

THE GENDERED EFFECT OF EARNING LEVELS ON PARENTING EVALUATIONS  
THROUGH PERCEIVED DEVOTION AND PERCEIVED CONFLICT

by

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(Under the Direction of Jody Clay-Warner)

ABSTRACT

Research on parenting evaluations often focuses on single-earner households and highlights women's disadvantage in parenting evaluations when they fail at caregiving or are employed. Few studies have examined parenting evaluations in dual-earner households, which is necessary to understand gendered conceptualizations of employed parenthood. Moreover, little is known about the mechanisms that explain gender differences in parenting evaluations. Using a 3 (relative earning level) x 2 (gender) vignette experiment, the present study investigates the gendered effects of relative earning levels on parenting evaluations and introduces perceived conflict and perceived devotion as two mechanisms explaining how employed mothers and fathers are conceptualized differently. Results reveal that perceived conflict and devotion are positively associated with parenting evaluations, but no gender difference is observed. This study proposes a theoretical framework that investigates gender differences in parenting evaluations and underlying mechanisms, which could be tested using refined vignettes and enhanced manipulation techniques in future research.

INDEX WORDS: gender; parenting; work/family conflict; devotion

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In most households, there is a notable amount of unfairness in the division of labor between men and women, with stark gender differences often observed in parenting practices (Blair and Lichter 1991; Hook 2010; Ridgeway 2011). Specifically, mothers tend to invest more time and effort than fathers in caregiving activities (Coltrane 2000; Craig 2006; Craig and Mullan 2011). This pattern could be attributed to the fact that the mother role is seen as emblematic of womanhood (Connor and Fiske 2018), which gets activated more readily than does the role of father for men (Park, Smith, and Correll 2010).

Given the asymmetrical importance of the parenting role across gender, there has been a substantial body of literature focusing on parenting evaluations to understand how motherhood is conceptualized differently from fatherhood. This stream of research has established that both failure at caregiving responsibilities and women being employed are behaviors inconsistent with stereotypes of mothers (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005; Okimoto and Heilman 2012; Riggs 1997, 2005; Villicana, Garcia, and Biernat 2017). These inconsistencies then signal parental ineffectiveness, leading to lower parenting evaluations.

While these studies provide invaluable insight into how deviations from conventional parenting expectations affect parenting evaluations in gendered ways, they do not adequately address the gendered nature of parenting evaluations in contemporary family structures. The rise of dual-earner families has challenged the once rigid division of labor, with women as caregivers and men as providers. This shift raises the question of how employed parenthood is

conceptualized and evaluated in light of the new gender ideals that involve individuals carrying both caregiver and provider roles simultaneously.

Moreover, comparing mothers and fathers within dual-career households allows for a deeper understanding of the specific employment-related characteristics that contribute to the gender differences in parenting evaluations observed in previous literature. Prior research has extensively explored the conflict that arise between employment and motherhood, which are considered to be incompatible. However, the compatibility between employment and fatherhood has not been systematically studied. While it has been integrated into discussions of work/family conflict, emphasizing that fathers face less conflict than do mothers, the compatibility between fatherhood and employment has not been investigated as an independent mechanism that explains the gendered effect of employment on parenting evaluations.

To address these gaps, the present study examines the gendered effects of relative earning levels on parenting evaluations in dual-earner households. Specifically, perceived devotion to the parenting role and perceived conflict with the parenting role are introduced as mechanisms to explain how employed mothers and fathers are evaluated differently. By doing so, this work aims to shed light on the influence of gender on the conceptualization of parenthood and uncovers the persistence of incompatibility between womanhood and employment, despite the fact that mothers increasingly need to work to support their families. Such understanding is essential for grasping contemporary gender dynamics and providing insights into the difficulties faced by parents in achieving work-life balance and maintaining well-being.

In the following paragraphs, I begin by reviewing empirical studies on parenting evaluation with a specific focus on gender differences. Following that, I address the existing research gaps concerning dual-earner families and the mechanisms underlying those gender

differences. To provide a theoretical foundation for hypotheses, I draw upon the Gender Beliefs System framework introduced by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) and the Shifting Standards Model proposed by Biernat and Manis (1994), as well as literature on gender differences in the compatibility between employment and parenthood.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous literature has found that mothers and fathers receive similar evaluations for their parenting practices (Riggs 2005; Villicana et al. 2017). When gender differences in parenting evaluations have been observed, it is usually in studies focusing on the interaction dynamics between gender and other variables, such as caregiving performance (i.e., success vs. failure), employment status (i.e., employed vs. unemployed), and external excuses for stereotype-inconsistent behaviors (e.g., work for personal fulfillment, failure at caregiving).

#### *Failure in caregiving performance*

The majority of studies in the field of parenting evaluation focus on the quality of caregiving performance, given its crucial role in shaping child development. This stream of research has documented a gendered effect of failure in caregiving responsibilities on parenting evaluation. Specifically, when both parents were depicted as forgetting to prepare lunch for their children, mothers were rated more negatively than were fathers (Villicana et al. 2017). Deutsch and Saxon (1998) also found that mothers reported being criticized more than fathers when they did not contribute to household labor. Furthermore, mothers were blamed more for their children's undesirable outcomes in comparison to fathers (Maher, Fraser, and Wright 2010). Childhood obesity was commonly attributed to mother's failure to provide healthy meals or make reasonable health decisions, while father's responsibilities regarding effective nutrition and caregiving were often overlooked.

These findings underscore the gender differences in societal reactions toward parental ineffectiveness. “Bad mothers” who fail at caregiving responsibilities face hostility and disdain (Chrisler 2013), compared to “bad fathers” who tend to encounter less negative feedback (Riggs 2005). The intensified criticisms directed at mothers could be attributed to the asymmetrical importance accorded to the parenting role within the cultural conceptualization of each gender. The role of mother is more readily activated for females than the role of father is for males (Park et al. 2010), signifying that motherhood still epitomizes the cultural conception of womanhood and femininity (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). Consequently, mothers face greater penalties for failing in caregiving duties, as such failures make them less of a woman (Dillaway and Paré 2008).

#### *Employment status*

With the increasing participation of women in the labor force, research on parenting has extended its focus to explore the interaction between employment status and gender. A common finding is that gender-atypical parenting roles generate more negative evaluations. For example, Brescoll and Uhlmann (2005) found that both female providers and male caregivers received significantly more negative evaluations than parents adhering to traditional roles. Specifically, unemployed fathers were consistently rated as the worst parent and received the least social regard in comparison to employed fathers and both employed and unemployed mothers. Similarly, Riggs (1997) found that unemployed fathers faced lower approval ratings than both employed fathers and unemployed mothers if they left jobs capable of supporting their families. In contrast, mothers who gave up employment to care for their children received higher levels of approval.

Although criticisms against nontraditional parents do reveal the enduring influence of traditional gender beliefs, this negative feedback can be understood as a way to “align actions” of norm violators who do not follow mainstream gender norms (Stokes and Hewitt 1976), which serves to police both genders. However, it is noteworthy that employment appears primarily to affect evaluations of mother’s parenting, which may originate from assumptions of parental ineffectiveness and maternal inadequacy that are only ascribed to employed women (Cuddy et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008; Okimoto and Heilman 2012). For instance, Wang and colleagues (2013) discovered that a majority of individuals continue to believe that a child is better off with an unemployed stay-at-home mother, while having a father who works outside the home is not perceived as detrimental to children’s well-being. Similarly, it was found that only employed mothers were seen as less effective parents compared to unemployed mothers, a distinction not observed among fathers (Okimoto and Heilman 2012).

This stark gender difference in the effect of employment status on parenting evaluations could be explained by women’s violation of prescriptive femininity ideologies. While unemployed fathers also faced negative evaluations, being employed exclusively disadvantaged women due to the implication that employed mothers may prioritize their careers over family obligations, thus eliciting backlash in evaluations (Connor and Fiske 2018).

#### *Excuses for stereotype-inconsistent behaviors*

Expanding on these findings, research has also explored how external excuses for stereotype-inconsistent behaviors restore parenting evaluations, particularly in cases where negative parenting evaluations of mothers are reduced. When their failure at caregiving activities or their decision to work outside the home were rationalized by external excuses, mothers were perceived more favorably than those whose inconsistent behaviors were not attributed to external

excuses. These excuses served to reduce the perceived inconsistency between those behaviors and the stereotypical notion of intensive mothering, which then restores a good parent image and results in higher parenting evaluations.

Specifically, mothers who pursued employment out of financial necessity tended to receive more favorable ratings than those who worked out of personal choice, likely because they were perceived as less selfish (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005). Okimoto and Heilman (2012) also found that mothers who worked due to financial necessity were rated similarly to unemployed mothers, illustrating a buffering effect of external excuses on the negative impact brought by employment to parenting evaluation. Meanwhile, Riggs (2005) found in a vignette study that when mothers were present but did not engage in childcare, they were rated more negatively than fathers. However, if they had legitimate reasons for not participating in caregiving activities (e.g., being away from home), they actually received positive ratings in all aspects of evaluations.

While mother's employment and failure at caregiving are both stereotype-inconsistent behaviors that prove or imply parental ineffectiveness, external excuses justifying these inconsistencies help mitigate negative evaluations. These findings align with the mechanism of "attributional rationalization" proposed by Heilman and Haynes (2005), which suggests that individuals tend to overlook evidence contradicting gender stereotypes when excuses are provided. Namely, external reasons for behaviors incongruent with prevailing stereotypes, such as working out of financial necessity or being unable to participate in caregiving, lead to perceptions of norm-violators as being more congruent to stereotypes. Consequently, the perceived incongruity between employment, caregiving failure, and the role of mothers is

reduced, contributing to the restored “good parent image” and more positive parenting evaluations.

### *Summary*

In sum, previous research has highlighted the disadvantage women face in parenting evaluations when they fail at caregiving responsibilities or when they are employed. Motherhood remains a central component of womanhood, with successful caregiving regarded as a major part of femininity (Cuddy et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). Those who fail to meet the expectation of ideal motherhood are penalized for exhibiting stereotype-inconsistent behaviors, thus facing lower parenting evaluations compared to fathers, who are more distantly related to caregiving.

Employment also signals ineffective parenting for mothers who are conventionally unemployed and could fully focus on caregiving, which also leads to lower parenting evaluations when compared to fathers, whose traditional role is the provider (Bridges and Etaugh 1995; Etaugh and Nekolny 1990). However, these disadvantages are mitigated by external excuses, which serve as buffers for stereotype-inconsistent behaviors. Having an excuse beyond one’s control triggers “attributional rationalization” (Heilman and Haynes 2005), causing individuals to overlook stereotype-inconsistent evidence, thereby restoring typical gender roles and resulting in more favorable parenting evaluations.

### *Current Study*

While informative, these studies fail to address the complexity of gender and parenting in dual-earner families. Previous studies were often situated within a traditional household, characterized either by a clear division of labor (i.e., full-time breadwinner with unemployed caregiver), or a less explicit portrayal of roles that still implies a marked division (i.e., one parent

handling all caregiving responsibilities with no mention of the other parent's involvement). These frameworks are not reflective of current family dynamics.

Dual-earner families have become increasingly common in the United States due to the economic necessity of having two incomes to support a family (Nomaguchi, Milkie, and Bianchi 2005). As of 2022, 65.0% of married-couple families with children had two incomes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic 2022). The rise of dual-earner families has not attenuated gender differences in the employment experiences of parents, however. Employed mothers remain less likely to work full time (80.5%) than do employed fathers (95.6%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic 2022), and those aged 25 to 34 earn only 85% as much as fathers at that age (Kochhar 2023). Thus, gender differences in financial contributions to household income remain, which may further shape gendered expectations for parenting.

Therefore, there is a need for an in-depth investigation into how earning levels impact parenting evaluations, rather than focusing solely on employment status. Investigating this topic could provide valuable insights into how employed parenthood is conceptualized differently in comparison to traditional family structures with more rigidly defined gender roles linked with either caregiving or breadwinning responsibilities.

Furthermore, the mechanisms explaining interaction effects between gender and employment have seldom been explored in previous literature. Comparisons within the employed parent group would enable a closer investigation into the exact elements of employment that contribute to the stark gender differences in the impact of employment on parenting evaluations in previous literature, which help uncover the ways in which ideal employed parenthood is conceptualized differently for men and women.

It is important to investigate this area given the financial need for two incomes in most households and the constant conflict between work and family roles, which tend to have particularly negative effects for mothers. Cultural ideals of intensive mothering bind women's identity to motherhood and centralize their value as women in caregiver roles, making parenting evaluation a "barometer" of their worth as women (Arendell 2000; Connor and Fiske 2018). These ideals trap employed mothers in a cycle of meeting unattainable mothering ideals (Connor and Fiske 2018), thus facing heightened feelings of shame, stress, and guilt (Aarntzen et al. 2023; Borelli et al. 2017; Morgan and King 2012; Okimoto and Heilman 2012). However, given the economic necessity of dual earnings to support a family, mothers cannot simply quit their jobs to conform to an intensive mother image. As such, they continually experience more negative feelings about insufficient parenting than do employed fathers.

Meanwhile, previous literature has seldom looked into how employment benefits fathers in terms of parenting evaluations. Most studies have focused on how employed fathers face fewer work/family conflict and are rated less negatively than employed mothers. Despite revealing valuable gender differences, these studies often overlook potential mechanisms through which employment *benefits* father's parenting evaluations, which may also explain the gender differences in parenting evaluations.

Therefore, unraveling how gender and levels of earning interact to shape parenting evaluations and understanding the mechanisms through which this interaction operates could shed light on how the ideal employed parenthood is conceptualized in gendered ways. This, in turn, may help explain the heightened mental health disadvantages faced by employed mothers and address the source of employed father's advantages in parenting evaluations.

In brief, this study seeks to investigate how gender and relative earning levels interact to impact parenting evaluations, which encompasses both parenting quality and time spent in parenting. In addition, the present study introduces perceived conflict and perceived devotion as mechanisms explaining gender differences in these evaluations. To explore these processes, an online vignette experiment employing a 2 (gender) X 3 (relative earning level) design was conducted. Before presenting the results, the following section will provide a theoretical framework in which to situate the research question within the literature on gender and parenting.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study draws upon the Gender Beliefs System framework proposed by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) and the Shifting Standards Model (Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997; Biernat and Manis 1994) to hypothesize a disadvantage experienced by mothers in parenting evaluation when their caregiving performance is equivalent to that of fathers. I review previous research on the (in)compatibility of employment and the parenting role and hypothesize two mediation effects of gender on parenting evaluations: one through perceived conflict and the other through perceived devotion.

#### *The Gender Beliefs System Framework and the Shifting Standards Model*

To understand how gender impacts evaluations in general, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) introduced a framework to study the gender beliefs system, positing that the higher status of men usually gives them an advantage over women in most evaluations across most masculine and gender-neutral settings. This bias favoring men, which serves to reinforce perceptions of their higher status and greater competence, is only *offset* when the focal task is conventionally feminine (Swim and Sanna 1996). Women's gender-typed skills in feminine activities can counterbalance assumptions of men's greater competence, resulting in a weak advantage for women in the evaluation of feminine activities (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Parenting evaluations, which often center on caregiving activities that are conventionally feminine, would seem to provide a friendly environment for women.

However, as previous studies have shown, gender usually does not exhibit a main effect on parenting evaluation. Conversely, interaction effects between gender and other variables tend to reveal a disadvantage for mothers in parenting evaluations compared to fathers (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005; Okimoto and Heilman 2012; Riggs 1997, 2005; Villicana et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2013). A compelling explanation rooted in the Shifting Standards Model (Biernat and Manis 1994) is that there is a higher bar for mothers in caregiving roles, as they are perceived as primary caregivers who are expected to excel. Within the framework of this model, it was argued that cross-group comparisons may yield similar ratings for different levels of performance because of group-specific standards and relative comparisons.

In the context of parenting, women need a higher level of parenting performance than men to be considered as equally good parents (Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997). With this higher bar of mothering, even when they outperform fathers, mothers are rated as equally good parents as fathers who do less, leaving a null effect of gender on parenting evaluation (Riggs 2005; Villicana et al. 2017). When mothers actually fail to meet the higher bar by which they are measured, either through failing at caregiving or being employed, they face harsher criticisms.

Drawing from these two theories, it could be hypothesized that when both parents equitably share caregiving responsibilities in dual-earner households, mothers should receive less positive parenting evaluations as a penalty for failing to outperform fathers in caregiving activities.

*H1 – Mothers will be rated less positively in parenting evaluation than fathers when performing the same level of caregiving activity in dual-earner households.*

### *The (In)compatibility between Employment and Parenthood*

Employment further complicates this gender effect, as mothers and fathers experience employed parenthood in distinct ways. The expectations for mothering differ from those for fathering, not only in terms of the standards to which they are held but also in the gendered content of their parental roles (Cabrera et al. 2000, 2022). Mothers are primarily evaluated based on caregiving activities, whereas fathers have more flexibility to demonstrate parenting through both caregiving and breadwinning activities (Ranson 2012). This gender difference in role content leads to an asymmetry in the mechanisms that explain gender differences in parenting evaluations.

Conventionally, the prevailing prescriptive norm for mothers dictates that they should prioritize caregiving across contexts (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). For fathers, their major primacy is breadwinning activities and financial security (Offer and Kaplan 2021; Pleck 1987). While this division of roles has become less rigid with the increasing participation of women in the labor force, the prescriptive gender norms for employed parents have remained relatively unchanged. The ideal mother figure is still characterized by an emphasis on nurturing and prioritizing family responsibilities above all others, whereas the good father figure primarily revolves around being authoritative and financially supportive of the family (Noonan, Lynn, and Walker 2020). As a result, employment is often considered incompatible with mothering, but compatible with fathering.

### *Incompatibility and Perceived Conflict*

The incompatibility between employment and motherhood is usually studied in the form of conflict between roles. Specifically, paid work expects a great amount of time commitment, which competes with the heavy time commitment required from mothers, who are considered

less replaceable at home (DeLeire and Levy 2004). Moreover, cultural expectations of mothers as nurturing and warm also conflict with the ideal worker as cool-headed and competitive (Blair-Loy 2001; Hays 1996). Employed mothers face a lose-lose situation in which they are evaluated as both mothers and employees, are seen as inadequate for both, and are assumed to have commitment deficits when holding these roles (Connor and Fiske 2018; Okimoto and Heilman 2012).

As employees, mothers face the assumption that they are primary caregivers whose family obligations may reduce working commitment to the job (Fuegen et al. 2004). This prioritization of family responsibilities lead to more interruptions at work (Bowlby 1982; Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000; Simon 1995), in which being a mother actually conflicts with the “ideal worker” role that stresses commitment to work. Similarly, mother’s employment is assumed to reduce their commitment to the family (Bridges and Etaugh 1995; Etaugh and Nekolny 1990), and to result in parental ineffectiveness of mothers (Okimoto and Heilman 2012).

In contrast, the ideal father image is and has always been a good provider who financially supports the family (Noonan et al. 2020), which gives men more latitude in fathering. Breadwinning remains the major component of fatherhood, with the direct care for the children being less important (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Fathers are expected to work for the family and then spend some free time with family members (Daly and Palkovitz 2004), leaving little to no time conflict between roles. Meanwhile, the cultural expectation of authoritative and disciplinary fathering and “fatherly-hero-protector” all align with stereotypes of manliness and expected traits of a good worker (Coltrane 2004; Noonan et al. 2020; Pleck 1987; Summers et al. 1999), which also reduce work/family conflict faced by employed fathers.

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that higher earning-levels would imply a greater commitment to work compared to lower earning-levels, which should then lead to heightened perceived conflict for high-earning mothers. The inherent incompatibility between employment and motherhood ideals creates a situation in which an increased time commitment to work contradicts the necessary commitment of time to childcare, thereby increasing the perceived conflict among mothers. In contrast, employment aligns more easily with the concept of fatherhood, where earning money is regarded as an integral part of the father role. The dual functions of father's employment in fulfilling both work and family roles make father's perceived conflict less sensitive to earning levels.

*H2a – The effect of earning levels on perceived conflict will be more pronounced for mothers than for fathers, such that differences in mothers' perceived conflict with the parenting role due to earning levels will be larger than those of fathers.*

The greater the perceived conflict experienced by parents, the more likely they are to be assumed to have lower investment and availability for parenting responsibilities. This, in turn, should result in more negative ratings in parenting evaluations.

*H2b – The more conflict a parent is perceived to have between employment and parenting, the more negatively they will be rated as a parent.*

#### *Compatibility and Perceived Devotion*

The compatibility between employment and fatherhood has received less attention as a mechanism that explains gender differences in parenting evaluations. Rather, it is usually incorporated into studies of work/family conflict to explain why fathers experience less conflict. What has been overlooked is how the compatibility of employment and fatherhood shapes evaluations of fathers' parenting.

In the context of fatherhood, success is still closely associated with breadwinning (Coltrane 2004; Randles 2018), with some expectation of minimal involvement in childcare (Dermott and Miller 2015; Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000). While fathers are expected to do some caregiving activities, they are also allowed to show fathering through breadwinning activities (Ranson 2012). For fathers, employment is seen as an important fulfillment of family responsibilities and the father identity (Simon 1995), a privilege that mothers do not have. Even in the debate between the “good-provider” schema and the “involved-father” schema, the conceptual difference is never about quitting or keeping the job, but rather about the extent of their work commitment after childbirth (Bernard 1981; Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000; Wilkie 1993).

Empirical studies have also documented the importance of employment to evaluations of fathering. Specifically, unemployed or part-time employed fathers tend to be rated as less socially acceptable and face negative reactions. Jacobs and Gerson (2016) found that fathers were only approved to switch to a part-time job or quit employment when the family did not depend on their incomes. Riggs (1997) also found that fathers received less approval if they left a job to take care of their children. Similarly, Kelland, Lewis, and Fisher (2022) found in a qualitative study that part-time employed fathers faced scrutiny and were viewed with suspicion during job interviews. Some of them even engaged in self-mockery for being a part-time employed father, which not only indicated societal disapproval but also uncovered their own self-disapproval.

These findings collectively suggest that the expectation for fathers to provide financially for their families has not disappeared, despite the increasing employment rates of mothers. Consequently, higher earning-levels are likely to enhance the "good provider" image of fathers

as being more financially supportive of the family, leading to a heightened perception of their devotion to the parenting role. In contrast, employed mothers do not have the same privilege to boost the evaluation of their parenting through earnings, as their mother roles are primarily centered around caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, their perceived devotion should be impacted less by their earning levels.

*H3a – The effect of earning levels on perceived devotion will be less pronounced for mothers than for fathers, such that differences in mothers' perceived devotion with the parenting role due to earning levels will be smaller than those of fathers.*

The more devotion a parent is perceived to exhibit, the more likely they will be perceived as effective in the parenting role. This heightened sense of effective parenting should result in more positive ratings in parenting evaluations.

*H3b – The more devoted a parent is perceived to be, the more positively they will be rated as a parent.*

Together, the incompatibility between employment and motherhood ideals should lead to more work/family conflict faced by mothers, subsequently leading to lower parenting evaluations of them. In contrast, the compatibility between employment and fatherhood ideals should lead to greater perceived devotion in fathers, which in turn should result in higher parenting evaluations of them.

*H4a – Perceived conflict with the parenting role will mediate the effect of gender on parenting evaluation.*

*H4b – Perceived devotion to the parenting role will mediate the effect of gender on parenting evaluation.*

To sum up, a parent's relative earning-level is likely to affect mothers and fathers through distinct pathways. Employment is perceived to be incompatible with motherhood ideals due to competing time demands and conflicting cultural expectations. In contrast, fatherhood aligns more with employment, as both stress the importance of being a good provider who works hard at a job and makes financial contribution to the family. These gender differences in the content of parenting roles likely contribute to an asymmetry in the perceived devotion and conflict associated with employed parents. Namely, relative earning levels should have a more pronounced positive effect on fathers' perceived devotion to the parenting role compared to mothers, while exerting a greater positive effect on mothers' perceived conflict relative to fathers. These differences in perceived devotion and conflict are expected to explain the effect of gender on parenting evaluations.

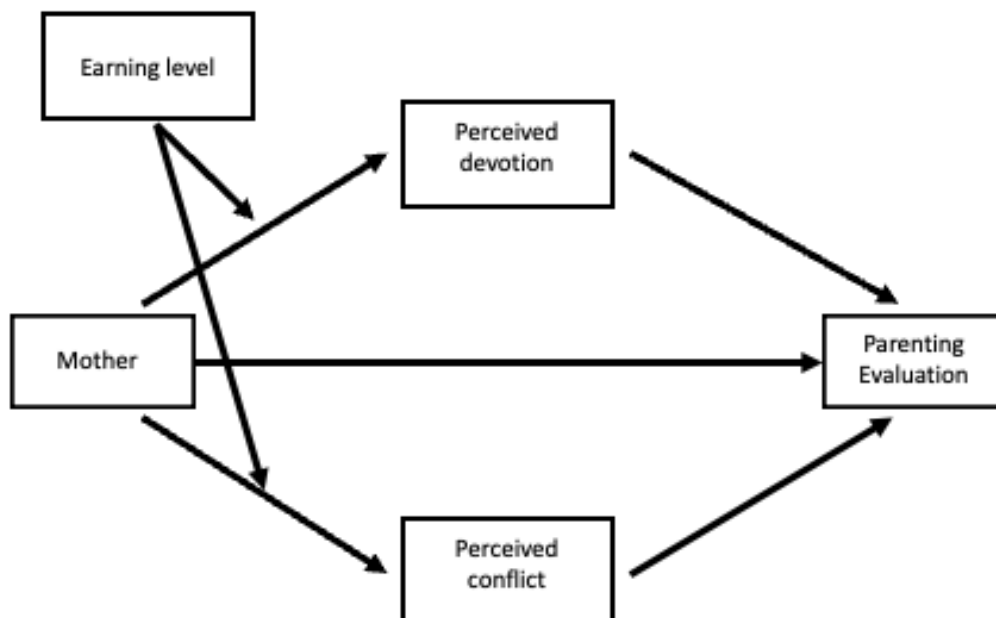


Figure 1. Theoretical Model: Gender, Earning Levels, Perceived Devotion, Perceived Conflict, and Parenting Evaluation.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

#### *Participants*

To test these hypotheses, I conducted an online experiment via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), with a nationwide sample of 400 people in the United States. MTurk is a crowdsourcing marketplace, in which "requesters" post different human intelligence tasks (HITs) that "workers" could complete if they meet the selection criteria. MTurk participants are found to be more diverse and representative than convenience samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011). They also provide better quality data than participants from probability samples even if the MTurk population is slightly less representative than national probability samples (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014).

To study gendered norms about parenting in the United States, two screening criteria were implemented. Eligible participants needed to be at least 18 years old and to have completed high school education in the United States. By employing these screeners, it was assumed that participants possessed English proficiency and a degree of familiarity with the U.S. culture. All participants who completed the HIT received a payment of \$1.60 for 9 minutes of participation, which meets the minimal payment requirement of \$9.60 per hour as stipulated in community guidelines.

Participants who had missing data on demographic variables ( $n = 30$ ) were removed, and primary analyses used the full sample of complete cases ( $n = 370$ ). Results were different when participants who failed either manipulation check or attention check were excluded from the

analysis ( $n = 160$ ) (See Table 3 – Table 5, Figure 1, Figure 2 in Appendix B). The results for the full sample are presented and interpreted here, since retaining the full sample ensures random assignment, which is a necessary condition of the experimental design.

Of the 370 respondents used in the analytic sample, women accounted for 51.35 percent. In terms of ethnicity, 92.97 percent identified as white. The mean age was 31.21 years ( $SD = 6.09$ ). All participants were parent. On average, they had 1.68 children ( $SD = 1.53$ ), with a mean child age of 6.13 years ( $SD = 4.89$ ). Over ninety-eight percent of the sample was married, and 99.19 percent of the sample was employed. This sample also exhibited a notable level of education, as 77.57 percent held a bachelor's degree or higher. Most respondents identified as straight (63.51%). Additionally, more than half of the sample reported an annual income exceeding \$50,000.

### *Procedures*

The design of the study was a 3 (relative earning level) x 2 (gender) vignette experiment. After providing consent, participants were instructed that this study was about parental activities and child development. They were then randomly assigned to one of the three earning conditions: mother making less money than father, mother making more money than father, or both parents making a similar amount of money. Following that, they were provided with a vignette depicting a family's typical week and answered manipulation check questions to assess their comprehension of the story. Subsequently, they were instructed to evaluate either the mother or the father on different scales, as well as one question concerning the development of the child in the story to align with the cover story. Two attention check questions were also included in the process to maintain data quality.

### *Manipulation*

Gender of the target parent was manipulated by assigning gendered names to the parents: “Mary” representing mothers and “Tom” representing fathers. To manipulate relative earning level, the vignettes had two sentences describing each parent’s income in relation to the other parent. The vignettes read, “Mary makes a lot more/less money than Tom,” or “Mary makes a similar amount of money as Tom.” This manipulation was repeated in a later paragraph using the same sentence to reinforce participant’s impression. In all vignettes, the parents were described as engaging equally in caregiving, with the parents taking turns in various childcare tasks.

Participants assigned to the “female” condition answered questions about their impressions of Mary whereas those who were assigned to the “male” condition answered questions about their impressions of Tom.

### *Measures*

*Perceived devotion.* I developed a five-item scale to assess perceived devotion ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Participants indicated on six-point Likert scales the extent to which they perceived the target parent as dedicated, attentive, and devoted to parenting. Additionally, two questions were included to assess specifically the level of commitment to parenting through job and through caregiving activities (i.e., “How much commitment to parenting does Mary demonstrate through caregiving activities/her job”). Items were averaged and standardized (-1 to 1), with a higher number indicating a higher level of perceived devotion.

*Perceived conflict.* I adapted a five-item *perceived conflict* scale from the Work-Family Conflict Scale (Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian 1996), with the only change from “I/me/my” to the target parent’s name ( $\alpha = .84$ ). For example, “The amount of time Mary’s job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities.” Participants indicated on six-point Likert

scales their perception of conflict between work and family responsibilities experienced by the target parent. Items were averaged and standardized (-1 to 1), with a higher number indicating a higher level of perceived conflict.

*Parenting quality.* Semantic differential slider scales were used to assess participant's ratings of the target parent's parenting quality, which is one aspect of parenting evaluations. The five-item scale ( $\alpha = .97$ ) was anchored with descriptors such as "a good parent" and "a bad parent," "an attentive parent" and "a sloppy parent," "a careful parent" and "a careless parent," "an involved parent" and "an uninvolved parent," and "an engaged parent" and "a disengaged parent." Participants indicated their ratings by the positions along the sliders, which were coded with values from 0 to 100. Items were averaged and standardized (-1 to 1), with a higher number indicating a higher rating of parenting quality.

*Time spent in parenting.* Participants also provided estimates of the percentage of spare time that the target parent spends with their child, using a measure adapted from Villicana, Garcia, and Biernat's (2017) study. The incorporation of this measure aligned with the recommendations of the Shifting Standards Model (Kobrynowicz and Biernat 1997), aiming at facilitating evaluations of parenting quality by making gender differences more observable in objective units (i.e., minutes). For consistency in interpretation, this single item was standardized using mean and standard deviation (-1 to 1), where a higher number indicates more time spent in parenting.

*Control variables.* I controlled for demographic variables, including respondent's gender (1 = female), sexual orientation (1 = straight), race (1 = white), age in years, education (1 = less than high school, 5 = advanced education), marital status (1 = married), employment status (1 = full-time employed), income level (1 = 0 - \$ 9,999), and political ideology (1 = liberal). Given

the focus on parenting, I also controlled for number of children and age of youngest child (Note 1 in Appendix A).

### *Analytic Strategy*

The data were analyzed with Stata 17 (all ANOVAs and regressions) and Mplus (path modeling). Two-way ANOVA was used to test the main effect of gender on parenting evaluations while controlling for earning levels (hypothesis 1). To test hypothesis 2a and 3a, I conducted two-way ANOVAs separately and used Tukey post hoc tests so that I could also explore any unanticipated significant effects. Then, I employed OLS regressions to test hypothesis 2b and 3b, controlling for demographic variables, gender of the target parent, and earning levels. For mediation hypotheses, I ran a path model with controlled covariances between mediators using OLS distributions and estimated the 95% confidence interval (CI) using bias-corrected bootstrap with 1000 resamples (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010). To obtain an effect size of each mediator, I then calculated the percent explained by each mediator using the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect (Preacher and Kelley 2011).

## CHAPTER 5

## RESULTS

The results are presented in two sections: 1) hypotheses tests, and 2) supplementary analyses to investigate relevant relationships between variables that were not originally hypothesized. Results that excluded participants who failed manipulation checks and attention checks are also discussed briefly. Support for hypotheses is based on significant associations at .05.

*Hypothesis Tests*

Table 1 shows means and standard errors by experimental conditions, along with results of Tukey post hoc tests. Contrary to hypothesis 1, no significant gender difference was observed in evaluations of parenting quality,  $F(1,366) = .00, p = .95$ , or time spent in parenting  $F(1,366) = 1.17, p = .28$ . These findings were not supportive of hypothesis 1 that mothers should receive lower ratings. I also found no evidence to support hypothesis 2a, which posited that the impact of earning levels on perceived conflict should be larger for mothers than fathers. The ANOVA predicting perceived conflict yielded a non-significant interaction between the effects of gender and relative earning level,  $F(2,364) = 1.21; p = .30$ . Also contrary to hypothesis 3a, there was no significant interaction between the effects of gender and earning levels on perceived devotion,  $F(2,364) = 1.10; p = .33$ .

- TABLE 1 HERE -

Partially supportive of hypothesis 2b, while Table 2 shows that perceived conflict had no significant relationship with perceived parenting quality, Table 3 displays that one standard

deviation increase in perceived conflict was associated with .159 standard deviation increase in perceived time spent in parenting ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, the tests of hypothesis 3b yielded supportive evidence that perceived devotion was positively correlated with parenting evaluation ( $p < .01$ ). As shown in Table 4 and Table 5, one standard deviation increase in perceived devotion was associated with a .542 standard deviation increase in perceived parenting quality ( $p < .01$ ), and a .407 standard deviation increase in perceived time spent in parenting ( $p < .01$ ).

- TABLE 2 HERE -

- TABLE 3 HERE -

- TABLE 4 HERE -

- TABLE 5 HERE -

No evidence was found to support hypothesis 4a, which predicted mediation effects, as the indirect effect of perceived conflict was not significant. As shown in Table 6, perceived conflict did not explain the effect of gender on either parenting quality (indirect effect = .004,  $p = ns$ ) or time spent in parenting (indirect effect = -.019,  $p = ns$ ). There was also no evidence supportive of hypothesis 4b. Table 6 shows that perceived devotion did not explain the effect of gender on either parenting quality (indirect effect = -.050,  $p = ns$ ), or time spent in parenting (indirect effect = -.034,  $p = ns$ ).

- TABLE 6 HERE -

Figure 2 and Figure 3 displays the specific coefficients of each path. As shown in Figure 2, mothers were perceived to experience .171 standard deviation less conflict than fathers ( $p < .05$ ). One standard deviation increase in perceived devotion was associated with a .533 standard deviation increase in parenting quality ( $p < .01$ ; Figure 2), and .363 standard deviation increase

in time spent in parenting ( $p < .01$ ; Figure 3). Since neither path was significant, no evidence of mediation effect through either path was found.

- FIGURE 2 HERE –

- FIGURE 3 HERE -

### *Supplementary Analyses*

While not hypothesized, Table 1 presents a few interesting findings on gender differences. Specifically, mothers with higher earnings were perceived to have .338 standard deviation more conflict than fathers with lower earnings ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, fathers with higher earnings were granted .416 standard deviation less time spent in parenting than mothers with higher earnings ( $p < .05$ ), and .300 standard deviation less time spent in parenting than fathers with lower earnings ( $p < .05$ ).

Analyses using data excluding participants who failed manipulation check and attention check was conducted as sensitivity analyses. While no significant correlation between exclusion and experimental conditions was observed (See Table 1 in Appendix B), comparison of those who were excluded ( $n = 160$ ) vs. those who passed the attention check questions ( $n = 240$ ) indicated a few significant demographic differences (See Table 2 in Appendix B). The retained sample comprises a larger number of parents with fewer children, a greater proportion of heterosexual individuals, and individuals with higher income levels. Major differences emerged in results were 1) no significant relationship between conflict and time spent in parenting, and 2) significant indirect effect through perceived devotion (See Table 3 – Table 5, Figure 1, Figure 2 in Appendix B).

In addition, exploratory supplementary analyses were conducted to investigate how participant gender might impact study variables as a blocking variable. This approach was

chosen because 1) the major focus of this study is gender, and 2) every participant in the primary analyses was a parent, providing an opportunity to explore how employed parenthood is conceptualized differently for mothers and fathers.

The ANOVA predicting parenting evaluations yielded significant effects of participant gender on parenting quality ( $F(1,368) = 7.51; p = .006$ ) and perceived devotion ( $F(1,368) = 12.64; p = .000$ ). As shown in Table 7, female participants rated the target parent .259 standard deviation higher in parenting quality and perceived them as being .287 standard deviation more devoted than did male participants.

- TABLE 7 HERE -

In addition, OLS regressions were conducted to investigate potential moderating effects of participant gender on the relationship between perceived devotion/perceived conflict and parenting evaluations. Table 8 shows that there was no significant moderating effect of participant gender on the relationship between perceived devotion and time spent in parenting. Conversely, there was evidence supportive of a significant moderating effect of participant gender on the relationship between perceived devotion and parenting quality. The moderating effect indicated that female participants who rated the target parents as being more devoted tended to rate the target parent higher on parenting quality.

- TABLE 8 HERE -

Table 9 demonstrates significant moderating effects of participant gender on the relationship between perceived conflict and parenting evaluations. Specifically, female participants who perceived the target parent as facing more conflict between work and family responsibilities gave lower ratings of their parenting quality and allocated them less time spent in parenting ( $p < .01$ ).

- TABLE 9 HERE -

*Summary*

The outcomes of hypothesis tests provided support only for hypothesis 3b and partial support for hypothesis 2b. Perceived devotion was positively related to parenting quality and time spent in parenting, while perceived conflict was only positively related to time spent in parenting. Additionally, supplementary analyses focusing on participant gender demonstrated noteworthy findings. Female participants tended to perceive parents as more devoted and rated them higher in parenting quality. They also rated those perceived as more devoted as better parents and gave lower ratings to those with higher levels of conflict.

Table 1. Standardized Means (SE) of Study Variables by Experimental Conditions.

		Lower earner	Higher earner	Similar earner
Perceived Devotion	Mother	-.053 <sup>a</sup> (.093)	.185 <sup>a</sup> (.109)	.104 <sup>a</sup> (.102)
	Father	-.051 <sup>a</sup> (.103)	.001 <sup>a</sup> (.098)	-.036 <sup>a</sup> (.098)
Perceived Conflict	Mother	.020 <sup>ab</sup> (.089)	.163 <sup>b</sup> (.105)	.098 <sup>ab</sup> (.099)
	Father	-.175 <sup>a</sup> (.100)	-.020 <sup>ab</sup> (.094)	-.024 <sup>ab</sup> (.095)
Parenting Quality	Mother	-.050 <sup>a</sup> (.108)	.123 <sup>a</sup> (.127)	.057 <sup>a</sup> (.120)
	Father	.184 <sup>a</sup> (.121)	.012 <sup>a</sup> (.114)	-.086 <sup>a</sup> (.115)
Time spent in Parenting	Mother	.019 <sup>ab</sup> (.117)	.239 <sup>b</sup> (.138)	.030 <sup>ab</sup> (.129)
	Father	.123 <sup>b</sup> (.130)	-.177 <sup>a</sup> (.123)	.016 <sup>ab</sup> (.124)

*Note: N = 370. Cells with different superscripted letters (a,b) are significantly different at .05 using Tukey post hoc tests. For instance, values superscripted with an 'a' are significantly different from those with 'b', but not significantly different from those with 'ab'.*

Table 2. OLS Regression Models of Parenting Quality on Perceived Conflict.

Variables	Parenting Quality		
Perceived conflict	0.066 (0.063)	0.069 (0.063)	0.058 (0.062)
Passed checks (1 = passed)		0.086 (0.099)	0.069 (0.099)
Father as target parent			0.019 (0.093)
Relative earning levels			-0.081 (0.058)
Number of children			0.068** (0.031)
Age of child			-0.013 (0.01)
Marital status (1 = married)			-0.14 (0.341)
Participant gender (1 = female)			0.169* (0.1)
Age			0.018** (0.008)
Race (1 = white)			-0.254 (0.19)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)			0.366*** (0.117)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)			0.186* (0.099)
Employment status (1 = employed)			-0.711 (0.52)
Income level			0.252*** (0.08)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)			-0.018 (0.103)
Intercept	0.032 (0.048)	-0.022 (0.078)	-0.339 (0.689)
Observations	370	370	370
R <sup>2</sup>	0.003	0.005	0.135

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

Table 3. OLS Regression Models of Time Spent in Parenting on Perceived Conflict.

Variables	Time spent in parenting		
Perceived conflict	0.173** (0.068)	0.171** (0.068)	0.159** (0.068)
Passed checks (1 = passed)		-0.067 (0.106)	-0.079 (0.109)
Father as target parent			-0.045 (0.102)
Relative earning levels			-0.085 (0.064)
Number of children			0.085** (0.034)
Age of child			0.007 (0.011)
Marital status (1 = married)			0.212 (0.376)
Participant gender (1 = female)			0.089 (0.11)
Age			0.014 (0.009)
Race (1 = white)			-0.147 (0.21)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)			0.218* (0.129)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)			0.067 (0.11)
Employment status (1 = employed)			-0.586 (0.573)
Income level			0.306*** (0.088)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)			0.038 (0.114)
Intercept	0.032 (0.051)	0.074 (0.084)	-0.651 (0.76)
Observations	370	370	370
R2	0.018	0.019	0.105

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

Table 4. OLS Regression Models of Parenting Quality on Perceived Devotion.

Variables	Time spent in parenting		
Perceived devotion	0.578*** (0.053)	0.597*** (0.054)	0.542*** (0.058)
Passed checks (1 = passed)		-0.137 (0.088)	-0.099 (0.09)
Father as target parent			0.069 (0.083)
Relative earning levels			-0.072 (0.052)
Number of children			0.061** (0.027)
Age of child			-0.006 (0.009)
Marital status (1 = married)			-0.395 (0.307)
Participant gender (1 = female)			0.077 (0.089)
Age			0.013* (0.007)
Race (1 = white)			-0.174 (0.17)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)			0.149 (0.107)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)			0.033 (0.091)
Employment status (1 = employed)			-0.522 (0.466)
Income level			0.209*** (0.071)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)			-0.057 (0.092)
Intercept	0.022 (0.041)	0.107 (0.068)	0.183 (0.62)
Observations	370	370	370
R2	0.246	0.251	0.304

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

Table 5. OLS Regression Models of Time Spent in Parenting on Perceived Devotion.

Variables	Time spent in parenting		
Perceived devotion	0.413*** (0.062)	0.447*** (0.064)	0.407*** (0.069)
Passed checks (1 = passed)		-0.246** (0.103)	-0.218** (0.106)
Father as target parent			-0.026 (0.098)
Relative earning levels			-0.076 (0.061)
Number of children			0.079** (0.032)
Age of child			0.01 (0.01)
Marital status (1 = married)			0.016 (0.363)
Participant gender (1 = female)			-0.007 (0.105)
Age			0.011 (0.009)
Race (1 = white)			-0.043 (0.2)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)			0.058 (0.127)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)			-0.035 (0.107)
Employment status (1 = employed)			-0.403 (0.551)
Income level			0.296*** (0.084)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)			-0.008 (0.109)
Intercept	0.025 (0.049)	0.178** (0.08)	-0.309 (0.733)
Observations	370	370	370
R2	0.107	0.12	0.174

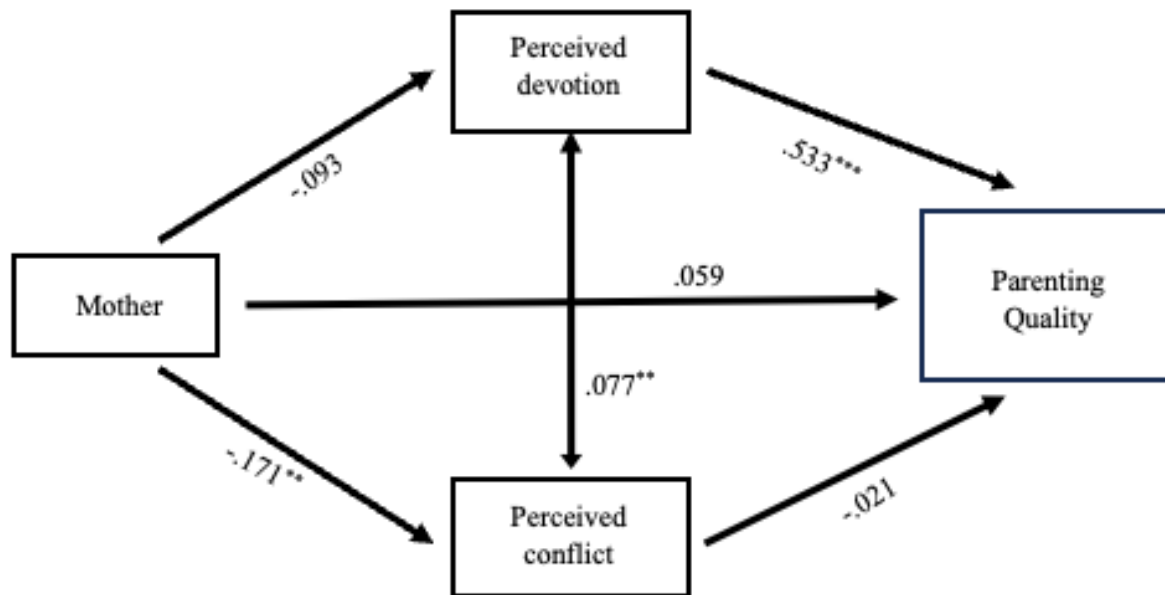
Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

Table 6. Indirect Effects Models of Gender of Target Parent on Parenting Evaluations through Perceived Devotion and Perceived Conflict, Using OLS Distribution for Path Modeling and Covariance.

Mediators	Parenting Quality		Time spent in Parenting	
	Indirect effect		Indirect effect	
	Coefficient [95% CI]	Percent Mediation	Coefficient (95% CI)	Percent Mediation
Perceived devotion	-.050 [-.14, .20]	44.25%	-.034 [-.11, .01]	44.74%
Perceived conflict	.004 [-.10, .22]	3.54%	-.019 [-.07, .00]	25.00%
N	370			

*Note: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$ .*

Figure 2. Coefficients from OLS Regression Models of Parenting Quality, Controlling for Covariances.



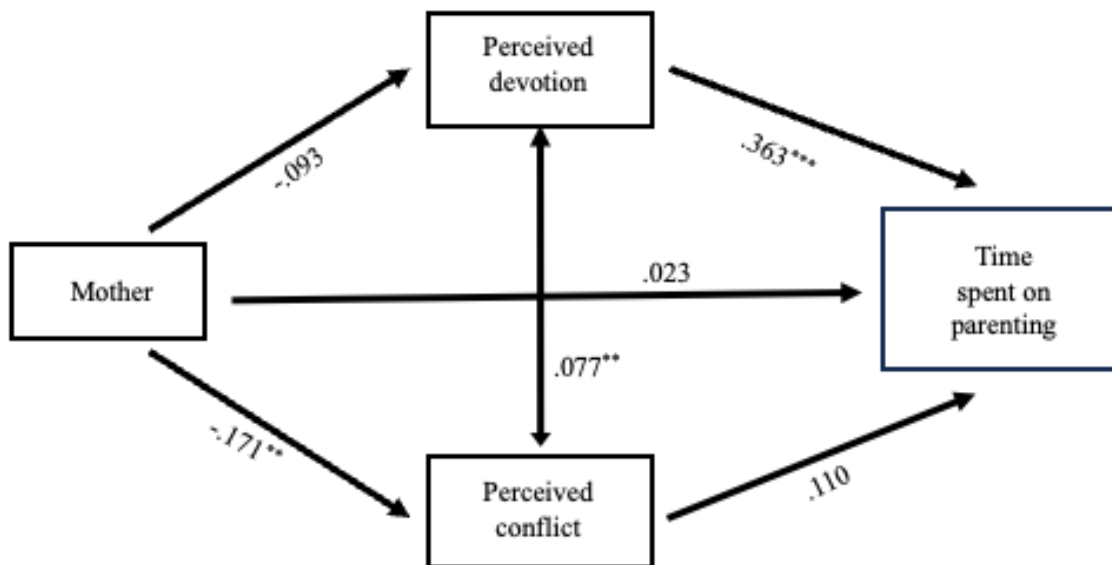
\* $p < .10$  \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$

$N = 370$ . Cases with missingness on demographic variables ( $n = 30$ ) were dropped.

Controlling for all demographic variables and earning level.

Model fits indices are as follows:  $\chi^2(0) = .000$ ,  $p = .000$ ; CFI = 1.000, and RMSEA = .00, indicating good model fit. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

Figure 3. Coefficients from OLS Regression Models of Time Spent in Parenting, Controlling for Covariances.



\*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$

$N = 370$ . Cases with missingness on demographic variables ( $n = 30$ ) were dropped.

Controlling for all demographic variables and earning level.

Model fits indices are as follows:  $\chi^2(0) = .000$ ,  $p = .000$ ; CFI = 1.000, and RMSEA = .00, indicating good model fit. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

Table 7. Means (SE) of Parenting Evaluations, Perceived Devotion, and Perceived Conflict by Participant Gender.

	Parenting Quality	Time spent in Parenting	Perceived Devotion	Perceived Conflict
Female Participant	.159 (.066) **	.109 (.072)	.158 (.056) **	-.053 (.055)
Male Participant	-.100 (.068)	-.048 (.074)	-.129 (.058)	.071 (.055)
Absolute Value of Mean Difference	.259	.157	.287	.124

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$ .

Table 8. OLS Regression Models of Perceived Devotion and Participant Gender on Parenting Evaluations.

Variables	Parenting Quality		Time spent in Parenting	
Perceived devotion	0.451*** (0.075)	0.394*** (0.081)	0.455*** (0.09)	0.453*** (0.097)
Female participant	0.093 (0.084)	0.071 (0.089)	0.042 (0.1)	-0.003 (0.105)
Female participant × Perceived devotion	0.234** (0.107)	0.271** (0.107)	-0.094 (0.127)	-0.081 (0.128)
Passed checks (1 = passed)		-0.088 (0.089)		-0.213** (0.106)
Number of children		0.062** (0.027)		0.079** (0.032)
Age of child		-0.008 (0.009)		0.01 (0.01)
Marital status (1 = married)		-0.368 (0.305)		-0.043 (0.363)
Age		0.015** (0.007)		0.01 (0.009)
Race (1 = white)		-0.171 (0.168)		-0.052 (0.2)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)		0.154 (0.106)		0.059 (0.127)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)		0.069 (0.091)		-0.056 (0.109)
Employment status (1 = employed)		-0.52 (0.463)		-0.409 (0.551)
Income level		0.213*** (0.071)		0.296*** (0.084)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)		-0.048 (0.092)		-0.013 (0.109)
Intercept	-0.042 (0.06)	0.013 (0.605)	0.01 (0.071)	-0.391 (0.72)
Observations	370	370	370	370
R <sup>2</sup>	0.259	0.311	0.108	0.171

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

Table 9. OLS Regression Models of Perceived Conflict and Participant Gender on Parenting

Evaluations.

Variables	Parenting Quality		Time spent in Parenting	
Perceived conflict	0.313*** (0.093)	0.28*** (0.091)	0.386*** (0.101)	0.369*** (0.101)
Female participant	0.276*** (0.093)	0.172* (0.099)	0.186* (0.102)	0.095 (0.109)
Female participant × Perceived conflict	-0.416*** (0.124)	-0.404*** (0.121)	-0.363*** (0.135)	-0.376*** (0.135)
Passed checks (1 = passed)		0.051 (0.098)		-0.098 (0.108)
Number of children		0.060** (0.03)		0.077** (0.033)
Age of child		-0.012 (0.01)		0.008 (0.011)
Marital status (1 = married)		-0.195 (0.334)		0.173 (0.37)
Age		0.015* (0.008)		0.011 (0.009)
Race (1 = white)		-0.288 (0.187)		-0.192 (0.207)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)		0.347*** (0.115)		0.204 (0.128)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)		0.173* (0.098)		0.052 (0.109)
Employment status (1 = employed)		-0.788 (0.513)		-0.666 (0.568)
Income level		0.27*** (0.079)		0.324*** (0.087)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)		-0.001 (0.102)		0.05 (0.113)
Intercept	-0.122* (0.067)	-0.227 (0.665)	-0.075 (0.073)	-0.648 (0.737)
Observations	370	370	370	370
R2	0.054	0.156	0.045	0.119

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

The present study examined how levels of earning affect parenting evaluations through perceived devotion and perceived conflict. Specifically, it was hypothesized that different levels of earning would have a stronger effect on perceived conflict of mothers but a weaker effect on perceived devotion, compared to those of fathers. These two mechanisms then explain the effect of gender on parenting evaluations. Namely, higher levels of perceived devotion should lead to more positive ratings in parenting evaluations, and higher levels of perceived conflict should lead to more negative ratings in parenting evaluations. My results only supported positive relationships between perceived devotion and parenting evaluations, with a partial support of perceived conflict's positive association with time spent in parenting.

While not initially hypothesized, participant gender revealed interesting findings. Female participants showed a more lenient approach when rating parents, as they gave parents higher subjective ratings and perceived them as more devoted. They also associated conflict and devotion with parenting evaluations in different ways. Specifically, female participants rated parents with higher levels of conflict lower in parenting evaluations but those with higher levels of devotion higher in evaluations of parenting quality. There was no evidence of them reacting differently to different levels of earning, however.

#### *Gendered Division*

It is noteworthy that participants' estimation of time spent in parenting for mothers showed no difference across earning levels, whereas fathers' time spent in parenting was

impacted by earning levels, with higher-earning fathers perceived as spending significantly less time on parenting (Table 1). Fathers with higher earnings were also allocated significantly less time spent in parenting than their higher-earning female counterparts.

These findings may align with previous literature on motherhood epitomizing cultural conceptions of womanhood and femininity (Cuddy et al. 2004; Heilman and Okimoto 2008). As women are still considered the primary caregiver in dual-earner families, their time spent in parenting remains unaffected by earning levels, suggesting that their role in parenting cannot be substituted by their earnings. In other words, the less rigid gender roles in dual-earner families have yet to transform gendered prescriptive norms of parenting. Even when both parents are out for work and spend similar time on childcare, mothers cannot fulfill their parenting responsibilities through financial contributions to the household.

Conversely, fathers are permitted to reduce their time spent in parenting when they earn more, which is consistent with previous literature suggesting that success in fatherhood is more closely linked with breadwinning (Coltrane 2004; Randles 2018). Fathers may contribute to fathering through financially providing for the family, and the expectation of them being involved in childcare is minimal (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000; Ranson 2012). Both of which could explain why fathers with higher earnings were granted significantly less time spent in parenting than those with lower earnings.

#### *Participant Gender and Parenting Evaluations*

While there was no significant effect of target parent's gender on any study variables, analyses using participant gender generated interesting findings, with female participants being more lenient in parenting ratings. Given that the majority of the study sample were parents, it could be argued that mothers, in particular, tended to rate other parents higher than did fathers.

This phenomenon could again be attributed to the close association between motherhood and womanhood (Heilman and Okimoto 2008). As mothers usually bear a disproportionate amount of parenting responsibilities, they may empathize with the challenges faced by other employed parents, thus explaining the higher ratings they gave to parents in evaluations of parenting quality and perceived devotion. Because they are more aware of how parenting required balancing different responsibilities, they might appreciate parenting behaviors in dual-earner households more than their male counterparts.

In addition, mother's primary caregiver role provides them with more experiences in estimating the time required for parenting tasks. This experience could explain why mothers granted less time spent in parenting for parents with higher levels of perceived conflict. Because they consistently face conflict between work and family and are negatively viewed for holding both roles, they also rate those with more conflict as worse parents. Fathers, on the other hand, are typically seen as secondary caregivers who do not always face the same dilemma. They generally have less parenting experience, experience less work/family conflict, and face fewer disadvantages brought by employment in parenting evaluations. These factors could explain their higher estimation of parenting time and higher ratings of parenting quality for those with higher levels of conflict.

### *Sample Characteristics*

To conceal the true objective of the study, this study was presented to participants as research on parenting and child development. Consequently, individuals who are not parents may have hesitated to participate, resulting in an all-parent sample (100% parents). Thus, these results should be interpreted as reflecting only parents' impressions of the target parents in the vignettes.

More specifically, these results reflect attitudes on parenting from employed white parents, as 92.97% of the sample was white and 99.19% was employed.

Hence, the null effect of gender and earning level on any dependent variables could be attributed to the fact that these employed parents took into account other factors when rating parents. Their demographic characteristics may have more influences on how they perceive parents than the manipulated variables. For instance, mothers in the study tended to rate other parents higher than did fathers. The number of children and income level were also positively associated with parents' perceptions of other parents' parenting quality and time spent in parenting ( $p < .05$ ; Table 2 – Table 5, Table 8, and Table 9). These patterns suggest that parents' ratings of other parents may be impacted more by their personal experiences, with the manipulated factors not exerting strong influences in this sample.

#### *Failed Manipulation*

While I engaged in speculation to account for the null findings and lack of significance, it is important to acknowledge that these results are far from conclusive. The lack of significance was inconsistent with prior literature, and the most plausible reason for this incongruity could be attributed to a notable proportion of participants who did not pass the manipulation check. Remarkably, 36.75% of the sample ( $n = 147$ ) did not correctly identify the higher earner within the vignettes, indicating a substantial majority of participants failing to accurately discern the variance in earning levels as intended. While surprisingly high, this exclusion rate falls within the typical range of attrition rates on MTurk, which often range from 31.9% to 51% (Aguinis, Villamor, and Ramani 2021). Still, the potential lack of effective manipulation raises questions about the null findings. This high exclusion rate could account for the lack of supportive

evidence for any hypothesis related to earning levels, given the large proportion of participants failing to retain correct knowledge of parents' earning levels.

The high exclusion rate could be due to an inadequate operationalization. To reduce the length of vignettes, the manipulation of earning levels was intentionally reiterated only twice, a quantity that falls short of the usual minimum of three repetitions. Also, the manipulation relied solely on direct descriptions of "who makes more money than their partner," which could be improved by the incorporation of specific numerical values to reinforce the distinction. Moreover, these manipulations were only placed in the very beginning of vignettes, with the subsequent content primarily focusing on the alternating childcare responsibilities between the two target parents. This setup carries the risk of participants failing to retain awareness of the initial earning level distinction as they progressed through the vignettes and started to answer subsequent questions.

### *Future Directions*

While this study provides limited insight into the dynamics of gender difference in parenting evaluations, this research does suggest several directions for future research. In future research, the relative earning-level manipulated should be strengthened. Participants might better retain and engage with this information if specific numerical values were included alongside qualitative descriptions of earning differences. In addition, adjustments should be made to the content and structure of the vignettes. For example, crafting vignettes that focus less on caregiving responsibilities may help generate more findings in response to the different levels of earnings.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The hypotheses in the present study were largely not significant, yet the findings are far from conclusive due to the failed manipulation of relative earning levels. While the indirect effect of gender on parenting evaluation through perceived devotion was proven to be significant, it is still unclear how different levels of earning interact with gender and impact parenting evaluation through perceived conflict.

In conclusion, while this study has limited contributions to the understanding of the mechanisms explaining gender differences in parenting evaluation within dual-earner households, there exists various directions for future investigations. With refined vignette design and enhanced manipulation techniques, future research has the potential to unveil a more nuanced picture of the interaction between gender, earning levels, and parenting evaluations.

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## APPENDIX A

## ENDNOTES

*Note 1*

Parental status was measured but not included as a control variable in the analyses due to the substantial portion of parents in this sample. It was also omitted because of collinearity even if it was added in the analyses.

## APPENDIX B

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Correlation between Exclusion and Experimental Conditions.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Excluded	1.000		
(2) Earning level condition	-0.031	1.000	
(3) Gender condition	0.030	0.006	1.000

Notes: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$

Table 2. Demographic Differences between Those Who Were Excluded v. Those Who Were Retained.

	Excluded (n = 160)	Retained (n = 240)	Standard Error	t value	p value
Parental Status (1 = parent)	0.904	0.963	0.024	-2.402	0.017
Number of kid(s)	1.979	1.502	0.162	2.94	0.003
Age of youngest kid	6.108	6.126	0.528	-0.034	0.973
Marital Status (1 = married)	1.103	1.142	0.069	-0.563	0.574
Gender (1 = men)	1.487	1.542	0.053	-1.028	0.304
Age	31.987	31.029	0.665	1.441	0.15
Race (1 = white)	1.217	1.246	0.096	-0.304	0.761
Education level (1 = less than high school)	3.788	3.8	0.103	-0.112	0.911
Sexual orientation (1 = straight)	1.853	1.579	0.095	2.887	0.004
Employment status (full-time employed)	1.071	1.029	0.028	1.481	0.139
Income level (1 = \$0 – \$9,999)	3.833	4.208	0.141	-2.666	0.008
Political affiliation (1 = republican)	1.936	1.979	0.069	-0.629	0.53

Table 3. OLS Regression Models of Parenting Quality on Perceived Conflict.

Variables	Parenting quality	
Perceived conflict	0.002 (0.078)	0.025 (0.079)
Number of children		0.137* (0.08)
Age of child		-0.017 (0.013)
Marital status (1 = married)		0.452 (0.675)
Participants gender (1 = female)		0.29** (0.134)
Age		0.026** (0.012)
Race (1 = white)		-0.233 (0.257)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)		0.253 (0.154)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)		0.239* (0.136)
Income level		0.248** (0.106)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)		0.078 (0.141)
Intercept	0.068 (0.062)	-2.115** (0.877)
Observations	240	231
R <sup>2</sup>	0	0.154

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$ .  $N = 240$ .

Table 4. OLS Regression Models of Time Spent in Parenting on Perceived Conflict.

Variables	Time spent in parenting	
Perceived conflict	0.098 (0.082)	0.032 (0.084)
Number of children		0.293*** (0.085)
Age of child		0.01 (0.014)
Marital status (1 = married)		0.839 (0.723)
Participants gender (1 = female)		0.103 (0.143)
Age		0.002 (0.013)
Race (1 = white)		-0.021 (0.275)
Education level (1 = college degree and above)		-0.004 (0.165)
Sexual orientation (1 = heterosexual)		0.101 (0.146)
Income level		0.413*** (0.114)
Political affiliation (1 = democratic)		0.047 (0.151)
Intercept	0.001 (0.065)	-2.324** (0.939)
Observations	240	231
R <sup>2</sup>	0.006	0.119

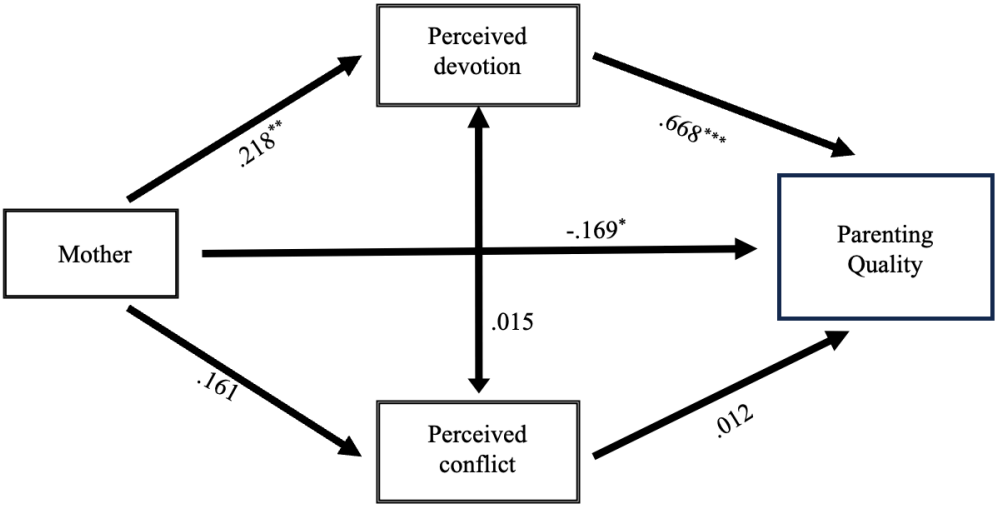
Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .1$ .  $N = 240$ .

Table 5. Indirect Effect Models of Gender of Target Parent on Parenting Evaluations through Perceived Devotion and Perceived Conflict, Using OLS Distribution for Path Modeling and Covariance.

Mediators	Parenting Quality		Time spent in Parenting	
	Indirect effect		Indirect effect	
	Coefficient [95% CI]	Percent Mediation	Coefficient (95% CI)	Percent Mediation
Perceived devotion	.145** [.03, .27]	45.89%	.068** [.01, .15]	58.62%
Perceived conflict	.002 [-.37, .03]	0.63%	.004 [-.02, .05]	3.44%
N	231			

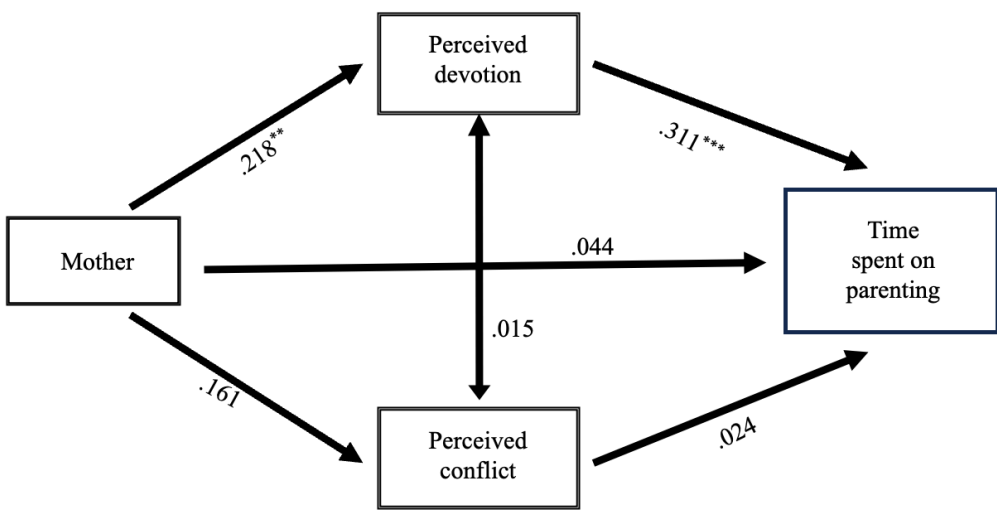
*Note: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$ . Cases with missing values on demographic variables ( $n = 9$ ) were dropped for model convergence using bootstrapping.*

Figure 1. Coefficients Using OLS Regressions of Parenting Quality, Controlling for Covariances.



\*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$   
 $N = 231$ . Cases with missingness on demographic variables ( $n = 9$ ) were dropped.  
Controlling for all demographic variables and earning level.  
Model fits indices are as follows:  $\chi^2(0) = .000$ ,  $p = .000$ ; CFI = 1.000, and RMSEA = .00, indicating good model fit. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

Figure 2. Coefficients Using OLS Regressions of Time Spent in Parenting, Controlling for Covariances.



\* $p < .10$  \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$   
 $N = 231$ . Cases with missingness on demographic variables ( $n = 9$ ) were dropped.  
Controlling for all demographic variables and earning level.  
Model fits indices are as follows:  $\chi^2(0) = .000$ ,  $p = .000$ ; CFI = 1.000, and RMSEA = .00, indicating good model fit. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.