

Understanding and Overcoming Challenges Faced by Working Mothers: A Theoretical and Empirical Review

Isaac E. Sabat, Alex P. Lindsey, Eden B. King and Kristen P. Jones

Abstract Working mothers face different sets of challenges with regards to social identity, stigmatization, and discrimination within each stage of the employment cycle, from differential hiring practices, unequal career advancement opportunities, ineffective retention efforts, and inaccessible work-family supportive policies (Jones et al. in *The Psychology for Business Success*. Praeger, Westport, CT, 2013). Not only do these inequalities have negative effects on women, but they can also have a detrimental impact on organizations as a whole. In this chapter, we review several theoretical and empirical studies pertaining to the challenges faced by women throughout their work-motherhood transitions. We then offer strategies that organizations, mothers, and allies can use to effectively improve the workplace experiences of pregnant women and mothers. This chapter will specifically contribute to the existing literature by drawing on identity management and ally research from other domains to suggest additional strategies that female targets and supportive coworkers can engage into help remediate these negative workplace outcomes. Finally, we highlight future research directions aimed at testing the effectiveness of these and other remediation strategies, as well as the methodological challenges and solutions to those challenges associated with this important research domain. We call upon researchers to develop more theory-driven, empirically tested intervention strategies that utilize all participants in this fight to end gender inequality in the workplace.

Keywords Workplace · Mothers · Women · Pregnancy · Discrimination

I.E. Sabat (✉) · A.P. Lindsey · E.B. King (✉) · K.P. Jones
Department of Psychology, George Mason University, MSN 3F5, 4400 University Drive,
Fairfax, VA 22030-4444, USA
e-mail: isabat@gmu.edu

E.B. King
e-mail: eking6@gmu.edu

Mothers are less likely to be hired for certain types of jobs, are paid less for doing those jobs, are less likely to be promoted, and are more likely to experience unequal treatment that leads them to turnover (Jones et al. 2013). These issues need to be addressed given the fact 38 % of the workforce will at some point undergo this transition into motherhood (Williams et al. 2006).

Throughout this chapter, we identify the challenges that mothers and pregnant women face in the workplace as well as offer strategies for overcoming these challenges. First, we will examine the theories that have been identified to explain the unfair treatment that women experience in the workplace in their transition to motherhood. We also provide a review of research studies that demonstrate empirical support for these theories. Indeed, consistent theoretical and empirical evidence supports the notion that mothers face a unique set of challenges in the workplace at all stages of the employment cycle, including recruitment, selection, negotiation, promotion, retention, and leadership. Second, we examine organizational strategies to overcome these challenges, including changes in formal policies as well as informal social cultures. Within this section, we focus primarily on ways to bolster the effectiveness of currently existing strategies. Third, we focus on novel strategies that ally coworkers can engage in to support and advocate on behalf of women in the workplace, such as advocating for more effective work-family policies and confronting instances of prejudice and discrimination. Fourth, we examine strategies that mothers can engage in to potentially counteract the barriers that they face, such as engaging in counter-stereotypical behaviors and providing individuating information.

Within the sections describing organizational, ally, and target remediation strategies, we contribute to the literature by focusing on theoretical underpinnings, future research directions, methodological challenges, and solutions to those challenges in order to provide a useful framework for researchers to draw upon in conducting future research in this area. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to engage all stakeholders in efforts to improve the workplace experiences of women in their transition to motherhood. In the following section, we begin this chapter by providing theoretical and empirical support for the existence of discrimination against working mothers.

Theoretical and Empirical Evidence of Discrimination

Discrimination Faced by Working Mothers

Several theoretical models have been proposed to explain the reasons for discrimination against working mothers. Four of these theories include stigma theory,

the Stereotype Content Model, social role theory, and role congruity theory. These theories explain different facets of the discrimination that is currently experienced by working mothers. Specifically, they assert that discrimination is a product of the specific stigmatizing characteristics of motherhood, the specific content of the stereotypes associated with motherhood, the social roles that have been ascribed to men and women over time, and the incongruity between the motherhood role and the role of an “ideal worker”, respectively. We discuss these four theoretical arguments in turn and then outline their existing empirical support.

According to stigma theory, working mothers face discrimination due to the fact that their identities are stigmatized within a workplace context. A stigma is defined as a characteristic that is devalued within a social context (Goffman 1963). Research has since identified various dimensions of stigmatized identities that determine the extent to which they negatively impact interpersonal relationships. These dimensions include the concealability, course, strain, aesthetic qualities, cause, and peril of a given stigma (Jones et al. 1984). One important dimension of stigma is the cause (Jones et al. 1984) or the perceived controllability (Weiner et al. 1988) of a stigma. Based on attribution theory, if a stigma is perceived as controllable, it often elicits decreased sympathy and increased judgment from others. Thus, based on stigma theory, mothers experience substantial stigmatization due to the fact that this identity is viewed negatively within a workplace setting, especially given the fact that this is often perceived to be controllable. As a result, mothers are subject to negative stereotypes and prejudices that often lead to discriminatory outcomes.

A large degree of discrimination against working mothers results from the specific content of the stereotypes associated with this identity. The Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al. 2002) states that stereotypes exist along two primary dimensions: warmth and competence. When working women transition to motherhood, they risk being subtyped as either homemakers (viewed as high in warmth but low in competence) or female professionals (viewed as low in warmth but high in competence) (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). The dimension of warmth is determined by competition whereas the dimension of competence is determined by status. Status characteristics theory (Berger et al. 1977) suggests that mothers’ disadvantaged position in the workplace results from the social status attached to the motherhood role, which detracts from competence-based evaluations (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Thus, women typically trade perceived competence for perceived warmth as they make the transition to motherhood (Cuddy et al. 2004).

Differential treatment among the sexes with regards to parenthood can also be explained by the social role theory (Eagly 1987, 1997). This theory states that the beliefs that people hold about the sexes derive from their observations of the roles performed by men and women throughout history. Within the U.S. and several other countries, women typically perform the domestic roles whereas men typically perform occupational roles (Shelton 1992). These observed social structures cause perceivers to infer differences in the trait characteristics of women compared to men. Thus, these social roles are a primary cause of gender-related behaviors and

differential treatment of men and women who fall into or violate their prescribed social roles (Eagly et al. 2000). According to this theory, women are viewed as being naturally good at taking care of domestic responsibilities and are encouraged to do so, whereas men are expected to successfully perform their roles of providing financial resources for their families. Thus, while women (especially those with children) are often discouraged from entering high-status positions, men (especially those with children) are often encouraged to do so in order to provide for their families (Eagly et al. 2000). This theory helps explain why men who have children often experience a “paternal boost” in how they are evaluated within an organizational setting.

Lastly, a portion of the differential treatment towards working mothers is due to the perceived conflict in the motherhood and worker roles. Role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002) suggests that the stereotypes of what it means to be a “good mother” are in direct opposition to expectations of “ideal workers”. Specifically, people believe that a “good mother” is always there for her children (Kobrynowicz and Biernat 1997), whereas the “ideal worker” (i.e., the most competent worker) foregoes all other commitments in favor of the job (Epstein et al. 1999; Williams 2001). This contrast creates the perception that these two ideals are mutually exclusive or that one cannot simultaneously excel in both roles. Furthermore, this leads to the assumption that as one becomes a mother, she will become decreasingly committed to her job (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

A plethora of empirical research has corroborated each of these different theoretical arguments. In alignment with stigma theory, research has documented the differential treatment between “mothers” and “others” (Crittenden 2001), with evidence suggesting that on average and controlling for a variety of other factors, working mothers incur a five percent wage penalty per child (Anderson et al. 2003; Budig and England 2001; see Biernat et al. 2004 for a review). This gender gap in wages has been posited as primarily driven by the low salaries of working mothers, as the wage gap between mothers and women without children is significantly larger than the wage gap between women and men (Waldfogel 1998). Field studies have also examined the influence of gender, race, and parental status on job applicant evaluations by sending out identical resumes for accounting jobs and varying these characteristics. Female parents were contacted significantly less than female nonparents, male parents, and male nonparents. (Firth 1982). Thus, in accordance with stigma theory, motherhood is indeed a characteristic that is stigmatized within a workplace setting.

In support of the Stereotype Content Model, Correll et al. (2007) demonstrated that in comparison to both men and women who were not parents, mothers were rated as less competent, committed, and punctual and received lower recommendations for hiring and salary. Similarly, using both a student sample and an employee sample, Heilman and Okimoto (2008) investigated the influence of gender and parental status on participants’ ratings of a job candidate and hiring recommendations hiring for a male-typed assistant Vice President position. This study revealed that participants evaluated mothers more negatively than both men and women who were not parents; specifically, mothers were rated lower in

competence and agency and thus were less likely to be recommended for hiring. These results demonstrate that the specific stereotypes associated with motherhood do indeed negatively impact working mothers with regards to their career advancement.

Several studies have also found evidence for a “fatherhood bonus” thereby supporting the tenants of social role theory (Eagly 1987, 1997). A study by Cuddy et al. (2004) examined the effects of gender and parental status on evaluations of competence and warmth. Not surprisingly, female employees without children were evaluated as more competent but less warm relative to female employees with children. However, compared to male employees without children, male employees with children were perceived as equally competent but higher on warmth. Relatedly, a lab experiment by Correll et al. (2007) found that participants rated fathers as more committed, and deserving of a higher starting salary compared to men without children. Thus, in accordance with social role theory, mothers often incur pervasive advancement barriers in the workplace, while males who have children appear to benefit from a “fatherhood bonus” with regard to important workplace outcomes.

Finally, in support of role congruity theory, research has shown that organizations often assume that women are more committed to family than to work. One study found evidence for a role-incongruity bias, such that female employees were perceived to have higher levels of work-family conflict compared to their male counterparts. The results of this study actually found that males reported higher levels of work-family conflict. These inaccurate gender biases persisted even for women who were not married and did not have children (Hoobler et al. 2009). These findings also support the systems-justification theory, which asserts that individuals are motivated to believe in stereotypes that support the status quo (Glick and Fiske 2001). As a consequence, individuals stereotype working mothers similar to ways in which they stereotype housewives (Cuddy et al. 2004).

Despite these commonly held assumptions that mothers are less committed to their jobs, empirical evidence supporting this notion is scant. For example, mothers’ commitment as measured by attachment to work identity did not significantly differ from that of other married women and men (Marsden et al. 1993). Furthermore, King (2008) examined not only mothers’ and fathers’ attitudes towards work and family, but their supervisors’ perceptions of their attitudes towards work and family. The study findings suggested that mothers and fathers reported comparable levels of work involvement, commitment, availability, and desire to and flexibility to advance. In spite of this, supervisors perceived mothers as less involved in work and less flexible for advancement, assumptions that partially accounted for the greater advancement of fathers relative to mothers. That is, even though mothers and fathers held similar attitudes towards work and family, their supervisors perceived a disparity in attitudes, ultimately contributing to greater advancement disparities between mothers and fathers. These findings support role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002) whereby mothers are inaccurately perceived to be more committed to their children and less committed to their organizations.

Taken together, these set of theories and empirical findings suggest that negative stereotypes towards employed mothers thwarting their career advancement are not only unjustified, but may also be barring organizations from capitalizing on undiscovered, high-quality talent.

Discrimination Faced by Pregnant Women

The stigmatization against mothers not only emerges when others have knowledge that a female employee has children, it negatively impacts female employees who are on the verge of motherhood. That is, pregnant employees are also perceived as incongruent with the role of an ideal employee. Arguably, these misperceptions occur to a larger degree with pregnant women as compared to working mothers who are not visibly pregnant since pregnancy is a often a visible condition that represents the “epitome of the traditional female role” (Hebl et al. 2007, p. 1499). For instance, participants in one study evaluated the same female employee as more likely to be promoted when they were unaware the employee was pregnant relative to when they were aware of a pregnancy (Morgan et al. 2011). According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2011), pregnancy discrimination claims filed in 2011 increased by almost 50 % since 1997. Furthermore, empirical research has demonstrated that pregnant employees experience many forms of negative backlash including discrimination, negative stereotyping, social rejection, and economic disadvantage (Budig and England 2001; Cuddy et al. 2004; Hebl et al. 2007; Williams and Segal 2004).

Because the initial stages of pregnancy represent a concealable stigma, pregnant workers likely face complex decisions about when, how, and to whom to disclose their pregnancies at work. Pregnant workers may be hesitant to tell others about their pregnancy because of the stigma associated with that status, but may also be compelled to reveal their pregnancy to take advantage of valuable resources, a predicament often referred to as the “disclosure dilemma,” whereby targets attempt to balance two competing motives, authenticity and self-protection (King and Botsford 2009). As a result, revealing one’s pregnant status or pregnancy-related information could make pregnant employees more vulnerable to discrimination, which recent meta-analytic evidence demonstrates is physically and psychologically damaging (Jones et al. 2013). Indeed, recent qualitative evidence suggests pregnant employees downplay or conceal pregnancy-related information in their interactions at work, especially with their supervisors, out of fear that making the pregnancy salient would reduce their power in the situation (Greenberg et al. 2009).

Recent longitudinal evidence suggests the above reasoning echoes the experiences of many expectant mothers. Using a weekly survey methodology, Jones et al. (2013) examined within-person changes in identity management and physical health. Specifically, their results suggested a unidirectional relationship between concealing and physical health wherein concealing led to improved physical health. In contrast, revealing led to declines in physical health and declines in physical

health triggered decreases in revealing. Taken together, these findings suggest discrimination avoidance, rather than need for authenticity, as the dominant mechanism driving disclosure decisions.

Given the plethora of challenges that working women face in their transition to motherhood, we focus the rest of this chapter on outlining strategies that organizations, allies, and targets can engage in to remediate this form of workplace discrimination.

Organizational Strategies

Organizations have the opportunity—and arguably, the obligation—to develop strategies that proactively curtail discrimination towards pregnant women and new mothers. These efforts likely begin at the macro level with policies and practices that are explicitly developed and implemented with this goal in mind. Such policies would also help to shape normative expectations and values that are communicated to employees through supportive organizational cultures. In line with this, we first describe several organizational policies that support women and then consider the elements of climate or culture that reinforce supportive policies.

Formal Policies

A number of organizational policies may be particularly attractive to pregnant women and new mothers to directly help with the practical challenges of balancing work and pregnancy/motherhood demands such as flextime, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, part-time work, concierge services, onsite, emergency or subsidized child care services, paid or extended maternity leave, and high quality health insurance. It has also been argued that clear and consistent standards in the implementation of these policies—rather than flexibility to create idiosyncratic deals between particular women and their supervisors—may serve women best (King and Botsford 2009). As a whole, these kinds of activities have been found to reduce women's experience of conflict between work and family (Butts et al. 2012). Unfortunately, we are not aware of any evidence directly confirming that pregnant women and new mothers necessarily encounter less discrimination in companies that offer such policies.

Some indirect evidence suggests that the proportion of women in an organization—particularly within its highest levels—might relate to women's experiences. Overall, women who work in male-dominated organizations may experience social isolation and gender role exaggeration (Kanter 1977; King et al. 2010). But even in female-dominated organizations, women tend to be underrepresented in positions of power (Valian 1998). A Catalyst study of Fortune 500 companies found that a strong predictor of women's advancement in an organization is the proportion of

women on the Board of Directors (Catalyst 2008). However indirect, this implies that women may experience less discrimination in companies that not only employ, but instead consistently promote women into positions of power. This can be explained by the theory of ingroup favoritism, which suggests that individuals typically prefer members of their own ingroup (Aronson et al. 2010). Because of these pervasive biases, having increased gender diversity in leadership positions in charge of hiring and promotion decisions naturally reduces gender discrimination through the organization.

The strongest evidence we have seen to date suggests that policies are the most influential in determining the success of women (and minorities) to the extent that there are structures of accountability in place (Kalev et al. 2006). Structures of accountability involve a specific role, position, or office that is directly accountable for equality (e.g., a Chief Diversity Officer). In a longitudinal study of over 700 companies, companies with such structures in place earned significant growth in the proportion of women (and minorities) in managerial roles. This study further showed that, although women might benefit in less formal ways from mentoring programs, diversity and sexual harassment training activities, and employee resource groups, these kinds of programs did not ultimately correlate with the growth in the proportion of women in managerial roles. Taking these findings together, policies and programs may only be successful in curbing discrimination toward pregnant women and new mothers to the extent that formal structures of accountability are in place to support their availability and enforcement. Moreover, the effectiveness of organizational strategies may be further enhanced through supportive organizational cultures.

Informal Culture

Policies and structures may do little to support pregnant women and new mothers if they are offered in hostile contexts. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis determined that family-supportive organizational perceptions transmit the effects of family-friendly policies on job outcomes (Butts et al. 2012); in other words, outcomes of family-related policies are achieved in part through individuals' interpretations that such policies convey support for families. Reductions in stereotypes about and bias toward pregnant women and new mothers may similarly be achieved in part through the signals that family-supportive organizational cultures send to employees. That is, people who work in the contexts of family-friendly cultures likely learn that the norms and values of an organization should reflect support for women and families.

Thompson et al. (1999) defined work-family culture of organizations as the "shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees' work and family lives" (p. 394). They conceptualized work-family culture as consisting of three components: (1) expectations that work is a priority above family, (2) perceived negative

career consequences for using work-family benefits, and (3) managerial support for family responsibilities. Each is a crucial element of determining an organization's work-family culture (Bailyn 1993; Perlow 1995; Thomas and Ganster 1995). It is important to note that formal and informal components of a family-friendly organization are not entirely independent constructs. It is unlikely that an organization will be perceived to support families if employees do not have, or do not know about, formal policies available to them. In fact, Thompson et al. (1999) showed a direct relationship between the perceived availability of family-friendly benefits and the perceptions of work-family culture.

Across multiple studies, work-family culture has been shown to have meaningful job-related outcomes beyond the effects of formal benefits. In their research, Thompson et al. (1999) found that work-family culture was related to work-family conflict, utilization of benefits, and organizational attachment beyond the effects of the availability of benefits in an organization. Pregnant women who perceived the culture of their organization to be supportive of family were more committed to their organizations and planned to return to work more quickly than those who perceived their organizations' cultures to be unsupportive women (Lyness et al. 1999). Similarly, Allen (2001) found that perceptions that an organization was family supportive affected work outcomes (e.g., work-family conflict, job satisfaction, commitment) over and above the availability of formal work-family benefits and supervisor support.

This finding makes sense given organizational support theory. According to this theory, individuals who sense that their organizations are supportive of them and their needs will reciprocate by caring about the organization's welfare and striving to help the organization reach its objectives. Thus, organizations that are perceived to be supportive will likely experience favorable outcomes for both the employees (such as increased job satisfaction) as well as for the organization itself (such as increased commitment, increased performance, and reduced turnover) (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002).

It stands to reason that the same cultural forces that help people to balance their work and family demands might also help women overcome the challenges of the transition to motherhood, including reducing the bias they might encounter. Ultimately, it is the human resource professionals, supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates who work with women in their transition to motherhood that must be ambassadors of such policies and culture norms. These individuals must be armed with strategies for acting as allies to pregnant women and new mothers.

Future Research on Organizational Strategies

Although a variety of organizational policies directed at supporting working mothers have been identified, empirical research is still needed to test the effectiveness of these strategies. By conducting such research, scholars can begin to understand which strategies are most effective relative to their cost of

implementation. This type of research would help organizations to more effectively select policies that maximize benefits in supporting working mothers. Although basing research in theory is ideal, researchers in this particular area should use empirically grounded approaches to more quickly and efficiently determine which of the currently utilized organizational strategies is optimal. Indeed, much more empirical and theoretical models are needed within this domain.

An important area of future research is to improve the effectiveness of diversity training programs. Currently, these programs have been shown to produce low levels of effectiveness with results that vary widely from study to study (Kalinowski et al. 2013). Future research may involve testing whether tailoring diversity training to groups that need it the most (such as employees who score highly on tests of implicit or explicit prejudice), framing diversity training programs in certain ways, or allowing for intergroup contact and discussion between mothers and non-mothers can help to improve their effectiveness overall. Scholars in this area should use existing theoretical models, such as organizational support and intergroup contact theories, to help create more effective and valid diversity training programs.

Informal organization cultures that are positive and supportive of working-women have also been shown to reduce discrimination beyond the presence of organizational policies (Allen 2001). Thus, researchers should do more to identify the root causes of organizational cultures that are perceived to be supportive or unsupportive of working mothers. Through this research, we may be able to identify ways to change organizational cultures to be more supportive. Work should also be done to examine the interaction of formal policies and informal cultures that may lead to fair and equitable organizations. Interactive effects could explain the inconsistent findings with regards to the effectiveness of organizational policies and diversity training programs. Indeed, many organizations may institute formal policies simply to receive the financial benefits associated with being perceived as an organization that is supportive of working women. Within these types of organizations, underlying cultural norms of hostility towards working mothers may still permeate. Thus, organizations that do not fully support diversity throughout the recruitment, selection, promotion, and retention phases of the employment cycle may foster resentment from employees that view a mismatch between an organization's espoused values and its actual treatment of stigmatized employees once they are hired (Lindsey et al. 2013).

Methodological Issues and Solutions Associated with Organizational Strategies

With regards to organizational remediation strategies, we identify four primary methodological concerns. First, research questions on this topic are often limited by our access to organizational data. Organizations are often weary of sharing their

data for the purposes of this research in that our analyses may uncover severe underlying issues related to discrimination, which in their eyes, may lead to negative public perceptions and the possibility of legal action. Second, in order to truly test cause and effect relationships, organizations would have to allow for manipulation versus control-group designs. Organizations often focus solely on receiving immediate benefits to the programs and policies that they institute, and thus, they are often resistant to a design that would partially delay those benefits. Third, in order to examine differences in organizational cultures, researchers would need to acquire data from multiple organizations. Due to the difficulties associated with collecting data from a single organization, research that examines variations among organizational cultures can be extremely challenging. Fourth and finally, research on the transition to motherhood is inherently dynamic in nature. As such, we need more advanced methods to be able to better understand the experiences of women throughout this transition. Also, the examination of remediation strategies requires that we study decreases in discrimination over time. Thus, it is important yet difficult to acquire longitudinal data from participating organizations.

To overcome these issues, researchers must strive to form more long-standing research-practitioner interdisciplinary partnerships (Kossek et al. 2011). Researchers must demonstrate that caring about the effectiveness of supportive policies is important to an organization's bottom line. By doing so, organizations will be more willing to work with researchers to test different strategies to improve conditions for working mothers. Through increased partnerships, researchers may be able to test these theories across several different organizations, using manipulation versus control group designs, across long periods of time. Researchers must demonstrate that using more rigorous methodologies (such as longitudinal, experimental designs) are most effective for understanding the true causal relationships among variables that the organizations are interested in. By doing so, they will be able to conduct studies that provide meaningful impact to an organization's current needs in reducing discrimination and improving conditions for working mothers.

Ally Strategies

In this section, we discuss strategies that allies (e.g., male colleagues and female colleagues without children) can use to aid in the goal of reducing discrimination against pregnant women and mothers in the workplace. Relative to strategies that targets can use, far less research attention has been devoted to prejudice reduction strategies that can be employed by allies. However, we argue that allies have an important role to play in discrimination reduction efforts. Specifically, we will discuss the ally strategies of prejudice confrontation and engaging in advocacy behaviors.

Prejudice Confrontation

One strategy that has shown some promise is that of prejudice confrontation, which can be defined as “verbally or nonverbally expressing one’s dissatisfaction with prejudicial and discriminatory treatment to the person who is responsible for the remark or behavior” (Shelton et al. 2006, p. 67). This strategy does not have to involve heated encounters and instead could be enacted by blowing off an inappropriate joke or asking a perpetrator to refrain from making disparaging remarks about a given stigmatized group. Importantly, confrontation has been shown to be effective in terms of reducing prejudice when used by targets of prejudice as well as their allies (Czopp et al. 2006).

Importantly, confrontation may be even more effective when coming from allies than when it comes from members of a target group. As an example, women who confront prejudice against other women are often ignored and viewed as complainers whereas men who confront are often seen as authoritative and objective. Although empirical work has yet to support this notion, attribution theory (Weiner 1980) can provide us with some direction as to why this may be true. On one hand, when confrontation is coming from a target of discrimination, people may label that individual as a whiner or complainer who is only confronting because she possesses the stigma in question and thus is motivated to confront by this sensitivity. On the other hand, when confrontation is coming from an ally no such attribution can be made. Thus, individuals may be more likely to take confrontation behavior coming from non-stigmatized allies more seriously due to these attributional processes.

Not surprisingly, both targets and allies report that they do not actually confront as often as they think they should. This is particularly true when they do not believe their confrontation will make a difference, or when they perceive that there may be social costs for confronting (Good et al. 2012; Rattan and Dweck 2010), which may be particularly salient in a workplace environment. This is problematic and alarming, given that discrimination has negative psychological consequences for targets and allies alike. Indeed, research has demonstrated that bystanders experience emotional discomfort when witnessing discrimination (Schmader et al. 2012). So, the question remains: How can we encourage allies to confront the discrimination they witness in the workplace?

Drawing from work on bystander intervention, the *confronting prejudiced responses* (CPR) model proposes several barriers that might prevent individuals from confronting, even when they feel as though action should be taken (Ashburn-Nardo et al. 2008). In order to overcome these barriers, the authors make the following recommendations to promote confrontation in our workplaces: (a) increase the detection of discrimination through workplace education, (b) help people understand that discrimination is serious and needs to be dealt with immediately, (c) empower individuals to increase perceptions of personal responsibility, and (d) teach people how to confront through social modeling and practice (Ashburn-Nardo et al. 2008). If the obstacles to confrontation can be overcome, it could lead to a naturally self-regulating workplace where allies reliably

communicate that prejudice is not to be tolerated. These confrontation behaviors are likely to reduce discrimination through the theory of social norm clarity, which posits that individuals can serve as effective communicators of information regarding the social appropriateness of attitudes, and that these social norms likely influence an individual's subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Martinez 2012; Zitek and Hebl 2007).

Advocacy Behaviors

Advocacy behaviors involve showing outward support for pregnant women and mothers in the workplace (Washington and Evans 1991) that move beyond passive tolerance to active engagement in the effort to change societal norms and influence organizational policies. Unlike prejudice confrontation, these behaviors are directed at organization as a whole rather than specific perpetrators of prejudice. Advocacy behaviors that should specifically help pregnant women and mothers center on calling for better and more progressive organizational policies discussed previously in this chapter.

Allies can and should engage in advocacy behaviors that involve calling for better policies and practices from their organizational leaders. Organizations may adopt more proactive and supportive policies if employees advocate for them due to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957). This theory asserts that individuals are motivated to reduce any discrepancies that they may have between their attitudes and behaviors. Thus, if organizational leaders are made aware that their current policies and practices do not support working mothers, they may be motivated to change these policies if they view themselves and/or their organizations as egalitarian and supportive of women. In the past, employers have typically begun adopting more supportive policies towards minority groups (e.g., women and African Americans) only after social and political movements had encouraged them to do so (rather than being motivated by economic factors or formal legislation.) Thus, allies can be an influential driver in changing organizational policy regarding pregnant women and mothers if they advocate for better and more progressive organizational policies (Brooks and Edwards 2009; Ruggs et al. 2011; Sabat et al. 2013).

Future Research on Ally Strategies

The study of behaviors that supportive coworkers can engage in on behalf of working mothers is a relatively new field. Research on ally behaviors in general is scant, and there is definitely a need to quantitatively examine the effectiveness of the behaviors discussed above in supporting working mothers. Researchers should continue to examine strategies to help allies overcome the barriers that they face in

confronting prejudice, such as modeling confrontation behaviors within diversity training videos or determining ways to reward confrontation behaviors within the workplace. More research is also needed to understand the different styles of confrontation that lead to the most optimal outcomes in terms of prejudice reduction and behavior change.

Researchers should also continue to examine new possible strategies that allies can engage in to remediate discrimination. We note two strategies in particular that have been suggested by organizational researchers, but have not yet been tested. These include acknowledging one's ally status to others even before any disclosures of pregnancy or motherhood have been made (Sabat et al. 2013). Thus, individuals within the organization who conceal their status or who may one day become pregnant or mothers will feel more freedom to reveal their potentially stigmatizing identities within the workplace. Additionally, expressing increased positivity towards working mothers may also help to support women in their transition to motherhood. Indeed, studies suggest that demonstrating high levels of support towards pregnant women (and other concealable stigmas) will lead to more frequent disclosing behaviors and improved psychological and organizational outcomes (Jones and King 2013).

Methodological Issues and Solutions Associated with Ally Strategies

Current research on ally strategies to remediate discrimination against working mothers suffers from a variety of methodological challenges. Primarily, these challenges stem from the fact that this research area is relatively new. Thus, it suffers from a severe lack of empirical, quantitative studies that experimentally test the effectiveness of different strategies. The few studies that do examine relationships beyond case studies and qualitative analyses of ally behaviors are typically conducted in laboratory settings that utilize convenience samples of undergraduate students. Thus, they often lack ecological and external validity. Additionally, studies that examine target perceptions typically use indirect measures of constructs that are inherently difficult to measure and often obscured by a variety of self-enhancement biases. As an example, it is difficult to obtain accurate self-report measures of subconscious biases or prejudices, and researchers continue to debate the validity of currently used measures, such as Implicit Association Tests (for a review, see Fiedler et al. 2006). Self-presentation also impacts the accuracy of surveys measuring ally behaviors, such as inaccuracies found in self-report measures on the degree to which allies have confronted instances of prejudice in the past.

More research is clearly needed that empirically test the differential effectiveness of ally strategies. Researchers should work hard to recruit large enough sample sizes of working allies to quantitatively analyze more complex relationships among

these variables and organizational outcomes of interest. Researchers must also be weary of the biases associated with responses to currently used measures, and use caution in framing their questions in order to improve the overall validity of their findings. More specifically, we recommend that researchers use manipulations and designs that are both deceptive in nature in order to circumvent the self-enhancement biases that cause inaccuracies in responses and representative of actual ally behaviors that can be implemented within a workplace setting. It is important to acknowledge the real-world barriers that allies may face in trying to engage in these strategies [such as those proposed by the CPR-Model of Confrontation (Ashburn-Nardo et al. 2008)]. By doing so, researchers will be able to develop and test strategies in a scientifically valid way that empirically demonstrate the relative effectiveness of these strategies. This will help to engage this underutilized resource in efforts to remediate discrimination against working mothers.

Target Strategies

In this section, we discuss strategies that pregnant women and mothers can use to reduce the prejudice and discrimination that they may face in their organizations. Although we do not wish to place the burden of prejudice reduction on pregnant women or mothers, it is important to consider strategies—including individuation and acknowledgment—that women can use to protect themselves from such manifestations of prejudice.

Individuation

According to social categorization theory (Fiske et al. 1999), people can form impressions about others based on individual, personal characteristics (bottom-up processing) or based on group-level characteristics (top-down processing). Due to the tendency to prefer ease and efficiency, perceivers typically rely on these group-level stereotypes to form impressions (Fiske et al. 1999). These social categorizations often influence how people think (cognitive stereotypes) and feel (affective biases) about others (Dovidio and Hebl 2005). However, social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner 1985) assert that when personal identity is made salient to others, perceptions are more likely to be based on individual characteristics, and a person's individual needs, standards, beliefs, and motives are more likely to be taken into consideration (Dovidio and Hebl 2005). Thus, an effective strategy for pregnant women and mothers to reduce discrimination may be to simply provide additional information that will emphasize their personal identities, a strategy known as individuation. This individuating information can be positive and/or counter-stereotypic in order to de-emphasize the

negative group-based stereotypes associated with their stigmatized identity. Importantly this impression management strategy has been shown to be effective, particularly for individuals possessing stigmas that are visible and deemed to be controllable (e.g., pregnancy, obesity; Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Singletary and Hebl 2009). We outline five empirical studies demonstrating the benefits of this strategy.

First, an early study by Eagly and Karau (1991) found that in the absence of other information, both men and women were likely to prefer male leaders due to gender stereotypes and implicit leadership theories stating that males fit better with prototypes for effective leaders than females. However, once more information on the candidates was provided, both men and women were less likely to rely on gender stereotypes when indicating their preference. Second, a field experiment showed that obese targets experienced less discrimination when they engaged in counter-stereotypic behaviors refuting stereotypes that they are lazy (King et al. 2006). Third, highly successful female leaders were evaluated more positively when they counteracted the stereotype that successful female leaders are not very communal (Heilman and Okimoto 2007). Fourth, a field study found that pregnant female applicants were able to reduce the amount of interpersonal discrimination that they experienced when they provided counter-stereotypical individuating information about their level of commitment and flexibility (Morgan et al. 2013). Fifth and finally, an fMRI study by Wheeler and Fiske (2005) indicated that participants engaged in more deliberative processing of information when they were instructed to look for unique information about racial out-groups. This last finding should not be overlooked, as it indicates individuation actually prompted less biased processing at the neurological level.

It is important to note that individuating information is likely something that coworkers and supervisors often naturally gain over time. Indeed, indirect support for this notion can be drawn from work on intergroup contact, which generally shows that groups start to evaluate each other more favorably after extended periods of contact (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Thus, the usefulness of individuation as an impression management strategy is likely maximized if used during the selection process or early in one's tenure at an organization.

Acknowledgment

Another impression management strategy that has shown some promise in terms of reducing experiences of discrimination in the workplace is acknowledgement. Acknowledgement can be defined as recognizing a given stigmatized identity outright when interacting with others. This strategy is thought to be effective because it draws evaluators' attention away from the stigma and allows them to focus on more important, job-related information. Importantly, extant theoretical and empirical literature has supported this rationale and the use of acknowledgement as a prejudice reducing strategy. Self-verification theory asserts that people

strive to have others view them similarly to the ways they view themselves (Swann 2011). Thus, identity management strategies that promote self-verification are likely to lead to more beneficial intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes.

An empirical study by Hebl and Skorinko (2005) evaluated the effectiveness of acknowledgement of stigmas on interview evaluations of individuals with disabilities. Findings revealed that acknowledgement did improve applicant evaluations, thus supporting the notion that acknowledging a visible stigma and getting it out in the open can allow evaluators to focus on more important and job-related information as opposed to focusing on stigmatizing characteristics. Although this strategy has shown some promise in research, we must provide an important caveat that this strategy has only received support for reducing prejudice against stigmas that are deemed to be uncontrollable. Given that both pregnancy and motherhood are stigmatized identities that are viewed as controllable, acknowledgement may actually backfire by further activating these stereotypical beliefs. Thus, further research is needed to more directly evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy for pregnant women and mothers in the workplace.

Future Research on Target Strategies Finally, researchers should continue to study pregnancy as well as motherhood in terms of how targets manage their visible or invisible stigmatized identities in the workplace, as well as the intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes. Because the visibility of pregnancy changes over time, one future consideration of researchers in this field may involve the timing of disclosure. Research on the timing of stigma disclosure to this point has been limited and mixed, but it does suggest that based on the specific characteristics of the stigma, there may exist an ideal time in one's tenure to reveal a stigmatized identity in the workplace.

A study conducted by King (2008) asked both homosexuals and heterosexual others to describe the best disclosure experience that they had ever experienced. This study revealed that disclosure timing is important for predicting a positive disclosure experience for heterosexual others. Specifically, the authors were able to show that the disclosure experience was typically more positive for heterosexuals when the disclosure happened later (rather than earlier) in their relationship with the homosexual target (King 2008). A similar experimental study analyzed the effects of timing of disclosure by having participants watch recorded interviews of a gay man that they believed they would be working with on a subsequent task in the lab. Results from this study largely replicated the results from the King (2008) paper in that heterosexuals generally reacted more positively to disclosures when they occurred later in the interview process. More specifically, the study showed that male participants formed more stereotypic impressions, displayed more negative responses, and reacted more aggressively to the gay male in the video when disclosure occurred early (as opposed to late) in the interview process (Buck and Plant 2011). These two studies seem to provide evidence for a primacy effect (Asch 1946) in relation to the timing of disclosure decisions.

On the other hand, the study examining the effects of acknowledgement of a physical disability found that earlier disclosures were actually more effective than

later disclosures (Hebl and Skorinko 2005). Conceptual papers specific to the disclosure of pregnancy have also suggested that later disclosures of this identity would elicit more negative interpersonal outcomes given that the targets may be viewed as withholding important information that may impact the job performance of the interaction partner (Jones and King 2013; King and Botsford 2009). Earlier disclosures of pregnancy may therefore be viewed more favorably by others given the fact that these types of disclosures would allow for more planning and would be perceived as more fair overall. Clearly, more research is needed on the impact of the timing of disclosures of the stigmatized identities of both pregnancy and motherhood in the workplace.

Researchers should also continue to test the effectiveness of current and new strategies from both the perspective of the stigmatized individuals as well as from the perspective of their interaction partners to ensure that there is alignment in the types of strategies that are viewed as effective from both perspectives.

Methodological Issues and Solutions Associated with Target Strategies Several methodological issues plague research on target remediation strategies. First, studies on this topic are typically limited to single source survey data. In order to truly test strategies that targets can engage into improve the differential treatment that they experience, researchers must be able to examine actual employee interactions using multi-source data. However, studies examining the extent to which pregnant women conceal their pregnancy, for instance, would not easily be able to obtain ratings from both pregnant women who conceal and their coworkers or supervisors due to privacy concerns. Second, it is often difficult to obtain large enough samples of participants who are eligible to participate in these types of studies. Quantitative research on target strategies requires large datasets of employed, self-identified pregnant women or mothers. Also, it is difficult to obtain generalizable target samples that demonstrate variability in the extent to which targets have disclosed their stigmatized identities to others. These difficulties are often compounded in research that attempts to examine the intersection of multiple stigmatized identities (such as research on ethnic minority working mothers).

Despite these methodological challenges, progress has been made and researchers should continue to seek new and innovate ways to advance this scientific endeavor. To combat the issues specified above, researchers should use a combination of multiple different methodologies (such as survey studies, lab studies, and field studies) and multiple sources of data in order to triangulate their results across different samples. This would eliminate the challenges associated with the single-source nature of current strategies.

Researchers should also develop new and innovative ways to recruit target samples. New online survey recruitment platforms have been developed, and these may allow researchers to better target specific sub-populations that are of interest. Specifically, these strategies may be helpful for recruiting targets that have not yet disclosed their stigmatized identities (such as pregnancy). Non-disclosed targets may also be more likely to respond fully and accurately in these anonymous

surveys when recruited in this way, compared to more traditional methods of organizationally distributed surveys or snowballing techniques.

Combining Strategies

It is important to study remediation strategies from the perspective of organizations, allies, as well as targets in order to maximize efforts to reduce prejudice. Researchers have begun to address these research questions, yet little work has examined the joint impact of these strategies. Researchers should examine the interaction of these approaches, to understand whether workplaces that utilize a combination of these three approaches witness the most optimal outcomes. Potential crossovers are apparent; diversity training programs may help to improve organizational cultures by also teaching mothers about how to best manage their own identities as well as instructing allies how to identify and effectively confront instances of discrimination.

Accomplishing this feat would allow organizations, targets, and allies to effectively diminish the barriers causing unequal treatment of mothers and fathers in the workplace. In doing so, we can continue to create organizations that improve the workplace experiences of all stigmatized minorities.

Conclusion

The current chapter serves as an overview of the different challenges faced by women in the workplace as they journey to become mothers. Pregnant women and mothers face unwarranted negative workplace consequences due to prescriptive and descriptive stereotypes of mothers being more committed to their children than their careers. Several well-established theoretical models explain the reactions to pregnant women and mothers in the workplace, including stigma theory, Stereotype Content Model, social role theory and role congruity theory. Despite this, there does not yet exist an overarching theory that explains how individuals and organizations can improve these reactions. Gender and parenting roles are so ingrained within our social structure (and arguably, within our biology) that there is not a simple solution for their transformation. Despite the inherent theoretical and methodological difficulties, researchers should continue to investigate effective theory-driven strategies to overcome these issues from all possible perspectives in order to maximally improve the equitable treatment of all working mothers.

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