

WOMEN AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY BENEFITS: DOES FEAR OF NEGATIVE
PERCEPTIONS BY MANAGEMENT AFFECT THE DECISIONS OF WOMEN
TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FAMILY LEAVE PROGRAMS?

by

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While women in America have made significant progress regarding the assimilation into the labor-force, the workplace has been slow to adapt to accommodate working mothers. In recent news, American companies such as Facebook, Google and Microsoft have received positive press attention for their generous family-friendly policies. Yet while these policies may benefit the companies by generating media attention, women may still choose not to take advantage of these programs. This exploratory study seeks to understand workplace conditions for professional, working mothers in order to better assess the effectiveness of family friendly policies. The results indicated that while society and business had made considerable progress, significant improvements are still needed.

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Although women have been a significant component of the American labor-force for more than seventy years, the assimilation of women into the American economy continues to require businesses to adjust antiquated workplace rules designed for an all-male workforce (Slaughter, 2015). Yet, the transition of women from the home to the workplace has not only changed the workplace; it has also impacted the family-structure as well. As the family structure has adjusted to the increasing employment of women, workplaces have in turn adjusted to the changing family.

For instance, because they were raised in an era of working mothers, members of the millennial generation have higher expectations for gender equality at home than prior generations, (Miller & Streitfield, 2015) and businesses today face certain pressures to meet those evolving expectations. This is especially the case in the technology industry, where companies must constantly compete for top talent. Companies such as Accenture, Facebook, and Microsoft have received recent media attention for announcing more family-friendly employee benefits (Miller & Streitfield, 2015) including generous paid parental leave programs. Apple and Facebook have even gone so far as to cover the cost of female employees to freeze their eggs (Alter, 2015), thus allowing them to “buy time” and delay motherhood.

Importantly, while these companies have received positive attention for their new programs and initiatives, a significant problem remains: women commonly choose not to take full advantage of these programs. Research has documented that overall utilization rates remain low even though employees have been found to believe in the benefits of such programs. (Swody & Powell, 2007; Employee Benefit

Plan Review, 1998; Hochschild, 1997; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Newman & Matthews, 1999; Thompson et al., 1999). Furthermore, perceptions formed by managers about the career devotion of women who use such benefits affect their promotability (Hoobler, Wayne & Lemmon, 2009). Not unexpectedly, because women are more likely to use family leave than men, as companies adopt more generous leave policies to attract women, use of such policies may actually increase workplace discrimination against women (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). Thus, a counter-productive consequence of increased family leave policies exists: use of family leave benefits designed to attract women employees may negatively affect the career advancement of women who actually use such family leave benefits.

Yet, the extent to which those negative perceptions actually impact the decision of female employees to use such benefits remains unanswered. In this exploratory study, I will examine how and why women choose to engage in and/or opt out of family friendly programs by interviewing and surveying women in senior management positions and leadership roles about their individual experiences in order to answer that question. Specifically, I hope to identify whether, and to what extent, fear of negative consequences from exercising family leave benefits impact the decisions of women to take or forego those benefits.

First, I will examine existing literature regarding perceptions of women in the workplace, the use of family-friendly programs, and concerns about the effects of such programs on the achievement of gender equality. Next, I will provide evidence for how and to what extent women choose to use family friendly policies. I will also provide information about why women choose to use or opt out of family

friendly policies. Finally, I will discuss the implications of my results for the future of family-friendly programs in organizations.

Current Conditions

Anne Marie Slaughter (2015) asserts that the only people who are able to successfully compete in today's high-stress culture are young, healthy individuals who do not have to care for family members. In America, she says, women have begun to outpace men throughout all levels of education and are even entering the workplace with higher starting salaries. However, despite this feat, Slaughter argues that women do not leave their job by their own choice, but instead are forced to leave due to the impossibility of fitting their family and work lives together. Thus, this high-stress culture is severely hindering the ability of women to remain in the workforce once they have children.

Many companies are taking action to remove this hindrance. Companies such as Accenture, Microsoft and Netflix have received recent media attention for implementing generous parental leave programs (Miller & Streitfield, 2015). At Accenture, primary caregivers are given the opportunity to work locally and forego traveling for up to one year after returning from the birth or adoption of a child, and the company now covers the cost for new mothers to ship breast milk while traveling (Schaffler, 2015). Microsoft has also extended its leave policy, allowing new mothers to take up to 20 weeks of paid leave and new fathers up to 12 weeks of paid leave (Adams, 2015). Netflix, which has the most generous program of the three, announced that it would offer paid leave to parents for a year after a baby's

birth. As Stew Friedman of the University of Pennsylvania explains, “competitive pressures in the labor market are pushing toward greater freedom and flexibility” for employees (Miller & Streitfield, 2015, para. 10).

Apple and Facebook have ventured beyond merely offering generous leave policies, and have created programs to cover the cost of freezing eggs for female employees in order to allow them to delay motherhood (Alter, 2015). Yet, this coverage has not been without controversy. By endorsing this practice at a corporate level, Alter asserts that companies contribute to women’s wishful thinking (2015). Significantly, freezing eggs is a risky procedure with a significant rate of failure and by no means guarantees that women who decide to delay having children until later in life will actually be able to do so. Nevertheless, women are beginning to view this alternative as an insurance policy of sorts. Therefore, by offering such benefits, employers potentially set women employees up for disappointment if they delay having children and then are not able to do so at that later point in their lives.

The companies providing generous family-leave policies receive many long-term benefits from offering family-friendly programs (Swody & Powell, 2007). These include both external benefits such as good publicity (Catalyst, 2003; Swody & Powell, 2007; Working Mother, 2003), as well as internal benefits such as decreased turnover intention, increased commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Swody & Powell, 2007; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), and increased job satisfaction (Allen, 2001; Swody & Powell, 2007). Yet, even though companies such

as Netflix and Accenture are offering more family-friendly programs, the benefits of these programs cannot be realized unless employees feel comfortable using them.

The Mommy Track and the Cost of Motherhood

The cost of having a child is high. From a cost perspective, direct expenses for food, clothing, medicine and other necessities can add up. However, for mothers, the cost of parenthood includes more than just increased household expenses. Studies have shown that mothers experience a wage penalty for after having each child (Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014). One study placed the penalty as high as 7 percent per child (Budig & England, 2001; Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014), while another shows low-income mothers as experiencing the highest penalty (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014). While the sources of this wage penalty vary from the loss of job experience to lower levels of productivity, the use of part-time employment itself was identified as a factor that contributed to the resulting moderate, negative impact on wages (Budig & England, 2014; Budig & Hodges, 2010; Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014). Thus, if a woman decides that part-time employment is the best means of improving family-work balance, she may do so for a significant reduction in wages. Several terms have been used to describe the sacrifices made by mothers in regards to career potential and time at home, including the mommy track and the second shift. Each of these terms is discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

The Mommy Track

In 1989, Felice N. Schwartz said that women needed a two-tiered system of employment (Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014). Women without children would have a career track identical to that of men in regards to hiring and promotions, while women with children would be placed on the “mommy track.” This career path would feature more flexible options for employment and less intensive work, which would be beneficial for women trying to balance family and work life. Although there would be trade-offs such as slower wage growth and more limited employment opportunities, Schwartz said that these would be “appropriate” trade-offs. Not surprisingly, these comments sparked a controversial debate over women’s role in the modern workforce.

Unfortunately, research has shown that all four types of flexibility options, including reduced work hours, flextime, telecommuting, and child-care assistance, were associated with decreased wages (Glass, 2004). Reduced work hours and telecommuting were linked with the largest declines in wages, while flextime and child-care assistance were linked with smaller declines. While professional mothers may see flexibility options as a positive option to improve their family-work balance, non-professional mothers may be limited to part-time positions as employers seek to keep costs of employment down (Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014; Webber & Williams, 2008).

Perceived negative consequences of motherhood for working mothers can also be significant, even if they have no basis in reality (Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014).

Contrary to their hypothesis, Crowley and Kolenikov (2014) found that perceived control over flexibility options did not significantly impact the perceived risks associated with the 'mommy track.' Furthermore, research has shown that perceived career harm negatively affects employees in several ways, including decreased worker health, increased strain between employees and their employers, and decreased organizational commitment (Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014). Thus, limited career potential is not the only risk.

There are several factors that impact women's decision of whether or not to join the mommy track. Spouses' careers have a considerable impact in several ways (Shafer, 2011; Sidle, 2011). First, women are likely to analyze what percentage of the household's income would be lost if she were to exit the workplace. If this percentage is less than 50%, they are more likely to leave their jobs than women who make greater than 50% of the household's income (Shafer, 2011; Sidle, 2011). Additionally, women whose spouses work 45 hours per week or more are more likely to exit the workplace than women who work fewer hours (Shafer, 2011; Sidle, 2011). However, preferences of the women also play a role (Shafer, 2011; Sidle, 2011). In 1979, Shafer interviewed women between the ages of 14 and 21 and followed them until 1994. After this time, the women were interviewed biennially. Shafer found that women who responded in 1979 that they would like to have a career at age 35 were more likely to remain in the workforce than women who responded that they would not like to have a career.

Women can increase their chances of getting on the mommy track by choosing companies with accommodating policies (Palmer, 2007). Best Buy, for

example, allows some of its corporate employees to work entirely from home and set their own hours. PricewaterhouseCoopers, an accounting firm, has the Full Circle program, which allows parents to temporarily stop working for the company after the birth of a child while remaining connected through networking and training events. However, as this program is highly selective, not all employees may be eligible to participate. Nevertheless, the turnover rate at PricewaterhouseCoopers fell from 24 percent to 15 percent between 2001 and 2007, due in part to this program.

The Second Shift

In her book, *The Second Shift* (1989), author Arlie Hochschild identifies the unequal workload experienced by employed mothers in regards to household labor and childcare (Hochschild, 1989; Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009). This, she says, results in a double day of work for women. Research has identified several negative consequences for women that result from this double day. For example, families with young children may see increased time pressures as well as strained relationships between mothers and their spouses. Furthermore, full-time employed mothers may report feeling as if they do not get enough sleep, leisure time, or quality time with their families.

In a study performed by Milkie, et. al. (2009), the authors examined three common family-work issues – time allocations, time pressures, and parent-child interactions – by examining national time diary collections. The research produced two primary findings. First, in households with young children, the level of maternal employment was consistently much lower than those with older children. Second,

while maternal employment varied accordingly, the level of paternal employment was not responsive to the age of children. Additionally, they found that mothers engaged in childcare activities twice as often as fathers regardless of a child's age. Moreover, of all of the groups studied, mothers who worked full-time felt the most time pressed, were more likely to report multitasking most of the time, and reported most often that they did not feel they had enough time with their spouses (Milkie, et. al., 2009).

Interestingly, research has also shown that mothers feel the need to assume the primary responsibility for childrearing because they believe that they are the ideal caregivers (Blair-Loy, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Milkie, et. al., 2009). For this reason, “mothers feel compelled to devote themselves totally to the project of childrearing and feel uncomfortable outsourcing this task to other caregivers – even fathers” (Hattery, 2001; Milkie, et. al., 2009, p. 490). Therefore, even though mothers may sense the negative consequences of the second shift, their reluctance to share in childcare duties contributes to a continued imbalance of the parental roles.

In a 2014 interview, Hochschild said that the good news was that progress has been made (Schulte, 2014). Women continue to enter the workplace, moving into higher positions and earning more money. Yet despite this progress, Hochschild asserted that women are in a stalled revolution. The workplace has proved very difficult to change, little progress has been made, and there is still very little governmental help regarding family leave policies. As businesses seek to remove the hindrance imposed by the new, high stress culture, which makes it very difficult for a woman to remain in the workforce once she has children, this stalled revolution

must be considered. If companies wish to improve retention of female employees, and if the programs companies offer are to benefit employees and not just the companies themselves, progress must continue to be made.

Balancing Act – Work and Family Lives

As previously discussed, while family structure has changed, workplace structure and public policies have fallen behind. As a result, parents face the difficult task of balancing work and home. Unfortunately, women still perform the majority of the housework and childcare in traditional homes (Miller, 2015a; Pew Research Center, 2015). While research shows that men are doing more at home, though, they tend to overestimate their level of contribution (Miller, 2015a; Pew Research Center, 2015). Although there was virtually no gender gap in housework before a couple had children, a considerable gap accompanied the birth of the first child. Specifically, women were found to spend an additional 21 hours a week on housework while men only spent an additional 12.5 hours (Miller, 2015b).

With sixty percent of children living in households where both parents work at least part time, working parents are becoming the norm (Miller, 2015a; Pew Research Center, 2015). Additionally, the number of mothers who stay at home has decreased from 46 percent in 1970 to 26 percent. As such, the balancing act concerning work and home is becoming a more common, widespread struggle.

An Unequal Playing Field for Women

There are several reasons why women are disadvantaged in comparison to men in the workplace. Biases and perceptions in the workplace, the double bind,

and the glass ceiling all cause significant difficulties and barriers for women as family lives clash with work lives and career aspirations. Additionally, biases against women in the workplace negatively affect bosses' perceptions about women's promotability. Each of these topics will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Biases and Perception in the Workplace

In June 2015, Nobel laureate Tim Hunt resigned as Honorary Professor at the University College London after he made a chauvinistic statement toward female scientists (Bilefsky, 2015). During a speech at the World Conference of Science Journalists, he remarked, "Let me tell you about my trouble with girls. Three things happen when they are in the lab: You fall in love with them, they fall in love with you, and when you criticize them, they cry" (Bilefsky, 2015, para. 3). These comments were met by silence from the crowd and received global backlash as both female and male scientists around the world were outraged by his speech. Although his comments referenced only women in the science professions, these comments demonstrate the larger issue about the challenges faced by women in all professions, including women in business, as they struggle against sexism and gender bias.

The Double Bind

Research has documented that women are expected to display more communal qualities than men, which means showing high concern for the treatment of others. Men, on the other hand, are expected to display more agentic qualities, or

those that convey assertion and control (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Importantly, the concepts of agentic and communal traits are not only different in men and women, but are often oppositional (Heilman, 2001). Men are often seen as lacking in communal traits, which are those most prevalent in women. Similarly, women are often seen as lacking in agentic traits, which are those most prevalent in men. Because upper management roles are perceived as being masculine, requiring “achievement-oriented aggressiveness” and “emotional toughness,” biased evaluations may keep women from securing these positions (Heilman, 2001).

Accordingly, these perceptions create a double bind for women. If a woman is highly communal, she may be criticized for not being agentic enough, but if she is highly agentic, she may be criticized for not being communal enough. Thus, if a woman does not achieve perfect balance between displaying agentic and communal qualities, it may be determined that she is an incorrect fit for a powerful position (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

These traditional stereotypes have been shown to exist not only in non-work settings, but in the workplace as well (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995). A study conducted by Heilman, et al. (1995) showed that even when women were depicted as managers, they were viewed as less agentic than men. Significantly, this gender difference only subsided when women were depicted as being highly successful. This research suggests that if women are to overcome these prevalent gender stereotypes in the workplace, a job title alone is not enough.

The Glass Ceiling

If a woman hopes to overcome the trait characterizations mentioned above, she must be very successful in a management role. However, the first step in this goal is attaining a management role, which is an obstacle of its own. The glass ceiling “presents an impenetrable barrier at some point in a woman’s career” (Heilman, 2001, p. 657; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987). Heilman (2001) argues that this barrier is a result of gender stereotypes and the resulting expectations about what women are like and how they should behave. Importantly, these stereotypes do not only keep women out of leadership and management roles. Instead, they continue to plague them as they move up the organizational ladder (Heilman, 2001).

There are two characteristics to these stereotypes (Heilman, 2001). First, they are descriptive, in that they describe men and women as they are perceived to be. Second, they are prescriptive, influencing the expected norms for each gender. According to the Lack of Fit model, women are perceived as not fitting traditionally male jobs, which then leads to expectations of failure for women in those roles (Heilman, 2001). Moreover, violating prescriptive norms about how women ought to behave can lead to disapproval, which may then lead to penalties for the women who violate these norms.

Gender-stereotypic descriptions and prescriptions have several consequences (Heilman, 2001). Descriptions that are gender based can lead to the devaluation of and denial of credit for women’s performance. Prescriptions that are gender based may cause women to be penalized for their competence. For this reason, gender stereotypes perpetuate the glass ceiling phenomenon.

However, Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that the “glass ceiling” metaphor is not an accurate depiction. According to them, this metaphor describes women’s workplace plight as a simple, direct struggle with a single obstacle standing in their way. Instead, they describe women’s struggle as a labyrinth, which involves multiple obstacles and requires constant persistence and analysis of future obstacles.

The Influence of Perceptions on Promotability

Many scholars have studied the existence and affects of gender biases in the workplace. Goldberg (1968) performed an experiment in which students were asked to evaluate written essays that were identical except for the attached male or female name (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Goldberg, 1968). Unless the essay was on a feminine topic, students gave lower evaluations to the women than to the men. Approximately forty years later, another study found that professors tended to view male applicants as significantly more competent and hireable than their identically qualified female counterparts (Moss-Racusin, et. al, 2012).

Other research has focused more specifically on the results of family-friendly employee benefit programs. Hoobler, Wayne and Lemmon (2009) found that managers’ perceptions of women’s family-work conflict may play a role in their career progress by influencing the managers’ perceptions of the women’s promotability. Still others have discussed the negative consequences that such programs are likely to cause. Bergmann (2009) asserted that paid parental leave would increase the social pressure for women to use those policies. As a result, employers would be more hesitant to place women in non-routine jobs where one

employee cannot be easily substituted for another. Studies have also examined the various strategies that women use to avoid opting in or out, but to “opt in between,” including part-time employment, self-employment, or flexible work hours (Grant-Valone & Ensher, 2011).

Each of these studies points to the persisting problem that women face in the workplace. Despite the fact that the Goldberg (1968) and Moss-Racusin, et. al. (2012) studies took place approximately forty years apart, each found a tendency of evaluators to give women poorer evaluations than for their counterparts. While workplace policies such as those mentioned above are an attempt at easing this struggle, assessments about their consequences are mixed, and as a result, women continue to face inequality in the workplace.

Impression Management Strategies

As previously noted, perception can play a significant role in the workplace by affecting the way bosses’ perceive employees’ promotability. In order to control perceptions and impressions of others, employees commonly use impression management strategies (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Impression management is “the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them” (Goffman, 1959; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007, p. 484; Jones, 1990; Rosenfeld, Edwards, & Thomas, 2005; Schlenker, 1980). According to Singh, Kumra and Vinnicombe (2007), by engaging in impression management, we bring our “public selves” closer to our “ideal selves” by constructing desirable social behaviors (p. 78).

There are several impression management strategies that employees may use in the workplace. Self-descriptions are descriptive statements used by an individual in order to point out one of his or her strengths or abilities (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). For example, a job applicant may describe herself as organized or self-motivated. Acclaiming is another type of impression management in which an individual shares events or accomplishments in such a way that he or she is viewed more favorably (Gardner & Martinko, 1988).

Another strategy is flattery. This is when an individual shows liking to or does favors for another individual, such as an employee flattering a supervisor in order to improve the supervisor's attraction to the employee (Wayne & Liden, 1995). Self-verification theory states that individuals are more attracted to people who reflect the opinions or perceptions they have of themselves (Swann, Steinn-Seroussi & Giesler, 1992; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Furthermore, individuals see themselves as similar to those who display similar perceptions of themselves (Byrne, 1971; Lewicki, 1983; Wayne & Liden, 1995). In this way, flattery may be used in an attempt to control the perceptions and impressions others form of them.

Another self-focused impression management strategy is presenting a 'professional demeanor,' or a totally work-focused image (Singh, et. al, 2007). Relatedly, it was found that women chose not talk about their families at work. In male dominated workplaces, there are few females in senior roles, resulting in a lack of role models for more junior women. Therefore, as women enter into this primarily male atmosphere, they must decide whether to adapt to become a better fit in existing cultures or to stand out at the risk of being seen as unprofessional.

Interestingly, although women recognize the importance of impression management, many choose not to use these strategies (Singh, et. al, 2007). Instead, they rely on superior performance for recognition, leaving networking, ingratiation and self-promotion to their male colleagues. Unfortunately, if male employees use impression management strategies while women continue to opt out of such practices, it will likely continue to negatively impact women's careers.

In the following section, I will discuss the results of this study. Surveys and individual interviews with professional women will provide insight for the perceived consequences of using family-friendly benefit programs and will also answer the central research question. Namely, whether and to what extent women's decisions to opt in or out of family-friendly benefit programs are influenced by perceptions and biases in the workplace.

Methods and Research

Using a convenience sample, I surveyed 40 working, professional mothers, each of which had at least one child. I intentionally avoided surveying women who were teachers, professors, nurses or doctors. As these professions may inherently provide more flexibility and therefore be more attractive to working mothers, women in these careers may not have as much experience with or need for family-friendly benefits programs. Accordingly, their responses may have skewed the data and made it more difficult to obtain an accurate view of working conditions for professional mothers in their attempt to balance work and family lives.

The surveys consisted of both quantitative and qualitative results. I used a Likert scale for topics such as husband's support, boss' perceptions, job flexibility, and use of benefits by males and females at each respondent's place of employment. Additionally, I used questions that asked for a simple "Yes" or "No" response to assess aspects such as travel expectations, involvement in mentorship programs, comfort with self-promotion, and desire to have a position in the C-Suite. Finally, I used open-ended qualitative questions for topics that required a longer response. These topics included regrets, difficulties experienced as a result of being a working mother, self-promotion tactics, and forms of childcare offered by employers and/or used by respondents.

Part of the survey was a question involving their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. After viewing responses, I conducted interviews with five individuals based on their indicated openness to such an activity during the survey. I sent interview questions to these individuals via email and received responses from four of these five women.

Number of Children

Survey respondents reported to have between one and six children with an average of 2.2. These children were between the ages of six-months and 27-years-old with an average of 14.8. The interview respondents had from one to three children, ranging in age from two- to twenty-one-years-old. When the interview respondents were asked whether they would have chosen to have more children if their working conditions had been different, each woman said no, citing reasons

that included meeting their desired number of children as well as financial limitations.

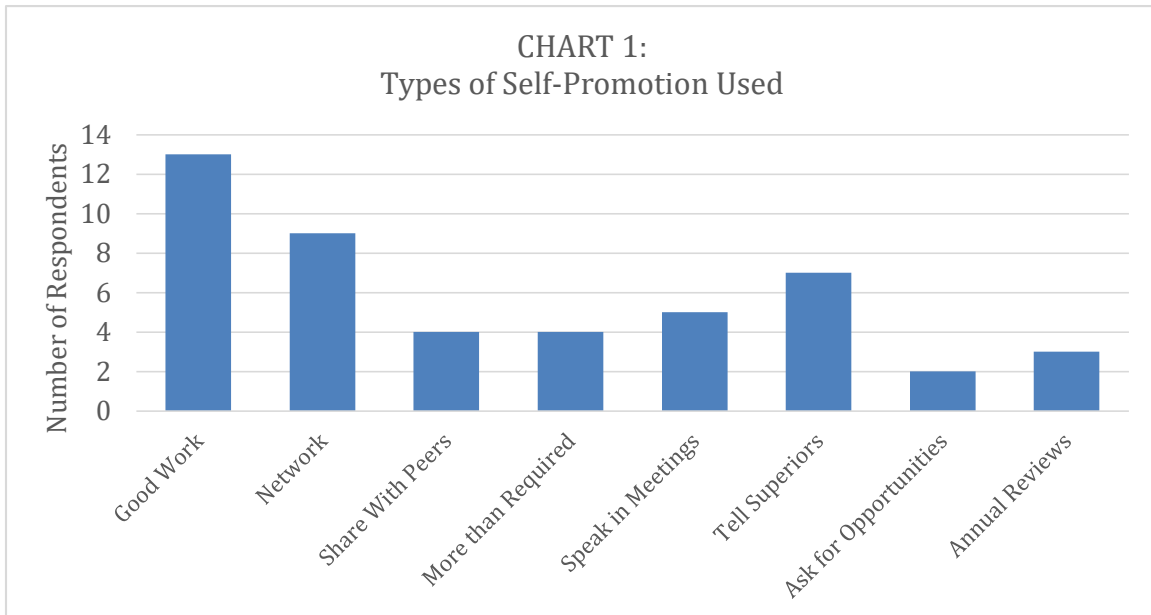
Desire for Position in the C-Suite and Self Promotion Techniques

Three of the four interview candidates indicated in the survey that they did not want to have a position in the C-Suite. One woman felt that she does her best work as a “number two person,” while another cited changes resulting from motherhood. Interestingly, this woman said that when she had children, she wanted “to be CEO of (her) domain,” which involved providing her children with the best childhood she could. While she believed that women in executive positions could still achieve this goal, she wanted the flexibility to put her family first, “without the guilt” of prioritizing her life in this way.

Only one interview respondent had previously indicated that she hoped to have a position in the C-Suite. When asked what prompted this goal, she referred to her involvement in a leadership development program during the early stages of her career. This program, she said, was designed specifically to “develop participants as future senior managers/officers.” While she is no longer at this employer, this respondent said that her early involvement in such a program allowed her to see her “potential to grow into a significant position.” Furthermore, she realized that people in high-ranking positions “are not all that different from (herself).”

Of the respondents, 27.5% indicated that they would like to have a position in the C-Suite at some point in their career. However, when asked to identify the types of self-promotion techniques each woman employed, 32.5% responded that they focused on doing good work, letting their quality products and work ethic

speak for itself. Only two women said that they asked for opportunities, and only five claimed to speak in meetings. The most popular types of self-promotion, as found in the survey responses, are displayed in *Chart 1* below.



It is interesting that the majority of respondents identified a strong work ethic and quality work results as a self-promotion technique. As previously noted, self-promotion is an act of drawing attention to ones' self intentionally in order to show their capabilities or strengths. However, good work is a passive activity, whereby the individual relies on others to notice on their own. Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook COO and former CEO of Google, says that hard work is not enough (Sandberg, 2013, pp. 63). Women tend to fall under what Sandberg calls the "Tiara Syndrome," in which they mistakenly believe that they will be noticed for their hard work and persistence, and as a result, a tiara will be placed on their head (Sandberg, 2013, pp. 63; Seligson, 2007). If women actually want to obtain C-Suite positions as indicated in their survey responses, they must become more comfortable using

effective self-promotion techniques such as speaking in meetings, telling supervisors of accomplishments, and asking for opportunities.

Most Common Benefits

As part of the open-ended questions, respondents were asked to recall which benefits their employers offered. Following this, they were asked to identify which benefits they took advantage of, if any, once they became pregnant or had children. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Use/Provision of Benefits

	Offered	Used
Flextime	13	12
Paid Parental Leave	10	10
Sick Leave	9	8
Vacation Days	7	6
Telecommute	7	5
None	5	

Consequences of Using Benefits

In the Likert portion of the survey, respondents were faced with statements regarding various consequences that they might experience as a result of being a working mother and using the family-friendly benefits offered by their employers. Three of these consequences included guilt, a change in bosses' perception and a change in bosses' treatment of women once they had children. The results of these statements and responses are displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 2:
Consequences of Being a Working Mother

	“I experience guilt from being a working mother.”	“I noticed a change in how I was perceived by my boss after having a child.”	“I noticed a change in how I was treated by my boss after having a child.”
Very Inaccurate	4	10	11
Inaccurate	4	13	13
Somewhat Inaccurate	0	1	0
Neutral	4	4	4
Somewhat Accurate	8	6	8
Accurate	12	3	4
Very Accurate	8	2	1

Interestingly, there was a significant correlation between the Guilt and Perception/Treatment responses. Accordingly, if a woman noticed a change in the way her boss treated/perceived her after having a child, she was more likely to report experiencing guilt. An ANOVA was run on a sample of 40 participants to examine the relationship between impression management techniques and reports of changes in bosses’ perceptions. It was found that the respondents were more likely to say they felt they needed to engage in more self-promotion if they reported a change in how they were perceived by their boss after having kids, $F(1,34)= 5.84$, $p<.05$. It was also found that respondents felt they needed to “act like one of the guys” if they reported noticing a change in how they were perceived by their bosses after having kids, $F(1,34)=4.27$, $p<.05$.

Greatest Difficulties

However, the remaining respondents identified several difficulties that related to both workplace and societal issues. These regrets are displayed below in Table 3.

TABLE 3:
Examples of Difficulties Resulting from Family/Work Decisions

Workplace	Society
"I feel I cannot talk openly about leaving work to attend to my children."	"The pressure to be at play dates... Sometimes stay at home mothers are not as understanding of your time."
"In the business I was in (there) were a lot of customer and company dinners and events. (It is) hard to attend when you are pregnant and cannot drink and have no desire to stay up till the wee hours of the morning - and so you seem like you are not participating."	"The guilt of working and missing out on the early years and also missing out on school activities."

Regrets

One of the open-ended survey questions involved regrets regarding their family/work decisions. The results are displayed in Chart 2. It is encouraging that twenty-three of the 40 survey respondents said that they had no regrets regarding their family/work decisions. Other responses were sorted into categories including "More Quality Time With Kids," "Job/Career-Related" and "Other." Examples of each type of regret can be found in Table 4.

CHART 2:
Regrets Concerning Family/Work Decisions

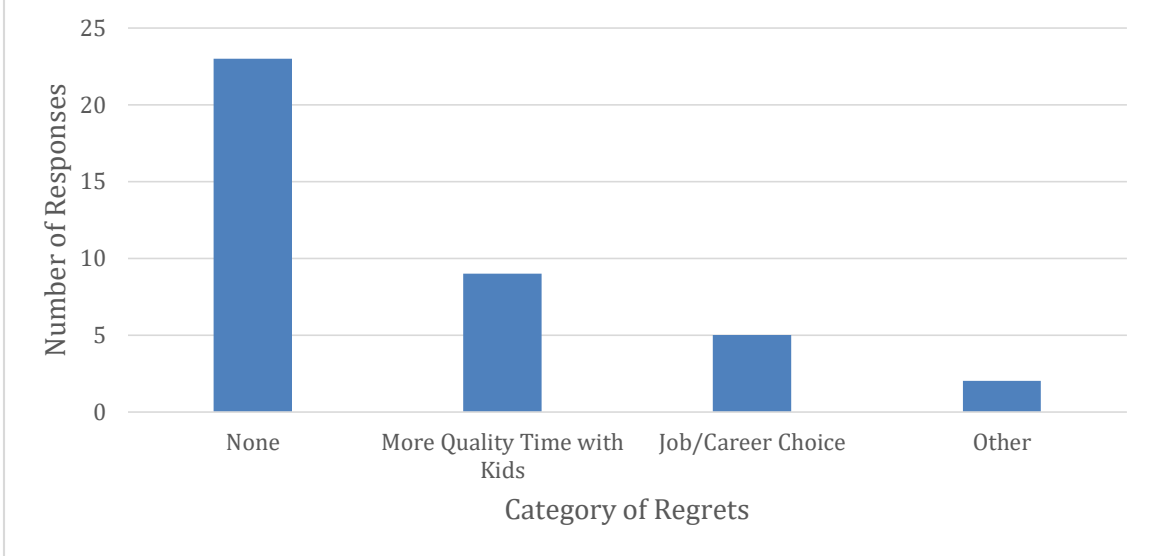


TABLE 4:

Examples of Regrets Concerning Family/Work Decisions

None	Quality Time	Job/Career Choice
<p>“None. I try to always put my children and their activities, appointments etc. first. I work a lot of late nights and early mornings from home to make sure I can always be at their games, plays, etc.”</p>	<p>“Would like to spend more time with my children. I’m a workaholic and need to focus on better balance.”</p>	<p>“...since being a stay at home is not an option (for me), given the information I know now I think I would have preferred to go into teaching or a school environment.”</p>
<p>“(I am) glad I had the working experience and I was successful at it - but (I am) glad I quit after my second was born and stayed home and raised my children.”</p>	<p>“I do regret more quality time with them, but I make the most of my time when I am with them. It's constantly a battle to be active in PTA and extra curricular activities.”</p>	<p>“Confidentially- I wish I had not left my former employer until after I was done having children.”</p>
<p>“No. Not at all. I want my kids to grow up with a strong work ethic and have gratitude and appreciation for all that we have because of hard work; I also love my job.”</p>	<p>“I would have liked to have been more available to my children in their junior high school years.”</p>	<p>“I wish I had gone part time earlier.”</p>
<p>“No. Both working parents are necessary to support our lifestyle.”</p>	<p>“I just wish I could have spent more time with my kids, although I think they have perhaps grown into strong, independent adults because they had to make decisions on their own and take care of themselves at times.”</p>	<p>“My only regret was having not changed jobs sooner... I left the previous organization when my youngest was three and took a position that allowed me to work from home and have considerable flexibility. I wish I had made the change sooner!”</p>

Limitations

There were two major limitations to my study. First, I used a convenience sample with a relatively small sample size. In future research, it may be helpful to survey a larger number of women in order to better identify relationships and trends. However, by using a convenience sample, I was able to ensure that each respondent fit my initial criteria; namely, that they were professional, working mothers with a career other than teachers, professors, doctors or nurses. If this had been a truly random sample, it may have been more difficult to ensure these characteristics.

Second, I was curious to see what life was actually like for working mothers, and therefore, this was an exploratory study. As such, I did not have established hypotheses for expected findings, and included a wide array of questions in my survey involving a variety of topics. Due to the exploratory nature, I posed a considerable number of open-ended questions. This may have altered the types of responses I received regarding how the respondents perceived the questions.

Implications and Future Research

The results of my study have two primary implications. First, businesses have improved conditions. Companies are beginning to realize the difficulties working mothers experience in balancing their work and family lives. Accordingly, companies have begun to provide benefits that working mothers view as attractive.

As shown in Table 1, the number of women whose employer offered one of the benefits was almost the same as the number of women who used that benefit. This suggests that employers offer benefits that women deem worthwhile.

Importantly, the nature of this survey question may provide some explanation for this outcome. Because the women were asked to identify the benefits offered by their employer, they may have been more likely to recall the benefits they used. For example, while an employer may offer telecommuting but an individual does not work remotely, he/she may not be likely to recall this as being an option. Additionally, while all employers may offer vacation days, some individuals may not initially categorize this as a family-friendly benefit. Regardless of these limitations, the results suggest that women tend to use the benefits that their employers offer.

However, while businesses have improved conditions, there is still considerable progress to be made. While companies are offering more family-friendly benefits, managers may not fully encourage their use. As the significant correlation between guilt and bosses' treatment/perception of working mothers suggests, managers may actually be discouraging employees from taking advantage of their company's family-friendly benefits. As long as women experience a change in the way their bosses treat or perceive them once they have children, they may be less likely to fully utilize the benefits offered by their employers.

Second, there is much progress yet to be made in society itself. As the difficulties experienced by respondents demonstrate, there are still expectations placed on working mothers that hinder their ability to achieve work-life balance.

One example of this is that stay-at-home moms are not as understanding of working mothers' time commitments. Additionally, the amount of housework performed by each spouse remains imbalanced. Expectations for working mothers, such as to cook meals at home, do laundry, and get the children ready for bed, make it even more difficult for these women to achieve family-work balance.

Future Research

Future studies may consider focusing on specific age ranges for working mothers to determine how the workplace and society have changed over the years. My survey included women whose age fell across a fairly broad range. However, it would be interesting to examine how family friendly benefits, bosses' perceptions and treatment of working mothers, and self-promotion have changed over time.

As I previously mentioned, my sample size was fairly small, and as it was a convenience sample, for the most part, respondents were from a singular geographic area: namely, the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and other fairly close cities. Future researchers might consider expanding this geographic area to get a better understanding of workplace conditions for working mothers across America. It may also be interesting to study various geographic regions of the United States to determine whether some areas are more friendly to working mothers.

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