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ABSTRACT

Intergenerational attitudes toward child care were examined among college-age students and their parents through the use of questionnaires, the Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment Scale (BACMEC), and the Bias in Attitudes toward Women Scale (BIAS). Findings indicated that traditional attitudes were more prevalent in males of both generations, while employed mothers scored the lowest on the BIAS. Male and female students reported more perceived benefits than their parents to maternal employment and child care, while beliefs about the costs of child care did not differ significantly along gender or generational lines. Living in a household with maternal employment and child care affected students and mothers, with only fathers showing nonsignificant differences on scores on the BACMEC Benefits and Costs subscales. (Author/EV)

Intergenerational Attitudes Toward Maternal Employment

Catherine P. Heaven and Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett
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Presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development,
Minneapolis, Minnesota, April, 2001

ABSTRACT

Intergenerational attitudes toward child care were examined in college-aged students and their parents through the use of questionnaires. The Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment Scale (BACMEC), and Bias in Attitudes toward Women Scale (BIAS). Traditional attitudes were more prevalent in males of both generations, while employed mothers scored the lowest on the BIAS scale. Male and female students reported more perceived benefits than their parents to maternal employment and child care, while beliefs about the costs of child care did not differ significantly along gender or generational lines. Living in a household with maternal employment and child care affected students and mothers, with only fathers showing nonsignificant differences on scores on the BACMEC Benefits and Costs subscales.

PARTICIPANTS

Students

N=149 (58 females, 91 males)

Age range: 18 to 28 (\bar{x} = 18.7)

Ethnicity: 87% Caucasian
2.7% Biracial
2.7% Asian-American
2.7% Hispanic
1.3% African American
0.7% Native American
4.2% Other

Reported Household Income: 75% > \$50,000
50% > \$80,000

Marital Status: 92.6% single

Religious Affiliation: 35.8% Catholic
35.1% Protestant— main line
10.4% Non-believer
9% Jewish
5.2% Protestant— Evangelical
1.5% Muslim
1.5% Mormon
1.5% Other

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*Kathleen
McCluskey-Fawcett*

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Political Views:
 21.8% slightly liberal
 21.1% moderate
 19.7% liberal
 15% slightly conservative
 13.6% conservative
 3.4% extremely liberal
 0% extremely conservative
 5.4% don't know

Residence:
 56.2% suburban
 29.5% urban
 14.4% rural

PARTICIPANTS

Parents

N=111 (65 mothers, 47 fathers)

Ethnicity:
 93.9% Caucasian
 3.9% Biracial
 2.6% Hispanic
 1.6% Native American
 1.6% Other

Reported Household Income:
 Mothers: 87.1% >\$50,000
 58.1% >\$80,000
 Fathers: 96% >\$50,000
 63.9% >\$80,000

Marital Status:
 Mothers: 92.3% married
 Fathers: 97.9% married

<u>Religious Affiliation:</u>	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Catholic	41.9%	35.6%
Protestant-Main Line	32.3%	44.4%
Jewish	8.1%	11.1%
Non-believer	1.6%	2.2%
Mormon	1.6%	----
Other	6.5%	4.4%

<u>Education:</u>	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
63.1% had at least a college degree	63.1%	80.8% had at least a college degree
20% had partial college	20%	48.9% had advanced degrees
24.6% had advanced degrees	24.6%	48.9%

Political Views:

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Slightly conservative	13.8%	24.5%
Conservative	20.0%	24.5%
Moderate	23.1%	20.4%
Slightly liberal	24.6%	16.3%
Liberal	18.5%	12.2%
Extremely conservative	----	2.0%
Extremely liberal	1.5%	----

Residence:

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Suburban	64.1%	66.0%
Urban	25.0%	23.4%
Rural	10.9%	10.6%

MEASURES

Beliefs about the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children (BACMEC) (Greenberger, et al, 1988)

- a 24 item, Likert scale questionnaire assessing the positive and negative impacts of maternal employment on (a) psychosocial conceptions, (b) gender-role opinions, (c) safety and health, and (d) intellectual development

Bias in Attitudes Survey (BIAS) (Jean & Reynolds, 1980)

- a 35 item, Likert scale questionnaire assessing the changing roles of men and women in society

Demographic and Family History Questionnaire

- gender, ethnicity, income, marital status, religious affiliation, residence, education

Political Affiliation Question

- a single question asking participants to rate themselves on a scale ranging from (1) extremely liberal to (7) extremely conservative

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a great deal of research has been conducted on the effects of maternal employment on young and school age children. There has been a paucity of research, however, on the attitudes of children in late adolescence who experienced maternal employment and child care during a significant part of their childhoods. A large number of today's young adults were raised in homes where both parents were employed and they experienced many years of non-parent caregivers. This study investigated the attitudes of older adolescents and their parents toward maternal employment and child care.

Women's increased participation in the labor force has become one of the most significant social changes occurring during the last two decades (Hofferth & Phillips, 1987). This phenomenon in turn has increased the demand for quality child care throughout the nation. Approximately 70 percent of mothers work outside the home (Cottle, 1998), and 70 to 75 percent of the children of employed mothers under the age of five have used some form of non-parental child care (Hofferth & Phillips, 1987).

Child care is entering a unique phase of development in the US. The post-World War II generation was the first to show drastic increases in maternal employment. Today, their children are of child-bearing age, confronting the same questions about maternal employment that their parents did a generation ago. By studying the attitudes of college-aged students and their parents toward maternal employment, it is possible to examine the impact it has on the formation of belief systems as well as the effects maternal employment has on family dynamics.

Underlying discussions about the benefits and costs of maternal employment is a more basic question about gender and family dynamics. A wealth of information exists on gender role attitudes, some dating back to around the time when the parents of college-aged students were students themselves. In 1975, Angst and Almquist found more liberal gender role attitudes regarding maternal employment among female students compared to male students. In 1977, Hoffman argued that attitudinal sex differences in future generations could be expected to decline due to the converging of sex roles. Twenge (1997) agrees with the speculation. In a meta-analysis of 71 studies of college students, a steady trend toward liberal feminist attitudes was detected during the 1980s.

What are the current attitudes toward child care of the generation of children who were raised as one of the first cohorts who spent their preschool years in child care? This study addresses that question, as well as the attitudes of their mothers and fathers.

HYPOTHESES

- 1. Individuals from households with employed mothers will hold more favorable attitudes toward maternal employment than individuals from households with one parent serving as homemaker before children are school age.*
- 2. Traditional attitudes will be more prevalent in family members who have one parent serving as homemaker until children are school age.*
- 3. College students who experienced maternal employment prior to attending school will have more favorable attitudes toward it than students who did not experience it.*
- 4. College students will have more favorable attitudes toward maternal employment than their parents regardless of their mother's employment decisions.*
- 5. Parents of college students will report more traditional gender attitudes than their sons and daughters.*

METHOD

Participants included 149 students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a large Midwestern university. Students were encouraged to participate in order to receive credit for a class assignment.

Of the 149 students surveyed, 122 gave permission to contact at least one of their parents. In total, permission was granted to contact 228 parents. Of the 228 parents, 111 questionnaire packets were returned (49%), resulting in 65 mother-child dyads and 47 father-child dyads.

Data were collected from students in groups of 2 to 36. Students filled out the consent forms and packet of

questionnaires at these sessions.

Packets were mailed to the parents/guardians of students who filled out and signed the second consent form. To encourage confidentiality and independence of responses, each parent/guardian was mailed a separate questionnaire.

RESULTS

Paired sample t-tests were completed analyzing the mean differences between students and parents on the Bias in Attitudes Toward Women Scale (BIAS), Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment (BACMEC) Benefits subscale, and the BACMEC Costs subscale. All results were measured using an alpha level of .05.

The mother-student and father-student comparisons produced significant differences on the BACMEC Benefits subscale. (\bar{x} = 3.5 vs. 4.1, p < .001; \bar{x} = 3.5 vs. 4.4, p < .001).

Comparing the means of the BIAS scores, mothers had an average score significantly lower than that of students (\bar{x} = 1.8 vs. 2.1, p < .000).

Comparisons were done of mothers and fathers on the BIAS and the BACMEC. Mothers' BIAS scores were significantly lower than father's scores (1.9 vs. 2.1, p < .002). The paternal BACMEC Cost mean was also significantly higher than the maternal BACMEC Cost mean (3.1 vs. 3.5, p < .05).

Male and female students held similar beliefs about both the benefits and costs of maternal employment, leading to non-significant differences when comparing means on the BACMEC scales. There was a significant gender effect on the BIAS, however. Female students reported a substantially lower mean score on the BIAS compared to their male counterparts (1.8 vs. 2.2, p < .001).

Daughters had the lowest mean raw score for the BIAS. Their scores were significantly lower than fathers (1.7 vs. 2.1, p < .005), but not mothers. On the BACMEC scale, female students reported significantly higher beliefs in the benefits of maternal employment than both mothers and fathers (4.0 vs. 3.5, p < .002; 4.0 vs. 3.4, p < .05). This result was not replicated for costs. Female students did not deviate substantially from parents in beliefs about the costs of maternal employment.

Sons averaged the highest mean on the BIAS, producing a significant difference from mothers (1.0 vs. 2.3, p < .001), but failing to differ from fathers. The results comparing sons to parents on the BACMEC scale were similar to the findings about daughters and parents. Sons averaged a statistically significant higher score on the BACMEC Benefits subscale than both mothers and fathers (4.2 vs. 3.5, p < .001; 4.1 vs. 3.5, p < .001). No differences were for costs.

Maternal employment prior to school age was examined as a possible factor in differences in parental attitudes on the BACMEC and the BIAS. Maternal and paternal results were highly discrepant. Mothers who were employed while their children were not yet in school reported a significantly lower score on the BIAS scale (1.8 vs. 1.9), a significantly higher score on the BACMEC Benefits subscale (3.8 vs. 3.2), and a significantly lower score on the BACMEC Costs subscale (2.6 vs. 3.7) than their non-employed counterparts. No significant differences were found for fathers.

Male and female students were grouped according to their response to being cared for by someone other than their parents before entering school. Independent t-tests were run examining differences between the two groups on BACMEC subscales and BIAS scores.

Females with child care experience scored higher on the BACMEC benefits subscale (4.3 vs. 3.8 $p < .005$) and lower on the costs subscale (2.6 vs. 3.2, $p < .01$)

Similar results were found for males, on benefits (4.3 vs. 3.8, $p < .005$; and costs 2.8 vs. 3.5, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

Attitudes about maternal employment and child care prove to be as complex as the public policy debates that surround them. College students and their parents refused to follow a neat linear progression in attitudes, instead sporadically separating along gender and generational lines. This complexity in attitudes enriches the data and the debate, serving as an indicator of the number of factors that influence micro and macro decisions about the ideal type of child care.

The hypothesis that individuals from households with employed mothers would hold more favorable attitudes toward maternal employment than individuals from families with one parent serving as homemaker was supported in all groups with the exception of fathers. The differences between employed and non-employed mothers was not really surprising, with employed mothers seeing more benefits and fewer costs to maternal employment than their non-employed counterparts. Male and female students of employed mothers reported similar results, enforcing the notion of generational transference of attitudes and suggesting positive outcomes for those who experienced child care.

The lack of statistically significant differences between fathers in households with employed versus non-employed mothers is surprising given the data on mothers and students, contradicting the results found by Hyde and McKinley (1992). The lack of difference in scores in fathers could be viewed as a reinforcement of the Wright & Young (1998) study that found fathers to be predominantly responsible for introducing and reinforcing traditional attitudes in their children. Thus, regardless of their wives employment status, fathers were more likely to hold traditional values about the benefits and costs of maternal employment.

Traditional attitudes, indicated by a higher score on the BIAS scale, corresponded with maternal employment only in the mother group. These results for the most part fail to support the hypothesis that traditional attitudes will be more prevalent in family members who experienced one parent serving as homemaker before their children reached school age. If fathers are primarily responsible for the instillation of traditional values and employed mothers liberate these traditional attitudes in their children, there should be a significant difference on the BIAS scale between the child care and no child care groups for male and female students. It appears that factors other than maternal employment may influence gender attitudes.

Results strongly supported the hypothesis that male and female students who experienced maternal employment hold more positive attitudes toward it, evidenced through their belief in more benefits and fewer costs to maternal employment than their non-experienced counterparts. This finding serves as an attitudinal reinforcement for the speculation that the next generation of parents will include more mothers in the work place.

Students held more favorable attitudes toward child care than their parents as a demographic group. Male and female students averaged substantially higher scores on the BACMEC Benefits subscale than their mothers and fathers. Interestingly, these differences were not replicated on the Costs subscale. If students had consistently more favorable attitudes toward maternal employment than their parental counterparts, they would presumably see fewer costs to maternal employment. In all of the parent-student dyads, the students reported slightly lower scores, but none of the differences between parents and students were large enough to be statistically significant. The higher Benefits scores in college-aged students supports the research suggesting maternal employment is more socially acceptable now than it was a generation ago. It can also be explained through the idealistic, optimistic nature of college-aged students compared with their parents who have experienced the positives and negatives of maternal employment. The lack of

substantial differences on the Costs subscale is more difficult to explain, perhaps pointing to a universal belief that there are negatives associated with maternal employment independent of its benefits.

Mothers of college students did not report more traditional gender attitudes than their sons and daughters. Instead, same-sex dyads were similar while opposite-sex dyads were substantially different. Mothers and daughters reported similar BIAS scores, while mothers scored lower than their sons. Fathers and sons were similar in their BIAS scores, but daughters scored substantially lower. These results point to gender, not age, as the predominant factor in attitudes about gender roles.

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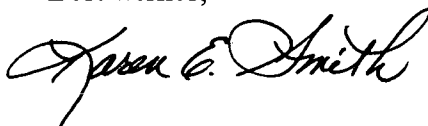
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