator's bias as a sign that they needed to exert greater effort in order to attain a desirable workplace outcome.

This interpretation is broadly consistent with reactance theory (Brehm 1966; Kray, Thompson, and Galinsky 2001; Hoyt and Blascovich 2007), which states that when a person perceives that their freedom or ability to perform is threatened, they tend to more strongly assert their freedom or performance ability. Thus, mothers in our study who labelled their mistreatment as discrimination may have tried harder to “disprove” the negative stereotypes underlying motherhood discrimination by performing at a higher level. Notably, this is the opposite outcome as might be predicted by stereotype threat research, which posits that the salience of a negative stereotype tends to depress performance on a stereotype-relevant task (Spencer, Logel, and Davies 2016). An important goal for future research is to replicate and investigate this effect, ideally with other task situations or with other bases of discrimination.

Mothers who did not perceive discrimination in the bias condition were not entirely unaffected by discrimination. Rather, they tended to have somewhat *higher* levels of interest in their work than those in the control condition, though these differences were smaller and less significant than their differences vs mothers in the bias condition who labeled discrimination. We suggested that this might occur because mothers who endorse the same ideologies that are used to discriminate against them will see those justifications as more valid and fair, and perceptions of fairness tend to predict organizational commitment behaviors (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquit et al 2013).

In the long run, discriminatory practices could therefore contribute to a self-fulfilling workplace selection process. If workers whose backgrounds and ideologies predispose them to label biased decisions as discrimination are more likely to disengage from work, while those who

are ideologically predisposed not to see these decisions as discrimination are made more likely to increase engagement with work, then over time firms' workforces and leaderships will tend to be populated with people who are least likely to see that firms' biased practices as discriminatory and who are least likely to see any need for change. This adds to existing work on how the recognition of gendered barriers at work tempers women's ambitions (Fisk 2018; Fisk and Overton 2019; Munsch et al 2014).

The literature on the motherhood penalty is replete with examples of mothers 'opting out' of work or, viewed through another lens, being pushed out due to employers' inflexibility (Byron and Rosçigno 2014; Cha 2010; Stone 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2019; Williams and Dempsey 2018). Thus, one possible response to parenthood discrimination is to decide not to pursue further workplace opportunities. On the other hand, another possible response to perceived discrimination that we tested here was to demand redress from workplace supervisors.

To test the likelihood of these two reactions, we gave participants opportunities to appeal the Evaluator's decision and to opt out of a future work group. Only mothers who perceived discrimination reacted by appealing the decision at a significantly higher rate than controls, and there was no evidence that discrimination affected the rate at which participants opted out of future work. Findings thus suggest that targets of motherhood discrimination may be more likely to appeal that injustice than to simply exit work. But the divergent impacts of motherhood discrimination on work attachment and valuation also suggest that chronic exposure to discrimination may cause this resistance to give way over time to disillusionment, especially if supervisors push back against workers' appeals.

Future Directions

Beyond its substantive contributions, our methods offer a novel framework for studying discrimination experimentally. Our study design has several major advantages. First, by randomly assigning whether the same negative outcome resulted from discrimination or not, the method overcomes the difficulty in much discrimination research in knowing whether discrimination has ‘actually’ occurred. In addition to this increase in internal validity, our procedures also allowed us to employ externally valid discursive strategies and rhetoric provided publicly to workers and third parties, rather than explicitly hostile and discriminatory rhetoric that is often kept behind closed doors (Bielby 2000; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019; Roscigno 2007).

Our method also provides researchers with the ability to study the interpretations and effects of discrimination on workers who do not perceive discrimination where it occurs. This is important because, as shown in our study, ideology can have powerful effects on whether a person subjected to discrimination experiences it as discrimination, and whether they then experience negative psychological consequences and engage in justice-seeking behaviors. Future research could build on the design introduced here to investigate the role of other ideologies or social factors, as well as other bases of discrimination, such as race.

Additionally, research should examine the ways in which different groups, and people at the intersection of different identities, may react differently to discrimination. Much research shows that discrimination is both gendered and racialized, with women of color tending to be subject to intersecting gender and racial prejudices (Roscigno 2007), which may explain why they are more likely to expect discrimination than White women, who are subject to gender but

not racial prejudice (Levin et al 2002). Other groups, like ethnic, sexual, or religious minorities, may therefore be more apt to recognize discrimination when it occurs.

Another major factor may be the degree to which targets of discrimination personally believe in the ideological justifications of discrimination. While women often believe in the gender ideologies that employers use to discriminate against them, it is likely less common for other groups to personally adhere to the ideologies used against them. For instance, it is unlikely that Muslims subscribe to the anti-Muslim stereotypes that lead to discrimination from non-Muslim employers. In these cases, responses to discrimination may have less to do with personal acceptance of employers' justifications, and more to do with other factors, such as whether prejudices are widely accepted by others in one's workplace (Correll et al 2017; O'Connor and Cech 2018).

Finally, future research may more fully address the role of participants' own goals and constraints in shaping their perceptions and responses to discrimination. Factors like financial need and family obligations might create constraints for workers that lead them to suffer through discrimination rather than risk losing needed income or benefits. Since these constraints play such a large role in shaping exposure to potential discrimination (Rosçigno 2007), future work should also address more fully how they influence perceptions of and responses to discrimination.

ENDNOTES

1—In the pilot, eight participants were excluded for low comprehension, 19 for failing an attention check, 43 for failing a manipulation check, and 19 for suspecting the Evaluator was not real or the manipulation was fake. In the full experiment, 28 participants were excluded for low comprehension, 37 for failing an attention check, 25 for failing a manipulation check, and 33 for suspicion. Twenty-one responses were excluded because of mTurk ID duplication. Since these categories overlapped, total exclusion rates are lower than the sum of each exclusion criterion.

2—As noted in Figure 1, the exception was separate spheres ideology, which was measured at the end of the study to prevent suspicion. Gender ideology did not differ by condition (Appendix Table A7), so we treat it as a moderator.

3—In the pilot, the approval scale did not contain the ‘fair’, ‘justified’, and ‘biased’ items but did contain an item asking how reasonable most other people would see the decision.

4—The pilot did not include the item ‘fun’, but the remaining two items were reliable ($\alpha=.89$).

5—The pilot used only the ‘influence’ item.

6—Appendix Table A8 examines other attributions for the decision that participants made other than discrimination.

7—Though the outcome variable was binary, linear probability models are more readily interpretable while providing virtually the same substantive conclusions and significance levels as logistic models (Angrist and Pischke 2008; Hellevik 2009).

8— Supplementary analyses (Tables A10 and A11) show that these differences between labeling groups are not due to any confounding of labeling with interest level.

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TABLES

Table 1—Key comparisons based on condition and participant labeling behavior.

P Labels Decision Parenthood Discrimination?	Condition	
	Control	Bias
No	1	2
Yes		3

Table 2—Overview of Ideology Measures.

Political Orientation ($\alpha=.89$)	Response Scale
“Politically speaking, where do you usually stand on social issues ?”	1 (Very liberal) – 7
“Politically speaking, where do you usually stand on economic issues ?”	(very conservative)
Separate Spheres Ideology ($\alpha=.69$)	Response Scale
“A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.” ^a (-)	
“It’s best for everyone when mothers focus on childcare while fathers support their family by working.”	1 (Strongly disagree) – 7
“In this world, people can have a fulfilling family life, or a fulfilling career, but not both.”	(Strongly agree)
“The most important way a father shows love for his family is by working to provide for them.”	
Availability Norm ($\alpha=.70$)	Response Scale
“In deciding how much people ought to earn in their occupation, how important should each of the following be?”	1 (Shouldn’t be important at all) – 7
- “How available they are outside business hours.”	(Should be very important)
- “Their ability to put in long hours.”	

Note: In an exploratory factor analysis, all items load onto their respective constructs with no significant cross-loadings.

^a Taken from a GSS scale on gender attitudes.

(-) reversed item.

Table 3—Contrasts for dependent variables, mothers.

	Approval Score	AME % Score	Subjective Performance	Task Difficulty	Task Value	Interest in Related Activities / Jobs
<u>Contrasts</u>						
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination</u>	-1.15*** (.14)	10.4* (4.0)	-.17 (.20)	.17 (.24)	-.58* (.23)	-.48* (.22)
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Control</u>	-1.35*** (.13)	6.1 (3.7)	-.21 (.19)	.36 (.23)	-.23 (.21)	-.31 (.20)
- <u>Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination vs Control</u>	-.20 (.11)	-4.3 (3.1)	-.04 (.16)	.19 (.19)	.35* (.17)	.17 (.17)
Control Mean	.27	61.5	4.88	3.74	4.85	5.57
	Expect Status in Group	Look Forward to Group	Chance of Appealing	Chance of Opting Out		
<u>Contrasts</u>						
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination</u>	-.57** (.20)	-.53* (.23)	.09 (.07)	-.13 (.08)		
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Control</u>	-.39* (.19)	-.13 (.21)	.19** (.06)	-.07 (.08)		
- <u>Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination vs Control</u>	.17 (.16)	.39* (.18)	.10 (.05)	.06 (.06)		
Control Mean	4.72	5.20	.17	.46		

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

Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4— Contrasts for dependent variables, fathers.

	Approval Score	AME % Score	Subjective Performance	Task Difficulty	Task Value	Interest in Related Activities / Jobs
<u>Contrasts</u>						
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination</u>	-1.00*** (.15)	1.2 (4.7)	.45* (.21)	-.004 (.27)	-.03 (.22)	.28 (.22)
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Control</u>	-1.10*** (.14)	3.6 (4.4)	.19 (.19)	-.02 (.25)	-.09 (.21)	.21 (.21)
- <u>Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination vs Control</u>	-.10 (.11)	2.3 (3.5)	-.26 (.16)	-.02 (.20)	-.06 (.17)	-.07 (.17)
Control Mean	.25	59.5	4.08	5.27	5.07	5.45
	Expect Status in Group	Look Forward to Group	Chance of Appealing	Chance of Opting Out		
<u>Contrasts</u>						
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination</u>	.11 (.24)	-.05 (.26)	.30*** (.08)	-.07 (.09)		
- <u>Bias: P Labels Discrimination vs Control</u>	-.01 (.22)	-.09 (.24)	.13 (.07)	.003 (.08)		
- <u>Bias: P Does Not Label Discrimination vs Control</u>	-.12 (.18)	-.04 (.19)	-.17** (.06)	.07 (.06)		
Control Mean	4.70	5.11	.39	.50		

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

Standard errors in parentheses.

FIGURES

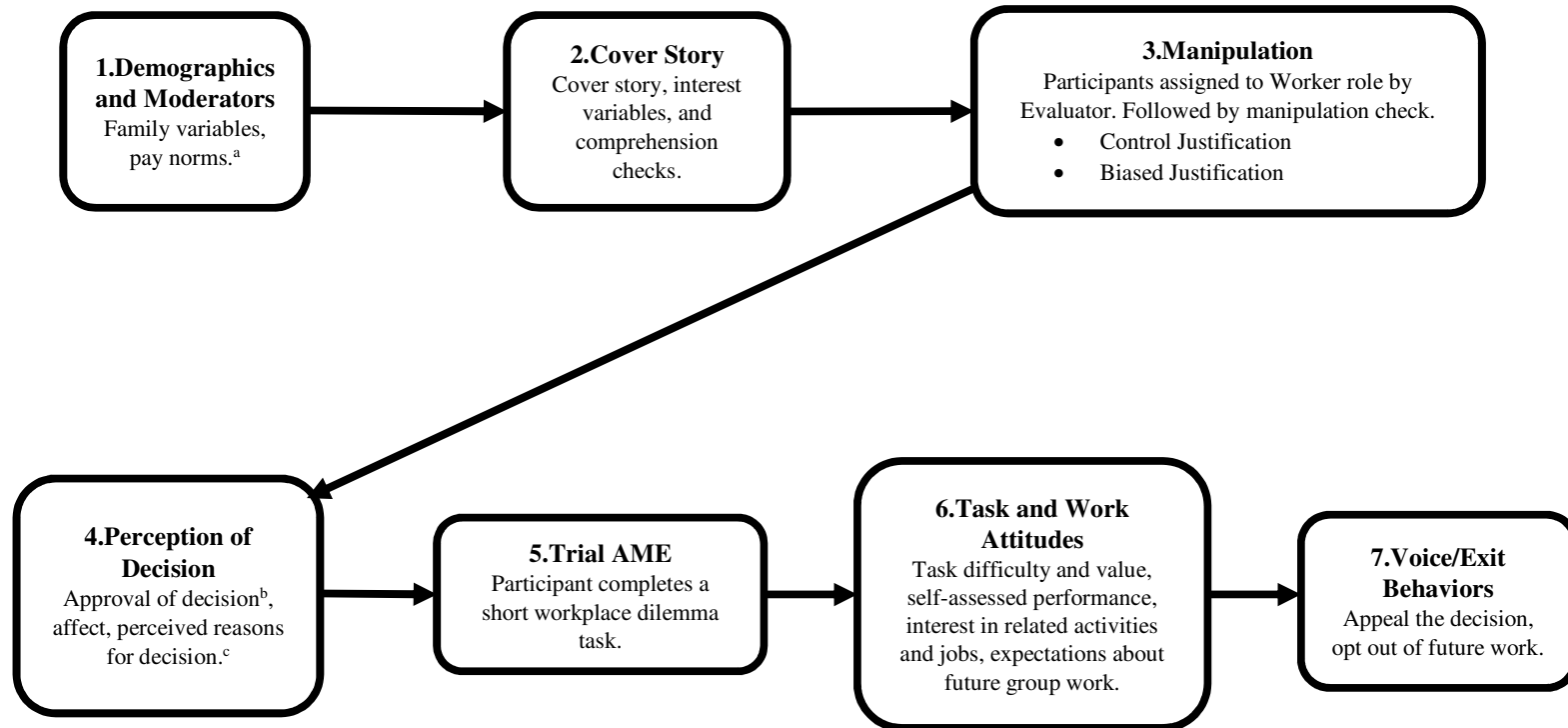


Fig. 1—Diagram of experimental procedure. ^a Separate spheres ideology was measured at the end of the study to reduce potential suspicion. Moderators were not measured in the pilot study. ^b Includes star rating of Evaluator, which was measured before the behavioral measures. ^c In the pilot study, attribution was coded from open-ended responses to a question administered before the behavioral measures.

Of the below factors, how important do you think each of the following were in the Evaluator's decision?

	1 - Not important at all	2	3	4 - Somewhat important	5	6	7 - Very important
Their professional experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time pressure for making a decision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My personal characteristics (age, parental status, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How well I fit with each role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	1 - Not important at all	2	3	4 - Somewhat important	5	6	7 - Very important
My responses to the personality and workplace attitude questions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The role I prefer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bias or discrimination against me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Logistical requirements for the study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



In the previous question, you selected "My personal characteristics" as a factor that was at least "somewhat important" in the Evaluator's decision. Please check below all the information that you think affected the Evaluator's decision.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My education level | <input type="checkbox"/> My occupation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My age | <input type="checkbox"/> My political orientation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My employment status | <input type="checkbox"/> My income level |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My being a parent | <input type="checkbox"/> My relationship status (married, single, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My gender | <input type="checkbox"/> My race/ethnicity |

Fig. 2—Questions used to construct the measure of labeled parenthood discrimination. Questions displayed in random order.