

Staying at Home or Working for Pay? Attachment to Modern Mothering Identities

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Jocelyn Elise Crowley, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Policy
The Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
33 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901
jocelync@rutgers.edu
Phone: (848) 932-2971
website: jocelyncrowley.com

Abstract:

In a context where the pressures of intensive mothering are all-consuming, mothers who work for pay, or those with mother-worker identities, face difficult challenges as they attempt to execute the tasks of both parenthood and employment in effective ways. In contrast, stay-at-home mothers, or those with mother-caregiver identities, receive reinforcing messages from intensive mothering ideology that they should remain solely focused on meeting their children's everyday needs. Using random sample survey data collected from 3,327 women in mothers' organizations during 2009, I find that only 18.5% of all mothers have strong beliefs regarding whether working for pay is best for children or not, and no single mothering identity (mother-worker or mother-caregiver) had a statistically significant relationship with holding such beliefs. However, among those who held such beliefs, full-time mother-workers were less likely than mother-caregivers to be able to align their current employment statuses with their preferred paid work preferences.

INTRODUCTION

A variety of factors have propelled mothers into the workforce over the past thirty-five years. With the feminist movement of the 1960 and 1970s, mothers began to see paid work as one avenue toward personal fulfillment that could additionally benefit their children in terms of modeling strong, self-reliant behavior. While this pull into the labor market was decidedly critical, there was an equally important push for these mothers as well. Declining male wages, especially among those with lower skill levels (Devereux 2003), also induced mothers to seek out paid work as a way to maintain their families' standard of living over the long run. The statistics reflect these trends of mothers seeking out paid employment in ever-increasing numbers (Ammons and Markham 2004). While in 1975 only 47.4% of all mothers with children under the age of eighteen were in the labor market, by 2011, that number had increased to 71.3% (BLS 2012). Also notably, these changes were not confined to mothers with older children. Over the same time period, mothers with children ages six and under increased their labor force participation from 39% to 64.2% (BLS 2012).

Yet, even with these dramatic increases in labor force participation, a significant percentage of mothers still decided to be at home with their sons and daughters, especially when these children were toddlers or younger. Similar to their employed counterparts, they do so for multiple reasons, including their desire to maximize time with their children, or due to the prohibitive costs of child care that would consume the majority of their wages if they were to work for pay. Mothers are thus split in a highly visible way by their paid work arrangements (Blair-Loy 2001). In these women's daily lives, scholars have argued that they have assumed a mother-caregiver identity if they stay at home, or a mother-worker identity if they are employed

for pay (Johnston and Swanson 2004).¹ Identities are potentially powerful mechanisms for establishing purpose and meaning in mothers' lives, and used in this context, establish two clearly distinct and alternative roadmaps for appropriate childrearing that are constantly analyzed by television programs, the internet, and in books and magazines.

Yet, while these opposing images of staying at home or working for pay might be highlighted by the media (Johnston and Swanson 2003b; Johnston and Swanson 2003a), it is important to examine women's real attachment to these mothering identities in shaping the attitudes and practices of mothers in the United States. That is, whether women are deeply wedded to their own mothering identities and are consequently quick to conclude that other arrangements are less than optimal is an empirical question. The purpose of this study is thus to investigate whether most mother-caregivers or mother-workers believe that there is one "ideal" arrangement--staying at home or working for pay--that is best for children. If so, are mother-caregivers more likely to hold this belief than mother-workers? And which mothers are most likely to align their current employment arrangements with their preferred options?

Answering these questions is critical in understanding the strength of modern mothering identities. At one end of the spectrum is the proposition that attachment to these identities is all-powerful and all-consuming; in this case, we should see high levels of commitment to a belief in one ideal arrangement for children among both mother-caregivers and mother-workers, as well as high levels of alignment with these beliefs in terms of their employment circumstances. At the far opposite end of the spectrum is another possibility, whereby there is a negligible level of agreement as to the merits of this ideal arrangement belief for both mother-caregivers and mother-workers, rendering alignment a non-issue. If this is true,

¹ While these scholars have described these two distinct mothering identities, the labels "mother-caregiver" and "mother-worker" are the author's own.

then women's attachment to mothering identities might be weaker than previously imagined. Of course, these are extreme scenarios and there may be many other combinations regarding particular mothering identities, their own specific beliefs, and their own alignment possibilities. But a general finding of weak attachment to mothering identities means that mothers' and fathers' roles and responsibilities within the family have the power of being more interchangeable than they exist right now. Understanding these dynamics, then, opens the door for potentially greater dialogue within families on issues related to establishing new models of domestic life, and in particular, potentially remaking the current gendered nature of caregiving as it exists in the United States today.

INTENSIVE MOTHERING IDEOLOGY AND THE MOTHER-CAREGIVER IDENTITY

How do contemporary American mothers form their identities as individuals operating within a larger society? One of the most significant influences relates to mothering ideologies. Ideologies are powerful systems of ideas that permeate society in multiple forms (Freeden 2003). They can encompass patterns of beliefs, forms of action, and interpersonal practices that guide how human beings both treat and interpret everyday events. Through their own particular interactions with society at large, individuals actively engage in both the creation of ideologies as well as the consumption of ideologies. Moreover, ideologies are not value-free; they are normative in that they prescribe both what is desirable and good in constructing modern communities (Therborn 1980). They also can be invisible; in other words, at times, ideologies can be so hegemonic that they permeate all aspects of life to the point where they become unquestioned foundations upon which almost all interpersonal and social relationships are built.

With respect to parenting, the most powerful ideology today is that of intensive mothering (Hays 1996). The philosophy inherent in intensive mothering requires that all mothers put forth as much energy as possible into nurturing their children at the expense of any other interests or activities that they may desire in their own personal lives. More specifically, this ideology demands that all mothers expend enormous emotional, physical, and financial resources on their children; they also must rely heavily on experts and other professionals to guide them into producing the best possible developmental outcomes for their sons and daughters.

For stay-at-home mothers, the pressures of intensive mothering are consistent with their adoption of a mother-caregiver identity. In other words, there is cognitive consistency between the messages that they receive about mothering and how they construct their everyday practices of motherhood. However, the principles of intensive mothering also apply to the increasing numbers of women who have entered the paid labor force (Hays 2003). In order to qualify as a "good mother" according to intensive mothering ideology, women who have adopted a mother-worker identity must attempt, in a variety of ways, to meet their employment responsibilities while at the same time attending to their children's every need. Unlike mother-caregivers, however, mother-workers face a much more difficult challenge--and extreme cognitive dissonance--in fulfilling both their work obligations and the demands of intensive mothering ideology.

In many ways, scholars have shown through a series of qualitative studies that many mother-caregivers endorse their chosen mothering identity without any misgivings. This makes sense in that as described above, the prevalent intensive mothering ideology overwhelmingly supports their mothering identity. Indeed, many of these stay-at-home mothers who embrace the

mother-caregiver identity report being aware of the difficulties in managing paid work while at the same time raising children. In response, these mother-caregivers avoid any type of family-work conflicts by doing what they believe is best: staying at home (Johnston and Swanson 2006; Johnston and Swanson 2007). Working for pay is simply a non-issue for this set of mothers.

This is not to say that all mother-caregivers are perfectly happy with their mothering identities; instead, feelings of ambivalence can and do emerge. For example, through a series of in-depth interviews, researchers have noted that mother-caregivers frequently report stress and impatience in dealing with their children twenty-four hours per day (Johnston and Swanson 2006; Johnston and Swanson 2007). Others indicate that they are lonely and miss adult interaction. Also notable among these mother-caregivers are the experiences of highly educated women with distinguished careers who then return home after they have children. While many acknowledge the joys of at-home parenting, some report very difficult transitions from their careers to home-based lives. For example, these mother-caregivers stress feelings of loss, vulnerability, guilt, shame, and conflict over their family arrangements as they negotiate their new, domestically-centered obligations (Rubin and Wooten 2007). Other mothers describe extreme bitterness over a work structure that they perceive forced them out of their jobs instead of accommodating them with respect to their family responsibilities (Stone 2007). But overall, whether they initially made the decision to stay at home or were "pushed" into their current circumstances, the power of intensive mothering ideology ultimately comes to support them as they assimilate into their new, mother-caregiver identities.

INTENSIVE MOTHERING IDEOLOGY AND THE MOTHER-WORKER IDENTITY

In the case of mother-workers, intensive mothering expectations directly clash with their mothering identities. These mothers are continuously pushed and pulled between their work and home worlds. As a result of these tensions, the academic scholarship indicates that only a small group of mother-workers are completely satisfied with their mothering identities and express no reservations about their arrangements. Part-time mother-workers are often the least conflicted of workers, as they are able to enjoy the best of both worlds: paid employment that provides them with personal growth opportunities and satisfaction, as well as time at home to attend to their children's needs (Johnston and Swanson 2006). Much less common are full-time mother-workers who are completely satisfied with their mothering identities. For instance, Hattery (2001) found that the set of mother-workers who are employed full time and express happiness with this identity tend to have stronger bonds to the working world than to the parenting world; she called this small, atypical group "non-conformists." Other research reported that a small set of other full-time mother-workers believe that the rewards of paid work are much greater than those offered by parenting; Gerson (1985) labeled this outlier group of women "reluctant mothers."

Much more common for both part-time and full-time mother-workers is ambivalence about their mothering identities in the face of intensive mothering ideological pressures (Johnston and Swanson 2006; Damaske 2011). For part-time mother-workers, being employed for fewer hours per week enables them to have quality interaction and communication with their children. However, being with their children for extended periods of time also creates periods of significant emotional stress. For example, these mothers often worry about losing their tempers with their children during long days of parenting. Other mother-workers who are employed part

time report being professionally disappointed in that they are missing opportunities in terms of advancing their careers (Webber and Williams 2008). To address these negative feelings, these mothers often attempt to emotionally detach from their employment aspirations and focus even more narrowly on their children's development over the long run (Johnston and Swanson 2007).

Similarly, the majority of mother-workers who are employed full time are highly conflicted about their mothering identities. Undoubtedly, full-time mother-workers are able to dedicate significant attention to their jobs and/or developing their careers. Yet these mother-workers also clearly see the downside associated with these pursuits. More specifically, they report being tired and rushed, and face a constant collision of worlds where their work obligations seep into their home lives, and vice versa (Johnston and Swanson 2006). Other full-time mother-workers engage in a variety of practices in order to compensate for the fact that paid employment consumes much of their energy and attention at the expense of, in their view, their families. For example, some of these mothers work the night shift in order to be fully present for their children during the day time hours (Garey 1995). Others rely on teams of nannies and au pairs in order to insure that their children are receiving the best possible at-home care (MacDonald 1998). Even with arrangements such as these in place, however, full-time mother-workers are often exhausted and mentally strained as they strive for work-family balance (Johnston and Swanson 2007).

In sum, the literature on mothering identities argues that mother-caregivers and mother-workers both struggle in the face of intensive mothering pressures. In light of these common struggles, there is therefore likely to be a low level of support among both groups regarding a belief in one ideal arrangement for children in terms of maternal employment. However, among those who *do* support such a position, this support is likely to come primarily from one source.

More specifically, because the pressures shaping intensive mothering ideology and those shaping mother-caregiver identities are reinforcing in terms of producing cognitive consistency, mother-caregivers are much more likely than mother-workers to have a strong perspective on how children should be raised with respect to maternal employment. This leads to the following two, central hypotheses explored in this analysis:

H(1): Mother-caregivers are more likely than mother-workers to express a belief in an ideal arrangement for children in terms of whether mothers should stay at home or work for pay.

H(2): Mother-caregivers are more likely than mother-workers to align their current employment statuses with their preferred arrangements regarding maternal employment.

DATA AND METHODS

To conduct this research, which is part of a larger research project on mothers and work-family balance, this study collected data from five specific mothers' organizations in the United States today. These groups are the only five in existence that due to their missions regarding combining paid work and family obligations, tend to attract members based on their current level of paid labor force participation; these are also the only five that have a multistate presence and compile centralized membership lists (essential for random sampling purposes).² These groups include Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), an in-person group that aims to promote Christian values among its members who have young children; Mocha Moms, an in-person group that, in its mission statement, aims to serve mothers of color who have decided not to work outside the home at this point in their lives (although anyone can join); Mothers & More, an in-person group that provides assistance and support to mothers when they are transitioning out of or into the

² Of course, smaller, local groups exist with similar purposes, but it would be extremely challenging to determine the population of such groups across the country as well as collect membership data from them.

workplace; the National Association of Mothers' Centers (NAMC), an in-person group that offers community-based resources and workplace advocacy to all interested mothers; and MomsRising, an online, politically active group that champions (among many issues) a variety of workplace flexibility reforms. Based on these missions, each group appeals to different percentages of mothers who work for pay versus mothers who stay at home. More specifically, in 2009, 34% of MOPS' 84,584 survey-eligible³ members worked for pay, as did 52% of Mocha Moms' 2,853 members, 52% of Mothers & More's 5,534 members, and 53% of NAMC's 885 members. At the other end of the spectrum, 74% of MomsRising's 168,786 members worked for pay.

For random sampling purposes, membership lists from each group were collected, which included only mothers' names and e-mail addresses. Then a census of the membership for the three smallest groups--Mocha Moms, Mothers & More, and NAMC--was conducted. In these cases, all of the survey-eligible members were asked to participate in a web-based survey, which was fielded from April through June, 2009. For the largest groups--MOPS and MomsRising--a random sample of 5,000 members from each was invited to participate in the same survey. All potential respondents were contacted up to five times; these contacts included an advance notice, a first request to participate, and three follow-up requests.

The survey covered many topics, including the mothers' level of involvement in their respective groups, attitudes toward paid work, and details regarding their participation in many types of political activism. The response rate for this survey was 19.3%, a rate quite common for

³ In this context, "survey-eligible" does not equal each group's total membership for a variety of reasons. In order to be included in the random sampling procedure, the analysis removed duplicate, inadequate, and corrupt records first. Next, all members who did not qualify as part of the main focus of inquiry were excluded. Therefore, any member who lacked a chapter affiliation, was not female, was not living in the United States, or had left the group before the survey was executed was excluded.

web-based surveys (Porter and Whitcomb 2003; Kaplowitz et al. 2004).⁴ The total sample size generated by the survey was 3,327; missing values for all of the included variables would have resulted in a reduction of cases to 3,108. Because using casewise deletion to address these missing data issues would likely introduce bias into the analysis (Royston 2005), multiple imputation methods (ICE in STATA) were used to complete the dataset. The analyses presented here created 50 imputed datasets using all of the independent and dependent variables and calculated parameter estimates using Rubin's rules (Rubin 1987; Rubin 1996).

Dependent Variables

There are two central dependent variables in this analysis that relate to a mother's commitment to a singular idea that working for pay or staying at home is best for most children. The first pertains to her *beliefs* on this issue and tests Hypothesis (1). The question in the survey was phrased in the following way: "An 'ideal arrangement' is one that works best for most people. Do you believe that there is one ideal arrangement in terms of whether mothers should stay at home to care for their children or work outside the home for pay?" Those responses were coded into the first dependent variable, "Belief in an Ideal Arrangement," with a value of either 1 (yes) or 0 (no) in Model 1.

The second dependent variable, "Alignment with an Ideal Arrangement," pertains to the smaller subset of respondents (n=614) who answered affirmatively to having a belief in an ideal arrangement. This variable reflects a mother's ability to *align* her own employment status with her preferred ideal arrangement for most children and tests Hypothesis (2). To create this variable, these particular respondents were asked the following question, "What do you think that

⁴ As the groups only offered their members' names and email addresses, the study was unable to determine the extent of nonresponse bias.

one ideal arrangement is?" Options included mothers working full time for pay, mothers working part time for pay, mothers not working outside the home at all, or "other," where respondents were given the opportunity to specify in their own words what this alternative might be. The "other" category, therefore, ended up containing a wide range of responses, including, for example, "mothers working when kids are older;" "better choices for mothers and fathers to determine a situation that works best for them;" and "mothers working with a lot of flexibility." These ideal arrangement responses were then matched with all mothers' current paid employment statuses to determine whether these women actually had in place the arrangements that they favored. This second dependent variable, Alignment with an Ideal Arrangement, was coded 1 (yes) if this alignment occurred, and 0 if not (no) in Model 2.

Independent Variables for Both Models

Overall, the research suggests that to the extent that it exists at all, a belief in an ideal arrangement for most children might be activated by one's mothering identity. And, although as of yet unstudied, an individual's mothering identity may also be linked to actually aligning one's current employment status with this preferred arrangement. The most important independent variables in this analysis therefore relate to each respondent's mothering identity. Two dummy variables regarding mother-worker identities were included in each model: full-time mother-workers, defined as working at least 35 hours per week (1=yes, 0=no) and part-time mother-workers, defined as working fewer than 35 hours per week (1=yes, 0=no). The omitted category was the mother-caregiver identity. As described above, these variables help test the core two hypotheses in this analysis.

What are other likely predictors of such beliefs and potential employment alignment with these beliefs beyond mothering identities? Group participation and strong social networks might be important indicators of whether or not mothers will express such beliefs as well as succeed in aligning their employment circumstances with such beliefs if they have them. One key variable around which mothers' groups may be structured is along the paid work/stay-at-home continuum (Crowley and Curenton 2011; Alger and Crowley 2012; Crowley 2012). If a group has mostly stay-at-home mothers or mostly mothers who work for pay as its members, then this organization will likely provide positive feedback to its members who possess the dominant arrangements and fewer acknowledgements of alternative ways for women to structure their lives (McPherson et al. 1992; Popielarz and McPherson 1995; McPherson et al. 2001). MOPS had the lowest percentage of mothers who work for pay at 34% and was thus relatively homogeneous along this employment status variable value; membership in this organization was the omitted category in this analysis. Membership in the other groups--MomsRising, Mocha Moms, Mothers & More, and NAMC--were all coded with either a 1 (yes) or a 0 (no). Besides MomsRising, where 74% of mothers work for pay and was also relatively homogeneous along this employment status variable value, recall that all of these other groups have roughly equal percentages of mothers who stay at home and mothers who work for pay, which should increase receptivity toward alternative work/parenting arrangements. Participants in all of these other groups (again, with the exception of the more homogeneous MomsRising) were thus predicted to be less likely to hold strong beliefs in one ideal arrangement for children than MOPS members and less likely to align their current employment statuses with their ideal arrangements if they have one than MOPS members.

In this same area of group participation and social networks, the more locally-based mothers' groups a woman self-selects into, the more she may be invested in one particular mothering identity.⁵ Belonging to numerous mothers' groups is therefore likely to decrease receptivity toward alternative work/parenting arrangements and increase the chances that a woman will align her current employment status with her ideal arrangement if she has one. A parallel argument can be made about a mother's own circle of friends as it relates to the concept of shared-context support. In this case, the more a mother's immediate set of friends share her mothering identity, the more likely she will receive affirmation for her own preferred arrangement (Johnston and Swanson 2004); she also might be more likely to align her own employment status with this ideal arrangement if she has one. The number of other in-person mothers' groups in which each respondent participated was therefore included in the models (with value options ranging from 0-50), as well as the number of the three closest friends each respondent had who shared her mothering identity.

Another critical factor that can influence beliefs and alignment with beliefs is the presence of role models. Hattery (2001) has suggested that mother-caregivers are particularly influential in shaping their daughters' feelings about entering the workforce. Once they become adults themselves, these daughters might become mother-workers because they financially have to, but really wish they were mother-caregivers like their own mothers, or because they want to do so, and truly oppose their own mothers' identities. In either case, they will likely have strong opinions about maternal employment in general. Both models therefore included a measure indicating whether these respondents were mother-workers, and their own mothers were mother-

⁵ These other groups are small and sometimes, informal. By definition, therefore, they exclude the five main groups in this study.

caregivers when they were children (1=yes, 0=no); this variable was predicted to be positively associated with a belief in an ideal arrangement; however, the directional impact on aligning their employment circumstances with their ideal arrangement if one exists is unclear as it depends on whether these women endorse or reject their own mothers' identities.

Consuming high levels of mainstream media may also increase a mother's propensity to express a belief in an ideal arrangement and intensify her quest to align her own employment situation with this ideal arrangement, if she has one (Johnston and Swanson 2003a; Peskowitz 2005; Zimmerman et al. 2008). More specifically, scholarly research that has examined popular depictions of mother-workers and mother-caregivers has noted that both groups are portrayed in highly divergent and frequently stereotypical ways that might promote strong belief systems about maternal employment (Johnston and Swanson 2003b; Johnston and Swanson 2003a; 2008). In this study, media consumption was simply a measure of how many hours per weekday a mother watches television (range: 0-24) and was predicted to be positively associated with both a belief in an ideal arrangement and actually aligning one's employment status with it if one exists.

Partisan identification and other types of political attitudes also might matter in predicting strong belief systems and alignment of employment practices with these beliefs. Republicans, who are more conservative than Democrats in general across a variety of issues including those affecting gender roles (Sanbonmatsu 2004), might be more inclined to favor the mother-caregiver identity (rather than be open to all mothering identities), thus increasing their likelihood of holding a belief in an ideal arrangement and their desire to align their employment circumstances with this ideal arrangement if they have one. In a different way, over the years, feminism has implied broader choice sets for mothers, including support for both those who are

working and those who are staying at home. A respondent's more positive feelings toward feminism might therefore both decrease her belief in one ideal arrangement for children and her inclination toward aligning her employment circumstances with this ideal arrangement, if she has one (McCabe 2005). To operationalize these concepts, both models included a variable indicating partisan identification (1=Republican, 0=otherwise). They also incorporated a feminism feeling thermometer variable adapted from repeated American National Election Studies (ANES) by asking respondents, "On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is very unfavorable, 50 is neutral, and 100 is very favorable, how do you feel about feminism?"

Finally, a broad array of socioeconomic and demographic variables might influence whether or not a woman expresses a belief in an ideal arrangement, and, if so, is able to align her employment status with this ideal arrangement. They were measured as follows. College education was included as a simple dichotomous variable (1=at least an associate's degree, 0=otherwise). Age was measured in years. Marital status was simply a dichotomous variable (1=yes, 0=no). To capture whether a respondent was religious, each mother was coded with a value of 1 (0=otherwise) if she attended services at least once per week. Household income was captured with two dummy variables: low income (less than \$30,000 per year) and medium income (between \$30,000 and less than \$75,000 per year). The omitted category was high income households (\$75,000 or higher). Finally, the study included a count of how many children the respondent had in each of the following four age categories: under 5; 5-8; 9-12; and 13-18.⁶

⁶ Race variables such as Black could not be incorporated in this analysis due to its high correlation with being a member of Mocha Moms.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the first dependent variable, Belief in an Ideal Arrangement (Model 1), and corresponding independent variables are provided in Table 1. About 18.5% of all respondents reported that they believed that there was one ideal way to raise children with respect to whether mothers should work for pay or not. This means that the remaining 4 out of 5 respondents rejected this claim.

In terms of the independent variable values collected from the sample as a whole, about 28.6% were part-time mother-workers, 22.5% were full-time mother-workers, and the remainder--48.9%--were mother-caregivers (the omitted category). The smallest percentage of respondents came from NAMC at 5.5%; this was followed by 13.9% from MomsRising and 18.6% from Mocha Moms. A full 39.1% were Mothers & More members, with the remainder--22.9%--coming from MOPS (the omitted category). Interestingly, beyond their primary membership in the aforementioned groups, most mothers did not join another in-person mothers' group, with a mean of .387 memberships in similar organizations. In addition, most mothers reported that the majority of their closest three friends shared their mothering identity status, with a mean of 1.86 friends holding the same identity. In terms of role models, overall, only 7.1% of the sample were mother-workers while their own mother was a mother-caregiver when they were children. Finally, in terms of media consumption, the average mother in these groups watched 2.57 hours of television per weekday.

The sample was more liberal than conservative as measured by the two included variables tapping into political attitudes. Only 25.1% described themselves as Republicans, while the average value on the feminism thermometer was 64.38 out of 100 (100 as most favorable toward feminism). With respect to sociodemographic characteristics, 91.7% reported

attaining at least an associate's degree, and the average age of the mothers in the sample was 37.72 years. They were also married at the high rate of 93.4%, and moderately religious, with 27.4% declaring that they attend services at least once per week. In addition, they were also advantaged economically, with only 2.6% in the low income household category, 27.3% in the medium income group, and 70.1% in the high income household group (the omitted category). With respect to the number of children in each age category (under 5, 5-8, 9-12, and 13-18), respondents had the highest number of children in the youngest category, at a mean of 1.16 children.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 2 provides additional details regarding the mothers who are most likely to believe that there is one ideal arrangement for children broken down by mothering identity and group affiliation. With respect to the general belief that there is one ideal arrangement to raise children with mothers either working for pay or staying at home (Table 2), recall that again, approximately 18.5% of all group mothers held this attitude. The percentage was slightly lower for all mother-workers considered together, at 15.7%; disaggregated even further, while 14.7% of full-time mother-workers held this belief, 16.4% of part-time mother-workers expressed this attitude. Mother-caregivers were more likely than any type of mother-worker to believe in an ideal arrangement, at 21.5%. Among the various mothers' groups included in the analysis, MOPS members were the most likely respondents to articulate this attitude at 28.3%, while MomsRising members were the least likely to register this belief, at 10.6%.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 3 presents the logistic regression results in the form of odds ratios related to the two dependent variables.⁷ Robust standard errors in parentheses next to each odds ratio and summary f-statistics for each model as a whole are also reported. Model 1, related to the first dependent variable, Belief in an Ideal Arrangement, was analyzed for the entire sample of 3,327 cases and will be discussed first. Most notably, and contrary to Hypothesis (1), mothering identities did not have any relationship with an ideal arrangement belief. In other words, part-time mother-workers and full-time mothers-workers were no more or less likely than mother-caregivers to express this attitude. This finding provides some evidence that attachment to particular mothering identities might be less powerful than previously imagined as measured along this dimension.

In terms of group affiliations and other social networks, another unexpected finding was that being a member of Mocha Moms increased the odds of agreeing with this ideal arrangement statement by about 67% in comparison to MOPS members. In contrast, membership in Mothers & More decreased the odds of agreeing with this statement by about one-quarter (.744) in comparison to MOPS members, as hypothesized. This unexpected finding regarding Mocha Moms can potentially be explained by the prominent organizational philosophy of the group. Recall that Mocha Moms, composed of mostly Black mothers, distinguishes itself as providing services to mothers of color who have decided not to work outside the home at this point in their lives, even though anyone can be a member. Perhaps more so than in all other groups, this distinct mission that focuses on one particular work-family situation makes Mocha Moms' members more likely to desire an ideal arrangement, regardless of what they are actually doing in their daily lives. In addition, being involved in other, in-person mothers' groups also made a

⁷ In this discussion, when presented, the odds ratios are in parentheses.

difference. More specifically, and as expected, involvement in one additional in-person mothers' group increased the odds of agreeing with the ideal arrangement statement by 26%. Notably, however, having additional friends who are similarly situated in terms of mothering identities made no difference in terms of influencing one's belief in an ideal arrangement for children.

While there were no role model or media effects here, political influences were important, as expected, with the odds of agreeing with the ideal arrangement statement 69% higher for Republicans than for members of any other party (or no party affiliation). In contrast, and as hypothesized, stronger positive feelings towards feminism, as defined by increasing the value on the feminism feeling thermometer by one point, slightly decreased mothers' odds of holding this belief by about 1% (.992).

Lastly, in terms of sociodemographic factors, only two variables were statistically significant. Those with a college education decreased their odds of holding this ideal arrangement view by about one-third in comparison to those without a college education (.697), as the higher educational experience perhaps exposes these mothers to the pros and cons of all mothering identities. In addition, the odds of holding this belief in an ideal arrangement were 39% higher for mothers in medium income households than for those in high income households. Mothers in medium income households, with more financial constraints upon them as compared with those from high income households, might have a heightened awareness of the trade-offs available to them (i.e., staying at home but not being able to afford luxury goods) and thus report stronger beliefs in terms of the appropriateness of maternal employment.

[Table 3 about here]

The second major research question analyzed in this study explored the predictors of who actually aligns their employment statuses with their own ideal arrangements among the smaller

sample who believes that such an ideal arrangement exists. Table 4 first offers descriptive statistics for this smaller sample (n=614). Interestingly, only 37.0% of these respondents had actually aligned their current employment statuses with their beliefs. In terms of this smaller sample's labor force participation, these 614 mothers were slightly less likely to be mother-workers than those in the full sample, with 25.4% as part-time mother-workers and 17.8% full-time mother-workers. The remaining respondents, 56.8%, were mother-caregivers (the omitted category).

[Table 4 about here]

Table 5 further explores the preferences of these same mothers who believe that there is one ideal arrangement for children broken down by mothering identity and group affiliation. Of all of these mothers, a plurality (39.1%) asserted that having a part-time job was the most ideal arrangement, followed by staying at home (33.4%), other arrangements (25.4%), and lastly, working full time (2.1%). Among all mother-workers and then mother-workers further disaggregated by full-time and part-time status, the part-time option again was most heavily favored. This top preference was also true for mothers across four of the five groups: NAMC, MomsRising, Mocha Moms, and Mothers & More. Among mother-caregivers and MOPS members, however, staying at home was the clear favorite, at 42.4% and 54.2%, respectively.

Table 6 shows whether the majority of those mothers who believe in an ideal arrangement actually have aligned their current employment statuses with their preferred options. Interestingly, out of the 614 mothers who believe that such an ideal arrangement is desirable, only 227 (37%), as reported above, stated that they were able to align their employment statuses with this ideal, with the remaining 387 (63%) asserting that they had not yet achieved this alignment. This divergence between preferences and reality is even more compelling when these

statistics are broken down by two critical variables: mothering identity and group affiliation. More specifically, neither a majority of mother-workers nor mother-caregivers were able to achieve alignment. In addition, among all of the groups, MOPS members were the only ones where the majority had aligned their employment arrangements with their preferred beliefs regarding maternal employment.

[Tables 5 and 6 about here]

Turning back to Table 3, Model 2 presents the results from the logistic regression analysis for the subset of respondents who held a belief in an ideal arrangement regarding maternal employment. Recall that in this estimation, the dependent variable was Alignment with an Ideal Arrangement; that is, the dependent variable measured whether the respondents were able to align their current employment arrangements with what they believed to be best for children in terms of mothers working for pay or staying at home. Most notably in Model 2, and in contrast to Model 1, a particular type of mothering identity *did* matter in terms of influencing the dependent variable, supporting Hypothesis (2). More specifically, full-time mother-workers decreased their odds of actually aligning their employment circumstances with their preferred ideal arrangements in their own lives by about 84% (.164) in comparison to mother-caregivers. In other words, these full-time mother-workers knew exactly what they wanted in terms of a suitable work-family life, but for a variety of reasons, perhaps such as financial need or inflexible workplaces, were less likely to align their employment arrangements with their beliefs. Notably, however, part-time mother-workers did not influence the dependent variable either positively or negatively in a statistically significant way.

Other independent variables were also statistically significant. Unexpectedly, membership in Mocha Moms decreased the likelihood of alignment by about 50% (.517) in

comparison to membership in MOPS. Membership in the other sampled groups or in any other number of in-person mothers' groups did not matter in influencing alignment with the respondent's ideal arrangement. How can we account for this Mocha Moms finding? Historically, most Black women have been expected to work even after motherhood for economic reasons (Glenn et al. 1994; Johnston and Swanson 2006). In addition, there is a strong cultural belief that all highly educated Black women especially must "give back" to their own communities by working (Giele 2008). However, again recall that Mocha Moms is an organization with a mission to assist mothers who are not working outside the home at this point in their lives. These contrasting pressures led 39% of all Mocha Moms who expressed a belief in an ideal arrangement to describe it not as working for pay nor staying at home, but rather as "other" in Table 5. These women were the most innovative among all mothers' group members in thinking through the possibilities for their lives, and for many of them, their current employment circumstances simply did not align with these innovative beliefs regarding their preferred arrangements for their children.⁸

In terms of the other independent variables, having an additional friend with a similar mothering identity increased the odds of mothers aligning their employment circumstances with their ideal arrangements by 37%. In addition, mother-workers whose own mothers were mother-caregivers when they themselves were children decreased the odds of alignment by about three-quarters (.226). Interestingly, the respondents' level of television consumption and their political attitudes were not statistically significant in predicting whether or not alignment was achieved. Finally, sociodemographic variables for the most part did not matter in terms of influencing the

⁸ There were very few Blacks in the other groups who expressed a belief an ideal arrangement, so it is difficult to make a comparison between them and Mocha Moms members. Interestingly, however, none of the small number of Black members in these other organizations were able to align their current employment statuses with their preferred arrangements. These included two women in MomsRising, three in Mothers & More, and two in MOPS.

dependent variable. Only the religion variable was statistically significant, with mothers who attended weekly services increasing their odds of alignment by a high rate of 112%. This finding is consistent with the research that suggests that some religious parents have special concerns about raising their children in a secular world. For example, Christian parents in particular worry about teaching their children to resist material goods, be well-disciplined, and respect their parents as authority figures (Mahoney 2005; Petts 2007; Bunge 2008; Crowley 2012). With these goals in mind, religious mothers might strive especially hard to align their employment statuses with their preferred arrangements for their children.

DISCUSSION

Mothers in the United States face enormous pressures when it comes to organizing their family and paid work lives. Mother-workers, or women who parent while engaging in paid employment, represent one segment of this population. Mother-caregivers, or women who do not participate in the paid labor market, represent the other segment of this overall population. In many ways, both sets of women occupy competing, binary identities. They are oppositional in that culturally, society places intense pressures on all women to be "good" mothers, with securing paid employment or staying at home playing a significant role in how positively or negatively they are judged across a wide range of parenting tasks (Buxton 1998; Blair-Loy 2001; Hattery 2001).

While the media certainly highlights the distinctions between these mothers, this study demonstrates that strong beliefs about maternal employment are relatively rare. In fact, less than one in five mothers revealed that they believe that there is one ideal arrangement for children in terms of whether a mother should work for pay or stay at home. Perhaps most compelling,

however, was that no single mothering identity was statistically significant in predicting such beliefs. This means that previous research suggesting that mother-caregivers might hold stronger views due to the cognitive consistency of intensive mothering ideology and their own mothering identities is incomplete; instead, other factors are at play in driving these attitudes when they do emerge. More specifically, this study pointed out the importance of certain group and social network linkages (membership in either Mocha Moms or Mothers & More, and other local, in-person group memberships), political influences (a Republican party affiliation and attitudes toward feminism), and sociodemographic variables (college educated and income) as key in influencing these attitudes.

This analysis also sheds more light on the subset of mothers who *do* believe that there is one ideal arrangement for children regarding maternal employment. Among this smaller set of women, in the aggregate, they cited part-time work as best for children. Interestingly, however, the majority of all of these mothers considered together were not able to align their employment circumstances with their preferred ideal arrangements in their own lives. On this point, no set of mother-workers, nor mother-caregivers, nor the majority of mothers in four of the five individual groups were, in fact, able to achieve this alignment. Indeed, only a majority of MOPS mothers reported aligning their current employment circumstances with their preferred ideal arrangements. Another key finding for this set of mothers was that full-time mother-workers had a smaller probability of achieving this alignment in comparison to mother-caregivers. In addition, while Mocha Moms members were less likely than MOPS members to obtain alignment as well as mother-workers whose own mothers were mother-caregivers, those with more friends who shared their mothering identities as well as those who were more religious were more likely to achieve alignment.

Of course, this study is not without its own qualifications, the most important of which is generalizability. The sample was drawn from a specific set of organizations that tend to attract members based on their own missions regarding mothers' labor force participation. Simply by participating in this type of mothers' group, respondents may have different attitudes toward maternal employment and actual alignment with these beliefs than the general population of mothers at large. In addition, the sample is highly advantaged in terms of multiple socioeconomic and demographic measures, with over 90% holding some type of college degree and the majority of households earning incomes of \$75,000 or more per year. This high level of education and household income most likely affects the results generated here perhaps by exposing those mothers to a wider range of occupations and/or the option of not working for pay at all that would not be possible among the general population of mothers across the country. Again, these advantages could produce different findings than those generated by mothers with fewer opportunities. Finally, with respect to alignment, this study only addressed whether current paid work statuses match preferred options regarding maternal employment. It does not speak to the issue of timing; that is, preferred options could come before *or* after mothers' decisions regarding employment.

Overall, however, and despite these limitations, this analysis contributes to our understanding of intensive mothering and mothering identities in several important ways. First, this study demonstrates that mothers are pushed and pulled by the pressures of intensive mothering ideology. The push and pull of these expectations, however, does not appear to solidify commitment to a singular mothering identity but rather to make this type of attachment more tenuous. That is, the practice of everyday motherhood creates both joys and struggles for mother-caregivers and mother-workers. Previous research has demonstrated that mother-

caregivers perhaps have more time to spend with their children, but also report losses in terms of delaying the achievement of their own personal goals. In a similar way, mother-workers retain income-producing autonomy, but frequently admit sadness in terms of missing key milestones in their children's lives while they are at work. This acknowledgment of ambivalence toward their own mothering identities for both groups, then, may make them more sympathetic with all mothers' struggles, thereby helping to generate the belief among the overwhelming majority of them that there is not one overall ideal arrangement for most children as to whether mothers should work for pay or stay at home. In addition, no mothering identity emerged as more or less likely than another in terms of holding these beliefs.

Second, this study also demonstrates that a small but not negligible number of American mothers *do* believe that only one ideal arrangement exists for mothers in terms of organizing their paid work and family lives. Also notably, the majority of these mothers were unable to align their current employment statuses with their preferred ideal arrangements, with full-time mother-workers less likely than mother-caregivers to achieve such alignment. There are many possible explanations for this lack of alignment, including economic needs, inflexible employment conditions, and cultural pressures that force mothers into working more or less hours than they would optimally choose on their own. Overall, this smaller set of mothers with these "mismatched" attitudes and practices are not living what they would view as their most rewarding lives. More importantly, these alignment findings can also be problematic if they lead to the promotion of a narrow societal view whereby only one set of mothers can be considered as practicing "good parenting," if they foster intermaternal judgment, or if they lead to a constant sense of failure among the group of mothers who cannot match their current employment statuses with their preferred ideal arrangements. How can mothers avoid these outcomes? Or

more broadly, how can we further relax the strong attachments to these mothering identities that some women have and make them less restrictive overall?

This analysis began with a focus on intensive mothering ideology and its relationship with mothering identities. Intensive mothering ideology, in this framework, places pressure on both mother-workers and mother-caregivers to provide their children with perfect lives. While both sets of mothers strive to meet these standards, mother-caregivers have an advantage in that they are more likely than mother-workers to perceive cognitive consistency between the intensive mothering ideology that surrounds them and their everyday motherhood practices. Mother-workers, on the other hand, lack this cultural reinforcement. In both cases, however, it is important to note that women's mothering identities are not theirs alone own to make, adopt, and/or integrate into their own lives.

In fact, sociodemographic, economic, and cultural factors all influence the array of options that women have at their disposal as they think about creating their own personal mothering identities. For the more advantaged women here, perhaps most important are the effects of fathers. On this point, numerous scholars have stressed that the process of maternal identity formation is much more relational than internally-generated in nature (Glenn 1994; Arendell 2000), with fathers playing a key role. While fathers clearly have been engaging in more child care and housework than in any other period in American history, as of 2008, mothers were still performing 17.4 hours of housework and 13.9 hours of child care per week, versus 9.5 and 7.8, respectively, for fathers (Bianchi 2011). If fathers would level the playing field in these two arenas within their own families, mothers would experience much less pressure to consistently "do it all" perfectly. Expectations that now fall chiefly on mothers, in other words,

would become shared parenting responsibilities between both mothers and fathers (Johnston and Swanson 2006).

Indeed, research suggests that relaxing the assumptions that buttress current mothering identities *must* be a collaborative process between men and women in order for attachments to these identities to be further weakened, restructured, and transformed (Gerson 2009). For instance, in their qualitative analyses of fifty couples, Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) first identified couple-based thoughts and behaviors that solidify attachments to mothering identities in rigid ways. These include partners believing that only mothers have a natural connection to their children; fathers stepping back from assuming more assertive parenting roles; mothers organizing their lives around their children; and mothers assuming continual responsibility for tasks related to their children. On the other hand, couples that wanted to create more equal partnerships engaged in completely different thought patterns and behaviors around childrearing. These couples assumed that responsibility for children is shared; they compensated for biological differences in areas such as breastfeeding by assigning fathers other duties; fathers took on caretaking jobs on their own initiative; fathers embraced learning about child care; and mothers did not act as gatekeepers as fathers became more involved with their children.

The most important conclusion drawn from this research is that thoughts and behaviors create self-perpetuating systems of either inequality or equality. When couples find themselves generating parenting thoughts and behaviors that keep them segregated from one another based solely on sex, attachments to mothering identities as they exist right now--and which can be oppressive--gain power. When, on the other hand, couples share responsibility for child care, women become less attached to mothering identities that could have previously controlled the ways in which their families operated. These couples establish much more egalitarian

childrearing practices, and, most importantly, develop new notions of proper mothering and fathering. Reducing attachments to mothering identities, therefore, must be a joint project between couples, one that promises benefits not only to parents in terms of shared duties and thus greater gender equality, but also to children as well as they gain closer relationships to both of the central adults in their lives.

AUTHOR NOTE

Jocelyn Elise Crowley is a Professor of Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her research focus is on American social policy. In addition to numerous peer-reviewed journal publications, her books include *The Politics of Child Support in America*, *Defiant Dads: Fathers' Rights Activists in America*, and *Mothers Unite! Organizing for Workplace Flexibility and the Transformation of Family Life*.

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Table 1 Descriptive statistics for full sample regarding belief in an ideal arrangement

VARIABLE NAME	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	N Size
Belief in an Ideal Arrangement	.185	.389	3327
MOTHERING IDENTITY			
Part-time Mother-Worker	.286	.452	3327
Full-time Mother-Worker	.225	.418	3327
GROUPS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS			
NAMC	.055	.227	3327
MomsRising	.139	.346	3327
Mocha Moms	.186	.390	3327
Mothers & More	.391	.488	3327
In-person Group Memberships	.387	.687	3327
Friends like Me	1.86	.980	3327
ROLE MODELS			
Mother-Worker but Own Mother was Mother-Caregiver	.071	.257	3327
MEDIA			
Television Hours watched Per Weekday	2.57	3.14	3327
POLITICAL INFLUENCES			
Republican	.251	.434	3327
Feminism	64.38	26.42	3327
SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS			
College Educated	.917	.276	3327
Age	37.72	6.48	3327
Married	.934	.246	3327
Religious	.274	.446	3327
Low Income Household	.026	.158	3327
Medium Income Household	.273	.446	3327
No. of Children under 5	1.16	.799	3327
No. of Children 5-8	.530	.680	3327
No. of Children 9-12	.178	.455	3327
No. of Children 13-18	.122	.420	3327

Table 2 Is there one ideal arrangement for children?

	ALL GROUP MOTHERS	ALL MOTHER- WORKERS	FULL- TIME MOTHER- WORKERS	PART- TIME MOTHER- WORKERS	ALL MOTHER CARE- GIVERS	NAMC	Moms- Rising	MOPS	Mocha Moms	Mothers & More
Yes	18.5%	15.7%	14.7%	16.4%	21.5%	17.6%	10.6%	28.3%	24.8%	12.8%
No	81.5%	84.3%	85.3%	83.6%	78.5%	82.4%	89.4%	71.7%	75.2%	87.2%

Note: N=3,327

Table 3 Odds ratios illustrating the predictors of a belief in an ideal arrangement and alignment with an ideal arrangement

VARIABLE NAME	MODEL 1. Belief in an Ideal Arrangement	MODEL 2. Alignment with an Ideal Arrangement
MOTHERING IDENTITY		
Part-time Mother-Worker	.861 (.101)	1.36 (.312)
Full-time Mother-Worker	.916 (.129)	.164** (.066)
GROUPS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS		
NAMC	1.08 (.250)	1.32 (.588)
MomsRising	.705 (.149)	1.16 (.504)
Mocha Moms	1.67** (.264)	.517* (.170)
Mothers & More	.744* (.106)	.853 (.246)
In-person Group Memberships	1.26** (.081)	.935 (.115)
Friends like Me	1.02 (.051)	1.37** (.135)
ROLE MODELS		
Mother-Worker but Own Mother was Mother-Caregiver	1.10 (.224)	.266** (.130)
MEDIA		
Television Hours watched Per Weekday	1.03 (.014)	1.01 (.028)
POLITICAL INFLUENCES		
Republican	1.69** (.217)	.936 (.237)
Feminism	.992** (.002)	.994 (.004)
SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS		
College Educated	.697* (.107)	.756 (.221)
Age	.994 (.009)	.974 (.019)
Married	.935 (.194)	1.20 (.574)
Religious	1.16 (.137)	2.12** (.498)
Low Household Income	1.18 (.356)	2.13 (1.20)
Medium Household Income	1.39** (.154)	.953 (.200)
No. of Children under 5	1.06 (.076)	.924 (.125)
No. of Children 5-8	1.04 (.075)	1.16 (.163)
No. of Children 9-12	1.03 (.111)	.686 (.147)
No. of Children 13-18	1.01 (.128)	1.29 (.273)
SUMMARY STATISTICS	F-statistic=9.41** N=3,327	F-statistic=4.01** N=614

Notes: **p-value<.01; *p-value<.05; Robust standard errors in parentheses

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for sub-sample that believes in ideal arrangement

VARIABLE NAME	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	N Size
ALIGNMENT WITH IDEAL ARRANGEMENT	.370	.483	614
MOTHERING IDENTITY			
Part-time Mother-Worker	.254	.436	614
Full-time Mother-Worker	.178	.382	614
GROUPS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS			
NAMC	.052	.222	614
MomsRising	.078	.269	614
Mocha Moms	.251	.434	614
Mothers & More	.270	.445	614
In-person Group Memberships	.477	.799	614
Friends like Me	1.86	1.02	614
ROLE MODELS			
Mother-Worker but Own Mother was Mother-Caregiver	.058	.234	614
MEDIA			
Television Hours watched Per Weekday	3.02	3.74	614
POLITICAL INFLUENCES			
Republican	.389	.488	614
Feminism	54.47	28.61	614
SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS			
College Educated	.863	.344	614
Age	36.76	6.10	614
Married	.938	.241	614
Religious	.396	.489	614
Low Household Income	.031	.173	614
Medium Household Income	.356	.479	614
No. of Children under 5	1.26	.804	614
No. of Children 5-8	.563	.710	614
No. of Children 9-12	.184	.473	614
No. of Children 13-18	.132	.471	614

Table 5 If there is one ideal arrangement, what is it?

IDEAL	ALL GROUP MOTHERS	ALL MOTHER- WORKERS	FULL- TIME MOTHER- WORKERS	PART- TIME MOTHER- WORKERS	ALL MOTHER CARE- GIVERS	NAMC	Moms- Rising	MOPS	Mocha Moms	Mothers & More
Mothers working full time	13 (2.1%)	11 (4.2%)	10 (9.2%)	1 (.64%)	2 (.57%)	0 (0%)	2 (4.2%)	2 (.93%)	5 (3.2%)	4 (2.4%)
Mothers working part time	240 (39.1%)	123 (46.4%)	54 (49.5%)	69 (44.2%)	117 (33.5%)	18 (56.3%)	20 (41.7%)	62 (29.0%)	61 (39.6%)	79 (47.6%)
Mothers not working at all outside the home	205 (33.4%)	57 (21.5%)	14 (12.8%)	43 (27.6%)	148 (42.4%)	6 (18.8%)	12 (25.0%)	116 (54.2%)	28 (18.2%)	43 (25.9%)
Other	156 (25.4%)	74 (27.9%)	31 (28.4%)	43 (27.6%)	82 (23.5%)	8 (25.0%)	14 (29.2%)	34 (15.9%)	60 (39.0%)	40 (24.1%)
Column Total	614 (100%)	265 (100%)	109 (100%)	156 (100%)	349 (100%)	32 (100%)	48 (100%)	214 (100%)	154 (100%)	166 (100%)

Note: Column Percentages in Parentheses

Table 6 Mothers who have aligned their employment statuses with their ideal arrangements

ALIGNMENT WITH IDEAL ARRANGEMENT	ALL GROUP MOTHERS	ALL MOTHER-WORKERS	FULL-TIME MOTHER-WORKERS	PART-TIME MOTHER-WORKERS	ALL MOTHER CARE-GIVERS	NAMC	Moms-Rising	MOPS	Mocha Moms	Mothers & More
YES	227 (37.0%)	79 (29.8%)	10 (9.2%)	69 (44.2%)	148 (42.4%)	12 (37.5%)	14 (29.2%)	115 (53.7%)	33 (21.4%)	53 (31.9%)
NO	387 (63.0%)	186 (70.2%)	99 (90.8%)	87 (55.8%)	201 (57.6%)	20 (62.5%)	34 (70.8%)	99 (46.3%)	121 (78.6%)	113 (68.1%)
Column Total	614 (100%)	265 (100%)	109 (100%)	156 (100%)	349 (100%)	32 (100%)	48 (100%)	214 (100%)	154 (100%)	166 (100%)

Note: Column Percentages in Parentheses