



## **Workplace Mistreatment of Middle Class Workers Based on Sex, Parenthood, and Caregiving**

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*Research suggests that women, but not men suffer negative professional consequences if they have children. These unequal consequences can be attributed to stereotypes about women's and men's roles as caregivers and breadwinners for their families, respectively. Two field studies of workplace mistreatment among middle-class employees examined whether fathers who violate these gender stereotypes by actively caregiving for their families suffer negative consequences at work. Study 1 (N = 232) examined not man enough harassment (being derogated as insufficiently masculine) and Study 2 (N = 451) examined general forms of mistreatment. Results showed that caregiving fathers experience more harassment and mistreatment than traditional fathers and than men without children. Women without children experience more harassment and mistreatment than mothers, and mothers who spend less time on caregiving experience more harassment and mistreatment than mothers who spend more time on caregiving. We discuss implications for theory and practice.*

Plenty of anecdotes exist about men getting teased and put down if they take leave, exercise flexible work options, or signal in other ways that they take care of children. An employee at a public utility company who took 3 weeks off when his second child was born explained, "Comments were made and my work

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wasn't being covered . . . It made me feel like I wasn't a 'man' if I choose to stay home and take care of the kids. This same attitude manifests when I ask to take time off so I can take the kids to the doctor" (Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996). An MBA student told us that when he took leave to care for his newborn after his physician wife took hers, he received phone calls and emails throughout the day from coworkers who expected him to keep working. His wife had not faced such expectations during her leave. In academic circles, we hear men, but not women, faculty derided for taking parental leave: Men are suspected of using their leave to avoid teaching and to concentrate on writing and publishing instead of caring for their child(ren), whereas women's leave-taking tends to be viewed as legitimate. Over dinner a corporate executive shared his experience of receiving raised eyebrows and looks of derision when announcing he could not attend an after-hours meeting because he had to be home to care for his three children.

If men and women face such different reactions to taking family leave and caring for their children, this suggests a form of sex discrimination that may be uniquely harmful to men. We know already that professional women with children face drastic career penalties: Working mothers are "mommy tracked," stereotyped as incompetent, and passed over for promotions, regardless of their qualifications or performance (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Dodson, 2013; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004; Stone & Hernandez, 2013). Fatherhood, on the other hand, generally appears to not harm (Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004), and even to benefit (Fuegen et al., 2004), professional men. This fatherhood benefit can be attributed to the stereotype that men become even more dedicated to work after having children because they are breadwinners for their families (Hodges & Budig, 2010).

But what if a man does not behave like a traditional father, and instead actively takes care of his children? Does he experience backlash at work that traditional fathers do not? Is he treated as badly as a working mother, or does he face worse, or unique forms of, backlash? Preliminary evidence from vignette experiments suggests that fathers who take leave might be especially stigmatized at work (Allen & Russell, 1999; Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqi, 2013; Wayne & Cordiero, 2003). A recent analysis of national longitudinal data shows that men who quit work or were unemployed for family reasons ended up earning significantly less later on than other men (Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, & Stewart, 2013). We seek to establish how working fathers who are not on leave but are active caregivers at home get treated in the workplace. We conducted two field studies of middle-class employees to gain insight into the contingencies faced by most working women and men, as most studies to date have focused on managerial and upper-class professions (e.g., Blair-Loy, 2009; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004; Vandello et al., 2013; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006; see Dodson, 2009, 2013 for exceptions).

We focus our analysis on common acts of social mistreatment, such as being teased, put down, or excluded by coworkers. Such acts provide the most immediate and informal feedback to employees about their social approval and status at work (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006). We expect that a close and systematic look at everyday acts of mistreatment experienced by employees in their work environments will reveal that these social contingencies at work serve to pull men out of the home and push women into it (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Stone, 2007; Williams, 2010; Williams, Manvell, & Bornstein, 2006).

Our first study focused on a specific form of mistreatment aimed at men who violate traditional gender roles: Not man enough harassment, which involves derogating a target for being insufficiently masculine or too feminine (Berdahl et al., 1996; Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1998). We surveyed unionized employees about their experiences of not man enough harassment and examined whether men experienced more of it as the amount of childcare they performed at home increased. We conducted a second study to broaden our lens on more general forms of mistreatment. We surveyed public service employees at a large organization about their experiences of a variety of forms of mistreatment at work, and examined whether this mistreatment varied as a function of employee sex, parental status, and domestic chores. We present our studies after reviewing the literature informing our hypotheses.

### **Mothers and Fathers at Work**

People tend to assume that women and men play stereotypical roles when it comes to parenting: Women are expected to take on the majority of caregiving responsibilities for children, consistent with the traditional role of homemaker, and men are expected to put career first to maximize their income, consistent with the traditional role of provider or breadwinner. Terms like “mommy brain” reflect the idea that women’s attention is scattered after having children because they can no longer focus solely on their work, or be counted on by their employer(s) to be there when needed, due to women’s primary responsibility for meeting children’s needs. Terms like “breadwinner” and “provider” are often applied to fathers, who are assumed to have a wife who manages the care of his children at home while he focuses on his work and provides the family’s income.

Consistent with such stereotyping, laboratory experiments show that professional mothers are evaluated as less competent and worthy of hiring, promotion, and salaries than professional fathers who have identical qualifications and levels of performance (Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004). Court cases suggest the motherhood penalty is both real and costly. For example, Kelly Voelker, vice president at Deutsche Bank, returned to work after a maternity leave to consistently receive higher performance ratings than her male peers. Despite this, Voelker was passed over for promotion for 13 years as lower-performing

men were promoted within 3–5 years. Seeing no other way out of her conundrum, Voelker sued for sex discrimination, attributing her lack of promotion to her status as a mother (Stempel, 2011). In another high profile case, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission sued Bloomberg LP for discriminating against pregnant women and new mothers. The suit included insulting quotes about working mothers made by senior officials at Bloomberg, which allegedly fired, demoted, or failed to promote women once they became mothers.

Another way of looking at the motherhood penalty and the fatherhood benefit is to compare mothers and fathers to women and men without children. One study showed that mothers are especially disadvantaged compared to women without children, who are seen as the most competent employees of all (Cuddy et al., 2004). Women without children may be seen as particularly driven and dedicated to their career—willing to forego the personal fulfillment of parenthood for the ambition of professional success. This may also be why this same study showed that professional women without children are viewed as interpersonally cold. Fathers, on the other hand, were evaluated as more competent, warm, and fit for promotion than men without children. Such laboratory studies, able to hold employee qualifications and performance constant, clearly demonstrate the penalty to women who become parents compared to men who do and to women and men who do not (Correll et al., 2007).

### *Changing Family Roles*

Increasingly, traditional assumptions about mothers and fathers are likely to be incongruent with reality. In the United States, women now earn a majority of Bachelor's, Master's, and even Doctoral degrees (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) and women's representation in traditionally male-dominated professions and ranks, including medicine, law, politics, management, and academia, has increased significantly. In contrast to upper-class households, during the past few decades the real income gains of middle-class households have been small (Feller & Stone, 2009), necessitating dual-income households and changes in work/family arrangements among men and women. During the recent recession, almost three men lost their job for every woman who did, largely as the manufacturing sector declined and the service sector grew (Hymowitz, 2012). Although women are still significantly underrepresented at the top of companies (Catalyst, 2013), women recently made up a larger proportion of the workforce than men for the first time in American history (Mulligan, 2010).

These trends contribute to the fact that 22% of married women in the United States now earn more than their spouse, compared to 4% in 1970 (Pew Research Center, 2010). Forty percent of wives in dual-earner households earn as much or more than their husbands (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2003; Freeman,

2000). The majority (71%) of women with children under 18 participate in the labor force, and most work full time (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Consistent with economic incentives, families tend to maximize their highest earner's work opportunities, with lower-earning spouses covering more of the domestic chores at home (e.g., Gupta, 2007). These shifting gender economics mean that fathers are increasingly staying home, taking leave, or working flexibly to care for their children, while mothers are increasingly working long hours in demanding jobs.

Childcare and housework, however, is still viewed as low-status “women's work.” In a culture that valorizes masculinity and its components—such as individual ambition and credit, and institutional power and earnings—taking time out of one's day or career to care for children is dismissively framed as a “choice” or a “luxury” that few can afford. Traditionally performed by unpaid wives or low-wage workers, childcare and housework are not activities that are recognized with a company title or upon a résumé. Childcare in particular appears to be low in status. Earnings for childcare workers are lower than earnings for workers who perform other tasks traditionally covered by housewives, such as cooks, taxi drivers, janitors (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), house cleaners, and even dog walkers (see PayScale, 2012). Research suggests that this is because childcare is a particularly gendered, or feminized, task (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002). The vast majority of child caregivers are women, whereas cooks, taxi drivers, and janitors tend to be men (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Like a man who wears feminine attire, a man who engages in the highly feminized activity of caring for his children may be disrespected and teased for being insufficiently masculine. Men who are judged to be less masculine are accorded lower status and respect than men who are judged as more masculine (e.g., Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Kimmel, 2007; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008; Vandello et al., 2013). Traditional fathers may enjoy a fatherhood benefit in the workplace because they conform to traditional notions of masculinity, but fathers who actively care for their children may be viewed as insufficiently masculine and be less likely to enjoy the status perks that fatherhood affords men.

### *Workplace Mistreatment*

The most immediate feedback about how those in our work environments view us is how they treat us. When others ignore or exclude us, tease or insult us, or threaten or bribe us, they convey dislike or disrespect. Such mistreatment serves as a warning sign that our status at work is in peril, and that we may suffer loss of reputation, assistance, promotion, or even employment. Workplace mistreatment is often used to punish those who have transgressed unwritten social rules or who

have violated valued norms and identities (e.g., Berdahl, 2007a; Brodsky, 1976). For these reasons, employees are sensitive to and aware of being mistreated in their work environments, and are motivated to do what they can to avoid mistreatment.

Research shows that gender “deviants” are subjected to significantly higher levels of workplace mistreatment than gender conformers. Women in gender atypical occupations (Berdahl, 2007b; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman, & Drasgow, 1999; Gruber, 1998; Mansfield, Koch, Henderson, & Vicary, 1991), women with gender atypical personalities (Berdahl, 2007b), and individuals with gender atypical sexual preferences (Konik & Cortina, 2008; Waldo et al., 1998) are significantly more likely than others to be sexually harassed at work. Most research has focused on women’s experiences of sexual harassment, but research on men suggests that men are harassed at work by having their courage, strength, sexuality, or some other aspect of their masculinity questioned (Berdahl et al., 1996; Waldo et al., 1998). Court records support the idea that men who do not conform to masculine stereotypes or ideals are subjected to severe forms of harassment at work (Franke, 1997; EEOC v. The McPherson Companies, Inc., 2011). There is also evidence that more general, or nongender-specific, forms of mistreatment are levied against those who violate gender roles, such as sabotage against individuals who excel at gender atypical tasks (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004) and general mistreatment of employees with gender atypical personalities (Berdahl, Ramarajan, & Moon, 2013).

In short, workplace mistreatment functions to penalize workers who do not stay within the confines of traditional gender roles at work (Berdahl, 2007b). What about the failure to conform to gender roles outside of work? Gender atypical activity in the home may not be as immediately obvious to coworkers as having a gender atypical job or personality. Because prior research shows that parental status can influence evaluations of an employee, however, knowledge of an employee’s parental status and caregiving activities at home may influence perceptions of that employee and therefore how he or she is treated at work.

### **Ideal Men, Ideal Women, and Ideal Workers: Predictions for Workplace Mistreatment**

As a penalty for violating valued identities and roles, most mistreatment should target employees who violate injunctive gender and work norms. For men, these norms are congruent; for women they are not. Men, like employees in general, tend to be evaluated according to their professional dedication and competence; women, on the other hand, tend to be evaluated according to their personal warmth (e.g., Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Townsend, 2002). Because men and workers are judged based on competence, and competence elicits respect (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002), we posit that the main

**Table 1.** Predictions for Workplace Mistreatment at Work as a Function of Gender and Childcare

Child caregiving	Male employee	Female employee
No children	Good worker but mediocre man	Good worker but failed woman
	<i>Somewhat disrespected</i>	<i>Respected but very disliked</i>
Low caregiving	Moderate mistreatment	High mistreatment
	Good worker and good man	Mediocre worker and bad woman
	<i>Respected</i>	<i>Somewhat disrespected and disliked</i>
High caregiving	Low mistreatment	Moderate to high mistreatment
	Bad worker and failed man	Bad worker but good woman
	<i>Disrespected</i>	<i>Disrespected but liked</i>
	High mistreatment	Moderate mistreatment

*Note.* Ideals for workers and for men are based on competence. Competence elicits respect. Workers and men are therefore judged based on perceptions of their competence and the result of these judgments is respect. Ideals for women, however, are based on warmth. Warmth elicits liking. Women are therefore judged based on perceptions of their warmth and the result of this judgment is liking.

determinant of social approval and treatment for working men is respect. Men who are respected should enjoy social approval and positive treatment, whereas men who are disrespected should receive disapproval and mistreatment. Because women are judged based on perceptions of their warmth, and warmth elicits liking (Fiske et al., 2002), we posit that the main determinant of social approval and treatment for women is whether they are liked. Women who are liked should enjoy social approval and positive interpersonal treatment (even if they are evaluated as less competent), whereas women who are disliked should experience disapproval and mistreatment. Our predictions are summarized in Table 1.

*Predictions for Men*

*Traditional fathers.* Being a “real man” means being heterosexual, virile, dominant, and competent (Connell, 2005). Having a family at home establishes a man’s heterosexuality and virility. Focusing on work rather than spending time caregiving signals his economic dominance at home and establishes him as a dedicated and reliable worker. Therefore, employed men with children who spend little time on childcare or domestic chores are likely to be seen both as good men and as good workers, and to be respected and well treated at work. These traditional men should experience particularly low rates of mistreatment (see Table 1).

Other of employees—men who take care of children, men without children, women with children, and women without children—fail to meet gender ideals, worker ideals, or both. These employees should therefore experience higher levels of mistreatment than traditional men.

*Caregiving fathers.* Employed men with children who spend a relatively large amount of time caring for them violate ideals for men as well as for workers. Men who do the low-status “feminine” work of childcare and housework are likely to be seen as failed men. They are also likely to be seen as having their dedication split between work and home, and therefore as bad workers. Though as fathers these men have established their heterosexual virility, they are likely to be seen as “wimps” who are not sufficiently dominant at home to have a woman doing most or all of the caregiving. Insulting terms for such a man includes “henpecked” and being told his wife “wears the pants” in the family (i.e., plays the traditional male role). Even comedies like “Daddy Daycare” (2003) and “What to Expect When You’re Expecting” (2012) make fun of men who, through accident or misfortune, end up being primary caregivers to children. In addition to being seen as failed men, caregiving fathers are also likely to be seen as bad workers. Like working mothers, they should be suspected of having split devotions between work and family and seen as unreliable and incompetent. We therefore predict that caregiving fathers experience high levels of social disrespect and mistreatment in their places of work.

*Men without children.* Men who do not have children are likely to fall between traditional fathers and caregiving fathers in terms of their masculine performance. On the one hand, men without children have not proven their heterosexual virility by becoming fathers, but on the other hand, they also have not lowered themselves to the stigmatized role of caregiver. They should therefore be seen as mediocre, rather than as good or as failed, men. We predict that men without children are viewed similarly to traditional fathers in terms of their standing as workers because their attention and time can be devoted entirely to their workplace responsibilities. Therefore, men without children are likely to be seen as good workers but as mediocre men, and therefore to be somewhat disrespected and mistreated in the workplace, falling between the high level of respect given to traditional fathers and the low level directed at caregiving ones.

### *Predictions for Women*

*Caregiving mothers.* Women employees who take time out of their work schedules or day to care for their children are likely to be seen as good women but as bad employees. Professional women with children are viewed as warm, and therefore as likeable, but are also judged to be incompetent, and thus are disrespected (Cuddy et al., 2004). Being liked may protect women who care for their children from mistreatment, but the disrespect caregiving mothers are likely to elicit as workers should result in moderate levels of mistreatment, especially when compared to the low levels directed at traditional men.

*Nontraditional mothers.* Women employees with children who do relatively little childcare or housework are likely to be more respected as workers than women who do more childcare and housework, but nontraditional mothers also likely to be disliked as women (Benard & Correll, 2010). Employed mothers who signal a primary devotion to work by spending little time with their children or on domestic chores are likely to be seen as bad mothers and as bad women. This, in turn, should cause them to be viewed as cold and to be disliked. Nontraditional mothers are also not likely to be fully respected as workers because they are mothers (Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004). Therefore, these nontraditional mothers should experience relatively high levels of mistreatment.

*Women without children.* Finally, working women who do not have children may be viewed as ideal workers but are also likely to be viewed as failed women if they are of typical childbearing age or beyond. Throughout history, derogatory terms like “old maid,” “spinster,” and “barren” have been applied to women who do not marry or have children. Today, professional women without children may be viewed as relatively competent but also quite cold (Cuddy et al., 2004), and are therefore likely to be respected as workers but disliked as women. We therefore predict that working women who do not have children are subject to particularly high amounts of mistreatment in the workplace compared to other women.

The bulk of prior research has examined perceptions of hypothetical, or “paper thin,” workers, and how these perceptions depend on a worker’s sex, parental status, and in some cases leave-taking. In real world settings, employees who work together over time are likely to have much more information than this, including information about their personal lives. Employees may share stories about what they do in the evening and on weekends, and information about time spent with family and children. We propose that knowledge of an employee’s caregiving activities may be even more important than knowledge of that employee’s parental status, as caregiving activities may be especially relevant to establishing gender and work identities.

We analyzed data from two field studies to test our hypotheses. Both samples involved middle-class occupations that typically require a high school diploma or some university but not a graduate degree. We surveyed union workers at various organizations in Study 1 and public service workers in Study 2. Both studies took place in the same major metropolitan area in the northeast. In Study 1 we asked employees about their experiences of not man enough harassment, which seemed the most likely form of mistreatment to be levied against men for violating traditional gender roles. In Study 2, we broadened our lens to include a wide variety of forms of mistreatment to see whether workplace mistreatment in general is primarily directed against nontraditional men and women.

## Study 1: Not Man Enough Harassment against Union Workers in a Female-Dominated Workforce

### *Procedure and Participants*

A union mailed our survey to the home addresses of about 750 of its members who worked in various organizations (ranging in size between 50 and 150 employees) in the same major metropolitan area. The mailing included a letter from the union explaining the study and encouraging the workers to complete the survey and mail it to the independent academic researcher in a preaddressed and postage-paid envelope. Workers were assured that their responses would be anonymous. Those returning a completed survey were paid \$20 for their time.

Just under one third (232) of the union members returned completed surveys. This represents a good response rate for voluntary mail-in surveys (Fox, Crask, & Kim, 1988; Krosnick, 1999) and for surveys that address negative interpersonal experiences such as workplace harassment (e.g., Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Gold, & Ormerod, 1988; Low, Radhakrishnan, Schneider, & Rounds, 2007; Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000). Of those who completed the survey, 33% were men, consistent with the proportion of men who were mailed a survey (35%). Modal income was \$30,000–\$45,000 per year. Most workers were 30–39 years (31%) or 40–49 years old (35%), or of child-rearing age. Half of the sample (51%) had children at home: 48% of the women and 52% of the men. Modal tenure was 10–19 years. The largest ethnic group was White (48%), followed by Asian (28%), Black (16%), and 5% or fewer identifying another group. See Table 2 for sample descriptive statistics.

**Table 2.** Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlation Coefficients, and Reliabilities of Main Variables

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Education	226	3.66	1.63	–						
2 Tenure	232	3.76	1.41	–.36***	–					
3 Non-White	232	.52	.50	.17*	–.20**	–				
4 Man	232	.33	.47	–.13	.55***	–.14*	–			
5 Kids at home	232	.49	.50	–.07	.05	.11	.03	–		
6 Childcare per week	232	2.07	2.89	–.09	.02	.02	–.02	.43***	–	
7 Not man enough harassment	232	.50	.65	.05	.04	.17*	.05	–.03	.01	(.61)

*Note.* Reliabilities are shown along the diagonal in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### Measures

*Sex.* Respondents indicated whether they were male (1) or female (0).

*Children at home.* Respondents indicated whether they had children living with them at home (0 = no, 1 = yes).

*Caregiving.* Respondents indicated how many hours (1 = 0 hours, 2 = 1–3 hours, or 3 = 4 or more hours) they spent caring for the children in their home on an average workday ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) and on an average day off ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ). Workday and day off hours were highly correlated ( $r = .72$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and were therefore combined to compute average hours spent on childcare per week. Based on the typical work week of 5 workdays and 2 days off, we multiplied average workday hours by five, average day off hours by two, added these products together, and divided their sum by seven.

*Not man enough harassment.* Respondents indicated how often they experienced four forms of harassment in their work environment in the past 2 years, from 0 = *Never*, 1 = *Once or twice*, 2 = *A few times*, 3 = *Several times*, to 4 = *Most of the time*: (1) Made you feel like you were not tough enough (e.g., assertive, strong, or ambitious enough) for the job, (2) Made you feel you needed to act more tough and aggressive to be respected, (3) Made it necessary for you to sacrifice family or personal time to be respected at work, and (4) Made fun of you for being soft-spoken or shy. Responses to the four items were averaged to measure harassment ( $M = .50$ ,  $SD = .65$ ;  $\alpha = .61$ ).

*Controls.* We controlled for tenure in the organization (1 = less than 6 months, 2 = 6 months to 2 years, 3 = 2–5 years, 4 = 6–9 years, 5 = 10–19 years, 6 = 20 years or more), level of education (1 = some high school or less, 2 = high school diploma or equivalent, 3 = high school diploma plus some technical training or apprenticeship, 4 = some university, no degree, 5 = graduated from university [BA, BS, or equivalent], 6 = some graduate school, and 7 = graduate or professional degree [e.g., MA, MS, JD, MD, EdD, PhD]), and ethnic minority status (0 = White, 1 = Non-White). These variables are likely to relate to formal or informal status in the organization and thus employees' likelihoods to be harassed.

### Results

*Masculinity harassment by sex and children.* We first conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to test whether there was an interaction between sex and having children for predicting the amount of harassment experienced

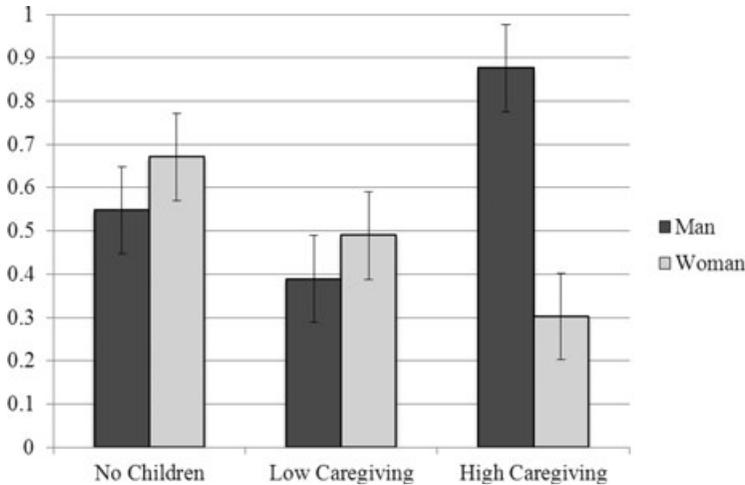


Fig. 1. Masculinity harassment by sex, children, and caregiving.

by the workers. This interaction was not significant ( $F(1,225) = .16, ns$ ). There was no main effect for sex ( $F(1,225) = 1.30, ns$ ) or for having children at home ( $F(1,225) = 1.19, ns$ ). The only control variable that was significant was ethnic minority status: Non-Whites reported significantly more not man enough harassment than Whites ( $F(1,225) = 7.77, p = .006$ ).

*Harassment by sex, children, and caregiving.* With a second ANCOVA, we added amount of childcare (median-split, where 0 = *below median childcare*, 1 = *above median childcare*) as an independent variable to see if the relative amount of childcare performed by those with children predicted the amount of masculinity harassment they experienced at work and compared to workers without children. Amount of childcare is a continuous variable, making regression a more fine-tuned approach than ANCOVA for analyzing its effects on mistreatment. However, results for regression and ANCOVA analyses were similar and the latter are more straightforward to plot and interpret. There was a significant three-way interaction between sex, children, and childcare ( $F(1,225) = 3.86, p \leq .05$ ). As Figure 1 shows, fathers who engaged in a high amount of childcare experienced significantly more harassment ( $M = .88, SD = 2.71$ ) than other men, and especially more not man enough harassment than traditional fathers who did little childcare ( $M = .39, SD = 1.95$ ) (Cohen's  $d = .20$ ). Also consistent with our predictions, women without children experienced more harassment ( $M = .67, SD = 2.86$ ) than other women, especially compared to mothers who performed a high amount of childcare ( $M = .30, SD = 1.65$ ) (Cohen's  $d = .28$ ).

*Discussion*

The results of this study largely support our predictions. Caregiving fathers were subjected to the highest rates of not man enough harassment, followed by women without children. Caregiving fathers experienced more not man enough harassment than men with no children and traditional fathers; women without children were harassed more than mothers.

This sample primarily involved workers at female-dominated organizations and examined a particular form of mistreatment that may be specifically designed to derogate men: not man enough harassment. Prior research has shown that women experience masculinity this type of harassment as well (Berdahl & Moore, 2006), but it may be especially pertinent to men who violate traditional gender roles (Berdahl et al., 1996; Waldo et al., 1998). We observed that not man enough harassment experiences among employees in mostly female-dominated jobs generally fit our predictions for mistreatment, suggesting that women as well as men perpetrate this form of harassment and tend to target it at men and women who violate gender roles for caregiving.

To see whether these results generalize to male-dominated organizations and to mistreatment in general, we conducted a second study of employees in a male-dominated occupation and examined their experiences of a variety of forms of general mistreatment. Combining different forms of mistreatment provides a bigger picture of negative social treatment employees may experience at work. When mistreatment in general is examined, different patterns of mistreatment by sex, parental status, and caregiving may be observed.

### **Study 2: General Mistreatment of Public Service Workers in a Male-Dominated Workforce**

*Procedure and Participants*

Surveys were delivered by internal mail to employees at a large, male-dominated public service organization in the same metropolitan area as the sample in Study 1. Only employees above entry-level (i.e., level 2 or above in a 9-level organizational hierarchy) were included to ensure they had sufficient time at the organization to comment on their treatment at work. A letter from the head of human resources accompanied the survey, in which he expressed his support for the survey and encouraged employees to complete it. The letter assured employees that the survey was entirely voluntary and confidential and was being conducted by a team of independent academic researchers. A monetary reward of \$1,000 was given to the unit of the organization with the highest response rate to purchase a

**Table 3.** Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlation Coefficients, and Reliabilities of Main Variables

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Education	434	3.97	1.28	–						
Tenure	450	22.95	7.62	–.05	–					
Non-White	435	.11	.32	.06	–.17***	–				
Man	446	.81	.39	–.07	.19***	.07	–			
Parent	406	.91	.28	–.02	.11*	–.03	.21***	–		
Domestic chores	422	4.54	3.22	–.03	–.28***	.06	–.09	.15**	–	
General mistreatment	449	.42	.73	.04	–.03	.07	–.16**	–.02	.05	(.91)

Note. Reliabilities are shown along the diagonal in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

collective gift, and everyone who completed the survey was entered into a lottery for one \$100 gift certificate.

Among the 1,310 surveys delivered, over one third (451) were completed and mailed directly to the researchers in the addressed and postage prepaid envelope provided. This response rate was higher than the organization had expected based on prior surveys its employees had been asked to complete, which had yielded response rates of 10–15%. Our response rate was also quite good for a mail-in survey and for surveys that address negative interpersonal experiences such as workplace harassment (e.g., Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fox et al., 1988; Krosnick, 1999; Low et al., 2007; Schneider et al., 2000). Of those who completed the survey, 81% were men, reflecting the highly male dominated composition of this workforce. The average age of respondents was 46.55 ( $SD = 7.69$ ). Most of the employees (91%) had children (77% of the women and 94% of the men). A majority of the sample had attended “Some university” (28%) or earned a “Bachelor degree” (31%). The average tenure of respondents in the organization was 22.95 years ( $SD = 7.62$ ). Most respondents identified themselves as White (88%), approximately 6% identified as Asian, 3% as Black, and the remaining 3% identified another category. See Table 3 for sample descriptive statistics.

### Measures

*Sex.* Respondents indicated whether they were male (1) or female (0).

*Children.* Respondents were asked if they had children (0 = no, 1 = yes).

*Caregiving.* After providing information about children, respondents were asked to indicate how many hours they spend on domestic-related tasks (childcare,

household tasks, meal preparation) on an average workday and how many hours they spend on these tasks on an average nonworkday. Workday and nonworkday hours were highly correlated ( $r = .78, p < .001$ ) and were thus combined to compute average domestic chores. Based on the typical week of five workdays and two nonworkdays, average domestic chores was calculated by multiplying the number of hours on an average workday by five, the number of hours on an average nonworkday by two, adding these two products, and dividing their sum by seven.

*General mistreatment.* To capture a variety of forms of general mistreatment that employees can experience at work, 23 items were adapted from scales designed to measure general forms of workplace aggression (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994; Keashly & Neuman, 2004; Rospenda & Richman, 2004), incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001), and bullying (Einarsen, 2000) (see Appendix). These items consisted of acts of exclusion (ignoring or excluding an employee), derogation (insults, slander, and humiliation), and coercion (bribing, threatening, and pressuring). Respondents were asked how often in the past 6 months they had experienced each form of mistreatment from someone(s) at work (0 = *Never*, 1 = *Once or twice*, 2 = *3 or 4 times*, 3 = *5 or more times*). This time frame was considerably shorter than the 2-year time frame given for not man enough harassment in Study 1, allowing for more specificity about frequency (e.g., “3 or 4 times” as opposed to “A few times” or “Several times”; Gutek et al., 2004). It is easier to estimate what happened in the past 6 months than in the past 2 years, and therefore this time frame should have also provided more accurate answers.

If respondents experienced a form of mistreatment at least once, they were asked to indicate how negative (e.g., bothersome, stressful, irritating) the experience was for them (0 = *not at all negative*, 1 = *somewhat negative*, 2 = *negative*, 3 = *very negative*). This allowed us to gauge how mistreated the employee felt, rather than assuming the experience was equally mistreating for all employees. General mistreatment was then calculated for each item by multiplying its frequency (0–3) by appraisal (0–3), and these 23 products were averaged to measure overall mistreatment ( $\alpha = .91$ ; cf. Berdahl & Raver, 2011).

*Controls.* As in Study 1, we controlled for education (1 = *some high school or less*, 2 = *high school diploma or equivalent*, 3 = *high school diploma plus some technical training or apprenticeship*, 4 = *some university (no degree)*, 5 = *graduated from university [e.g., BA, BSc]*, 6 = *some graduate school*, and 7 = *graduate or professional degree [e.g., MA, MS, JD, MD, PhD]*), organizational tenure (in years), and ethnic minority status (1 = *Non-White*, 0 = *White*), as these variables are likely to relate to formal or informal status in the organization and thus employees’ likelihoods to be mistreated.

## Results

*Mistreatment by sex and children.* Our first ANCOVA on mistreatment as a function of sex and children revealed a significant main effect for sex ( $F(1,387) = 13.95, p < .001$ ). Women experienced significantly more mistreatment ( $M = .78, SD = 2.17$ ) than men ( $M = .27, SD = 1.58$ ) in this organization (Cohen's  $d = .37$ ). The interaction between sex and children was also significant ( $F(1,387) = 4.33, p < .05$ ). Women without children experienced more mistreatment ( $M = .95, SD = 3.74$ ) than mothers ( $M = .62, SD = 1.97$ ) (Cohen's  $d = .46$ ), and fathers experienced more mistreatment ( $M = .39, SD = 0.79$ ) than men without children ( $M = .14, SD = 3.15$ ) (Cohen's  $d = .32$ ).

*Mistreatment by sex, children, and caregiving.* Our second ANCOVA on mistreatment as a function of sex, children, and domestic chores (median split) showed that the main effect for sex ( $F(1,304) = 46.55, p < .001$ ) remained significant. Similar to the amount of childcare in Study 1, hours spent on domestic chores in Study 2 is a continuous variable, making regression a richer approach than ANCOVA for analyzing the effects of domestic chores on mistreatment. Similar to Study 1, however, results for regression and ANCOVA analyses were similar, and the latter are more straightforward to plot and interpret. All two-way interactions (sex by children, sex by domestic chores, and children by domestic chores) were also significant ( $F(1,304) = 21.78, 12.02, \text{ and } 27.10$ , respectively, all  $p \leq .001$ ), as was the three-way interaction between sex, children, and domestic chores ( $F(1,304) = 28.54, p < .001$ ). Plots of the estimated marginal means (see Figure 2) show that women without children experienced by far the most mistreatment ( $M = 2.71, SD = 5.94$ ), followed by mothers who did few domestic chores ( $M = 1.16, SD = 3.32$ ), and mothers who did a lot ( $M = .46, SD = 2.61$ ) (Cohen's  $d = 1.11$ ). Fathers who did a lot of domestic chores experienced more mistreatment ( $M = .39, SD = 1.05$ ) than fathers who did little ( $M = .33, SD = 1.05$ ) and than men without children ( $M = .20, SD = 3.32$ ), who experienced the least mistreatment of all (Cohen's  $d = .09$ ).

## Discussion

For men in this organization, being a caregiving father resulted in the highest rate of mistreatment, just as being a caregiving father in Study 1 resulted in the highest rate of not man enough harassment. Men without children, however, experienced slightly lower rates of general mistreatment in this Study, whereas in Study 1 they fell between traditional and caregiving fathers. In this organization, being a father made a man more vulnerable to mistreatment than not having children.

For women in this organization, having no children resulted in higher rates of mistreatment than being a noncaregiving mother, which resulted in higher rates

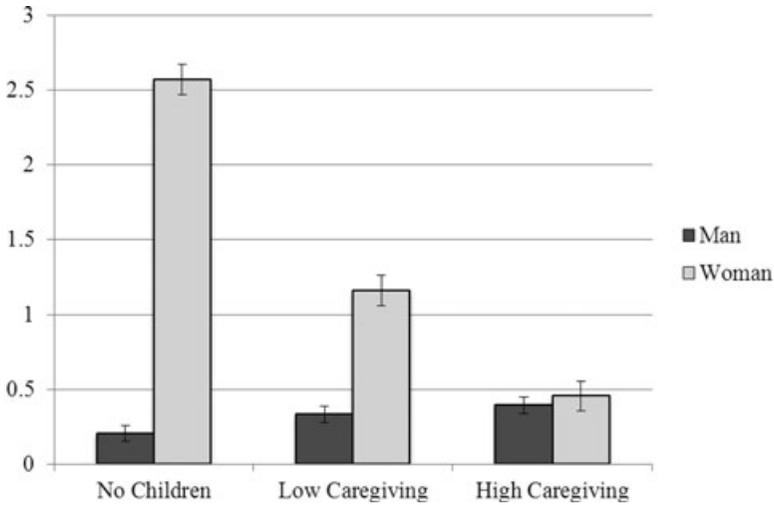


Fig. 2. General workplace mistreatment by sex, children, and caregiving.

of mistreatment than being a caregiving mother. This is similar to the pattern of harassment observed in Study 1: the more women violated notions of what it means to be a good woman, the more women were mistreated at work. The key difference between the two studies is that women without children experienced the most mistreatment of all employees by quite a margin in Study 2, whereas in Study 1 it was caregiving fathers who experienced more not man enough harassment than other workers. Again, this is likely due to the fact that we studied a male-dominated organization and measured general mistreatment. In sum, being a mother, especially being a caregiving mother, made women less vulnerable to mistreatment than not having children in both studies, while the opposite pattern was observed for men.

The patterns of mistreatment by parenthood and domestic chores observed in this study were highly similar to the patterns of not man enough harassment by parenthood and childcare observed in Study 2—within sex. The overwhelmingly higher level of mistreatment experienced by women in this highly male-dominated organization shifted patterns for overall mistreatment. Including appraisals in our calculation of mistreatment did not raise women’s scores relative to men’s, as analyses with frequencies alone showed the same pattern. The gender shift in Study 2 is likely the result of two things: First, that we measured general acts of mistreatment—such as ignoring, exclusion, derogation, sabotage, threats, and bribes—rather than limiting our analysis to harassment; and second, that we studied employees in a male-dominated context, where women are more likely than men to be mistreated (e.g., Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Björkqvist, Österman,

& Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Cortina, et al., 2001; Gruber, 1998; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008).

### General Discussion

This is the first set of studies to show that workplace mistreatment is systematically related to employees' gender performance outside the workplace and inside the home. Our results showed that women who violated traditional gender roles by not having children, or by not actively caring for them outside of work, experienced more mistreatment than more caregiving mothers. Men who violated traditional gender roles by actively caring for children outside the home, in contrast, experienced more workplace mistreatment than men who did not actively care for children.

Rather than finding more evidence for a motherhood penalty and a fatherhood benefit at work, documented for discrete employment decisions in vignette experiments and audit studies, we found almost the opposite pattern for employee experiences of mistreatment at work. Rather than a motherhood penalty, we found a motherhood benefit: Working mothers, especially those who did relatively high amounts of childcare and housework in the home, experienced less mistreatment than did women without children. Rather than a fatherhood benefit, we found a fatherhood penalty for dads who did relatively high amounts of childcare and domestic chores. These caregiving fathers experienced the most not man enough harassment and mistreatment among men. Thus, the fatherhood benefit appears to be limited to traditional fathers, who do relatively little caregiving in the home.

The key distinction between the current studies and prior research on the motherhood penalty and fatherhood benefit is that our studies examined everyday treatment at work among coworkers, rather than decisions about pay and promotion. This research should not be interpreted as an indictment, or a contradiction, to past research on the motherhood penalty and the fatherhood benefit. Working mothers who are highly involved in caregiving in their homes may be treated with relative kindness in their everyday work lives while at the same time less likely than other employees to receive pay and promotions in recognition of their work. Such mothers may be seen as good women, and thus treated kindly, but as bad employees, and thus not promoted. Traditional fathers, who are likely to be seen as both good men and good employees, may experience both good treatment and promotions, while nontraditional fathers, who are neither seen as good men nor as good employees, may experience both mistreatment and career stagnation.

A further distinction between the current studies and prior research is the focus on middle-class workers. During the past few decades, the real income of middle-class workers has not increased at the same rapid pace as income earned by elite

professionals. Women have made significant strides in the general workforce, but less so in jobs at the top of organizations (e.g., only 3.6% of Fortune 500 CEOs; Catalyst, 2012). Upper-class households may be able to afford (and choose) to enact a clear division of work/family labor—typically a male breadwinner and female caregiver—that middle-class households cannot. A qualitative study comparing fathering by upper-class (physicians) and middle-class (emergency medical technicians) men, for example, found that the middle-class men were significantly more involved in the daily care of their children than their upper-class counterparts (Shows & Gerstel, 2009). Those at the top of organizations may disproportionately shape gender expectations and stereotypes (Fiske, 1993), even if their experiences are increasingly at odds with most workers. The current studies suggest that traditional gender stereotypes continue to shape the treatment of middle-class employees.

The results of this research suggest that after one or two decades at an organization (the average tenure of employees in these studies), most employees are systematically judged, and treated, based on how well they conform to traditional family roles. Such contingent treatment is likely to be a powerful force of social control. If men and women are punished with social disapproval and negative treatment when they fail to conform to traditional family roles, they are likely to feel pressured to conform to these roles to avoid mistreatment and protect their status at work. If long-term career outcomes, such as raises and promotions, are based on perceptions of an employee's dedication to work, this social phenomenon is particularly likely to economically and professionally penalize women. If long-term personal outcomes, such as having healthy and intimate personal relationships, are based on spending time with family, this social phenomenon is particularly likely to emotionally and personally penalize men.

Given changing trends in family economics and social mores, men are increasingly expected to actively participate in the caregiving of their children. A large majority of families with young children now have employed mothers, and in a significant (and growing) proportion of these families, wives earn more than their husbands. Fathers are thus increasingly needed to cover the childcare and housework traditionally done by women in the home. Considering the mistreatment fathers are likely to face at work if they are active caregivers in their homes, however, men are now likely to perceive a trade-off between having a career and having children that women have long perceived. This may be why men between 21 and 39 now list family-friendly work environments as more important than high pay, prestige, and job security (Harvard Gazette, 2000). Unless the nature of these trade-offs change, increasing numbers of employed men and women are likely to opt out of having children, consistent with the declining birthrates of countries in which women and men have similar professional opportunities but continue to face traditional family role expectations (e.g., Joshi, 1998).

There are questions raised by this research that cannot be answered with the current studies and that future research can address. In the female-dominated study, for example, men who engaged in relatively high amounts of childcare experienced the most not man enough harassment at work. We know that most harassment is perpetrated by coworkers, so it seems likely that men's female coworkers were perpetrating not man enough harassment against them. Future research can establish whether the sex of perpetrators of such harassment is disproportionately male or female when controlling for organizational sex ratios. Theory would suggest that individuals feel threatened by those who blur traditional boundaries between the sexes one has benefited from, or sacrificed for, these boundaries (Berdahl, 2007a). It is therefore possible that women feel threatened by men who violate traditional family roles by taking on a significant amount of the caregiving of children and the running of the household, which may account for harassment against men in a female-dominated environment. In the male-dominated study, women without kids, and women who did little caregiving, were especially likely to be mistreated. Again, this could be due to their predominantly male coworkers' feeling threatened by nontraditional women. Experimental methodologies are better suited to address the social psychological causes for such behavior (e.g., Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003; Siebler, Sabelus, & Bohner, 2008).

Our theorizing considered the consequences to men and women of violating gender and worker ideals. We reasoned that men's treatment at work is largely based on how much others respect them as workers and as men, and that women's treatment is largely based on how much others respect them as workers and like them as women. Our results suggest that gender performance drives mistreatment more than work performance does, as women with no children, who are likely to be seen as ideal workers who are highly competent and dedicated to their work (Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004), were mistreated more than mothers, who are unlikely to be seen as ideal workers but who are likely to be seen as good women. An interesting goal for future research is to establish whether it is primarily respect that determines social reactions to and workplace treatment of men but primarily liking that determines social reactions to and workplace treatment of women.

Though field research provides unique and real-world insight into what is happening in the lives of working men and women, it is never without its limitations. Our cross-sectional designs make causality something we can only infer, not establish. For example, it is possible that caregiving fathers experience more mistreatment than other men not because their caregiving incites mistreatment but because workplace mistreatment causes them to caregive at home. That is, being mistreated at work may drive men to seek refuge and buffer their identities with more positive experiences and involvement at home (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). If this were a general reaction to mistreatment, however, we would not expect women

who experience the lowest levels of mistreatment at work to also be the most actively caregiving mothers, which we observed. It is possible that this dynamic works differently for women, so that women who feel supported and approved of at work feel free to care for their children and do housework at home. These explanations are less parsimonious and seem less likely than our theoretical one based on a relatively large body of research establishing negative social reactions to gender role violators. Nonetheless, these and other causal ambiguities result from cross-sectional field research.

Another limitation of field studies such as those reported here is that they rely on the voluntary completion of mail-in surveys, which typically do not yield response rates above 25% or 30% (e.g., Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fox et al., 1988; Krosnick, 1999; Low et al., 2007; Schneider et al., 2000). Attempts to increase this response rate require more coercive strategies, such as exerting management pressure on employees to complete the survey or offering disproportionate rewards for survey completion. These strategies, however, do not qualify for ethical standards for research on human subjects and are likely to resort in poor quality data as a result of disingenuous survey responses. In addition, achieving higher response rates or correcting for sample composition bias also does not appear to yield more accurate results (for a review, see Krosnick, 1999). The employees who chose to complete our surveys may have been more (or less) likely to experience mistreatment at work, or may have differed in some other way from the employees who did not complete our surveys. Though demographically similar, the experiences of one third of employees may not have reflected the experiences of the other two thirds, and thus our results must be interpreted with that potential limitation in mind.

## Conclusion

A basic tenet of economic theory is that people tend to make rational decisions that maximize their economic resources. A basic tenet of psychological theory is that people tend to do what they are rewarded for doing and avoid what they are punished for doing. For a growing proportion of workers, these forces are increasingly at odds with one another. What may be economically rational in a household that is primarily supported by a mother's income, for example, appears to be psychologically irrational given the social contingencies individuals face in their work environments. At this point, neither organizations nor their members are likely to fulfill the neoclassical and neoliberal ideals of economic efficiency, meritocracy, equal opportunity, and individual freedom. We encourage future research and policy to consider further how these dynamics unfold so that we can build a better society that is free of family-based sex discrimination.

## Appendix

### *General Mistreatment Items*

- (1) Prevented or discouraged you from expressing your opinion.
- (2) Tried to silence you.
- (3) Ignored or failed to respond to your communication (email, phone, in person, etc.)
- (4) Paid little attention to your statement or shown little interest in your opinion.
- (5) Treated you as nonexistent.
- (6) Refused to speak with you or given you the “silent treatment.”
- (7) Excluded you from important work activities or meetings.
- (8) Excluded you from influential roles or committee assignments.
- (9) Delayed action on matters that were important to you.
- (10) Kept information from you that you should have known.
- (11) Failed to warn you about impending dangers.
- (12) Slandered you or spread damaging rumors about you.
- (13) Tried to turn others in your work environment against you.
- (14) Made comments about you to others that put you down.
- (15) Humiliated or belittled you in front of others.
- (16) Did things to embarrass you.
- (17) Teased you in a hostile way.
- (18) Called you something demeaning or derogatory.
- (19) Flaunted their status or treated you in a condescending manner.
- (20) Threatened or harassed you for “blowing the whistle” about activities at work.
- (21) Offered you a subtle or obvious bribe to do something that you did not agree with.
- (22) Pressured you to change your beliefs or opinions at work.
- (23) Threatened to “get back at you” if you resisted doing something that you thought was wrong or if you challenged things about the workplace.

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