

Running Head: Feminizing Male Leave Requesters

in press, *Journal of Social Issues*

Penalizing Men Who Request a Family Leave:
Is Flexibility Stigma a Femininity Stigma?

Laurie A. Rudman

Kris Mescher

Rutgers University – New Brunswick

Keywords: flexibility stigma, work-life balance, gender stereotypes, backlash effects

Laurie A. Rudman
Department of Psychology, Tillett Hall
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey – New Brunswick
53 Avenue E
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8040
E-mail: rudman@rci.rutgers.edu

Abstract

Men who request a family leave are viewed as poor organizational citizens and ineligible for rewards (e.g., Allen & Russell, 1999; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003). In addition to a poor worker stigma, we found that male leave requesters suffer femininity stigma. Compared with control targets, male leave requesters were viewed as higher on weak, feminine traits (e.g., weak and uncertain), and lower on agentic masculine traits (e.g., competitive and ambitious). Perceptions of weakness uniquely predicted greater risk for penalties (e.g., being demoted or downsized) and fully accounted for the effect of poor worker stigma on male leave requesters' penalties. By contrast, the poor worker stigma and both agency and weakness perceptions contributed to their reward recommendations. Results were comparable regardless of the reason given for requesting a family leave, target race (White or Black), and participant gender. The implications of these findings for work-life balance and gender equality are discussed.

Word count: 150

Penalizing Men Who Seek Work-Life Balance:

Is Flexibility Stigma a Femininity Stigma?

Despite the Women's Movement, gender stereotypes dictating that men should be more career-oriented and ambitious than women persist (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Also intractable is the Western workplace ideology promoting "ideal workers" as those who are focused almost solely on their careers (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2004; Williams, 2000). The ideal worker schema is tailored to men, who have traditionally borne the family responsibility of being the primary provider, whereas women have served as the primary caregivers. In fact, being the family's main provider is a key component of the definition of masculinity (Vandello, Bosson, & Cohen, 2008). Therefore, it may be necessary for men to be almost exclusively career-oriented in order to be perceived as a "real man."

Nonetheless, men have responded to women's increased participation in the workforce by stepping up their family responsibilities (Pleck, 1993), to the point where both genders may report similar levels of work-family conflict (Eagle, Miles, & Icenogle, 1997). As a result, many men may welcome workplace reforms that promise a more balanced way of life than the traditional male role of "working like a dog" to support a family. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* reports that two male Stanford law students founded an organization designed to promote work-life balance by protesting the 90-plus hour workweek typically demanded by law firms (Lattman, 2007). Moreover, when Johns Hopkins medical school revised its meeting schedule to better accommodate women (so that meetings were no longer scheduled in the evenings or on weekends), both men and women responded favorably (Fried et al., 1996). Several studies show that companies perceived as "family friendly" benefit from having more

satisfied and productive employees (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kinicki & Carson, & Bolanger, 1992; Koys, 1991). Therefore, it serves organizations well to accommodate all of their employees' personal lives.

Flexibility Stigma versus Backlash for Gender Deviance

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a government mandate that enables workers to take up to a 12-week absence to care for a newborn or an ill family member (child, parent, or spouse). Although this legislation came about because of women's participation in the workforce, the FMLA clearly benefits men, enabling them to be better fathers and to respond to family emergencies. It also provides legal recourse when employers discriminate against male as well as female caretakers. When a former Maryland State Trooper sought a leave to care for his wife, he was denied by a manager who said, "Unless your wife is in a coma or dead, you can't be the primary caregiver" (Press, 2007, p. 39). The Trooper filed a sex discrimination suit and he won. As this case illustrates, male leave takers risk *flexibility stigma* (Williams, 2000) – a type of discrimination triggered whenever an employee signals a need for workplace flexibility due to family responsibilities (e.g., by requesting leaves of absence or flexible hours). Irrespective of their performance, people with family obligations may suffer hiring discrimination, miss out on a promotion, or be terminated because their employers penalize workers who do not meet the "best worker" standards (Acker, 1990).

According to this analysis, women and men alike should experience flexibility stigma and it should be incumbent on both genders to be more devoted to work than family in order to be perceived as the ideal worker; indeed, some female executives have fervently adopted this standard (Blair-Loy, 2004). However, it is also clear that women who ask for family leave are behaving in a more gender normative way, compared with men who request a family leave (Hill,

Hawkins, Martinson, & Ferris, 2003). For example, of the workers who utilized California's law to provide paid leave to new parents, 74% were women (Belkin, 2010). In general, men and women alike risk penalties for violating expectancies based on gender norms (termed *backlash*; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008). This is because gender stereotypes are both descriptive (describing how men and women are) and prescriptive (dictating how men and women ought to be; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). When people break the gender rules, they can raise hackles (and not merely eyebrows), provided perceivers feel justified (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Men's stereotypic rules clearly support the gender hierarchy because they consist of (1) prescribed agentic traits that are aligned with both male gender and high status (e.g., *competitive, confident, and a strong leader*), and (2) proscribed vulnerable traits that are aligned with both female gender and low status (e.g., *weak, insecure, and emotional*; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2011). Thus, what men cannot be is low in status, and what they must be is high in status. Research on backlash against atypical men shows that people judge them to be high on weakness and low on agency – gender rules that are enforced because they legitimize the gender status quo (Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010; Rudman et al., 2011). Therefore, men who seek a family leave are apt to be similarly feminized as low on agency and high on weakness, which could lead to men being viewed as more punishable than women when they request a family leave.

What does the research reveal? On the one hand, an analysis of archival organizational data showed that family-related leaves of absence were negatively correlated with performance ratings for both genders (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). On the other hand, experimental research suggests that, compared with women, men suffer more negative reactions from evaluators when

they ask for a family leave (Wayne & Codeiro, 2003). For example, men who took a family leave were rated as lower on organizational commitment than comparable women; they were also viewed as less eligible for rewards (Allen & Russell, 1999). In addition, male workers experiencing a family conflict received lower performance ratings and reward recommendations than female counterparts (Butler & Skattebo, 2004). Using controlled methods, it therefore appears that men are more disapproved of than women for failing to uphold the “ideal worker” image – either because this image is crafted almost strictly for men, who have traditionally relied on their wives to address family obligations (Acker, 1990), or because their “feminine” behavior lowers their status and thus, threatens the gender hierarchy (Berdahl, 2007; Rudman et al., 2011).

Although these findings may appear contrary to evidence suggesting a bonus for fatherhood (e.g., fathers are awarded higher starting salaries than childless men; Correll, Benard & Paik, 2007), this bonus is likely due to men’s traditional role as the primary breadwinner (Eagly, 1987). That is, fathers may receive monetary benefits to help support their families, but expressing a desire to otherwise care for their offspring violates gender roles traditionally reserved for women and therefore, should yield backlash.

Motives for Penalizing Male Leave Requesters

However, the precise motives for penalizing men who request a family leave are not yet known. If such men are punished for failing to uphold the “ideal worker” image, they will be seen to suffer from *poor worker stigma* – in which case, employees who seek work-life balance should be devalued for ostensibly being distracted from their work obligations by family needs. However, because the concept of work-life balance is strongly gendered, men who request a family leave may also suffer a *femininity stigma*, whereby “acting like a woman” deprives them of masculine agency (e.g., competence and assertiveness) and impugns them with negative

feminine qualities (e.g., weakness and uncertainty). For example, men who behaved modestly during a job interview encountered more prejudice than a comparable woman, an effect that was fully accounted for by perceptions of weakness (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). Moreover, men who championed women's causes (i.e., male feminists) were viewed as higher in femininity and lower in masculinity than either a male biologist or a benevolent sexist (Glick & Fiske, 1996), suggesting that defending women's rights can weaken men's gender identity in the eyes of observers (Rudman, Mescher, & Moss-Racusin, 2011). In addition, men who succeed in female domains are at risk for penalties that range from being perceived as a "wimp" and robbed of respect (Heilman & Wallen, 2010) to being sabotaged by their peers (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Precarious manhood theory would also suggest that men who "act like women" by requesting family leave are at risk for feminization (Vandello et al., 2008). According to this theory, manhood is not assured by biological changes that occur during puberty but instead, must be won and continuously sustained by men's behavior. As a result, men who request a family leave may be penalized by perceptions that they are not "real men."

Overview and Hypotheses

The primary aim of the present research was to compare the utility of poor worker stigma and femininity stigma to predict negative reactions to men who request a family leave. Because these stigmas are not mutually exclusive, the research was designed to reveal potential interplay (e.g., men who are judged as poor workers might also be feminized and as a result, be at risk for discrimination). Given the evidence suggesting that it is primarily men who risk backlash when they ask for family leave (Allen & Russell, 1999; Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Wayne & Codeiro, 2003), we only investigated male targets. However, unique to the present study, we manipulated targets' ethnicity (White or Black) and included penalties as well as

reward recommendations as our primary outcome variables. We expected both Black and White leave requesters to be discriminated against (i.e., to be recommended for less rewards and more penalties) relative to control men who did not ask for a family leave. However, because racial stereotypes include perceptions that Black men are lazy and hostile (Devine & Baker, 1991), it was possible that Black men would suffer more than White men. For example, Black employees might be perceived as particularly poor workers and thus, subject to penalties, when they requested a family leave. With respect to femininity stigma, it was possible that Black men would be relatively immune because they are stereotyped as hyper-masculine (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008) and prescribed to be more communal than White men in order to “disarm” perceptions that they are intimidating (Richardson, Phillips, Rudman, & Glick, 2011; Livingston & Pearce, 2009).

Beyond investigating target race as a potential moderator, we improved on past research by adding recommendations for penalties (e.g., demotion and termination) as well as rewards (e.g., a pay raise and promotion). In addition, we isolated the presence or absence of a family leave request as the basis for evaluating targets, rather than including additional information (e.g., resumes and performance reviews) that might confound the manipulation. To do so, participants read an interview transcript during which the employee (Kevin Dowd) requested a 12-week family leave from a Human Resources officer (the maximum allowed by law). However, he chose to take an intermittent leave, rather than a sequential leave, meaning that he would be absent from work sporadically rather than for three months at a time. We view this as a more conservative test compared with past research in which the target asked for sequential leaves of either 12-week (Wayne & Codeiro, 2003) or 6-month (Allen & Russell, 1999) durations. As a test of generality, the reason for the leave was either to take care of a sick child or

a sick mother (Wayne & Codeiro, 2003). In two control conditions, Mr. Dowd either requested extra hours or inquired about his employee benefits.

Should we expect participant gender effects? Although some research has shown that men are more likely to react negatively to male leave requesters than women (Wayne & Codeiro, 2003), other studies have not found gender differences (Butler & Skattebo, 2004). Because backlash effects are not moderated by perceivers' gender (Rudman & Phelan, 2008), we predicted that both genders would similarly use femininity stigma to justify penalizing male leave takers. Nonetheless, because women are far more likely than men to ask for family leave (Hill, Hawkins, Martinson, & Ferris, 2003), they might not view taking a leave as reflecting poorly on work quality. If so, women might be less likely than men to use the poor worker stigma as a reason to punish men who seek work-life balance.

Method

Participants and Design

Volunteers ($N = 371$, 131 men) participated in exchange for partial fulfillment of their Introductory Psychology research requirement. Of these, 50% were White, 30% were Asian, 4% were Black, 6% were Hispanic, and 10% reported another ethnic identity. The design of the experiment was a 2 (target race: Black, White) x 4 (family leave condition: childcare, parental care, two controls) x 2 (participant gender) between-participants factorial. We used two control targets; one who asked a Human Resource officer for more hours (rather than time off), and one who merely inquired about his employee benefits. We included the latter control condition because it was possible that asking for more hours would be viewed as particularly masculine (e.g., ambitious). However, preliminary analyses showed no significant differences between the two control groups; they were therefore collapsed.

Experimental Manipulations

Family leave manipulation. Participants read the transcript of an interview that ostensibly took place between the employee (Mr. Dowd) and an unnamed Human Resource (HR) manager. The interview began with the manager asking Mr. Dowd to consent to having the interview tape recorded “at the request of the legal department” and explaining that the tape would only be released in specific circumstances, including “as a research tool for our partner universities.” This information was used to bolster the cover story (i.e., to account for why researchers had access to employee interview transcripts).

After agreeing to the procedure, Mr. Dowd stated his reason for the interview. In the childcare condition, he requested a 12-week intermittent leave because his daughter has leukemia. He explained that he would like to be present for her chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and to spend as much time with her as he can. In the parental care condition, he requested a 12-week intermittent leave to care for his widowed mother. He explained that she recently needed to be moved from a retirement community to a more medically intensive facility due to the onset of Alzheimer’s, so he would like to spend as much time with her as he can before her condition deteriorates. In the first control condition, he requested extra hours in order to take on added responsibility that might increase his performance reviews and thus, his chances of a promotion. In the second control condition, he requested that the HR officer advise him of his dental plan options and whether or not he was contributing the maximum to his retirement fund.

To avoid confounding the family leave manipulation with perceptions that the family’s finances would be damaged, the HR officer stipulated that there was no guarantee Mr. Dowd would continue to receive his salary and full benefits during the leave. Mr. Dowd replied, “I’ve

considered the family's financial situation. Our savings should cover any pay gap that might occur during my leave." Similarly, to avoid perceptions that the control targets would enhance their family's finances, the HR manager noted that even if more hours were assigned to Mr. Dowd, or if he changed his benefits, his base pay would remain the same. We therefore sought to examine the effects of taking a leave independent of family provider perceptions.

Target race manipulation. At the end of each interview, the HR manager asked Mr. Dowd if they knew someone in common. In the Black target condition, the HR manager said, "Listen, I was going over your file and I see you graduated from Howard University. I used to know a Latisha Williams who went to Howard – did you overlap with her?" Mr. Dowd responded, "Not that I know of. Did she belong to the Black History Association? I was pretty active in that." Participants were likely to infer the target was Black by references to his attending a historically Black college (one that a woman with a common African-American name also attended), and by his being active in the Black History Association. In the White target condition, we removed these racial cues. Instead, the HR manager said, "Listen, I was going over your file and I see you graduated from George Washington University. I used to know a Leigh Williams who went to GW – did you overlap with her?" Mr. Dowd responded, "Not that I know of. Did she belong to the History Club? I was pretty active in that." The HR manager always responded, "I don't think so because she majored in English. Well, I'll let you know what happens with your request." Mr. Dowd then thanked the HR manager and the interview ended.

Dependent Measures

Poor worker stigma. Beliefs that men who ask for family leave would be perceived as poor workers were assessed using the Organizational Citizen Behaviors Scale (OCBS; Smith,

Organ, and Near, 1983). The measure has two dimensions: altruism and organizational compliance. Because past research found that family leave impacted only perceptions of the latter (Wayne & Codeiro, 2003), we concentrated on it. Participants responded to seven questions prefaced by, “How likely is Kevin Dowd to...” on a 1 (*not at all likely*) to 10 (*very likely*) scale. Sample items include, “Come to work early if needed,” “Be absent less than most employees,” and “Work overtime when it is necessary” ($\alpha = .91$). In addition, using the same scale, we administered four items designed to capture devotion to work (Blair-Loy, 2003). These items were, “Be committed to the organization he works for,” “Be committed to having a career,” “Be an ideal worker,” and “Be respected at work” ($\alpha = .89$). The two measures were highly correlated, $r(370) = .74, p < .001$. They were therefore combined to form the poor worker index (PWI), after recoding items to reflect perceptions that the target was an inferior employee.

Femininity stigma. Participants indicated the extent to which they perceived Kevin Dowd to be characterized by attributes associated with women and men (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman et al., 2011). Participants responded to the question, “How much did Kevin Dowd strike you as...” using a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much so*). Four feminine traits formed the weak index (*weak, naïve, insecure, and emotional*) and the communal index (*warm, supportive, humble, good listener*); α s = .69 and .78, respectively. Four masculine traits formed the agentic index (*intelligent, competitive, confident, and a strong leader*) and four masculine traits formed the dominant index (*dominant, aggressive, intimidating, and arrogant*); α s = .84 and .70, respectively.

Rewards and penalties. Following Allen and Russell (1999), participants were asked how much they would recommend Kevin Dowd for six rewards on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much so*). The rewards included recommendations for a leadership role, a promotion,

a raise, a fast-track executive training program, and a challenging, high profile project ($\alpha = .90$). New to the present research, we added six penalties, including recommendations for a salary reduction, a demotion, termination if the company is downsized, decreased responsibilities at work, and being encouraged to work for another organization ($\alpha = .80$). Rewards and penalties were negatively related, $r(370) = -.36, p < .001$, but sufficiently distinct to maintain as separate indexes.

Procedure

The Experimenter escorted participants to a private cubicle and started a computer program. After administering consent, which explained that the study involved reading about an interview between a workplace employee and a Human Resources officer, the program randomly presented one of eight versions of the interview, followed by the dependent measures in the order described above. Items within each measure were randomly presented by the program. Participants were subsequently probed for suspicion, debriefed, and compensated.

Results

Flexibility Stigma

The poor worker index (PWI) and rewards and penalties were submitted to separate 2 (target race: Black, White) x 3 (family leave condition: childcare, parental care, no leave) x 2 (participant gender) analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Results showed the expected main effects of leave condition for the PWI, $F(2, 359) = 36.49$; for rewards, $F(2, 359) = 45.66$; and for penalties, $F(2, 359) = 26.38$, all $ps < .001$. There were no interactions with target race, all F s $< 1.34, ns$. In addition, the penalty index showed a main effect of target race, $F(1, 359) = 5.15, p < .05$, such that Black targets were penalized more so than White targets, (M s = 4.25 vs. 3.91, respectively; $d = .23$). Finally, there was a main effect for participant gender for the PWI, $F(1,$

359) = 4.32, $p < .05$, such that women judged the targets to be poorer workers than did men ($M_s = 4.18$ vs. 3.76, respectively; $d = .24$). Because these effects were independent of the family leave manipulation, we collapsed across target race and participant gender to investigate the three main effects for leave condition.

As shown in Figure 1, control targets were rated lower on the PWI compared with targets who requested a family leave in the childcare condition, $t(265) = 7.41$, $p < .001$ ($d = .81$), and the parental care condition, $t(268) = 8.35$, $p < .001$ ($d = .92$). They were also recommended for more rewards compared with targets in the childcare condition, $t(265) = 7.96$, $p < .001$ ($d = .88$), and the parental care condition, $t(268) = 9.08$, $p < .001$ ($d = 1.05$). Further, control targets were less likely to be penalized compared with targets in the childcare condition, $t(265) = 6.73$, $p < .001$ ($d = .67$), and the parental care condition, $t(268) = 6.18$, $p < .001$ ($d = .76$). Finally, no significant differences emerged between the childcare and parental care conditions for the PWI, rewards, or penalties, all $t_s(203) < 1.00$, *ns*.

In summary, Figure 1 reveals support for flexibility stigma by showing that men who requested a family leave were more likely to be viewed as poor workers and subject to penalties, and less likely to be recommended for rewards, compared with control targets. These findings were independent of the reason for requesting family leave, participant gender, and the target's ethnicity. Although Black targets suffered more penalties than White targets, this effect was independent of the family leave manipulation.

Femininity Stigma

The gender stereotype indexes (weak, dominant, communal, and agentic) were submitted to separate 2 (target race: Black, White) x 3 (family leave condition: childcare, parental care, control) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVAs. Each index showed only a main effect of the family

leave condition, with $F_s(2, 370)$ ranging from 13.27, $p < .001$ (for agentic) to 4.25, $p < .05$ (for communal).

Figure 2 shows the findings. Compared with control targets, male leave takers were rated as weaker in the childcare condition, $t(265) = 2.84$, $p < .01$ ($d = .36$), and in the parental care condition, $t(268) = 3.47$, $p = .001$ ($d = .42$). They were also rated as less dominant in the childcare condition, $t(265) = 4.76$, $p < .001$ ($d = -.47$), and in the parental care condition, $t(268) = 4.36$, $p < .001$ ($d = -.59$). Further, they were rated as more communal in both the childcare condition, $t(265) = 3.05$, $p < .01$ ($d = .40$), and the parental care condition, $t(268) = 2.16$, $p < .05$ ($d = .27$). Finally, they were also rated as less agentic in the childcare condition, $t(265) = 3.34$, $p < .01$ ($d = -.43$), and in the parental care condition, $t(268) = 5.27$, $p < .001$ ($d = -.65$). However, no significant differences emerged between the childcare and parental care conditions for any of the stereotype indexes, all $t_s(203) < 1.78$, *ns*.

Note that Figure 2 suggests that all targets were rated more positively than negatively (i.e., viewed as more agentic and communal than weak and dominant), but that within each valence, leave takers were feminized, whereas controls were viewed as more masculine than feminine. Paired sample *t*-tests supported this observation. Targets in the childcare condition were rated as more weak than dominant, $t(100) = 3.59$, $p = .001$ ($d = .35$), and as more communal than agentic, $t(100) = 7.65$, $p < .001$ ($d = .75$). Similarly, targets in the parental care condition were rated as more weak than dominant, $t(103) = 5.97$, $p < .001$ ($d = .59$), and as more communal than agentic, $t(103) = 9.03$, $p < .001$ ($d = .89$). By contrast, control targets were judged to be more dominant than weak, $t(165) = 4.01$, $p < .001$ ($d = .31$), and as more agentic than communal, $t(165) = 2.07$, $p < .05$ ($d = .16$).

In summary, Figure 2 supports femininity stigma because men who requested family leave were rated as weaker and more communal, but less agentic and dominant, compared with control targets, regardless of the reason for requesting a family leave, target's ethnicity, or participant gender. In addition, leave takers were judged to be higher on feminine than masculine traits, whereas control targets were rated as higher on masculine than feminine traits, whether traits were negative (weak vs. dominant) or positive (communal vs. agentic).

Comparing Poor Worker and Femininity Stigmas

Because no reliable differences were found between the childcare and parental care conditions, we combined them for subsequent analyses that investigated the utility of the poor worker and femininity stigmas to predict discrimination. After standardizing all variables, we separately regressed rewards and penalties on the PWI and the four gender stereotype indexes. To be conservative, we controlled for target race (0 = White, 1 = Black) and participant gender (0 = men, 1 = women). Table 1 shows the results, separately for family leave requesters and control targets.

As can be seen in Table 1, male family leave requesters were less recommended for rewards to the extent they were judged as poor workers and weak; agency showed a marginally positive relationship. Further, they suffered penalties to the extent they were viewed as weak. Thus, being effeminized as weak was a significant factor for both rewards and penalties, whereas poor worker stigma showed incremental validity only for rewards. Unexpectedly, dominance was positively related to leave requesters' penalties. This was also true using bivariate correlations for male leave requesters, $r(203) = .28, p < .001$, but not for control targets, $r(164) = .04, ns$. We speculate that because dominance is prohibited for women, and is used to justify backlash against them (Rudman et al., 2011), male leave requesters were responded to more like

women than men as a result of being feminized. However, future research is necessary to support this hypothesis.

By comparison, Table 1 shows that control targets' rewards were negatively influenced by poor worker judgments and positively influenced by agency and communality. Further, control targets were penalized to the extent they were judged as poor workers and weak. Thus, poor worker beliefs were a significant factor for both rewards and penalties for control targets, whereas being viewed as weak showed incremental validity only for penalties.

The findings for male leave requesters suggest that both poor worker stigma and femininity stigma play a role in determining their rewards, but that femininity stigma plays a more important role when penalties are the outcome. Of interest, leave requesters' high scores on communality (relative to controls) did not benefit them when rewards were recommended, or protect them from penalties. Thus, being a "nice guy" was of little aid to gender norm violators (see also Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

Path Models for Male Leave Requesters

The present research was designed to examine potential interplay between poor worker stigma and femininity stigma for men who request a family leave. First, we theorized that poor worker stigma might lead to perceptions of weakness, which in turn might account for penalties. To test this possibility, we conducted a path analysis solely for leave requesters ($N = 205$), using standardized variables. Figure 3 shows Model 1, in which weakness was specified to mediate the effect of poor worker stigma on penalties. Guided by Table 1, we also specified direct paths from poor worker stigma, agency, and weakness to rewards. The sole modification index suggested adding a negative path from weakness to agency. The resulting model was successful, as indicated by $\chi^2(3) = 4.53, p = .21$, and adequate fit statistics (GFI = .99, IFI = .99, RMSEA =

.04, with no modification indexes > 4.00). Thus, Model 1 supports concluding that the effect of the poor worker stigma on penalties was fully mediated by femininity stigma, whereas poor worker stigma and both agency and weakness judgments informed reward decisions. A test of the hypothesis that Model 1 similarly fit the data for both leave requesters and control targets was rejected, $\chi^2(12) = 74.64, p < .001$.

Figure 4 shows an alternative Model 2 for family leave requesters, which specifies that the effects of weakness and agency ratings will be mediated by poor worker stigma. This model was unsuccessful, as indicated by $\chi^2(5) = 53.85, p < .001$ and weak fit statistics (GFI = .91, IFI = .81, RMSEA = .22). Three large modification indexes suggested adding paths from weakness to both penalties and rewards, and from agency to rewards. These results rule out poor worker stigma as a mediator of the effects of femininity stigma on men's outcomes. Therefore, we conclude that Model 1 is superior to Model 2 in both parsimony and fit.

In summary, femininity stigma is just as important as poor worker stigma when predicting discriminating against male employees who ask for family leave. Further, although both types of stigma were significant predictors of rewards, Model 1 suggested that femininity stigma fully accounted for the effect of poor worker stigma on penalties. In other words, male leave takers may be penalized for being poor workers precisely because they are perceived to be relatively high in the feminine traits proscribed for men (weak, insecure, emotional, and naïve).

Discussion

Replicating past research, men who requested a family leave were viewed as poor workers (Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Wayne & Codeiro, 2003) and ineligible for rewards (Allen & Russell, 1999). Uniquely, we also found that male leave requesters suffered femininity stigma, such that perceivers judged them as weaker and more communal, but also as less agentic and

dominant, compared with control targets. Indeed, male leave requesters were viewed as relatively more weak than dominant, and more communal than agentic. By contrast, these perceptions were reversed for control targets. However, communality did not protect male leave requesters from judgments of low rewards and high penalties. Instead, being effeminized as weak was a significant factor in predicting both rewards and penalties, and fully mediated the effect of poor worker stigma on penalizing men who request a family leave. The findings suggest that because weakness is prohibited for men (Prentice & Carranza, 2001; Rudman et al., 2011), men are penalized for this transgression, and those who request a family leave are particularly at risk for this consequence. In tandem with prior research, it appears that when men “act like women” they are charged with violating proscriptions against weakness and prescriptions for agency – gender rules that play a key role in employment discrimination (Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010).

Overall, our results were not moderated by either target race or participant gender, with two exceptions: Black male workers were penalized more so than Whites, and female participants judged male targets as poorer workers than did male participants, regardless of the leave manipulation. We suspect these findings reflect racial and gender ingroup bias, respectively. Unexpectedly, women were not likely to protect male leave requesters from poor worker stigma, suggesting the extent to which women have been co-opted by ideal worker ideologies (Blair-Loy, 2003). The fact that women were just as likely as men to feminize male leave requesters is less surprising, given past research (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman, Mescher, & Moss-Racusin, 2011), but troublesome given its implications for gender equality. Because women are more likely than men to utilize FMLA (Hill et al., 2003), we had hoped that their reactions to male counterparts would be more positive than men’s.

Even the most optimistic gender scholars admit that women's progress will depend on both genders sharing family responsibilities equally (Jackson, 1998, 2006). To do so, men must be able to request family leaves and flexible working hours without fear of repercussions. The present research suggests that men seeking work-life balance by taking advantage of FMLA are at risk for poor worker stigma, femininity stigma, and organizational penalties. In other research presented in this issue, male workers who requested flexible hours to care for a newborn child were subjected to similar penalties (Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqi, 2012).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations to the present research, including our use of young adult participants. Although organizational researchers have found that actual workers with work-family conflicts receive poor performance ratings (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999), future research should investigate whether femininity stigma explains backlash toward male leave takers in real-world contexts.

Other than target race and participant gender, we did not examine potential moderators of reactions to men who request a family leave. For example, people who eschew gender rules or who endorse the need for work-life balance might be more accepting of family leave requesters. In addition, evaluators who believe that manhood is precarious (e.g., easily lost if a man displays feminine tendencies) might show especially negative reactions toward men who request a family leave.

Because of its direct influence on both penalties and rewards, future research should seek ways to countermand femininity stigma. For example, men who present their request for a family leave as a means of protecting their family members from harm might avoid the impression that they are weak, emotional "caregivers." Given that flexibility stigma is generally observed for

targets who care for family members, it is likely that flexibility stigma overlaps with caregiver bias (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002). Finding ways to counteract poor worker stigma is also critical, but perhaps less tractable given pervasive beliefs that the best employees are those who devote nearly all of their time to the job (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Williams, 2000).

Perhaps an employee who requests a leave with a promise to compensate when they return (e.g., by working overtime and on weekends) would escape stigmatization. However, this would not be the best solution given that the ultimate goal is to afford both genders a lifestyle that accommodates their need for work-life balance (Williams, 2010).

Although it is important for employers to provide flex-time policies, doing so is not likely to be the sole solution, as noted by Belkin (2010). Although California provides paid leave for new parents, only 26% of the workers who take advantage of the policy are men. In France, parents are allowed to take a leave or work reduced hours until their child is three years of age, but only 3% of those who do so are men. By contrast, 80% of Swedish fathers now take at least some time off for bonding with their children, whereas only 4% did so in the past. What made the difference? Sweden instituted a “fathers-only” paid leave policy that men have to take advantage of before their child turns 8, or else they lose their days off. According to Belkin, “Parental leave was transformed from a way to escape the world of work into a way to maximize the benefits available to families; from an emotional decision to a financial one; from something mothers do to something every parent does” (p. 14). In other words, by transforming family leave into a gender-neutral policy and removing the stigma of femininity, Sweden altered men’s behavior to the benefit of family life.

Conclusion

The present research supported our prediction that men who ask for family leave are feminized for “acting like a woman” and economically punished as a result. They are also stigmatized as poor workers who are low on agentic competencies, which had direct effects on their eligibility for rewards. The implications of our findings for gender equality and men’s ability to achieve work-life balance are dour, but they provide a key to a significant barrier that might be overcome. Whether by altering public policies so that requesting family leave is gender-neutralized, or framing requests for family leave in ways that masculinize the behavior, it may be possible for men to overcome the femininity stigma as a barrier to work-life balance.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139-158.
- Allen, T. D., & Russell, J. E. A. (1999). Parental leave of absence: some not so family-friendly implications. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 29(1), 166-191.
- Berdahl, J. L. (2007). Harassment based on sex: Protecting social status in the context of gender hierarchy. *Academy of Management Review*, 32, 641-658.
- Belkin, L. (2010, October 24). Calling Mr. Mom? Why women won't have it all until men do, too. *The New York Times Magazine*, pp. 13-14.
- Blair-Loy, M. (2004). Work devotion and work time. *Fighting for Time: Shifting Boundaries of Work and Social Life* (Russell Sage Foundation), 232-316.
- Butler, A. B., & Skattebo, A. (2004). What is acceptable for women may not be for men: The effect of family conflicts with work on job performance ratings. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 77, 553-564.
- Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*. 112(5), 1297-1339.
- Devine, P. G., & Baker, S. M. (1991). Measurement of racial stereotype subtyping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17, 44-50.
- Eagle, B. W., Miles, E. W., Icenogle, M. L. (1997). Interrole conflicts and the permeability of work and family domains: Are there gender differences? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 50, 168-184.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Eberhardt, J. L., Goff, P. A., Purdie, V. J., & Davies, P. G. (2004). Seeing black: Race, representation, and visual perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*, 876-893.
- England, P., Budig, M., & Folbre, N. (2002). Wages of virtue: The relative pay of care work. *Social Problems, 49*, 455-473.
- Richardson, E., Phillips, K. W., Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2011). *Double jeopardy or greater latitude: Do Black women escape backlash for dominance displays?* Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Fried, L. P., Francomano, C. A., MacDonald, S. M., Wagner, E. M., Stokes, E. J., Carbone, K. M., Bias, W. B., Newman, M. M., & Stobo, J. D. (1996). Career development for women in academic medicine: Multiple interventions in a department of medicine. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 276*, 898-905.
- Goff, P. A., Eberhardt, J. L., Williams, M., & Jackson, M. C. (2008). Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 292-306.
- Grover, S. L., & Crooker, K. J. (1995). Who appreciates family-responsive human resource policies: The impact of family-friendly policies on the organizational attachment of parents and non-parents. *Personnel Psychology, 48*, 271-288.
- Heilman, M. E., & Wallen, A. S. (2010). Wimpy and underserving of respect: Penalties for men's gender-inconsistent success. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46*, 664-667.
- Hill, E. J., Hawkins, A. J., Martinson, V., & Ferris, M. (2003). Studying "working fathers": Comparing fathers' and mothers' work-family conflict, fit, and adaptive strategies in a global high-tech company. *Fathering, 1*, 239-261.

- Jackson, R. M. (1998). *Destined for equality: The inevitable rise of women's status*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jackson, R. M. (2006). Opposing forces: How, why, and when will gender equity disappear. In F. D. Blau, M. B. Brinton, & D. B. Grusky (Eds.), *The declining significance of gender?* (pp. 215–243). New York: Russell Sage.
- Judiesch, M. K., & Lyness, K. S. (1999). Left behind? The impact of leaves of absence on managers' career success. *Academy of Management Journal*, 42(6), 641-651.
- Kinicki, A. J., Carson, K. P., & Bohlander, G. W. (1992). Relationship between an organization's actual human resource efforts and employee attitudes. *Group and Organization Management*, 17, 135-152.
- Koys, D. J. (1991). Fairness, legal compliance, and organizational commitment. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 4, 283-291.
- Lattman, P. (2007, August 28). You say you want a big-law revolution. *Wall Street Journal Online*, <http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2007/04/03/you-say-you-want-a-big-law-revolution>.
- Livingston, R. W., & Pearce, N. (2009). The teddy-bear effect: Does having a baby face benefit Black chief executive officers? *Psychological Science*, 20(10), 1229-1236.
- Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Rudman, L. A. (2010). When men break the gender rules: Status incongruity and backlash toward modest men. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 11, 140-151.
- Pleck, J. H. (1993). Are "family supportive" employer policies relevant to men? In J. C. Hood (Ed.), *Men, work, and family* (pp. 217-237). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- 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.

- Press, E. (2007, July 29). Family-leave values. *The New York Times Magazine*, pp. 37-41.
- Rudman, L. A., & Fairchild, K. (2004.) Reactions to counterstereotypic behavior: the role of backlash in cultural stereotype maintenance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 157-176.
- Rudman, L. A., Mescher, K., & Moss-Racusin, C. A. (2011). *Reactions to male feminists: Stigma-by-association?* Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, S. (2011). *Status incongruity and backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice toward female leaders.* Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Rudman, L. A., & Phelan, J. E. (2008). Backlash effects for disconfirming gender stereotypes in organizations. In A. P. Brief & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 28, (pp. 61-79). New York, Elsevier.
- Vandello, J. A., Bosson, J. K., & Cohen, D. (2008). Precarious manhood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(6), 1325-1339.
- Vandello, J. A., Hettinger, V. E., Bosson, J. K., & Siddiqi, J. (2012). When equal isn't really equal: The masculine dilemma of seeking work flexibility. *Journal of Social Issues*, X, xx-xx.
- Wayne, J. H., & Cordeiro, B. L. (2003). Who is a good organizational citizen? Social perception of male and female employees who use family leave. *Sex Roles*, 49(5/6), 233-246.
- Williams, J. C. (2000). *Unbending gender: Why family and work conflict and what to do about it.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Laurie A. Rudman (PhD in Psychology from the University of Minnesota) is a Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Her research interests focus on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, especially with respect to how they deter gender and racial equality. The author of over 70 peer-reviewed publications and four books, including *The social psychology of gender: How power and intimacy shape gender relations* (co-authored with Peter Glick), Dr. Rudman is an honorary fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Association for Psychological Science, and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology. Her honors and awards include a National Research Service Award (National Institutes of Health), and winner (in 1994 and 2009) of the Gordon Allport Prize for the best paper on intergroup relations, given annually by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. She has served as an expert witness in several sex discrimination cases. She currently serves as a Senior Associate Editor for *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Kris Mescher is a PhD student at Rutgers University – New Brunswick, where she studies social psychology under her advisor, Dr. Laurie Rudman. She received her B.A. in psychology from the University of Missouri – Columbia in 2009, and her MS in psychology from Rutgers in 2012. Her research is focused on issues of gender, prejudice, and sexuality.

Table 1

Regression Analyses for Rewards and Penalties by Family Leave Manipulation

Measure	<u>Leave Requesters</u>				<u>Control Targets</u>			
	β	t	p	R^2	β	t	p	R^2
<u>Rewards</u>								
Target Race	-.03	.59	.55		.10	1.69	.09	
Participant Gender	-.02	.06	.95		.02	.35	.73	
Poor Worker Index	-.58	8.99	< .001		-.23	2.64	.01	
Agency	.16	1.89	.06		.31	2.83	.01	
Weakness	-.15	2.50	.01		-.03	.42	.67	
Communality	-.10	1.30	.20		.19	2.11	.04	
Dominance	.07	1.07	.28	.69	.08	1.17	.24	.68
<u>Penalties</u>								
Target Race	.05	.72	.47		.02	.31	.76	
Participant Gender	.04	.55	.58		.04	.66	.51	
Poor Worker Index	.12	1.53	.13		.45	4.68	< .001	
Agency	-.06	-.59	.56		.02	.17	.86	
Weakness	.37	5.24	< .001		.32	4.25	< .001	
Communality	.09	.98	.33		.05	.46	.64	
Dominance	.18	2.21	.03	.50	.01	.02	.98	.61

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown ($n = 105$ in the leave request condition, $n = 166$ in the control condition). Target race was coded 0 = White, 1 = Black. Participant gender was coded 0 = men, 1 = women.

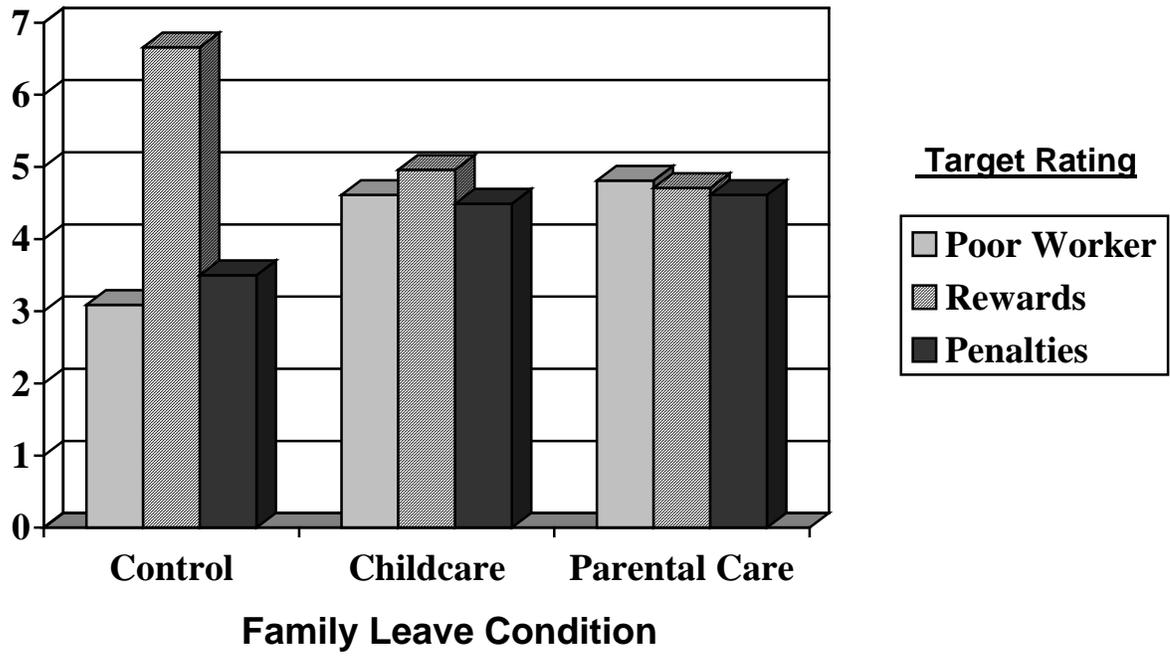
Figure Captions

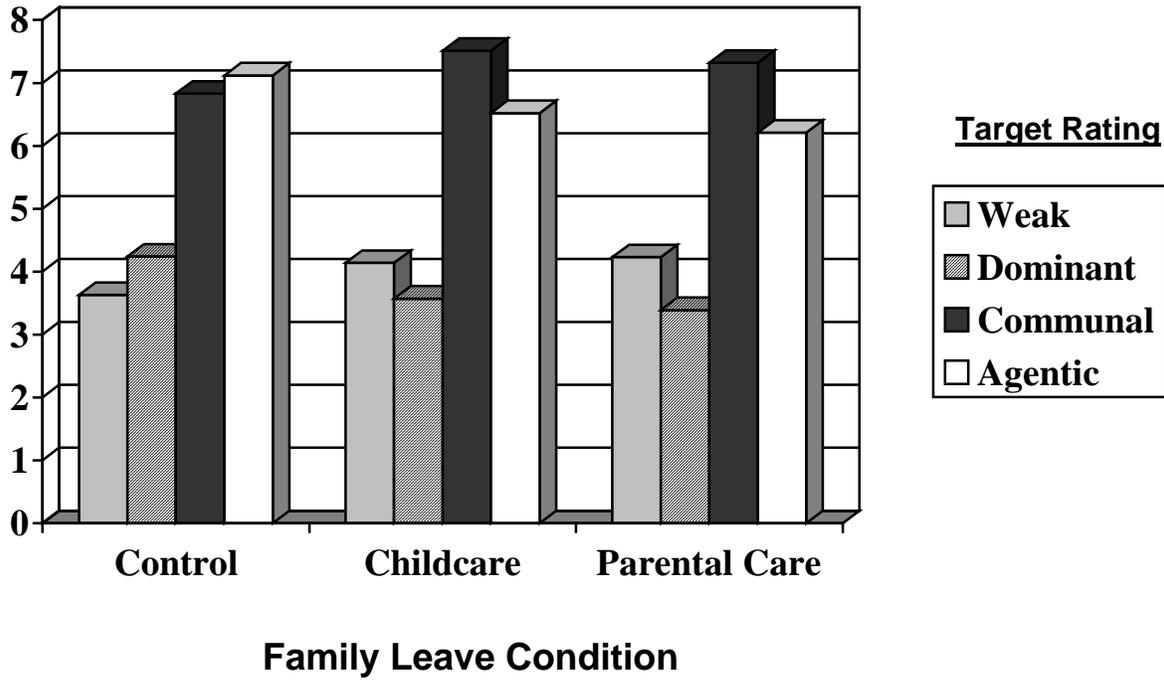
Figure 1. The effect of the presence or absence of requesting a family leave on male employees' poor worker ratings, eligibility for rewards, and recommendations for penalties.

Figure 2. The effect of the presence or absence of requesting a family leave on judging male employees' weakness, dominance, communality, and agency.

Figure 3. Path analysis for men who requested a family leave stipulating that poor worker stigma had an indirect effect on penalties (mediated by weakness perceptions) but direct effects on rewards (Model 1). The model was successful, as indicated by $\chi^2 (3) = 4.53, p = .21$ and adequate fit statistics (GFI = .99, IFI = .99, RMSEA = .04).

Figure 4. Path analysis for men who requested a family leave stipulating that femininity stigma had an indirect effect on penalties (mediated by poor worker stigma perceptions) and rewards (Model 2). This model was unsuccessful, as indicated by $\chi^2 (5) = 53.85, p < .001$ and poor fit statistics (GFI = .91, IFI = .81, RMSEA = .22).





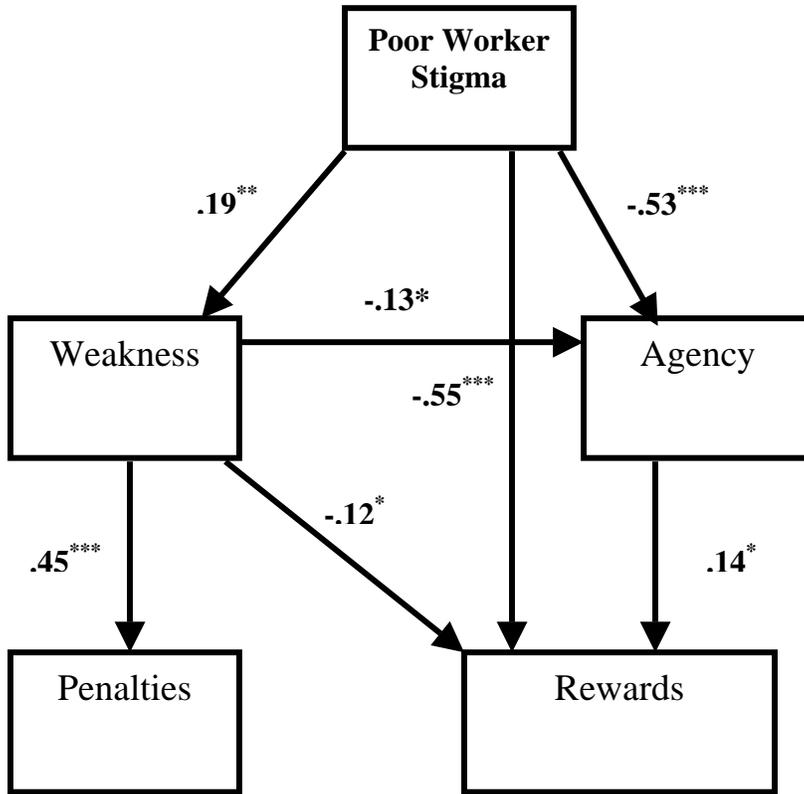


Figure 4

