



Cultural Schemas, Social Class, and the Flexibility Stigma

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“First comes love, then comes marriage, then come flex-time and a baby carriage.”
–Statement of a supervisor, *Velez v. Novartis* lawsuit (Wilson, 2010)

Flexibility programs have become widespread in the United States, but their use has not. According to a recent study, 79% of companies say they allow some of their employees, and 37% officially allow all or most of their employees, to periodically change starting or quitting times (Galinsky, Bond, & Sakai, 2008). Although researchers often regard the official availability of flexibility and other work–life policies as an indicator of an organization’s responsiveness to employees’ work–life concerns (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006), having policies on the books does not always mean that workers feel comfortable using these policies (Blair-Loy, Wharton, & Goodstein, 2011). Studies that have assessed usage rates generally find that usage rates are low.

This has proved a remarkably resilient problem. The basic forms of workplace flexibility have been around for decades: flextime, part-time schedules, compressed workweeks, job shares (Friedman, n.d.). Yet usage of these programs

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has spread slowly (Galinsky et al., 2008). One study surveyed workers in 80 top U.S. companies with access to flexibility and found that a mere 2% used telecommuting, job-sharing, and part-time schedules and only 24% used flextime (Solomon, 1994). Another study found that only 11% of the full-time workforce had a formal agreement with their employer to vary their work hours; a separate 18% had an informal agreement to vary their hours (Weeden, 2005). A survey of 519 employees in a financial services firm found that only 26% were currently using or had used flexible work policies (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). The business case for workplace flexibility—that flex policies are not only good for employees, but also financially beneficial for companies—has been around for over a decade (Williams, 2000; Williams & Huang, 2011). But somehow even the business case fails to persuade.

Low usage rates stem in part from fears of negative career repercussions for using these policies (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). These fears appear to be well founded. The use of flexibility policies results in wage penalties (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Glass, 2004), lower performance evaluations (Wharton, Chivers, & Blair-Loy, 2008), and fewer promotions (Cohen & Single, 2001; Judiesch, 1999). Other research documents that wage penalties and marginalization are also associated with a specific type of flexible work: reduced hours or “part-time” work (Budig & England, 2001; Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1999; Stone, 2007; Waldfogel, 1997).

Thus some of these flexibility programs appear to be merely “shelf paper,” offered for public relations reasons but accompanied with the tacit message that workers use workplace flexibility at their peril. But even in organizations that have made sustained, long-term efforts to endorse and support flexibility programs, these programs have not come close to dislodging the norm of the ideal worker who receives the backstage support of a stay-at-home wife. For example, despite the fact that accounting/consulting firm Deloitte & Touche has worked for over 15 years to make workplace flexibility a cornerstone of its human resource strategy, at a recent panel one representative of the company noted that his entire department, with two exceptions, consisted of men married to homemakers (Williams, 2010).

Despite official efforts to the contrary, then, the American workplace continues to reflect the cultural model of the 1960s, when the most common family form was a male breadwinner married to a stay-at-home wife (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). Formal flexibility policies may recognize the realities of today’s families, in which 70% of American children live in households with all adults in the labor force (Kornbluh, 2003), but informal practices appear to stigmatize the use of these policies.

This special issue argues that, in order to understand the very slow spread of real flexibility in the workplace and to appreciate why the business case so often fails to persuade, we must delve deeper. Resistance to workplace flexibility is not about money. It is about morality.

The Work Devotion Schema

The schema that drives the flexibility stigma for professionals is the “work devotion schema” (Blair-Loy, 2003), that reflects deep cultural assumptions that work demands and deserves undivided and intensive allegiance. That schema specifies the cognitive belief, moral commitment, and emotional salience of making work the central focus of one’s life. Mary Blair-Loy (2010) has explored the workplace as a potent site of moral prescriptions, experienced as externally binding mandates and subjectively compelling schemas. The work devotion schema is both coercive—many workers feel forced to comply—and seductive—workers may also believe that a strong work ethic helps form their sense of self and self-worth. The use of flexible work arrangements can be interpreted by superiors, co-workers, and even the employee herself as a signal that the employee is violating the work devotion schema and is therefore morally lacking.

The work devotion schema has roots in the 17th century Protestant work ethic in England and the American colonies (Weber, 1976). This ethic specified that one should dedicate oneself to continuous, methodical work in a “calling” to serve God and society. Weber (1976) argued that the Protestant work ethic retained its cultural importance long after its religious justification had vanished. Work as a calling and the moral elevation of a “work ethic” remain compelling for many Americans (e.g., Rosenthal, Levy, & Moyer 2011).

In the 21st-century United States, the work devotion mandate reflects and reinforces the Great American Speed-Up: Americans now work longer hours, on average, than workers in most other developed countries, including Japan, where there is even a word, *karoshi*, for “death by overwork” (“Death by overwork in Japan,” 2007; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], n.d.; Sanchez-Burks, 2002). Moreover, dual-career families in the United States work far longer hours than do two-job families in most other industrialized countries (Gornick & Meyers, 2005).

Today, the work devotion schema has several dimensions. These include the acceptance of the legitimacy of work demands and identification with one’s employer or profession, at least among the upper-middle class. This schema offers an implicit contract between the worker and the firm, assuring the worker that his or her sacrifices of time, talent, and energy will be honored. This schema is institutionalized in company practices, including an expectation that employees will minimize time spent on caregiving or else risk stigma and career penalties (Blair-Loy, 2003). Experiencing work–family conflict can be laced with feelings of anguish and guilt (e.g., Glavin, Schieman, & Reid, 2011). These emotions point to moral dilemmas, as workers wrestle with conflicts among inconsistent social ideals of the ideal worker, the good mother, and the new “involved father” (Biernat & Kobryniewicz, 1997; Marks & Palkovitz, 2004; Williams, 2000).

Understanding the contours of the flexibility stigma requires understanding how it differs by class and gender. Class is an important category of analysis here because, as studies have shown, the triggers, content, and consequences of the work devotion schema, and the flexibility stigma that reflects it, differ by class. Gender also is an important vector, because the content, and psychological dynamics, of the stigma differ by gender in fundamental ways.

How the Flexibility Stigma Differs by Class Location

Without close attention to class, the picture of workplace flexibility gets murky fast. Take, for example, the quantitative literature on workplace flexibility, which reports that men have more workplace flexibility than women. This finding just does not fit with studies that show that men trigger severe flexibility stigma if they signal that caregiving responsibilities impinge in any way on their jobs (Allen, 2001; Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, & Stewart, 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqi, 2013; Wayne and Cordiero, 2003).

The confusion stems from the erasure of class. The finding that men have more flexibility than women stems from the fact that far more men than women occupy high status jobs, and workers in high-status jobs typically are given much more control over their hours of work: they are seen as “trusted workers” who are felt not to need close supervision (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005). Thus when researchers define “workplace flexibility” as the ability to alter one’s work schedule, they find that professional-managerial men have more flexibility than anyone else because such men predominate at the top of the occupational hierarchy. The implication that elite men have the most family-friendly workplaces is highly misleading. Often these men’s jobs consume their lives; they are not “flexible” in the sense of delivering work–life balance.

This problem signals a larger issue. Given how class stratified the labor market is, the triggers for the flexibility stigma differ substantially by class (Reskin & Padavic, 2002). A closer examination shows that not only the triggers, but also the consequences and content, of the stigma differ in different class locations.

The first step is to define the relevant class groupings: the professionals, the poor, and Americans who are neither rich nor poor—a group all too often forgotten, and therefore called “missing middle” (Skocpol, 2000; Williams & Boushey, 2010). Professionals comprise the 13% of American families who work in managerial or professional jobs in which at least one family member has graduated from college (the “professionals”); their median family income (as of 2008) is \$147,742 (Williams & Boushey, 2010). Middle-income Americans—the 53% of American families who are neither rich nor poor—have a median income of (as of 2008) of \$64,465 (Williams & Boushey, 2010). Low-income families in

the bottom third of the income distribution have a median income of only \$19,011 (again as of 2008) (Williams & Boushey, 2010).

Professionals

Professionals are expected to arrange their lives to ensure unlimited availability to work unencumbered by family responsibilities. For example, an executive interviewed in *Competing Devotions* (Blair-Loy, 2003) describes this single-minded focus on professional responsibilities.

“My husband [at the time] and I both worked very hard . . . All our friends were in the office. We had no other interests. We worked on Saturdays and were exhausted on Sundays. It was a totally stimulating and all-encompassing job . . . You have no casual clothes because you are never casual. You don’t read. Holidays are a nuisance because you have to stop working. I remember being really annoyed when it was Thanksgiving. Damn, why did I have to stop working to go eat a turkey? I missed my favorite uncle’s funeral, because I had a deposition scheduled that was too important.” (p. 34). Work devotion both justifies and fuels very long work hours (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Whereas in the past leisure signaled elite status (“bankers’ hours”), today elite status is signaled by long hours of high-intensity work. Thus work devotion becomes a “class act”—a way of signaling elite status (Williams, 2010, p. 6). Thus a “real professional” stays of his own volition until the job is done, in contrast to someone who just “punches the clock.” (Punching the clock, of course, is an explicit reference to hourly jobs.) The typical upper-middle-class man spends 55 hours a week at work or commuting, spending 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. away from home each weekday or working at least 1 day each weekend (Williams, 2010, p. 81). In professional-managerial circles, performing as an ideal worker takes on distinct moral dimensions. Upper-middle class American men typically “attach great importance to success-related traits such as ambition . . . [and] a strong work ethic . . . [T]hese traits are doubly sacred . . . as signals of both moral and socioeconomic purity” (Lamont, 1992, p. 85).

Many professional women find themselves caught between the work devotion schema and the family schema. Just like traditional men executives, some of the women executives with children interviewed by Blair-Loy (2003) subcontract out most nonwork demands to others:

“I started from the premise that I had to have a full time, live-in child care person. When Elizabeth was little, we had a live-in nanny, always.”

“I see my [eighteen month old] daughter for fifteen minutes before I leave. Her caregiver comes in, and I head for the train.”

“[M]y husband and I go through some periods of intense work schedules. We are thinking about hiring someone to take over for the nanny when we can’t get back in time.” (p. 35).

These actions make sense in light of the work devotion schema. “[M]anagerial and professional men commonly justified their absence from the home by the social legitimacy of their breadwinning role and their vocational calling. Now some executive women are doing the same thing” (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 35).

However, other mothers find that maintaining full-time careers is morally and emotionally untenable, since they so dramatically violate the family devotion schema’s mandate that mothers’ primary focus should be to care for their children. To illustrate, one respondent who left her full-time executive position after motherhood stated:

“When I meet mothers who don’t spend time with their kids, I make judgments. I think it’s a travesty the way a lot of kids are raised this way . . . Breaking the glass ceiling, if that’s your goal in life, then you should raise dogs.” (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 81)

Thus the ability to live up to the work devotion schema is part of elite men’s gender privilege. Elite women who do so actually suffer workplace penalties. This happens because they tend to be disliked on the grounds that they are bad mothers, given that elite mothering is seen as requiring time-intensive concerted cultivation of elite children’s every nascent talent to protect their future class status in a winner-take-all society (Benard & Correll, 2010; Frank, 1995; Lareau, 2003).

The flexibility stigma comes on strong when professionals work “part time”—despite the fact that “part time” professionals may well be working a 40-hour week. Surveys consistently show that use of workplace flexibility in general, and part-time work in particular, is seen as triggering career detriments (Albiston, 2007; Cohen & Single, 2001). Cynthia Fuchs Epstein’s (1999) influential study of lawyers found that part-time lawyers were seen as “time deviants”: they were flouting the accepted politics of time. Women lawyers, including many who worked hard to introduce part-time programs, regularly report to the lead author that young women in their firms say that they would prefer to quit rather than go part time. Pamela Stone (2007) quotes a former marketing executive, who became a stay-at-home mom, explaining why she left her career after trying to work part time: it “was a really, really big deal to cut it off. Because I never envisioned myself not working. I just felt like I would become a nobody if I quit. Well I was sort of a nobody working too. So it was sort of, ‘Which nobody do you want to be?’” (p. 92).

This quote aptly captures the sense in which the career detriments associated with use of workplace flexibility is a “stigma”: that is, a bias that causes the target to fall into social disgrace (Link & Phelan, 2001). What triggers the flexibility stigma for professionals? In many professional environments, taking time off in the middle of the day is not a problem, given elites’ status as trusted workers who are not closely supervised. But taking a career break definitely is, as is signaling the inability or unwillingness in working long hours, between 50 and 60 for lawyers and academics, and between 70 and 90 for investment bankers and doctors.

The consequences of the flexibility stigma in professional-managerial jobs are both reputational and concrete, with a powerful feedback loop between the two. When caregiving constraints become salient at work, the quality of work assignments suffers. This alone can doom a career, given that career development is highly dependent on on-the-job highly specialized training. Yet negative career consequences are overdetermined: other penalties include the difficulty of finding mentors and sponsors, which again is vital for career progress in elite jobs. Another important consequence of the flexibility stigma are the artificially high penalties associated with taking a career break, penalties completely out of proportion to the deterioration of human capital. Widespread anecdotal evidence, particularly in law and the sciences, documents professionals (typically women) who are literally unable to get a job, despite highly elite credentials, after they take a year or two off to care for children. In a conference co-organized by the lead author, a Harvard law graduate was told that no headhunter would want to take her on as a client because she had taken off a single year raising a child (Bar Association of San Francisco [BASF] Work–Life Balance Initiative Conference, 2006). Science careers also are organized to make taking even a few years off a career-ender, although happily this may be beginning to change. It should be noted that the flexibility stigma in elite careers differs by field, with medicine much more open to part-time work (Mason and Ekman, 2007).

The Poor

The triggers, consequences, and content of the flexibility stigma are very different among low-income and low-wage workers. Low-wage jobs typically do not require long hours. In fact, whereas elite workers complain of too many work hours, low-wage workers often complain of too few (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lambert, 2008). In addition, given that low-wage jobs typically have no career track, taking time off work has fewer negative consequences: quitting a low-wage, dead-end job simply means finding another similarly low-wage, dead-end job. As a result, the consequences of the flexibility stigma are very different among the poor than among professionals.

Studies show that when low-income workers ask for workplace flexibility, or indeed when they place any kind of restrictions whatsoever on their availability for work, they are likely to be given fewer hours. Even when low-wage employers offer only part-time hours, they often insist on full-time work devotion. A full 94% of store managers in a study of a retail chain reported that they try to hire workers with “open availability”—that is, a willingness to work anytime the store is open. “The sales associates have to be flexible. They signed on for ‘whatever’—they agreed to this when they were hired,” said one manager (Lambert & Henly, 2010, p. 19). For half (49%) of all jobs that do not require a college education, workers’ willingness to work odd hours or to be available whenever the employer

needs staff weighs heavily in the hiring decision (Acs & Loprest, 2008). Other research shows that low-wage workers who need workplace flexibility often get unceremoniously fired (Williams, 2006).

Not only the consequences, but also the triggers of the flexibility stigma differ in the professional and low-wage contexts. Whereas the flexibility stigma in professional-managerial jobs typically is triggered by taking a career break or putting limits on work hours, for highly supervised workers in low-wage jobs, the flexibility stigma typically is triggered by tardiness and absenteeism (Williams & Huang, 2011).

Both tardiness and absenteeism are rampant due to the rigidity and instability typical of low-wage jobs. Unlike professionals, low-wage workers typically punch in and punch out. Being even a few minutes late can lead to losing your job. Nor can low-wage workers typically leave in the middle of a shift: even leaving due to a family emergency such as a child in the emergency room can lead, under a progressive discipline system, to dismissal (Williams, 2006). Low-wage jobs are not only rigid; many also have “just in time” schedules, replacing the stable shift patterns commonplace a generation ago with schedules designed to match labor supply to labor demand in real time. Thus, if fewer customers than expected appear at a restaurant on a given day, a waitress reporting for work may well be sent home; if a hospital ward has fewer patients than expected, nurses’ aides (who may have taken three buses to get to work and already paid for child care) may well be sent home with no hours. In industries where just-in-time schedules are common, notably retail, hospitality, and health care, supervisors typically are judged chiefly on whether they “stay within hours”: on how tightly they match labor supply and labor demand. Moreover, just-in-time schedules typically shift from day to day and week to week; workers often get little notice of their schedule for the next week—3 days’ notice is commonplace. Nearly three fourths of workers said their schedules were posted only 1 week at a time (Lambert, 2009). Shifts are routinely extended if business is brisk or if work is not completed by the end of a shift.

The scheduling of hourly jobs fits very poorly with low-wage workers’ family lives. Two thirds of low-income families are headed by single parents, who typically rely on a fragile network of family and friends for child care; their wages are so low they typically cannot afford to pay for market child care (Williams & Boushey, 2010, p. 17). This means that low-wage workers rely for child care on people whose schedules often are as unstable as their own. Thus child care responsibilities affect not only parents, but also the extended family networks involved in child care. Grandmothers, in particular, play a large role: the fastest-growing household type is organized around grandparents being the primary guardian for their grandchildren. Indeed, grandparents are the primary guardian for 30–50% of children under 18 in some inner cities (Pruchno, 1999). Low-income families also are more than twice as likely as higher-income families to provide more than

30 hours of unpaid assistance a week to parents or parents in law. A majority of workers providing elder care say they have had to go to work late, leave early, or take time off during the day to provide care (Heymann, 2005). Finally, low income families are much more likely than other Americans to be caring for ill family members. One study found that nearly one third of welfare-to-work mothers are caring for children with chronic illnesses (Heymann, 2000). Two thirds of the low-wage parents interviewed for another study were caring for a child with either a chronic health condition or a learning disability (Dodson, Manuel, & Bravo, 2002). In addition, low-income families often must rely for health care on emergency rooms or clinics that require long waits. Therefore, caring for an ill family member may well be more time consuming than it is in a family that has access to health care delivered through appointments rather than long waits. The poor fit between the scheduling of hourly jobs, and the family care arrangements among the poor, means that workers' family care responsibilities often interrupt work. One study found that 30% of low-income families reported interrupting work due to family responsibilities in a single study week (Heymann, 2000).

The result is sky-high rates of absenteeism and turnover that are frustrating and costly to employers. Consequently, low-wage Americans have sharply lower rates of job tenure than do more affluent workers: among those who earn less than \$25,000, over three fourths of the men and nearly half of the women have been at their jobs for 2 years or less (Corporate Voices, 2006). Managers often interpret low-wage workers' high turnover and absenteeism as evidence of irresponsibility. For example, a Milwaukee manager claimed that "massive absenteeism" is usually "linked to other irresponsible-type behavior" (Dodson, 2009, p. 33). Note the moral valence: this is a different flexibility stigma than exists for managerial-professional workers. To the extent the poor are not "trusted workers," the flexibility stigma may reflect employers' stereotypes that the workers are "gaming" the system by asking for leave or flexibility they do not really need (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Wharton et al., 2008). In addition, whereas elite mothers whose caregiving responsibilities become salient are faulted as workers, they are lauded as mothers (Stone, 2007). In sharp contrast, as Lisa Dodson points out in this issue, poor mothers often are faulted for having had children. Their decision to have children may well be viewed as further evidence of irresponsibility (Dodson, 2013). The fact that employers place workers in the position of having to say they have unlimited availability feeds employers' image of them as irresponsible because so many low-wage workers' family responsibilities mean that they cannot realistically make themselves available for work anytime the employer needs them. Typically, these workers hang on as long as they can, then they simply stop showing up (Henly & Lambert, 2005). This is a strategy that, of course, only serves to exacerbate the sense that these workers are irresponsible.

The Missing Middle

The triggers of the flexibility stigma for the “missing middle” (Skocpol, 2000) are more like those encountered by the poor than the rich, given that Americans who are neither rich nor poor tend to have jobs as rigid and highly supervised as those of the poor, with a few highly prized exceptions such as truck drivers. The jobs in the missing middle are less likely to have just-in-time schedules than are jobs held by low-wage workers, although mandatory overtime produces schedule instability for some. When schedule instability arises, work–family conflict often also arises because one of the chief forms of child care among the missing middle is tag teaming, where parents work different shifts to care for the kids while the other is at work. Thus if one parent is ordered to stay overtime at short notice, the family may have to choose between Mom’s job and Dad’s job in a context where they need both jobs to pay the mortgage. Even among middle-income families that do not tag team, middle-income families are almost as likely as poor ones (and much more likely than professional-managerial workers) to rely on relatives for child care—relatives who often will have schedules as rigid as their own (Williams & Boushey, 2010, p. 9). Thus the triggers for the flexibility stigma among the missing middle are similar to those among the poor, with schedule instability more of a problem for the poor, and more middle-income workers may have a modicum less schedule rigidity than low-income ones.

The consequences to middle class workers of the flexibility stigma are also likely to be more similar to those that affect the poor than the elite. Workers in the kinds of jobs typically held by the missing middle—routine white-collar jobs and blue-collar jobs—probably are more likely to get fired than quietly frozen out of career progression (as is often the case among professionals) (Williams, 2006).

Given the relative lack of information about this group, the content of the flexibility stigma remains unclear. It seems likely that middle class workers encounter less blanket moral condemnation as irresponsible employees than do low-wage workers. In part, this is because more middle-income jobs have a career track: after all, one reason low-wage workers so often handle work–family conflict by quitting is that they have little to lose by doing so, because the opportunities for career progression are nonexistent. Also, the racialization of class means that low-income workers are more likely to be people of color than middle-income employees; to the extent that the “irresponsibility” charge codes racial stereotypes, that charge may well affect a lower proportion of middle- than low-income Americans.

To the extent that the flexibility stigma for nonelite workers stems from a clash between elites’ attempts to impose the norm of work devotion on those below, the different relationship of blue-collar families to work devotion becomes salient. Nonelite men often dismiss the work devotion schema as a symptom of narcissism, and embrace a class-specific family devotion schema. Michèle Lamont (2000) notes that (in sharp contrast with professional-managerial men) about a third of

blue-collar men express distrust of ambition. Said a bank supply salesman, people who are too ambitious “have blinders on. You miss all of life” (Lamont, 2000, p. 110). An electronics technician saw blind ambition as narcissism, observing that overly ambitious people are “so self-assured, so self-intense that they don’t really care about anyone else . . . It’s me, me, me, me” (Lamont, 2000, p. 110). Like professionals, blue-collar families place an extraordinarily high value on hard work. But this agreement on the moral stature of hard work masks important differences. Whereas professional men’s sense of personal growth is intertwined with their career success rather than the quality of family life, nonelite men are more likely to see their jobs as a means of supporting their families (Williams, 2010). “My father’s job was a means to an end . . . a way to put food on [the] table,” said one “class migrant” who grew up working class, and ultimately opted out of defining masculinity as being work-obsessed (Lamont, 1992, p. 33). “Blue-collar men [i.e., stably employed, missing-middle men] put family above work, and find greater satisfaction in family than do upper-middle-class men,” notes Lamont (2010); “family is the realm of life in which these workers can be in charge and gain status for doing so” (p. 30). Similarly, a study comparing Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs)—missing middle men—and physicians showed that the EMTs were far more involved in their children’s daily care than were the physicians (Shows & Gerstel, 2009).

A final class-specific aspect of the content of flexibility stigma concerns the meaning of part-time work among white working-class men. Men’s understanding of work as the bulwark against hard living creates a disdain for part-time work, which blue-collar men often see as “polluting”: Lamont (2000) notes that “a tin factory foreman, Jim Jennings puts himself above part-time workers, whom he views as ‘dummies’” (p. 136–137). Part timers are seen as having low moral standards, “nothing but trouble,” Lamont (2000) explains, as if “their part time employment was to be explained by their instability, lack of character, or inability to handle responsibility” (p. 137). This form of flexibility stigma stems from a world view that stresses the importance of responsibility and what Lamont (2000) calls the “disciplined self.” Workers admire men who “don’t let go, they don’t give up, and it’s largely through work and responsibility that they assert control over the uncertainty” associated with their relatively vulnerable economic position and social status (Lamont, 2000, p. 23). The disciplined self is seen as a vital precondition to “settled living”: a steady job rests on a foundation of full time work, and part-time work is associated with “hard living” men who lack the character, discipline and stick-to-it-iveness required to hold down jobs that often are both strenuous and boring (Williams, 2010). Their distaste for part-time work is matched by a distrust of workplace “flexibility,” which they often see as a ruse used by employers to eliminate the premium for overtime work by requiring workers to work short hours some days and longer than 8 hours on other days, or by restructuring work in ways that allow employers to cut workers’

hours if demand diminishes (Gerstel & Clawson, 2001). All this means that the language the elite has chosen to describe the need to better mesh work and family responsibilities—“workplace flexibility”—becomes a serious liability if the goal is to interest blue-collar families in the discussion.

In conclusion, the content, triggers, and consequences of the flexibility stigma all differ by class. At the same time, the content and psychological dynamics of the stigma also differ in important ways by gender.

The Flexibility Stigma as a Gendered Phenomenon

The Flexibility Stigma for Men

The flexibility stigma is an inherently gendered phenomenon. For men, the dynamic is straightforward. Being a good father, unlike being a good mother, is not seen as culturally incompatible with being a good worker. Quite the contrary: being a good provider is seen as an integral part of being a good father (Townsend, 2002). The traditional breadwinner ideal, still robust today, defines being a good father as leaving the house and family caregiving behind, and going to work. Thus, matched-resume studies for professional positions found fathers were rated as more committed to work than men without children, more likely to be recommended for management, offered higher starting salaries, and held to lower performance and punctuality standards (Correll, Benard & Paik, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004).

Among professional men, the flexibility stigma is intertwined with the enactment of elite masculinity (Blair-Loy, 2003). Studies of lawyers document this. “There’s definitely a machismo that goes with being a corporate lawyer,” said one attorney, a woman of color (Epner, 2006). Working long hours is seen as a “heroic activity,” noted Epstein et al. (1999, p. 22). A Silicon Valley engineer described the conflation of manhood with working long hours, noting that his work was “not like being a brave firefighter and going up one more flight than your friend” (Cooper, 2002, p. 5, 7). Cooper observes that working long hours was seen as a way of turning pencil pushing or computer keyboarding into a manly test of physical endurance. “There’s a kind of machismo culture that you don’t sleep,” said a father who ultimately left his job to work from home. “The successful enactment of this masculinity,” Cooper concludes, “involves displaying one’s exhaustion, physically and verbally, in order to convey the depth of one’s commitment, stamina, and virility” (Williams, 2010, p. 87). The flexibility stigma for professional men thus stems in significant part from the sense that a man who makes caregiving responsibilities salient on the job is less of a man. This finding is confirmed by the studies in this issue (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello et al., 2013).

In some professional-managerial workplaces, gender wars emerge about the right way to be a man as the breadwinner ideal is contested by a more contemporary ideal of the “new, involved father” (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). A Silicon Valley engineer, panicked that he would jeopardize his marriage by failing to show up at his child’s baptism, said his manager “doesn’t have two kids and a wife, he has people who live in his house, that’s basically what he has” (Cooper, 2002, p. 21). The rise of the nurturing father ideal may help to explain why men now report greater levels of work–family conflict than women (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2011).

Among stably employed blue-collar men (part of our missing middle category), the flexibility stigma is both similar and different. A man who makes his caregiving responsibilities salient on the job often meets with similar messages that he is not a real man. This focus on jobs as a key arena for the enactment of manliness means that blue-collar men with child care responsibilities report that they get teased: “The husbands think I’m pussy whipped . . . There are friends of mine who think I’m a wuss,” noted one blue-collar man (Williams, 2010). One result is that working-class men often are so reluctant to admit that they have to leave work to attend to family responsibilities that some would prefer to be fired for insubordination rather than admit the reason they have to leave. The classic example was in the union arbitration of *Tractor Supply Co.* (2001), in which an employer posted notice of 2 hours of mandatory overtime (Williams, 2006, p. 19). The worker in question refused to stay at work past his regular shift because he had to get home to care for his grandchild. When his supervisor asked why he would not stay, he replied that it was none of his business. The supervisor said that accommodations could be made for reasonable excuses and then asked again why he could not stay. The worker again said it was none of his business. So the supervisor ordered him to stay; the worker left, and was fired for insubordination (Williams, 2006, p. 19). This pattern of caring in secret, also seen in other arbitrations, is powerful evidence of the stigma associated with a man’s admission that he has child care responsibilities. The study of missing middle men by Jennifer Berdahl and Sue Moon in this issue confirms a strong flexibility stigma among these men (Berdahl & Moon, 2013).

The Flexibility Stigma for Women

While the flexibility stigma for men stems from gender-*nonconforming* behavior, the flexibility stigma for women stems from gender-*conforming* behavior. When women request family leave or workplace flexibility, they are doing what women are expected to do: to limit work obligations in favor of family commitments. Pamela Stone notes that in many workplaces, women who decide to opt out are lauded, Yet women who stay in the workplace but make their caregiving responsibilities salient by taking leave or using workplace flexibility

often encounter severe stigma. “When you job share [in this company], you have ‘MOMMY’ stamped in huge letters on your head,” commented a market executive at a software company (Stone, 2013). Women lawyers at one firm told the lead author that, after they went part time, they felt so stigmatized that they secretly gestured “L” (for loser) on their heads when they met each other in the library. Stone and Hernandez found in their study of highly qualified professional women that, once women went part time, their status fell sharply, as did the quality of their work assignments. “As time deviants, they were distrusted and expected to leave, and they did so”—a classic case of self-fulfilling prophecy (Stone & Hernandez, 2013).

These incidents suggest that, for women, family leave or flexible work make motherhood salient in ways that trigger gender bias against mothers, often called “maternal wall” bias (Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004). A well-known experimental study found that mothers were 79% less likely to be hired, 100% less likely to be promoted, offered an average of \$11,000 less in salary, and held to higher performance and punctuality standards than identical women without children (Correll et al., 2007). Other studies have elaborated this theme (see Benard, Paik, & Correll, 2008 for a review of this literature).

While the flexibility stigma probably is very similar for professional and middle-class women, it is quite different for poor women. As noted above, employers commonly attribute sky-high levels of absenteeism and attrition to poor mothers’ lack of a work ethic and their fundamental irresponsibility. Given the racialization of class in the United States, this stigma is likely linked to stereotypes about African-Americans as lazy, a stereotype that presumably stems back to slavery (Devine & Baker, 1991). As noted above, employers often respond to poor women’s need for flexibility by concluding that it was irresponsible of them to have had children.

Summary

Our review of the literature relating to the stigmatization of workplace flexibility and caregiving by class and by gender is summarized in Table 1. The table represents men and women workers crossed with the two ends of the class continuum, from lower income (poor) to higher income (professional). Predictions for the “missing middle” likely fall between these two poles, although more empirical research on this group is needed. We ground our analysis in the basic concept of power, defined as the control over valued outcomes and resources (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007), such as time, production, and identity.

For poor workers, control over employee production is typically viewed as external to the employee, with the employer relying on overt economic power and rigid work schedules to ensure employee production. For professional workers, on the other hand, control over employee production is located internally to the

Table 1. Predictions for the Flexibility Stigma by Gender and Class

Class	Gender	
	Masculinity	Femininity
	Competence, independence, and work status	Warmth, (inter)dependence, and family status
Lower		
Salience of family devotion schema	Gender and work identities in conflict between work and family devotion	Gender and work identities consistent with family devotion
Employee works to live; job supports family	<i>Strong flexibility stigma if family caregiving requires job absences, tardiness, or unavailability for certain shifts</i>	<i>Severe flexibility stigma if family caregiving requires job absences, tardiness, or unavailability for certain shifts</i>
Employer relies on economic control over employee		
Higher		
Salience of work devotion schema	Gender and work identities consistent with work devotion	Gender and work identities in conflict between family and work devotion
Employee lives to work; family supports career	<i>Flexibility stigma hard to trigger, but if triggered, these men suffer a sharp decrease in status</i>	<i>Strong flexibility stigma if motherhood is seen to violate work devotion schema</i>
Employer relies on employee internalization of work ideology		

employee, with the employer relying more on the covert ideological power of the work devotion schema to ensure loyalty and performance. These sources of control are differentially consistent with gendered identities. “Real men” are defined by their amount power over their own and their families’ lives, whereas poor men’s masculine identities are threatened as weak breadwinners and subordinates to an employer’s overt economic power. The flexibility stigma may therefore be easily triggered in this group, which cannot easily afford additional loss of masculine standing. Poor men may also overtly reject employer external control in an attempt to regain their masculine dignity, as in the male worker who would rather be fired for insubordination than admit he could not work overtime to care for a child.

Professional men, on the other hand, can more commonly live up to accepted social ideals, performing as ideal workers and as ideal men. They can be trusted to control their own schedules and to have internalized cultural norms of work devotion. It may be most difficult to trigger the flexibility stigma against this group. Any deviations from the ideal worker norm would likely be assumed by evaluators to be temporary, since professional men generally command professional resources and household support and devoted worker persona. Like temporarily perturbed gyroscopes, they may be assumed to return to their gravitational equilibrium of work devotion quickly and permanently. Although elite men may find it harder to trigger the flexibility stigma, however, once the stigma is triggered, they have further to fall, given that they then leave the high-status categories of ideal worker and ideal man, and plummet into the much lower-status feminized category of family caregiver.

The situation for elite women is quite different. Professional women's status as ideal workers is likely to be considered suspect, or temporary, as long as they are, or intend to be, mothers. Requesting flexible work arrangements or taking time off may make them better able to fulfill the ideals of womanhood, and the personal and social forces on them to be so may be seen by their supervisors and workers as enough to permanently tilt caregiving women toward the gravitational pull of family devotion. These women who take time off, or shorten or alter their work schedules to care for their families, are likely to be viewed as good mothers but failed professionals who will inevitably succumb to the forces of external family control, making them unreliable professionals undeserving of their elite jobs.

The flexibility stigma may be even more easily triggered, and with more severe consequences, for working women who are poor. Although many poor women may identify with the family devotion schema, they generally encounter the greatest level of work–family conflict since they often lack the economic and personal resources to cover child-care. Moreover, they are likely to be seen by employers as failed workers and as women who should not have had children in the first place (Dodson, 2009, 2013). Any sign that they are unreliable workers and cannot adhere to an employer's requests may be interpreted as confirmation of negative views of these women as workers and as women.

The articles in this issue explore this range of workers across class and gender and the implications of flexibility and caregiving for them in the workplace. The next section introduces these studies.

Roadmap to This Issue

This issue represents a diversity of articles that take different conceptual and disciplinary approaches to studying the flexibility stigma. The scholars in this issue come from law, sociology, social psychology, and organizational behavior.

The articles are organized into three sections. The first section contains two articles that focus specifically on women and the flexibility stigma. The second section includes three articles that turn our attention to men and the flexibility stigma. The third section contains studies of managers and workplaces, and includes the only study to explicitly focus on middle-income workers. The concluding article explores the legal and public policy implications of the flexibility stigma.

Women and the Flexibility Stigma

The first article, by Pamela Stone and Lisa Ackerly Hernandez (2013), examines the experience of flexibility stigma among elite women. Drawing on intensive life-history interviews with 54 women who “opted out” of professional or managerial jobs after having children (Stone, 2007), these authors consider the way in which flexibility stigma influenced these women’s decisions to leave their jobs. Stone and Hernandez find that, particularly after professional/managerial women go part time, their status and the quality of their work assignments suffer. The authors find both strong evidence of flexibility stigma, and that the women involved do not see themselves as victims of prejudice. Instead, they buy into the time norms that ultimately cause them to become disillusioned with their careers and head home (Stone & Hernandez, 2013).

The second article, drawing on studies of a combined 500 lower-income working parents, Lisa Dodson (2013) considers the nature of the flexibility stigma for low-wage earning mothers. Dodson documents just how acute are the work–family conflicts these women face as they feel “ripped” between their work schedules and their commitment to giving their children the care they need. She documents that the content of the flexibility stigma is quite different for poor than for other women. Whereas more affluent women with work–family conflict typically receive strong messages that they should stop working and stay home with their children, poor women are more likely to receive the message that they should not have had children (Stone, 2007). Dodson links this message to racialized stereotypes, notably that of the irresponsible welfare mother.

Men and the Flexibility Stigma

The next three articles focus on how the flexibility stigma affects men. Using a national U.S. longitudinal dataset, Coltrane et al. (2013) find strong support for the flexibility stigma thesis. After controlling for a wide variety of characteristics, Coltrane and his co-authors find that men who take a career break, reduce their hours, or are out of the labor force for family reasons sharply reduce their earnings. In contrast to experimental studies, which typically find a larger

flexibility stigma for men than for women (Allen & Russell, 1999; Butler & Skattebo, 2004), Coltrane and his co-authors find few statistically significant differences between the flexibility stigma for men and for women. Significant racial differences emerged. While not working for family reasons depressed the wages of whites (both men and women), the effects for Blacks and Latinos did not reach statistical significance.

The two experimental studies of the flexibility stigma among men, by contrast, confirm the findings of prior experimental studies that find the flexibility stigma stronger for men than for women who make their caregiving responsibilities salient on the job. Vandello et al. (2013) study the moral evaluations of professional men who choose to work part time to take care of an infant. In their first study, they find that men and women value workplace flexibility equally, but men are less likely to say they expect to use flexibility policies to the extent they believe (as many do) that others would see them as less masculine if they used such policies. In a second study these authors find that use of flexibility policies caused both men and women to be evaluated more negatively and recommended for a smaller raise. Men were not penalized more than women on objective measures, but they faced harsher character judgments. Both men and women who used flexibility policies were seen as more feminine and less masculine, but this evaluation hurt the men more because they were seen as gender deviants.

Laurie Rudman and Kris Mescher's (2013) contribution confirms that the flexibility stigma is a femininity stigma. Using experimental vignettes of men who request to take a 12-week family leave to care for a sick child or an ailing mother, and either do or do not offer to make up the lost hours, the study by Rudman and Mescher measured the extent to which workers who took leave were seen as deficient organizational citizens ("bad worker stigma") and feminine ("femininity stigma"). They found that men who took leave were viewed as bad workers, and the bad worker stigma was associated with organizational penalties (e.g., being demoted or downsized). Men who took leave were also seen as more feminine, making them more likely to be penalized and less likely to be given organizational rewards (e.g., promotions, raises, and organizational opportunities). The femininity stigma played a more important role than did the bad worker stigma in increasing the likelihood of workplace penalties: The femininity stigma fully accounted for the effect of the bad worker stigma on penalties, suggesting that male workers who took leave tend to be seen as bad workers precisely because they are seen as feminine. The study's findings suggest that the flexibility stigma overlaps with caregiver bias. The study also found that Blacks who took leave were seen as worse workers than Whites who did so. More research needs to be done on the flexibility stigma and race; only a few studies do so (e.g., Correll et al., 2007; Kennelly, 1999). Rudman's pioneering study intentionally examines race separately from social class and begins to test the interaction of race, gender, and flexibility.

Studies of Managers and Workplaces

The third section of this issue contains field studies and studies of managers. The field studies, by Jennifer Berdahl and Sue Moon (2013), examine two different working-class samples of public service employees. The first sample involves a female-dominated workforce and the second involves a male-dominated one. These studies examine both men's and women's experiences of social mistreatment in their organizations (e.g., teasing, insults, slander, and sabotage), and whether amounts of social mistreatment relate to the amount of caregiving employees engage in within the home. Caregiving fathers were found to suffer the highest rates of masculinity harassment (i.e., teasing and insults for lacking masculine characteristics or for possessing feminine ones). Women were subjected to more social mistreatment than men overall, as a general manifestation of gender bias, but within sex, employees who violated gender stereotypes for caregiving were subjected to more mistreatment than those who conformed to gender stereotypes. That is, women without children experienced the most mistreatment, followed by mothers who did little caregiving. Mothers who did a lot of caregiving experienced the least social mistreatment on the job among women. Among men, fathers who did a lot of caregiving experienced the most social mistreatment, significantly less than fathers who did little caregiving and men without children. These studies show that caregiving fathers are at risk of greater masculinity harassment and general mistreatment; the fatherhood bonus documented by earlier studies was limited to traditional fathers who evidenced little domestic work (Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004). These studies suggest that gender bias (being seen as a bad woman or a bad man) drives workplace mistreatment more than ideal worker bias does (being seen as a good or bad worker), at least in these middle-income work environments.

The United States is unusual in its reliance on free-market mechanisms for setting workplace schedules and access to flexibility. Brescoll, Glass, and Sedlovskaya (2013) studied managers' responses to workers' requests for a compressed workweek with experimental scenarios. These authors examine whether managers who are asked to play the role of an employer react differently to men and women who request flex time, and whether their reaction depends on the reason for the request and/or the status of the employee. In their first study, they found that managers are more likely to grant compressed workweeks to high-status men than to high-status women when the request was made for career development reasons. Managers were more likely to grant the same request to men in low-status jobs, as compared with men in high-status jobs, when the request stemmed from family reasons. Women were less likely to have their request for a compressed workweek granted, regardless of their reason for requesting flex-time and regardless of their status. Low-status mothers were least likely to have their requests for flex-time granted for child care reasons. This study, unlike others, did not find that

men seeking flex-time for childcare reasons were more likely than women to be denied. The authors suggest that status may be a better predictor than gender of managers' reactions. The second study found that both men and women believed it was less likely that their requests for leave would be granted than is actually likely to be the case. High-status women overestimated, whereas high-status men underestimated, the likelihood that their request for flex-time would be granted for child care reasons.

The concluding article, by Stephanie Bornstein (2013), places the studies presented in this issue within a larger legal and public policy context. She concludes that, because the flexibility stigma is rooted in gender stereotypes, its effects can be litigated under Title VII's prohibition of discrimination because of sex. Second, prior as well as the present research suggests that private and public policies that encourage the adoption of workplace flexibility must also control for bias against mothers and gender nonconforming fathers, lest such policies be undermined by the flexibility stigma.

Conclusion

The articles in this special issue document the pervasive moral underpinnings of the flexibility stigma in North American society. Despite the increased availability of flexible work arrangements on the books of many American employers, there is a perplexing underutilization of these arrangements on the part of American workers in light of their strong desire and desperate need for such flexibility. The articles in this issue suggest that moral convictions, not rational organizational concerns about merit and performance, define the social context that drives this gap. Deep-rooted cultural values of work devotion, personal responsibility, and gender identity run through the causal streams revealed by these studies of flexibility stigma. Rather than questioning these cultural truisms, professional women driven out of the workplace accepted extreme time norms as legitimate; poor women were told they should not have had children; both men and women suffered economic penalties for caregiving, and men suffered character judgments as failed men; and gender performance, rather than work performance, defined treatment of middle-class workers on the job. These sociocultural forces not only determined the consequences of flexibility, but distorted perceptions of it, as people misunderstood the gendered and status-based nature of access to flexibility. In sum, the articles in this issue reveal that flexibility stigma is rooted in gender stereotypes and class divisions, qualifying it for Title VII legal redress.

It is our hope that this special issue spurs further research and dialogue into the reasons behind the failure of the American workplace to successfully adapt to the realities of the American workforce. With the most family-hostile public policy and the highest levels of work-family conflict of industrialized countries (Gornick & Meyers, 2005), the societal and economic threats posed by this failure

are serious indeed. Only by continuing to reveal, understand, and make public these social and cultural forces can we do something to address them and their dire consequences.

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