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MOTHERS ON THE MARKET: EMPLOYER HIRING PRACTICES  
AND MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES

by

Elizabeth Kiester

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Sociology

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Logan Utah

2014

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## ABSTRACT

Mothers on the Market: Employer Hiring Practices and Motherhood Penalties

by

Elizabeth A. Kiestler, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2014

Major Professor: Dr. Christy Glass  
Department: Sociology

Recent scholars have identified a phenomenon known as the motherhood wage penalty with research demonstrating that women with children face wage discrepancies beyond those associated with being female. This project adds to our understanding of non-wage-related penalties by investigating two distinct gatekeeping stages: screening and interviewing. I asked *do employer hiring practices create barriers to mothers' access to jobs?* To answer this question, I used a novel mixed-methods approach, combining a dual-state audit study with qualitative employer interviews. I framed my study using the status theory of motherhood, which suggests that whenever motherhood is salient in the labor market, mothers will face discrimination. This study is the first of its kind in the field of motherhood and organizational discrimination. In phase one, I completed an audit study in two states: Utah and California. Each week, I applied for 10 jobs in each state using two fictitious applicants for a total of 40 resumes per week. This resulted in 960 applications (480 companies) over a 24-week period. I then randomly selected

employers in each state for a total of 27 interviews, allowing me to speak directly with hiring managers regarding their employment practices.

Throughout this project I identified employer bias at both the screening and interviewing stages. This included three key mechanisms: employers' ideal expectations for their workers, the subjective assessment of both soft skills and family responsibilities, and the employment gap inquiry. Findings also varied by state suggesting that the salience of motherhood may be impacted by larger cultural and policy contexts resulting in varied labor market outcomes.

(237 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

## Mothers on the Market: Employer Hiring Practices and Motherhood Penalties

Elizabeth Kiester

While gender inequity in wages is often discussed in the media by politicians, the motherhood wage penalty receives substantially less attention. This distinct wage penalty suggests that women with children suffer a wage penalty separate from women without children. In addition, there is an employment gap between mothers and nonmothers indicating that mothers are less likely to be employed. While some argue that this is a matter of choice, I contend that mothers may face unique barriers that deny them access to the labor market. I tested this theory in two ways and in two states; Utah and California. First, I sent two applications to 480 companies; both applicants were women but one indicated that she was a mother. I then kept track of which applicants received follow-up emails or phone calls. If employers were biased and discriminated against mothers, I would expect that the “mother” candidate would receive fewer follow-up contacts. The second way I investigated this issue was by directly speaking with hiring managers at 27 of the companies that I applied to. I asked them questions regarding their ideal worker, gender preferences, and the relevance of family responsibilities in their hiring decisions. This research was funded by a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant.

Findings from both studies indicate that employers’ assumptions about mothers create a bias against them when they are being considered for employment. This project has significant societal benefits as it indicates that both the motherhood wage penalty and

employment gap are not simply products of mothers choosing to opt out of the labor market. In addition, it suggests that cultural assumptions about motherhood may adversely affect women without children as they are perceived of being “at risk” of becoming mothers in the future. These penalties may also expand beyond the hiring and wage setting stages to performance and promotion issues.

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do it. Thanks for 24 years of friendship. When you decide to add “PhD” to your list of credentials, I’ll be there for you too.

To my parents, Anne and Don Johnson; you have given me every opportunity in the world to succeed. You have helped out in so many ways not the least of which has been a ton of babysitting these past few months while I traveled and tried desperately to finish writing. Your support and belief in me has made a world of difference, and I will be so proud to share in that with you as I walk across the stage one last time. I hope I make you proud.

August, you are my light at the end of every tunnel. Thank you for always holding my hand and wrapping your arms around me. I spent the better part of Aug-Oct of 2013 away from home, and you are the one who made that possible by keeping everything together. Since my return in November, I have been incredibly difficult to love between the stress of the job market and writing this dissertation. There is no way I could have done this without you. You have all my gratitude and all my love, forever. Kaiya, you have been so patient with me and all my reading and writing. I am so sorry you have had to miss me so much. I only hope that someday you will see me as the example I hope to have set for you. Reach for the stars! Last but not least, Rosemary Johnson. I take great comfort in knowing that you are looking down and smiling proudly.

Elizabeth Kiester

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Employers can no longer legally exclude young women on the grounds that they may have babies and leave the job . . .but informal exclusion and unspoken denigration are still widespread and still difficult to document and to confront” (Acker 2006).

“There are many sources of the gender gap in employment caused by potentially discriminatory actions by employers: in wages for the same job, in hiring, in promotion, and in how wages are set for different kinds of work. Of these, hiring is potentially the most important. . . . Yet hiring is perhaps the least understood of these processes” (Petersen and Togstad 2006).

Since the 1970s and the substantial rise in female labor force participation, the gender wage gap has long interested social scientists (Bielby and Baron 1986; England 1992; Kilbourne et al. 1994). More recently, scholars have identified a phenomenon known as the motherhood wage penalty (MWP) (Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003; Budig and England 2001; Waldfogel 1997). This research has demonstrated that women with children face wage discrepancies that go above and beyond being a woman or being a parent and represent a unique interaction between these two ascribed status characteristics (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). However, while the MWP has been established empirically, there remains debate over the mechanisms that produce these outcomes. While some scholars suggest the wage penalty is the result of discrimination by employers (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007), others speculate that the wage gap may be due to reduced effort by women following the birth of a child (Belkin 2003; Hakim 2000). Unfortunately, most research to date remains largely theoretical or relies on

individual level survey data, limiting the ability to identify those factors that contribute to the MWP.

At the same time, scholars have begun to rule out reduced work effort as a mechanism driving motherhood penalties (Kmec 2011). To date, very little research has explored the meso-level processes, such as employment practices and job context, to determine what role (if any) discrimination plays in shaping access to jobs. This project, while informed by the MWP literature and disparate wage outcomes, seeks to expand our understanding of non-wage related motherhood penalties by analyzing recruitment and hiring practices, specifically applicant screening and interviewing. Specifically, I am interested the *practice* or implementation of employment policies rather than the formal written policies themselves. Existing organizational research indicates a strict adherence to and continued development of these policies, thus leaving little room for deviation between employers (Dobbin 2009; Kalev, Kelly, and Dobbin 2006; Kelly and Dobbin 1999). Thus, it is the unwritten practices and decision-making processes that are the most interesting for understanding penalties in access to jobs faced by mothers. By focusing on employment strategies pursued by firms, I identify barriers to employment faced by mothers.

Analysis of meso-level employment practices advances the literature in two critical ways. First, this research identifies mechanisms that contribute to motherhood employment barriers at the meso-level. I hypothesized that these barriers would occur at two gatekeeping stages. At stage one, employers screen applicants. This could be accomplished by publically seeking applicants through some form of advertising or by the use of employee referrals and informal networks. Next, applicants face an initial

screen for suitability based on the requirements of the position to be filled. Stage two focuses on the reduced pool of applicants, typically inviting applicants for telephone and/or in-person interviews. The final stage is the actual hiring of the person deemed the most ideal for the job. See Figure 1. This model indicates a reduction in the applicant pool at each stage of gatekeeping, thus reducing the likelihood of an applicant advancing to the next stage. If, at either of these stages of gatekeeping, mothers face discriminatory practices, then they are less likely to be hired. Additionally, if mothers face barriers to employment at the gatekeeping stages, it would also suggest that those who are lucky enough to receive job offers would be subject to similar barriers when it comes to wage setting and promotion.

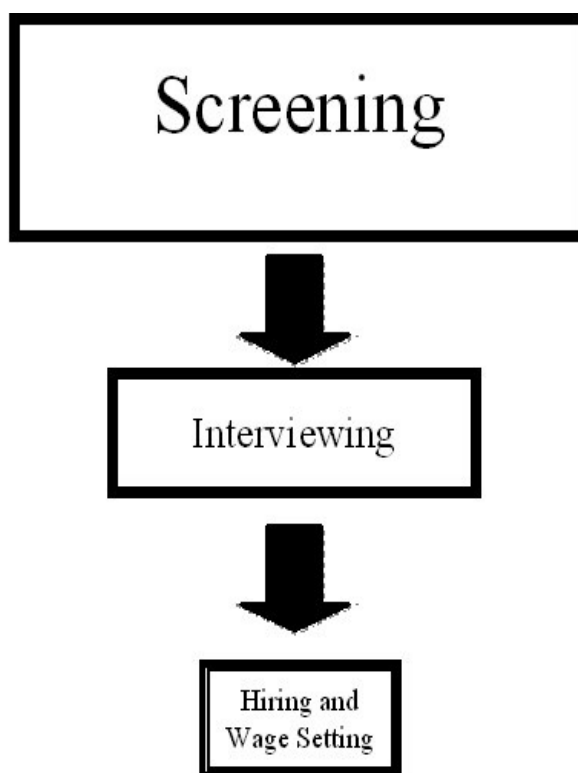


FIGURE 1. Stages of the Employment Process



Second, this project sought to determine whether motherhood penalties are underspecified as existing research focuses on wages and underrepresented because wages only measure those applicants that survived all three stages of the employment process. Existing research hypothesizes that employer bias may be a contributing to the MWP (Correll et al. 2007). This project would be able to confirm the plausibility of this mechanism by identifying pre-wage, employment barriers as noted above.

My primary research question was *Do employer hiring practices create barriers to mothers' access to jobs?* This question comes at an important time when legal precedence has long since been established to prevent discrimination yet reports continue to reveal illegal practices. As Acker (2006:459) notes “employers can no longer legally exclude young women on the grounds that they may have babies and leave the job . . .but informal exclusion and unspoken denigration are still widespread and still difficult to document and to confront.” In order to examine this question in depth, I began by reviewing the existing literature to provide a substantive, theoretical, and methodological foundation for this project. Initially I provide an overview of the MWP literature and present both supply and demand-side explanations for its existence. I then explain my engagement with the theoretical framework of motherhood as a status characteristic and its usefulness for exploring motherhood employment barriers. I conclude my literature review with existing empirical evidence that examines the role of employer bias and discrimination in disparate labor market outcomes. Next, I provide outlines for three chapters that explore the existence of motherhood employment barriers using a mixed-methods approach. Finally, I present some preliminary hypotheses and concluding remarks about the important contributions of this research.

## THE RESEARCH PUZZLE

In the U.S., 79% of nonmothers<sup>1</sup> are employed.<sup>2</sup> However, only 67% of mothers with young children are employed.<sup>3</sup> This employment gap indicates that there is something unique about being a mother in the labor market. Existing literature has documented compelling evidence of a MWP (Anderson et al. 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll et al. 2007). And while this literature is often driven by the assumption that employer bias and discrimination are critical mechanisms of this wage penalty, the mechanisms themselves have not been tested. My research builds upon the work of gender scholars and organizational theorists who have sought to identify gender-related discriminatory mechanisms (Acker 1998; Britton 2000; Reskin 2003; Reskin and McBrier 2000). In doing so, these scholars begin to move beyond the *why* of motherhood penalties to discover *how* inequalities occur and are reproduced over time. My research question advances the field by identifying the role of employer screening and interviewing practices in shaping mothers' labor market opportunities.

## MOTHERHOOD WAGE PENALTIES

Previous research has demonstrated the existence of wage differentials based on gender, parental status, race, and sexual orientation (Budig and England 2001; Elliot and Smith 2004; England 1992; Kilbourne et al. 1994; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004).

Additional studies have demonstrated how these individual characteristics may create variance in the size of the penalty. When it comes to race, Glauber (2007) finds that white mothers pay a larger wage penalty than black or Hispanic mothers. She indicates that this

---

<sup>1</sup> Nonmothers are all men and childless women

<sup>2</sup> 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

may reflect the existence of a floor to the wage penalty suggesting that black and Hispanic mothers already have such low earnings that they simply can't get any lower. However, there may also be cultural differences in that motherhood and paid labor may not be constructed as mutually exclusive when it comes to the expectations associated with certain races. Therefore, employers may not construct their ideal worker and motherhood the same when race is also a salient status characteristic. Budig and Hodges (2010) find that women with the least to lose are proportionately losing the most. Mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning occupations suffer larger penalties. They indicate this could reflect the increased difficulty low wage mothers face of combining family obligations with employment. This research may also suggest that higher paying, high-skilled employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on these meso-level contexts as well as the expectation that low wage mothers will struggle with work-family balance issues.

At the macro-level, scholars aggregate micro-level data to draw country level conclusions for use in cross-national comparisons (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Misra, Budig, and Boeckmann 2011; Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel 2007). With regard to the MWP, this literature finds that there is significant variation between countries. While some studies rely on variation in human capital and others on work-family policies, Harkness and Waldfogel (2003) find that the MWP was closely associated with the motherhood employment gap, indicating that pre-wage, employment stages may be contributing to the disparate labor market outcomes. These findings indicate that there may be meso-level employment barriers in the entire employment process versus just the hiring and wage

setting stage, contributing to larger labor market disparities. They also identify the potential for the variation between employers' construction of motherhood based on workers' individual characteristics and macro-level policy constraints. Such biases as reflected in these wage penalty studies also suggests that similar mechanisms may also be contributing to the motherhood employment gap as noted above by creating access barriers to the labor market.

### SUPPLY VS. DEMAND

There is substantial theoretical debate over the causal mechanisms contributing to motherhood penalties. In economic terms, it is a conversation about supply-side versus demand-side labor market forces and employer/employee relationships. Supply-side theorists suggest that individual characteristics including investment in human capital, workplace effort, commitment, and the self-rated importance of family shape women's employment choices in ways that lead to lower wages and lower rates of employment participation (Becker 1985, 1991; Belkin 2003; Hakim 2000). This research suggests that wage inequalities represent women's rational and conscious choices with regard to work effort and commitment and therefore are not necessarily problematic or subject to remedy through anti-discrimination social policies. Demand-side theorists instead argue that structural barriers, including employer preferences and discrimination, drive inequalities between mothers and nonmothers (Bobbitt-Zeher 2011; Correll et al. 2007; Glauber 2007). Relative to supply-side theorists, demand-side advocates are more concerned with anti-discrimination interventions to limit differences between mothers and nonmothers.

Supply-side contributions to this debate build on classical human capital theory suggesting that individual characteristics and preferences drive labor market outcomes (Becker 1985). Hakim (2000) outlines a preference theory of work and gender. Unlike human capital theory, preference theory is designed to be gender-specific with women in mind, considering how women negotiate work-family conflict. This conflict arises from an increase in heterogeneity among women as a response to the contraceptive and equal rights revolutions, an increasing diversity of family and lifestyle choices, and expanding economic opportunities. As a result of these developments, Hakim (2000) argues that many women simply reduce work effort and/or self-select out of the labor market following the birth of a child. This theoretical perspective was popularized in a contemporary debate known as “opting out” (Belkin 2003). In a *New York Times* article, Belkin (2003) made the controversial argument that highly educated women will *choose* to leave the labor market upon marriage and/or the birth of their first child. Subsequent scholars have since argued that not only is this a class-based argument, but the premise is compromised by a labor market that is hostile to mothers and the concept of work-family balance (Aumann and Galinsky 2012; Jones 2012; Lambert 2012).

However, recent empirical research undermines the relevance of preference theory in explaining motherhood penalties in the workplace. In an analysis of nationally representative data of full-time adults, Kmec (2011) finds that mothers are no different than nonmothers on various pro-work outcomes ranging from work effort, work intensity, and job engagement. Furthermore, in her study of the experiences of highly skilled women who left work following the birth of a child, Stone (2007) finds that these women report systematic cultural and structural barriers to remaining employed rather than any

personal desire to leave the labor force. These studies suggest that mothers are equally capable and willing to remain employed but face employer-related barriers upon their transition into parenthood.

Demand-side theorists use organizational theories to better understand gender wage gaps and motherhood penalties. Reskin's (2008) labor queues theory suggests that employers create a ranking of possible ideal workers typically based on ascriptive characteristics including gender and race. Employers then seek to hire from the top of their list, or as close as possible, ensuring that "the most desirable jobs go to the most preferred workers . . . and the most lowly workers end up jobless or in jobs others have rejected" (Reskin 2008:803). This theory also relies upon social psychological theories that indicate employers are subjected to a cognitive bias and use stereotypes when recruiting, hiring and promoting workers (Benard, Paik, and Correll 2008; Glass and Minnotte 2010; Heilman and Okimoto 2008) as well as when they construct their ideal worker (Glass and Fodor 2011; MacKenzie and Forde 2009). Therefore, mothers may also find themselves subjected to similar cognitive biases throughout the hiring process as employers rank them at the bottom of preferred applicants.

#### MOTHERS' ACCESS TO JOBS AND THE EMPLOYMENT GAP

Since employment screening practices occur at the meso-level within the firm, a meso-level analysis is critical for bridging existing research and empirically analyzing the mechanisms that shape mothers' access to jobs. Employer stereotypes are most salient and impactful on labor market outcomes at the point of hire (Baumle 2009). Additionally, if employer discrimination against mothers is strongest during the hiring process,

measured wage penalties at the aggregate level underestimate the degree and nature of motherhood penalties in paid work. After all, aggregate wage data only measure mothers who made it through the hiring process and are actively employed rather than mothers who were denied access to jobs due to discrimination. More importantly, if there are employment barriers designed to restrict mothers' access to the labor market, these could explain the employment gap between mothers and nonmothers.

Significant experimental research provides insight into how and why employer bias may create access barriers to mothers by demonstrating the strength of negative stereotypes associated with motherhood. These studies have evaluated experimental testers', typically university students, responses to both applicants and managers who were visibly pregnant (Bragger et al. 2002; Corse 1990; Cunningham and Macan 2007; Halpert, Wilson, and Hickman 1993). Without exception, these studies find that pregnant women are evaluated as less competent, less motivated, and less committed than their non-pregnant counterparts. Additional studies that focused on mothers generally rather than pregnant women specifically confirmed these findings (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). In each instance, researchers noted a conflict in the association between the social construction of motherhood and the ideal worker expectations of 100% commitment and effort to the workplace. In light of this conflict, employers are likely to rank mothers much lower in their labor queues with this preference acting as an employment barrier.

In addition, a study that examined mothers' perceptions of hiring discrimination through qualitative interviews with working mothers found that 44% of respondents reported some type of subjective discrimination (Crowley 2013). Discrimination came in

the form of interview questions regarding pregnancy intentions and childcare responsibilities. However, Morgan et al. (2013) found that when mothers provided counter stereotypical information during the hiring process (e.g., evidence of commitment and competence); there was a reported reduction in hiring manager hostility and formal discrimination. These studies suggest that pre-employment screening may allow employers to screen out any applicants that are readily identified as mothers, reducing the need for such questions at the interview stage and decreasing claims of discrimination and litigation at the hiring stage.

#### EMPLOYER BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION

In their groundbreaking study on the relationship between subjective bias and MWP, Correll et al. (2007) also employ the theoretical framework of motherhood as a status characteristic. They first conducted a laboratory experiment in which undergraduate students compared and ranked resumes of imaginary candidates with equivalent levels of education and experience. In each candidate pair, one was a parent and one was not. Applicants were also paired by gender to control for any gender discrimination. According to the authors, “Mothers were judged as significantly less competent and committed than women without children” (Correll et al. 2007:1316). Students were more likely to negatively assess mothers and reward fathers, thereby supporting the salience of motherhood as a status characteristic in employment practices.

In a second experiment, Correll et al. (2007) conducted an audit study of employers, submitting over 1,200 resumes to over 600 employers. Based on employer callbacks, they were able to determine that, like the students in the first experiment,



employers were more likely to call back female applicants who showed no signs of being a parent as opposed to those who did. As in the previous experiment, men who signaled fatherhood on their resumes were more likely to receive a callback than childless men. Unfortunately, the authors note that they were unable to determine causal mechanisms for the discriminatory practices that were revealed in both experiments. However, they provide a compelling argument for future research to investigate meso-level mechanisms associated with disparate labor market outcomes including employer bias against mothers.

#### MOTHERHOOD AS A STATUS CHARACTERISTIC

How might we better understand motherhood as a source of employer bias and discrimination? Expectation states theory suggests that when we enter social settings, we form expectations about how others will behave and how we might be expected to behave as well (Berger et al. 1977; Correll et al. 2007). According to Berger et al. (1977), a status characteristic is defined by a widely-held set of cultural beliefs that associate greater status worthiness and competence with one category of distinction over another (e.g., nonmothers vs. mothers). In other words, a personal attribute, particularly one that has socially constructed meaning, has attached expectations as to how we anticipate that individual will act. For example, women who are mothers may be expected to put children before work and thus be evaluated as less committed to the workplace. Expectations are particularly salient in social settings and interactions with people we have never met, including the screening of applications, as we search for subtle cues about how to behave and how to relate to others (Morgan et al. 2013; Ridgeway and

Correll 2004). Examples of status characteristics include gender, marital status, and race, and a variety of studies have relied on these status characteristics to analyze disparate labor market outcomes (England 1992; Kanter 1977; Pager 2003).

Not only does status shape how we make sense of others, it is also hierarchical. Status is rarely equal, but rather there is either a preference or higher expectation for one group over another (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). When one group is chronically evaluated by employers as inferior based on cultural assumptions, regardless of circumstance, it becomes a matter of discrimination. In the workplace, status-based discrimination results when employers systematically evaluate high status groups more favorably than low status groups (Correll et al. 2007; GÜngör and Biernat 2009). Employers create expectations for the status group in question (e.g., mothers), and any biases they may have against that group are likely to create employment barriers as this status is evaluated as lower than nonmothers. Thus, this framework suggests that the employment process is biased in favor of high status groups over lower status groups (e.g., nonmothers over mothers).

Motherhood is culturally constructed as a status incompatible with a commitment to paid work, thus mothers tend to be perceived as low status in employment contexts (GÜngör and Biernat 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Mothers are assumed to lack competency as well as devotion to work due to the prioritization of children and family over job responsibilities (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996). This cultural construction of motherhood conflicts with the construction of the ideal worker who is assumed to be completely committed and devoted to the company 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Kmec 2011; Williams 2001). Because of the high cultural status

afforded to paid labor and those who commit themselves to hard work, the above contradiction leads to the devaluation of the status of motherhood (Crittenden 2001; Kimmel 2004). Empirical support for this contradiction comes from studies that have found that occupations that require nurturance—an activity typically associated with motherhood and mothers—is associated with lower wages regardless of whether the employee is male or female (England 1992; Kilbourne et al. 1994).

To support the claim that motherhood is a status characteristic related to but distinct from gender, it is necessary to distinguish the status of mothers from the status of women. To establish this distinction, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that context matters and so the issue of salience must be addressed. In any given situation, for motherhood to become a status characteristic, there must be both mothers and nonmothers present, and actors must be able to differentiate between them. Once this difference has been established, actors will create expectations about those individuals with that status characteristic “even if it is logically irrelevant to the task at hand” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:686). Without differentiation in parental status, and without the ability to detect this difference, another status characteristic (e.g., gender or race) remains the only salient status. The lack of visible indicators of motherhood make this a low ascriptive characteristic, making it even more difficult to assess specific biases associated with this status as opposed to a more visible status.

However, motherhood can become visible in the workplace when a woman displays evidence of being a mother. Evidence of motherhood could include a visible pregnancy, requesting time off to care for a sick child, or simply sharing stories about a child’s antics. When it comes to the pre-employment process, each of these examples

could be easily avoided on an application or resume. Per federal hiring regulations, it is illegal to require marital or parental status on an application (U.S. EEOC 2014). If the issue comes up either inadvertently on the part of the applicant or through an employer's hiring practices, motherhood could become a salient status characteristic. Salience may be contextual, and some employers may never notice or care if signs of motherhood are displayed as it is irrelevant to their construction of the ideal worker. Thus, it is important to consider contextual variance in the labor market to determine if there is variance in the salience of motherhood in the employment process.

Therefore, this project seeks to test the relevance of motherhood as a low status characteristic in the pre-hiring employment stages. In addition, I seek to understand if the salience of motherhood is constant across contexts. Specifically, *1) does variation in state context influence the salience of motherhood* and *2) does variation in occupational context, specifically occupational authority, influence the salience of motherhood?* First, with regard to state level context, I hypothesized that the variance in the states' policy and cultural contexts would also result in a variance in the way employers' construct motherhood and the level of salience it has in the workplace. While individual states are constrained by federal policies, they are also capable of going "above and beyond" what is required. Examples include setting a state-specific minimum wage that is higher than federal standards and offering paid parental leave while the federal government only affords the unpaid protection of a job. Comparing a more liberal state that provides benefits in excess of federal requirements with a more conservative state that does not allows me to examine the role of state policy context in shaping the salience of motherhood.

Existing research has demonstrated that variation in national welfare policies appears to create variance in the severity of the MWP in cross national context (Gornick and Meyers 1997; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Misra et al. 2011; Pettit and Hook 2009). This variation includes differential approaches to welfare policies including parental leave and childcare, resulting in differential levels of motherhood employment rates and variation in the severity of wage penalties. Additional studies find similar outcomes with regard to gaps in family-related pay with social democratic countries facing the smallest wage penalty and corporate conservative countries facing a larger wage penalty (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Harkness and Waldfogel 2003). Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann (2012) add to this field of research by suggesting that the differential outcomes in the existing literature are related to larger cultural norms. They argue that “work-family policies work in concert with gendered cultural norms regarding motherhood to produce a range of outcomes” (Budig et al. 2012:164). In their study, they find that the success of policies that seek to alleviate motherhood penalties depends upon broad cultural support. When work-family policies were implemented without cultural support for mothers in the workplace, the policies failed to mitigate these inequalities. Thus, I hypothesized that broad cultural differences between states would help explain both the variation in policy approaches as well as any employment barriers faced by mothers in each state.

Second, with regard to occupational context, a growing body of research indicates that the salience of motherhood in employment is varied due to occupational characteristics rather than individual demographics. While there is limited research on the effect of occupational categories on motherhood penalties, there is enough evidence to suggest that certain occupations face larger penalties than others (Langdon 2013; Solberg

2005). Additional research suggests that this is due to occupational sex composition indicating that mothers who work in occupations that are female-dominated are subject to a larger wage penalty than mothers in non-female-dominated occupations (Budig and Hodges 2010; Glauber 2012). Glass and Fodor (2014) find differential constructions of the ideal worker by employers in Hungarian financial and business sectors, with mothers facing employment access barriers in the financial industry but not in business firms. Additionally, it appears that occupations that require more authority are perceived to be less flexible and more intense than low skill, non-authoritarian, entry-level occupations, making motherhood even more salient in these contexts (Elliot and Smith 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Lastly, in some instances, employers may actually embrace motherhood and construct their ideal worker in ways compatible with motherhood due to occupational characteristics (Glass, Petrzeka, and Mannon 2011; Glass and Fodor 2014). Specifically, as noted above, employers seeking to fill occupations that require nurturance may find motherhood salient in a positive way, seeking the skill set that is culturally associated with mothering (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996; Hochschild 1983). Thus, I hypothesized that mothers in managerial and administrative occupations would receive less callbacks than mothers in sales, clerical and administrative occupations. This would also hold true for mothers in jobs that require occupational authority.

In addition, a prominent school of thought in organizational psychology, “think manager, think male,” suggests that characteristics and skill sets needed for managerial success are more likely to be associated with men (Schein 1973, 1975). For instance, men are assumed to be more devoted, flexible, and committed to the labor market—all characteristics typically associated with leadership. This assumed association between

masculinity and leadership ability leaves women in general and mothers in particular at a disadvantage when it comes time for promotion into these positions. Organizational context plays an important role in determining if men or women are perceived to be more ideal candidates for the job. I then use this same premise to explore the role of organizational context on the salience of motherhood and the potential for employer bias and discrimination. Therefore, I hypothesized that employers recruiting for occupations that require managerial authority would display a greater preference for hiring nonmothers compared to employers recruiting for occupations that require little or no authority (e.g., “think manager, think nonmother”).

Reskin’s (2008) labor queues theory suggests that employers create a hierarchy of preference based on the ideal worker for each position. They then evaluate applicants for each position based on these hierarchies or labor queues. When the most ideal candidate cannot be found, employers must choose from applicants lower in their labor queue. Employer preferences are also constrained by workers’ own preferences for certain positions, creating their own job queue. As these two labor market queues come together, “the most desirable jobs go to the most preferred workers, less attractive jobs go to the workers lower in the labor queue, and the most lowly workers end up jobless or in jobs others have rejected” (Reskin 2008:803). While the available workforce composition may shift, the preference order does not. Roos and Reskin (1992) argue that while these preferences may not shift, as the labor supply changes, employers’ ability to hire their preferred workers may be constrained, forcing them to move down their labor queue.

When combined with status characteristic theory, I found that employers could rely on cultural assumptions about how all mothers will behave once employed. If they

perceive a tension between their stereotypical ideal worker and motherhood, they could place mothers lower in their hiring queue, demonstrating a resistance to even offering mothers a position anytime a nonmother is available. Existing research has tested this theory and demonstrated that disparate labor market outcomes are not limited to wage outcomes. Several experimental studies have used evaluators for rating the competence and effort along with starting salary for fictitious applicants (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004). In each instance, mothers were rated as less competent, less capable of putting forth effort, and less deserving of a higher starting salary than both men and nonmothers. These lower ratings would be consistent not only with lower wages but a decreased likelihood of receiving an initial job offer. I relied on this theoretical framework to frame my three research questions listed above. Existing research has confirmed both the validity of this framework as well as its usefulness in evaluating employment disparities between mothers and nonmothers (Correll et al. 2007; Güngör and Biernat 2009).

The invaluable work of Correll et al. (2007) guides my own project both theoretically and methodologically. However, my research expands on their research in a critical way. As noted above, I move beyond the exploration of employer bias at the point of hire to two preliminary gatekeeping stages; screening and interviewing. These stages present employment barriers that occur before the applicant is even hired. Additionally, this project adds a comparative element in an attempt to discern the influence of both state and occupational contexts on the salience of motherhood.



## OUTLINE FOR CHAPTER II

As noted in the model above, I suggest that there are three distinct stages of employment, with only the third stage of hiring and wage setting receiving significant attention in the literature as it is easier to test empirically. Chapter two isolates and examines the first stage: Screening. At this point in the employment process, employers list a job opening with a set of required skills. Initial applications are then screened for initial suitability. Applicants who fail to demonstrate the desirable skill set will not move on to the next stage.

In order to measure the way in which employers list jobs and select initial candidates for interviews, I conducted an audit study. While I was able to view original job postings as any potential applicant would, my ability to determine how a specific employer then screens initial applicants for suitability was limited. The use of an audit study allowed me to record the number of callbacks a particular applicant received. Thus, a callback acts a proxy for initial suitability of a particular candidate. My specific research question for this particular chapter was *Does motherhood affect the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback?* Based on previous research (Correll et al. 2007), I hypothesized that motherhood would have a negative effect on likelihood of receiving a callback.

This chapter also addressed variation in employment context in two ways. First, I disaggregated audit findings by state to discern if there were any differences based on state context. Existing research has demonstrated that welfare policies at a national level have demonstrated variance in the severity of the MWP in cross national context (Gornick and Meyers 1997; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Misra et al. 2011; Pettit and

Hook 2009). Second, I disaggregated callbacks by occupation. *Occupation* refers to the classification of the job posting for the company audited. Existing research suggests that motherhood penalties may vary based on context rather than the more straight-forward suggestion that all mothers face a standard MWP (Budig et al. 2012; Budig and Hodges 2010; Glass and Fodor 2014). Variance at either the state and/or occupational level adds to this growing body of literature which suggests that context matters, because it would indicate that the ideal worker and the cultural construction of motherhood are not always considered mutually exclusive. In addition, it would help identify contexts in which mothers may thrive and thus inform policy decisions accordingly.

### OUTLINE FOR CHAPTER III

The third chapter focuses on the second stage of employment: Interviewing. At this point in the process, applicants have passed an initial screen and been invited for a more in-depth analysis of suitability. In order to assess the way in which employers proceed through the interviewing stage, I conducted in-depth interviews with hiring managers. Respondents were selected from the sample of companies audited in the previous chapter. See below for further methodological details. Through these interviews, I sought to understand if employment barriers existed that would have a disparate impact on mothers or women perceived to be at risk of becoming mothers.

Using the theoretical framework of motherhood as a status characteristic as well as the existing literature on employers' construction of the ideal worker, I searched for themes regarding how employers defined the ideal worker as well as their practices for identifying ideal candidates. My specific research questions for this chapter include 1)

*how do employers define their ideal worker? 2) How do employers screen for this type of employee in their interviewing practices? 3) Do perceptions of motherhood shape employers' interviewing strategies?* Based on existing research, I hypothesized first that the majority, if not all, of employers, would utilize soft skills (e.g., competence, team player, friendly, good communicator) to describe their ideal worker (Moss and Tilly 2001). Secondly, I hypothesized that while the application would screen for hard skills (e.g., typing skills, certifications, language proficiency), interviews would be used to screen for subjective soft skills. Finally, I hypothesized that motherhood will be an important consideration for employers throughout the interviewing process. While employers may not describe their practices in discriminatory terms, the effect of their interviewing strategies may lead to disparate outcomes and employment barriers for mothers.

#### OUTLINE FOR CHAPTER IV

Chapter four sought to expand our understanding of the role of macro contexts in determining meso-level practices at both of the gatekeeping stages. In addition, the status theory of motherhood suggests that employers negatively assess motherhood as incompatible with the ideal worker. While not incompatible, if the salience of motherhood varies by context, there are important implications for scholars and policy makers interested in disparate labor market outcomes. Existing research suggests that motherhood penalties may vary based on job context rather than the more straightforward suggestion that all mothers face a standard penalties (Budig et al. 2012; Budig and Hodges 2010; Glass and Fodor 2014).

For instance, recent scholarship indicates that in some instances, motherhood as a status characteristic may even benefit women in the labor market (Glass and Fodor 2014; Glass et al. 2011). Theoretically, it then indicates that it is not motherhood itself that is necessarily a detriment to women but rather the way in which its salience is constructed by employers. This paper contributes to this growing body of literature by exploring whether state level variation shapes the salience of motherhood for employers.

My specific research questions for this chapter expand this theoretical framework in the U.S. context by asking: 1) *Does variation in state context influence the salience of motherhood* and 2) *Does variation in the salience of motherhood impact mothers' access to employment*. As in chapter two, variance at the state level adds to this growing body of literature that suggests that context matters. Using in-depth interviews, I identified divergence at the state level when it came to employer screening and interviewing practices.

## METHODS

Existing research on the relationship between racial discrimination and access to jobs provides methodological guidance for measuring underlying mechanisms (Bendick and Nunes 2012; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Moss and Tilly 2001; Pager and Quillian 2005; Pager and Western 2012). Recent innovations in the use of audit studies, as well as the integration of audit studies and employer interviews, provide a viable approach to understanding employer behaviors and labor market outcomes. My research is one of only a few studies to incorporate this novel methodology in order to understand the role of employer hiring practices on labor market outcomes for mothers. Additionally,

this research also builds on existing meso-level studies that suggest employer practices shape labor market outcomes for mothers (Baumle 2009; Boushey 2008; Glass and Fodor 2014; Staff and Mortimer 2012). The pivotal audit study conducted by Correll et al. (2007) demonstrates the existence of the salience of motherhood in employment practices. Women who indicated motherhood on their application were found to be less competent and committed by evaluators and less likely to receive a callback by actual employers. My research builds upon this work by moving beyond the MWP to explore employment barriers mothers may face during the hiring process. Additionally, I add comparative elements at both the state and occupational level. Identifying the meso-level causal mechanisms can not only help with our understanding of these specific processes, but also increases our capacity for advancing the motherhood penalties field and informing public policy at the macro-level.

### *Core Theoretical Concepts*

For the purposes of this study, there are four key components: gender, parental status, employers, and discrimination. Gender refers to the socially constructed norms and expectations associated with biological sex (Kimmel 2004). This association was acceptable, with female referring to both biological sex as well as the socially constructed behaviors and expectations women in general, and mothers in particular, face in the workplace. Parental status refers to the presence of and responsibility for children living in the home.

For the purposes of this study, employers were the firms themselves as this was the site where discrimination takes place. Since firms are a conglomeration of

individuals, hiring managers and human resource personnel acted as proxies for firm-level decisions and outcomes. There are some content validity concerns associated with this practice. It is difficult to determine if I am actually measuring firm-level behavior or personal bias of the individuals being interviewed. However, to the extent that employers serve as the gatekeepers for firms, analyzing their preferences at the point of hire is an excellent measure of firm-level behavior.

Discrimination is a more complicated concept to operationalize. It refers to negative outcomes for a particular group of people often based on an ascribed characteristic. There are two types of discrimination. In the context of hiring, overt discrimination is a blatant display of unwillingness to hire a person based on a protected status under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. While parental status is not a protected category, gender and pregnancy are covered. In today's labor market, overt discrimination is the least prominent form of discrimination (Kimmel 2004). Subtle discrimination is less obvious and usually comes in the form of occupational segregation, wage inequalities, and institutional barriers (England 1992; Padavic and Reskin 2002; Pettit and Hook 2009; Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2006). It is this form of discrimination that has become more frequent in the wake of a more regulated work environment.

There is also some debate about our awareness of personal biases and discriminatory practice. Statistical discrimination in employment is a form of conscious bias, in that preference is intentional and the employer is conscious of both the preference and the intent to discriminate (Petersen 2008). Non-conscious bias is more subtle because the employer is not aware of any personally held biases or discriminatory policies or practices (Petersen 2008). In fact, many employers assume that discrimination is

impossible due to their highly standardized and legitimized policies (Dobbin 2009; Kalev et al. 2006; Kelly and Dobbin 1999).

Measuring discrimination empirically was complicated and requires multiple measures. Each phase of the current study operationalized discrimination in a unique way. In addition, I was able to improve research validity by implementing multiple tests of the same concepts (e.g., firm-level behavior, motherhood penalties). In the audit study, discrimination was operationalized as the decreased likelihood of a callback for an applicant based on her parental status. Employer interviews were designed to ask directly and indirectly about perceptions, attitudes and practices vis-à-vis women and mothers. Previous research finds that interviews with employers may reveal the ways in which employers justify discriminatory practices in non-discriminatory terms or with reference to “rational” firm behavior and incentives (Glass and Fodor 2011; Moss and Tilly 2001). Sample questions included basic questions about desired skill sets (e.g., “What are some of the most important skills you look for when hiring?”), empirical hiring policies and practices (e.g., “Describe the hiring process for new applicants.”), as well as more direct questions about perceptions of workers’ parental responsibilities (e.g., “Do you think that family responsibilities can be a disadvantage to workers in your firm?”). See Appendix D for an example of the interview guide. Careful interview guide design was important to building a rapport with the interviewee without priming the respondent or creating any leading or threatening questions that would alter their response and thereby compromising validity. While employers were not likely to willingly describe discriminatory practices, they could allude to more “legal” forms of subtle discrimination based on their definition and identification of their ideal worker.

*Data Collection Phase 1: Employer Audit Studies*

Audit studies have provided unique and provocative measures of employer behaviors and preferences (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Correll et al. 2007; Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009). They act as quasi-experiments in which researchers can utilize real-life situations while controlling conditions of primary interest. When it comes to discrimination, they are an invaluable direct measure of employer behavior. Using this methodology avoids possible bias associated with self-report behavior disclosed in employer surveys or interviews (Pager and Quillian 2005). These studies provide quantitative data regarding the likelihood of a fictitious applicant receiving a callback for an interview or job offer. Also known as matched-pairs testing, audit studies were heavily used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1970s to study desegregation and housing claims of racial discrimination after the Civil Rights movement (Pager 2003). More recently, this methodology has been revitalized to study employer behaviors with regard to race, criminal record status, and hiring bias against minorities (Bendick and Nunes 2012; Pager 2003; Pager and Quillian 2005).

Testers are research participants matched either on paper for mail-in/electronic-submission resumes or for in-person audits of organizations. The matching process involves assigning human capital backgrounds of a comparable nature. Once matched, these testers become fictitious employees looking for jobs. Researchers can then simply alter one primary characteristic of interest including race or criminal background. For the purposes of this study, I created a pair of fictitious applicants, both female, but altered their parental status. See Appendices B and C for sample cover letters and resumes.



Existing research has convincingly established that men, whether they are fathers or not, are unlikely to be penalized in the labor market regardless of occupational context (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004). In many instances, fathers may even receive a hiring and wage premium over non-fathers, often referred to as the “daddy bonus” (Baumle 2009; Padavic and Reskin 2002). Since my research questions focused specifically on motherhood penalties, it was unnecessary to include a male pair of testers in this audit. Additionally, limiting my comparison to mothers and nonmothers allowed me to maximize my female sample population. One tester was assigned a parental status, and this status was signaled in two ways. First, I replicated the signal demonstrated by Correll et al. (2007), conveying parental status to the employers by listing “Parent Teacher Association, Fundraising Coordinator” on the resume of the mother tester. The nonmother listed “Home Owners Association, Event Coordinator” as an equivalent experience. By doing so, this tester also expressed a non-work-related interest but one that is not specific to being a parent. As the majority of employers relied heavily on computerized or electronic submission of applications and resumes, I used both electronic-submission and mailed resume audits.

I then added a second subtle signal of motherhood status. This second signal was necessary as some employers’ electronic applications would not provide space for supplemental information such as non-work-related activities. Similarly, employers may not read the second page of a resume, where non-work-related activities were listed. Therefore, I decided to signal parenthood through email address. The nonmother had a simple email of emilyannesmith86@gmail.com. The mother signaled family status by listing a possible family unit as her email: sarah.tim.milly.mack@gmail.com. The email

address was always listed prominently on each resume along with other pertinent information (e.g., name, address, phone number). This email address was also used in all email correspondence and a preliminary step in acquiring access to electronic/online applications. This secondary indicator ensured that every hiring manager would see the email address, even if they didn't request or look for non-work-related relevant activities.

For the purposes of this study, I audited a variety of occupations. This allowed me to investigate the impact of job context on labor market outcomes. One limitation was that the variety of occupations audited was constrained by the applicants' resumes. While they were designed to allow for some occupational flexibility, the applicants' backgrounds consisted of experience in customer service, sales, clerical, administration, and mid-level management. However, as many of these occupations are often highly feminized (Hochschild 1983; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Pettit and Hook 2009), I used the assumption that women, nonmothers or mothers, would have an easier time qualifying for these positions, thus increasing the likelihood of a callback. If the testers struggled to obtain these positions, it would suggest a more severe penalty for mothers when the occupational context was less feminized.

I used online websites of local newspapers as my sampling frame to locate firms from which to audit.<sup>4</sup> I combined these ads with free, public workforce agency job posting sites as employers could turn to these third party resources with unemployment

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<sup>4</sup> In Salt Lake City Utah, this was the *Salt Lake Tribune* whose classified section is hosted by Monster.com. In Sacramento California, this was the *Sacramento Bee* whose classified section is hosted by CareerBuilder. These contracted hosts meant that I also found local area jobs that were posted directly through those hosts as opposed to the original newspaper sites. However, any jobs that did not have local contact information were excluded.

rates remaining high and as they seek to minimize advertising costs.<sup>5</sup> I applied to 10 ads per week, per candidate, resulting in 40 applications per week for 24 weeks. Each firm level contact was only audited once. This resulted in 240 audits (480 resumes) in each of two local labor markets, leading to a total of 480 audits (960 resumes). Based on existing research, it was important to start with a large sample due to a projected low response rate (Pager 2003). For the findings to be statistically significant, I needed to obtain a large enough number of callbacks. Results of the audit study were critical for identifying the likelihood that different types of workers (e.g., mother vs. nonmother) would receive a callback for a job and if the context (e.g., state or occupation) mattered.

I made every attempt to control for human capital difference between the applicants. Both had bachelor's degrees and the same number of years of work experience, including similar supervisory experience. However, to control for any spurious differences, I switched which resume went with which candidate every other week. See Appendices B and C for sample cover letters and resumes. The only thing that stayed the same for the testers was their contact information and the information signaling parental status. Lastly, to control for any bias based on the order in which the applications were received, along with the resume switch, I altered which tester submitted their application first. On Week A, the nonmother applied first while on Week B, the mother applied first. These controls helped mitigate any unforeseen differences between the resumes.

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<sup>5</sup> In Utah, this was Department of Workforce Services. In California, this was Sacramento Works.

*Data Collection Phase 2: Employer Interviews*

Conducting interviews with employers has provided significant insights into firm level practices as well as employer attitudes and how these attitudes shape recruitment and hiring practices (Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014; Moss and Tilly 2001). Gaining access to key decision-makers was more difficult and time consuming than submitting a resume. However, interviews with employers were crucial in order to measure employer preferences and strategies. Such interviews were subject to social desirability bias in which employers might say what is perceived to be the most appropriate answer rather than their honest opinion or open practice (Benard et al. 2008; Pager and Quillian 2005). Similar limitations also occur with self-report survey data. However, this type of data collection provides rich analyses that survey data cannot. In order to mitigate this limitation, I was careful to build a rapport with the respondents both while setting up the interview time and upon arrival. See Appendix A for the letter of intent used in correspondence with potential respondents and during the in-person interviews. Appendix E is an example of an interview request email/phone script. In addition, I used a carefully constructed instrument with careful attention to question sequencing, content, and style (Berg 2009). Therefore, the benefits outweigh the possibility of the social desirability bias. Once the audit was completed, I randomly selected 10-15 employers from both labor markets for in-person, semi-structured interviews. This allowed for another level of analysis related to employer hiring practices and preferences.

*State Selection*

Replicating this study in two states allowed for greater generalizability as well as examination of larger policy or cultural effects on outcomes. For the purpose of this study, I identified two states in which to conduct my study. I conducted this research in Salt Lake City (SLC), UT and Sacramento, CA. Both cities are similar in size and geography, and both are capital cities. However these states allowed for an analysis of variation in state context. First, these states vary in terms of the size of the motherhood employment gap. In California, 78.2% of nonmothers are employed while 62.4% of mothers with young children are employed, resulting in a 15.8% employment gap.<sup>6</sup> In Utah, 82.7% of nonmothers are employed while only 54.5% of mothers with young children are employed, resulting in a substantially higher 28.2% employment gap.<sup>7</sup> Second, these states vary in terms of employment policies. SLC is traditionally conservative and racially homogeneous. Its minimum wage laws mirror federal standards (U.S. DOL 2014), and it offers no additional parental leave benefits to the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which simply provides 12 weeks of unpaid job security (NCSL 2014). In contrast, Sacramento is politically more liberal and racially heterogeneous. It provides a state minimum wage of \$8.00/hr., \$.75 above the federal minimum (U.S. DOL 2014). When it comes to parental leave laws, California is one of only two states in the country to offer paid or partially paid family and medical leave, providing up to six weeks of leave paid at 55% weekly wage (NCSL 2014).

In addition, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2011) found that there was a significant difference in the earnings ratio between these states. In California,

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<sup>6</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

women earned \$.82 for every male dollar, earning eleventh place in the country for earning equity. In Utah, women only earned \$.69 for every male dollar, placing Utah last in the nation. Thus, these two states provide a compelling sample for examining the role of state context variation on motherhood penalties.

Finally, there are significant cultural differences between these states when it comes to both political party identity and religiosity. In California, 50% of the population identifies as Democrat while in Utah 58% of the population identifies as Republican (Gallup 2013). When it comes to religiosity, people in California who identify as “very religious” make up 34% of the population and are likely to be Protestant (37%) or Catholic (32%) (Gallup 2013). However, in Utah, those who identify as “very religious” make up 60% of the population and are likely to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) (60%) (Gallup 2013; McCombs 2014). These cultural indicators suggest that the policy approaches noted above may be reflective of larger contextual constraints; the same constraints that may shape employer bias and mothers’ access to employment.

### *Data Analysis*

With audit studies, quantitative data was compiled by recording callbacks. I first presented a descriptive overview of the companies audited and overall response rates. Second, I provided an analysis of the callbacks received and proportional difference. Next, I disaggregated the findings by state and organizational contexts to test my hypotheses about the salience of motherhood. Finally, I conducted a binary logistic

regression model with robust standard errors to test the relationship between parental status and the likelihood of receiving a callback.

When it came to employer interviews, content analysis was the primary analytic strategy employed. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Transcripts were read multiple times in an effort to increase consistency and reliability. I started by searching each transcription for themes and patterns framed using Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood. Analysis of transcripts began by coding or sorting the data into meaningful categories (Lofland et al. 2006). While it was difficult to predict what themes might emerge, I relied on existing research and the importance of themes including gender, parental status, motherhood, hard skills, soft skills, ideal worker, discrimination, commitment, standardization, legal, and human resources as relevant coding categories.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the existing literature on the MWP has offered compelling analyses of macro-level labor market outcomes, it falls short in two areas. First, there is finite amount of research on the existence of non-wage penalties in the form of employment barriers. My research identified two distinct gatekeeping stages of the employment process that help us better understand these disparate outcomes for mothers. Second, the existing research relies heavily on individual employee characteristics and a universal construction that mothers cannot be ideal workers. This research elaborates on a growing framework that indicates the context of job characteristics may play a larger role in explaining variation in motherhood penalties. Finally, this project moves beyond the use

of quantitative survey data that establishes the existence of MWP by employing a novel mixed-methods approach to establish the conditions under which these inequalities emerge. Using a combination of audit study techniques and qualitative interviews, this research identifies how employers construct hiring practices and how these strategies impact mothers. Audit study methodology allows me to track how employees are treated during the recruitment and screening process based on parental status. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with employers allow me to analyze how employers construct the ideal worker, how this construction shapes employment practices, and how larger job contexts influence labor market outcomes.

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## CHAPTER II

HELP WANTED: A COMPARATIVE AUDIT OF EMPLOYER HIRING PRACTICES  
AND MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES

“Despite the fact that claims of employment discrimination at any stage are rare, their relative distribution implies far less vulnerability for employers over decisions made at the initial hiring stage. It may be the case, then, that even if overall levels of discrimination have declined, the relative importance of hiring discrimination (compared to discrimination at later stages) may be increasing in importance”  
(Pager and Western 2012).

“Mothers are rated as less hireable, less suitable for promotion and management training and deserving of lower salaries because they are believed to be less competent and less committed to paid work” (Correll et al. 2007).

## INTRODUCTION

The motherhood wage penalty (MWP) has been well researched and documented on both national and international scales (Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). However, explanatory mechanisms remain largely untested. Additionally, there is limited research on the existence of an employment gap between mothers and nonmothers suggestive of something unique about being a mother in the labor market. The use of individual wage data derived from surveys is only able to account for mothers who actually gained access into the labor market and potentially underreports the impact of those who faced barriers prior to getting the job offer. Therefore, the focus on wage data also neglects meso-level processes that may create these barriers to the workplace during the hiring process, thereby potentially underestimating the size of motherhood penalties by discounting non-wage related penalties such as workplace barriers.

In the U.S., there is an employment gap between mothers and nonmothers.<sup>8</sup> For some researchers, these disparate labor market outcomes are explained by supply-side theories of individual choices or preferences (Belkin 2003; Hakim 2000). However, other researchers cite demand-side mechanisms such as structural barriers (Crosby, Williams, and Biernat 2004; Padavic and Reskin 2002; Williams 2001) and employers' use of statistical discrimination (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Glauber 2007). While little research has sought to identify the specific mechanisms that contribute to motherhood penalties, a growing body of evidence suggests employer discrimination may be of critical importance to this discussion (Correll et al. 2007; Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014). This research builds upon the work of gender scholars and organizational theorists who have been working together to identify gender-related discriminatory mechanisms (Acker 1998; Britton 2000; Reskin 2003; Reskin and McBrier 2000). In doing so, these scholars begin to move beyond the *why* of motherhood penalties to discover *how* inequalities occur and are reproduced over time.

To date, very little research has explored the meso-level processes, such as employment practices and occupational context, to determine what role discrimination plays in shaping access to jobs. This project, while informed by the MWP literature on disparate wage outcomes, seeks to expand our understanding of non-wage related motherhood penalties by analyzing recruitment and hiring practices. Specifically, I am interested in the *practice* or implementation of employment policies rather than the formal written policies themselves. Existing organizational research indicates a strict adherence to and continued development of these policies, thus leaving little room for

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<sup>8</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

deviation between employers (Dobbin 2009; Kalev, Kelly, and Dobbin 2006; Kelly and Dobbin 1999). Thus, it is the unwritten practices and decision-making processes that are the most interesting for understanding penalties in access to jobs faced by mothers. By focusing primarily on employment strategies pursued by firms, I can better identify barriers to employment faced by mothers.

Analysis of meso-level employment practices advances the literature in two critical ways. First, this research will identify mechanisms that contribute to motherhood employment barriers at the meso-level. I suggest that these barriers occur at two distinct gatekeeping stages. At stage one, employers screen applicants. Candidates for an open position face an initial screen for suitability based on the requirements of the position to be filled. Stage two focuses on a reduced pool of applicants, typically inviting only select applicants for telephone and/or in-person interviews. The final stage, the hiring of the person deemed the most ideal for the job, is the one most studied in the existing literature as it is one of the easiest to test empirically. See Figure 2. This model indicates a reduction in the applicant pool at each stage of gatekeeping, thus reducing the likelihood of an applicant advancing to the next stage. If, at either of these stages of gatekeeping, mothers face discriminatory practices, then they are less likely to be hired. Additionally, if mothers face barriers to employment at the gatekeeping stages, it would also suggest that those who survive the hiring process would be subject to additional barriers when it comes to wage setting and promotion. However, those employers who are less likely to discriminate against mothers during the gatekeeping stages and do hire mothers may be less likely to discriminate at wage setting and promotion stages as well. This paper focuses specifically on stage one; applicant screening. At this point in the process,

applicants have only submitted a resume or application to a firm with an open position and await further contact from a hiring manager.

Second, this project seeks to determine whether the fact that much existing research focuses on wages might mean that motherhood penalties are underestimated. After all, wages only measure those applicants that survived all three stages of the employment process. Only those applicants who become employees ever receive a wage. Therefore, any applicants who run into employment barriers at the screening stage would be excluded not only from the interviewing stage but from the third and final hiring stage. Such candidates would be excluded from wage data. Existing research hypothesizes that employer bias may be a contributing to the MWP (Correll et al. 2007). This project is able to test the plausibility of this mechanism by identifying pre-wage, employment barriers as noted above.

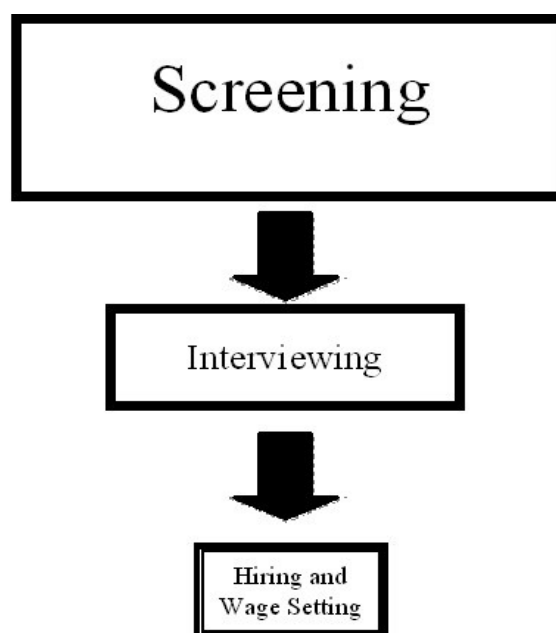


FIGURE 2. Stages of the Employment Process

As noted above, this study focuses on the initial screening stage of the employment process. In order to assess the ways employers make an initial screen of their pool of applicants, I conducted an audit study between January 2013 and July 2013. My primary research question is *Does motherhood affect the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback?* Based on existing research, I hypothesize that mothers will receive fewer callbacks than nonmothers (Correll et al. 2007). To answer this question, I first examine the existing literature with regard to the motherhood wage penalty, mothers' access to jobs, the employment gap and employer bias and discrimination. Second, I review Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood as a framework for understanding employer bias throughout the employment process. Third, I describe the audit study methodology used in this research. Fourth, I present my findings using a series of descriptive and comparative analyses. Finally, I conclude with some discussion and future implications of this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the U.S., 79% of nonmothers are employed.<sup>9</sup> However, only 67% of mothers with young children are employed.<sup>10</sup> This employment gap indicates that there is something unique about being a mother that affects participation in the labor market. Existing literature has documented compelling evidence of a MWP (Anderson et al. 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll et al. 2007). And while this literature is often driven by the assumption that employer bias and discrimination are critical mechanisms of this wage penalty, the mechanisms themselves have not been tested. My research

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<sup>9</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

builds upon the work of gender scholars and organizational theorists who have sought to identify gender-related discriminatory mechanisms (Acker 1998; Britton 2000; Reskin 2003; Reskin and McBrier 2000). In doing so, these scholars begin to move beyond the *why* of motherhood penalties to discover *how* inequalities occur and are reproduced over time. My research question advances the field by identifying the role of employer screening practices in shaping mothers' labor market opportunities.

### *Motherhood Wage Penalties*

Previous research has demonstrated the existence of wage differentials based on gender, parental status, race, and sexual orientation (Budig and England 2001; England 1992; Elliot and Smith 2004; Kilbourne et al. 1994; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004).

Additional studies have demonstrated how these individual characteristics may create variance in the size of the penalty. When it comes to race, Glauber (2007) finds that white mothers pay a larger wage penalty than black or Hispanic mothers. She indicates that this may reflect the existence of a floor to the wage penalty suggesting that black and Hispanic mothers already have such low earnings that they simply can't get any lower. However, there may also be cultural differences in that motherhood and paid labor may not be constructed as mutually exclusive when it comes to the expectations associated with certain races. Therefore, employers may not construct their ideal worker and motherhood the same when race is also a salient status characteristic. Budig and Hodges (2010) find that women with the least to lose are proportionately losing the most. Mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning occupations suffer larger penalties. They indicate this could reflect the



increased difficulty low wage mothers face of combining family obligations with employment. This research may also suggest that higher paying, high-skilled employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on these meso-level contexts as well as the expectation that low wage mothers will struggle with work-family balance issues.

At the macro-level, scholars aggregate micro-level data to draw country level conclusions for use in cross-national comparisons (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Misra, Budig, and Boeckmann 2011; Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel 2007). With regard to the MWP, this literature finds that there is significant variation between countries. While some studies rely on variation in human capital and others on work-family policies, others find that the MWP was closely associated with the motherhood employment gap, indicating that pre-wage, employment stages may be contributing to the disparate labor market outcomes (Harkness and Waldfogel 2003; Pettit and Hook 2009). These findings indicate that there may be meso-level employment barriers throughout the entire employment process versus just the hiring and wage setting stage, contributing to larger labor market disparities. They also identify the potential for the variation between employers' construction of motherhood based on workers' individual characteristics and macro-level policy constraints. Such biases as reflected in these wage penalty studies also suggest that similar mechanisms may also be contributing to the motherhood employment gap as noted above by creating access barriers to the labor market.

*Mothers' Access to Jobs and the Employment Gap*

Since applicant screening employment practices occur at the meso-level within the firm, a meso-level analysis is critical for bridging existing research and empirically analyzing the mechanisms that shape mothers' access to jobs. Employer stereotypes are most salient and impactful on labor market outcomes at the point of hire (Baumle 2009). Additionally, if employer discrimination against mothers is strongest during the hiring process, measured wage penalties at the aggregate level underestimate the degree and nature of motherhood penalties in paid work. More importantly, if there are employment barriers designed to restrict mothers' access to the labor market, these could explain the employment gap between mothers and nonmothers.

Significant experimental research provides insight into how and why employer bias may create access barriers to mothers by demonstrating the strength of negative stereotypes associated with motherhood. These studies have evaluated experimental testers', typically university students, responses to both applicants and managers who were visibly pregnant (Bragger et al. 2002; Corse 1990; Cunningham and Macan 2007; Halpert, Wilson, and Hickman 1993). Without exception, these studies find that pregnant women are evaluated as less competent, less motivated, and less committed than their non-pregnant counterparts. Additional studies that focused on mothers generally rather than pregnant women specifically confirmed these findings (Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). In each instance, researchers noted a conflict in the association between the social construction of motherhood and the ideal worker expectation of 100% commitment and effort to the workplace. In light of this conflict,

employers are likely to rank mothers much lower as their ideal worker candidate with this preference acting as an employment barrier.

In addition, a study that examined mothers' perceptions of hiring discrimination through qualitative interviews with working mothers found that 44% of respondents reported some type of subjective feelings of discrimination (Crowley 2013). This came in the form of interview questions regarding pregnancy intentions and childcare responsibilities. However, Morgan et al. (2013) found that when mothers provided counter stereotypical information during the hiring process (e.g., evidence of commitment and competence); there was a reported reduction in hiring manager hostility and formal discrimination. These studies suggest that pre-employment screening may allow employers to screen out any applicants that are readily identified as mothers, reducing the need for such questions at the interview stage and decreasing claims of discrimination and litigation at the hiring stage.

### *Employer Bias and Discrimination*

In their groundbreaking study on the relationship between subjective bias and MWP, Correll et al. (2007) also employ the theoretical framework of motherhood as a status characteristic. They first conducted a laboratory experiment in which undergraduate students compared and ranked resumes of imaginary candidates with equivalent levels of education and experience. In each candidate pair, one was a parent and one was not. Applicants were also paired by gender to control for any gender discrimination. According to the authors, "Mothers were judged as significantly less competent and committed than women without children" (Correll et al. 2007:1316).

Students were more likely to negatively assess mothers and reward fathers, thereby supporting the salience of motherhood as a status characteristic in employment practices.

In a second experiment, Correll et al. (2007) conducted an audit study of employers, submitting over 1,200 resumes to over 600 employers. Based on employer callbacks, they were able to determine that, like the students in the first experiment, employers were more likely to call back female applicants who showed no signs of being a parent as opposed to those who did. As in the previous experiment, men who signaled fatherhood on their resumes were more likely to receive a callback than childless men. Unfortunately, the authors note that they were unable to determine causal mechanisms for the discriminatory practices that were revealed in both experiments. However, they provide a compelling argument for future research to investigate meso-level mechanisms associated with disparate labor market outcomes including employer bias against mothers. This paper builds upon their groundbreaking study by adding both state and occupational context considerations as well as examining hiring practices in a post-recession atmosphere.

### *Motherhood as a Status Characteristic*

How might we better understand motherhood as a source of employer bias and discrimination? Expectation states theory suggests that when we enter social settings, we form expectations about how others will behave and how we might be expected to behave as well (Berger et al. 1977; Correll et al. 2007). According to Berger et al. (1977), a status characteristic is defined by a widely-held set of cultural beliefs that associate greater status worthiness and competence with one category of distinction over another (e.g.,

nonmothers vs. mothers). In other words, a personal attribute, particularly one that has socially constructed meaning, has attached expectations as to how we anticipate that individual will act. For example, women who are mothers may be expected to put children before work and thus be evaluated as less committed to the workplace.

Expectations are particularly salient in social settings and interactions with people we have never met, including the screening of applications, as we search for subtle cues about how to behave and how to relate to others (Morgan et al. 2013; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Examples of status characteristics include gender, marital status, and race, and a variety of studies have relied on these status characteristics to analyze disparate labor market outcomes (England 1992; Kanter 1977; Pager 2003).

Not only does status shape how we make sense of others, it is also hierarchical. The different statuses of two people are rarely equal, but rather there is either a preference or higher expectation for one group over another (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). When one group is chronically evaluated by employers as inferior based on cultural assumptions, regardless of circumstance, it becomes a matter of discrimination. In the workplace, status-based discrimination results when employers systematically evaluate high status groups more favorably than low status groups (Correll et al. 2007; Güngör and Biernat 2009). Employers create expectations for the status group in question (e.g., mothers), and any biases they may have against that group are likely to create employment barriers as this status is evaluated as lower than nonmothers. Thus, this framework suggests that the employment process is biased in favor of high status groups over lower status groups (e.g., nonmothers over mothers).

Motherhood is culturally constructed as a status incompatible with a commitment to paid work, thus mothers tend to be perceived as low status in employment contexts (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Mothers are assumed to lack competency as well as devotion to work due to the prioritization of children and family over job responsibilities (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996). This cultural construction of motherhood conflicts with the construction of the ideal worker who is assumed to be completely committed and devoted to the company twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Kmec 2011; Williams 2001). Because of the high cultural status afforded to paid labor and those who commit themselves to hard work, the above contradiction leads to the devaluation of the status of motherhood (Crittenden 2001; Kimmel 2004). Empirical support for this contradiction comes from studies that have found that occupations that require nurturance—an activity typically associated with motherhood and mothers—is associated with lower wages regardless of whether the employee is male or female (England 1992; Kilbourne et al. 1994).

To support the claim that motherhood is a status characteristic related to but distinct from gender, it is necessary to distinguish the status of mothers from the status of women. To establish this distinction, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that context matters and so the issue of salience must be addressed. In any given situation, for motherhood to become a status characteristic, there must be both mothers and nonmothers present, and actors must be able to differentiate between them. Once this difference has been established, actors will create expectations about those individuals with that status characteristic “even if it is logically irrelevant to the task at hand” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:686). Without differentiation in parental status, and without

the ability to detect this difference, another status characteristic (e.g., gender or race) remains the only salient status. The lack of visible indicators of motherhood make this a low ascriptive characteristic, one that is much harder to discern visibly, making it even more difficult to assess specific biases associated with this status as opposed to a more visible status.

However, motherhood can become visible in the workplace when a woman displays evidence of being a mother. Evidence of motherhood could include a visible pregnancy, requesting time off to care for a sick child, or simply sharing stories about a child's antics. When it comes to the pre-employment process, each of these examples could be easily avoided on an application or resume. Per federal hiring regulations, it is illegal to require the disclosure of marital or parental status on an application (U.S. EEOC 2014). If the issue comes up either inadvertently on the part of the applicant or through an employer's hiring practices, motherhood could become a salient status characteristic. Salience may be contextual, and some employers may never notice or care if signs of motherhood are displayed as it is irrelevant to their construction of the ideal worker. Thus, it is important to consider contextual variance in the labor market to determine if there is variance in the salience of motherhood in the employment process.

Therefore, this project seeks to test the relevance of motherhood as a low status characteristic in the pre-hiring employment stages. In addition, I seek to understand if the salience of motherhood is constant across contexts. Specifically, *1) does variation in state context influence the salience of motherhood* and *2) does variation in occupational context, specifically occupational authority, influence the salience of motherhood?* First, with regard to state level context, I suggest that the variance in the states' policy and

cultural contexts may also result in a variance in the way employers construct motherhood and the level of salience it has in the workplace. While individual states are constrained by federal policies, they are also capable of going “above and beyond” what is required. Examples include setting a state-specific minimum wage that is higher than federal standards and offering paid parental leave while the federal government only affords 12 weeks of unpaid protection of a job. Comparing a more liberal state that provides benefits in excess of federal requirements with a more conservative state that merely replicates the federal baseline allows me to examine the role of state policy context in shaping the salience of motherhood.

Existing research has demonstrated that variation in national welfare policies appears to create variance in the severity of the MWP in cross national context (Gornick and Meyers 1997; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Misra et al. 2011; Pettit and Hook 2009). This variation includes differential approaches to welfare policies including parental leave and childcare, resulting in differential levels of motherhood employment rates and variation in the severity of wage penalties. Additional studies find similar outcomes with regard to gaps in family-related pay with social democratic countries facing the smallest wage penalty and corporate conservative countries facing a larger wage penalty (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Harkness and Waldfogel 2003). Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann (2012) add to this field of research by suggesting that the differential outcomes in the existing literature are related to larger cultural norms. They argue that “work-family policies work in concert with gendered cultural norms regarding motherhood to produce a range of outcomes” (Budig et al. 2012:164). In their study, they find that the success of policies that seek to alleviate motherhood penalties depends upon broad cultural support. When



work-family policies were implemented without cultural support for mothers in the workplace, the policies failed to mitigate these inequalities. Therefore, I hypothesize that broad cultural differences between states will help explain both the variation in policy approaches as well as any employment barriers faced by mothers in each state.

Second, with regard to occupational context, a growing body of research indicates that the salience of motherhood in employment is varied due to occupational characteristics rather than individual demographics. While there is limited research on the effect of occupational categories on motherhood penalties, there is enough evidence to suggest that certain occupations face larger penalties than others (Langdon 2013; Solberg 2005). Additional research suggests that this is due to occupational sex composition indicating that mothers who work in occupations that are female-dominated are subject to a larger wage penalty than mothers in non-female-dominated occupations (Budig and Hodges 2010; Glauber 2012). Glass and Fodor (2014) find differential constructions of the ideal worker by employers in Hungarian financial and business sectors, with mothers facing employment access barriers in the financial industry but not in business firms.

Additionally, it appears that occupations that require more authority are perceived to be less flexible and more intense than low skill, non-authoritarian, entry-level occupations, making motherhood even more salient in these contexts (Elliot and Smith 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). A prominent school of thought in organizational psychology, “think manager, think male,” suggests that characteristics and skill sets needed for managerial success are more likely to be associated with men (Schein 1973, 1975). For instance, men are assumed to be more devoted, flexible and committed to the labor market—all characteristics typically associated with leadership. This assumed

association between masculinity and leadership ability leaves women in general and mothers in particular at a disadvantage when it comes time for promotion into these positions. Organizational context plays an important role in determining if men or women are perceived to be more ideal candidates for the job. We can then use this same premise to explore the role of organizational context on the salience of motherhood and the potential for employer bias and discrimination. Therefore, I hypothesize that employers recruiting for occupations that require managerial skills, or occupational authority, will display a greater preference for hiring nonmothers compared to employers recruiting for occupations that require little or no authority (e.g., “think manager, think nonmother”).

Reskin’s (2008) labor queues theory suggests that employers create a hierarchy of preference based on the ideal worker for each position. They then evaluate applicants for each position based on these hierarchies or labor queues. When the most ideal candidate cannot be found, employers must choose from applicants lower in their labor queue. Employer preferences are also constrained by workers’ own preferences for certain positions, creating their own job queue. As these two labor market queues come together, “the most desirable jobs go to the most preferred workers, less attractive jobs go to the workers lower in the labor queue, and the most lowly workers end up jobless or in jobs others have rejected” (Reskin 2008:803). While the available workforce composition may shift, the preference order does not. Roos and Reskin (1992) argue that while these preferences may not shift, as the labor supply changes, employers’ ability to hire their preferred workers may be constrained, forcing them to move down their labor queue.

When combined with status characteristic theory, we find that employers may rely on cultural assumptions about how all mothers will behave once employed. If they

perceive a tension between their stereotypical ideal worker and motherhood, they may place mothers lower in their hiring queue, demonstrating a resistance to even offering mothers a position anytime a nonmother is available. Existing research has tested this theory and demonstrated that disparate labor market outcomes are not limited to wage outcomes. Several experimental studies have used evaluators for rating the competence and effort along with starting salary for fictitious applicants (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004). In each instance, mothers were rated as less competent, less capable of putting forth effort, and less deserving of a higher starting salary than both men and nonmothers. These lower ratings would be consistent not only with lower wages but a decreased likelihood of receiving an initial job offer. I rely on this theoretical framework to frame the research questions listed above. Existing research has confirmed both the validity of this framework as well as its usefulness in evaluating employment disparities between mothers and nonmothers (Correll et al. 2007; Güngör and Biernat 2009).

## METHODS

In order to measure the way in which employers screen initial candidates for interviews, I conducted an audit study to measure the impacts of the screening process used by employers. While I am able to view original job postings as any potential applicant would, my ability to determine how a specific employer actually screens initial applicants for suitability is limited as it also is for all potential applicants. The use of an audit study allows me to record the number of callbacks a particular applicant received. Thus, a callback acts a proxy for initial suitability of a particular candidate. As noted

above, the specific research question for this particular analysis is *Does motherhood affect the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback?* Based on previous research (Correll et al. 2007), I hypothesize that motherhood will have a negative effect on the likelihood of receiving a callback.

This paper also addresses variation in employment context in two ways. First, I disaggregate audit findings by state to discern if there are any differences based on state context. Existing research has demonstrated that national welfare policies vary in the severity of the MWP in cross national context (Gornick and Meyers 1997; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Misra et al. 2011; Pettit and Hook 2009). Therefore, my second research question is: *Does state context affect the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback?* Second, I disaggregate callbacks by occupational context. *Occupation* refers to the classification of the job posting for the company audited. Occupational categories were primarily determined by self-report on job listings created by firm hiring managers. In the instances in which this information was not provided in the job listing, I matched the job description with another posting that had already been classified. This resulted in eight categories: administrative, sales, clerical, customer service, management, care work, housekeeping, and general labor. Both the housekeeping and care work categories were too small to stand on their own. Therefore, they were both added to customer service as their job descriptions most closely matched the jobs in this occupational category. Existing research suggests that motherhood penalties may be greater in occupations that entail some degree of managerial authority (Elliott and Smith 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Therefore, I also looked at the roll of occupational authority, combining administrative and managerial occupations into an *authority*

category and customer service, sales, clerical, and labor into a *no authority* category.

These categories were also informed by job postings and the responsibilities listed by the firms based on required leadership, supervisory, and authoritative responsibilities. Thus, my third research question is: *Does occupational context affect the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback?* Any variance at either the state and/or occupational level would add to this growing body of literature that suggests that context matters, because it would provide evidence that the cultural constructions of the ideal worker and motherhood are not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather fluid. In addition, it contributes to our understanding of the status theory of motherhood and the influence of both state and occupational context on the salience of motherhood. If callback rates vary by state or occupational context, this would suggest important sources of variation in disparate labor market outcomes.

Audit studies have provided unique and provocative measures of employer behaviors and preferences (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Correll et al. 2007; Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009). They act as quasi-experiments in which researchers can utilize real-life situations while controlling conditions of primary interest. When it comes to discrimination, they are an invaluable direct measure of employer behavior. Using this methodology avoids possible bias associated with self-report behavior disclosed in employer surveys or interviews (Pager and Quillian 2005). These studies provide quantitative data regarding the likelihood of a fictitious applicant receiving a callback for an interview or job offer. Also known as matched-pairs testing, audit studies were heavily used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1970s to study desegregation and housing claims of racial discrimination after the

Civil Rights movement (Pager 2003). More recently, this methodology has been revitalized to study employer behaviors with regard to race, criminal record status, and hiring bias against minorities (Bendick and Nunes 2012; Pager 2003; Pager and Quillian 2005).

Testers are research participants matched either on paper for mail-in/electronic-submission resumes or for in-person audits of organizations. The matching process involves assigning human capital backgrounds of a comparable nature. Once matched, these testers become fictitious employees looking for jobs. Researchers can then simply alter one primary characteristic of interest including race or criminal background. For the purposes of this study, I created a pair of fictitious applicants, both female, but altered their parental status. See Appendices B and C for sample cover letters and resumes. Existing research has convincingly established that men, whether they are fathers or not, are unlikely to be penalized in the labor market regardless of occupational context (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Williams 1992). In many instances, fathers may even receive a hiring and wage premium over non-fathers, often referred to as the “daddy bonus” (Baumle 2009; Padavic and Reskin 2002). Since my research questions focus specifically on motherhood penalties, it is unnecessary to include a male pair of testers in this audit. Additionally, limiting my comparison to mothers and women who are not mothers allows me to maximize my female sample population.

Each tester was assigned a parental status, and this status was signaled in two ways. First, I replicated the signal demonstrated by Correll et al. (2007), conveying parental status to the employers by listing “Parent Teacher Association, Fundraising

Coordinator” on the resume of the mother tester. The nonmother listed “Home Owners Association, Event Coordinator” as an equivalent experience. By doing so, this tester also expressed a non-work-related interest but one that is not specific to being a parent. As the majority of employers rely heavily on computerized or electronic submission of applications and resumes, I used both electronic-submission and mailed resume audits.

I then added a second subtle signal of motherhood status. I found this signal to be necessary as some employers’ electronic applications would not provide space for supplemental information such as non-work-related activities. Similarly, employers may not read the second page of a resume, where non-work-related activities were listed. Therefore, I decided to signal parenthood through email address. The nonmother had a simple email of emilyannesmith86@gmail.com. The mother signaled family status by listing a possible family unit as her email: sarah.tim.milly.mack@gmail.com. It should be noted that for this particular email to signal parenthood, I rely on the heteronormative ideal family construction indicating the hegemonic preference for a mother and father as heads of households. The email address was always listed prominently on each resume along with other pertinent information (e.g., name, address, phone number). It was also used in all email correspondence and a preliminary step in acquiring access to electronic/online applications. This ensured that every hiring manager would see the email address, even if they didn’t request or look for non-work-related relevant activities. It is important to note that these are both incredibly subtle signals, but unlike race and gender, motherhood cannot be signaled with a name (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004) or by checking a box that indicates criminal background (Pager 2003).

For the purposes of this study, I audited a variety of occupations. This allowed me to investigate the impact of job context on labor market outcomes. One limitation is that the variety of occupations audited was constrained by the applicant resumes. While they were designed to allow for some application flexibility, the applicants' backgrounds consisted of experience in customer service, sales, clerical, administration, and mid-level management. However, as many of these occupations are often highly feminized (Hochschild 1983; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Pettit and Hook 2009), I relied on the assumption that women, nonmothers or mothers, would have an easier time qualifying for these positions, thus increasing the likelihood of a callback. If the testers struggled to obtain these positions, it might suggest a more severe penalty for mothers when the occupational context is less feminized.

I used online websites of local newspapers as my sampling frame to locate firms from which to audit.<sup>11</sup> I combined these ads with free, public workforce agency job posting sites as employers may turn to these third party resources with unemployment rates remaining high and as they seek to minimize posting costs.<sup>12</sup> I applied to 10 ads per week, per candidate in each labor market, resulting in 40 applications per week for 24 weeks. Each firm level contact was only audited once. This resulted in 240 audits (480 resumes) in each of two local labor markets, leading to a total of 480 audits (960 resumes). Based on existing research, it was important to start with a large sample due to a projected low response rate (Pager 2003). For the findings to be statistically significant,

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<sup>11</sup> In Salt Lake City Utah, this was the *Salt Lake Tribune* whose classified section is hosted by Monster.com. In Sacramento California, this was the *Sacramento Bee* whose classified section is hosted by CareerBuilder. These contracted hosts meant that I also found local area jobs that were posted directly through those hosts as opposed to the original newspaper sites. However, any jobs that did not have local contact information were excluded.

<sup>12</sup> In Utah, this was Department of Workforce Services. In California, this was Sacramento Works.



I needed obtain a large enough number of callbacks. Results of the audit study are critical for identifying the likelihood that different types of workers (e.g., mother vs. nonmother) would receive a callback for a job and if the context (e.g., state or occupation) mattered.

I made every attempt to control for human capital difference between the applicants. Both had bachelor's degrees and the same number of years of work experience, including similar supervisory experience. However, to control for any spurious differences, I switched which resume went with which candidate every other week. See Appendices B and C for sample cover letters and resumes. The only thing that stayed the same for the testers was their contact information and the information signaling parental status. Lastly, to control for any bias based on the order in which the applications were received, along with the resume switch, I altered which tester submitted their application first. On Week A, the nonmother applied first while on Week B, the mother applied first. These controls help mitigate any unforeseen differences between the resumes.

### *State Selection*

Replicating this study in two states allowed for greater generalizability as well as examination of larger policy or cultural effects on outcomes. For the purpose of this study, I identified two states in which to conduct my study. I conducted this research in Salt Lake City (SLC), UT and Sacramento, CA. Both cities are similar in size and geography, and both are capital cities. However these states allowed for an analysis of variation in state context. First, these states vary in terms of the size of the motherhood employment gap. In California, 78.2% of nonmothers are employed while 62.4% of

mothers with young children are employed, resulting in a 15.8% employment gap.<sup>13</sup> In Utah, 82.7% of nonmothers are employed while only 54.5% of mothers with young children are employed, resulting in a substantially higher 28.2% employment gap.<sup>14</sup> Second, these states vary in terms of employment policies. SLC is traditionally conservative and racially homogeneous. Its minimum wage laws mirror federal standards (U.S. DOL 2014), and it offers no additional parental leave benefits to the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which simply provides 12 weeks of unpaid job security (NCSL 2014). In contrast, Sacramento is politically more liberal and racially heterogeneous. It provides a state minimum wage of \$8.00/hr., \$.75 above the federal minimum (U.S. DOL 2014). When it comes to parental leave laws, California is one of only two states in the country to offer paid or partially paid family and medical leave, providing up to six weeks of leave paid at 55% weekly wage (NCSL 2014).

In addition, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2011) found that there was a significant difference in the earnings ratio between these states. In California, women earned \$.82 for every male dollar, earning eleventh place in the country for earning equity. In Utah, women only earned \$.69 for every male dollar, placing Utah last in the nation. Thus, these two states provide a compelling sample for examining the role of state context variation on motherhood penalties.

Finally, there are significant cultural differences between these states when it comes to both political party identity and religiosity. In California, 50% of the population identifies as Democrat while in Utah 58% of the population identifies as Republican (Gallup 2013). When it comes to religiosity, people in California who identify as "very

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<sup>13</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

religious” make up 34% of the population and are likely to be Protestant (37%) or Catholic (32%) (Gallup 2013). However, in Utah, those who identify as “very religious” make up 60% of the population and are likely to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) (60%) (Gallup 2013; McCombs 2014). These cultural indicators suggest that the policy approaches noted above may be reflective of larger contextual constraints; the same constraints that may shape employer bias and mothers’ access to employment.

### *Data Analysis*

With audit studies, quantitative data can be compiled by recording callbacks. I first provide a descriptive overview of the companies audited and overall response rates. Second, I provide an analysis of the callbacks received and proportional difference. Next, I disaggregate the findings by state and organizational contexts to test my hypotheses about the salience of motherhood. Finally, I provide a binary logistic regression model with robust standard errors to test the relationship between parental status and the likelihood of receiving a callback.

## FINDINGS

Does parental status affect the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback? With an overall 19.5% response rate, a total of 187 applicants received callbacks from employers, with nonmothers receiving a higher number of callbacks. This suggests that employers may screen out mothers at higher rates than nonmothers during the initial screening process. See Table 1. While this trend supports my first hypothesis, the difference in proportions is not significant. These findings are still important as they

TABLE 1. Proportions of Applicants Receiving Callbacks, Total

	Callbacks/Total Jobs	Proportion Called Back
Nonmothers . . . . .	100/480	0.208
Mothers . . . . .	87/480	0.181

Note. --Nonmothers and mothers applied to the same 480 jobs.

TABLE 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients for the Estimated Effects of Motherhood on the Likelihood of Receiving a Callback

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Robust SE
Mother . . . . .	-0.173	0.109

Note.--Clustered by job. Nonmothers and mothers applied to the same 480 jobs.

support the possibility of employer bias at the first employment stage while also indicating that additional bias may occur at subsequent employment stages and may simply reflect a sample that was too small. Additionally, it is important to note that signals of motherhood are incredibly subtle as they cannot be easily associated with names like race and gender (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004) or even criminal background status (Pager 2003). As can be seen in Table 2, the effect of motherhood on receiving a call back is negative although still not significant. All regression models provide robust standard errors as I corrected the results by clustering callbacks by employer identification numbers since the data set contains two records per employer (e.g., nonmother and mother). This finding still supports the above observations that mothers are less likely to receive a callback than nonmothers. Since motherhood status

was the only discernable difference between the applicants, I suggest that employer bias remains a viable mechanism for explaining these disparate outcomes.

### *State Context*

In order to test my second hypothesis, I disaggregate findings by state. In SLC, applicants received a total of 124 callbacks while in Sacramento applicants received a total of 63 callbacks. See Table 3. Findings also suggest that the callback gap between mothers and nonmothers is greater in SLC than in Sacramento. That is to say, while a preference for nonmothers does appear in California, it is much slighter than the possible advantage nonmothers receive in Utah. The decrease in sample size negatively affected the likelihood of obtaining any significant outcomes. So while the difference in proportions is still not statistically significant, as with overall findings trends, state trends support the first hypothesis that nonmothers will receive more callbacks. Additionally, we can observe that in Utah, there is a 4.1% difference between nonmothers and mothers while in California that difference shrinks to 1.2%, suggesting that larger state contexts may contribute differences in disparate labor market outcomes. Policy differences as noted above including differential approaches to minimum wage laws and parental leave reflect unique state contexts that may be contributing to the salience of motherhood in the workplace. The more conservative cultural context in Utah may also create a context in which employers do not place mothers as high in their labor queues based on a cultural construction of what is expected of mothers. However, in California, the more liberal policy approach may foster an environment in which employers do not hold the same types of biases that construct mothers and workers as mutually exclusive. These findings

TABLE 3. Proportions of Applicants Receiving Callbacks, By State

	Callbacks/Total Jobs	Proportion Called Back
UT Nonmothers . . . . .	67/241	0.278
UT Mothers . . . . .	57/241	0.237
CA Nonmothers . . . . .	33/239	0.138
CA Mothers . . . . .	30/239	0.126

Note. --Mothers and Nonmothers applied to the same jobs

then indicate that variation in state contexts may influence the salience of motherhood thereby affecting the likelihood of an applicant receiving a callback depending upon which state they are in.

Due to the observed differences in callback rates between Utah and California, Table 4 provides additional regression analyses with a focus on the impact of state context and motherhood in Utah. I chose to focus on Utah in particular as it had the larger observable difference in callback rates between mothers and nonmothers. Model 2 supports the initial finding that motherhood would have a negative impact on the likelihood of a mother receiving a callback. In addition, all applicants in Utah had a statistically significant increased likelihood of receiving a callback, reaffirming that state context may be affecting labor market outcomes. In model 3, both motherhood and the interaction of being a mother in Utah were both negative though not statistically significant. There remained a statistically significant likelihood that applicants in Utah would receive more callbacks than applicants in California. Overall, these models suggest that motherhood remains a viable mechanism for employer discrimination, and state context appears to impact labor market outcomes.

TABLE 4. Logistic Regression Coefficients for the Estimated Effects of Motherhood on the Likelihood of Receiving a Callback, By State

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Motherhood	-0.173	(0.109)	-0.177	(0.112)	-0.11	(0.176)
State (Utah)			0.826**	(0.214)	0.877**	(0.237)
Motherhood * State					-0.108	(0.227)
Constant	-1.335	(.113)	-1.8 **	(.176)	-1.831**	(.188)
Wald Chi Square	2.52		17.07**		17.79**	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.001		0.027		0.027	

\*\*p<.001

Note.--Clustered by job. Nonmothers and mothers applied to the same 480 jobs for a total of 960 applications.

### *Occupational Context*

When callbacks were disaggregated by occupation, mothers appeared to continue to face a similar disadvantage although the difference becomes slighter to non-existent based on the occupational category. See Table 5. As in the instance of state context, further disaggregation of the data negatively impacted statistical significance. However, the same trend can be observed with no instance in which a mother receives more callbacks than a nonmother. These initial results may indicate that the salience of motherhood does not differ by occupational category. However, it may also suggest that there is not enough variance between these occupations, which are all typically highly feminized. Therefore, I examined role of occupational authority, collapsing the six occupational categories in two: authority and no authority. See Table 6.

TABLE 5. Proportions of Applicants Receiving Callbacks, By Occupation

	Callbacks/Total Jobs	Proportion Called Back
Admin Childless Women . . . . .	16/140	0.114
Admin Mothers . . . . .	14/140	0.100
Sales Childless Women . . . . .	24/67	0.358
Sales Mothers . . . . .	21/67	0.313
Customer Service Childless Women	39/133	0.293
Customer Service Mothers . . . . .	34/133	0.256
Clerical Childless Women . . . . .	10/85	0.118
Clerical Mothers . . . . .	7/85	0.082
Management Childless Women . . . .	8/43	0.186
Management Mothers . . . . .	8/43	0.186
Labor Childless Women . . . . .	3/12	0.250
Labor Mothers . . . . .	3/12	0.250

Note. --Mothers and childless women applied to the same jobs

TABLE 6. Proportions of Applicants Receiving Callbacks, By Occupational Authority

	Callbacks/Total Jobs	Proportion Called Back
Authority Nonmothers . . . . .	24/183	0.131
Authority Mothers . . . . .	22/183	0.120
No Authority Nonmothers . . . . .	76/297	0.256
No Authority Mothers . . . . .	65/297	0.219

Note. --Mothers and Nonmothers applied to the same jobs

In this instance, it appears that motherhood becomes more salient in occupations without authority. While counter-intuitive, these findings support the work of Budig and Hodges (2010) who find that low wage workers suffer a larger penalty than high wage earners. The motherhood employment gap may then be subject to the same biases that



low wage mothers face which may be driven by assumptions about the ability to balance work and family responsibilities (e.g., state policy context; occupational expectations context).

As can be seen in Table 7, model 2 indicates that the likelihood a mother will receive a callback remains negative but statistically insignificant. However, authority itself is both negative and significant indicating that all applicants applying for jobs that require authority face the most barriers. As both applicants were female, it may be a broader gender bias keeping women out of these types of occupations. However, without male testers this suggestion is based on evidence from existing research (Cuddy et al. 2004; Glass and Fodor 2011). This finding modestly supports the hypothesis that occupational context may affect disparate labor market outcomes. Additionally, the salience of motherhood and the subsequent likelihood of a mother receiving a callback may then also be impacted by occupational context.

Model 3 indicates that, while only at the .1 significance level, the decreased likelihood of a mother receiving a callback becomes statistically significant. The negative effect of occupational authority also remains statistically significant for all applicants. Using the interaction of motherhood and authority, it also reaffirms the above observation that a mother applying for a job with authority is in fact more likely to receive a callback though this is still not statistically significant. Overall, these models suggest that motherhood remains a viable mechanism for employer discrimination, and occupational context, specifically authority, appears to impact labor market outcomes. Similar trends are robust when all variables are examined as a full model. See Appendix F.

TABLE 7. Logistic Regression Coefficients for the Estimated Effects of Motherhood on the Likelihood of Receiving a Callback, By Occupational Authority

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Motherhood	-0.173	(0.109)	-0.176	(0.111)	-0.205*	(0.122)
Authority			-0.773***	(0.224)	-0.823***	(0.256)
Motherhood * Authority					0.105	(0.272)
Constant	-1.335	(.113)	-1.081***	(.132)	-1.067***	(.133)
Wald Chi Square	2.52		14.23***		15.23**	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.001		0.021		0.021	

\*p<.1, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.001

Note.--Clustered by job. Nonmothers and mothers applied to the same 480 jobs for a total of 960 applications.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I make two main contributions to the existing literature on motherhood penalties and disparate labor market outcomes. First, even with incredibly subtle indicators of motherhood, the audit study provides consistent trends that modestly support my first hypothesis that motherhood negatively impacts the likelihood of a woman receiving a callback. In addition, nonmothers received more callbacks than mothers irrespective of state and occupational contexts. These findings provide modest support for my predictions that employer bias in the applicant screening process would create penalties for mothers in terms of employment access. Employers appear to screen out mothers at a higher rate and place them lower in hiring queues. Of course, callback rates only act as a proxy for employers' initial screening of applicants for suitability. Future researchers should consider discussing both the screening and interviewing

process with hiring managers to get a better understanding of the actual decision-making processes and ideal worker criteria.

Second, this project makes a significant theoretical contribution to our understanding of the status theory of motherhood. By adding both state and occupational variables to this analysis, I was able to evaluate the salience of motherhood across different policy, cultural, and job contexts. With regard to state contexts, the modest disadvantage faced by mothers in California was overshadowed by the larger disadvantage faced by mothers in Utah. This trend modestly supported my second hypothesis that state context may affect callback rates, thus suggesting that the salience of motherhood may be dependent on larger policy and cultural constraints. Limiting the scope to these cities raises concerns about generalizability to other cities and states with different social, political, and economic diversities. However, I feel this sample is capable of providing compelling results that open several avenues for future research.

When it comes to organizational context, a similarly consistent trend suggests variation in callback rates based on occupation. While these differences were slight, they still favored the overall hypothesis that mothers were less likely to receive a callback irrespective of occupational context. When occupational categories were collapsed into categories reflecting occupational authority as a necessary skill, the difference between the two categories shifted. Women in general applying for jobs that required some degree of authority (e.g., leadership, management, supervision) were less likely to receive a callback than women applying for jobs without authority. Unfortunately, with a statistically insignificant interaction between motherhood and authority, I am unable to detect employer bias based on motherhood versus a possible gender bias that

discriminates against women in general for these types of positions. However, the disadvantage faced by mothers in occupations *without* authority is provocative and deserving of further research. If mothers face access penalties at the lowest end of the occupational scale in highly feminized jobs, they may be more likely to face more severe penalties in high wage, high skill occupations. Overall, these findings modestly support my third hypothesis that occupational context may affect callback rates. Applicants in occupations requiring authority faced more significant barriers than in occupations without. Once again, the salience of motherhood appeared to vary based on both occupational categories and the authority associated with specific occupations. When combined, the addition of state and occupational variables indicates that context matters when it comes to labor market outcomes, and thus the salience of motherhood may also be fluid and context driven.

This project is one of the first studies aimed at identifying the mechanisms that shape motherhood penalties at the meso-level, where screening, interviewing, and hiring take place. As such, it is uniquely suited to identify employment barriers faced by mothers. In addition to motherhood, future researchers should consider the possible interactions of race and sexuality of working parents. Existing research suggests that these additional status characteristics may also impact disparate labor market outcomes (Elliot and Smith 2004; Glauber 2007; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004). While the scope of this project did not include fathers, existing research indicates that men with children actually receive a wage premium known as the “daddy bonus” (Baumle 2009; Padavic and Reskin 2002). Future researchers should examine whether the same mechanisms that contribute to motherhood penalties also lead to the daddy bonus or if there are processes

unique to fatherhood as a status characteristic. Finally, future researchers may want to conduct interviews with employers themselves to discern how employers interpret federal policy constraints and implement their own hiring practices. Specifically, we should focus on a better understanding of stage two—interviewing—to discover if similar biases presented in this paper are carried through to the next stage, creating an additional set of employment barriers for mothers trying to gain access to the labor market.

With fertility levels falling (Lesthaeghe 2010) and populations aging (Orloff 2009), family responsibilities are increasingly about care of elderly parents. If this task continues to fall primarily on the shoulders of women, then even those who find themselves past their childbearing years may find themselves subject to family responsibilities discrimination (Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Esping-Andersen 2009; Orloff 2009; Smith 2012). This suggests that the proposed research has implications far beyond motherhood penalties when it comes to understanding employers' motivation, perceptions, and constructions of the ideal worker and how these shape labor market outcomes.

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## CHAPTER III

‘TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF’: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE  
EMPLOYER INTERVIEW AND MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES

“[The job interview] is fraught with potential for unreliable and inappropriate hiring. Most interviewers believe that they can intuitively determine if an applicant will be a good employee” (Bragger et al. 2002).

“I know it’s illegal for me to ask, but it’s not illegal for you to tell me about your marital and family status” *Larry, CEO.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s and the substantial rise in female labor force participation, the gender wage gap has interested social scientists (Bielby and Baron 1986; England 1992; Kilbourne et al. 1994). More recently, scholars have identified a phenomenon known as the motherhood wage penalty (MWP) (Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003; Budig and England 2001; Waldfogel 1997). This research has demonstrated that women with children face wage discrepancies that go above and beyond those separately associated with being female or being a parent and represent a unique interaction between these two ascribed status characteristics (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). However, while the MWP has been established empirically, there remains debate over the mechanisms that produce these outcomes. While some scholars suggest the wage penalty is the result of discrimination by employers (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007), others speculate that the wage gap may be due to reduced labor force effort by women following the birth of a child (Belkin 2003; Hakim 2000). Recent scholarship finds that MWP are not about work effort, reaffirming that the story lies with employers (Kmec 2011).

To date, very little research has explored meso-level processes, such as employment practices and job context, to determine what role discrimination plays in shaping access to jobs. This paper, while informed by the MWP literature and disparate wage outcomes, seeks to expand our understanding of non-wage related motherhood penalties by analyzing hiring practices, specifically applicant screening and interviewing. In this paper, I am interested in the *practice* or implementation of employment policies rather than the formal written policies themselves. Existing organizational research indicates a strict adherence to and continued development of these policies, leaving little room for deviation between employers (Dobbin 2009; Kalev, Kelly, and Dobbin 2006; Kelly and Dobbin 1999). Thus, it is the unwritten practices and decision-making processes that stand to provide the type of information that will help us understand penalties in access to jobs faced by mothers. By focusing primarily on employment strategies that firms pursue, we can better identify barriers to employment faced by mothers.

Analysis of meso-level employment practices advances the literature in two critical ways. First, this research will identify mechanisms that contribute to motherhood employment barriers at the meso-level. I suggest that these barriers occur at two distinct gatekeeping stages. At stage one, employers screen applicants. Candidates for an open position face an initial screen for suitability based on the requirements of the position to be filled. Stage two focuses on a reduced pool of applicants, typically inviting applicants for telephone and/or in-person interviews. The final stage, the hiring of the person deemed the most ideal for the job, is the one most studied in the existing literature as it is one of the easiest to test empirically. See Figure 3. This model indicates a reduction in the



applicant pool at each stage of gatekeeping, thus reducing the likelihood of an applicant advancing to the next stage. If, at any of these stages of gatekeeping, mothers face discriminatory practices, then they are less likely to be hired. Additionally, if mothers face barriers to employment at the gatekeeping stages, it would also suggest that those who survive the hiring process may also be subject to additional barriers when it comes to wage setting and promotion. However, employers who are less likely to discriminate against mothers during the gatekeeping stages may also be less likely to discriminate at wage setting and promotion stages as well. This paper focuses specifically on stage two; the employer interview. At this point in the process, applicants have passed an initial screen and been invited for a more in-depth evaluation of their suitability for the job.

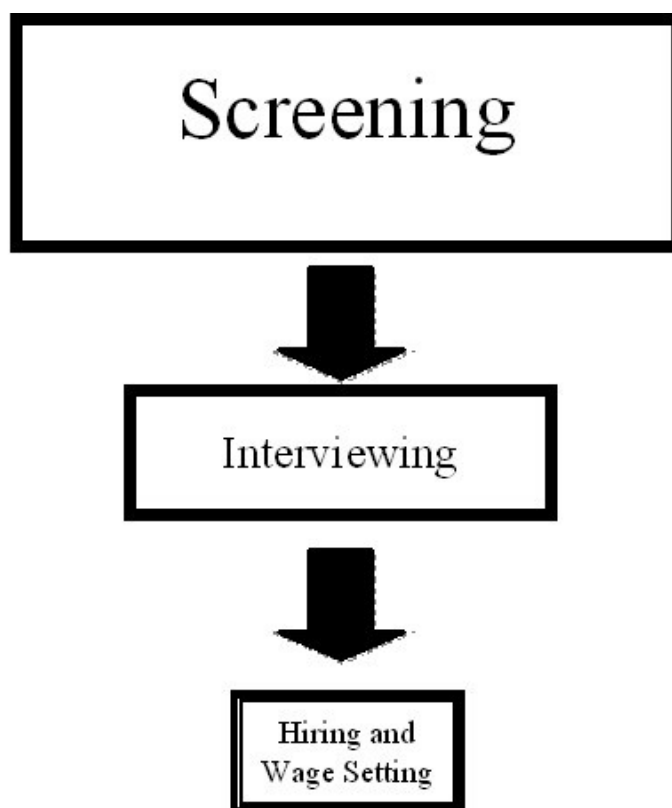


FIGURE 3. Stages of the Employment Process

Second, this project seeks to determine whether motherhood penalties are underspecified by existing research, which focuses on wages, and underestimated because wages only measure those applicants that survived all three stages of the employment process. Only those applicants who become employees ever receive a wage. Therefore, applicants who experience employment barriers at the screening and/or interviewing stage would be excluded from existing wage data. Existing research hypothesizes that employer bias may be a contributing to the MWP (Correll et al. 2007). This project allows us to confirm the plausibility of this mechanism by identifying pre-wage employment barriers as noted above.

In order to assess the ways in which employers use the interview process to screen and evaluate potential employees, I conducted 27 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with hiring managers in September and October of 2013. Using the status theory of motherhood as well as the existing literature on employers' construction of the ideal worker, I searched interview transcripts for themes regarding how employers define the ideal worker as well as their practices for screening and evaluating candidates. My specific research questions for this paper include 1) *how do employers define their ideal worker?* 2) *How do employers screen for this type of employee in their interviewing practices?* 3) *Do perceptions of motherhood shape employers' interviewing strategies?* Based on existing research, I hypothesize first that the majority, if not all, of employers, will describe their ideal worker in terms of a set of requisite soft skills (e.g., competence, team player, friendly, good communicator) (Glass and Fodor 2014; Moss and Tilly 2001). Second, I hypothesize that while the application will screen for hard skills (e.g.,

typing skills, certifications, language proficiency), interviews will be used to screen for subjective soft skills (Bragger et al. 2002; Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014).

Finally, I hypothesize that motherhood will be an important consideration for employers throughout the interview process (Bragger et al. 2002; Correll et al. 2007; Güngör and Biernat 2009). While employers may not describe their practices in discriminatory terms, the effect of their interviewing strategies likely lead to disparate outcomes and employment barriers for mothers.

In order to answer these questions, I first examine the existing literature with regard to the motherhood wage penalty, mothers' access to jobs, the employment gap, and employer bias and discrimination. Second, I review Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood as a framework for understanding employer bias throughout the employment process. Third, I describe the meso-level, qualitative methodological approach I used for answering my research questions. Fourth, I present my findings as a series of themes drawn from interviews with hiring managers. Finally, I conclude with some discussion as well as the limitations and future implications of this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the U.S., 79% of nonmothers are employed.<sup>15</sup> However, only 67% of mothers with young children are employed.<sup>16</sup> This employment gap indicates that there is something unique about being a mother in the labor market. Existing literature has documented compelling evidence of a MWP (Anderson et al. 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll et al. 2007). While this literature is often driven by the assumption that

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<sup>15</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

employer bias and discrimination are critical mechanisms of this wage penalty, the mechanisms themselves have not been tested. My research builds upon the work of gender scholars and organizational theorists who have sought to identify gender-related discriminatory mechanisms (Acker 1998; Britton 2000; Reskin 2003; Reskin and McBrier 2000). In doing so, these scholars begin to move beyond the *why* of motherhood penalties to discover *how* inequalities occur and are reproduced over time. My research questions advance the field by identifying the role of employer interviewing practices in shaping mothers' labor market opportunities.

### *Motherhood Wage Penalties*

Previous research has demonstrated the existence of wage differentials based on gender, parental status, race, and sexual orientation (Budig and England 2001; England 1992; Elliot and Smith 2004; Kilbourne et al. 1994; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004). Additional studies demonstrate how these individual characteristics may create variance in the size of the penalty. When it comes to race, Glauber (2007) finds that white mothers pay a larger wage penalty than black or Hispanic mothers. She indicates that this may reflect the existence of a floor to the wage penalty suggesting that black and Hispanic mothers already have such low earnings that they simply can't get any lower. However, there may also be cultural differences in that motherhood and paid labor may not be constructed as mutually exclusive when it comes to the expectations associated with certain races. Therefore, employers may not construct their ideal worker and motherhood in the same way when race is also a salient status characteristic. Budig and Hodges (2010) find that women with the least to lose are proportionately losing the most.

Mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning occupations suffer larger penalties. They indicate this could reflect the increased difficulty low wage mothers face in combining family obligations with employment. This research may also suggest that higher paying, high-skilled employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on these meso-level contexts as well as the expectation that low wage mothers will struggle with work-family balance issues.

At the macro-level, scholars aggregate micro-level data to draw country level conclusions for use in cross-national comparisons (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Misra, Budig, and Boeckmann 2011; Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel 2007). With regard to the MWP, this literature finds that there is significant variation between countries. While some studies rely on variation in human capital and others on work-family policies, others find that the MWP is closely associated with the motherhood employment gap, indicating that pre-wage, employment stages may be contributing to the disparate labor market outcomes (Harkness and Waldfogel 2003; Pettit and Hook 2009). These findings indicate that there may be meso-level employment barriers in the entire employment process versus just the hiring and wage setting stage, contributing to larger labor market disparities. They also identify the potential for the variation between employers' construction of motherhood based on workers' individual characteristics and macro-level policy constraints. Such biases as reflected in these wage penalty studies also suggest that similar mechanisms may also contribute to the motherhood employment gap as noted above by creating access barriers to the labor market.

*Mothers' Access to Jobs and the Employment Gap*

Since applicant screening employment practices occur at the meso-level within the firm, a meso-level analysis is critical for bridging existing research and empirically analyzing the mechanisms that shape mothers' access to jobs. Employer stereotypes are most salient and impactful on labor market outcomes at the point of hire (Baumle 2009). Additionally, if employer discrimination against mothers is strongest during the hiring process, measured wage penalties at the aggregate level underestimate the degree and nature of motherhood penalties in paid work. After all, aggregate wage data only measure mothers who made it through the hiring process and are actively employed rather than mothers who were denied access to jobs due to discrimination. More importantly, if there are employment barriers designed to restrict mothers' access to the labor market, these could explain the employment gap between mothers and nonmothers.

Widely-cited experimental research provides insight into how and why employer bias may create access barriers to mothers by demonstrating the strength of negative stereotypes associated with motherhood. These studies have evaluated experimental testers' (typically university students) responses to both applicants and managers who were visibly pregnant (Bragger et al. 2002; Corse 1990; Cunningham and Macan 2007; Halpert, Wilson, and Hickman 1993). Without exception, these studies find that pregnant women are evaluated as less competent, less motivated, and less committed than their non-pregnant counterparts. Additional studies that focused on mothers generally rather than pregnant women specifically confirmed these findings (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). In each instance, researchers noted a conflict in the association between the social construction of motherhood and

ideal worker expectations of 100% commitment and effort to the workplace. In light of this conflict, employers may be likely to rank mothers much lower in their labor queues, with this preference acting as an employment barrier.

In addition, a study that examined mothers' perceptions of hiring discrimination through qualitative interviews with working mothers found that 44% of respondents reported some type of subjective feelings of discrimination (Crowley 2013). It came in the form of interview questions regarding pregnancy intentions and childcare responsibilities. However, Morgan et al. (2013) found that when mothers provided counter stereotypical information during the hiring process (e.g., evidence of commitment and competence) there was a reported reduction in hiring manager hostility and formal discrimination. These studies suggest that pre-employment screening may allow employers to screen out any applicants that are readily identified as mothers, reducing the need for such questions at the interview stage and decreasing claims of discrimination and litigation at the hiring stage.

### *Employer Bias and Discrimination*

In their groundbreaking study on the relationship between subjective bias and MWP, Correll et al. (2007) also employ the theoretical framework of motherhood as a status characteristic. They first conducted a laboratory experiment in which undergraduate students compared and ranked resumes of imaginary candidates with equivalent levels of education and experience. In each candidate pair, one was a parent and one was not. Applicants were also paired by gender to control for any gender discrimination. According to the authors, "Mothers were judged as significantly less

competent and committed than women without children” (Correll et al. 2007:1316).

Students were more likely to negatively assess mothers and reward fathers, thereby supporting the salience of motherhood as a status characteristic in employment practices.

In a second experiment, Correll et al. (2007) conducted an audit study of employers, submitting over 1,200 resumes to over 600 employers. Based on employer callbacks, they were able to determine that, like the students in the first experiment, employers were more likely to call back female applicants who showed no signs of being a parent as opposed to those who did. As in the previous experiment, men who signaled fatherhood on their resumes were more likely to receive a callback than childless men. Unfortunately, the authors note that they were unable to determine causal mechanisms for the discriminatory practices that were revealed in both experiments. However, they provide a compelling argument for future research to investigate meso-level mechanisms associated with disparate labor market outcomes, including employer bias against mothers.

### *Motherhood as a Status Characteristic*

How might we better understand motherhood as a source of employer bias and discrimination? Expectation states theory suggests that when we enter social settings, we form expectations about how others will behave and how we might be expected to behave as well (Berger et al. 1977; Correll et al. 2007). According to Berger et al. (1977), a status characteristic is defined by a widely-held set of cultural beliefs that associate greater status worthiness and competence with one category of distinction over another (e.g., nonmothers vs. mothers). In other words, a personal attribute, particularly one that has



socially constructed meaning, has attached expectations as to how we anticipate that individual will act. For example, women who are mothers may be expected to prioritize parenting their child before completing their work obligation and thus be evaluated as less committed to the workplace. Expectations are particularly salient in social settings and interactions with people we have never met, including the screening of applications, as we search for subtle cues about how to behave and how to relate to others (Morgan et al. 2013; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Examples of status characteristics include gender, marital status, and race, and a variety of studies have relied on these status characteristics to analyze disparate labor market outcomes (England 1992; Kanter 1977; Pager 2003).

Not only does status shape how we make sense of others, it is also hierarchical. Differential statuses between two groups are rarely equal, but rather there is either a preference or higher expectation for one group over another (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). When one group is chronically evaluated by employers as inferior based on cultural assumptions, regardless of circumstance, it becomes a matter of discrimination. In the workplace, status-based discrimination results when employers systematically evaluate high status groups more favorably than they do low status groups (Correll et al. 2007; GÜngör and Biernat 2009). Employers create expectations for the status group in question (e.g., mothers), and any biases they may have against that group are likely to create employment barriers as this status is evaluated as lower than nonmothers. Thus, this framework suggests that the employment process is biased in favor of high status groups over lower status groups (e.g., nonmothers over mothers).

Motherhood is culturally constructed as a status that is incompatible with a commitment to paid work, thus mothers tend to be perceived as low status in employment

contexts (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Mothers are assumed to lack competence as well as devotion to work due to the prioritization of children and family over job responsibilities (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996). This cultural construction of motherhood conflicts with the construction of the ideal worker who is assumed to be completely committed and devoted to the company 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Kmec 2011; Williams 2001). Because of the high cultural status afforded to paid labor and those who commit themselves to hard work, the above contradiction leads to the devaluation of the status of motherhood (Crittenden 2001; Kimmel 2004). Empirical support for this contradiction comes from studies that have found that occupations that require nurturance—an activity typically associated with motherhood and mothers—are associated with lower wages regardless of whether the employee is male or female (England 1992; Kilbourne et al. 1994).

To support the claim that motherhood is a status characteristic related to but distinct from gender, it is necessary to distinguish the status of mothers from the status of women. To establish this distinction, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that context matters and so the issue of salience must be addressed. In any given situation, for motherhood to become a status characteristic, there must be both mothers and nonmothers present, and actors must be able to differentiate between them. Once this difference has been established, actors will create expectations about those individuals with that status characteristic “even if it is logically irrelevant to the task at hand” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:686). Without differentiation in parental status, and without the ability to detect this difference, another status characteristic (e.g., gender or race) remains a more salient status. The lack of visible indicators of motherhood make this a

low ascriptive characteristic, one that is hard to discern visibly, making it even more difficult to assess specific biases associated with this status as opposed to a more visible indicator.

However, motherhood can become visible in the workplace when a woman displays evidence of being a mother. Evidence of motherhood could include a visible pregnancy, requesting time off to care for a sick child, or simply sharing stories about a child's antics. When it comes to the pre-employment process, each of these examples could be easily avoided on an application or resume. Per federal hiring regulations, it is illegal to require the disclosure of marital or parental status on an application (U.S. EEOC 2014). If the issue comes up either inadvertently on the part of the applicant or through an employer's hiring practices, motherhood could then become a salient status characteristic. Salience may be contextual, and some employers may never notice or care if signs of motherhood are displayed as it is irrelevant to their construction of the ideal worker. Therefore, it is important to consider contextual variance in the labor market to determine if there is variance in the salience of motherhood in the employment process.

Reskin's (2008) labor queues theory suggests that employers create a hierarchy of preference based on the ideal worker for each position. They then evaluate applicants for each position based on these hierarchies or labor queues. When the most ideal candidate cannot be found, employers must choose from applicants lower in their labor queue. Employer preferences are also constrained by workers' own preferences for certain positions, creating their own job queue. As these two labor market queues come together, "the most desirable jobs go to the most preferred workers, less attractive jobs go to the workers lower in the labor queue, and the most lowly workers end up jobless or in jobs

others have rejected” (Reskin 2008:803). While the available workforce composition may shift, the preference order does not. Roos and Reskin (1992) argue that while these preferences may not shift, as the labor supply changes, employers’ ability to hire their preferred workers may be constrained, forcing them to move down their labor queue.

When combined with status characteristic theory, we find that employers may rely on cultural assumptions about how all mothers will behave once employed. If they perceive a tension between their stereotypical ideal worker and motherhood, they may place mothers lower in their hiring queue, demonstrating a resistance to even offering mothers a position anytime a nonmother is available. Existing research has tested this theory and demonstrated that disparate labor market outcomes are not limited to wage outcomes. Several experimental studies have used evaluators for rating the competence and effort along with starting salary for fictitious applicants (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004). In each instance, mothers were rated as less competent, less capable of putting forth effort, and less deserving of a higher starting salary than both men and childless women. These lower ratings would be consistent not only with lower wages but a decreased likelihood of receiving an initial job offer. I rely on this theoretical framework to frame the three research questions listed above. Existing research has confirmed both the validity of this framework as well as its usefulness in evaluating employment disparities between mothers and nonmothers (Correll et al. 2007; Güngör and Biernat 2009).

## METHODS

The hiring managers interviewed were selected from a sample of companies in a previous audit study (See Chapter II). In this study, she used online websites of local newspapers as a sampling frame to locate firms that were actively recruiting from which to audit.<sup>17</sup> She combined these ads with free, public workforce agency job posting sites as employers may have also used these third party resources with unemployment rates remaining high and as they seek to minimize posting costs.<sup>18</sup> Over a period of six months, she audited a total of 480 companies with half of the jobs located in Salt Lake City and half in Sacramento. This population of audited companies then became my sampling frame from which to select hiring managers to conduct in-person, semi-structured interviews.

In selecting among audited companies to develop an interview sample, I excluded any companies that did not list sufficient contact information (e.g., phone number, email), reducing my population from 480 to 347. Of that pool, I randomly selected firms to contact either via email or phone. I contacted 245 companies and conducted interviews with 27 of those, resulting in an 11% response rate. Time and financial constraints limited my ability to contact all 347 companies. See Appendix E for a sample script. This response rate reflects the difficulty of 1) finding the right person at each company to speak with (without being sent to a corporate office) and 2) obtaining participants who were willing to discuss employment practices in light of federal and corporate hiring

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<sup>17</sup> In Salt Lake City Utah, this was the *Salt Lake Tribune* whose classified section is hosted by Monster.com. In Sacramento California, this was the *Sacramento Bee* whose classified section is hosted by CareerBuilder. These contracted hosts meant that I also found local area jobs that were posted directly through those hosts as opposed to the original newspaper sites. However, any jobs that did not have local contact information were excluded.

<sup>18</sup> In Utah, this was Department of Workforce Services. In California, this was Sacramento Works.

regulations. However, of the 218 companies I contacted but did not conduct interviews, most non-interviews were a result of either no response by the contact or being sent to the corporate office. Eleven potential respondents indicated that they were too busy or unavailable during my timeframe, while 13 stated that they simply weren't interested in participating. Lastly, four of my contacts indicated that it was against corporate policy to even discuss hiring practices. My position as a graduate student working on a school project may have increased the willingness of respondents to meet with me. However, my own gender may have acted as a status characteristic that discouraged certain employers from agreeing to meet with me. Overall, the net effect of these two possibly contradictory positions still provided a reasonable sample of interviews.

It is also important to note that while the overall sample included a large selection of companies based on size, many of the respondents interviewed represented small to mid-size firms. Fourteen of the companies had less than 100 employees with the smallest being five. The remaining 13 companies had between 101-600 employees, though one firm had an additional 1,200 contract workers. Generally speaking, the firms that agreed to speak with me were smaller in size and less corporate. These characteristics may account for the ability of the respondents to get the necessary authorization to speak with me. However, this context may not reflect the processes and attitudes of much larger, formalized firms and limit the generalizability of these findings to smaller, less bureaucratic firms. The lack of corporate constraints in these firms may also allow for greater flexibility and fluidity during the hiring process that is unique and provocative to those companies that have less formalized processes.

Hiring manager interviews were designed to ask directly and indirectly about perceptions, attitudes, and practices vis-à-vis women and mothers. Previous research suggests that interviews with employers may reveal the ways in which employers justify discriminatory practices in non-discriminatory terms or with reference to “rational” firm behavior and incentives (Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014). Sample questions included basic questions about desired skill sets (e.g., “What are some of the most important skills you look for when hiring?”), empirical hiring practices (e.g., “Describe the hiring process for new applicants.”), as well as more direct questions about perceptions of workers’ gender status and parental responsibilities (e.g., “Do you think that family responsibilities can be a disadvantage to workers in your firm?”). See Appendix D for an example of the complete interview guide. Careful interview design was important to building a rapport with respondents without priming them with leading or threatening questions that would alter their response and thereby compromise validity. While hiring managers are not expected to volunteer personal bias or discriminatory practices, they may allude to more “legal” forms of subtle discrimination based on their definition and identification of their ideal worker.

Interviews with employers have allowed prior researchers to gain significant insights into firm level practices as well as employer attitudes and how these attitudes shape recruitment and hiring practices and outcomes (Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014; Moss and Tilly 2001). Such interviews can be subject to social desirability bias, however, in which employers say what is perceived to be the most appropriate answer (Benard, Paik, and Correll 2008; Pager and Quillian 2005). Similar limitations also occur with self-report survey data. Never the less, this type of data provides rich analyses of employer

perceptions and behavior that survey data cannot. In order to mitigate the limitations of this method, I was careful to build a rapport with the hiring managers while setting up the interview time and upon arrival. To do this, I relied heavily on my status as a student to appear as non-threatening as possible. In addition, I used a carefully constructed instrument with careful attention to question sequencing, content, and style (Berg 2009).

### *Data Analysis*

I employed content analysis as the primary analytic strategy. I digitally recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim, using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Transcripts were read multiple times in an effort to increase consistency and reliability. I started by searching each transcription for themes and patterns using Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood. While it was difficult to predict what themes might emerge, I relied on existing research and the importance of previous themes including gender, parental status, motherhood, hard skills, soft skills, ideal worker, discrimination, commitment, standardization, legal, and human resources as relevant coding categories. The final step in the coding process was to identify which themes best fit my original research questions (e.g., 1) *How do employers define their ideal worker?* 2) *How do employers screen for this type of employee in their interviewing practices?* 3) *Do perceptions of gender and parental status shape employers' interviewing strategies?*). Three key themes emerged and are discussed below.



### *Sample Characteristics*

Of the 27 participants, 12 were from California and 15 were from Utah. Respondents were equally represented with 13 men and 14 women. While I did not specifically ask the respondents to self-identify, based on my observations, all 27 respondents were white and fell within the age range of 25-55 years old with the average age between 30-40 years old. They had a variety of titles (e.g., HR assistant, CEO, general manager) but each had direct hiring responsibilities. Respondents represented companies that had advertised for the following positions: seven administrative, five clerical, seven customer service, one labor, three management and four sales. See Table 8 for summary details about the sample. Below I identify indications of clear and present employer bias when it came to both gender and parental status. The following three sections focus specifically on three mechanisms I identified that employers use during the interviewing process; Setting Ideal Expectations, The Use of Subjective Assessments, and The Employment Gap Inquiry.

## FINDINGS

### *Employer Bias*

As noted above, existing research provides a compelling case for employer bias against mothers in employment practices (Bragger et al. 2002; Correll et al. 2007; Halpert et al. 1993; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012). While I never mentioned discrimination, some hiring managers openly discussed their personal hiring preferences and how these were reflected in their employment practices. In addition, I did ask the respondents if they felt an applicant with family responsibilities was at a disadvantage

TABLE 8. Characteristics of Employers and Job Descriptions

Pseudonym	Respondent's Job Title	State	Job Descriptions	
			Hours	Occupation
Anne	Project Manager	CA	F/T	Admin
Brett	General Manager	CA	F/T	Sales
Chris	Executive Director	CA	F/T	Admin
David	Practice Manager	CA	P/T	Cust. Service
Eric	Manager	CA	F/T	Cust. Service
Frank	VP of Operations	CA	F/T	Sales
Gail	HR Consultant	CA	F/T	Labor
Herbert	General Manager	CA	F/T	Cust. Service
Ingrid	HR Manager	CA	F/T	Admin
Kirk	CEO	CA	F/T	Sales
Larry	CEO	CA	F/T	Clerical
Mabel	HR Generalist	CA	F/T	Clerical
Nancy	Operations Manager	UT	F/T	Management
Olive	HR Coordinator	UT	F/T	Cust. Service
Polly	HR Coordinator	UT	F/T	Cust. Service
Quinn	HR	UT	F/T	Cust. Service
Robin	Store Manager	UT	F/T	Management
Sally	Director of HR	UT	P/T	Cust. Service
Tammy	HR Assistant	UT	F/T	Admin
Ursula	HR Manager	UT	F/T	Management
Victor	Operations Manager	UT	F/T	Admin
Wanda	Manager	UT	P/T	Clerical
Yoshi	Director	UT	F/T	Admin
Zoe	HR Assistant	UT	P/T	Clerical
Albert	Office Manager	UT	F/T	Sales
Billy	HR Generalist	UT	F/T	Admin
Cathi	Practice Manager	UT	F/T	Clerical

in the labor market. Some respondents indicated directly that gender generally and motherhood specifically could be an impediment to receiving a job offer. Respondents also indicated a number of strategies they use to determine parental status of prospective employees. With regard to gender, many respondents conflated being a woman with

being a mother. For instance, Albert, an office manager looking to hire a sales position told me:

Typically speaking [women] don't want to work. They'd much rather not have to work. And when they have to work, they do what they have to do but they don't really get out there and succeed. And the reason why is because their focus is more on their family.

He also indicated that while he would never discriminate against women applicants, he often used his personal preference when deciding which candidates would be invited in for interviews.

In addition to equating being a woman with having family responsibilities, respondents also described a number of strategies they used to elicit information about family status. Larry, the CEO of a financial institution, told me that he openly discussed marital and family status with every candidate he interviews. To each applicant he states: "I know it's illegal for me to ask, but it's not illegal for you to tell me about your marital and family status." He informed me that only one candidate in over 15 years had refused to engage with this statement. The applicant, a woman, who did inform him that it was in fact illegal for him to discuss those topics, was described as "uppity" and "hostile" and therefore was not offered the job. While Larry had almost exclusively hired women in his duration as CEO, he justified this process as an exercise in trust and honesty. Since he constructed trust and honesty as required for employment with his company, he expected applicants to demonstrate these characteristics with their willingness to discuss personal issues, including family responsibilities. He also shared a story about a newly hired female employee who, upon hire, disclosed that she was pregnant. Larry, along with the female members of his staff, became upset with the new employee as they felt she had

betrayed their trust. He disclosed that she was later dismissed for non-pregnancy related work violations.

For other hiring managers who were willing to share a preference for male employees, they were more careful to indicate that hiring was based on necessary skills, and if a candidate could not demonstrate those skills, they would not be positively assessed. Instead, they used a series of screening mechanisms that would legitimize their preferences. The first mechanism, *setting ideal expectations*, provides insight into how employers construct motherhood and the ideal worker as mutually exclusive. The second mechanism, *the use of subjective assessments*, highlights the way in which employers put full faith in standardized and HR legitimized assessment tools to identify the best candidates. Hiring managers also indicate the need to evaluate subjective skill sets and the failings of standardized assessments to do so, increasing the significance of the interview for assessing these types of skills using a “gut feeling.” This mechanism highlights the significance of the interview in the employment process as a critical gatekeeping stage that mothers must face in order to gain access to the labor market. The final mechanism, *the employment gap inquiry*, specifies a direct question (e.g., what were you doing during this gap in employment?) that employers can legally use to investigate any non-labor market activities or constraints of an applicant. If motherhood is a salient status characteristic to that employer, this mechanism allows the status to become visible, creating a potential barrier for mothers.

*Setting Ideal Expectations*

Contemporary employment, regardless of industry or occupation, has constructed an ideal worker expectation (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Williams 2001). This construction can vary between positions within a single organization so it is never static. Scholars have discovered that in many instances, this construction of the ideal worker comes into conflict with larger cultural constructions of motherhood and what it means to be a good mother (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996.) In experimental conditions, evaluators are likely to view mothers as less competent, less deserving of higher starting wages, less committed to the workplace, and less likely to receive positive performance evaluations (Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008).

During the interviews, I asked each hiring manager to describe the ideal skill set they were looking for in their applicant pool. In many cases, they described how the ideal worker must possess a variety of both hard and soft skills. Hard skills included empirically testable qualifications including language skills, computer knowledge, or certifications while soft skills “pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal knowledge of training” (Moss and Tilly 2001:44). The hiring managers relied much more on a variety of these requisite soft skills, including “availability,” “dependability,” “being a team player,” “competitive,” “motivated,” “dedicated,” and “friendly” to describe their ideal worker. The primary reliance on these soft skills is problematic for mothers when they are culturally constructed to lack some of these skills (e.g., dependable, competitive, motivated, dedicated) (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Morgan et al. 2013).

When asked about the weight of both hard and soft skill sets, hiring managers consistently indicated that the soft skills were more important than concrete skills or specific previous experience. Mabel, an HR generalist for an educational organization, stated, “You hire for attitude and train for skills . . . We may give that person a chance over the person who maybe has great skills but has an awful attitude. We can’t change [attitude].” This concern over *attitude* is a prime example of a soft skill that would be difficult to empirically evaluate and allows for employers to simply construct the attitude and behavior of their ideal worker and motherhood as mutually exclusive. For example, Kirk, the CEO of a retail organization, indicated how his ideal worker would behave:

Historically we have found that good employees, they’re almost like gym rats. They’ll stay there all day. They come to work here to get away from everything else that’s going on out there. And this is the type of employee that you are looking for. Someone who stays with you and likes what you’re doing and doesn’t try to drag a bunch of baggage in here . . . You know, Johnny’s got the flu. My husband left me. And my car is not working. And it’s like, geez just come to work.

In addition to describing his ideal worker, Kirk also alluded to the type of employee he would not consider ideal, indicating that mothers may face a critical employment barrier and decreased access to the labor market. This is also reflected in his highly gendered complaints. Women workers are much more likely than men to miss work due to family care, and reference to a “husband” clearly indicates the complainant is a woman/wife. In general, this “gym rat,” one who is totally committed to the workplace and comes without “baggage,” is unlikely to be a mother given the cultural expectations associated with motherhood. For Kirk, his expectations about the ideal worker devalued mothers’ potential contributions, making it less likely he would offer them a job.

In another instance, Yoshi, the director of a business services organization, also described how his ideal worker would fit into an open position with his company. The employee would say “Maybe I could take on a chunk of these responsibilities.” Yoshi elaborated on why he would prefer this type of attitude in this way: “This is good because that means the employee wants to be busy. They want to feel like they are contributing. Sometimes they’re taking on some for others.” Again, this preference reflects the ideal candidate as someone who is willing to give their total devotion to the company without external familial constraints, once again using motherhood as a status characteristic that is devalued vis-à-vis the ideal worker model.

While many of the hiring managers gave similar examples as to what an ideal worker would behave like, most of them described job requirements in a way that could easily exclude mothers. Albert, an office manager, was the most forthcoming in the gender profile of his ideal worker. “We try to find guys that are married. And we try to find guys that have kids. Because for them, having that wife is a motivator.” He stated a clear preference not only for gender but for marital and family status. When I asked him how single mothers would fit into that preference model, he explained that while they had similar motivations as a traditional, breadwinning married father, they were still distracted by their childcare responsibilities and were therefore not considered as reliable or devoted as a father. In this way, Albert viewed parenthood in deeply gendered ways. While family responsibilities serve as distractions for mothers in the workplace, family responsibilities not only do not distract fathers but serve to reinforce fathers’ undivided devotion to work (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Kmec 2011).

*The Use of Subjective Assessments*

As employers search for their ideal worker, they are constrained in their interviewing practices by federal hiring policies. Prime examples include *The Equal Pay Act of 1963* which prohibits wage discrimination for equal work, *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* which prohibits employer discrimination based on race or gender and a subsequent amendment in 1978, the *Pregnancy Discrimination Act*, which added pregnancy as a protected status. Every hiring manager I interviewed was knowledgeable of these federal guidelines. When asked directly about disadvantages mothers may face in the workplace, almost every hiring manager noted that it was illegal to even discuss family status. Most respondents pointed to these federal guidelines as the primary reason for their reliance on standardization of their applications and interview questionnaires. Mabel, an HR generalist for an educational company, reflected on the relevance of federal authority over her firm's interviewing practices: "By law, we really can't ask about marital obligations, children, are you going to have children, things like that. You aren't allowed to do that. So the only way we can kind of gauge it is from what their past experience has been." This sentiment also emphasizes the importance of the interview for its flexible nature and ability to uncover information about otherwise taboo topics.

When it came to the evaluation and assessment of hard skills, the hiring managers were able to request either documented proof of a mandatory skill or present applicants with some sort of test, often computerized and capable of providing a numerical score for proficiency (e.g., typing test). The hiring managers then relied on personality and integrity tests to measure requisite soft skill attributes which also generated numerical scores with regard to the applicant's predicted performance (e.g., Predictive Index,



WorkKeys Assessment). Billy, an HR generalist for a multimedia organization, relied on a self-invented applicant score sheet, complete with numerical scores to assess not only experience, education, and computer skills but “conscientiousness,” “ambition,” and “communication skills.” These skills were also assigned a certain weight value, indicating a varied level of importance to the applicant’s overall assessment. When I asked about the complexity and ingenuity of this tool, Billy indicated his awareness of the subjective nature of the employment process:

Recruiting and staffing can be extremely subjective. There are a lot of biases and things that can come into play. When you are interviewing people you have a tendency to be attracted more to the people who are like you or are similar to you. You may subconsciously discriminate based on certain factors. So this is basically an attempt to remove that subjectivity and make the process a little bit more objective.

In his mind, having this type of standardized assessment helped mitigate both conscious and non-conscious bias. And while employers demonstrated an increasing reliance on these standardized and highly quantitative tests and measures to ensure compliance with federal regulations, they also demonstrated a resistance to relying fully on these tools.

David, a practice manager for a healthcare organization, explained that the interview was more important for getting at soft skill capabilities and “organizational fit,” and should not be quantitatively interpreted. “You can’t make it a quantitative amount.” Herbert, the general manager of a hospitality company, concurred with this sentiment: “I don’t let a computer do my hiring.” There was a shared distrust in a computer’s ability to accurately screen for both soft skills and organizational fit. Rather, the respondents believed in their own subjective assessment ability, previous experience and interviewing expertise to more accurately evaluate a candidate’s fitness for a particular position.

Thus, when it came to the actual implementation of strict federal guidelines and standardized company policies, hiring managers reported a strong reliance on emotional reactions to candidates, “gut feelings,” and instincts, to guide their ultimate choice among candidates. Chris, the executive director of a non-profit, described the emotional nature of the hiring process as “Love at first sight.” Others focused on the inherently subjective nature of the necessary skills applicants needed to have. Kirk, the CEO of a retail organization, said he was looking for that “Bounce in your step, sparkle in your eye.” For Kirk, organizational fit was not something that could be measured by a computer or a worksheet but was something he had to witness for himself in the interview. Brett, the general manager of a retail company, said that when he interviews an applicant, what he is really trying to figure out is if he can stand being around them. He stated, “If you don’t bring a positive influence on my personal day, you don’t work here. I’m in a position that I can make that decision.” Each of these examples reinforces both the subjective nature of the interview and its ability to grant access to the third and final stage of the employment process (e.g., hiring and wage setting).

Similarly, Herbert, a general manager in the hospitality industry, described his practice as a “gut feeling in the first two minutes.” This notion of a “gut feeling” was the most widely used expression by all the hiring managers. However, when Herbert allowed me to review his corporate hiring score sheet, he had an actual criteria labeled “Gut Feeling” with a score range from 0-10. When I asked him to describe how he would assign an applicant a score for this criteria he explained: “There really isn’t that criteria. Like if you smile three times, it’s a ten. There’s nothing like that. It’s kind of a judgment call on us.” He relied on the legitimacy of his interviewing guide as provided to him by a

corporate HR entity to promote equity in hiring, but did not seem to acknowledge that the inherent subjectivity of the skills he was trying to measure and even score, was still open to bias.

For these hiring managers, the use of subjective assessments during the interview allowed their ideal expectations to be fluid. This flexibility then fostered the conditions for the hiring managers to legitimately and legally dismiss a candidate for any reason. Such fluidity subjects anyone with a devalued status characteristic, including mothers, to the risk of employer bias and employment barriers. As noted above, hiring managers are increasingly defining their ideal worker through the use of soft skills, many of which are constructed as mutually exclusive from motherhood. The use of subjective assessments and employers' reliance on a "gut feeling" is made especially apparent during the interview stage of the employment process. Taken together, this suggests that interviews are a critical gatekeeping stage in which mothers are subjected to employment barriers and face restricted access to the labor market.

### *The Employment Gap Inquiry*

During my interviews, I also asked the hiring managers about their reliance on resumes and past work experience as indicators of soft skill qualifications. I subsequently noticed the reoccurring discussion of the importance and evaluation of gaps in employment histories. For many hiring managers, gaps were described as "red flags" and reason for suspicion. No one indicated that a gap would preclude an applicant from an interview but indicated it would be a topic for scrutiny during the interview process. It

quickly became apparent that all employment gaps were not created equal. Brett, the general manager of a retail company, told me:

[Gaps] make a huge deal. I want to know why, and I'm interviewing so I can ask that question. And if they tell me, well if they have a good excuse . . . well excuse is the wrong word, but if they have a good reason for the gaps in their employment, then it's no problem at all.

This sentiment reflects the connection between a solid work history and dedication to the labor market. Any time not directly engaged in the labor market was deemed an “excuse” and minimized as less valuable. As mothers are much more likely than nonmothers to have employment gaps (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Mandel 2011; Misra et al. 2011), the importance of this inquiry leaves mothers vulnerable to employer bias.

At the same time, the hiring managers indicated that in a post-2008 recession labor market, the significance of an employment gap had changed. However, the hiring managers appeared to have created a hierarchy of acceptability based on the duration of and reason for the gap in question. Albert, an office manager for a telecommunications company, indicated that any gap over six months was considered unacceptable. Anything longer than that meant that “something was wrong.” Hiring managers also indicated that there were certain *types* of gaps that they considered acceptable. Olive, an HR coordinator for a hospitality organization, emphasized the acceptability of an education-related employment gap. “If they went from high school to college, and they are just graduating college and they really haven't had much of a job history, that's not something we are going to hold against them because we know they have been in school full-time.” The relationship between education and skills necessary to be successful in the workplace contributes to employers' acceptance of this time out of the labor market. This

type of gap was considered proof of a future employee's dedication and commitment to the labor market through a solid work history. Olive also reiterated not only the acceptability of employment gaps for education but the company's overall enthusiasm for education as a direct reflection of labor market dedication:

We have lost several people who were coming back into the workforce who thought they could work a full-time job, and then discovered they had to pick up their kids . . . and we don't have that type of flexibility for a new hire. But because we do have tuition reimbursement, and we do work with school schedules that's kind of a little bit of an equalizer there.

For this organization, employees who demonstrated dedication to the labor market through a commitment to both the job and education were rewarded with flexible working arrangements. However, when it came to those caring for children, flexibility was not possible. While both students and mothers had employment gaps, motherhood was clearly the status that was devalued as it was not accommodated with the same flexibility allotted to those with school schedules. Unfortunately, these assumptions about "acceptable" gaps then come into direct conflict with the construction of mothers as dedicated to the family instead of the labor market. Thus, while education or training were considered acceptable reasons for an employment gap and even rewarded with a financial reimbursement for educational expenses, unpaid family care work was neither rewarded nor accommodated. Thus, the focus on employment gaps makes mothers more vulnerable as employers construct devotion to the workplace and motherhood as mutually exclusive (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Morgan et al. 2013).

Hiring managers were much less forthcoming about their negative assessments of employment gaps. They were all adamant that gaps were a cause for concern and needed to be justified by the applicant, but rarely gave specific examples of a gap that would

prohibit hiring. One respondent started to mention pregnancies in our discussion about evaluating employment gaps, but he stopped short, paused and simply stated that “There’s all kinds of [gaps]. . . I want to know where you’re at. I want to know where you’re going.” His hesitancy seemed to acknowledge that family–related employment gaps were less than ideal and those candidates would be given less preference due to a lack of labor market commitment as well as unpredictable future stability.

Applicants with too many gaps or gaps of excessive duration were also constructed as less committed and therefore categorized as a risky financial investment. Yoshi, the director of a business services organization, assessed each applicant’s gap by asking the question “Do we run the risk of somebody leaving again because of those same reasons that they were without a job last time?.” Employers were extremely conscious of the cost associated with hiring and training new employees and the evaluation of gaps was a way to protect that investment. Frank, the vice president of a retail and distribution organization, noted this cost in his negative assessment of applicants’ overuse of unemployment:

And so when somebody says ‘Well yeah, I just took a year and a half off because I could get unemployment and it pays me 60-70% and I could survive.’ That turns me off. I pretty much won’t hire them, because the training period costs so much and is so long, I don’t want to spend that time and effort.

Herbert, the general manager of a hospitality company, even knew the exact cost each new employee’s training would cost his company: \$400 for his primary position and \$700 for his secondary position. These financial considerations weighed heavily on the hiring managers’ assessments of employment gaps and motivated them to find ideal workers that did not pose such a financial risk. Employment gaps that were constructed

as risky investments were assessed negatively as opposed to the education gaps that were rewarded with tuition reimbursements. Employers therefore had a financial incentive to restrict access to an applicant who was not considered a good investment. Motherhood gaps, while not specifically identified as negative, could easily face this negative assessment if employers construct mothers as less committed or devoted to the labor market and less predictable in their tenure due the possibility of future family responsibility employment gaps.

Overall, non-labor market employment gaps were a cause for concern for hiring managers. All gaps were not created equal, with time away from the labor market to acquire education or additional training rewarded rather than questioned. Other gaps were regularly scrutinized, and applicants were put on the defensive; asked to justify time spent on non-paid activities. Hiring managers defended this potentially invasive questioning in light of expensive hiring and training costs and a need to protect a long term investment in every new hire. Unfortunately for mothers, the employment gap inquiry may also act as a mechanism for circumventing federal restrictions on discussing marital and family statuses, as they are much more likely than nonmothers to have these less acceptable, non-work-related gaps. This inquiry also legitimately allows motherhood to become salient during the interview process, subjecting mothers and their skills to further assessment based on cultural expectations and their devalued status characteristic.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research deconstructs the employer interview process by talking to hiring managers themselves. I highlight three mechanisms used by hiring managers during this

process that act as employment barriers to mothers: setting ideal expectations, the use of subjective assessments and the employment gap inquiry. First, consistent with my first hypothesis, I found that employers often define their ideal worker through soft skills. Competence, dedication, and availability were key attributes the hiring managers described in their ideal worker. Unfortunately, these criteria may devalue mothers as employees, if they are culturally constructed to be less competent, less dedicated, or less flexible with their time.

Second, I discovered that while the hiring managers were well-versed in federal policy requirements, interviews could be used to skirt policy in an attempt to fully evaluate soft skills as well as any other issues that might make the applicant a less than ideal candidate. This finding supports my second hypothesis that interviews would be used to screen applicants' soft skills. Hard skills were typically tested and quantified electronically, while more creative subjective assessments had to be developed to adequately measure soft skills. Even the hiring managers who tried to test and quantify subjective assessments were skeptical of their reliability and relied on a more personal, gut-feeling assessment of the applicant that paper applications and computers failed to capture. These subjective assessments, even when standardized to maintain legitimacy, had the flexibility to screen out candidates that did not meet the ideal expectation, potentially leaving mothers vulnerable to employer bias based on cultural expectations of motherhood. This makes the interview an important gatekeeping stage in the employment process that mothers must face in order to gain access to the labor market.

Finally, the hiring managers emphasized the importance of the employment gap inquiry. These gaps were of critical interest to the hiring managers though not all gaps



were assessed equally. Certain types of gaps in employment were evaluated as a lack of commitment to the labor market, unless the gap was labor market-related (e.g., education, increase in training/skill set). Hiring managers were acutely aware of the financial risk each new employee posed to the company. Thus, applicants without a “reasonable explanation”, too many gaps, or gaps with excessive duration were categorized as less than ideal with hiring managers opting for applicants in their labor queues without similar concerns. The employment gap inquiry also has the capacity for circumventing federal restrictions on discussing marital and family statuses, providing hiring managers with a legitimate means to ask for details as to why the applicant was disengaged from the labor market for a particular timeframe. This inquiry becomes especially problematic for mothers as they are more likely than nonmothers to have these “unjustified” employment gaps especially in a context where motherhood becomes salient in hiring decisions. Overall, these three mechanisms support my third hypothesis that motherhood could be an important consideration during the hiring process. Similarly, these findings support Ridgeway and Correll’s (2004) status theory of motherhood and the devaluation of mothers vis-à-vis the ideal worker model.

This study advances our understanding of disparate labor market outcomes faced by mothers by examining meso-level employment practices rather than policies suggesting that it is the implication of these policies that leads to labor market inequity. Additionally, I identify three distinct stages to the employment process with the first two (e.g., screening and interviewing) serving as gatekeeping stages. I isolate the interviewing practices of hiring managers through qualitative interviews and advance our understanding of hiring decisions. I also contribute to the field of gender and

organizations by identifying three mechanisms that may create motherhood employment barriers preventing mothers from gaining access to the labor market long before they ever face wage or organizational mobility discrimination. Finally, I suggest that the same mechanisms and employer bias are present at stage three when it comes time to make the job offer and set wages, thus expanding our understanding of range and degree of motherhood penalties in the labor market.

As this study is limited in scope with regard to both its geography and exclusive focus on motherhood, future researchers should consider the possible interactions of race and sexuality of working parents and an expanded comparative framework, incorporating labor markets from a diverse range of cultural and political contexts. Existing research suggests that these additional status characteristics may also impact disparate labor market outcomes (Elliot and Smith 2004; Glauber 2007; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004). While the scope of this project did not include fathers, existing research indicates that men with children actually receive a wage premium known as the “daddy bonus” (Baumle 2009; Padavic and Reskin 2002). Future researchers should examine whether the same mechanisms noted above that create employment barriers also lead to the daddy bonus or if there are processes unique to fatherhood as a status characteristic. Finally, future researchers may want to examine the influence of both state and organizational contexts on motherhood penalties. Budig and Hodges (2010) find that mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning jobs suffer larger the largest penalties. This research indicates that some employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on additional contexts.

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## CHAPTER IV

WHERE MOTHERHOOD MATTERS: UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECT OF  
STATE CONTEXT ON THE SALIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD

“And another big difference between this market and Utah is the diversification, the diversity of people here. For instance, I probably have seven women that work in sales here. I've got a Philippine manager, a Chinese manager and a Hispanic manager, and you just don't see that . . . you didn't when I was working in Utah because it is so dominated by the same race and culture”

*Brett, General Manager, California.*

“We don't have a problem here as far as if people have gaps for having children. Like I said, we have a large number of people with children, so that is not a concern so we don't look at that”

*Cathi, Practice Manager, Utah.*

## INTRODUCTION

Existing research has demonstrated the existence of a wage disparity between mothers and nonmothers in the labor market (Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). Additional research also suggests that there is an employment gap between mothers and nonmothers, with mothers facing barriers to paid employment (Harkness and Waldfogel 2003). Much of this research has relied on Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood, suggesting that employers devalue mothers because they view motherhood as mutually exclusive from paid labor (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996; Kimmel 2004). However, an emergent body of literature suggests that the salience of motherhood is not invariant but dependent on context (Budig and Hodges 2010; Glass and Fodor 2014; Chapter II). While not incompatible, if the salience of motherhood varies by context, there are important

implications for scholars and policy makers interested in disparate labor market outcomes. For instance, recent scholarship indicates that in some instances, motherhood as a status characteristic may even benefit women in the labor market (Glass and Fodor 2014; Glass, Petrzela, and Mannon 2011). Theoretically, it then indicates that it is not motherhood itself that is necessarily a detriment to women but rather the way in which its salience is constructed by employers. This paper seeks to contribute to this growing body of literature by exploring whether state level variation shapes the salience of motherhood for employers.

To date, very little research has explored meso-level processes to determine what role, if any, discrimination plays in shaping mothers' access to jobs. This project seeks to expand our understanding of non-wage related motherhood penalties by analyzing hiring practices. I am interested in the *practice* or implementation of employment policies rather than the formal written policies themselves as they are manifested in applicant screening and interviewing. Existing organizational research indicates a strict adherence to and continued development of formal policies at the firm, thus leaving little room for variation among employers (Dobbin 2009; Kalev, Kelly, and Dobbin 2006; Kelly and Dobbin 1999). It is, therefore, the unwritten practices and decision-making processes that are the most interesting for understanding penalties in access to jobs faced by mothers. By focusing primarily on employment strategies pursued by firms, I can better identify barriers to employment faced by mothers.

Analysis of meso-level employment practices advances the literature in two ways. First, this research will identify mechanisms that contribute to motherhood employment barriers at the meso-level. I suggest that these barriers occur at two distinct gatekeeping

stages. At stage one, employers screen applicants. Candidates for an open position face an initial screen for suitability based on the requirements of the position to be filled. Stage two focuses on a reduced pool of applicants, typically inviting applicants for telephone and/or in-person interviews. The final stage, hiring and wage setting, is confounded by our lack of knowledge into the mysteries of hiring decisions and wage setting which is the one most studied in the existing literature as it is one of the easiest to test empirically. I suggest that it is the two gatekeeping stages that act as mechanisms for covert hiring decisions and allow for employer bias that contributes to the motherhood employment gap. See Figure 4. This model indicates a reduction in the applicant pool at each stage of gatekeeping, thus reducing the likelihood of an applicant advancing to the next stage. If, at either of these stages of gatekeeping, mothers face discriminatory practices, then they are less likely to be hired.

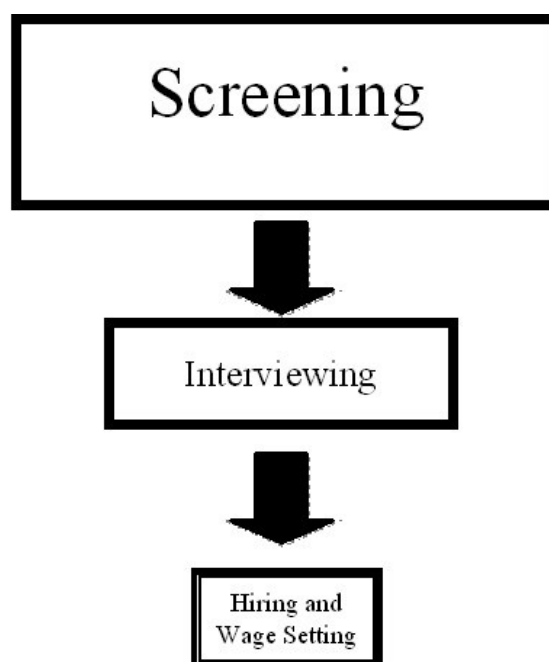


FIGURE 4. Stages of the Employment Process

Additionally, if mothers face barriers to employment at the gatekeeping stages, those who survive the hiring process may be subject to additional barriers when it comes to wage setting and promotion. However, those employers who are less likely to discriminate against mothers during the gatekeeping stages and do hire mothers may also be less likely to discriminate at wage setting and promotion stages as well. This paper focuses on both the screening and interviewing stages from the perspective of employers.

Second, this project seeks to add a comparative element to the research by adding an analysis of the state context. Context refers to the circumstances or larger constraints that employers must work within including state and federal hiring regulations as well as the socio-cultural environment. Existing research suggests that the salience of motherhood may vary based on context indicating that a variance in salience may contribute to the variance in motherhood penalties (Budig and Hodges 2010; Glass and Fodor 2014).

In order to assess the way in which employers use the interview process to screen and evaluate potential employees, I conducted 27 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with hiring managers in Utah and California between September and October of 2013. Interviews focused on the construction of the ideal worker, requisite soft skills, and applicant assessments as well as employer perceptions of gender differences and the impact of family responsibilities. Using the status theory of motherhood as well as the existing literature on employers' construction of the ideal worker, I searched interview transcripts for themes regarding how employers define the ideal worker as well as their practices for screening and evaluating candidates. My specific research questions for this paper include 1) *Does variation in state context influence the salience of motherhood* and

2) *Does variation in the salience of motherhood impact mothers' access to employment?*

Based on existing cross national research that suggests country level context affects employment outcomes (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Harkness and Waldfogel 2003), I hypothesize that state context will influence the salience of motherhood. Additionally, if there is indeed variation in the salience of motherhood (Glass and Fodor 2014; Glass et al. 2011), I hypothesize that salience will have an impact on mother's access to employment.

In order to answer these questions, I first examine the existing literature with regard to the role of labor market contexts, the salience of ascribed characteristics, mothers' access to jobs, and employer discrimination. Second, I review Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood as a framework for understanding employer bias throughout the employment process. Third, I describe the meso-level, qualitative methodological approach I used for answering my research questions. Fourth, I present my findings as a series of themes drawn from interviews with hiring managers. Finally, I conclude with some discussion as well as the limitations and future implications of this research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the U.S., 79% of nonmothers are employed compared to 67% of mothers with young children.<sup>19</sup> This employment gap indicates that there is something unique about being a mother in the labor market. Existing literature has documented compelling evidence of a MWP (Anderson et al. 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll et al. 2007). And while this literature is often driven by the assumption that employer bias and

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<sup>19</sup> 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

discrimination are the primary drivers of this wage penalty, the mechanisms themselves have not been elaborated empirically. My research builds upon the work of gender scholars and organizational theorists who have sought to identify gender-related discriminatory mechanisms (Acker 1998; Britton 2000; Reskin 2003; Reskin and McBrier 2000). In doing so, these scholars begin to move beyond the *why* of motherhood penalties to discover *how* inequalities occur and are reproduced over time. My research questions advance the field by identifying the role of employment practices in shaping mothers' labor market opportunities and how these processes may vary under different state contexts.

#### *Labor Market Contexts*

At the macro-level, scholars aggregate micro-level data to draw country level conclusions for use in cross-national labor market comparisons (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Misra, Budig, and Boeckmann 2011; Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel 2007). This research has demonstrated that variation in national welfare policies appears to create variance in the severity of the MWP in cross national context (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Pettit and Hook 2009). This variation includes differential approaches to welfare policies including parental leave and childcare, resulting in differential levels of motherhood employment rates and variation in the severity of wage penalties. Existing research suggests that variance in both the availability of affordable quality childcare and parental leave policies impact mothers' ability to engage in the paid labor market (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011; Misra et al. 2011; Pettit and Hook 2009). When these policies exist, mothers have an increased ability

to balance work and family responsibilities as opposed to contexts in which these policies do not exist. Therefore, in states where work-family policies are present, motherhood would become less salient as employers are less concerned with a woman's ability to achieve work-life balance. These findings indicate that there may also be meso-level employment barriers operating across the entire employment process versus just the hiring and wage setting stage, contributing to larger labor market disparities. They also identify the potential for the variation between employers' construction of motherhood based on workers' individual characteristics and macro-level policy constraints including access to affordable quality daycare and parental leave policies.

Other researchers add to this field of research by suggesting that the differential labor market outcomes in the existing literature may be related to cultural context (Budig et al. 2012; DiMaggio 1997; Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Swidler 1986). Budig et al. (2012:164) specifically identify the role of culture in successfully implementing new policies suggesting that "work-family policies work in concert with gendered cultural norms regarding motherhood to produce a range of outcomes." In their study, they find that the success of policies that seek to alleviate motherhood penalties depends upon broad cultural support. When work-family policies were implemented without cultural support for mothers in the workplace, the policies failed to mitigate these inequalities. Thus, I hypothesize that broad socio-cultural differences between states will help explain both the variation in policy approaches as well as any employment barriers faced by mothers in each state.

At the occupational level, there is significant evidence that the type of job can also lead to disparate labor market outcomes (Bianchi 2011; Crosby, Williams, and



Biernat 2004; Williams 2001). With the rise of the new economy, jobs have become less secure, less flexible, and less skilled all leading to lower pay, less hours, and decreased mobility (Jacobs and Gerson 2001; McCrate 2012; Webber and Williams 2008; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012). In many instances, these types of new jobs have been coined “mommy track” jobs as they are perceived to be desirable for a mother trying to balance work and family responsibilities. However, additional research suggests that these may not be mothers’ choice jobs but rather the jobs they find that are limited to because of larger labor market dynamics (Glass 2004; Glauber 2012; McCrate 2012). These findings dismiss the original “opting out” argument (Belkin 2003), and support the growing body of evidence that mothers are facing constraints and labor market barriers to other types of jobs (Jones 2012; Stone 2007).

For instance, Budig and Hodges (2010) find that women with the least to lose are proportionately losing the most. Mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning occupations suffer larger penalties. They indicate this could reflect the increased difficulty low wage mothers face of combining family obligations with employment. This research may also suggest that higher paying, high-skilled employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on these meso-level contexts as well as the expectation that low wage mothers will struggle with work-family balance issues. In her study on the impact of work-family policy use on women’s wage outcomes, Glass (2004:370) notes that “mothers are either condemned to the labor market purgatory of low wage part-time jobs to accommodate family care or are the fatigued victims of inflexible full-time jobs that lower their productivity.” These studies reinforce the role of contextual constraints on both women’s

labor market choices and employers' construction of the ideal worker thereby influencing the entire employment process.

### *The Salience of Ascribed Characteristics*

A variety of studies have demonstrated and reinforced the importance of understanding how ascribed characteristics may lead to disparate labor market outcomes (Reskin 2003; Reskin and McBrier 2000; Schein et al. 1996). These are individual traits that people are typically associated with from birth including race/ethnicity and sex/gender. They are not earned achievements like getting an education or even getting married. While motherhood is typically something that we would then consider achieved, its cultural association with being a woman, an ascribed characteristic, conflates our perceptions of motherhood as something women will inevitably become. This can be problematic for all women in the labor market including those who never intend to or are incapable of having children.

For example, Glauber (2007) specifically finds that white mothers pay a larger wage penalty than black or Hispanic mothers. She indicates that this may reflect the existence of a floor to the wage penalty suggesting that black and Hispanic mothers already have such low earnings that they simply can't get any lower. However, there may also be cultural differences in that motherhood and paid labor may not be constructed as mutually exclusive when it comes to the expectations associated with certain races. Therefore, employers may not construct their ideal worker and motherhood the same when race is also a salient status characteristic.

It is important to also understand the impact of cultural, structural and organizational factors that shape the salience of ascribed characteristics. A large portion of the labor market dynamics puzzle includes the available labor supply. Reskin and Roos (1990) suggest that employers have a labor queue of available applicants. Hiring managers will then rank those applicants based on desirability and how those applicants fit their own ideal worker model. “Employers often have a particular sex in mind when they create new jobs, set pay levels, and organize how work is to be done and under what conditions” (Padavic and Reskin 2002:11). At the same time, applicants have a jobs queue in which they rank the jobs available to them based on desirability (Reskin and Roos 1990). Those workers deemed the most ideal are the most likely to end up with the jobs often deemed the most desirable. Non-ideal workers must settle for the jobs most frequently rejected. This theory may then also explain why so many of the less desirable new economy jobs described above have been promoted as “mommy track” if mothers are constructed as incompatible vis-à-vis the ideal worker model. And while employer preferences may not change, when labor supplies change, employers may have to hire from lower in their labor queue (Roos and Reskin 1992). If there are cultural norms about who works and who stays home with family responsibilities, this may alter the gender composition of the labor market. As noted above, if there are also cultural expectations about who performs and who *wants* to perform certain types of work, this may also impact the labor supply from which employers have to choose and how they shape their own labor queues.

A growing body of research indicates that the salience of motherhood in employment is also varied due to occupational characteristics rather than individual

demographics. While there is limited research on the effect of occupational categories on motherhood penalties, there is enough evidence to suggest that certain occupations face larger penalties than others (Langdon 2013; Solberg 2005). Additional research suggests that this is due to occupational sex composition indicating that mothers who work in occupations that are female-dominated are subject to a larger wage penalty than mothers in non-female-dominated occupations (Budig and Hodges 2010; Glauber 2012). Glass and Fodor (2014) find differential constructions of the ideal worker by employers in Hungarian financial and business sectors, with mothers facing employment access barriers in the financial industry but not in business firms.

#### *Mothers' Access to Jobs and Employer Discrimination*

Differences in labor market contexts and their impact on the salience of ascribed characteristics appear to play a significant role in shaping our understanding of disparate labor market outcomes. So how might we better understand the role of employer bias and discrimination within these diverse contexts? Experimental research provides insight into how and why employer bias may create access barriers for mothers by demonstrating the strength of negative stereotypes associated with motherhood. These studies have evaluated experimental testers' (typically university students) responses to both applicants and managers who were visibly pregnant (Bragger et al. 2002; Corse 1990; Cunningham and Macan 2007; Halpert, Wilson, and Hickman 1993). Without exception, these studies find that pregnant women are evaluated as being less competent, less motivated and less committed than their non-pregnant counterparts. Additional studies that focused on mothers generally rather than pregnant women specifically confirmed

these findings (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Fuegen et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). In each instance, researchers noted a conflict between the social construction of motherhood and the ideal worker expectations of 100% commitment to and effort in the workplace. In light of this conflict, employers are likely to rank mothers much lower in their labor queues than nonmothers.

Further evidence of such barriers is provided in a study that examined mothers' perceptions of hiring discrimination through qualitative interviews with working mothers. This work found that 44% of respondents reported subjective perceptions of having experienced some type of discrimination (Crowley 2013). Discrimination came in the form of interview questions regarding pregnancy intentions and childcare responsibilities. However, Morgan et al. (2013) found that when mothers provided counter-stereotypical information during the hiring process (e.g., evidence of commitment and competence), there was a reported reduction in hiring manager hostility and formal discrimination. These studies suggest that pre-employment screening may allow employers to screen out any applicants that are readily identified as mothers, reducing the need for such questions at the interview stage and decreasing claims of discrimination and litigation at the hiring stage.

In their groundbreaking study on the relationship between bias and MWP, Correll et al. (2007) also employ the theoretical framework of motherhood as a status characteristic. They first conducted a laboratory experiment in which undergraduate students compared and ranked resumes of imaginary candidates with equivalent levels of education and experience. In each candidate pair, one was constructed to be "read" as a parent and one was not. Applicants were also paired by gender to control for any gender

discrimination. According to the authors, “Mothers were judged as significantly less competent and committed than women without children” (Correll et al. 2007:1316). Students were more likely to negatively assess mothers and reward fathers, thereby supporting the salience of motherhood as a status characteristic in employment practices.

In a more recent study, Kiester (See Chapter III) identified three mechanisms used by hiring managers during the interview process that created employment barriers to mothers: setting ideal expectations, the use of subjective assessments, and the employment gap inquiry. These mechanisms legitimized employer bias by identifying tangible yet highly subjective criteria on which to screen applicants, a standardized process for assessing applicants during both the screening and interviewing stages, and a legitimate question for obtaining personal information regarding protected statuses. These mechanisms then acted as loopholes for avoiding claims of discrimination and dismissing the potential for employer bias throughout the employment process. This paper further evaluates these mechanisms to determine if employers in varying state contexts differ in their construction of the ideal worker, use of subjective assessments and employment gap inquiries.

### *Motherhood as a Status Characteristic*

Under what conditions is motherhood a source of employer bias and discrimination? Expectation states theory suggests that when we enter social settings, we form expectations about how others will behave and how we might be expected to behave as well (Berger et al. 1977; Correll et al. 2007). According to Berger et al. (1977), a status characteristic is defined by a widely-held set of cultural beliefs that associate greater

status worthiness and competence with one category of distinction over another (e.g., nonmothers vs. mothers). In other words, a personal attribute, particularly one that has socially constructed meaning, has attached expectations as to how we anticipate that individual will act. For example, women who are mothers may be expected to prioritize caring for their children above meeting obligations for work and thus be evaluated as less committed to the workplace. Expectations are particularly salient in social settings and interactions with people we have never met, including the screening of applications, as we search for subtle cues about how to behave and how to relate to others (Morgan et al. 2013; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Examples of status characteristics include gender, marital status and race, and a variety of studies have relied on these status characteristics to analyze disparate labor market outcomes (England 1992; Kanter 1977; Pager 2003).

Status shapes how we make sense of others, and it is also hierarchical.

Differential statuses are rarely equal, but rather there is either a preference or higher expectation for one group over another (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). When one group is chronically evaluated by employers as inferior based on cultural assumptions, regardless of circumstance, it becomes a matter of discrimination. In the workplace, status-based discrimination results when employers systematically evaluate high status groups more favorably than low status groups (Correll et al. 2007; Güngör and Biernat 2009).

Employers rely on expectations for the status group in question (e.g., mothers), and any biases they may have against that group are likely to create employment barriers as this status is evaluated as lower than nonmothers. Thus, this framework suggests that the employment process is biased in favor of high status groups compared to lower status groups (e.g., nonmothers receive favored treatment when compared to mothers).

Motherhood is culturally constructed as a status incompatible with a commitment to paid work, thus mothers tend to be perceived as having low status in employment contexts (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Mothers are assumed to lack competence as well as devotion to work due to the prioritization of children and family over job responsibilities (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996). This cultural construction of motherhood conflicts with the construction of the ideal worker who is assumed to be completely committed and devoted to the company twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Kmec 2011; Williams 2001). Because of the high cultural status afforded to paid labor and those who commit themselves to hard work, the above contradiction leads to the devaluation of the status of motherhood (Crittenden 2001; Kimmel 2004). To support the claim that motherhood is a status characteristic related to but distinct from gender, it is necessary to distinguish the status of mothers from the status of women. To establish this distinction, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that context matters and so the issue of salience must be addressed. For motherhood to become a status characteristic, there must be both mothers and nonmothers present, and actors must be able to differentiate between them. Once this difference has been established, actors will create expectations about those individuals with that status characteristic “even if it is logically irrelevant to the task at hand” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:686). Without differentiation in parental status, and without the ability to detect this difference, another status characteristic (e.g., gender or race) remains the most important salient status. The lack of visible indicators of motherhood make this a low ascriptive characteristic, making it even more difficult to assess specific biases associated with this status as opposed to a more visible status.



However, motherhood can become visible in the workplace when a woman displays evidence of being a mother. Evidence of motherhood could include a visible pregnancy, requesting time off to care for a sick child or simply sharing stories about a child's antics. When it comes to the pre-employment process, each of these examples could be easily avoided on an application or resume. Per federal hiring regulations, it is illegal to require the disclosure of marital or parental status on an application (U.S. EEOC 2014). If the issue comes up either inadvertently on the part of the applicant or through an employer's hiring practices, motherhood could become a salient status characteristic. Salience may be contextual, and some employers may never notice or care if signs of motherhood are displayed as it is irrelevant to their construction of the ideal worker. Thus, as noted above, it is important to consider contextual variance in the labor market to determine if there is variance in the salience of motherhood in the employment process.

This project seeks to test the relevance of motherhood as a low status characteristic in the pre-hiring employment stages. In addition, I seek to understand if the salience of motherhood is constant across contexts. Specifically, *does variation in state context influence the salience of motherhood?* I suggest that the variance in the states' policy and cultural contexts may also result in a variance in the way employers' construct motherhood and the level of salience it has in the workplace. While individual states are constrained by federal policies, they are also capable of going "above and beyond" what is required. Examples include setting a state-specific minimum wage that is higher than federal standards and offering paid parental leave while the federal government only affords the unpaid protection of a job. Comparing a more liberal state that provides

benefits in excess of federal requirements with a more conservative state that does not allows me to examine the role of state policy context in shaping the salience of motherhood.

## METHODS

The hiring managers interviewed were selected from a sample of companies in a previous audit study (See Chapter II). In this study, she used online websites of local newspapers as a sampling frame to locate firms that were actively recruiting from which to audit.<sup>20</sup> She combined these ads with free, public workforce agency job posting sites as employers may have also used these third party resources with unemployment rates remaining high and as they seek to minimize posting costs.<sup>21</sup> Over a period of six months, she audited a total of 480 companies with half of the jobs located in Salt Lake City and half in Sacramento. This population of audited companies then became my sampling frame from which to select hiring managers to conduct in-person, semi-structured interviews.

In selecting among audited companies to develop an interview sample, I excluded any companies that did not list sufficient contact information (e.g., phone number, email), reducing my population from 480 to 347. Of that pool, I randomly selected firms to contact either via email or phone. I contacted 245 companies and conducted interviews with 27 of those, resulting in an 11% response rate. Time and financial constraints limited

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<sup>20</sup> In Salt Lake City Utah, this was the *Salt Lake Tribune* whose classified section is hosted by Monster.com. In Sacramento California, this was the *Sacramento Bee* whose classified section is hosted by CareerBuilder. These contracted hosts meant that I also found local area jobs that were posted directly through those hosts as opposed to the original newspaper sites. However, any jobs that did not have local contact information were excluded.

<sup>21</sup> In Utah, this was Department of Workforce Services. In California, this was Sacramento Works.

my ability to contact all 347 companies. See Appendix E for a sample script. This response rate reflects the difficulty of 1) finding the right person at each company to speak with (without being sent to a corporate office) and 2) obtaining participants who were willing to discuss employment practices in light of federal and corporate hiring regulations. However, of the 218 companies I contacted but did not conduct interviews, most non-interviews were a result of either no response by the contact or being sent to the corporate office. Eleven potential respondents indicated that they were too busy or unavailable during my timeframe, while 13 stated that they simply weren't interested in participating. Only four of my contacts indicated that it was against corporate policy to even discuss hiring practices. My position as a graduate student working on a school project may have increased the willingness of respondents to meet with me. Additionally, my own gender may have acted as a status characteristic that discouraged certain employers from agreeing to meet with me. However, the net effect of these two possibly contradictory positions still provided a reasonable sample of interviews.

It is also important to note that while the overall sample included a large selection of companies based on size, many of the respondents interviewed represented small to mid-size firms. Fourteen of the companies had less than 100 employees with the smallest being five. The remaining 13 companies had between 101-600 employees, though one firm had an additional 1,200 contract workers. Generally speaking, the firms that agreed to speak with me were smaller in size and less corporate. These characteristics may account for the ability of the respondents to get the necessary authorization to speak with me. However, this context may not reflect the processes and attitudes of much larger, formalized firms and limit the generalizability of these findings to smaller, less

bureaucratic firms. The lack of corporate constraints in these firms may also allow for greater flexibility and fluidity during the hiring process that is unique and provocative to those companies that have less formalized processes.

Hiring manager interviews were designed to ask directly and indirectly about perceptions, attitudes, and practices vis-à-vis women and mothers. Previous research suggests that interviews with employers may reveal the ways in which employers justify discriminatory practices in non-discriminatory terms or with reference to “rational” firm behavior and incentives (Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014). Sample questions included basic questions about desired skill sets (e.g., “What are some of the most important skills you look for when hiring?”), empirical hiring practices (e.g., “Describe the hiring process for new applicants.”), as well as more direct questions about perceptions of workers’ gender status and parental responsibilities (e.g., “Do you think that family responsibilities can be a disadvantage to workers in your firm?”). See Appendix D for an example of the complete interview guide. Careful interview design was important to building a rapport with respondents without priming them with leading or threatening questions that would alter their response and thereby compromise validity. While hiring managers are not expected to volunteer personal bias or discriminatory practices, they may allude to more “legal” forms of subtle discrimination based on their definition and identification of their ideal worker.

Interviews with employers have allowed prior researchers to gain significant insights into firm level practices as well as employer attitudes and how these attitudes shape recruitment and hiring practices and outcomes (Glass and Fodor 2011, 2014; Moss and Tilly 2001). Such interviews can be subject to social desirability bias, however, in

which employers say what is perceived to be the most appropriate answer (Benard, Paik, and Correll 2008; Pager and Quillian 2005). Similar limitations also occur with self-report survey data. Never the less, this type of data provides rich analyses of employer perceptions and behavior that survey data cannot. In order to mitigate the limitations of this method, I was careful to build a rapport with the hiring managers while setting up the interview time and upon arrival. To do this, I relied heavily on my status as a student to appear as non-threatening as possible. In addition, I used a carefully constructed instrument with careful attention to question sequencing, content, and style (Berg 2009).

### *State Selection*

Replicating this study in multiple states allowed for greater generalizability as well as examination of larger structural constraints. For the purpose of this study, I identified two states in which to conduct my study. I conducted this research in Salt Lake City (SLC), UT and Sacramento, CA. Both cities are similar in size and geography, and they are both capital cities. However these states allowed for an analysis of variation in state contexts. First, these states suggested contextual variation in the motherhood employment gap. In California, 78.2% of nonmothers are employed while 62.4% of mothers with young children are employed, resulting in a 15.8% employment gap.<sup>22</sup> In Utah, 82.7% of nonmothers are employed while only 54.5% of mothers with young children are employed, resulting in a substantially higher 28.2% employment gap.<sup>23</sup> Second, these states allowed for policy variation as noted above. SLC is traditionally conservative and racially homogeneous. Its minimum wage laws mirror federal standards

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<sup>22</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

<sup>23</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

(U.S. DOL 2014), and it offers no additional parental leave benefits to the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which simply provides 12 weeks of unpaid job security (NCSL 2014). In contrast, Sacramento is politically more liberal and racially heterogeneous. It provides a state minimum wage of \$8.00/hr., \$.75 above the federal minimum (U.S. DOL 2014). When it comes to parental leave laws, California is one of only two states in the country to offer paid or partially paid family and medical leave, providing up to six weeks of leave paid at 55% weekly wage (NCSL 2014).

Finally, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2011) found that there was a significant difference in the earnings ratio between these states. In California, women earned \$.82 for every male dollar, earning eleventh place in the country for earning equity. In Utah, women only earned \$.69 for every male dollar, placing Utah last in the nation. Thus, these two states provide a compelling sample for examining the role of state context variation on motherhood penalties. Limiting the scope to these cities raises concerns about generalizability to other cities and states with different social, political and economic diversities. However, I feel this sample is capable of providing compelling results that open several avenues for future research.

In addition to policy differences, there are significant cultural differences between these states when it comes to both political party identity and religiosity. In California, 50% of the population identifies as Democrat while in Utah 58% of the population identifies as Republican (Gallup 2013). When it comes to religiosity, people in California who identify as "very religious" make up 34% of the population and are likely to be Protestant (37%) or Catholic (32%) (Gallup 2013). However, in Utah, those who identify as "very religious" make up 60% of the population and are likely to be members of The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) (60%) (Gallup 2013; McCombs 2014).

These cultural indicators suggest that the policy approaches noted above may be reflective of larger contextual constraints that influence employer bias and mothers' access to employment.

### *Data Analysis*

I employed content analysis as the primary analytic strategy. I digitally recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim, using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Transcripts were read multiple times in an effort to increase consistency and reliability. I started by searching each transcription for themes and patterns using Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) status theory of motherhood. While it was difficult to predict what themes might emerge, I relied on existing research and the importance of previous themes including gender, parental status, motherhood, hard skills, soft skills, ideal worker, discrimination, commitment, standardization, legal, and human resources as relevant coding categories. The final step in the coding process was to identify which themes best fit my original research questions (e.g., 1) *Does variation in state context influence the salience of motherhood* and 2) *Does variation in the salience of motherhood impact mothers' access to employment?*). Three key themes emerged and are discussed below.

### *Sample Characteristics*

Of the 27 participants, 12 were from California and 15 were from Utah. Respondents were equally represented with 13 men and 14 women. While I did not specifically ask the respondents to self-identify, based on my observations, all 27 respondents were white and fell within the age range of 25-55 years old with the average

age between 30-40 years old. They had a variety of titles (e.g., HR assistant, CEO, general manager) but each had direct hiring responsibilities. Respondents represented companies that had advertised for the following positions: seven administrative, five clerical, seven customer service, one labor, three management, and four sales. See Table 9 for summary details about the sample. The following three sections focus specifically on three mechanisms I identified that employers use during the interviewing process; Employers' Ideal Expectations, The Subjective Assessment of Family Responsibilities, and The Employment Gap Inquiry.

## FINDINGS

Hiring managers described a series of screening mechanisms that could be used to legitimize any preferences they had while avoiding any claims of discrimination. The first mechanism, *employers' ideal expectations*, provides insight into how the construction of both the ideal worker and motherhood varies based on state context. The second mechanism, *the subjective assessment of family responsibilities*, highlights the way in which employers in each state put full faith in standardized and HR legitimized assessment tools to identify the best candidates while protecting themselves from claims of discrimination. This mechanism highlights the significance of the interview in the employment process as a critical gatekeeping stage that mothers must face in order to gain access to the labor market. It also seeks to identify if larger state contexts impact the way in which hiring managers assess this typically taboo information. The third mechanism, *the employment gap inquiry*, specifies a direct question (e.g., what were you



TABLE 9. Characteristics of Employers and Job Descriptions

Pseudonym	Respondent's		Job Descriptions	
	Job Title	State	Hours	Occupation
Anne	Project Manager	CA	F/T	Admin
Brett	General Manager	CA	F/T	Sales
Chris	Executive Director	CA	F/T	Admin
David	Practice Manager	CA	P/T	Cust. Service
Eric	Manager	CA	F/T	Cust. Service
Frank	VP of Operations	CA	F/T	Sales
Gail	HR Consultant	CA	F/T	Labor
Herbert	General Manager	CA	F/T	Cust. Service
Ingrid	HR Manager	CA	F/T	Admin
Kirk	CEO	CA	F/T	Sales
Larry	CEO	CA	F/T	Clerical
Mabel	HR Generalist	CA	F/T	Clerical
Nancy	Operations Manager	UT	F/T	Management
Olive	HR Coordinator	UT	F/T	Cust. Service
Polly	HR Coordinator	UT	F/T	Cust. Service
Quinn	HR	UT	F/T	Cust. Service
Robin	Store Manager	UT	F/T	Management
Sally	Director of HR	UT	P/T	Cust. Service
Tammy	HR Assistant	UT	F/T	Admin
Ursula	HR Manager	UT	F/T	Management
Victor	Operations Manager	UT	F/T	Admin
Wanda	Manager	UT	P/T	Clerical
Yoshi	Director	UT	F/T	Admin
Zoe	HR Assistant	UT	P/T	Clerical
Albert	Office Manager	UT	F/T	Sales
Billy	HR Generalist	UT	F/T	Admin
Cathi	Practice Manager	UT	F/T	Clerical

doing during this gap in employment?) that employers can legally use to investigate any non-labor market activities or possible constraints, current or future, of an applicant. If motherhood is a salient status characteristic to that employer, this mechanism allows the

status to become visible, creating a potential barrier for mothers. This section seeks to understand if the salience of motherhood varies by state context by comparing the differential assessments of hiring managers when considering the validity of a hiring gap.

*Employers' Ideal Expectations: Flexibility and Availability*

Contemporary employment has constructed an ideal worker expectation (Acker 1990; Hays 1996; Williams 2001). This construction can vary between positions within a single organization so it is never static. During interviews, I asked each hiring manager to describe the ideal skill set they were looking for in their applicant pool. In many cases, they described how the ideal worker must possess a variety of both hard and soft skills. Hard skills included empirically testable qualifications including language skills, computer knowledge, or certifications while soft skills “pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal knowledge of training” (Moss and Tilly 2001:44). The hiring managers relied much more on a variety of these requisite soft skills, including “dependability,” “being a team player,” “competitive,” “motivated,” “dedicated,” and “friendly” to describe their ideal worker. Employers’ reliance on these soft skills may be problematic for mothers if they are culturally constructed to lack these skills (e.g., dependable, competitive, motivated, dedicated) (Güngör and Biernat 2009; Morgan et al. 2013).

Hiring managers from both states often described the need to assess a candidate’s flexibility and availability as key soft skills that would classify them as an ideal worker. However, their own ability and willingness to be flexible seemed to vary by state. In California, hiring managers indicated that both advertising the schedule requirements of

the position and verifying an applicant's availability on both the application and during the interview mitigated any issues of work-family conflict. When asked if candidates with any type of family responsibilities were at a disadvantage when applying with their companies, respondents typically stated that the early schedule disclosure simply removed these applicants from the queue of ideal candidates. For those applicants who disclosed a schedule conflict upon hire, hiring managers in California readily discussed their unwillingness to accommodate their schedule for even the most ideal candidate. For Brett, the general manager of a retail organization, the ideal worker was available to work weekends. "A salesperson knows that unless he is on vacation or dying in a ditch, he's going to work every Saturday for the rest of his life." His use of the masculine pronoun seemed purposeful as mothers would be more likely to have problems arranging daycare to increase their weekend availability (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996). Mabel, an HR generalist for an educational organization, speculated that there was a lack of part-time jobs that could accommodate a mother's need for flexibility. Thus, when an applicant disclosed any schedule needs that reflected a lack of flexibility or availability, they were pushed lower in the hiring queue behind a candidate with similar hard skill qualifications but more desirable soft skill attributes. This construction of flexibility and availability as the ideal expectation for new workers may put mothers at a disadvantage when assumptions about their schedule restrictions devalue them as potential employees.

In Utah, hiring managers indicated a greater willingness to accommodate a variety of schedules. While flexibility and availability were still considered necessary expectations, there was also acceptability, if not expectation, that family responsibilities would have to be accommodated. Polly, an HR coordinator for a hospitality organization,

indicated that even though they worked on Saturdays, they only worked until 3:15pm, giving employees “the opportunity to come home while the kids are still awake and have dinner and all that family time.” In her mind, this early dismissal on weekends made her organization more accommodating for mothers. Sally, the director of HR of a healthcare organization, indicated that her company currently employed quite a few “single moms and working-family members.” In fact, when describing her ideal worker, she described attributes that were reflective not only of schedule accommodation but a preference for mothers:

If the calls are quiet, there are ladies upstairs who knit. They're happy with this sort of non-confrontational work. They're not looking to climb the corporate ladder. They want a job that is steady, has good benefits, pays the bills and the company is solid. They want to just float along on the top of the water.

Sally’s description of mothers as ideal workers may also reflect the larger state context and cultural assumption that working mothers in Utah are content as secondary breadwinners in “non-confrontational work” with little opportunity for mobility and where they can “just float along on the top of the water.” Thus, these low skill, low wage opportunities may be the primary employment opportunities that mothers have access to in this state.

These examples indicate a clear distinction between California and Utah and the way in which the salience of motherhood varies between contexts. In California, motherhood and the ideal worker seem to be constructed as mutually exclusive due to the required schedule flexibility and availability. However, in Utah, while these are still highly desirable traits in an employee, the cultural expectations associated with motherhood do not automatically disqualify an applicant and in some cases may even be

viewed as beneficial. Therefore, cultural context may be shaping employers' attitudes towards women in general and mothers in particular.

It is also important to consider the variation in work-family policies between these states. Even though hiring managers in Utah indicated a higher degree of flexibility than their counterparts in California, the state of Utah does not provide the same level of parental leave, making it harder for mothers to balance work and family responsibilities. The knowledge of these state-level policy constraints may account for the discrepancy between hiring managers' description of flexible employment practices and the substantial motherhood employment gap present in Utah.

#### *The Subjective Assessment of Family Responsibilities*

When hiring managers were asked about the evaluation of family responsibilities, the answers were quite distinct based upon which state they were located. In California, hiring managers indicated that family responsibilities would never be considered during an assessment as they would never ask a candidate to disclose such information due to legal constraints. When asked if applicants ever self-disclosed, hiring managers were quick to state how they would dismiss any information if it were brought up. Mabel, an HR generalist for an educational company, stated that "Some people will [bring up family responsibilities], and I am always shocked when that happens." Her disbelief indicated the taboo nature of this topic in an interview due to the possibility of employer bias against mothers. David, a practice manager for a healthcare organization, stated that he would ignore the comment and refer back to the pertinent interview questions. Like many of the other hiring managers, David found protection from claims of bias in his

standardized and HR legitimized assessment tool. Gail, an HR consultant for a non-profit organization, described how her company's process was designed to assess only skills and abilities rather than any personal bias based on gender or parental status:

And so we do a lot in order to not make any of those judgments or make the assessments to say all the females seem to be this. Now you may see that in the scores it comes up. But what we are looking for is demonstration of job skills and ability to perform.

She too discounted the possibility of discrimination when standardized assessments were used and the disclosure of any personal information was dismissed.

In Utah, hiring managers were also clear on the illegality of discussing marital or family status on either an application or during an interview. Yet, when they were asked if candidates ever self-disclosed this information, they had a much more relaxed interpretation of receiving this knowledge. Billy, an HR generalist with a media organization, reflected on the unique cultural context of Utah:

To me that's not a big deal. Especially when you are living in a culture like here in Utah where family life is very highly valued, and there's a good chance, that women especially, have taken time off of work to stay home with their children or maybe husbands have done the same thing. And so, to me, that doesn't have a particularly high significance.

His nonchalance indicated the cultural expectation that women in Utah will be mothers and so the disclosure of marital and/or family status during an interview is commonplace if not assumed. Unfortunately, this assumption may serve to reproduce the social construction that *all* women are mothers or at risk of becoming mothers, thereby subjecting all women to possible motherhood penalties. For Yoshi, the director of a business services organization, people with family responsibilities were highly desired as

they were constructed to be extra motivated and dedicated to the job during the time spent at work. He noted:

Sometimes they're actually better employees because their financial responsibilities are very important to them because they are also taking care of families or parents or something else. It means they work really hard when they are here because they gotta make as much money as they can so that then they can go and take care of the other stuff . . . Generally, they're like 'hey, I want to give my kids a good life, and I'm going to work hard because I'm in sales to make as much money as I can.' So sometimes it works to their advantage.

Yoshi even indicated that any nice car I saw in the parking lot was guaranteed to belong to a young, single guy who lacked the same motivation as employees with family responsibilities. In both instances, he had constructed what motivates employees based on their marital and parental status and the cultural context of living and working in Utah. Rather than shy away from this information as in California, Utah hiring managers used the unique cultural context to inform their construction and assessment of the ideal worker.

The underpinnings of this contradiction may lie in the observations of Albert, an office manager for a retail organization. He described a similar assumption of what motivates employees with family responsibilities as noted by Yoshi. However, he disclosed a distinct gender preference when it came to which type of employee would be motivated versus distracted by the same responsibilities:

So we try to find guys that are married. And we try to find guys that have kids. Because, for them, having those kids and having that wife is a motivator. Now for somebody else, we've hired a couple women in here where, it wasn't a motivator. It was more of a detractor.

When I asked how single mothers fit into this model, he indicated that they were modestly more motivated than married mothers to provide for their children; more like a

traditional breadwinning father. However, he also suggested that the distraction of having to juggle work and family responsibilities still outweighed the motivation to perform at work. So, while the cultural context of Utah may lend itself to the acceptability and presence of motherhood in the assessment of applicants, these larger cultural contexts may also strengthen and reproduce the contradiction between being a “good” employee and being a “good” mother (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996).

### *The Employment Gap Inquiry*

Existing research finds evidence of a negative assessment of employment gaps (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1997; Staff and Mortimer 2012). Therefore, during my interviews, I also asked the hiring managers about their reliance on resumes and past work experience as indicators of soft skill qualifications. I subsequently ran into discussions about the importance and evaluation of gaps in employment histories. For many hiring managers, gaps were described as “red flags” and reason for suspicion. No one indicated that a gap would preclude an applicant from an interview but indicated it would be a topic for scrutiny during the interview process. It quickly became apparent that all employment gaps were not created equal and that this variance was reflected in each unique state context.

In California, hiring managers spoke generically about their concern for gaps in employment history. Each wanted a detailed account for why an applicant was not actively engaged in the labor market. This concern seemed to reflect the desire for an employee who was dedicated to work as well as an indicator of longevity. The importance of longevity in a new employee was driven by the costs associated with the



recruitment, hiring, and training of each new employee. Frank, the vice president of a retail and distribution organization, went so far as to say that “If they’ve moved around too many times in a short period of time, I almost don’t even consider them” citing extremely long training periods within his company. Brett, the general manager of a retail organization, implied that there was a hierarchy in the acceptability of employment gaps. “Well, if they have a good excuse, if they have a good reason for the gaps in their employment, then it’s no problem at all.” Unfortunately, none of the California hiring managers gave an example of an “acceptable” gap. These accounts of employment gap assessments and importance suggest that motherhood gaps, while not specifically identified as negative, could easily face a negative assessment if employers construct mothers as less committed or devoted to the labor market and less predictable in their tenure due to the possibility of future family responsibility employment gaps.

The story in Utah was quite different. When asked about their assessment of employment gaps, these hiring managers also indicated the importance of an in-depth explanation of time away from the labor market. However, many of them quickly volunteered that gaps related to family responsibilities were not only acceptable but expected. Cathi, a practice manager in a healthcare organization, reaffirmed that “Everyone here has a family . . . so we don’t have a problem here as far as if people have gaps for having children.” Sally, the director of HR of a healthcare organization, reaffirmed this sentiment stating that “If I had a gap because I decided to stay home with my child for a while, had a gap because I had an ill parent I cared for, those are understandable.” Both of these hiring managers specifically identified, as did the hiring managers in California, that there was a hierarchy of acceptability to employment gaps.

Yet the unique cultural context of Utah allowed hiring managers to avoid the construction of motherhood as mutually exclusive from the ideal worker model. Victor, the operations manager of an educational organization, stated that he often gave advice to mothers who were concerned about employment gaps related to family responsibilities:

And I encourage candidates when I talk with them, or if someone is asking me about what they should do with a gap in a resume, often mothers will worry about that. My stance is, put that in. That is a full time job. You are working hard. So I tell candidates to put it in.

As noted above in the subjective assessment of job applicants, it would seem then that mothers in Utah would face fewer barriers during the employment process as their motherhood gaps would not be negatively assessed. Yet the fact remains that Utah has the lowest female-to-male earnings ratio in the country and a 29% motherhood employment gap. I suggest that while motherhood may be extremely commonplace and lack salience in the day-to-day life of Utahans, the construct of what it means to be a “good mother” amplifies the salience of motherhood in the workplace. When hiring managers express an indifference to motherhood gaps, they may simply be mirroring the larger state context that places a high value on motherhood. However, it may be the strength of this cultural context that disadvantages mothers in the labor market as employers devalue their status vis-à-vis the ideal worker model. Additionally, because motherhood is so normative in Utah, there is an increased visibility which increases its salience. If it is commonplace for both hiring managers and applicants in Utah to discuss family status openly, motherhood as a status characteristic is readily available for employers to use in their assessment of the applicant as an ideal worker. Employers in

California are much less likely to voluntarily receive this type of personal information from a prospective applicant, making motherhood much less visible and salient.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research provides a comparative approach to understanding the salience of motherhood in the labor market in two unique state contexts. I provide three plausible mechanisms used by hiring managers in Utah and California during their employment processes that may act as employment barriers to mothers: employers' ideal expectations, the subjective assessment of family responsibilities, and the employment gap inquiry. With regard to the first mechanism, while hiring managers in both states had ideal expectations regarding the flexibility and availability of their applicants, employers in California appeared to be inflexible and unforgiving of non-work related commitments. They attempted to screen out applicants with these constraints though both the application screening and interview process, potentially creating barriers for mothers. However, if the policy context of California provides adequate resources for mothers trying to balance work and family responsibilities, applicants may be able to confidently present themselves as flexible and available, never making their motherhood status salient during the employment process.

In Utah, similar flexibility and availability expectations of hiring managers did not have the same stringent standards or appear to create barriers for mothers. Several indicated the ability to easily incorporate less than ideal work schedules into their organizations. This would appear to be a counterintuitive distinction between these two politically and culturally diverse states as the work-family policy context in Utah would

seem to make it more difficult for mothers to balance work and family responsibilities. If employers in Utah culturally construct mothers as unable to meet their ideal expectations with regard to flexibility and availability due to both policy and cultural context, mothers may have limited access to the labor market.

Additional organizational or labor market dynamics unspecified in this study may also be affecting the degree to which this mechanism may be creating barriers for mothers, particularly in Utah. There may be something distinct about these companies that allows for greater leniency when it comes to flexibility and availability. As noted above, these were small to mid-size firms that lack the same bureaucracy as a large, multi-national firm. It may also be that the occupations sampled (e.g. female-dominated, entry level, low skill) are designed to be more family-friendly, mommy-track jobs that do welcome mothers. However, existing research indicates that these types of jobs often come with a more limited notion of flexibility, increased insecurity, limited mobility, and low wages (Bianchi 2011; Crosby et al. 2004; Glass 2004). If these are the only types of jobs without barriers to mothers in Utah, mothers may be making a choice within these constraints to simply stay home which also contributes to the motherhood employment gap.

Concerning the second mechanism, hiring managers in both states relied on standardized and legitimized assessments to avoid potential family status bias. Hiring managers in California consistently referred to the inappropriate nature of discussing or even acknowledging an applicant's statement pertaining to marital or family status. Mothers in California may also have adequate policy resources that allow them to omit familial obligations throughout the employment process. In addition, cultural

expectations in California may not construct all women as mothers or future mothers.

When taken together, the contexts in which hiring managers find themselves operating reduce the salience of motherhood thereby minimizing employment access barriers to mothers.

In Utah, hiring managers appeared far less concerned and in many instances expected women to discuss their status as mothers. They attributed the openness directly to cultural expectations that women of child-bearing age would in fact have children at home and that they would still be considered the primary caregiver even while employed. This normative assumption regarding motherhood and the open discussion of family status during an interview makes motherhood much more visible than in California, allowing for it to become more salient in Utah. As noted above, this increased salience may not act as a barrier, and may even be assessed positively, in certain occupations. Yet, motherhood may also be assessed more negatively in higher skilled, higher paying “good jobs” that may be considered more desirable (Bianchi 2011; Crosby et al. 2004; Glass 2004). So while Utah hiring managers may appear more nonchalant in their evaluation of motherhood as a salient status characteristic, they hold a privileged position over hiring managers in California.

Lastly, when discussing the importance of the employment gap inquiry, hiring managers in both states were equally concerned with the need to know why anyone would spend time away from the labor market. However, hiring managers did not assess all gaps equally or in the same fashion. In California, respondents often referred to gaps as “excuses” or “red flags” while simultaneously referring to “acceptable gaps” with education as one of the only gaps that was classified as such. In Utah, respondents were

much less concerned with an employment gap once they knew it simply reflected time spent on family responsibilities. As with the previous mechanisms, motherhood was considered a normative part of the Utah culture which encouraged applicants to openly discuss their time away from the labor market for family reasons making motherhood more salient. Without this normative cultural assumption, applicants in California are much less likely to disclose family status to a potential hiring manager, making motherhood less salient and harder for hiring managers to use in their employment process.

Generally speaking, my findings support my hypothesis that variation in state context will influence the salience of motherhood. While hiring managers in Utah are more likely to dismiss motherhood as an important status characteristic, motherhood is made more salient than in California due to the increased visibility afforded employers as a result of the normative nature of motherhood in Utah. I suggest that it is the normative construction of motherhood that is unique to Utah that allows employers to openly discuss motherhood during the employment process and legitimize the collection of this personal information. It is also the heightened awareness of what it means to be a “good mother” in Utah that increases the conflict between motherhood and the ideal worker model thus resulting in even larger access barriers as demonstrated with a 30% motherhood employment gap.<sup>24</sup> In addition, if the only types of occupations mothers in Utah have access to are low pay, low mobility, and low in desirability, more women may choose to opt of the workforce. Lastly, a lack of resources within the Utah policy context

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<sup>24</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

may also decrease mothers' ability to successfully balance work and family obligations, further contributing to the substantial motherhood employment gap in this state.

These findings then support my second hypothesis that variation in salience can affect mothers' access to employment with increased salience creating barriers to employment at both the screening and interviewing stages of the employment process. However, it would also suggest that when motherhood is not salient, mothers may not be subject to the same types of barriers allowing them more access to the labor market. In California, mothers may have a more supportive policy context for balancing work-family life, allowing them the privilege of the non-disclosure of family status during the employment process. Additionally, applicants may not be subjected to cultural norms in which motherhood is associated with all women. Both of these contexts allow women greater access to employment in a wider variety of occupations rather than just family-friendly, mommy-track jobs. As motherhood is made less salient to all employers and cultural norms of motherhood play a less significant role in shaping employers' expectations of all women, mothers should face far fewer barriers to the labor market, resulting in a smaller motherhood employment gap.

As this study is limited in scope with regard to both geography and an exclusive focus on gender and family status, future researchers should consider the possible interactions of race and sexuality of working parents. Existing research suggests that these additional status characteristics may also contribute to disparate labor market outcomes (Elliot and Smith 2004; Glauber 2007; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004). While the scope of this project did not include fathers, existing research indicates that men with children actually receive a wage premium known as the "daddy bonus" (Baumle 2009;

Padavic and Reskin 2002). Future researchers should examine if the same mechanisms noted above that create employment barriers also lead to the daddy bonus or if there are processes unique to fatherhood as a status characteristic. Finally, future researchers may want to further examine the influence of organizational contexts on motherhood penalties. Budig and Hodges (2010) find that mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning jobs suffer larger the largest penalties. This research indicates that some employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on additional contexts.

With fertility levels falling (Lesthaeghe 2010) and populations aging (Orloff 2009), family responsibilities are increasingly about care of elderly parents. If this task continues to fall primarily on the shoulders of women, then even those who find themselves past their childbearing years may find themselves subject to family responsibilities discrimination (Benard et al. 2008; Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Esping-Andersen 2009; Orloff 2009; Smith 2012). This suggests that the proposed research has implications far beyond motherhood penalties when it comes to understanding employers' motivation, perceptions, and constructions of the ideal worker and how these shape labor market outcomes.

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## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout this project, I sought to answer the question *Do employer hiring practices create barriers to mothers' access to jobs?* Using a mixed methods approach, I conducted an audit study of 480 companies and 27 in-depth interviews with a sample of those companies audited. I make a substantial contribution to the motherhood penalty literature by suggesting that motherhood penalties occur at two distinct pre-hire, pre-wage gatekeeping stages: screening and interviewing. Additionally, my comparative approach at the state and occupational level expands both our theoretical and substantive understanding of the salience of motherhood under different contexts. Below, I highlight specific mechanisms that contribute to motherhood access penalties. I also contend that while these mechanisms impact mothers' access to jobs, the same mechanisms are likely contributing to larger wage-related penalties as well as mobility issues pertaining to glass ceilings and maternal walls.

## REVIEW OF CHAPTER II

In this paper, I make two main contributions to the existing literature on motherhood penalties and disparate labor market outcomes. First, even with incredibly subtle indicators of motherhood, the audit study provides consistent trends that modestly support my first hypothesis that motherhood negatively impacts the likelihood of a woman receiving a callback. In addition, nonmothers received more callbacks than mothers irrespective of state and occupational contexts. These findings provide modest

support for my predictions that employer bias in the applicant screening process would create penalties for mothers in terms of employment access. Employers appear to screen out mothers at a higher rate and place them lower in hiring queues. Of course, callback rates only act as a proxy for employers' initial screening of applicants for suitability. Future researchers should consider discussing both the screening and interviewing process with hiring managers to get a better understanding of the actual decision-making processes and ideal worker criteria.

Second, this project makes a significant theoretical contribution to our understanding of the status theory of motherhood. By adding both state and occupational variables to this analysis, I was able to evaluate the salience of motherhood across different policy, cultural, and job contexts. With regard to state contexts, the modest disadvantage faced by mothers in California was overshadowed by the larger disadvantage faced by mothers in Utah. This trend modestly supported my second hypothesis that state context may affect callback rates, thus suggesting that the salience of motherhood may be dependent on larger policy and cultural constraints. Limiting the scope to these cities raises concerns about generalizability to other cities and states with different social, political, and economic diversities. However, I feel this sample is capable of providing compelling results that open several avenues for future research.

When it comes to organizational context, a similarly consistent trend suggests variation in callback rates based on occupation. While these differences were slight, they still favored the overall hypothesis that mothers were less likely to receive a callback irrespective of occupational context. When occupational categories were collapsed into categories reflecting occupational authority as a necessary skill, the difference between

the two categories shifted. Women in general applying for jobs that required some degree of authority (e.g., leadership, management, supervision) were less likely to receive a callback than women applying for jobs without authority. Unfortunately, with a statistically insignificant interaction between motherhood and authority, I am unable to detect employer bias based on motherhood versus a possible gender bias that discriminates against women in general for these types of positions. However, the disadvantage faced by mothers in occupations *without* authority is provocative and deserving of further research. If mothers face access penalties at the lowest end of the occupational scale in highly feminized jobs, they may be more likely to face more severe penalties in high wage, high skill occupations. Overall, these findings modestly supported my third hypothesis that occupational context affects callback rates. Applicants in occupations requiring authority faced more significant barriers than in occupations without. Once again, the salience of motherhood appeared to vary based on both occupational categories and the authority associated with specific occupations. When combined, the addition of state and occupational variables indicates that context matters when it comes to labor market outcomes, and thus the salience of motherhood may also be fluid and context driven.

### REVIEW OF CHAPTER III

This research deconstructs the employer interview process by talking to hiring managers themselves. I highlight three mechanisms used by hiring managers during this process that act as employment barriers to mothers: setting ideal expectations, the use of subjective assessments and the employment gap inquiry. First, consistent with my first

hypothesis, I found that employers often define their ideal worker through soft skills. Competence, dedication, and availability were key attributes the hiring managers described in their ideal worker. Unfortunately, these criteria may devalue mothers as employees, if they are culturally constructed to be less competent, less dedicated, or less flexible with their time.

Second, I discovered that while the hiring managers were well-versed in federal policy requirements, interviews could be used to skirt policy in an attempt to fully evaluate soft skills as well as any other issues that might make the applicant a less than ideal candidate. This finding supports my second hypothesis that interviews would be used to screen applicants' soft skills. Hard skills were typically tested and quantified electronically, while more creative subjective assessments had to be developed to adequately measure soft skills. Even the hiring managers who tried to test and quantify subjective assessments were skeptical of their reliability and relied on a more personal, gut-feeling assessment of the applicant that paper applications and computers failed to capture. These subjective assessments, even when standardized to maintain legitimacy, had the flexibility to screen out candidates that did not meet the ideal expectation, potentially leaving mothers vulnerable to employer bias based on cultural expectations of motherhood. This makes the interview an important gatekeeping stage in the employment process that mothers must face in order to gain access to the labor market.

Finally, the hiring managers emphasized the importance of the employment gap inquiry. These gaps were of critical interest to the hiring managers though not all gaps were assessed equally. Certain types of gaps in employment were evaluated as a lack of commitment to the labor market, unless the gap was labor market-related (e.g., education,

increase in training/skill set). Hiring managers were acutely aware of the financial risk each new employee posed to the company. Thus, applicants without a “reasonable explanation”, too many gaps, or gaps with excessive duration were categorized as less than ideal with hiring managers opting for applicants in their labor queues without similar concerns. The employment gap inquiry also has the capacity for circumventing federal restrictions on discussing marital and family statuses, providing hiring managers with a legitimate means to ask for details as to why the applicant was disengaged from the labor market for a particular timeframe. This inquiry becomes especially problematic for mothers as they are more likely than nonmothers to have these “unjustified” employment gaps especially in a context where motherhood becomes salient in hiring decisions. Overall, these three mechanisms support my third hypothesis that motherhood could be an important consideration during the hiring process. Similarly, these findings support Ridgeway and Correll’s (2004) status theory of motherhood and the devaluation of mothers vis-à-vis the ideal worker model.

This study advances our understanding of disparate labor market outcomes faced by mothers by examining meso-level employment practices rather than policies suggesting that it is the implication of these policies that leads to labor market inequity. Additionally, I identify three distinct stages to the employment process with the first two (e.g., screening and interviewing) serving as gatekeeping stages. I isolate the interviewing practices of hiring managers through qualitative interviews and advance our understanding of hiring decisions. I also contribute to the field of gender and organizations by identifying three mechanisms that may create motherhood employment barriers preventing mothers from gaining access to the labor market long before they ever

face wage or organizational mobility discrimination. Finally, I suggest that the same mechanisms and employer bias are present at stage three when it comes time to make the job offer and set wages, thus expanding our understanding of range and degree of motherhood penalties in the labor market.

#### REVIEW OF CHAPTER IV

This research provides a comparative approach to understanding the salience of motherhood in the labor market in two unique state contexts. I provide three plausible mechanisms used by hiring managers in Utah and California during their employment processes that may act as employment barriers to mothers: employers' ideal expectations, the subjective assessment of family responsibilities, and the employment gap inquiry. With regard to the first mechanism, while hiring managers in both states had ideal expectations regarding the flexibility and availability of their applicants, employers in California appeared to be inflexible and unforgiving of non-work-related commitments. They attempted to screen out applicants with these constraints though both the application screening and interview process, potentially creating barriers for mothers. However, if the policy context of California provides adequate resources for mothers trying to balance work and family responsibilities, applicants may be able to confidently present themselves as flexible and available, never making their motherhood status salient during the employment process.

In Utah, similar flexibility and availability expectations of hiring managers did not have the same stringent standards or appear to create barriers for mothers. Several indicated the ability to easily incorporate less than ideal work schedules into their

organizations. This would appear to be a counterintuitive distinction between these two politically and culturally diverse states as the work-family policy context in Utah would seem to make it more difficult for mothers to balance work and family responsibilities. If employers in Utah culturally construct mothers as unable to meet their ideal expectations with regard to flexibility and availability due to both policy and cultural context, mothers may have limited access to the labor market.

Additional organizational or labor market dynamics unspecified in this study may also be affecting the degree to which this mechanism may be creating barriers for mothers, particularly in Utah. There may be something distinct about these companies that allows for greater leniency when it comes to flexibility and availability. As noted above, these were small to mid-size firms that lack the same bureaucracy as a large, multi-national firm. It may also be that the occupations sampled (e.g. female-dominated, entry level, low skill) are designed to be more family-friendly, mommy-track jobs that do welcome mothers. However, existing research indicates that these types of jobs often come with a more limited notion of flexibility, increased insecurity, limited mobility, and low wages (Bianchi 2011; Crosby, Williams, and Biernat 2004; Glass 2004). If these are the only types of jobs without barriers to mothers in Utah, mothers may be making a choice within these constraints to simply stay home which also contributes to the motherhood employment gap.

Concerning the second mechanism, hiring managers in both states relied on standardized and legitimized assessments to avoid potential family status bias. Hiring managers in California consistently referred to the inappropriate nature of discussing or even acknowledging an applicant's statement pertaining to marital or family status.



Mothers in California may also have adequate policy resources that allow them to omit familial obligations throughout the employment process. In addition, cultural expectations in California may not construct all women as mothers or future mothers. When taken together, the contexts in which hiring managers find themselves operating reduce the salience of motherhood thereby minimizing employment access barriers to mothers.

In Utah, hiring managers appeared far less concerned and in many instances expected women to discuss their status as mothers. They attributed the openness directly to cultural expectations that women of child-bearing age would in fact have children at home and that they would still be considered the primary caregiver even while employed. This normative assumption regarding motherhood and the open discussion of family status during an interview makes motherhood much more visible than in California, allowing for it to become more salient in Utah. As noted above, this increased salience may not act as a barrier, and may even be assessed positively, in certain occupations. Yet, motherhood may also be assessed more negatively in higher skilled, higher paying “good jobs” that may be considered more desirable (Bianchi 2011; Crosby et al. 2004; Glass 2004). So while Utah hiring managers may appear more nonchalant in their evaluation of motherhood as a salient status characteristic, they hold a privileged position over hiring managers in California.

Lastly, when discussing the importance of the employment gap inquiry, hiring managers in both states were equally concerned with the need to know why anyone would spend time away from the labor market. However, hiring managers did not assess all gaps equally or in the same fashion. In California, respondents often referred to gaps

as “excuses” or “red flags” while simultaneously referring to “acceptable gaps” with education as one of the only gaps that was classified as such. In Utah, respondents were much less concerned with an employment gap once they knew it simply reflected time spent on family responsibilities. As with the previous mechanisms, motherhood was considered a normative part of the Utah culture which encouraged applicants to openly discuss their time away from the labor market for family reasons making motherhood more salient. Without this normative cultural assumption, applicants in California are much less likely to disclose family status to a potential hiring manager, making motherhood less salient and harder for hiring managers to use in their employment process.

Generally speaking, my findings support my hypothesis that variation in state context will influence the salience of motherhood. While hiring managers in Utah are more likely to dismiss motherhood as an important status characteristic, motherhood is made more salient than in California due to the increased visibility afforded employers as a result of the normative nature of motherhood in Utah. I suggest that it is the normative construction of motherhood that is unique to Utah that allows employers to openly discuss motherhood during the employment process and legitimize the collection of this personal information. It is also the heightened awareness of what it means to be a “good mother” in Utah that increases the conflict between motherhood and the ideal worker model thus resulting in even larger access barriers as demonstrated with a 30% motherhood employment gap.<sup>25</sup> In addition, if the only types of occupations mothers in Utah have access to are low pay, low mobility, and low in desirability, more women may

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<sup>25</sup> 2017-2011 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

choose to opt of the workforce. Lastly, a lack of resources within the Utah policy context may also decrease mothers' ability to successfully balance work and family obligations, further contributing to the substantial motherhood employment gap in this state.

These findings then support my second hypothesis that variation in salience can affect mothers' access to employment with increased salience creating barriers to employment at both the screening and interviewing stages of the employment process. However, it would also suggest that when motherhood is not salient, mothers may not be subject to the same types of barriers allowing them more access to the labor market. In California, mothers may have a more supportive policy context for balancing work-family life, allowing them the privilege of the non-disclosure of family status during the employment process. Additionally, applicants may not be subjected to cultural norms in which motherhood is associated with all women. Both of these contexts allow women greater access to employment in a wider variety of occupations rather than just family-friendly, mommy-track jobs. As motherhood is made less salient to all employers and cultural norms of motherhood play a less significant role in shaping employers' expectations of all women, mothers should face far fewer barriers to the labor market, resulting in a smaller motherhood employment gap.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

As this study is limited in scope with regard to both geography and an exclusive focus on gender and family status, future researchers should consider the possible interactions of race and sexuality of working parents. Existing research suggests that these additional status characteristics may also contribute to disparate labor market

outcomes (Elliot and Smith 2004; Glauber 2007; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004). While the scope of this project did not include fathers, existing research indicates that men with children actually receive a wage premium known as the “daddy bonus” (Baumle 2009; Padavic and Reskin 2002). Future researchers should examine if the same mechanisms noted above that create employment barriers also lead to the daddy bonus or if there are processes unique to fatherhood as a status characteristic. Finally, future researchers may want to examine the influence of both state and organizational contexts on motherhood penalties. Budig and Hodges (2010) find that mothers in high-earning careers experience smaller wage penalties, while mothers in low-earning jobs suffer larger the largest penalties. This research indicates that some employers may shift their construction of the ideal worker and motherhood based on additional contexts.

With fertility levels falling (Lesthaeghe 2010) and populations aging (Orloff 2009), family responsibilities are increasingly about care of elderly parents. If this task continues to fall primarily on the shoulders of women, then even those who find themselves past their childbearing years may find themselves subject to family responsibilities discrimination (Benard, Paik, and Correll 2008; Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Esping-Andersen 2009; Orloff 2009; Smith 2012). This suggests that the proposed research has implications far beyond motherhood penalties when it comes to understanding employers’ motivation, perceptions, and constructions of the ideal worker and how these shape labor market outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Letter of Intent



Dear Hiring Manager,

**Introduction/Purpose:** Doctoral Candidate Elizabeth Kiester under the direct oversight of Dr. Christy Glass, in the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology at Utah State University, are conducting a research study to find out more about employer recruitment and hiring practices during an economic recovery. The information you provide may be used for academic and publishing purposes. Your company was selected as one who has publically advertised a job opening in your local newspaper in the past 6 months. Our project aim is to complete 40 interviews with individuals such as you as representatives of these firms.

**Procedures:** Over the next 2-3 months, I will be conducting interviews with companies in two different states that have publicly recruited and hired at least one position in the past 6 months. I require no access to any type of files or the names of any employees. The only identifiers used in any written assignment will include role (i.e. employee, hiring manager). Companies will be identified only by general industry labels (I.e. retail, manufacturing, construction etc.). If you agree to be in this research study, I will conduct a short interview with you that will last approximately 15 minutes. This interview seeks to better understand basic company characteristics including number of employees, industry classification, and percent female workforce. This interview will be audio recorded for transcription. Based on initial interviews, a smaller sample of companies will also be asked to do follow-up interviews that may last 45-60 minutes. This interview will ask you questions ranging from your professional background, company hiring and recruitment policies, and daily implementation of these processes. The interview will be audio recorded and last approximately 45-60 minutes.

**Risks:** There is minimal risk in participating in this research. There is a potential for loss of confidentiality but measures are in place to minimize this risk. More information is provided below under "Confidentiality." No personal answers or identifying information will be used.

**Benefits:** There may not be a direct benefit to you at this time; however, researchers hope to learn and increase their knowledge and understanding of employment practices including recruitment and hiring after the recession of 2008 and the subsequent ongoing recovery.

**Explanation and Offer to Answer Questions:** If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to talk to you. Please feel free to call me at (435) 797-1230, or contact me by e-mail ([beth.kiester@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:beth.kiester@aggiemail.usu.edu)). Additionally, my supervisor, Dr. Christy Glass, may be reached at (435) 797-1258 or by email at ([christy.glass@usu.edu](mailto:christy.glass@usu.edu)).

**Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequences:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequence. However, increased exposure to employment practices in the current job market may greatly aid my understanding of such.

**Confidentiality:** Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the Dr. Glass and Beth Kiester will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked room to maintain confidentiality. To protect your privacy, personal, identifiable information will be removed from study documents and replaced with a study identifier. Identifying information will be stored separately from data and will be kept. All documents that identify you, including the audio tapes, will be destroyed 6 months after the research and writing phase of the project is complete.

**IRB Approval:** The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at Utah State University has approved this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury and would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email [irb@usu.edu](mailto:irb@usu.edu) to obtain information or to offer input.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Only with the generous help of people like you can this study can be successful!

Sincerely,

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Christy Glass, Ph.D.,  
Principal Investigator  
(435) 797-1258  
[christy.glass@usu.edu](mailto:christy.glass@usu.edu)

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Elizabeth Kiester  
Doctoral Candidate  
(435) 797-1230  
[beth.kiester@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:beth.kiester@aggiemail.usu.edu)

Appendix B. Sample Cover Letters

# Emily Anne Smith

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PO Box 526335 • Salt Lake City• UT •84152•916-525-5810

July 18, 2013

Re: Customer Care Professional-Relationship Care

To Whom It May Concern:

I am applying for the position that your company advertised on the Salt Lake Tribune website. My resume is enclosed for your review. Given my experience and skills, I know I would be an ideal match for this position!

I have over 5 years of experience in a variety of fields including project management. I am capable of both multi-tasking and overseeing the delegation of smaller project components. In addition to my extensive professional experience, I have strong communication, customer service, and administrative skills. My broad background makes me an excellent candidate for this position.

I would like to find out more about the position, and I would welcome the opportunity to tell you how my skills and ideas can benefit your company. I look forward to an interview where we can further discuss my qualifications and experience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Emily Anne Smith  
emilyannesmith86@gmail.com

# Sarah Marie Johnson

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*PO Box 58944, Salt Lake City UT, 84158 Δ 385-234-8443*

July 16, 2013

Re: Sales Associate

To Whom It May Concern:

I read with interest your posting for a Sales Associate position on the Salt Lake Tribune website. I believe I possess the necessary skills and experience you are seeking and would make a valuable addition to your company. As my resume indicates, I possess more than 5 years of experience in a variety of customer service related fields.

As a staffing manager for SOS Staffing, my responsibilities include project management and organization of other associates. I assisted in the successful completion of several projects. My supervisor also relied on my ability to help customers in a calm and friendly manner as well as my attention to detail.

I have attached my resume for your review and I look forward to speaking with you further regarding your available position. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sarah Marie Johnson  
385-234-8443  
sarah.tim.milly.mack@gmail.com

Appendix C. Sample Resumes

**Emily Anne Smith**

916-525-5810

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*PO Box 526335, Salt Lake City UT 84152*

emilyannesmith86@gmail.com

**Professional Profile**

- Team Player
- Computer knowledgeable
- Microsoft Office Suite proficient
- Great leadership skills
- Detail-oriented
- Can work independently
- Friendly
- Good communicator
- Multi-tasker
- Creative thinker
- Quick learner
- People person

**Professional Experience**

SOS Staffing, Salt Lake City UT

Jan 2010-current

**Staffing Manager**Responsibilities:

- Hiring employees; Dealing with federal hiring policies and procedures
- Developing relationships with clients to meet staffing needs
- Payroll for 100+ employees
- Record keeping and filing
- Administering drug tests

Missoulain, Missoula, MT

June 2007-Dec 2009

**Classified Advertising/Department Manager**Responsibilities:

- Overseeing the sales and development of all classified advertising (11-12,000 ads monthly)
- Book keeping for all accounts receivable (\$1,500 daily average)
- Pagination and graphic design for classified advertising pages
- Developing relationships with businesses running ads
- Overseeing 2 additional sales staff

Barnes and Noble Bookstore, Missoula MT

Sept 2005-June 2007

**Sales Associate**Responsibilities:

- Stocking shelves
- Helping customers, making recommendations
- Running cash registers and store computers for online orders

## **Education**

University of Montana, Missoula, MT  
Bachelor of Arts in Communications, GPA 3.8  
May 2007

West Campus High School, Sacramento, CA  
Graduated, Class Valedictorian  
June 2003

## **Relevant Volunteer Activities**

Central Point, Salt Lake City UT  
Home Owners Association Event Coordinator  
Feb 2012-current

University of Montana, Missoula, MT  
Member, Debate Team  
Aug 2003-May 2006

## **References**

References available upon request



Week A Mother

PO Box 58944, Salt Lake City UT, 84158•385-234-8443• sarah.tim.milly.mack@gmail.com

## Sarah Marie Johnson

- Organized   ■Team Player   ■Punctual   ■Great Computer Skills   ■Friendly
- Self-Motivated   ■Proficiency with Microsoft Office   ■Reliable   ■Hard Working
- Leadership Experience

### Work Experience

June 2009-Current                      Kohls                                      Salt Lake City UT

#### Sales Associate/Department Manager

- Helping hire and train sales associates
- Customer service
- Making sure department is signed and stocked before all sales
- Responsible for handling cash drawers
- Supervising sales associates

Aug 2007-May 2009                      Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center      Boise ID

#### Administrative Assistant

- Reporting to multiple program directors
- Organizing office correspondence, keeping records of meetings, distributing memos
- Handling project management and coordinating multiple interested parties
- Answering incoming phone calls, returning messages
- Coordinating meetings between staff and directors
- Overseeing front desk staff

Aug 2005-Aug 2007                      Wal-Mart                                      Boise ID

#### Sales Associate (Part Time)

- Making sure items were restocked and aisles were clear
- Customer service, helping people find things
- Responsible for handling cash drawer

### **Other Experience**

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Aug 2012-current	Wasatch Elementary School	Salt Lake City UT
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Parent/Teacher Association, Fundraising Coordinator

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Aug 2004-May 2005	Boise State University	Boise ID
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Resident Assistant

### **Education**

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Aug 2003-May 2007	Boise State University	Boise ID
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Bachelor of Arts in Communications

- Graduated 3.73 GPA
- Emphasis in Public Relations

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Aug 1999-June 2003	Skyline High School	Idaho Falls ID
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High School Diploma

- Graduated with honors

Week B Nonmother

PO Box 526335, Salt Lake City UT, 84152•916-525-5810• emilyannesmith86@gmail.com

## Emily Anne Smith

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- Organized   ■ Team Player   ■ Punctual   ■ Great Computer Skills   ■ Friendly
- Self-Motivated   ■ Proficiency with Microsoft Office   ■ Reliable   ■ Hard Working
- Leadership Experience

### Work Experience

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June 2009-Current	Kohls	Salt Lake City UT
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#### Sales Associate/Department Manager

- Helping hire and train sales associates
- Customer service
- Making sure department is signed and stocked before all sales
- Responsible for handling cash drawers
- Supervising sales associates

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Aug 2007-May 2009	Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Cente	Boise ID
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#### Administrative Assistant

- Reporting to multiple program directors
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---

Aug 2005-Aug 2007	Wal-Mart	Boise ID
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#### Sales Associate (Part Time)

- Making sure items were restocked and aisles were clear
- Customer service, helping people find things
- Responsible for handling cash drawer

---

 Other Experience

Feb 2012-current	Central Point	Salt Lake City UT
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Home Owners Association, Event Coordinator

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Aug 2004-May 2005	Boise State University	Boise ID
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Resident Assistant

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 Education

Aug 2003-May 2007	Boise State University	Boise ID
-------------------	------------------------	----------

Bachelor of Arts in Communications

Graduated 3.73 GPA

Emphasis in Public Relations

---

Aug 1999-June 2003	Skyline High School	Idaho Falls ID
--------------------	---------------------	----------------

High School Diploma

Graduated with honors

**Sarah Marie Johnson**

385-234-8443

---

*PO Box 58944, Salt Lake City UT 84158**sarah.tim.milly.mack@gmail.com***Professional Profile**

- Team Player
- Computer knowledgeable
- Microsoft Office Suite proficient
- Great leadership skills
- Detail-oriented
- Can work independently
- Friendly
- Good communicator
- Multi-tasker
- Creative thinker
- Quick learner
- People person

**Professional Experience**

SOS Staffing, Salt Lake City UT

Jan 2010-current

**Staffing Manager**Responsibilities:

- Hiring employees; Dealing with federal hiring policies and procedures
- Developing relationships with clients to meet staffing needs
- Payroll for 100+ employees
- Record keeping and filing
- Administering drug tests

Missoulia, Missoula, MT

June 2007-Dec 2009

**Classified Advertising/Department Manager**Responsibilities:

- Overseeing the sales and development of all classified advertising (11-12,000 ads monthly)
- Book keeping for all accounts receivable (\$1,500 daily average)
- Pagination and graphic design for classified advertising pages
- Developing relationships with businesses running ads
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Barnes and Noble Bookstore, Missoula MT

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**Sales Associate**Responsibilities:

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June 2003

## **Relevant Volunteer Activities**

Wasatch Elementary School, Salt Lake City UT  
Parent/Teacher Association, Fundraising Coordinator  
Feb 2012-current

University of Montana, Missoula, MT  
Member, Debate Team  
Aug 2003-May 2006

## **References**

References available on upon request

Appendix D. Interview Guide

EMPLOYER INTERVIEWS OF RECRUITMENT AND HIRNING PRACTICES

CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW

Principal Investigators:

*Dr. Christy Glass*

Utah State University

*Elizabeth Kiester*

Utah State University

Company name:

Respondent's name:

Respondent's title:

Date:

Time began:



## 1. RECRUITMENT AND HIRING EXPERIENCE:

- a. ROLE AND EXPERIENCE IN HIRING-SPECIFIC POSITIONS?
  
- b. APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY WORKERS HAS YOUR COMPANY HIRED IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS?
  
- c. IS THIS LOW OR HIGH COMPARED TO RECENT MONTHS OR YEARS?
  
- d. HAVE YOU OBSERVED CHANGE IN TYPE OF WORKER APPLYING FOR JOBS?
  - ⇒ MORE MEN VS. WOMEN?
  - ⇒ MORE SKILLED AND EDUCATED?
  - ⇒ OLDER VS. YOUNGER?

## 2. RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

- a. WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCES FOR RECRUITING NEW WORKERS?
  
- b. DESCRIBE THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR WORKERS. EXAMPLE FROM LAST HIRE?
  
- c. HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PROCESS CHANGE OVER TIME? BECOME MORE COMPETITIVE (EG, INCREASE IN QUALIFIED APPLICANTS)?

### 3. HIRING PRACTICES

- a. BY WHAT MEANS DO YOU SCREEN POTENTIAL WORKERS (CV, INTERVIEW, TESTS)?
- b. GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS YOU LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING WORKERS?
- c. THINKING ABOUT SOME OF YOUR RECENT HIRES, HOW HAVE YOU TRIED TO SCREEN FOR THESE SKILLS?

### 4. HIRING PREFERENCES

- a. SEVERAL EMPLOYERS HAVE STATED THAT THEY THINK MEN AND WOMEN BRING DIFFERENT KINDS OF SKILLS TO THE WORKPLACE. DO YOU FIND THIS TO BE TRUE AMONG WORKERS?
- b. EXAMPLES?
- c. SOME EMPLOYERS HAVE TOLD US THAT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS OF WORKERS—SAY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN—MATTER MORE NOW THAN THEY USED TO. DO YOU AGREE?
- d. MANY EMPLOYERS HAVE TOLD US THAT FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES CAN BE A DISADVANTAGE TO WORKERS. GIVEN YOUR EXPERIENCE, DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS?
  - ⇒ MARRIAGE?
  - ⇒ YOUNG CHILDREN?
  - ⇒ CARE FOR ELDERLY?
- e. IF SO, IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU FOUND THAT FAMILY STATUS CAN INTERFERE WITH WORK?
- f. EXAMPLES?

5. HIRING AS INVESTMENT

- a. HIRING AND TRAINING NEW WORKERS IS A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT FOR YOUR COMPANY. HOW DO YOU PROTECT THIS INVESTMENT? IN OTHER WORDS, HOW DO YOU SCREEN FOR WORKERS THAT WILL STICK WITH THE COMPANY?
  
- b. HAS LONGEVITY BECOME MORE OR LESS IMPORTANT TO THE BANK OVER TIME?
  
- c. DO YOU CONSIDER FAMILY STATUS WHEN YOU ARE RECRUITING AND SCREENING FOR WORKERS?

6. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO TELL ME ABOUT THAT I HAVE MISSED?

Appendix E. Interview Request Email/Phone Script

Good afternoon,

My name is Elizabeth Kiester and I am a doctoral student at Utah State University in the Sociology department working on my dissertation. My records indicate that you or your company have publicly listed a job posting in 2013. That is why I am contacting you today!

My project seeks find out more about employer recruitment and hiring policies during an economic recovery. I will be conducting interviews in the Salt Lake area Monday October 21-Friday November 1 and was hoping to schedule a time that would be convenient for you or one of your hiring managers to meet with me. Interviews have been taking approximate 30-45 minutes and I would be happy to meet you at your office. My goal is to conduct 20 interviews during this time frame!

All information will of course be completely confidential and used purely for academic purposes as well as my degree completion requirements.

I am happy to provide you with any other information about my project or my visit. This research is being overseen by my adviser Dr. Christy Glass who can be reached at 435-797-1258 or [christy.glass@usu.edu](mailto:christy.glass@usu.edu) for further clarification.

To schedule our visit, please feel free to respond to this email or to call me at 208-569-5974. Also, please feel free to forward this email to a more appropriate hiring manager within your company.

I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Elizabeth

--

Elizabeth Kiester, ABD  
Doctoral Candidate and Graduate Instructor  
Dept. of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology  
Utah State University  
Logan, UT 84321  
w: 435.797.1230

Appendix F. Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Likelihood of Receiving a  
Callback

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Motherhood	-0.173	(0.109)	-0.177	(0.112)	-0.177	(0.112)	-0.182	(0.115)	-0.140	(0.185)
State			0.826**	(0.214)	0.819**	(0.213)	0.922**	(0.213)	0.980**	(0.238)
Occupation					0.018	(0.064)	-0.140	(0.111)	-0.140	(0.111)
Authority							-1.011**	(0.312)	-1.068**	(0.336)
Motherhood*State									-0.121	(0.232)
Motherhood*Authority									0.120	(0.280)
Constant	-1.335	(.113)	-1.8**	(.176)	-1.846**	(.243)	-1.138*	(.399)	-1.158*	(0.403)
Wald Chi Square	2.52		17.07**		17.07**		31.93**		33.83	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.001		0.027		0.027		0.053		0.053	

\*p<.01, \*\*p<.001

Note.--Clustered by job. Nonmothers and mothers applied to the same 480 jobs for a total of 960 applications.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Elizabeth Kiester  
(May 2014)

### EDUCATION

#### **Doctorate**

Department of Sociology, Utah State University, Expected May 2014.

*Dissertation:* "Mothers on the Market: Employer Hiring Practices and Motherhood Penalties."

#### **Master of Science**

Department of Sociology, Utah State University, December 2010.

*Master's Thesis:* "For Love or Money: Has Neoliberalism Impacted Fertility? An Historical Comparison."

#### **Bachelor of Arts**

Department of Political Science and Sociology, Carroll College, May 2001.

*Honor's Thesis:* "Determining What Factors Create an Active Citizen in Helena, MT."

### RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Gender; Work and Organizations; Qualitative Research Methods; Social Policy; Marriage and Family; Demography; Sociological Theory; Political Sociology; Research Methods

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

#### **Instructor**

*In each of the following undergraduate courses, I was an Independent Instructor, responsible for course design, textbook selection, and all lecture materials and classroom activities. I have included approximate enrollment in parenthesis.*

Social Problems, Summer 2013 (15)

Sociology of Gender Fall 2011 (60), Summer 2012 (20), Fall 2012 (60)

Political Sociology; Spring 2012 (30), Spring 2014 (40)

Introduction to Sociology, Summer 2011 (20) \*This was also taught as a broadcast course.



### **Invited Lectures**

Lecture: "Gender and the Family: The Rise of a New Cultural Regime." Sociology of Work Course, Utah State University, Spring 2013.

Lecture: "The Motherhood Wage Penalty." Social Inequalities Course, Utah State University, Spring 2013.

Lecture: "Research Methods." Introduction to Sociology Course, Utah State University, Fall 2011.

Lecture: "Introduction to Gender, Culture and Socialization." Social Problems Course, Utah State University, Fall 2010.

Lecture: "For Love or Money: How Neoliberalism Has Influenced Women's Fertility Choices in Developed Nations." Developing Societies Course, Utah State University, Spring 2010.

### **Teaching Assistant**

Introduction to Sociology, Spring 2011

Social Statistics, Spring 2011

Introduction to Sociology, Fall 2010

Social Psychology, Spring 2010

Developing Societies, Spring 2010

## **PUBLICATIONS**

### **Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles and Refereed Book Chapters**

- Kiester, Elizabeth. 2013. "Transnational Mothering." Pp. 611-12 in *Sociology of Work: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Vikki Smith. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

- Glass, Christy, Nancy Kubasek, and Elizabeth Kiester. 2011. "Toward a 'European Model' of Same-Sex Marriage Rights: A Viable Pathway for the U.S.?" *Berkeley Journal of International Law (BJIL)* 29(1):132-174.

### **Manuscripts in Progress**

Kiester, Elizabeth. "The Standardization of Subjectivity: How Employers Rely on Formal Policies to Dismiss Discrimination" Under Review at *Work and Occupations*

Kiester, Elizabeth, Paul Jacobs, Christy Glass and Peg Petrzelka. “ ‘Out of the Shadows’: Understanding the Movement to Redefine the Immigration Policy Debate in Utah” Revise and Resubmit at Sociological Perspectives

Kiester, Elizabeth. “Help Wanted: A Comparative Audit of Employer Hiring Practices and Motherhood Penalties” in preparation for submission to *Gender and Society*

Kiester, Elizabeth. “‘Tell Me About Yourself’: Understanding the Role of the Employer Interview and Motherhood Penalties” in preparation for submission to *Gender and Society*

Kiester, Elizabeth. “Where Motherhood Matters: Understanding the Role of State and Occupational Variation on the Salience of Motherhood” in preparation for submission to *Gender and Society*

Kiester, Elizabeth. “Merging Mothers and Migration: Identifying Motherhood as a Key Mechanism of Migration in the Global Economy” in preparation for submission to *Gender and Society*

### **Other Publications**

Glass, Christy and Beth Kiester. 2009. “Employment Status and Attitudes of Electrical Workers.” Final Project Report to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)

### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Independent Dissertation Research. 2012-Present. **“Understanding Motherhood Penalties: An Audit Study of Employer Recruitment and Hiring Practices.”**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christy Glass, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities include conducting an audit study, interviews with employers, content analysis, statistical analysis

Research Assistant. 2013. **“Understanding the Guest Worker Program in Utah.”**

Principal Investigators: Dr. Christy Glass and Dr. Peg Petrzelka, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities include conducting interviews and content analysis with business, political, social, and religious leaders involved in immigration reform legislation at the state level in the State of Utah

Research Assistant . 2013. **“Fortune 500 CEO and BOD Demographic Composition and Economic Outcomes.”**

Principal Investigators: Dr. Allison Cook and Dr. Christy Glass, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities include improving and cleaning a data set of all Fortune 500 company’s CEOs and Boards of Directors, content analysis of press release statements

Independent Research 2012. **“Understanding Employer Recruitment and Hiring Practices.”**

Principal Investigator: Leon Anderson, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities included securing site location, writing letter of informed consent, obtaining IRB approval, participating in field observations weekly, writing up field notes, creating an interview guide, conducting interviews, transcribing interviews, coding, data analysis, and project write up

Research Assistant. 2011. **“Mothers, Migrants and Markets.”**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christy Glass, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities included creating an extensive literature review on motherhood, migration, wage penalties

Research Assistant. 2009. **“Employment Status and Attitudes of Electrical Workers.”**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christy Glass, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities included survey mailings, data analysis, literature reviews

Research Assistant. 2009. **“Toward a 'European Model' of Same-Sex Marriage Rights: A Viable Pathway for the U.S.?”**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christy Glass, Utah State University.

\*Responsibilities included research and writing case studies on Sweden, Norway, and Belgium, formatting footnotes to law journal standards, proof reading, and editing

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“‘Tell Me About Yourself’: Understanding the Role of the Employer Interview and Motherhood Penalties.” Pacific Sociological Association Meetings. Portland, OR. March 27-30, 2014

“‘Out of the Shadows’: Understanding the Movement to Redefine the Immigration Policy Debate in Utah.” Pacific Sociological Association Meetings. Portland, OR. March 27-30, 2014

“Walking the Walk: A Comparative Audit of Employer Recruitment and Hiring Practices and Motherhood Penalties.” American Sociological Association Annual Meetings. New York City, NY. August 10-14, 2013

“Walking the Walk: A Comparative Audit of Employer Recruitment and Hiring Practices and Motherhood Penalties.” Intermountain Graduate Research Symposium. Utah State University, April 12, 2013

“The Standardization of Subjectivity: How Employers Rely on Formal Policies to Dismiss Discrimination.” Pacific Sociological Association Meetings. Reno, NV. March 21-24, 2013

“Merging Mothers and Migration: Identifying Motherhood as a Mechanism of Migration in the Global Economy.” American Sociological Association Annual Meetings. Denver, CO. August 17-20, 2012

“The Role of Motherhood in International Labor Migrations.” Sociology Section, Intermountain Graduate Research Symposium. Utah State University, April 5-6, 2012

“Merging Mothers and Migration: Identifying Motherhood as a Key Mechanism of Migration in the Global Economy.” Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meetings. San Diego, CA. March 23-25, 2012

“Understanding the Neoliberal Mechanisms of Downward Pressure on Fertility.” Women and Gender Issues Section, Western Social Science Association Meetings. Salt Lake City, UT. April 13-16, 2011

“Does Migration Matter: Examining the Impact of Migration on Fertility Rates: A Case Study of Latin America and The United States.” Intermountain Graduate Research Symposium. Utah State University, April 2011

“For Love or Money: Has Neoliberalism Impacted Fertility?” Gender and Well-Being Under Globalization Section, Allied Social Science Association Meetings. Denver, CO. Jan 7-9, 2011

“For Love or Money: How Neoliberalism Has Influenced Women's Fertility Choices in Developed Nations.” Intermountain Graduate Research Symposium. Utah State University, March 2010

## **FUNDING**

### **RESEARCH AWARDS**

National Science Foundation, Doctoral Dissertation Grant, Summer 2013-Summer 2014

- Center for Women and Gender Studies Research Award, Spring 2013
- Graduate Research and Project Grant, Spring 2013

**SCHOLARSHIPS (Utah State University)**

- Carmen Frederikson Fellowship Award, Fall 2012-Spring 2013; Fall 2013-Spring 2014
- Leah Dunford Parkinson Christensen Scholarship, Fall 2013-Spring 2014
- Blanche Browning Rich Scholarship, Fall 2012-Spring 2013
- Graduate Student Senate Enhancement Award, 2011; 2012
- Seely-Hinkley Scholarship, Fall 2009-Spring 2010; Fall 2010-Spring 2011

**TRAVEL AWARDS (Utah State University)**

- Graduate Student Senate Travel Award, Spring 2011; Spring 2012; Spring 2013
- Sociology Graduate Student Association Travel Award, Spring 2011; Spring 2012
- Sociology Graduate Student Travel Award, Spring 2012; Spring 2013
- Center for Women and Gender Studies Travel Award, Spring 2012, Fall 2013

**HONORS and AWARDS**

- Distinguished Graduate Student Paper, 2013. "Standardization of Subjectivity: How Employers Rely on Formal Policies to Dismiss Discrimination," Pacific Sociological Association.
- Finalist, Woman of the Year, Robbins Award, 2013. Utah State University.
- Graduate Instructor of the Year, 2013. Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology, Utah State University
- Finalist, Graduate Instructor of the Year, 2013. College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
- Graduate Researcher of the Year, 2012. Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology, Utah State University
- Graduate Researcher of the Year, 2012. College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
- Best Paper, Utah State University Graduate Student Symposium, Sociology and Communications Section, March 2010, "For Love or Money: How Neoliberalism Has Influenced Women's Fertility Choices in Developed Nations"

**PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY**

Survey Design, "GED Outcome Survey" Haven Homeless Shelter (Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership), Anne Johnson (Manager), November 2010

Survey Design, "Serving Those in Need: Who They Are and How Can We Help?" Sparrow Alliance, Amber Olsen (President), May 2010

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

Session Presider. Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meetings, March 27-30, 2014

Session Discussant. Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meetings, March 27-30, 2014

Faculty Hiring Committee Graduate Student Representative. Utah State University, Feb-April 2013

Session Presider. Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meetings, March 20-24, 2013

Sociological Graduate Student Association, President 2011-2012

Sociological Graduate Student Association, Vice President of Student/Faculty Affairs 2010-2011

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

2007- Sociological Graduate Student Association, Utah State University

2011- American Sociological Association

2011- Section Member: Race, Class, Gender

2013- Section Member: Organization, Occupations, and Work

2011- Pacific Sociological Association

2013- Sociologists for Women in Society

2013- Work and Family Researchers Network

2009-2013 International Association For Feminist Economics

2011-2012 Western Social Science Association