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**WHEN DO WORK-FAMILY POLICIES WORK FOR MEN AND WOMEN?
UNPACKING THE EFFECTS OF FORMAL POLICIES VERSUS INFORMAL PRACTICES***

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ABSTRACT

In response to concerns about the disjuncture between the demands of work and family life, some employers have implemented supportive work-family policies, such as parental leave and flexible scheduling options. Yet, uptake of these policies varies across workplaces and by the gender of the worker. In this paper, we examine the extent to which norms and practices within organizations may assist in explaining such variability. Drawing on original survey-experimental data, we examine how likely men and women would be to use work-family policies at their workplace while exogenously manipulating formal aspects of the policy as well as the informal practices surrounding such policies in a given work organization. Our findings provide new evidence about the formal and informal aspects of policies and organizations that drive the use of these policies for men and women, as well as the material and normative mechanisms underlying gender differences in work-family policy use. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for work-family conflict and gender inequality.

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It is now well-established that, across key social and economic measures, progress toward gender equality has been slow, and at best, incremental since the late 1990's. Little has changed in terms of women's labor force participation, occupational integration by gender, or the gender wage gap (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012, Cha and Weeden 2014; England 2010). And although men now do more unpaid work at home than in previous years, women still tend to take on the majority of household work and caregiving, regardless of their employment or occupational status (Bianchi 2011).

A leading explanation for these trends is that work and family institutions in the United States are based on outdated conceptions of workers and families. Research suggests that now, perhaps more than ever, workplace norms often dictate that employees conform to "ideal worker" expectations, where a worker is nearly constantly available to the employer and maintains few responsibilities outside of work (Correll et al. 2014). Yet, there has also been a cultural trend toward time-intensive parenting practices and women still face cultural expectations that they should prioritize family (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1998; Milkie et al. 2010). These expectations limit men's and women's ability to equally share responsibilities for earning and caregiving with their spouse or partner, even if that is what they desire (Cha 2010; Gerson 2010, Pedulla and Thebaud 2015; Stone 2007).

In response to these concerns, some states and employers implement supportive work-family policies, such as paid family leave and flexible work arrangements. But there is evidence that, even when available, both men's and women's policy uptake is highly variable across workplace contexts and across policy types and designs (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). Indeed, concerns about how one will be perceived by one's co-workers and managers in terms of

competence and commitment – key dimensions that undergird the “ideal worker” norm (Correll et al. 2007) – may drive workers’ use (or lack thereof) of work-family policies. Additionally, there is gender variation in the use of some work-family policies. For instance, women are much more likely than men to utilize parental leave and part-time employment options, but men and women are similarly likely to use flexibility policies that maintain full-time employment status, such as schedule control (Gornick and Meyers 2009; Moen et al. 2016; Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002).

Our study employs an original survey experiment to address this set of issues in two ways. First, we identify the mechanisms currently driving men’s and women’s use of two types of work-family policies: parental leave and flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Specifically, we aim to tease apart the relative importance of financial concerns, employer and co-worker expectations, and gender norms, and to identify their relevance as explanations for possible gender differences in the intent to use these policies. Second, we experimentally manipulate 1) formal aspects of policy design and 2) the informal organizational practices surrounding those policies, with the goal of identifying their causal effect on men’s and women’s policy use intentions. By doing so, we uncover key dimensions of work-family policy that are likely to both increase and equalize men’s and women’s policy use intentions.

WORK-FAMILY POLICY USE AND GENDER

Supportive work-family policies, such as paid family leave, subsidized childcare, and flexible work arrangements, are widely cited as factors that can alleviate work-family conflict and promote gender equality in the workplace and at home (Gerson 2010; Gornick and Meyers 2009). For instance, they have been linked to lower levels of work-family stress, higher levels of

job satisfaction, and increased overall well-being for both men and women (Lyness et al. 2012; Moen et al. 2016). They also promote higher employment rates for women (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011) and greater investments in housework and childcare for men (Patanik 2015; Schober 2014; Hook 2006; Estes et al. 2007), though notably, the effects of policies on men's domestic work are relatively weaker than are their effects on women's employment (Noonan 2013). Arguably, these policies help achieve such outcomes because they tend to provide workers with more time, resources, and flexibility, resources that are typically needed to simultaneously meet the often intense and unpredictable demands of work and parenting.

In the United States, federal support for these policies is relatively weak. For instance, the United States is the only high-income country that does not mandate paid maternity leave (Gault et al. 2014). Although the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows for 12-weeks of *unpaid* job protected leave after the birth or adoption of a child, approximately 49.3 million (44.1%) of private sector workers were *not* eligible for FMLA leave in 2012 (Jorgensen and Appelbaum 2014). And, many eligible workers do not take advantage of it leave because they cannot afford it, they are unaware of the policy, their employers are out of compliance with FMLA law, or they fear negative consequences from their employer (Matos and Galinsky 2012; Gerstel and McGongagle 1999). Nevertheless, a minority of US workers do have access to some form of paid leave either through their state or their employer: California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island now offer paid family leave programs for mothers and fathers, and a 2012 report showed that 58% of employers offer at least some pay during maternity leave (Matos and Galinsky 2012). However, very few offer mothers full pay (9%) and very few offer any sort of pay for paternity leave (14%).

In this study, we focus on two types of work-family policies: parental leave and flexible work arrangements. These policies are increasingly discussed in the public sphere, with high profile companies such as Facebook and Netflix now offering generous paid parental leave, for instance. Organizations are now even being publically rated and ranked according to the quality of their work-family policies, suggesting their importance to workers (for example, see Glassdoor.com and Fairygodboss.com). Despite these trends, however, take-up rates still vary considerably. And, importantly for the purposes of this study, men are less likely than women to use many work-family policy options, even when they are available.

Material Underpinnings

Existing scholarship has identified both material and normative reasons for patterns of policy use. For example, if parental leave is unpaid or very poorly paid, many workers are unable to take it even if they would like to do so (Gerstel and McGonagle 1999). Similarly, some workers are unable to afford an even temporary reduction in their wages or salary—whether that reduction were due to an unpaid leave or to a move from full-time to part-time work. There is also recent experimental evidence that very few workers are willing to take a pay cut in order to have access to a flexible work arrangement (Mas and Pallais 2016). Patterns of gender inequality within families—with men often earning the majority of the family income—also suggest that these concerns over finances are likely to be even more salient for men than for women (Coltrane et al. 2013). And indeed, studies find that men are generally more responsive to financial incentives than women. For instance, “use it or lose it” style paternity leaves—which effectively create a financial penalty for men who do not take advantage of the leave—have been found to be the most successful at increasing men’s use of leave (Ekberg, Eriksson and Friebel 2013;

Patanik 2015). Men are also less likely than women to reduce their normal work hours after the birth of a child, which suggests that they are less willing to accept a reduction in earnings (Cha 2010).

Normative Underpinnings: The Gendered Ideal Worker

A growing body of research indicates that it is not just material considerations that matter when individuals decide whether or not to utilize a work-family policy when it is available to them. Concerns over retaliation for violating social norms and expectations also play a key role in determining who uses work-family policies and the extent to which they utilized them. One set of such norms and expectations are those centered on what scholars describe as “the ideal worker”—the idea that workers should be constantly available and able to meet demands (Acker 1990; Correll et al. 2014). These expectations are often imposed by a constellation of organizational practices and interactions with managers, coworkers, customers and/or clients. The salience of this norm has strengthened in recent years, as evidenced by the rise in work hours (especially among professionals) and the rising unpredictability of work hours (especially among non-professionals). In work environments where this norm is particularly strong, taking a leave or merely arranging one’s schedule to prioritize other obligations over work, may signal a lack of commitment, which may lead to earnings or promotion penalties (Coltrane et al. 2013; Munsch, Ridgeway and Williams 2014).

Scholars have also long recognized that the notion of an ideal worker is implicitly gendered (Acker 1990). Men are much less likely than women to have significant family obligations, in large part because they are more likely to have a spouse that is willing to take on those responsibilities (Cha 2010; Hochschild 1989). And cultural beliefs about the family

reinforce this situation: women still face strong prescriptive expectations that they ought to prioritize family and caregiving (Blair-Loy 2003), and maintaining primary responsibility for earning rather caregiving remains a key cultural expectation for many men (Potuchek 1997; Tichenor 2005). These gendered expectations have been shown to produce significant disadvantages for mothers in the workplace (Correll, Benard and Paik 2007). However, they simultaneously make it more socially acceptable for women than for men to deviate from the ideal worker norm: people *expect* that women, not men, will need to do so. This expectation reinforces the view that supportive work-family policies are meant to address “women’s problem” of managing work and care, rather than something that addresses a broader problem applicable to all workers (Duvander 2014; Padavic, Ely and Reid 2013).

There is a growing body of evidence to support the idea that deviating from the ideal worker norm is costlier for men than for women. A history of part-time work has been shown to produce damaging effects on men’s, but not women’s, employment prospects (Pedulla 2016). Men have also been found to face more negative social stigma when they take significant amounts of leave time or utilize flexible work arrangements (Berdahl and Moon 2013; Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al. 2013). Importantly, such stigma has been tied directly to their violation of a mainstream vision of masculinity. For men, taking family leave or flex time may not merely raise concerns about violating the ideal worker norm, but it may also raise concerns about violating masculinity norms (Thebaud and Pedulla 2016). Thus, even if a man does not personally believe that he needs to prioritize earning over caregiving, merely believing that most others believe he should (because he is a man) may be enough to dissuade him from using work family policies. And, there is evidence to support this idea: men typically increase, rather than

decrease, their work hours and receive a wage premium after the birth of a child (Killewald 2013) – arguably bolstering their masculine image as an earner rather than a caregiver.

Although prior research has clearly established the material and normative underpinnings of work-family policy use, scholars have yet to estimate or compare the relevance of such factors to one another within the same study. Doing so is an important task if a goal is to understand the key source(s) of inequality in policy use, and to identify the extent to which these factors may be more or less relevant for certain types of policies (e.g., leave policies versus flexible work policies). Furthermore, no prior studies have tested the extent to which certain policy designs or workplace practices may increase or decrease the salience of these concerns for men and women, thereby affecting policy usage and gender differences therein. This is an issue to which we now turn.

POLICY DESIGN AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

A key interest for scholars of work and gender has been to identify features of a “good” policy—one which will effectively enable workers to reconcile the often competing demands of work and family without exacerbating gender inequalities. One central feature is financial remuneration: policies that do not create financial hardship, or ideally, do not affect earnings at all, are generally more successful than those that do not (Gornick and Meyers 2009). However, even in cases where policies are materially generous, such as California, take-up often remains low because workers both witness and experience retaliation at work when they take family leave (Albiston and O’Connor 2016). This suggests that the material and normative elements of work-family policies can be understood as paralleling the theoretical distinction between “formal policies” versus “informal practices” in organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977). If informal

practices (e.g., organizational norms) are hostile toward utilizing work-family policies, then the degree of material support that the formal policies offer may be nearly irrelevant.

And, there is good reason to believe that informal workplace practices play a critical role. Although they are formally granted by an organization or a state, work-family policies are typically implemented at the discretion of a manager, and may thus be used as a perk for well-performing employees (Kelly and Kalev 2006). Further, the ability to build a good reputation within the organization—by having been assigned a powerful supervisor upon entry into the organization, for instance—helps buffer the negative career consequences often associated with using a flexible work program (Briscoe and Kellogg 2011). Yet, the disadvantages associated with using policies may not merely come from managers. For instance, if client demands are exceptionally high, taking advantage of a flexible scheduling policy may actually increase burdens on workers (Blair-Loy 2009).

Together, these findings suggest that the organizational context in which a policy is being utilized matters greatly. Our experiment unpacks the causal implications of this factor by measuring the extent to which the organizational context within which a policy is implemented matters, and how the consequences may vary when policies offer differing levels of material support. Specifically, we identify contexts in which the salience of ideal worker and gendered norms and expectations can be expected to be mitigated, and thus less likely to deter men and women from using these policies.

DATA & METHODS

Methodological challenges have made it difficult for existing research to examine the mechanisms driving gender differences in work-family policy use. Measures of the key

mechanisms of interest – concerns about financial security and violations of ideal worker and gender norms – are often not available in the datasets that track employees’ use of parental leave and flexibility policies. Additionally, identifying the direct effects of formal versus informal aspects of work-family policies on policy use has proved challenging. Organizational norms and practices are complex and are often endogenous to a host of other forces – such as the demographic make-up of management – making it difficult to causally link the climate within an organization to the behaviors of its workers. We are not aware of any studies to date that have been able to causally examine how formal aspects of policy and informal organizational practices interact in the production of workers’ intentions to use these policies. We address these methodological and theoretical issues with data from an original population-based survey experiment that enables us to measure the key mechanisms of interest that may drive differential use of work-family policies by gender, and to exogenously manipulate formal aspects of a policy as well as key aspects of the organizational context.

Data collection for the survey experiment was funded by from Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences and fielded by the survey company GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks). Respondents were part of GfK’s KnowledgePanel, a population-based, representative panel of respondents recruited through address-based sampling methods.¹ Given that our research questions focus on work-family issues, we drew a sample of individuals for whom these issues and the policies that address them would be most relevant: 18 to 44 years-olds who are in the labor force (working as a paid employee, temporarily laid off from work, or not working but looking for work). GfK fielded the survey to 4,444 panel members. 2,252 respondents completed the survey and 2,036 of those individuals were qualified (e.g., between

¹ Additional information about KnowledgePanel sampling, data collection procedures, and weighting is available at: <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html> (last accessed December 15, 2016).

18 and 44 years old and in the labor force).² Thus, the completion rate for the survey is 50.8%. GfK produced study-specific weights using benchmark distributions based on gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, household income, home ownership, metropolitan area, and having home internet access. These weights are used throughout our analyses.

Experimental Design

All respondents in the survey experiment were asked how likely they would be to use two different work-family policies offered by their employer: a 12-week parental leave and a flexible work arrangement (FWA).³ However, respondents were randomly assigned to experimental conditions that varied aspects of the policy along two dimensions: the formal aspects of the policy and the informal organizational context. For the parental leave policy, there were three formal policy conditions and five informal context conditions, resulting in a 3X5 experimental design with 15 cells. For the FWA policy, there were two formal policy conditions and five informal context conditions, resulting in a 2X5 experimental design with 10 cells.

For the parental leave policy, three manipulations altered formal policy information regarding the wage replacement rate for the 12-week leave. Respondents were told that the parental leave policy would either be: 1) unpaid, 2) that they would receive 50% of their usual pay during the leave period, or 3) that they would receive 100% of their usual pay during the leave period. For the flexibility policies, two manipulations that altered formal information about the number of compensated work hours. Respondents were presented with one of two flexibility policies: 1) *job sharing*, which would allow workers to reduce their hours by up to 50% and be compensated only for the proportion of their full-time hours that they worked, or 2) *schedule*

² The qualification rate (the number of qualified cases divided by the number of completed cases) was 90.4%.

³ The order in which respondents saw the two policies was randomized. We do not detect ordering effects.

control, which would provide workers with some control over the work schedule and where there would be no decrease in their pay as long as they still worked the full number of hours they were supposed to work. The full text of the experimental prompts are available in Appendix A.

For both work-family policies, we varied the organizational context along two dimensions: 1) whether or not managers link policy use to adverse promotion prospects and 2) the overall rate of use of the policy within the organization (high use vs. low use). There was also a “control” condition, where nothing about the organizational culture was mentioned. Thus, there were five total experimental conditions along the organizational context dimension: 1) *promotion reassurance*: reassurance that using the policy would not affect promotions, 2) *promotion penalty*: signals that using the policy may decrease promotion chances, 3) *high uptake*: a high use rate among eligible workers (80% use), 4) *low uptake*: a low use rate among eligible workers (10% use), and 5) *control condition*: no mention of anything about the context of the organization. Given prior research on work-family policies, these manipulations are likely to tap into key contextual features that are implicated in men’s and women’s decisions about policy utilization.

Survey Items

After being presented with the information about a given work-family policy, all respondents were asked the same set of questions. First, respondents were asked how likely they would be to use the policy (on a scale from 1 to 100, where a rating of “1” indicated that they would be very unlikely to use the policy and a rating of “100” meant they would be very likely to use the policy). This item is our primary dependent variable, capturing how likely a respondent

would be to actually use the policy. While not capturing actual policy use, we believe that this measure captures the behavioral intentions of workers.

To capture the key mechanisms of interest – material concerns, “ideal worker” and gender norm violations – we asked respondents a series of questions. First, respondents were asked to what extent four items would be of concern to them if they used the policy (again, on a scale from 1 to 100): 1) Other people in my organization would see me as a less competent worker, 2) Other people in my organization would see me as a less committed worker, 3) My financial security may be at risk, and 4) My relationships with managers, co-workers, customers, or clients may be harmed. Next, respondents were asked how other people in their organization would see them in terms of masculinity and femininity. Respondents were presented with a scale from 1 to 100 where a score of “1” means that they would be perceived as “highly feminine” and a score of “100” means that they would be perceived as “highly masculine.”

From this set of items (which was asked separately for each policy), we generated three variables. To capture the “ideal worker” norm construct, we combined the items about competence, commitment, and relationship concerns into a single scale by taking the average of the three items (alpha = 0.910 for the parental leave policy; alpha = 0.906 for the flexibility policy). To measure material concerns, we utilize respondents’ response to the item about their financial security being at risk. Finally, we use the item about femininity and masculinity perceptions to measure gender norm violations. Here, we reverse coded women’s responses to the item about femininity and masculinity, which leads to a score of “100” on this item – for both men and women – representing strong gender conformity and a score of “1” on this item representing strong gender non-conformity.

RESULTS

Gender Disparities in the Use of Work-Family Policies

In this section, we examine gender differences in the use of work-family policies and probe the material and normative mechanisms that account for the gendered patterns of work-family policy use. Specifically, we examine gender differences in policy use and our key mechanisms – ideal worker norm violations, financial concerns, and gender norm violations – controlling for the experimental condition to which a respondent was randomly assigned. We begin with the parental leave policies and then move on to the flexible scheduling arrangement policies.

Parental Leave Policies. In Table 1, below, we present gender differences in four outcomes for the *parental leave policy*: intentions to use the policy, “ideal worker” norm violations, financial concerns, and gender non-conformity. Model 1 examines the gender difference in the likelihood of using the parental leave policy. As the coefficient for “female respondent” indicates, women report being approximately 10 points (on a 100-point scale) more likely to use parental leave than men. This difference is statistically significant.

Models 2 through 4 examine the potential mechanisms driving gender differences in use. First, Model 2 examines differences in how concerned men and women are that utilizing the parental leave policy will violate “ideal worker” norms. A higher score on the “ideal worker” norm scale means that a worker is more concerned that utilizing the policy will violate the norm. Thus, the results in Model 2 indicate that women are significantly *less* likely than men to be concerned about violating ideal worker norms if they use the parental leave policy. Model 3 turns to financial concerns. Here, we find no substantive or statistically significant differences in how concerned men and women are about their financial security, if they were to use the parental

leave policy. Finally, Model 4 examines the gender non-conformity outcome, where a higher score means that one believes others will see them as more gender non-conforming. Not surprisingly, the results indicate that women are much less likely than men to think that they will be perceived as gender non-conforming for utilizing the parental leave policy.

[Table 1 About Here]

Next, we examine whether the two statistically significant constructs in Table 1 – “ideal worker” norm violations and gender non-conformity – can assist in explaining the gender gap in the use of parental leave. If these constructs assist in mediating the gender gap in policy use, including them as predictors in the Model 1 of Table 1 should lead to the attenuation of the “female respondent” coefficient. In Table 2, below, we present these findings. Model 1 in Table 2 includes a control for the “ideal worker” norm in a model where parental leave policy use likelihood is regressed on the gender of the respondent. Here, the coefficient for “female respondent” drops from 10.132 in Model 1 of Table 1 to 8.900. In Model 2 of Table 2, we include the gender non-conformity variable in Model 1 of Table 1. Here, the coefficient for “female respondent” is reduced to 7.583 (from 10.132 in Model 1 of Table 1) and loses statistical significance. Finally, in Model 3 of Table 3, we include both the “ideal worker” norm violation construct and the gender non-conformity construct in the model. With both of these variables in the model, the coefficient for “female respondent” reduced from 10.132 to 6.869, indicating that these two constructs together explain approximately 32.2% of the gender gap in parental leave policy use.

Importantly, the analyses presented in Table 2 are not formal tests for mediation. To formally test for the role of “ideal worker” norm violations and gender non-conformity concerns in mediating the gender gap in parental leave policy use, we utilize the average causal mediation

analysis framework of Imai et al. (2010; 2011). Using this approach, we confirm that these two constructs mediate a meaningful and statistically significant portion of the gender gap in parental leave use. Specifically, the mediation analysis indicates that “ideal worker” norm violations mediate 12.2% of the gender gap in parental leave use, whereas the gender non-conformity construct mediates 25.3% of the gender gap. Together, these findings provide compelling evidence that “ideal worker” norm violations and gender non-conformity play an important role in driving gender difference in the use of parental leave policies.

[Table 2 About Here]

Flexible Work Arrangement. Next, we conduct the parallel set of analyses for the flexibility policies. In Table 3, below, we examine gender differences in four outcomes for the *flexible work arrangement*: intentions to use the policy, “ideal worker” norm violations, financial concerns, and gender non-conformity. Model 1 in Table 3 examines the gender gap in the likelihood of using a FWA policy. The coefficient for “female respondents” indicates that there is no difference between men and women in the likelihood of using a FWA policy. Model 2 examines whether men and women differ in the perception of how utilizing flexibility policies will lead to violations of the “ideal worker” norm. Here, we see a statistically significant negative effect for women, indicating that, similar to the finding for parental leave, women are less concerned than men that utilizing flexibility policies will violate “ideal worker” norms. Model 3 examines whether there are gender differences in financial concerns about utilizing flexibility policies. Similar to the parental leave policies, there are no gender differences in this outcome. Finally, in Model 4, we examine whether men and women are differentially concerned about gender non-conformity for utilizing flexibility policies. Again, similar to the parental leave

context, we see that women are less likely to be concerned about gender non-conformity than men for using a FWA policy.

[Table 3 About Here]

Moving the Needle: Effects of Formal Policy Designs and Informal Policy Norms

Our first set of results identifies the relative importance of material and normative concerns in explaining men’s versus women’s intentions to use work-family policies. Here, we address how the formal design of a policy, in combination with the informal norms surrounding that policy in a given organizational context, may affect such concerns, thereby shaping the likelihood that men and women will want to use these policies.

Parental Leave Policies. Figure 1, below, presents the results for how likely men and women are to use the *parental leave* policy in each of the policy conditions. Panel 1a of Figure 1 shows women’s likelihood of using the parental leave policy when promotion penalties are primed (in red), when they are reassured that promotions will not be affected by policy use (in green), and in the “no statement” (e.g., control) condition (in blue). Along the x-axis, we present the pay level: unpaid, 50% wage replacement, and 100% wage replacement. When the parental leave is unpaid, we see limited differences in women’s likelihood of using the policy – utilization scores of just under 70 out of 100. However, once there is a replacement rate, we see a divergence of use likelihood between the promotion penalty and the “no statement” condition as well as the promotion reassurance conditions. Among the women in the “no statement” and the promotion reassurance condition, their use likelihood increases from just under 70 in the unpaid condition to over 80 in the 100% wage replacement condition. However, for women in the

promotion penalty condition, there is no increase in their likelihood of using the parental leave policy as the wage replacement rate increases.

[Figure 1 About Here]

[Table 4 About Here]

Table 4 presents regression models examining how the material and contextual aspects of the parental leave policies interact, separately for women (Model 1) and men (Model 2). Two primary findings emerge from Model 1. First, the coefficient for “100% Replacement Rate” indicates that, in the “no statement” condition, women are much more likely to use the parental leave policy when there is a 100% replacement rate than when the leave is unpaid. Second, there is a large, negative, and statistically significant interaction between the “100% replacement rate” condition and the “promotion penalty” condition. This indicates that the positive effect of the 100% replacement rate on women’s utilization is significantly weaker in the promotion penalty condition than it is in the “no statement” condition. Substantively, this finding suggests that, for women, negative informal norms surrounding parental leave effectively cancel out the attraction that a higher rate of pay might otherwise offer.

Next, we examine the consequences of the high and low uptake primes on women’s parental leave use. These findings are presented in Panel 1b of Figure 1. The positive effects of 100% wage replacement are similar in both the high- and low-uptake conditions. The regression results presented in Model 1 in Table 4 confirm that there are no statistically significant effects of uptake levels on women’s parental leave use.

Panels 1c and 1d in Figure 1 present the findings for men’s likelihood of using the parental leave policies. Panel 1c focuses on the effect of promotion penalties (red) and promotion reassurance (green), compared to the “no statement” condition (blue). Here, we see that in the

unpaid leave condition, there are major differences between the “no statement” and promotion penalty conditions compared to the promotion assurance conditions. In the promotion assurance condition, the use likelihood score is nearly 70 out of 100, compared to just over 40 out of 100 in the promotion penalty condition and approximately 50 out of 100 in the “no statement” condition. While the parental use likelihood remains relatively consistent for men in the promotion reassurance condition across the various replacement rate levels, things look different for men in the promotion penalty and “no statement” conditions. Among men in the promotion penalty condition, their use likelihood is essentially unchanged with a 50% wage replacement rate. At the 50% replacement rate, the use likelihood in the “promotion penalty” condition is statistically significantly lower than in the “no statement” condition ($|t| = 3.84, p < .001$) as well as the “promotion reassurance” condition ($|t| = 2.68, p < .01$).⁴ However, men’s parental leave use likelihood jumps nearly 20 points in the 100% replacement rate condition. Men in the promotion penalty condition have a use score of nearly 70 out of 100 in the promotion penalty condition, compared to just over 40 in the unpaid leave condition. Indeed, at the 100% replacement rate, there is no statistically significant variation between the “no statement” condition, the “promotion reassurance” condition, and the “promotion penalty” condition for men. Additionally, the interaction terms between the replacement rates and the promotion primes are jointly significant in a model predicting parental leave use for men (Table 4, Model 2). This finding suggests that, for men, there is a point at which the formal aspects of a policy outweigh the normative aspects; these factors effectively act as substitutes for one another, rather than jointly making the policy more attractive.

⁴ These statistical tests (as well as the test for the uptake primes, below) were conducted by estimating separate linear regressions where parental leave use was regressed on the relevant condition of interest. Weights were included in the regression models.

Panel 1d of Figure 1 examines the high- versus low-uptake conditions for men's use of the parental leave policy. Here, we see very similar use likelihood for men in the high- and low-uptake conditions as well as the "no statement" condition when the leave is either unpaid or when the replacement rate is 100%. However, when the replacement rate is 50%, men are more likely to use the parental leave policy if there is high uptake compared to low uptake within their organization ($|t| = 2.74, p < .01$). Model 2 in Table 4 presents the full regression model that was estimated to generate the predicted values in Panels 1c and 1d of Figure 1.

The graphs and regression models above present the findings subset by gender. However, we are also interested in the ways that the formal and informal aspects of the policies may mitigate or exacerbate gender disparities in the use of parental leave policies. Indeed, our data indicate that material and contextual forces can close the gender gap in intentions to utilize the parental leave policy. Analyzing the data pooled for both men and women, our findings indicate that while there is a large gender gap in terms of use likelihood when the parental leave policy is unpaid *and* there is a promotion penalty, this gender gap disappears when one of two conditions is met: 1) there is a prime reassuring workers that taking the leave will *not* affect their promotion prospects, or 2) the wage replacement rate is 100%. However, when both of those conditions are met – promotion reassurance and 100% wage replacement – a gender gap re-emerges, largely because the joint presence of these factors exerts an especially strong positive effect on women's use likelihood (results available upon request).

Flexible Work Arrangements. Figure 2, below, presents the results for how likely men and women are to use a *flexible work arrangement* policy in each of the policy conditions. Panel 2a in Figure 2 presents the findings for women's likelihood of using the FWA policies in the promotion penalty versus the promotion reassurance condition. For the job sharing policy, there

are no differences in use likelihood between the promotion penalty and promotion reassurance condition. However, in the schedule control condition, significant differences emerge. Women are much less likely to use the schedule control policy if promotion penalties are primed. Panel 2b examines how low- and high-uptake rates of flexibility policies shape women's likelihood of use. Although women are much more likely to use the schedule control policy than the job sharing policy, the uptake rates do not affect women's use.

Model 1 in Table 5 presents regression models for how the material and contextual aspects of the flexible work arrangement policy affect use likelihood, separately for women (Model 1) and men (Model 2). In Model 1 of Table 5, the large, negative, and statistically significant interaction between the "promotion penalty" condition and being in the schedule control condition indicates that, for women, promotion penalties have stronger negative effects of use likelihood in the schedule control condition than the job sharing condition (compared to the "no statement" condition).

The findings for men's likelihood of using the flexibility policies are presented in Panels 2c and 2d. In the case of the promotion penalty and promotion reassurance conditions (Panel 2c), the findings for men closely parallel those for women. There is little variation in the job sharing condition. However, for the schedule control prime, there are large negative effects. Men are much less likely to use the schedule control policy if promotion penalties are primed, compared to promotion reassurance or the "no statement" condition. Panel 2d examines the effects of the high- versus low-uptake conditions. Here, we see a strong, positive effect of high uptake on men's likelihood of using the job sharing program, compared to both the "no statement" condition ($|t| = 2.89, p < .01$) as well as the "low uptake" condition ($|t| = 2.12, p < .05$). In the

case of schedule control, however, there is no statistically significant variation across the “no statement,” low uptake, and high uptake conditions.

[Figure 2 About Here]

[Table 5 About Here]

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Why is the uptake of certain work-family policies lower among men than women? And, how do design aspects of particular work-family policies and the contexts within which those policies are implemented impact men’s and women’s likelihood of use? The results presented above provide some novel insights about these questions.

First, we find that women are more likely than men, on average, to indicate that they would utilize parental leave policies. Our data provide evidence that this gender discrepancy can be explained, in part, by men’s greater likelihood of being concerned about ideal worker and gender norm violations. Interestingly, men and women are equally likely to express concerns about finances regarding the utilization of parental leave *and* the utilization of flexible work arrangements. This finding underscores the importance of financial security for both men and women in an age where women’s employment is ubiquitous and the “breadwinner wage” is a thing of the past. We also do not find any gender differences in the likelihood of utilizing flexible working arrangements, which further suggests that both men and women desire flexibility (though possibly for different reasons).

Next, we identify the extent to which the formal versus informal aspects of work-family policies may exert causal effects on men’s and women’s likelihood of using them. In terms of the intention to use parental leave, we find that, in general, greater levels of formal (financial) or

informal (supportive workplace norms) can mitigate gender gaps in policy use. For men, financial compensation and support from managers serve as substitutes for one another: in either case, men are more likely to utilize parental leave. Women's use intentions are high, regardless of the level of pay or organizational context, but can be improved even further in the event that both pay and support from managers is present. Importantly, though, financial compensation alone does not have a significant impact on women's use likelihood and concerns about a promotion penalty can actually erase the positive effects of increasing the replacement rate.

In contrast to our findings for parental leave, the findings regarding flexible work arrangements show that informal practices only matter when the policy design offers a high degree of monetary support. For instance, not only are respondents more likely to opt for a schedule control policy (high financial remuneration) over a job sharing policy (low financial remuneration), but supportive informal organizational norms only work to increase men's and women's willingness to use the schedule control policy.

While providing novel insights about gender and work-family policy use, our study is not without limitations. One important limitation of our analysis is that our utilization outcome measures are hypothetical. While finding ways to gain causal traction on the effects material and contextual variation in actual organizations is difficult, it is an important next step in understanding the processes examined above. Additionally, while our mechanisms explain some of the variation we detect, there is still significant variation that is unexplained by our proposed mechanisms. Future work could theorize and test additional potential mechanisms that explain variation in work-family policy use.

The implications of our findings span from theory to practice. On the practical front, if policymakers and employers hope to increase and equalize work-family policy use, our findings

suggest that improving the financial support that is incorporated into the formal aspects of policy design will be important, but incomplete. Managers matter. The ways that managers discuss work-family policy use and its implications have consequences for policy use intentions. On a theoretical level, our findings contribute to key debates about the promises and caveats associated with supportive work-family policies. Our findings suggest that, under the right conditions and with the right design, work-family policies can promote gender equality both in the workplace and at home.

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APPENDIX A: EXPERIMENTAL PROMPTS

PARENTAL LEAVE PROMPT

Please imagine that the company where you work offers parental leave to all employees following the birth or adoption of a child. The policy offers a worker 12 weeks of [**unpaid leave / leave where the individual receives 50% of his or her usual pay / leave where the individual receives 100% of his or her usual pay**]. The parental leave policy has been in place for more than a decade. [**Of the eligible workers within your organization, including managers, more than 80% have used this policy over the past five years / Of the eligible workers within your organization, including managers, less than 10% have used this policy over the past five years / However, your manager recently indicated that taking the full amount of leave may decrease your chances of being promoted / In addition, your manager recently indicated that taking the full amount of leave would not affect your chances of being promoted / No statement**].

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS PROMPT

Please imagine that the company where you work offers all employees [**a job sharing program, where they can reduce their hours by up to 50% without changing their job title. As part of this program, employees are only paid for the proportion of their full-time schedule that they work / access to a flexible scheduling policy that provides them with a degree of control over their work schedule. As part of this program, employees receive their full compensation as long as they do not decrease the total number of hours they work per week**]. This policy has been in place for the past decade. [**Of the eligible workers within your organization, including managers, more than 80% have used this policy over the past five years / Of the eligible workers within your organization, including managers, less than 10% have used this policy over the past five years / However, your manager recently indicated that using this policy may decrease your chances of being promoted / In addition, your manager recently indicated that using this policy would not affect your chances of being promoted / No statement**].

TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1. Linear Regression Models of Gender Differences in Parental Leave Policy Use, Perceptions of "Ideal Worker" Norm Violations, Financial Concerns, and Gender Non-Conformity

	Parental Leave Policy Use (1)	Ideal Worker Norm Violations (2)	Financial Concerns (3)	Gender Non- Conformity (4)
Female Respondent	10.132*** (1.670)	-5.293*** (1.262)	1.192 (1.690)	-18.633*** (1.134)
R-squared n	0.0974 1,964	0.0261 1,964	0.0881 1,964	0.1616 1,964

Statistical significance (two-tailed tests): $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Weights used in all models. Controls included for experimental manipulations of the replacement rate and the contextual axis of variation for the parental leave policy.

Table 2. Linear Regression Models of Examining Mechanisms for Gender Differences in Parental Leave Policy Use

	Parental Leave Policy Use		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female Respondent	8.900*** (1.654)	7.583*** (1.782)	6.869** (1.758)
"Ideal Worker" Norm	-0.233*** (0.033)	-- --	-0.224*** (0.033)
Gender Non-Conformity	-- --	-0.137** (0.041)	-0.112** (0.041)
R-squared	0.1285	0.1053	0.1338
n	1,964	1,964	1,964

Statistical significance (two-tailed tests): $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Weights used in all models. Controls included for experimental manipulations of the replacement rate and contextual features for the parental leave policy.

Table 3. Linear Regression Models of Gender Differences in Flexibility Policy Use, Perceptions of "Ideal Worker" Norm Violations, Financial Concerns, and Gender Non-Conformity

	Flexibility Policy Use	Ideal Worker Norm Violations	Financial Concerns	Gender Non- Conformity
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female Respondent	2.600 (1.505)	-2.947* (1.361)	2.407 (1.628)	-5.470** (1.054)
R-squared	0.3029	0.0708	0.2099	0.0230
n	1,968	1,968	1,968	1,968

Statistical significance (two-tailed tests): $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Weights used in all models. Controls included for experimental manipulations of the two flexibility policies (job sharing and flexible scheduling) as well as the contextual manipulations.

Table 4. Linear Regression of the Effect of Formal and Informal Policy Conditions on Parental Leave Use, by Gender

	Parental Leave Use	
	Women (1)	Men (2)
Formal Policy Design		
Unpaid (omitted)		
50% Replacement	6.597 (8.750)	17.647** (5.644)
100% Replacement	17.628** (5.961)	27.895*** (5.976)
Informal Policy Norms		
Control (omitted)		
Low Uptake	-2.037 (6.861)	8.424 (6.026)
High Uptake	4.997 (7.887)	5.898 (6.863)
Promotion Penalty	-4.648 (6.695)	-6.982 (5.814)
Promotion Reassurance	-2.198 (7.310)	18.167** (6.354)
Interactions		
50% X Low Uptake	-2.928 (11.570)	-16.556* (8.411)
50% X High Uptake	-12.301 (11.657)	3.322 (8.772)
50% X Promo Penalty	2.171 (10.693)	-13.909 (7.958)
50% X Promo Reassurance	3.084 (11.353)	-22.314* (8.600)
100% X Low Uptake	3.084 (8.183)	-14.713 (8.224)
100% X High Uptake	-6.412 (9.282)	-5.770 (8.891)
100% X Promo Penalty	-18.342* (8.339)	-3.902 (8.108)
100% X Promo Reassurance	-4.648 (9.231)	-23.427** (8.399)
Constant	70.334*** (4.986)	50.441*** (4.443)
n	935	1055
R-squared	0.0768	0.1102

Statistical Significance (two-tailed tests): * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Weights used in all models.

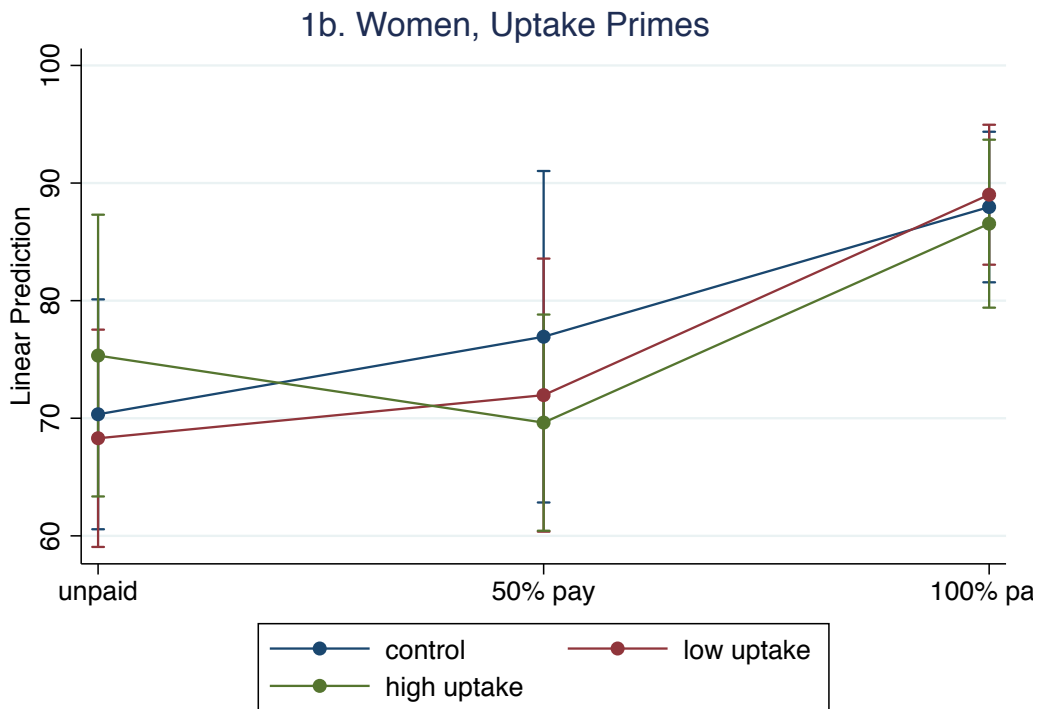
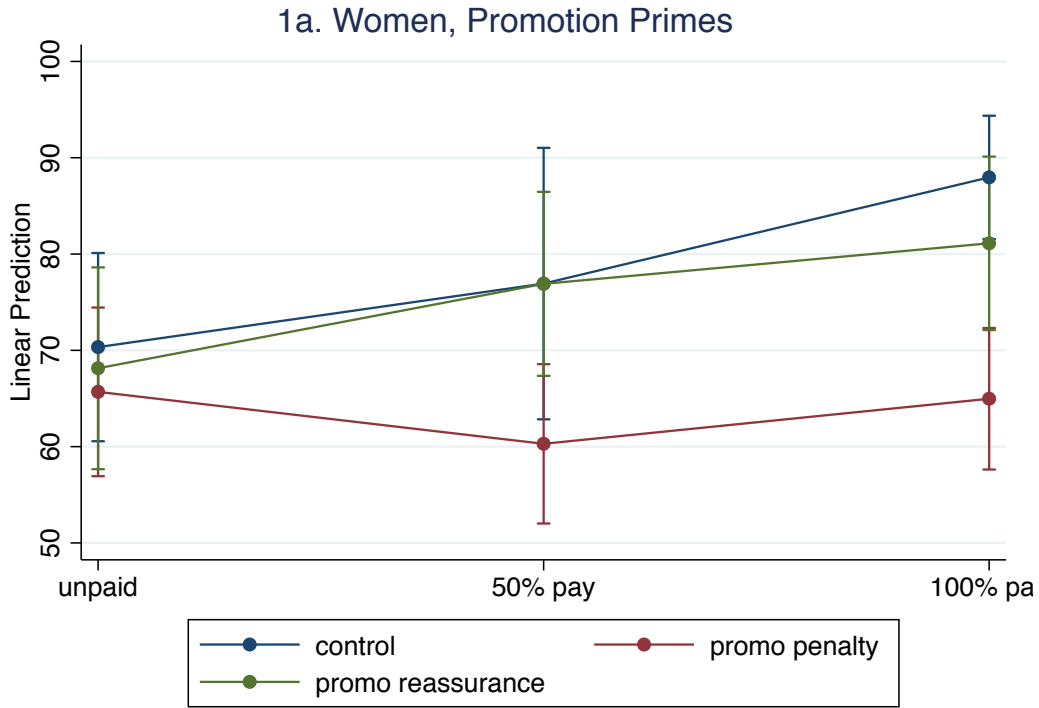
Table 5. Linear Regression Models of the Effect of Formal and Informal Policy Conditions on Flexible Work Arrangement Use, by Gender

	Flexible Work Arrangement Use	
	Women (1)	Men (2)
Formal Policy Design		
Job Sharing (omitted)		
Schedule Control	47.773*** (4.666)	44.832*** (4.604)
Informal Policy Norms		
Control (omitted)		
Low Uptake	1.095 (4.874)	3.418 (4.707)
High Uptake	6.962 (5.017)	13.088** (4.531)
Promotion Penalty	-1.442 (5.011)	1.185 (4.247)
Promotion Reassurance	6.154 (5.306)	3.018 (4.703)
Interactions		
Schedule Control X Low Uptake	-11.486 (6.739)	-9.991 (6.544)
Schedule Control X High Uptake	-8.738 (6.688)	-16.846** (6.338)
Schedule Control X Promo Penalty	-24.906*** (6.647)	-24.089*** (6.471)
Schedule Control X Promo Reassurance	-9.706 (6.661)	-3.793 (6.455)
Constant	34.810*** (3.862)	32.441*** (3.309)
n	945	1060
R-squared	0.3359	0.2968

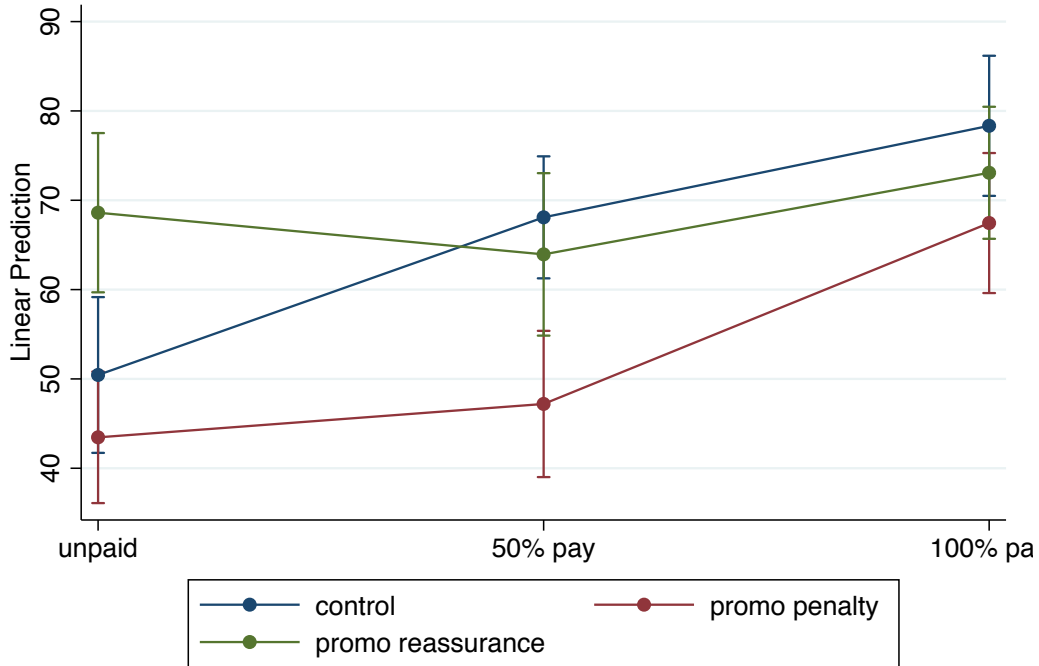
Statistical Significance (two-tailed tests): * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Weights used in all models.

Figure 1. Predicted Parental Leave Policy Use, by Gender and Policy Prime



1c. Men, Promotion Primes



1d. Men, Uptake Primes

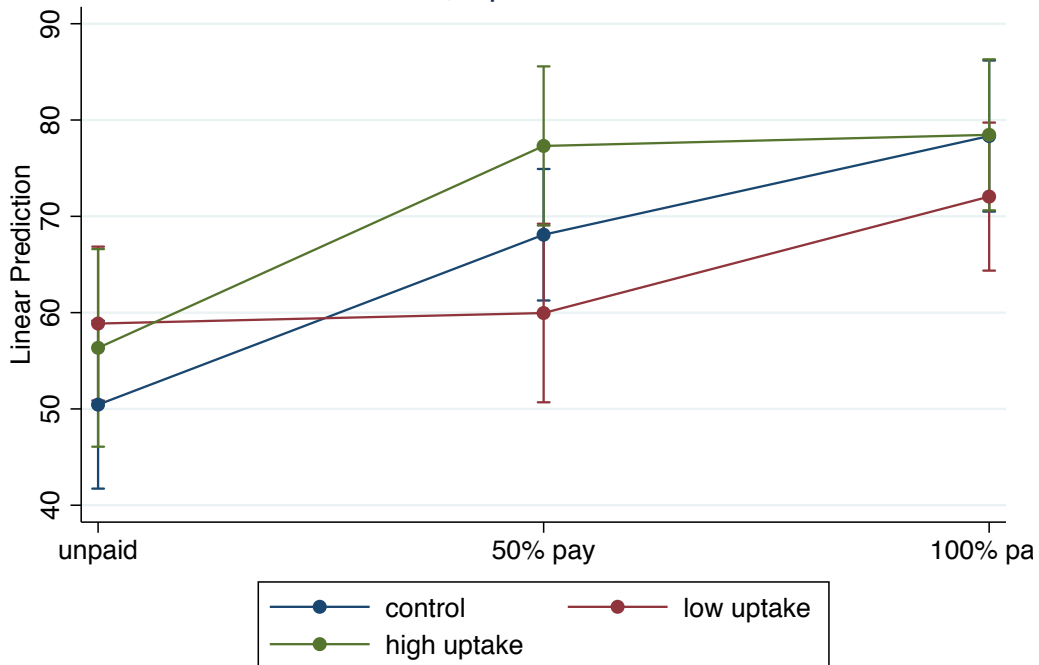


Figure 2. Predicted Flexible Work Arrangements Policy Use, by Gender and Policy Prime

