College of Business Summer 2015 Research Grant Program

Executive Summary

PI Name: Shanna R. Daniels
Department: Management

Proposal Title: Paternalism as a Form of Subtle Bias: Exploring the Experiences of Pregnant and New Mothers in the Workplace

Overview and Research Questions: Federal law forbids harassment or discrimination based on pregnancy when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment (EEOC, 2014). However, pregnant women and new mothers claim they frequently experience more subtle forms of bias such as condescending comments and patronizing behaviors from others in the workplace (Babycenter.com, 2014). These behaviors are considered “microaggressions,” which are subtle and ambiguous forms of discrimination that leave target employees feeling devalued, invalidated, invisible, and confused (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torin, 2009). Although the law fails to provide protection from more subtle forms of discrimination, research demonstrates that subtle and overt bias may have similarly negative influences on their targets’ workplace outcomes (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, Kind, & Gray, 2013). As such, the purpose of the proposed study is to better understand the pervasive forms of subtle bias experienced by pregnant women and new mothers in organizations. To do so, we extend work on paternalism as a form of subtle bias in the workplace (see attached document by Hall, Daniels, Nishii, & Colella, paper prepped for submission to the Academy of Management Journal) and explore perceived paternalistic treatment as an explanation for career advancement barriers for pregnant women/new mothers in the workplace. Paternalism is generally associated
with treating others the way parents would treat their children (Ackers, 2001; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993). It involves an actor reducing the target’s autonomy and monitoring his/her actions through the actor’s superficially considerate deeds. Gender stereotypes and prescribed gender roles continue to limit the roles of and expectations for women in society. Pregnancy is a condition that evokes both descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes about women and while attitudes toward working women have progressed, attitudes toward pregnant women and working moms have evolved to a lesser extent. Pregnant women are hired less often than non-pregnant women (Bragger et al., 2002; Hebl et al., 2007), experience more bias during performance appraisals (Gueutal, Luciano, & Michaels, 1995; Masser, Grass, & Nessie, 2007), and experience anger and resentment from their supervisors and coworkers (Gueutal, 1991).

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of management scholarship that explores these women’s own accounts of their experiences in the workplace. Thus, two research questions guide our efforts for this study: 1) Do pregnant women/new moms report being treated more paternalistically in the workplace; and 2) Is paternalism a factor in the career advancement barriers experienced by pregnant women/new moms?

**Paternalism and Pregnant and New Mothers in the Workplace:** Applying the stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), we argue that paternalism, the extent to which employees are treated in both a benevolent and controlling manner (Ackers, 1998; Jackman, 1994; Wagstaff, Colella, Triana, Smith, & Baskerville-Watkins, in press), may be differentially applied to pregnant women/new mothers in the workplace. Although professional women are stereotyped as highly competent but cold (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), pregnant women and new mothers are stereotyped as warm but incompetent (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). The pattern of stereotype content associated with pregnant women/new moms may result in
paternalistic treatment (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). As such, paternalism may act as a form of subtle discrimination that, in turn, hinders a pregnant woman and/or new mother’s ability to successfully advance in the workplace (Colella, McKay, Daniels, & Signal, 2012; Colella & Stone, 2005). Thus, the goal of this research is to build on past work which showed that pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace may be subject to paternalistic treatment by examining perceived paternalism and its effects from the targets’ points of view. Further, we examine the extent to which perceptions of paternalistic treatment relate to other negative workplace outcomes.

**Methodology:** Pregnant women working full-time were recruited using an Amazon MTurk panel. This was a two-phase study where independent variables (e.g., demographics, supervisor/co-worker paternalism) were measured at Time 1. Dependent variables (e.g., turnover intentions, going the extra mile, perceived promotion prospects, etc.) were measured at Time 2, which was 3 weeks post Time 1 data collection.

**Participants:** There were 425 participants invited to take the survey. There were a total of 291 participants who responded to the survey. There were 15 cases excluded from the analyses because the participants indicated that they were male respondents. After, accounting for the deleted cases there were a total of 252 completed cases with a response rate of 59%. Of these individuals, 100% identified as female. With respect to age, 11% were between 18-25, 56% were between 26-34, and 29% were between 35-54 years old. In terms of ethnicity, 68.4% were Caucasian, 10.7% were African American, 3.4% were Hispanic, 2.4% were Native American, 5.8% were Asian, and the remainder fell into the “other” or “unknown” categories. As for organizational tenure, 4.5% had been working in the company for less than 1 year, 38.5% for between 1-4 years, 33.7% for between 5-9 years, 12.7% for 10-19 years, and 1% for more than
20 years. As for family structure, 19.2% were single, 59.5% were married, and 8.9% had a life partner.

**Results:** Preliminary results for the first study in this research project provide several insights on the experiences of pregnant women in the workplace. First, pregnant women reported being treated paternalistically at a higher rate compared to non-pregnant women. Second, pregnant reported going the extra mile, such as doing more work, to avoid being perceived as less committed to their work because of their pregnancy status. Third, for pregnant women there was a significant positive relationship between paternalism and work family conflict. That is, the more pregnant women were treated paternalistically the more strain they felt between their work and family.

**Contribution:** This research contributes to the management literature by enhancing our theoretical understanding of subtle bias manifested as paternalism and by understanding the experiences of pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace as distinct from the biases exhibited against professional women in general.