ATTITUDES TOWARD TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL PARENTS

Victoria L. Brescoll and Eric Luis Uhlmann
Yale University

Three studies investigated attitudes toward traditional parents (stay-at-home mothers and employed fathers) and nontraditional parents (stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers) among adult men and women. Using a between-subjects design, Study 1 found that nontraditional parents were liked significantly less than traditional parents. Participants also believed that stay-at-home fathers were not regarded highly by others. Study 2 replicated these results using a within-subjects design, suggesting that participants felt little compunction about expressing negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents. Study 3 further found that employed mothers were less disliked when described as working out of financial necessity rather than for personal fulfillment. Both male and female participants reported negative evaluations of employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers, suggesting that prescriptive gender role stereotypes represent a consensual ideology shared by men and women.

For the past three decades, conservatives have argued that feminism has caused society to devalue women's traditional roles, such as homemaking and caring for children (Robertson, 2000; Schlafly, 2003). Recently, some have even asserted that society has stigmatized stay-at-home mothers because they are not pursuing careers outside the home. "Stay-at-home moms are used to the silent snubs they receive from mothers who decide to pursue careers—as if they were nothing but pre-feminist breeders who don't lead worthwhile lives" (Miller & Ponnuru, 2001). According to this perspective, society's stigmatization of stay-at-home mothers has discouraged women from staying home to raise their children and, more generally, has contributed to the devaluing of the traditional American family.

Psychological theories of gender take a starkly different position by hypothesizing that people respond negatively to men and women who do not conform to traditional gender roles (Deaux & Major, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999; Russo, 1976; Silverstein, 1996). This is because gender stereotypes do not just describe how men and women behave, but also prescribe gender appropriate behavior. For example, when women lead in a masculine manner (e.g., authoritatively) they are judged more harshly than men who lead in the same way (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Likewise, women who self-promote and behave agentically are liked less than women who behave in stereotypically feminine ways, and agentic women suffer a "backlash effect" as a result (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999).

Mothers who are employed full-time outside the home and fathers who stay home to care for children occupy nontraditional gender roles. Contemporary psychological theories predict that they would be stigmatized, as are agentic, "masculine" women (Eagly et al., 1992; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999), because these nontraditional parents are violating prescriptive gender stereotypes.

Previous research has examined people's beliefs about and perceptions of mothers but has not directly addressed whether certain types of parents, such as stay-at-home mothers and fathers, are disliked or stigmatized (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Bridges & Orza, 1993; Etaugh & Poertner, 1992; Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990; Etaugh & Folger, 1998; Etaugh & Moss, 2001; Etaugh & Petroski, 1985). This research has varied women's marital status (divorced vs. single vs. married), work status (full-time vs. part-time; continuously employed vs. interrupted employment), prestige of job (moderate vs. low), and parental status (children vs. no children) and has revealed a number of interesting findings. For example, married women are seen as better adjusted and more nurturant than divorced women (Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990; Etaugh & Poertner, 1992, 1991)

Victoria L. Brescoll and Eric Luis Uhlmann, Department of Psychology, Yale University.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Victoria Brescoll, Department of Psychology, Yale University, 2 Hillhouse Ave., New Haven, CT 06520. E-mail: victoria.brescoll@yale.edu

and mothers are seen as more nurturant but less competent than nonmothers (Etaugh & Poertner, 1991, 1992). Furthermore, continuously employed mothers are evaluated more negatively than mothers who interrupted their employment to care for their children because people view continuously employed mothers as less committed to their maternal role (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995). These findings suggest that people's evaluations of mothers depend on their perceived level of commitment to their children.

The present research builds upon and extends this previous work in six major ways. First, past studies have focused primarily on documenting people's stereotypes and beliefs about parents, rather than their attitudes toward them. This emphasis on cognition at the expense of affect is unfortunate given that attitudes predict discriminatory judgments and behavior more effectively than do stereotypes (Fiske, 1998; Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 1991; for a meta-analytic review, see Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). Accordingly, the present studies explored people's affective reactions to mothers and fathers who occupy traditional and nontraditional roles. We expected that individuals who violate prescriptive gender stereotypes (i.e., employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers) would elicit negative affective reactions.

Second, we examined reactions to stay-at-home and employed fathers. Prior research was primarily concerned with how responses to mothers vary based on their employment status (see Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farrell, 2002, for an exception). To some extent, this emphasis is reasonable because there are far more employed mothers than there are stay-at-home fathers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). However, the number of fathers who stay at home to care for the children while their wife works outside the home is steadily increasing, rising 18% since 1994 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Moreover, personal and social prejudices against stay-at-home fathers are directly relevant to women's options because they may make fathers unwilling to assume a homemaker role while their wife works outside the home. Indeed, the stigma against stay-at-home fathers may contribute to some fathers' unwillingness to stay home full-time with their children out of fear that they may encounter problems when trying to re-enter the workplace (Duindam, 1999; "Stay-at-home dads," 2003).

Third, we assessed people's beliefs about society's reaction to nontraditional parents. Perceived cultural norms have been shown to predict behavior above and beyond personal attitudes (Ajzen, 1996), moderate the expression of personally endorsed attitudes (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001), and strongly influence automatic judgments and behaviors (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002; Devine, 1989; Livingston, 2002). To the extent that it is perceived as culturally normative to lack respect for stay-at-home fathers and/or employed mothers, sexist individuals should be more likely to express their attitudes, nonsexist individuals should be more likely to "go along" with sexist social norms, and automatic "gut" responses are likely to be gender biased. Thus, it is important to know not only people's personal reactions to nontraditional parents but also their beliefs about how most other people regard such individuals.

Fourth, we investigated the extent to which people feel a sense of compunction about expressing negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents. Previous work has shown that people feel strong internal and external pressures not to express racial prejudice or endorse racial stereotypes (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998). In fact, discrimination based on race occurs mainly under ambiguous circumstances when racial biases are easiest to rationalize and justify (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002). However, there is reason to believe that such pressures are considerably weaker when it comes to gender role stereotypes. Because many men are dependent on women for child rearing and sexual companionship, stereotypes regarding women's behavior are often more prescriptive than stereotypes of racial groups (Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Notably, one recent study found that while people anticipate feeling guilty at having judged a Black person in a stereotypical manner, they react with amusement at having stereotyped a woman (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Thus, in Study 2 we employed a within-subjects design, presenting participants with side-by-side descriptions of employed and stay-at-home mothers and fathers and asking them to provide their attitudes toward each target. We were particularly interested in whether participants would express negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents when such a bias would be blatant and obvious.

Fifth, we examined the effects of motivations for working outside the home on attitudes toward both mothers and fathers (Study 3). Extensive work in the field of moral judgment indicates that people receive less blame for socially undesirable acts when the behavior is externally compelled (Weiner, 1995, 1996). Because women who work out of financial necessity are violating prescriptive gender stereotypes for situational (i.e., external) reasons, we hypothesized that they would provoke less negative reactions than women who seek employment for reasons of personal fulfillment. In contrast, motivation should have little impact on attitudes toward employed fathers because, whatever their reason for employment, they are fulfilling their traditional role. Although earlier work has shown that mothers who work outside the home out of financial necessity are perceived as more communal than employed mothers whose motive is personal fulfillment (Bridges & Orza, 1992), the present research is the first to look at attitudes and to use fathers as well as mothers as targets.

Finally, the present research fills an important gap in the literature because we used a racially diverse adult sample (average age = 38 years) rather than college students. Our participants thus had considerable experience with parenting and working. Moreover, because prejudice varies greatly across different cohorts (Judd, Park, Ryan, Brauer, & Kraus, 1995; Sears, 1986), adult samples may be necessary to obtain

a complete picture of attitudes toward parents (cf. Bridges et al., 2002). Although a few other studies have examined adult women's attitudes toward parents, to our knowledge the present studies are the first to assess those of adult men.

In summary, three studies examined adult men's and women's affective reactions to traditional parents (employed fathers and stay-at-home mothers) and nontraditional parents (employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers). Also investigated were: perceptions of other people's responses to nontraditional parents (Study 1), the extent to which people feel a sense of compunction about reporting negative attitudes toward stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers (Study 2), and the effects of mothers' and fathers' motivations for working (Study 3). Taken together, these studies were designed to investigate prejudices against nontraditional parents and explore some of the potential parameters of such biases.

While in part an effort to build upon and extend prior work on prescriptive gender stereotyping and perceptions of parents, the present studies also make important novel contributions. First, the present work is the first to empirically investigate attitudes toward stay-at-home fathers, a stigmatized category that has received no attention in the stereotyping and prejudice literature. Second, the present research points to a double-standard regarding women's and men's reasons for working. Specifically, in Study 3, we investigate whether mothers are evaluated more negatively for choosing to work out of personal fulfillment than fathers who do the same.

STUDY 1

Study 1 presented participants with a description of either an employed mother, an employed father, a stay-at-home mother, or a stay-at-home father. Each paragraph described either a man's or a woman's decision to either stay home to care for his or her children or to work outside the home. The target individual was described as being married with two children who recently had another baby. Participants answered a series of questions about these individuals, including an assessment of their affective reaction to the person. We hypothesized an interaction between gender of target and decision to work versus stay at home. That is, those who violated traditional gender roles (i.e., stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers) were expected to be more negatively evaluated than those who conformed to traditional gender roles (i.e., stay-at-home mothers and employed fathers).

In addition to assessing participants' personal attitudes toward the target persons, we were interested in measuring participants' beliefs about other people's reactions to employed and stay-at-home mothers and fathers. Perceived social norms are powerful influences on judgment and behavior (Ajzen, 1996; Correll et al., 2002; Devine, 1989; Sechrist & Stangor, 2001). For example, a man who believes that stay-at-home fathers are not respected may be reluctant

to assume a homemaker role, even though his personal attitudes toward staying at home while his wife works are positive.

In fact, there are reasons to expect stay-at-home fathers to be held in lower social regard than employed mothers. Among the most powerful prescriptive stereotypes directed at men are those that emphasize avoiding "effeminate" behaviors (e.g., playing with dolls for young boys, failing to defend one's honor for adult men; Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Muller & Goldberg, 1980). Stay-at-home fathers, by adopting a traditionally feminine role, may thus incur a steep drop in perceived social regard. In contrast, while an employed woman might be disliked for violating prescriptive stereotypes, her adoption of the high-status, traditionally male role of breadwinner may win her some of the social respect and regard associated with that role (for a discussion of the distinction between perceived warmth and perceived competence, see Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

Method

Participants

Seventy-three adults (44 males and 29 females) between the ages of 17 and 79 years ($M = 31.33$, $SD = 16.64$) were recruited from a public park in Connecticut. Seventy-seven percent of the sample was European American. The remaining 23% were African American, Asian, and Hispanic. Participants were largely middle class (the median income level was $40,000 per year). Participants were given a lottery ticket, a drink, or paid $1.00 in exchange for participation in the study. Data from two participants were excluded because they were not sufficiently fluent in English to complete the survey.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four paragraph-long descriptions. Each paragraph described either a man's or a woman's decision to either stay home to care for his or her children (including an infant) or to work outside the home. A situation in which parents have an infant to care for was chosen as particularly relevant to prescriptive stereotypes regarding maternal care of children (Russo, 1976). We used two names, John and Jennifer, which were pretested for comparability. The four paragraphs were identical in every way except for the decision made and whether it was a man or a woman making the decision, yielding a 2 (stay home vs. work outside home) $\times$ 2 (male target vs. female target) design. With this design, it was possible to compare participants' reactions to stay-at-home mothers, employed mothers, stay-at-home fathers, and employed fathers in a between-subjects manner.

Participants answered seven questions assessing their attitudes and beliefs about the person described in the paragraph. These seven items fell into two groups: personal

affective evaluations of the target and beliefs about others' opinions of the target.

Affective evaluations. Five items assessed participants' affective evaluations of the target. Two items pertained to whether participants thought the target was a good parent ("John [Jennifer] is a good parent") and whether the target was contributing equally to the family's well-being ("John [Jennifer] is contributing equally to the family's well-being"). Two items assessed beliefs that were especially relevant to employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers. In particular, it is frequently suggested that employed mothers are more selfish than stay-at-home mothers (Russo, 1976). Therefore we included an item assessing this particular belief ("John [Jennifer] is selfish"). Another item focused on participants' attitudes toward the target's decision ("John's [Jennifer's] decision to work was a good one"). These four items were assessed with 9-point Likert-type scales (1 = *completely disagree*, 9 = *completely agree*). The final item in this set consisted of a feeling thermometer for the target person ("On a scale from 0–100, how warmly or coldly do you feel toward this person? [0 = extremely cold, 50 = neutral, 100 = extremely warm]"). Feeling thermometers have been widely used as a measure of affective evaluation (e.g., Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991; Haddock & Zanna, 1994).

Others' opinions. Using 9-point Likert-type scales (1 = *completely disagree*, 9 = *completely agree*), two items were included to assess participants' perceptions of whether these roles are stigmatized differently by gender ("John [Jennifer] is the type of person that others see as successful" and "John's [Jennifer's] coworkers will respect his [her] decision to stay at home with his [her] children"). We refer to these items throughout as measures of perceived social regard.

Last, participants completed demographic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, and age. Participants were then thanked and debriefed.

Results

We performed a factor analysis on the items so as to describe the variables more parsimoniously. Visual inspection of the scree plot and varimax factor analysis revealed two distinct factors. All of the items had factor loadings over .41 and were therefore retained for further analysis. The first factor contained the Affective Evaluations items while the second factor contained the Others' Opinions items. The two subscales had moderate internal reliability. Cronbach's alpha was .70 for the Affective Evaluation items and .46 for the two Others' Opinions items. Taken together, these two factors accounted for 55% of the total variance. The reason the Others' Opinions alpha was low was at least partially because there were only two items in this measure. It is common for measures with few items to have reliabilities in this range (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Moreover, the

relatively low reliability of this measure, while certainly not desirable, does provide a conservative test of our hypothesis that scores would differ significantly by condition. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the reliability of this measure is below what is generally considered psychometrically acceptable, potentially qualifying some of the present findings.

Affective Evaluations

The five affective evaluation items were standardized and summed to form a single index. We predicted that participants would hold more negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents (i.e., employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers) than traditional parents (i.e., employed fathers and stay-at-home mothers). This prediction was tested with a 2 (target gender) × 2 (target role: stay-at-home vs. employed outside the home) × 2 (participant gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the Affective Evaluations index. There were no significant effects involving the gender of participants so all the data were collapsed across this variable. As predicted, we did not find main effects for target gender or target role. However, and also as predicted, results revealed the expected target gender × target role interaction, $F(1, 68) = 4.37$, $p < .05$. Specifically, the nontraditional parents (employed mother $M = -.27$, $SD = .64$; stay-at-home father $M = -.08$, $SD = .58$) were evaluated more negatively than traditional parents (employed father $M = .09$, $SD = .77$; stay-at-home mother $M = .21$, $SD = .61$). Notably, by using the terms nontraditional versus traditional parents, we are describing not a main effect, but the interaction between target role and target gender because the overlap between these two independent variables creates the categories nontraditional and traditional parents.

Individual Item Analysis

We also examined each item individually to further explore our hypotheses. The item that measured pure affect, the feeling thermometer, revealed the same expected pattern of results as the overall affective evaluations index. Specifically, the interaction between target gender and target role was significant, $F(1, 68) = 11.36$, $p < .01$. No main effects were found for target gender or target role. Participants felt less warmly toward employed mothers ($M = 64.01$, $SD = 17.30$) and stay-at-home fathers ($M = 68.74$, $SD = 18.11$) than employed fathers ($M = 75.28$, $SD = 19.20$) and stay-at-home mothers ($M = 84.11$, $SD = 11.45$).

A planned contrast on the item "Jennifer [John] is a good parent," suggested that participants believed that the stay-at-home father was a worse parent ($M = 6.63$, $SD = 2.00$) than the stay-at-home mother ($M = 7.47$, $SD = 1.84$), employed mother ($M = 7.44$, $SD = 1.55$), or the employed father ($M = 7.68$, $SD = 1.60$), $t(69) = 1.91$, $p = .06$. As predicted, a planned contrast also suggested that participants viewed the employed mother as more selfish ($M = 6.50$, $SD = 2.42$) than the stay-at-home mother ($M = 7.48$, $SD = 1.86$), employed father ($M = 7.32$, $SD = 2.03$), or

stay-at-home father ($M = 7.89$, $SD = 1.66$), $t(69) = 1.88$, $p = .06$. However, both of these effects were only marginally significant. We also predicted that for the item, "John's [Jennifer's] decision to work was a good one," participants would view the nontraditional parents' decision as worse than the traditional parents' decision. A 2×2 (employed vs. stay-at-home $\times$ mother vs. father) ANOVA supported this hypothesis. The interaction between target gender and target role was significant, $F(1, 69) = 1.64$, $p < .05$, meaning that the mothers' decision to work ($M = 7.11$, $SD = 1.67$) was seen as worse than the fathers' decision to work ($M = 7.89$, $SD = 1.35$). Again, no main effects for target gender or target role were found. Finally, participants did not rate the target parents significantly differently on the item, "John [Jennifer] is contributing equally to the family's well-being" ($p > .05$ for all).

Others' opinions. We standardized the two items assessing others' opinions and summed them to form a single index of perceived social regard. The overall one-way ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 69) = 9.22$, $p < .001$. More important, the planned contrasts were significant, $t(69) = 5.03$, $p < .001$. As expected, participants perceived less social regard for stay-at-home fathers ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.79$) than employed fathers ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 1.31$), stay-at-home mothers ($M = 6.03$, $SD = 1.48$), or employed mothers ($M = 6.87$, $SD = 1.16$).

Discussion

Study 1 supported our hypotheses that people hold more negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents than toward traditional parents. Contradicting claims that modern society stigmatizes stay-at-home mothers (Robertson, 2000; Schlafly, 2003), but supporting theories of prescriptive gender stereotyping (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 1999), stay-at-home mothers and employed fathers were evaluated more positively than stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers. Presumably because they violate stereotypic prescriptions for how men and women are supposed to behave and the roles they ought to fill, nontraditional parents were disliked relative to traditional parents.

An item analysis provided some potential insights into people's perceptions of employed mothers, stay-at-home fathers, employed fathers, and stay-at-home mothers. Participants tended to perceive the stay-at-home father as the worst parent. Although speculative, it seems possible that participants saw fathers as lacking the skills to be the primary caretaker for young children. Also, employed mothers were seen as more selfish than stay-at-home mothers, employed fathers, and stay-at-home fathers. Because women's prescribed role is to care for children, abandoning this role may be perceived as an especially selfish act. In contrast, it seems possible that stay-at-home fathers are seen as relatively unselfish because they are adopting a low-status, stig-

matized role for the sake of the family. So while employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers were both perceived as having made a bad decision, somewhat different impressions may underlie this belief (i.e., perceived selfishness on the part of employed mothers, perceived lack of ability on the part of stay-at-home fathers). Of course this interpretation is speculative and additional work is required to clarify the specific cognitions that underlie responses to nontraditional mothers and fathers.

Interestingly, perceived social regard was lowest for stay-at-home fathers. Despite evaluating employed mothers negatively, participants felt that other people would respect employed mothers and perceive them as successful—perhaps because by assuming the traditionally male "breadwinner" role they gain some of the social status associated with that role. This finding is consistent with the distinction of Fiske et al. (2002) between the perceived warmth and competence of social targets. Apparently, employed mothers are disliked but respected, whereas stay-at-home fathers are neither liked nor respected. Fathers appear to be aware of this stigmatization of stay-at-home fathers because they report that one of the major reasons they do not take paternity leave is due to the stigma that it will carry (Duindam, 1999). This reluctance on the part of fathers to assume a homemaker role (even temporarily) may limit mothers' employment opportunities and serve as an important barrier to gender equality both in the home and in the workplace.

An alternative explanation for the present results is that the statistical infrequency of stay-at-home fathers may explain why people react to them negatively. Indeed, research on the mere exposure effect shows that increased familiarity with a stimulus can increase liking of the stimulus (Zajonc, 1980). Although we certainly do not rule out the possibility that a lack of familiarity makes some contribution to attitudes toward stay-at-home fathers, this is not a satisfying explanation for the present results. While employed mothers are far more statistically frequent than stay-at-home fathers, they were not better liked. Stay-at-home fathers were only rated more negatively than employed mothers when it came to perceptions of other people's beliefs. There is no evidence that familiarity with a stimulus has a greater influence on perceptions of other people's attitudes toward the stimulus than it does on one's own attitudes. Theories of prescriptive stereotyping provide a much better account of the present data than an explanation based on the statistical frequency of the groups in question.

STUDY 2

Study 1 leaves open the question of whether participants feel any sense of compunction about expressing negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents. Previous work has documented that White people often feel guilty and self-critical when they have stereotypical reactions to Black people (Devine et al., 1991; Monteith et al., 2002). Racial discrimination is rare when such a bias is obvious and,

in general, under circumstances that promote socially desirable responding (Evans, Garcia, Garcia, & Baron, 2003; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Hodson et al., 2002). However, additional research suggests that people are much less concerned about discriminating based on gender than on race (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). In Study 2, we employed a within-subjects design to determine whether participants would continue to report negative reactions to stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers, relative to employed fathers and stay-at-home mothers, when their evaluations were assessed at the same time. Under such circumstances, a bias based on the gender of the employed or stay-at-home parent would be blatantly obvious. Therefore, any prejudice against nontraditional parents that participants express must occur with relatively little compunction.

Method

Participants

Seventy-nine adults (46 males and 33 females) between the ages of 17 and 53 years ($M = 30.11$, $SD = 12.62$) were recruited from a public park in Connecticut. Participants were given a lottery ticket, a drink, or paid $1.00 in exchange for participation in the study. Sixty-five participants were European American and the remaining 15 participants were African American, Asian, and Hispanic. None of the participants under the age of 30 had children whereas 65% of the participants over 30 years of age reported having one or more children. Additionally, 91.14% of the participants reported that they were currently working outside the home, ranging from 8 hours per week to 65 hours per week ($M = 38.22$, $SD = 13.29$).

Procedure and Measures

Participants read four descriptions of parents: an employed father, an employed mother, a stay-at-home father, and a stay-at-home mother. These materials were identical to those used in Study 1 and were presented in a random order. In Study 1, the feeling thermometer rating correlated .89 with the entire affective evaluation index.

Participants then completed demographic information (including gender, race/ethnicity, and age) and were then thanked and debriefed.

Results and Discussion

We expected that even using a within-subjects design, in which participants evaluated stay-at-home and employed mothers and fathers at the same time, more positive affect would be reported toward traditional than nontraditional parents. These predictions were tested with a mixed model, within- and between-subjects (with gender of participant as the between-subjects factor) ANOVA on the feeling thermometer ratings.

There were no significant effects involving the gender of participants, so all the data were collapsed across participant gender. However, as predicted, the within-subjects ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 231) = 10.60$, $p < .01$. Within-subjects contrasts revealed that participants reported significantly more positive attitudes toward traditional than nontraditional parents. Specifically, attitudes toward stay-at-home mothers ($M = 79.00$, $SD = 19.10$) were significantly more positive than attitudes toward stay-at-home fathers ($M = 65.40$, $SD = 24.75$), $F(1, 77) = 19.93$, $p < .001$, and employed mothers ($M = 71.55$, $SD = 23.96$), $F(1, 77) = 5.22$, $p < .05$. Likewise, attitudes toward employed fathers ($M = 84.82$, $SD = 19.01$) were significantly more positive than attitudes toward employed mothers ($M = 71.55$, $SD = 23.96$), $F(1, 77) = 22.30$, $p < .001$, and stay-at-home fathers ($M = 65.40$, $SD = 24.75$), $F(1, 77) = 27.93$, $p < .001$. As predicted, attitudes toward the two traditional parents (stay-at-home mothers and employed fathers) were not significantly different from each other nor were attitudes toward the two nontraditional parents. Notably, participants reported nearly the same pattern of attitudes in this within-subjects design as in the between-subjects design in Study 1. Although direct statistical comparisons cannot be made across studies, assessing attitudes toward parents using a within-subjects design clearly did not eliminate participants' self-reported dislike for nontraditional parents.

STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that people generally hold more positive attitudes toward traditional than nontraditional parents. Study 2 further indicated that people will report negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents even under conditions that enhance social desirability concerns. When participants evaluated stay-at-home and employed mothers and fathers side-by-side, in a within-subjects design, they continued to report more negative attitudes toward employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers. This complements research suggesting that people feel little compunction about stereotyping based on gender (Czopp & Monteith, 2003).

Study 3 built on Studies 1 and 2 by investigating whether attitudes toward employed parents would vary based on the reasons that parents provide for working outside the home. In Study 3, the target parent was said to work outside the home either for personal fulfillment or out of financial necessity. Bridges and Orza (1992) examined reactions to employed and unemployed mothers while varying their employment motive. They found that participants perceived an employed mother who worked out of personal fulfillment as less communal than the employed mother who worked out of financial need. We extend this work by looking at attitudes rather than trait attributions and further examining the effects of motivation on reactions to fathers.

Because women who work out of financial necessity are violating prescriptive gender stereotypes for reasons beyond their control, we hypothesized that they would provoke less negative reactions than women who work outside

the home for reasons of personal fulfillment. Research on moral judgment indicates that actors are blamed less for engaging in socially undesirable behaviors when the act is externally compelled or otherwise outside of their control (Weiner, 1995, 1996). Women who work for personal fulfillment may be perceived as willfully neglecting gender prescriptions such as the "Motherhood Mandate," which demands that women always be available to their children (Russo, 1976). They should therefore receive more moral censure than women who work outside of the home because their family's financial circumstances leave them little option. However, motivation should have little impact on evaluations of employed fathers because, whatever their reason for employment, they are fulfilling their traditional, expected role.

Method

Participants

One hundred twelve adults (51 males and 61 females) between the ages of 18 and 75 years ($M = 34.50$, $SD = 14.74$) were recruited from a public park in Connecticut. Eighty percent of the sample was European American. The remaining 20% were African American, Asian, and Hispanic. Participants were given a lottery ticket, a drink, or paid $1.00 in exchange for participation in the study.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of six paragraph-long descriptions. Each paragraph described either a father's or a mother's decision to work outside the home and one of two motives (personal fulfillment or financial necessity) for why the target parent made that decision. A third, control condition did not describe the parent's motivation for his or her decision. The six paragraphs were identical in every way except for the gender of the parent and the motive for working outside the home, yielding a 2 (participant gender) × 2 (target gender) × 3 (motive: financial, personal fulfillment, none mentioned) design.

Participants answered seven questions assessing their attitudes and beliefs about the parent. Five of these seven items were identical to the affective evaluation items used in Study 1 and two additional items assessed participants' beliefs about the level of dedication the target parent possessed ("John is a dedicated father") and perceptions of the warmth of the target parent ("John is a warm person"), using 9-point Likert-type scales (1 = completely disagree, 9 = completely agree). We added these two items to better assess affective reactions to the targets. As predicted, a factor analysis with a varimax rotation revealed one distinct factor tapping affective evaluations for these seven items (Cronbach's alpha = .58).

Last, participants completed demographic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, and age. Participants were then thanked and debriefed.

Results and Discussion

The seven affective evaluation items were standardized and summed to form a single index. We predicted that participants would hold the most negative attitudes toward mothers who worked outside the home for personal fulfillment, compared to mothers who worked outside the home out of financial necessity and fathers who worked outside the home regardless of motive. We also predicted that participants would hold equally positive attitudes toward fathers who work outside the home for personal fulfillment or financial necessity. In other words, for fathers, the reason given for working outside the home should not have an impact on participants' attitudes.

These predictions were tested with a 2 × 2 × 3 ANOVA and planned contrasts on the Affective Evaluations index. Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, there were no significant effects involving the gender of participants, so all the data were collapsed across participant gender. Results were consistent with our hypotheses, $F(5, 102) = 3.34$, $p < .01$. Specifically, planned contrasts revealed that participants reported the most negative attitudes toward mothers who worked outside the home for personal fulfillment, compared to all other types of employed parents. Simple effects analyses revealed that fathers were evaluated the same regardless of the reason stated for their working outside the home.

Examining the feeling thermometer item separately from the other Affective Evaluation items revealed the same pattern of results (see Table 1). Specifically, participants felt most coldly toward women who worked outside the home for personal fulfillment compared to all other types of employed parents, $t(103) = 3.52$, $p < .01$. The evaluation of employed fathers was not impacted by the stated reason for their working outside the home, while the evaluation of employed mothers was affected by the stated reasons for their working outside the home, $F(2, 53) = 3.67$, $p < .05$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

All three studies reveal that people report more negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents (i.e., employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers) than toward traditional parents (i.e., stay-at-home mothers and employed fathers). This finding is consistent with other research showing that

Table 1

Mean Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Employed Mothers and Fathers by Employment Motive (Study 3)

Reason for Employment	Gender of Target	
	Father	Mother
Financial need	69.21 (18.65)	66.06 (12.74)
Personal fulfillment	66.50 (23.16)	47.84 (25.20)
No reason given (control)	63.24 (15.30)	56.58 (20.35)

people dislike those who violate prescriptive stereotypes (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 1999) and prior studies of the trait attributions made about traditional and nontraditional parents (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Bridges & Orza, 1993; Etaugh & Folger, 1998; Etaugh & Moss, 2001; Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990; Etaugh & Petroski, 1985; Etaugh & Poertner, 1992). However, the present research is the first to empirically document prejudice against stay-at-home fathers, a stigmatized category that has received insufficient attention in the literature.

Participants' beliefs about other people's reactions to stay-at-home and employed mothers and fathers were further examined in Study 1, revealing that perceived social regard was lowest for stay-at-home fathers. The perceived social stigmatization of male homemakers may represent a major barrier to mothers' opportunities if it makes fathers reluctant to stay at home with the children while their wife works outside the home. Notably, perceived social regard for employed mothers was just as high as for traditional parents. It may be that by assuming the traditionally male breadwinner role, employed women accrue some of the social respect and regard associated with that role. Thus, employed women may be simultaneously disliked and socially respected. This highlights the distinction between perceptions of competence and warmth drawn by previous researchers (Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999).

Participants apparently felt little compunction about expressing negative attitudes toward nontraditional parents. People generally experience guilt and self-criticism about their negative feelings toward racial minorities (Devine et al., 1991). Other work indicates that people are most likely to discriminate based on race under ambiguous circumstances, when their prejudices are easy to rationalize and justify (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Hodson et al., 2002). However, even in Study 2's within-subjects design, where gender-biased judgments were blatantly obvious, participants continued to evaluate nontraditional parents more negatively than traditional parents. These results are consistent with those of Czopp and Monteith (2003), who found that people feel guilty at the thought of stereotyping a Black person, but amused at the thought of stereotyping a woman. As Fiske and Stevens (1993) note, gender stereotypes may be more strongly prescriptive, and therefore normative, than stereotypes of other groups. As a consequence, people may not fear social censure for expressing gender stereotypes to the same extent that they do for racial stereotypes.

The effects of motivations for working on attitudes toward employed mothers and fathers were investigated in Study 3. Participants reported more negative attitudes toward mothers who worked out of personal fulfillment than toward mothers who worked out of financial necessity or mothers who did not mention a reason for employment. However, motivation for working outside the home did not affect people's attitudes toward employed fathers. This finding suggests that mothers are subjected to an unfair double

standard in that they are required to have a socially acceptable reason for working outside the home while fathers are not. If employed mothers are thought to work outside the home for personal fulfillment, they may be perceived as failing to fulfill the role of the selfless mother, thus causing people to dislike them (Russo, 1976).

Remarkably, no gender differences in attitudes toward traditional and nontraditional parents were observed. One might expect that female participants would feel more positively toward employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers, given that women should be less likely to endorse and act on prescriptive stereotypes that are detrimental to their own life opportunities. However, these results are consistent with theories in which consensual ideologies, adopted by both dominant and subordinate group members, promote social inequality (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For example, Jost and Banaji's (1994) system justification theory proposes that due to implicit socialization by the dominant culture, members of low status groups adopt stereotypes and belief systems that perpetuate their low social position. For example, many African Americans endorse the Protestant Work Ethic, which implies that laziness is the primary cause of poverty (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Similarly, women often endorse ideologies such as benevolent sexism, which holds that "good" women who fulfill their traditional roles as mothers and wives should be "put on a pedestal" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Indeed, many women likely enjoy the special status traditional gender roles accord the "weaker sex." However, they may do so at the cost of limiting their personal options and those of women as a whole.

It is equally important to note that men's life choices are also limited by restrictive gender roles and prescriptive gender stereotypes. Some men may want to care for their children full-time rather than working outside the home, but the stigma attached to being a stay-at-home father may prevent them from doing so. Prescriptive gender stereotypes and the stigma attached to violations of them limit and restrict both men's and women's opportunities and lives.

Previous research that has examined the consequences of prescriptive stereotype violations generally has not focused on whether men who violate prescriptive gender stereotypes experience similar "backlash" effects as women who violate gender norms. The media, however, has recently paid a great deal of attention to the stigma that stay-at-home fathers face. For example, a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* ("Stay-at-home dads," 2003) reported that employers view stay-at-home fathers either with disdain or confusion. Sometimes employers even "wonder whether 'stay-at-home dad' is a cover for 'couldn't find work.'" ("Stay-at-home dads," 2003). Anecdotal reports have even surfaced of parents not allowing their children to socialize with the children of stay-at-home fathers and employed mothers ("Your career," 2001). To our knowledge, the present studies are the first to document this stigmatization of stay-at-home fathers.

One limitation of the present research is worth noting. The present studies examined attitudes toward parents with an infant. This scenario was selected as particularly relevant to prescriptive gender stereotypes regarding care of children. However, only future research can reveal whether the present findings generalize to parents whose children are older.

Future research should further seek to understand the reasons why people dislike nontraditional parents and, more generally, why people dislike those who violate prescriptive gender stereotypes. Perhaps reactions to nontraditional parents are negative because people generally dislike individuals who violate social norms (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). However, this only raises the issue of how and why such norms developed in the first place. Prescriptive stereotypes may serve the system-justifying function of keeping women "in their place," such that they do not act in ways that disrupt the social order (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). That is, people may dislike employed mothers because they (consciously or unconsciously) perceive these women as trying to increase their power and status, thereby rejecting a subordinate role.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. (1996). The directive influence of attitudes on behavior. In P. M. Gollwitzer & J. A. Bargh (Eds.), *The psychology of action: Linking cognition and motivation to behavior* (pp. 385–403). New York: Guilford.

Bridges, J. S., & Etaugh, C. (1995). College students' perceptions of mothers: Effects of maternal employment-childrearing pattern and motive for employment. *Sex Roles, 32,* 735–751.

Bridges, J. S., Etaugh, C., & Barnes-Farrell, J. (2002). Trait judgments of stay-at-home and employed parents: A function of social role and/or shifting standards? *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 26,* 140–150.

Bridges, J. S., & Orza, A. M. (1992). The effects of employment role and motive for employment on the perceptions of mothers. *Sex Roles, 27,* 331–343.

Bridges, J. S., & Orza, A. M. (1993). Effects of maternal employment childrearing pattern on college students' perceptions of a mother and her child. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 17,* 103–117.

Cialdini, R. B., & Trost, M. R. (1998). Social influence: Social norms, conformity, and compliance. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 151–192). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Cohen, D., Nisbett, R. E., Bowdle, B. F., & Schwarz, N. (1996). Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor: An "experimental ethnography." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70,* 945–960.

Correll, J., Park, B., Judd, C. M., & Wittenbrink, B. (2002). The police officer's dilemma: Using ethnicity to disambiguate potentially threatening individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83,* 1314–1329.

Czopp, A. M., & Monteith, M. J. (2003). Confronting prejudice (literally): Reactions to confrontations of racial and gender bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29,* 532–544.

Deaux, K., & Major, B. (1987). Putting gender into context: An interactive model of gender-related behavior. *Psychological Review, 94,* 369–389.

Devine, P. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56,* 5–18.

Devine, P. G., Monteith, M. J., Zuwerink, J. R., & Elliot, A. J. (1991). Prejudice with and without compunction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60,* 817–830.

Dovidio, J. F., Brigham, J. C., Johnson, B. T., & Gaertner, S. L. (1996). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination: Another look. In N. Macrae, C. Stangor, & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Stereotypes and stereotyping* (pp. 276–319). New York: Guilford.

Duindam, V. (1999). Men in the household: Caring fathers. In L. McKie, S. Bowlby, & S. Gregory (Eds.), *Gender, power and the household.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Dunton, B. C., & Fazio, R. H. (1997). An individual difference measure of motivation to control prejudiced reactions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23,* 316–326.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109,* 573–598.

Eagly, A. H., Makhijani, M. G., & Klonsky, B. G. (1992). Gender and the evaluation of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 111,* 3–22.

Eagly, A. H., Mladinic, A., & Otto, S. (1991). Are women evaluated more favorably than men? An analysis of attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 15,* 203–216.

Etaugh, C., & Folger, D. (1998). Perceptions of parents whose work and parenting behaviors deviate from role expectations. *Sex Roles, 39,* 215–223.

Etaugh, C., & Moss, C. (2001). Attitudes of employed women toward parents who choose full-time or part-time employment following their child's birth. *Sex Roles, 44,* 611–619.

Etaugh, C., & Nekolny, K. (1990). Effects of employment status and marital status on perceptions of mothers. *Sex Roles, 23,* 273–280.

Etaugh, C., & Petroski, B. (1985). Perceptions of women: Effects of employment status and marital status. *Sex Roles, 12,* 329–339.

Etaugh, C., & Poertner, P. (1991). Effects of occupational prestige, employment status, and marital status on perceptions of mothers. *Sex Roles, 24,* 345–353.

Etaugh, C., & Poertner, P. (1992). Perceptions of women: Influence of performance: Marital, and parental variables. *Sex Roles, 26,* 311–321.

Evans, D. C., Garcia, D. G., Garcia, D. M., & Baron, R. S. (2003). In the privacy of their own homes: Using the internet to assess racial bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29,* 273–284.

Fiske, S. T. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 357–411). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82,* 878–902.

Fiske, S. T., & Stevens, L. E. (1993). What's so special about sex? Gender stereotyping and discrimination. In S. Oskamp & M. Costanza (Eds.), *Gender issues in contemporary society* (Vol. 6., pp. 173–196). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (1986). The aversive form of racism. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 61–89). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70,* 491–512.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). An ambivalent alliance: Hostile and benevolent sexism as complementary justifications for gender inequality. *American Psychologist, 56,* 109–118.

Haddock, G., & Zanna, G. (1994). Preferring "housewives" to "feminists": Categorization and the favorability of attitudes toward women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 18,* 25–52.

Hodson, G., Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (2002). Processes in racial discrimination: Differential weighting of conflicting information. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28,* 460–471.

Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 33,* 1–27.

Judd, C. M., Park, B., Ryan, C. S., Brauer, M., & Kraus, S. (1995). Stereotypes and ethnocentrism: Diverging interethnic perceptions of African American and White American youth. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 460–481.

Livingston, R. W. (2002). The role of perceived negativity in the moderation of African Americans' implicit and explicit racial attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38,* 405–413.

Miller, J. J., & Ponnuru, R. (2001). A modest proposal for Jane Swift. *National Review Online.* Retrieved Sept. 3, 2005 from http://www.nationalreview.com/daily/nr052101.shtml

Monteith, M. J., Ashburn-Nardo, L., Voils, C. I., & Czopp, A. M. (2002). Putting the brakes on prejudice: On the development and operation of cues for control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83,* 1029–1050.

Muller, R., & Goldberg, S. (1980). Why William doesn't want a doll: Preschoolers' expectations of adult behavior toward girls and boys. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 26,* 259–269.

Plant, E. A., & Devine, P. G. (1998). Internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75,* 811–832.

Prentice, D. A., & Carranza, E. (2002). What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 26,* 269–281.

Robertson, B. (2000). *There's no place like home: How business, government, and our obsession with work has driven parents from home.* New York: Spence.

Rudman, L. A. (1998). Self-promotion as a risk factor for women: The costs and benefits of counterstereotypical impression management. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74,* 629–645.

Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (1999). Feminized management and backlash toward agentic women: The hidden costs to women of a kinder, gentler image of middle managers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77,* 1004–1010.

Russo, N. (1976). The motherhood mandate. *Journal of Social Issues, 32,* 143–153.

Schlafly, P. (2003). *Feminist fantasies: Essays on feminism in the media, the workplace, the home, and the military.* New York: Spence.

Sears, D. O. (1986). College sophomores in the laboratory: Influences of a narrow data base on social psychology's view of human nature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51,* 515–530.

Sechrist, G. B., & Stangor, C. (2001). Perceived consensus influences intergroup behavior and stereotype accessibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80,* 645–654.

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Silverstein, L. B. (1996). Fathering is a feminist issue. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 20,* 3–37.

Stangor, C., Sullivan, L. A., & Ford, T. E. (1991). Affective and cognitive determinants of prejudice. *Social Cognition, 9,* 359–380.

Stay-at-home dads fight stigma. (2003, September 9). *Wall Street Journal,* p. B1.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *Children's living arrangements and characteristics: March 2002.* Current population reports, P20-547. Washington, DC: Author.

Weiner, B. (1995). *Judgments of responsibility.* New York: Guilford.

Weiner, B. (1996). Searching for order in social motivation. *Psychological Inquiry, 7,* 199–216.

Your career matters: Have husband, will travel. (2001, February 13). *Wall Street Journal,* p. B1.

Zajonc, R. B. (1980). Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences. *American Psychologist, 35,* 151–175.