**Gender egalitarianism and attitudes toward parental leave**

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**Gender egalitarianism and attitudes toward parental leave**

**Abstract**

This paper examines the relationship between gender ideology and attitudes toward parental leave. We use data from two original survey experiments with a total analytic sample of 3,332 respondents. Using an experimental design where participants evaluate a new parent’s decision about taking parental leave in light of the employer’s leave policies, and answer attitudinal questions about leave and gender ideology, we assess the associations between gender ideology and (a) desired weeks of parental leave for mothers and fathers, as well as (b) perceptions of whether the new parent described in the experiment took too little or too much leave. We find that participants think fathers should receive 10.5 weeks of paid paternity leave whereas mothers should receive 16 weeks of paid maternity leave. In general, those with egalitarian gender ideals support longer paternity leave and more equal periods of leave for mothers and fathers—and are more likely to think that men workers take too little leave. However, those who support mothers as financial providers are more likely to think that women workers take too much leave, demonstrating the complexities between dimensions of gender ideology, the gender of the parent taking leave, and views of parental leave.

**Keywords**

Gender ideology, parental leave, gender gap, survey experiment

**Gender egalitarianism and attitudes toward parental leave**

**Introduction**

The United States is the only industrialized country with no universally available paid maternity leave and one of a diminishing number without paid paternity leave (Kaufman 2020). Access to paid parental leave has increased within the US, however. Currently twelve states plus Washington, DC have passed legislation providing paid leave to eligible workers (Koslowski et al. 2021). Additionally, paid parental leave policies are common among highly profitable companies (Kaufman and Petts 2022), and the overall percentage of US workers with access to paid parental leave has increased (albeit slowly) over time (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). There has also been movement on the national level, with the federal government increasing access to paid family leave temporarily during the COVID-19 pandemic (US Department of Labor 2020) and having more serious discussions about implementing a national paid parental leave policy. Despite these trends, it seems unlikely that the US will implement a national paid parental leave policy anytime soon.

In addition to a lack of widespread access to paid parental leave, stigmas and penalties surrounding leave-taking persist due to the importance of ideal worker norms in the US (Kramer, Pak, and Park 2022; Petts, Mize, and Kaufman 2022). Americans are overall supportive of paid parental leave policies, but there is disagreement about where these policies should come from (government vs. employers) as well as negative attitudes toward workers who utilize such policies (Li, Knoester, and Petts 2022; Sanzari, Dennis, and Moss-Racusin 2021). More research is needed to understand both attitudes toward leave policies and attitudes toward leave-taking to assess what might be driving these discrepancies and inform policies that may be more widely supported.

One such factor to consider is gender ideology. Parental leave policies, and patterns of parental leave-taking, are highly gendered (Kaufman and Petts 2022). Although gender ideologies have become more egalitarian over the past fifty years (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011; Scarborough, Sin, and Risman 2019), there is much greater support for gender equality in the public sphere (i.e., women should work in paid employment) than in the private sphere (i.e., men and women should equally share domestic tasks) (Pepin and Cotter 2018). There is also evidence suggesting the pandemic may have caused a shift back toward more traditional gender attitudes (Mize, Kaufman, and Petts 2021).

Given their close ties, gender attitudes likely shape perceptions of parental leave policies and parental leave-taking. Broadly defined, egalitarian gender attitudes may incorporate greater support for paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers and greater support for workers who take leave, as paid parental leave can promote greater gender equality by encouraging women to return to employment (Akgunduz and Plantenga 2013) and men to engage in more housework and childcare (Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011; Schober 2014). In contrast, given that traditional gender attitudes promote a separate spheres family model, they may be associated with less support for paid parental leave (Li et al. 2022). Yet, there has been limited research on the association between gender attitudes and attitudes toward parental leave, with recent work focusing on the association between a limited number of gender attitudes and paid parental leave without consideration toward differences in attitudes toward mothers’ and fathers’ leave-taking (Li et al. 2022). More work is needed to better understand the association between a broad array of gender attitudes and attitudes about paid leave as well as how gender attitudes may affect perceptions of working mothers and fathers who take leave – particularly given the stigmas associated with leave-taking even while there is broad support for paid leave policies. This is especially true given that gender ideologies may undermine or strengthen the impact of work-family policies that aim to support gender equality (Pfau-Effinger 2005).

In this study, we build and expand on recent work to address the following questions: How is gender ideology associated with attitudes toward parental leave and perceptions of workers who take leave? Is gender ideology differentially associated with attitudes toward men’s and women’s leave-taking? We use unique experimental data based on two surveys (N = 3,332) that allow us to measure attitudes and perceptions of parents who took parental leave. First, we examine the relationship between gender ideology – related to financial providing, childcare responsibility, and working parents’ relationship with children – and opinions regarding how many weeks of parental leave mothers and fathers should receive. Second, we examine the relationship between gender ideology and the gender gap in leave preferences, as measured by the difference between the number of weeks of leave mothers should get minus the number of weeks of leave fathers should get. Third, we examine the relationship between gender ideology and perceptions of whether a hypothetical worker took too much or too little leave, considering both a woman worker and a man worker.

We provide a unique contribution to the understanding of factors that shape perceptions of paid parental leave by examining multiple dimensions of gender ideology focused on mothers’ and fathers’ roles, and how these are associated with views of desired length of maternity leave and paternity leave, as well as utilizing a novel survey experiment that allows us to examine how gender attitudes correspond to perceptions of whether a leave-taking worker took too little or too much leave. Our findings highlight support for paid parental leave, which has implications for policy, including the potential to support the Build Back Better legislation or similar federal legislation on family leave. We also find nuances in the associations between different dimensions of gender ideology and support for parental leave, which may suggest that increasingly egalitarian ideologies within the population will facilitate the success of parental leave policies.

**Parental leave policies and support for parental leave in the US**

There is no national paid parental leave in the US (Koslowski et al. 2021). At the state level, California was the first to introduce paid family leave in 2004, and since then eleven additional states and the District of Columbia have enacted and implemented paid family leave (National Partnership for Women & Families 2021). In addition, a number of companies have introduced paid parental leave, but this is mainly concentrated among large companies, such as those listed in the Fortune 500 (Kaufman and Petts 2022). Yet, while 89 percent of workers in private industry have access to unpaid family leave, less than one-quarter of these workers have access to *paid* family leave (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). In contrast, a majority of Americans agree mothers (82%) and fathers (69%) should receive paid parental leave. Nevertheless, most of those who support paid parental leave feel it should come from employers rather than the government, and paid leave is not seen as a top priority among public policy issues (Horowitz et al. 2017).

Despite widespread support for paid leave policies, obstacles to leave-taking remain even within organizations that provide paid leave. Daniela Grunow and Marie Evertsson (2016) refer to a “culture-policy gap” in which policies do not align with cultural values, in this case when policies do not fully support the broader societal desire for gender equality. Indeed, parents who request leave are viewed as less committed workers and experience career penalties as a result of taking leave (Petts et al. 2022; Sanzari et al. 2021). Such concerns about career penalties are particularly salient for fathers given the emphasis on breadwinning (Kaufman 2018; Twamley and Schober 2019). In the US, men who take parental leave or use other flexible workplace policies face a “flexibility stigma” in which they are seen as less masculine and even harassed (Berdahl and Moon 2013; Rudman and Mescher 2013). There may also be consequences for men’s careers in terms of lower earnings (Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, and Stewart 2013). For women, assumptions that they will prioritize family and take lengthy periods of time off when having a child are key factors driving the gender pay gap and broader patterns of gender discrimination in the paid labor market (Benard and Correll 2010).

**Gender ideology and parental leave attitudes**

Given the close link between gender, work, and family, it is likely that gender ideology and attitudes about parental leave are interrelated. Shannon Davis and Theodore Greenstein (2009: 87) define gender ideologies as “individuals’ levels of support for a division of paid work and family responsibilities that is based on the belief in gendered separate spheres.” In general, more traditional gender ideologies would support separate spheres in which men primarily take on paid work and women primarily take on family work (Davis and Greenstein 2009), while more egalitarian ideologies would support women and men equally engaging in work and family responsibilities (Gerson 2010; Knight and Brinton 2017). Daniela Grunow and colleagues (2018) assert that gender ideology is not one-dimensional with a continuum from traditional to egalitarian but rather a multidimensional concept in which individuals may simultaneously hold traditional beliefs about one area and egalitarian beliefs about another area. For example, individuals increasingly support gender egalitarianism in the workplace while also endorsing traditional beliefs about women being primarily responsible for housework and childcare (Dernberger and Pepin 2020). Relatedly, although US adults were more likely to endorse traditional gender attitudes during the pandemic than pre-pandemic, they also were more likely to support ideas about mothers working and less likely to believe that mothers are key to child development (Mize et al. 2021). As such, we focus on attitudes about mothers’ and fathers’ roles as financial providers, caregivers, and working parents to acknowledge and assess the multidimensionality of gender ideology.

Gender theory would suggest gender ideologies influence behaviors, including the division of paid and domestic work (Gaunt 2006).[[1]](#footnote-1) For women, egalitarian ideologies usually mean support for paid employment (Knight and Brinton 2017; Yu and Lee 2013), whether in combination with a partner or on one’s own (Gerson 2010). Furthermore, women with more egalitarian views are more likely to be employed and work longer hours (Cunningham 2008). While mothers with young children tend to reduce their work hours, this pattern is weaker among women with egalitarian gender attitudes (Andringa, Nieuwenhuis, and van Gerven 2015). As mothers increasingly emphasize the importance of providing financially for their families (Christopher 2012; Dow 2016), we consider the impact of attitudes about financial providing for mothers (i.e., whether mothers should financially support their family and whether working mothers can establish warm relationships with children) as well as fathers.

For men, egalitarian attitudes usually mean greater emphasis on family and father involvement (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015). Indeed, fathers with more egalitarian gender beliefs are more engaged in childcare (Gaunt 2019; Kuo, Volling, and Gonzalez 2018) and reduce their work hours when they become fathers (Weinshenker 2015). Fathers who believe in the “new fatherhood ideal” that emphasizes the importance of father involvement for children’s well-being are more engaged with their children and act warmer and more affectionate toward children, while fathers with more traditional attitudes are less involved in routine care, emotional engagement, and parental responsibility (Offer and Kaplan 2021; Petts, Shafer, and Essig 2018). With this outlook in mind, we consider the impact of attitudes about childcare responsibility for fathers (i.e., whether fathers should be as involved in childcare as mothers) as well as mothers.

Gender ideology may influence the gendered division of parental leave and attitudes toward parental leave. Given that gender egalitarianism supports equality in paid and domestic work, it seems likely that individuals with egalitarian attitudes would be more likely to take advantage of a more equal division of parental leave (when available), support parental leave for both mothers and fathers, and be less likely to stigmatize workers for taking parental leave. This fits best with a view of egalitarian couples in which both partners are focused on care and careers rather than one in which both partners lean toward career (and outsource much care work) or lean toward family through strategies such as split-shift parenting (Masterson and Hoobler 2015). Evidence from other countries suggests gender ideology is an important factor in determining fathers’ use and sharing of parental leave. For instance, Swedish fathers with more egalitarian views are more likely to use parental leave than less egalitarian fathers (Duvander 2014). Likewise, fathers in Finland who support a more equal division of work and family are more likely to take parental leave (Lammi-Taskula 2008). Evidence from a British study shows gender egalitarianism among expectant mothers is positively associated with intentions to share parental leave (Twamley and Schober 2019).

Similarly, support for gender equality is positively associated with support for paid maternity leave (Staerklé, Roux, Delay, Gianettoni, and Perrin 2003) and paid paternity leave (Petts, Knoester, and Li 2020). In a study of 26 OECD countries, Chris Knoester and colleagues (2021) find that those who favor dual-earner couple arrangements are more likely to support parental leave while those who favor a more traditional separate spheres division of labor are less likely to support parental leave. Likewise, using the 2012 General Social Survey, Qi Li and colleagues (2022) find that respondents with egalitarian views are more likely to support parental leave while those with more traditional views favor shorter parental leaves. More generally, both women and men who favor greater participation of women in the labor market show greater support for social investments such as parental leave (Knijn and van Oorschot 2008).

Although egalitarian beliefs may be generally associated with support for parental leave and parental leave-taking, there may be some complexities in terms of how gender ideology influences attitudes toward parental leave for mothers versus fathers. Gender egalitarianism often encompasses support for women’s employment and men’s caregiving. This may mean that egalitarian individuals would support policies that encourage men to spend more time at home (i.e., take longer leave) and women to spend more time at work (i.e., take shorter leave), while individuals with more traditional views would support policies that enable women to stay home and men to focus on work. For example, Isabel Valarino and colleagues (2018) find that those with a more traditional gender ideology prefer a gendered division of parental leave in which mothers take most or all of the leave while fathers take some or none of the leave.

Finally, we anticipate that attitudes toward parental leave and parental leave-taking for mothers and fathers will vary across dimensions of gender ideology. First, we consider ideologies about mothers and fathers as financial providers. Those who see fathers as providers fall in line with traditional notions of men and masculinity that perpetuate unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt 2019). Andrea Doucet (2020) suggests that there has been a binary of caregiving and breadwinning in which father involvement equals breadwinning in households with different-gender couples. Therefore, those who think fathers should be providers may see parental leave as more suitable for mothers. At the same time, views of mothers as financial providers are changing and there is overwhelming support for employed mothers (Kaufman and Bair 2021). With regard to leave, longer parental leave may have negative consequences for women’s employment and career opportunities (Kaufman 2020; Nieuwenhuis, Need, and Van der Kolk 2017). Even in the US, where there is limited parental leave, longer leaves can reduce returns to work and upward mobility at work (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, and Grunow 2009). Those who think mothers should be providers may therefore favor shorter maternity leave in an attempt to avoid the negative career consequences of lengthy employment absences. In addition, those who support mothers as providers may feel as though fathers should take on more of the domestic work and therefore support longer paternity leave and a smaller gap between maternity and paternity leave. We hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1a: Those who agree that a good father supports his family financially will desire shorter paternity leave and longer maternity leave, will prefer a larger gap between desired length of maternity and paternity leave, and will be more likely to think that a father took too much paternity leave.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Those who agree that a good mother supports her family financially will desire shorter maternity leave and longer paternity leave, will prefer a smaller gap between desired length of maternity and paternity leave, and will be more likely to think that a mother took too much maternity leave.*

Second, we consider ideologies about mothers and fathers as caregivers. As with breadwinning fathers, caregiving mothers are core to traditional views of gender and family – and these traditional endorsements of women as primarily responsible for housework and childcare persist (Dernberger and Pepin 2020). Therefore, those who think mothers should be caregivers are likely to support as much time home as possible for mothers, including longer maternity leave, while expecting fathers to return to work more quickly. On the other hand, the wide support for fathers as caregivers suggests a clear link between egalitarian views of fathers and desired length of paternity leave. Most fathers want to take paternity leave and consider leave an important workplace issue (Harrington et al. 2014), and US attitudes are generally supportive of fathers taking leave (Petts et al. 2020). Not surprisingly, fathers who take longer leaves are more engaged in caregiving (Petts and Knoester 2018). Therefore, those who think fathers should be caregivers are likely to support longer leaves for fathers and a smaller gap between maternity and paternity leave. Yet, unlike with more traditional attitudes focused on mothers as caregivers, those who support father involvement are not necessarily opposed to mothers also taking leave and being involved in caregiving. We posit the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2a: Those who agree that a mother’s primary role is caregiving will desire longer maternity leave and shorter paternity leave, will prefer a larger gap between desired length of maternity and paternity leave, and will be more likely to think that a mother took too little maternity leave.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Those who agree that fathers should be as involved in caregiving as mothers will desire longer paternity leave, will prefer a smaller gap between desired length of maternity and paternity leave, and will be more likely to think that a father took too little paternity leave.*

Third, we consider ideologies about how mothers and fathers balance their work and family roles. We do this through attitudes about working parents establishing a warm relationship with their children. For mothers, the stereotype of employed mothers as less committed and less warm compared to non-employed mothers persists (Odenweller and Rittenour 2017). Yet, those who argue that employed mothers are just as warm as non-employed mothers challenge traditional notions of motherhood. Therefore, patterns regarding the work/family dimension of gender ideology should be similar to those for mothers as financial providers discussed above, suggesting less need for longer maternity leaves and more emphasis on equal leaves for mothers and fathers. For fathers, the potential relationship may be more difficult to see. Because fathers are expected to engage in employment, the comparison is often based more on hours of work rather than whether or not they are employed. With greater emphasis on involved fathers, there is now more concern about too much emphasis on breadwinning or working too much. For example, opinions about whether work-oriented fathers hurt their families is split among the US population (Kaufman and Bair 2021). It may be that those who think fathers who work longer hours can have as warm a relationship as those who work fewer hours may then prefer shorter paternity leave. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 3a: Those who agree that an employed mother can establish as warm a relationship with her children as a non-employed mother will desire shorter maternity leave and longer paternity leave, will prefer a smaller gap between desired length of maternity and paternity leave, and will be more likely to think that a mother took too much maternity leave.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Those who agree that a father who works more than full-time can establish as warm a relationship with his children as a father who works fewer hours will desire shorter paternity leave, a larger gap between desired length of maternity and paternity leave, and will be more likely to think that a father took too much paternity leave.*

**Data and methods**

*Data*

We use data from two original survey experiments. Samples for both experiments came from Prolific ([www.prolific.co](http://www.prolific.co)), which hosts an online survey panel that is specifically designed for academic survey research and has policies in place to ensure that the data obtained is high-quality (Peer et al. 2017). Studies using data from online panels have become increasingly common in the social sciences, and evidence suggests that multivariate results using opt-in panel data are similar to those using nationally representative surveys (Coppock, 2018; Coppock et al. 2018; Mullinix et al. 2015; Weinberg et al. 2014). In both experiments (conducted in 2019 and 2020) we worked to increase diversity in the samples by oversampling older adults, parents, those without college degrees, and political conservatives. Even with these efforts, it is important to acknowledge that non-religious individuals and individuals with a college degree are overrepresented in the sample, whereas Black and Hispanic individuals are underrepresented. However, in sensitivity analyses we found no substantial moderating effects of religiosity, education, or race on the hypothesized relationships.

Both experiments were primarily designed to assess the effects of various aspects of paid parental leave policies (Petts et al. 2022), but these surveys also included general questions about attitudes toward leave as well as a host of sociodemographic and attitudinal questions (such as gender attitudes). Most all aspects of the two survey experiments were identical. Although there were slight differences—employing different manipulations of leave-taking (see below)—these variations are unrelated to the relationships examined in this study. As such, we combine data from both experiments here. The total sample size for both experiments is 3,343 after data quality checks (which removed just under 6% of cases). We remove a small number of cases with missing values (*n* = 11), resulting in an analytic sample of 3,332 respondents for this study (1,712 from the first experiment; 1,620 from the second experiment).

*Experimental design*

Participants were shown a Human Resources (HR) form that documented a meeting in which an employee is expecting a child and asks about the organization’s parental leave policies given the impending birth of a child. This form was adapted from a real form used in a mid-sized US company. In the meeting, the HR employee provides information about the paid parental leave policies offered. At the bottom of the form, details are provided about how much leave the employee took. We experimentally manipulated many of the details on the form, some of which are included in this study. Specifically, we manipulated: (a) the employee’s *gender* (man or woman), (b) *weeks of leave taken,* which ranges from 0-12 in both experiments but employees in the second experiment had the option of also taking up to 5 additional weeks of paid time off (increasing maximum length of leave to 17 weeks), (c) *weeks of paid parental leave offered* (ranging from 0-12 weeks), and (d) *percent salary replaced,* ranging from 55% to 100%. In our survey experiment, each participant viewed one HR form and rated one worker on a variety of dimensions (including perceptions of the worker’s leave-taking), as well as provided their general preference on length of paternity/maternity leave. Participants viewed the HR form prior to answering all survey questions about both their perceptions of the vignette worker and general attitudes.

*Attitudes toward paid parental leave*

We measure attitudes toward paid parental leave in two ways that capture both global attitudes as well as how individuals view workers’ leave-taking. In doing so, our study is unique in assessing both general preferences about, and specific reactions towards, paid parental leave-taking. First, respondents were asked two general questions about (a) how much paid paternity leave fathers should receive following the birth/adoption of a child and (b) how much paid maternity leave mothers should receive (both ranging from 0-52 weeks). Responses to these questions are used to assess *desired weeks of leave for fathers* and *desired weeks of leave for mothers*. We also assess the *gender gap in desired leave*, which is constructed by subtracting desired weeks of leave for fathers from desired weeks of leave for mothers. Second, immediately after viewing the HR form, respondents were asked “In your opinion, did [employee] take too much or too little time off?” Responses to this question are also used to assess attitudes toward paid parental leave, with responses ranging from 1 (*far too little time off*) to 10 (*far too much time off*).

*Gender attitudes*

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 10 = *strongly agree*) to a series of statements about mothers and fathers. We focus on parallel statements about gendered parenting attitudes for both mothers and fathers in this study. Specifically, we focus on *attitudes about financial providing* (“A good father supports his family financially”; “A good mother supports her family financially”), *attitudes about work/family* (“A father who works more than 40 hours a week can establish a warm and secure relationship with his children as much as a father who works fewer hours”; “An employed mother can establish a warm and secure relationship with her children as much as a mother who is not employed”), and *attitudes about childcare responsibility* (“Fathers should be as heavily involved in the care of children as mothers”; “A mother’s primary role is to take care of the home and family”). Initial analyses (using Cronbach’s alpha and factor analyses) suggested that these items (the 6 items included here as well as the broader list of 19 attitudinal items included in the survey[[2]](#footnote-2)) did not load together into a single index (α = .54 for the six items). As such, we include these six items separately in all models (Variance Inflation Factors from all models are less than 2, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem).

*Control variables*

We incorporate a number of control variables in our models that are associated with gender attitudes and views of parental leave to try and isolate the unique effect of gender attitudes. We control for factors like political views and religiosity because while each is associated with gender attitudes, we want to examine effects of gender attitudes above and beyond these other factors. Examining variance inflation factors from all models suggests no issues with multicollinearity, allowing us to include all of the following variables in a single model. These include *participant gender* (woman, man, other), *age* (in years), *race/ethnicity* (White, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Other), *liberal political views* (ranging from 1 = very conservative to 5 = very liberal), *religious importance* (not, somewhat, or very important), and *household income* ($0-$40,000, $40,000-$75,000, $75,000-$125,000, and above $125,000). We also include dummy variables (1 = yes) indicating whether the respondent has a *college degree*, is *married*, *has any children*, *has taken parental leave,* and is currently *employed.* We also include a variable for whether respondents participated in the 2019 or 2020 version of the survey experiment.

*Analytic strategy*

We use linear regression to test all hypotheses as each of our outcome measures are continuous (desired weeks of leave, gender gap in desired leave, and perceptions of worker’s leave-taking). For desired weeks of leave, we present separate models for desired weeks of leave for mothers and desired weeks of leave for fathers. For perceptions of worker’s leave-taking, we present separate regression models for men and women workers. We note any differences in effects by gender for the gender attitude measures using seemingly unrelated estimation and test the equality of coefficients across models (Mize, Doan, and Long 2019). Tables presented in the text only include the main variables of interest (i.e., gender attitude variables), but full results including coefficients for all control variables can be found in the online appendix. All results interpreted in the main text are significant at *p* < .05 in two-tailed tests.

**Results**

Summary statistics for all variables are included in Table 1. Results show that on average, participants believe that fathers should receive 10.5 weeks of paid paternity leave whereas mothers should receive 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, suggesting that desires for paid leave are much higher than allowed by public policy (no paid leave except in certain states) and average leaves taken by mothers (11 weeks) and fathers (1 week or less) (Horowitz et al. 2017; Petts et al. 2020). Interestingly, support for paid parental leave is almost universal in our sample; less than 1% of respondents believe that fathers (N = 27) or mothers (N = 11) should receive zero weeks of paid parental leave. Participants also believe that mothers should receive approximately 5.5 more weeks of leave than fathers. In fact, less than 1% of participants favored longer leave for fathers, and in contrast to U.S. public policies (FMLA and state-level policies), only 35% were supportive of equal leave for mothers and fathers (results not shown).

----- Insert Table 1 About Here -----

Results in Table 1 also suggest that participants largely endorsed more egalitarian gender attitudes. Specifically, there was general agreement that mothers should support their family financially, that working mothers can establish warm relationships with children, and that fathers should be equal caregivers, and less agreement that mothers’ primary role is to care for the home and family. There was also general agreement for the traditional attitude that fathers should support their families financially. However, there were some gender differences; participants more strongly agreed that fathers should be financial providers (compared to mothers) and more strongly agreed that working mothers could establish warm relationships with children than fathers.

 Table 2 shows results predicting desired lengths of leave. In support of Hypothesis 1a and 1b, we find that believing that fathers should be financial providers was associated with desiring fewer weeks of paternity leave whereas believing that mothers should be financial providers was associated with desiring fewer weeks of maternity leave. In support of Hypothesis 2a, believing that mothers should be primary caregivers is associated with desiring fewer weeks of paternity leave though there is no significant relationship with desired length of maternity leave. It may be that individuals who believe strongly that mothers should prioritize family care also believe that mothers should not be working, and thus do not need to take leave. In support of Hypothesis 2b, we find that believing that fathers should be as involved as mothers is associated with desiring more weeks of paternity leave. This egalitarian belief is also associated with desiring more weeks of maternity leave, perhaps suggesting that egalitarian beliefs about shared care are associated with desires for longer leaves for all parents.

In support of Hypothesis 3b, we find that beliefs that fathers who work more than 40 hours per week can have warm relationships with children is associated with desiring fewer weeks of paternity leave. This belief is also associated with desiring fewer weeks of maternity leave. We do not find support for Hypothesis 3a as there is no significant relationship between beliefs that employed mothers can establish as warm a relationship with children and desired length of maternity or paternity leave. Again, this may be due to disagreement with this attitude being associated with believing mothers should not work, and thus do not need leave.

----- Insert Table 2 About Here -----

 Table 3 shows results predicting the difference between number of weeks of leave mothers should receive compared to fathers. Traditional beliefs are generally associated with desiring larger gaps between maternity and paternity leave, and consistent with Hypothesis 1a, those who think fathers should be financial providers desire a larger gap between maternity and paternity leave. Similarly, consistent with Hypothesis 2a, those who think mothers should be primary caregivers desire a larger gap between maternity and paternity leave. In contrast, egalitarian beliefs are generally associated with desiring smaller gaps between maternity and paternity leave. Specifically, and consistent with Hypothesis 1b, those who think mothers should support their family financially desire a smaller gap between maternity and paternity leave. Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, those who think fathers should be as involved as mothers desire a smaller gap between maternity and paternity leave. Contrary to Hypothesis 3b, those who think fathers who work longer hours can have a warm relationship with children desire a smaller gap between maternity and paternity leave. Although inconsistent with our expectations, this finding is consistent with results in Table 2 showing a negative relationship between this gender attitude and desired weeks of leave for both fathers and mothers – perhaps suggesting that support for this attitude reflects ideal worker norms valuing work and minimizing the need for work-family policies. We find no support for Hypothesis 3a.

------- Insert Table 3 About Here -------

To better illustrate the association between gender ideology and the gender gap in desired weeks of paid leave, we estimate predicted values of the difference between desired weeks of leave for mothers and fathers based on three ideal types of gender ideology – egalitarian, traditional, and neutral (Long and Freese 2014; Mize 2019). For this analysis, we define *egalitarian* as +1 SD for good mother supports family financially, working mother can establish warm relationship with kids, and fathers should be as involved as mothers, and -1 SD for the other three items (good father supports family financially, mother’s primary role is caregiver, and working father can establish warm relationship with kids). In contrast, we define *traditional* as the opposite; -1 SD for the first three items noted above and +1 SD for the last three items. *Neutral* is defined as the mean value for all six items. Results are displayed in Figure 1 and show a clear disparity across these three ideal types. As hypothesized, egalitarian participants prefer more equitable periods of leave (with mothers receiving 3.2 more weeks of leave than fathers) compared to neutral (mothers receiving 5.4 more weeks of leave than fathers) and traditional participants, who believe that mothers should receive 7.5 more weeks of paid leave than fathers.

------- Insert Figure 1 About Here -------

We now turn to results from analyses assessing whether gender attitudes are associated with participants’ evaluations of whether the vignette worker took too little/too much leave. As shown in Table 4, and consistent with Hypothesis 1b, the belief that mothers should support their family financially is associated with perceptions that the woman worker took too much leave (though this is also associated with perceptions that the man worker took too much leave). Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, the belief that fathers should be as involved as mothers is associated with perceptions that the man worker took too little leave (as well as the woman worker). There is mixed support for Hypothesis 2a as the belief that mothers should be primary caregivers is associated with perceiving the worker as taking too much leave (we expected this for the man worker but the opposite for the woman worker; the positive association may reflect beliefs that women should be at home and not working, and thus should not be taking leave). Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, the belief that fathers who work more than 40 hours can establish warm relationships with children is associated with perceiving the man worker as taking too much leave (as well as the woman worker). There is no support for Hypothesis 3a.

----- Insert Table 4 About Here -----

**Discussion**

In this paper, we examined the relationship between gender ideologies and parental leave attitudes. Because parental leave policies can promote gender equality (Kaufman 2020), we sought to understand how views of parental leave policies fit into broader gender ideologies. Using a survey experiment, we found that our sample of American adults believe that mothers should receive 16 weeks of paid maternity leave and fathers should receive 10.5 weeks of paid paternity leave. We also find more widespread support for the idea that both mothers and fathers should receive some paid leave than previous studies (Horwitz et al. 2017; Li et al. 2022), which may be due to greater awareness of the benefits of paid leave given that this has been a highly publicized topic in recent years. These findings suggest that Americans would likely support the 12 weeks of paid family leave included in the original version of the Build Back Better legislation, although we acknowledge that there is disagreement among Americans about who should provide, and pay for, paid leave (Horowitz et al. 2017).

 In looking at the relationship between gender ideology and attitudes toward parental leave, we expand on previous studies (e.g., Li et al. 2022) by including a wider range of gender attitudes and an expanded set of variables measuring attitudes toward paid leave. We found two patterns that suggest egalitarian gender ideology is associated with support for longer paternity leave and a smaller gap between desired maternity and paternity leave. First, those who think fathers should be equal caregivers think paid paternity leave should be longer. Second, individuals who hold more egalitarian attitudes about mothers (e.g., who support mothers as financial providers) are more likely than their traditional counterparts to desire similar lengths of maternity and paternity leave (i.e., a smaller gap). An emphasis on women’s financial autonomy likely suggests rejection of a traditional division of labor (Gerson 2010), including parental leave. These findings make sense in light of the idea that egalitarian gender ideologies emphasize men’s family involvement (Offer and Kaplan 2021), and egalitarian men tend to cut back at work (Weinshenker 2015) and engage more in childcare (Gaunt 2019; Petts and Knoester 2018). Based on evidence from Nordic countries, we speculate that if paid leave were more widely available in the US, egalitarian fathers might act as the forerunners in taking more parental leave (Duvander 2014; Lammi-Taskula 2008; Ma et al. 2020).

 On the other hand, traditional gender beliefs are associated with support for shorter paternity leave and longer maternity leave. In particular, those who agree that fathers should be financial providers and mothers should be caregivers support more weeks of maternity leave. This finding is consistent with the idea that traditional ideologies support separate spheres for men and women (Davis and Greenstein 2009) but also that an emphasis on women’s domestic roles may remain even for employed women (Dernberger and Pepin 2020). It also aligns with previous research that shows when parental leave is available, those with traditional gender ideologies believe mothers should take most or all of the leave while fathers take less or none (Valarino et al. 2018). When we consider people’s responses to those who have taken leave and whether they think someone has taken too little or too much leave, these findings show further nuances. On the one hand, there is some support for the notion that egalitarian gender ideology is associated with support for taking longer leaves and traditional gender ideology is associated with support for taking shorter leaves. Those who think fathers should be equal caregivers are more likely to say that both the vignette father and vignette mother took too little leave compared to more traditional respondents, supporting arguments that engaged fatherhood has become the norm (Kaufman 2013; Offer and Kaplan 2021) and that both parents should be equally involved in raising children. Additionally, those who believe fathers who work more than full-time can establish warm relationships with children as much as fathers who work fewer hours are more likely to say that the vignette father took too much leave. This may indicate that people with these opinions feel fathers should work long hours and therefore do not need as much paternity leave while those disagreeing with the statement may feel as though fathers should work less, including taking more paternity leave. This is consistent with the idea that many Americans think fathers who work too much may be harmful to their families (Kaufman and Bair 2021).

However, consistent with our expectations, there is also evidence that egalitarian ideology is associated with believing leave was too long; those who think mothers should financially support their family are more likely to say that both the vignette father and vignette mother took too much leave compared to more traditional respondents. Thus, even when leave is available and taken, the flexibility stigma (Berdahl and Moon 2013; Rudman and Mescher 2013) or other stigmas may be present, which add more barriers to utilizing leave policies. Further, these stigmas may also contribute to the “cultural policy gap” (Grunow and Evertsson 2016), in which institutional policies and obstacles do not support leave-taking. Indeed, those who face institutional constraints are more likely to fall back on more neotraditional arrangements (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Thus, this potential impact on policies and leave-taking practices may shape future gender ideologies and attitudes toward length of parental leave.

 It may be that those who think mothers are financial providers feel it is important for mothers to return to work in a timely fashion in order to support their families, but also that fathers should not necessarily take longer leaves to compensate. This is consistent with other research that suggests women breadwinners may encourage more equal sharing of home tasks alongside continued emphasis on men’s own breadwinning role (Sánchez-Mira 2021). While support for maternal employment is linked to egalitarian gender ideologies (Knight and Brinton 2017), this finding seems similar to ideas about fathers as good providers. Thus, some paths to gender equality may involve women taking less leave.

 There are some limitations to this study. Most notably, our focus is largely on parental leave-taking within a two-parent different-gender family. The worker described in the survey experiment is married to a partner of a different gender, and so we are unable to consider how attitudes about parental leave may differ in other family contexts. Future work should consider how attitudes toward parental leave vary for single parents, parents in same-gender relationships, and other diverse family forms. Also, while we study a wider range of gender attitudes than is usually possible, there are many additional aspects of gender ideology that could be profitably studied. In exploratory analyses of the full set of gender ideology items we fielded in the study, we found at least four distinct aspects of gender ideology. Future studies could unpack differences among these various dimensions. Additionally, although attempts were made to ensure a diverse sample, our data are not nationally representative, particularly of religiosity, education, and race. However, sensitivity analyses reveal no substantial moderating effects of these three demographics on the hypothesized relationships. This is not a problem for analyses involving experimental manipulations (i.e., those presented in Table 4), but future studies should continue to examine how various dimensions of gender ideology are associated with attitudes toward parental leave using nationally representative data. Finally, we recognize that participant gender may also condition both gender ideology and attitudes about leave. In supplemental analyses (results available upon request), we disaggregated the models by participant gender. Because there were few differences in the disaggregated models and results are largely similar to those presented here, we present results from models combining responses for all participant genders to remain parsimonious.

In conclusion, the current study uses a novel survey experiment that provides a unique contribution to understandings of egalitarian gender ideology and parental leave attitudes. Our use of multiple gender ideology measures allowed us to work through some complexities of the relationship between gender ideology and support for paid parental leave. While past research suggests egalitarianism is associated with greater support for parental leave (Li et al. 2021), our findings suggest that the relationship is more complicated depending on the dimension of gender ideology and the gender of the parent taking leave. To encourage support for longer periods of paid parental leave and more gender equal leave-taking, policies should focus on increasing support for fathers as caregivers. Policies can shift attitudes (Omidakhsh, Sprague, and Heymann 2020), and support for fathers as caregivers is a key factor linked to support for longer leaves for both mothers and fathers, perceiving both fathers and mothers as taking too little leave, and equal leaves for mothers and fathers.

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|  |
| --- |
| **TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics (N = 3332)** |
|   |  Mean/Prop.  |  SD  |  Min.  |  Max.  |
| *Attitudes about paid parental leave* |  |  |  |  |
|  Weeks of leave for fathers | 10.53 | 10.41 | .00 | 52.00 |
|  Weeks of leave for mothers | 15.88 | 12.69 | .00 | 52.00 |
|  Gender gap in desired leave | 5.35 | 8.19 | -40.00 | 51.00 |
|  Worker took too little/too much leave | 3.68 | 2.16 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |  |  |  |
|  Good father supports family financially | 8.29 | 1.71 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
|  Good mother supports family financially | 7.00 | 2.06 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |  |  |  |
|  Working father warm relationship w/kids | 6.54 | 2.48 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
|  Working mother warm relationship w/kids | 7.60 | 2.39 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |  |  |  |
|  Fathers should be as involved as mothers | 8.48 | 1.77 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
|  Mother primary role is caring for family | 5.64 | 2.87 | 1.00 | 10.00 |
| *Experimental manipulations* |  |  |  |  |
|  Worker is a woman | .50 |  |  |  |
|  Weeks of leave taken | 4.51 | 3.62 | .00 | 17.00 |
|  Weeks of leave offered | 9.03 | 4.58 | 1.00 | 17.00 |
|  Percent salary replaced | 77.53 | 14.17 | 55.00 | 100.00 |
| Experiment Version (2020 vs. 2019) | .49 |  |  |  |
| Age | 37.29 | 12.90 | 18.00 | 81.00 |
| *Participant gender* |  |  |  |  |
|  Woman | .48 |  |  |  |
|  Man | .51 |  |  |  |
|  Other | .01 |  |  |  |
| College degree | .59 |  |  |  |
| Has any children | .50 |  |  |  |
| Has taken parental leave | .31 |  |  |  |
| Liberal political views | 3.40 | 1.24 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| *Religion importance to life* |  |  |  |  |
|  Very Important | .27 |  |  |  |
|  Somewhat Important | .23 |  |  |  |
|  Not Important | .50 |  |  |  |
| Currently married | .49 |  |  |  |
| *Race Ethnicity* |  |  |  |  |
|  White | .74 |  |  |  |
|  Black | .08 |  |  |  |
|  Latinx | .07 |  |  |  |
|  Asian | .09 |  |  |  |
|  Other | .02 |  |  |  |
| LGBTQ | .13 |  |  |  |
| *Household income* |  |  |  |  |
|  0 to 40k | .27 |  |  |  |
|  40k to 75k | .32 |  |  |  |
|  75k to 125k | .27 |  |  |  |
|  Above 125k | .14 |  |  |  |
| Currently employed | .79 |   |   |   |

**TABLE 2. Results from linear regression models predicting number of weeks of leave mothers and fathers should get**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weeks Leave for Fathers | Weeks Leave for Mothers | Cross-Model Difference |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |  |  |
| Good father supports family financially | -0.418\*\*\* | -0.020 | -0.398\*\*\* |
|  | (0.117) | (0.147) | (0.107) |
| Good mother supports family financially | 0.038 | -0.266\* | 0.304\*\*\* |
|  | (0.094) | (0.117) | (0.082) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |  |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | -0.542\*\*\* | -0.712\*\*\* | 0.170\* |
|  | (0.079) | (0.099) | (0.079) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | -0.028 | -0.130 | 0.102 |
|  | (0.086) | (0.108) | (0.081) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |  |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | 0.787\*\*\* | 0.599\*\*\* | 0.188 |
|  | (0.109) | (0.137) | (0.100) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | -0.193\*\* | 0.032 | -0.224\*\*\* |
|  | (0.071) | (0.089) | (0.060) |
| Constant | 4.507\*\* | 12.604\*\*\* |  |
|  | (1.730) | (2.168) |  |
| Observations | 3332 |  |

Standard errors in parentheses. Control variables included but not shown here (see full results including

control variables in the online appendix).

\* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

**TABLE 3. Results from linear regression models predicting desired leave gap (the difference between number of weeks of leave mothers should get compared to number**

**of weeks fathers should get)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |
| Good father supports family financially | 0.398\*\*\* |
|  | (0.098) |
| Good mother supports family financially | -0.304\*\*\* |
|  | (0.079) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | -0.170\* |
|  | (0.066) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | -0.102 |
|  | (0.072) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | -0.188\* |
|  | (0.092) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | 0.224\*\*\* |
|  | (0.060) |
| Constant | 8.097\*\*\* |
|  | (1.454) |
| Observations | 3332 |

Standard errors in parentheses. Control variables included but not

shown here (see full results including control variables in the online appendix).

\* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

**TABLE 4. Results from linear regression models predicting perceptions of whether worker took too much leave**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Man Worker* | *Woman Worker* | *Cross-Model Difference* |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |  |  |
| Good father supports family financially | -0.032 | -0.037 | 0.004 |
|  | (0.031) | (0.030) | (0.044) |
| Good mother supports family financially | 0.058\* | 0.080\*\* | -0.022 |
|  | (0.025) | (0.024) | (0.036) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |  |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | 0.117\*\*\* | 0.088\*\*\* | 0.029 |
|  | (0.021) | (0.020) | (0.030) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | 0.050\* | 0.018 | 0.033 |
|  | (0.022) | (0.023) | (0.033) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |  |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | -0.211\*\*\* | -0.130\*\*\* | -0.081 |
|  | (0.028) | (0.029) | (0.045) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | 0.078\*\*\* | 0.090\*\*\* | -0.012 |
|  | (0.018) | (0.020) | (0.028) |
| Observations | 1666 | 1666 |  |

Negative coefficients indicate factors associated with the perception that the worker took too little leave. Standard errors in parentheses. Control variables included but not shown here (see full results including control variables in the online appendix).

\* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

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**ONLINE APPENDIX**

**TABLE A1. Results from linear regression models predicting number of weeks of leave mothers and fathers should get**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Weeks Leave for Fathers | Weeks Leave for Mothers | Cross-Model Difference |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |  |  |
| Good father supports family financially | -0.418\*\*\* | -0.020 | -0.398\*\*\* |
|  | (0.117) | (0.147) | (0.107) |
| Good mother supports family financially | 0.038 | -0.266\* | 0.304\*\*\* |
|  | (0.094) | (0.117) | (0.082) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |  |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | -0.542\*\*\* | -0.712\*\*\* | 0.170\* |
|  | (0.079) | (0.099) | (0.079) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | -0.028 | -0.130 | 0.102 |
|  | (0.086) | (0.108) | (0.081) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |  |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | 0.787\*\*\* | 0.599\*\*\* | 0.188 |
|  | (0.109) | (0.137) | (0.100) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | -0.193\*\* | 0.032 | -0.224\*\*\* |
|  | (0.071) | (0.089) | (0.060) |
| *Controls* |  |  |  |
| Worker is a woman | -1.125\*\* | -3.211\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.330) | (0.414) |  |
| Total weeks of leave taken | 0.213\*\*\* | 0.197\*\* |  |
|  | (0.059) | (0.074) |  |
| Weeks of leave offered | 0.413\*\*\* | 0.466\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.054) | (0.067) |  |
| Percent salary replaced | 0.002 | -0.020 |  |
|  | (0.012) | (0.015) |  |
| Experiment version (2020 vs. 2019) | -2.367\*\*\* | -2.833\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.429) | (0.538) |  |
| *Participant Gender* |  |  |  |
|  Woman | 0.509 | 1.028\* |  |
|  | (0.348) | (0.436) |  |
|  Other | 0.513 | -1.293 |  |
|  | (1.661) | (2.081) |  |
| Age | -0.038\* | -0.101\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.015) | (0.018) |  |
| College degree | 0.098 | 0.762 |  |
|  | (0.374) | (0.469) |  |
| Has any children | 0.367 | 0.393 |  |
|  | (0.522) | (0.655) |  |
| Has taken parental leave | 0.217 | 1.649\*\* |  |
|  | (0.488) | (0.611) |  |
| Liberal political views | 1.439\*\*\* | 1.728\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.158) | (0.198) |  |
| *Religious Importance* |  |  |  |
|  Somewhat important | -0.678 | 0.092 |  |
|  | (0.483) | (0.605) |  |
|  Not important | 0.683 | 1.071 |  |
|  | (0.461) | (0.578) |  |
| Married | 0.105 | 0.993 |  |
|  | (0.449) | (0.562) |  |
| *Race/Ethnicity* |  |  |  |
|  Black | -1.219 | -0.903 |  |
|  | (0.628) | (0.787) |  |
|  Latinx | 0.666 | 0.494 |  |
|  | (0.665) | (0.833) |  |
|  Asian | -0.486 | -0.522 |  |
|  | (0.593) | (0.742) |  |
|  Other | 0.943 | 1.853 |  |
|  | (1.172) | (1.469) |  |
| LGBTQ | 1.437\*\* | 0.977 |  |
|  | (0.521) | (0.653) |  |
| *Income* |  |  |  |
|  40k to 75k | 0.770 | 1.420\* |  |
|  | (0.444) | (0.557) |  |
|  75k to 125k | 0.447 | 0.756 |  |
|  | (0.491) | (0.616) |  |
|  Above 125k | 0.537 | 1.340 |  |
|  | (0.604) | (0.757) |  |
| Employed | -0.717 | -0.739 |  |
|  | (0.428) | (0.536) |  |
| Constant | 4.507\*\* | 12.604\*\*\* |  |
|  | (1.730) | (2.168) |  |
| Observations | 3332 |  |

Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

**TABLE A2. Results from linear regression models predicting the difference between**

**number of weeks of leave mothers should get compared to number**

**of weeks fathers should get**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |
| Good father supports family financially | 0.398\*\*\* |
|  | (0.098) |
| Good mother supports family financially | -0.304\*\*\* |
|  | (0.079) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | -0.170\* |
|  | (0.066) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | -0.102 |
|  | (0.072) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | -0.188\* |
|  | (0.092) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | 0.224\*\*\* |
|  | (0.060) |
| *Controls* |  |
| Worker is a woman | -2.086\*\*\* |
|  | (0.278) |
| Total weeks of leave taken | -0.015 |
|  | (0.049) |
| Weeks of leave offered | 0.053 |
|  | (0.045) |
| Percent salary replaced | -0.022\* |
|  | (0.010) |
| Experiment version (2020 vs. 2019) | -0.465 |
|  | (0.361) |
| *Participant Gender* |  |
|  Woman | 0.519 |
|  | (0.293) |
|  Other | -1.805 |
|  | (1.396) |
| Age | -0.063\*\*\* |
|  | (0.012) |
| College degree | 0.664\* |
|  | (0.315) |
| Has any children | 0.026 |
|  | (0.439) |
| Has taken parental leave | 1.432\*\*\* |
|  | (0.410) |
| Liberal political views | 0.288\* |
|  | (0.132) |
| *Religious Importance* |  |
|  Somewhat important | 0.771 |
|  | (0.406) |
|  Not important | 0.387 |
|  | (0.388) |
| Married | 0.889\*\* |
|  | (0.378) |
| *Race/Ethnicity* |  |
|  Black | 0.315 |
|  | (0.528) |
|  Latinx | -0.171 |
|  | (0.559) |
|  Asian | -0.367 |
|  | (0.498) |
|  Other | 0.909 |
|  | (0.985) |
| LGBTQ | -0.460 |
|  | (0.438) |
| *Income* |  |
|  40k to 75k | 0.649 |
|  | (0.374) |
|  75k to 125k | 0.309 |
|  | (0.413) |
|  Above 125k | 0.803 |
|  | (0.507) |
| Employed | -0.022 |
|  | (0.360) |
| Constant | 8.097\*\*\* |
|  | (1.454) |
| Observations | 3332 |

Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

**TABLE A3. Results from linear regression models predicting perceptions of whether worker took too much leave**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Man Worker* | *Woman Worker* | *Cross-Model Difference* |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |  |  |
| Good father supports family financially | -0.032 | -0.037 | 0.004 |
|  | (0.031) | (0.030) | (0.044) |
| Good mother supports family financially | 0.058\* | 0.080\*\* | -0.022 |
|  | (0.025) | (0.024) | (0.036) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |  |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | 0.117\*\*\* | 0.088\*\*\* | 0.029 |
|  | (0.021) | (0.020) | (0.030) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | 0.050\* | 0.018 | 0.033 |
|  | (0.022) | (0.023) | (0.033) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |  |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | -0.211\*\*\* | -0.130\*\*\* | -0.081 |
|  | (0.028) | (0.029) | (0.045) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | 0.078\*\*\* | 0.090\*\*\* | -0.012 |
|  | (0.018) | (0.020) | (0.028) |
| *Controls* |  |  |  |
| Total weeks of leave taken | 0.313\*\*\* | 0.322\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.015) | (0.015) |  |
| Weeks of leave offered | -0.093\*\*\* | -0.068\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.014) | (0.014) |  |
| Percent salary replaced | -0.001 | -0.000 |  |
|  | (0.003) | (0.003) |  |
| Experiment version (2020 vs. 2019) | 0.330\*\* | 0.201 |  |
|  | (0.110) | (0.113) |  |
| *Participant Gender* |  |  |  |
|  Woman | -0.513\*\*\* | -0.649\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.089) | (0.092) |  |
|  Other | -0.107 | -0.133 |  |
|  | (0.398) | (0.471) |  |
| Age | 0.010\* | -0.003 |  |
|  | (0.004) | (0.004) |  |
| College degree | -0.034 | -0.117 |  |
|  | (0.096) | (0.099) |  |
| Has any children | 0.078 | -0.097 |  |
|  | (0.134) | (0.138) |  |
| Has taken parental leave | -0.235 | 0.132 |  |
|  | (0.123) | (0.131) |  |
| Liberal political views | -0.092\* | 0.073 |  |
|  | (0.040) | (0.042) |  |
| *Religious Importance* |  |  |  |
|  Somewhat important | -0.446\*\*\* | -0.376\*\* |  |
|  | (0.125) | (0.127) |  |
|  Not important | -0.691\*\*\* | -0.442\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.120) | (0.121) |  |
| Married | 0.090 | -0.017 |  |
|  | (0.116) | (0.117) |  |
| *Race/Ethnicity* |  |  |  |
|  Black | -0.087 | 0.019 |  |
|  | (0.163) | (0.163) |  |
|  Latinx | 0.197 | 0.070 |  |
|  | (0.176) | (0.170) |  |
|  Asian | -0.155 | 0.089 |  |
|  | (0.156) | (0.152) |  |
|  Other | 0.143 | -0.232 |  |
|  | (0.292) | (0.317) |  |
| LGBTQ | 0.010 | 0.038 |  |
|  | (0.133) | (0.138) |  |
| *Income* |  |  |  |
|  40k to 75k | -0.185 | -0.266\* |  |
|  | (0.115) | (0.116) |  |
|  75k to 125k | -0.178 | -0.225 |  |
|  | (0.127) | (0.129) |  |
|  Above 125k | -0.238 | -0.323\* |  |
|  | (0.153) | (0.161) |  |
| Employed | 0.071 | 0.111 |  |
|  | (0.109) | (0.113) |  |
| Constant | 4.188\*\*\* | 2.702\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.438) | (0.457) |  |
| Observations | 1666 | 1666 |  |

*Note:* Negative coefficients indicate factors associated with the perception that the worker took too little leave. Standard errors in parentheses. \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

**TABLE A4. Results from linear regression models predicting perceptions of whether worker took too much leave, controlling for desired weeks of paid leave**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Man Worker* | *Woman Worker* | *Cross-Model Difference* |
| *Attitudes about financial providing* |  |  |  |
| Good father supports family financially | -0.048 | -0.034 | -0.015 |
|  | (0.031) | (0.030) | (0.044) |
| Good mother supports family financially | 0.058\* | 0.070\*\* | -0.012 |
|  | (0.024) | (0.023) | (0.035) |
| *Attitudes about work/family* |  |  |  |
| Father works >40 hours warm relationship w/kids | 0.099\*\*\* | 0.065\*\* | 0.034 |
|  | (0.021) | (0.020) | (0.029) |
| Working mother warm relationship w/kids | 0.043 | 0.017 | 0.025 |
|  | (0.022) | (0.022) | (0.032) |
| *Attitudes about childcare responsibility* |  |  |  |
| Fathers should be as involved as mothers | -0.183\*\*\* | -0.111\*\*\* | -0.071 |
|  | (0.028) | (0.028) | (0.045) |
| Mother primary role is caring for family | 0.075\*\*\* | 0.090\*\*\* | -0.015 |
|  | (0.017) | (0.020) | (0.027) |
| Desired weeks of paid leave for fathers | -0.025\*\*\* | 0.006 |  |
|  | (0.006) | (0.007) |  |
| Desired weeks of paid leave for mothers | -0.008 | -0.041\*\*\* |  |
|  | (0.005) | (0.006) |  |
| Observations | 1666 | 1666 |  |

Negative coefficients indicate factors associated with the perception that the worker took too little leave. Standard errors in parentheses. Control variables included but not shown here.

\* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

|  |
| --- |
| **Table A5:** **Text of All Survey Items on Gendered Parenting Attitudes** |
| - A good father supports his family financially\* |
| - A father who works more than 40 hours per week can establish a warm and secure relationship with his children as much as a father who works fewer hours\* |
| - Being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have |
| - Fathers should do as much routine housework (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry) as mothers  |
| - Fathers should be as heavily involved in the care of a child as mothers\* |
| - Fathers should spend more time interacting with their children and less time at work |
| - It is essential for a child’s well-being that fathers spend time interacting and playing with their child |
| - Fathers play a central role in a child’s development |
| - Fathers should be the disciplinarians in the family |
| - Fathers should share responsibility for organizing children’s schedules (e.g., activities, lessons, doctor’s appointments) |
| - An employed mother can establish a warm and secure relationship with her children as much as a mother who is not employed\* |
| - Being a mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have |
| - A mother’s primary role is to take care of the home and family\* |
| - Mothers should not work full time if their child is younger than 5 years old |
| - Mothers are much happier if they stay home and take care of their children |
| - Mothers should do as much non-routine housework (e.g., lawn care, minor home repairs, etc.) as fathers |
| - Mothers play a central role in a child’s development  |
| - A good mother supports her family financially\* |
| - Mothers should be solely responsible for organizing children’s schedules (e.g., activities, lessons, doctor’s appointments) |

\*Indicates items used in the current study.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table A6:** Correlations among core gender attitudes |  |  |
|  | father finances | mother finances | working father | working mother | father childcare | mother childcare |
| father finances | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| mother finances | 0.3224 | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| working father | 0.2918 | 0.1487 | 1 |  |  |  |
| working mother | 0.0765 | 0.3234 | 0.4096 | 1 |  |  |
| father childcare | 0.0999 | 0.3392 | 0.1010 | 0.4009 | 1 |  |
| mother childcare | 0.3734 | 0.008 | 0.1981 | -0.1287 | -0.2263 | 1 |

**ONLINE APPENDIX B**

**Instructions & Example Experiment Treatment**

**Instructions**

In this study, we are interested in how leave policies are presented to workers and the decisions that workers make about taking leave.

You will review the form and notes that a Human Resource (HR) Officer completed after meeting with a worker about leave options at the company.

To protect the privacy of the company and its employees, we have removed any identifying information from these documents.

<page break>

**Instructions**

To give you some background, the company is a mid-size company in the United States with about 750 total employees. All employees are full-time and are salaried.

Employees are encouraged to meet with the Human Resources (HR) staff if they have questions about company policies, including policies about taking leave. The company is currently evaluating their leave policies and is interested in how their leave policies are viewed.

As part of this process, the company is partnering with a research team at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ University to learn more about how their leave policies are viewed and presented to their employees. As part of this research partnership, the company shared forms from recent HR meetings. These meetings were about workers considering taking leave.

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**Instructions**

**Please read the following form carefully. The rest of the questions on this survey will be about the details on this form.**

The form is the summary of a recent meeting between a Human Resources (HR) officer and an employee of the company. The company has a policy that all HR meetings must be documented for record-keeping purposes. The form is typically filled out by the HR officer during and immediately after the meeting with the employee.

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HR Meeting – Official Documentation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Employee Name:** |  Matthew Smith |
| **Employee Position Title:**  |  Marketing Associate |
| **Years with Company:** |  4 |
|  |  |
| **HR Employee:** |  Nancy Davis, Human Resources Officer |
| **Date of Meeting:** |  August 12, 2018 |

|  |
| --- |
| **PURPOSE OF MEETING:**  |
| * The employee (Matthew Smith) requested a meeting about the company’s parental leave policies
* At our meeting, Matthew said he and his wife were expecting their first child and he is considering taking leave after the baby is born. His wife also works and plans to take some time off after the birth
* Matthew’s main questions concerned:
	+ The policies about leave and pay during time on leave
	+ What is typical in the company for new parents
 |
| **NOTES:**  |
| * I informed Matthew of the company’s parental leave policy and gave him a pamphlet with the full details. I emphasized the policy’s main details:
	+ Up to 7 weeks of paid parental leave after the birth of a child. Employees also have the option to supplement their leave using up to 5 weeks of accrued vacation and sick days (if available) to extend their leave
	+ For weeks of paid parental leave, employees are paid 100% of their regular salary
* He asked about what most new parents at General Electic do and about how taking time off might be viewed by management. I told him:
	+ Our company considers work-family balance to be very important and both HR and management always encourage employees to utilize the full benefits provided to them
	+ Over 80% of new parents in our company take some time off
 |
| **RESOLUTION:** |
| I sent a follow-up email to Matthew a week after our meeting. He informed me that he planned to take all 7 weeks of paid parental leave and an additional two weeks for a total of 9 weeks off and return to work on a full-time basis after that |

1. The reverse is also true, as behaviors and events may influence gender ideologies. For example, employment may encourage a shift toward more gender egalitarian attitudes (Schober and Scott 2012). We have also seen a shift in gender attitudes due to pandemic-induced changes (Mize et al. 2021). Given that the focus of the current study is on whether gender ideology predicts attitudes toward paid parental leave, we focus on this directional relationship here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The full list of items is included in Table A5 of the appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)