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A woman's place and a man's duty: How gender role incongruence in one's family life can result
in home-related spillover discrimination at work

Cite: Triana, M. (2011) A woman's place and a man's duty: How gender role incongruence in
one's family life can result in home-related spillover discrimination at work. *Journal of
Business and Psychology*, 26, 71-86. doi: 10.1007/s10869-010-9182-5.

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This is the final version of the paper which was accepted.

The final publication is available at Springer via:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10869-010-9182-5>

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this study was to investigate how gender role incongruence in terms of women being primary wage earners and males being secondary wage earners in their families could affect them at work.

Design/methodology/approach - Using an experimental design and a sample of 306 college students, I explored how females who are the primary wage earners in their families and males who are the secondary wage earners are perceived and evaluated in a work setting.

Findings - I proposed, and found, that female primary wage earners are seen as the least overqualified and are given lower reward recommendations than equally qualified male peers (i.e., peers with exactly the same credentials and job performance). Male secondary wage earners are seen as being the most overqualified and are given higher reward recommendations than equally qualified female peers.

Implications – Results demonstrate how the lack of fit model, which has been shown to penalize women who succeed in traditionally masculine domains (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman, 1983, 2001), can be applied to situations where gender-incongruent behavior exists in the form of women being primary wage earners in their families. I refer to this phenomenon as “home-related spillover discrimination,” named after the spillover effects that derive from societal expectations that are transferred into employment situations (Nieva & Gutek, 1980). The practical implication of this finding is that this may present a new form of sex discrimination against women that has not yet been considered.

Originality/value - This is the first study to show how violating stereotypical roles in terms of family wage earner status can influence outcomes in work settings.

Keywords: gender roles, sex discrimination, incongruence, wage earner status, stereotypes

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Research on sex discrimination in the workplace shows that women can be penalized for acting outside of their prescribed gender stereotypes (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman, 1983, 1995; Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). One way in which men and women may violate their prescribed gender roles, an area that has not received much research attention, is by women being the primary breadwinners and men being the secondary breadwinners in the family. Population survey figures suggest "the presence of a growing number of married couples in which traditional gender roles vis-à-vis labor market activity may be reversed" – that is, the wife is the primary wage earner and the husband is the secondary wage earner (Winkler, 1998, p. 42; Winkler, McBride, & Andrews, 2005). Among dual-earner couples in the United States, 24% of wives earn more than their husbands (Winkler, 1998; Winkler et al., 2005). However, despite the evidence that wage earner roles are shifting, the majority of couples still exhibit the "traditional" model where the male is the primary wage earner in the family (Winkler, 1998; Winkler et al., 2005). In fact, the pattern where the wife earns more than the husband has been called the "innovative" pattern (Kulik & Rayyan, 2003). Therefore, female primary and male secondary wage earners are a minority.

To date, no research has examined the possibility that knowledge about an employee's gender role incongruent behavior (in terms of women being primary wage earners in their families and males being secondary wage earners) might affect these employees at work. Yet evidence from studies on personal relationships and self-disclosure at work indicates that it may be time for such a study because coworkers and supervisors are likely to know about an employee's home life. Self-disclosure is pervasive and pivotal in developing relationships at

work (Tardy & Dindia, 2006). Self-disclosure at work frequently includes information about families, households, and spouses (Hessing, 1991). Also, one of the most common illegal interview questions is, “What does your spouse do?” (DeLuca, 1997; Fry, 2000). If people ask job candidates about their spouse’s occupation during the interview process (when it is illegal to do so), one can only assume that the frequency of this question after employment (when it is no longer illegal to do so) would be equal or greater (Douglas, 1990; Mongeau & Henningsen, 2008; Sias & Cahill, 1998). Further, knowledge about others’ occupations can indirectly provide salary information because people are well-informed about salaries through public sources (e.g., university placement centers, O*Net, Bureau of Labor Statistics, CNNMoney.com, Forbes.com).

Knowledge of such information by others at work could impact the employee because there is research suggesting that when women act outside of their stereotypically ascribed gender roles, others react harshly toward them (Heilman, 1995; Heilman & Chen, 2005). A common explanation for harsh reactions toward women who do not conform to their traditional gender role stereotypes is the lack of fit model (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman, 1983, 2001), which predicts that people sense a mismatch between the target person’s group stereotype and the person’s actual behavior (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman, 1983, 2001). When men are in stereotypically female roles, people also react negatively to them. These men are more likely to be disrespected and pressured to look for more “masculine” and prestigious work (Hultin, 2003; Williams, 1992). As more females become primary wage earners and more males become secondary wage earners, it remains to be seen how others in the workplace will react to them.

The purpose of this research is to analyze whether female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners are treated differently from their equally successful peers (i.e., peers with exactly the same credentials and job performance) in the workplace. Specifically, are people

surprised to see these individuals in these roles, do they think they are overqualified for their jobs, and what kinds of reward recommendations (i.e., salary increases) do they receive relative to their equally successful but role-conforming peers? I examine surprise because surprise indicates sensing gender role incongruence (Heilman, 1983) and can lead to negative reactions (Heilman et al., 2004). Perceived overqualification is important because it relates to reward recommendations (Hultin, 2003; Williams, 1992). Finally, it is important to examine reward recommendations in the form of salary. Although there are other rewards including promotions and bonuses, I focus on salary because annual salary increases are the most widely used pay-for-performance plans (Milkovich & Newman, 2005), which means that employees go through the an annual review process many times and the outcomes of that process accumulate over the employee's career (Gómez-Mejía, Balkin, & Cardy, 2007; Milkovich & Newman, 2005).

This study aims to make three main contributions. First, it examines a timely research question as the numbers of female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners grow (Kulik & Rayyan, 2003; Winkler, 1998; Winkler et al., 2005). Second, it sheds light on how female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners are treated in work settings. Aside from being morally wrong (Dipboye & Colella, 2005), workplace discrimination is illegal. Discrimination meets the criteria for constituting a moral wrong partly because there is a social consensus (Jones, 1991) that it is wrong (e.g., the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prevent sex discrimination in employment; U.S. National Archives, 2009). Third, it is important to understand how female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners are treated in the workplace from a fairness perspective. Most employers present their rewards policies as a meritocracy where top performers receive top rewards (Milkovich & Newman, 2005). If managers discriminate against some employees on the basis that they violate

norms pertaining to their sex, then this is not meritocratic – it is unfair.

Theory and Hypotheses

In this section, I describe the basis for a type of discrimination against women that I refer to as “home-related spillover discrimination.” This term is based on work pertaining to sex-role spillover, which is the carryover of gender roles from society into the workplace (Gutek & Cohen, 1987; Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Even in jobs that are neutral in terms of the sex composition of those occupying those jobs, sex-role spillover can occur because employees have their sex role and work role merged together (Gutek & Cohen, 1987). Therefore, the basis of home-related spillover discrimination is in the gender incongruent behavior that female primary wage earners exhibit. This argument is based on sex-role spillover effects as well as lack of fit.

According to Heilman’s lack of fit model (1983), when people observe others acting in a way that is incongruent with their prescribed gender roles, they sense that something about that person is not right and simply does not fit with how things ought to be. People form stereotypes about groups of people in much the same way as they generalize about any aspect of their environment. Categorizing people into groups is functional because it helps us make sense of the world. Once categorized, we perceive and interpret the behavior of individual group members on the basis of the general knowledge and the expectations that we hold about that group (Heilman, 1995). A common way in which we categorize others is based on sex because this is a readily-observable, surface-level characteristic (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). This categorization process then allows us to quickly recall the types of behavior that should be associated with a person in that social category (i.e., a man or a woman). For example, adjectives used to describe “feminine” behavior generally include *nurturing*, *tender*, *understanding*, *concerned for others*, *kind*, *helpful*, and *sympathetic*. Adjectives used to describe “masculine” behavior generally

include *independent, decisive, ambitious, forceful, and aggressive* (Heilman, 1995, 2001). There is substantial evidence that these gender stereotypes affect the way that men and women are perceived and treated in their daily lives (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000; Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Heilman, 1995, 2001).

One way in which these stereotypes influence expectations about male and female behavior is in the way we expect men and women to provide for their families. Males are generally assumed to be the head of the household, providing for the family (Kroska, 2008). Females are assumed to function in a more supportive role, either as stay-at-home mothers or as secondary wage earners (Gerson, 1993; Henslin, 2007; Kroska, 2008; Rosen, 1987; Tichenor, 1999; Townsend, 2002; Weiss, 1987). These assumptions are supported by statistics showing that, overwhelmingly, males are the primary wage earners in their families (Kulik & Rayyan, 2003; Winkler, 1998; Winkler et al., 2005). However, as more women enter the workforce, there is some evidence that this is gradually changing.

Recent Changes in Gender Roles – But Males Still Predominantly Primary Wage Earners

According to the lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983), people should be surprised to see others who are exhibiting gender role incongruent behavior. As more women enter the workforce and the roles of men and women change, people should express less surprise to see gender role incongruent behavior in the form of female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners. However, population survey data still show that males are overwhelmingly the primary wage earners in their families (Winkler et al., 2005).

Over the last 50 years in the United States, the percentage of married women who work outside the home rose from 25% to 60% and the proportion of dual-earner couples increased from 39% to 61% of all married couples (Winkler, 1998; Winkler et al., 2005). In addition, the

proportion of married couples in which only the wife works rose to 7% by 2003 (Winkler et al., 2005). In other words, gender roles in the family are slowly shifting as more women become the primary wage earners and more men become the secondary wage earners. However, because most men are still the primary breadwinners in 76% of American families (Winkler et al., 2005) and because there is still a wage gap between the overall earnings of men and women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008, 2009), people should be more surprised to see female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners as compared to seeing male primary wage earners and female secondary wage earners. Therefore, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: Participants will be more surprised to see female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners than female secondary wage earners and male primary wage earners.

Reactions to Men and Women who Violate Gender Stereotypes

Research on gender in organizations has found that gender stereotypes impact the way women are perceived and rewarded. There is a prescriptive component of gender stereotypes suggesting how women should be and act (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Heilman et al., 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Heilman et al. (2004) found that women in stereotypically male occupations who are acknowledged to have been successful are more personally derogated than equally successful men. Heilman and Chen (2005) further found that women are penalized when they behave contrary to female stereotypes by failing to help others. Consistent with the expectation that women should be helpful, kind, and sympathetic (Heilman, 2001), when women perform citizenship behaviors such as helping others, they are not rewarded because people simply assume that they are acting in accordance with female behavior. However, when women do not

help others, they are given lower reward recommendations by others in the workplace for violating the stereotypes that society holds about appropriate female behavior. In contrast, when males do not help others, they are not penalized because the stereotypes that we hold about men do not include males being concerned for others (Heilman & Chen, 2005). This demonstrates that the stereotypes we hold about males and females lead us to react differently to women and men even though they may be exhibiting the exact same behavior. Specifically, women are punished when they deviate from the stereotypically female behavior. But what about men who act against their stereotypical gender roles?

There is evidence to suggest that people will see males in the secondary wage earner role as behaving incongruently with their gender roles and they may also see them as possibly being overqualified for their roles. Because men have higher overall social status than women (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and men also tend to hold more prestigious occupations than women (Catalyst, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1992), male secondary wage earners are likely to be seen as even more incongruent than female primary wage earners. Because men are afforded higher social capital than women (Burt, 1998), it is possible that supervisors and coworkers may feel that these men are more overqualified for their jobs than equally qualified female peers. Research shows that when people sense that they are overqualified for their jobs (an incongruence between personal qualifications and the job), they become dissatisfied and are motivated to do something to fix it (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Fine & Nevo, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 1996, 2000). Likewise, if people perceive that males in a secondary wage earner status are overqualified for their roles, they may become motivated to help them improve their situation.

Both males and females who are in non-traditional occupations for their gender are

viewed by others as not fitting in. As Heilman (1995) states, there is simply a notion that things should not be this way and hence there is a lack of fit. This perception that there is a lack of fit can lead to assessments of the appropriateness of the target person's job situation and, potentially, to discriminatory workplace evaluations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman & Eagly, 2008). However, whereas men who are secondary wage earners should be seen as lagging behind their wives and being overqualified for their current situation, women who are primary wage earners should be seen as exceeding their career and salary expectations for their traditional role. This is consistent with research showing that the idea of male breadwinners/primary wage earners is firmly entrenched in society (Gerson, 1993; Henslin, 2007; Kroska, 2008; Rosen, 1987; Tichenor, 1999; Townsend, 2002; Weiss, 1987) and that even when men are unemployed they still "construct their gender identity around the breadwinner persona" (Willott & Griffin, 2004, p. 53). This is also consistent with research showing that "women receive more praise than men for their incomes" (Deutsch, Roska, & Meeske, 2003, p. 291), which suggests that while making money is simply assumed for men, women who make money are somehow seen as praiseworthy and excelling in their careers beyond standard expectations for their gender role. For these reasons, people may feel that women who are the primary wage earners in their families have achieved enough while men who are the secondary wage earners in their families have underachieved and are overqualified for their positions. Women who are the secondary wage earners and men who are the primary wage earners are conforming to their expected gender roles and should be seen as a good fit with their jobs in the sense that they are neither highly overqualified nor underqualified (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman, 1983, 2001). Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Male secondary wage earners will be given the highest ratings for being

overqualified for their jobs while female primary wage earners will be given the lowest ratings for being overqualified for their jobs by participants. Male primary wage earners and female secondary wage earners are role conforming and should elicit medium ratings for being overqualified for their jobs from participants.

Violating Gender Stereotypes and Reward Recommendations

Reward recommendations are those incentives that an employee receives through the employer's pay-for-performance system. Pay-for-performance systems reward employees on the basis that individuals differ on how much they contribute to the organization, that individual performance is linked to the overall organizational performance, and that in order to be fair to all employees the organization needs to reward its employees in a manner commensurate to their level of performance (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Gómez-Mejía, Welbourne, & Wiseman, 2000; Ray & Altmansberger, 1999). In this study, I focus on individual reward recommendations that could be made for an employee as part of the annual review process and how knowledge about an employee's gender role incongruence may influence such reward recommendations.

For females, the idea that acting against gender roles turns into lower reward recommendations has received empirical support. Heilman et al. (2004) found that women who were successful in stereotypically male jobs were given lower reward recommendations than their equally successful male peers. Heilman and Chen (2005) found that when women do not help others, they are given lower reward recommendations than their male counterparts.

For males in non-traditional occupations, the outcomes they will receive in terms of reward recommendations are complex. Because of their gender role incongruence, people may feel that there is something about the situation that does not fit the way things should be (Heilman et al., 2004; Williams, 1992). This incongruence should prevail when evaluating men

who are secondary wage earners in their families because that is the traditionally female role. The research discussed above implies that people would simultaneously perceive that the jobs these males hold are beneath them and that they need to start doing better. Supervisors and coworkers are more likely to feel that male secondary wage earners are overqualified for their jobs because they suffer by comparison to their wives and are not fulfilling the bread-winner role (Kroska, 2008). For these reasons, people may decide that they need to help these men be adequately rewarded by giving them higher reward recommendations.

However, I also propose that the opposite will be true for female primary wage earners. While male secondary wage earners will be seen as lagging behind their wives, female primary wage earners will shine in comparison to their husbands and people may believe that they have been extremely successful in their careers. This may create the illusion that these women are doing so well that they have achieved enough and really do not need any further rewards for two reasons. The first is the lack of fit model (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman 1983, 2001) and the fact that women who achieve in male-dominated domains are often penalized. According to Heilman and Okimoto (2007, pp. 81-82) it is not “necessary for women to actually behave counternormatively to induce social penalties; the mere knowledge that a woman has been successful in a male domain produces inferences that she has engaged in stereotype-violating behavior, resulting in social penalties.”

The second reason why people may feel that women primary wage earners have achieved beyond expectations and do not need further rewards is because when women become much more successful than their husbands, this might cause problems in the marriage. For example, women in the African-American community have a long tradition of employment, sometimes because African-American men face workplace racial discrimination and do not make high

enough wages to support the family (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Collins, 2000). Some African-American working women have reported that spending too much time working has been seen as encroaching on the male breadwinner role, thus resulting in marital conflict (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Collins, 2000). This is also consistent with important research on “the second shift” (Hochschild, 1989), which shows that while men do their fair share of the housework when both spouses work and make roughly equal amounts of money, when women make more money than the men, women once again take on a disproportionate amount of the housework (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003). According to Bittman et al. (2003, p. 186), in households where the woman makes more than half of the family income, the housework again shifts mostly to the woman as if to compensate for this gender role incongruence and ensure their spouses do not feel emasculated.

All of these ideas about what masculine and feminine behavior should look like (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001) can potentially conspire against female primary wage earners and influence people to under-reward them in order to keep them from getting too far ahead of their husbands. For these reasons, it is possible that women who are primary wage earners will be penalized while male secondary wage earners will be over-rewarded compared to their equally qualified and successful female peers. Again, male primary wage earners and female secondary wage earners are acting according to their gender roles and hence they should receive medium reward recommendations. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Males who are the secondary wage earners in their families will be given the highest reward recommendations from participants while females who are the primary wage earners will be given the lowest reward recommendations. Male primary

wage earners and female secondary wage earners are role conforming and will be given medium reward recommendations by participants.

The Moderating Role of Participant Sex

Researchers who study sex roles have identified many ways in which males and females are systematically socialized in different ways. In order to understand male and female interactions within organizational settings, it is important to understand this socialization process, because “individuals do not leave their gender ... identities at the door when they enter an organization” (Nkomo & Cox, 1996, p. 342). Of particular relevance are findings describing the way that male and female children learn to play, because this is one area where children learn early on what it means to act masculine and feminine.

For example, researchers who study communication patterns in children’s play have observed that male and female children tend to play different kinds of games with different rules (Bronstein, 2006; Leaper & Friedman, 2007; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Nutt & Brooks, 2008; Morrongiello & Dawber, 1999; Wood, Desmarais, & Gugula, 2002). Most boys’ games are competitive, have clear goals, and are organized by specific rules. Girls’ games, on the other hand, often do not have clear-cut goals or rules but instead emphasize collaboration, cooperation, sensitivity to feelings, and inclusion of others (Wood, 1994). “Whereas boys learn that they have to *do* something to be valuable, the lesson for girls is to *be*. Their worth depends on being good people, which is defined as being cooperative, inclusive, and sensitive” (Wood, 1994, p. 141).

Given these findings, it seems reasonable to expect that males and females might react differently to others in an organizational setting depending upon the target’s sex and wage earner status. In particular, because men are often socialized to behave in more competitive ways than women (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Wood, 1994) and because men also identify strongly with the

primary breadwinner role (Willott & Griffin, 2004), it is likely that men will hold higher expectations of other men than of women in terms of their capacity to provide for their families. Men may be especially likely to react toward male secondary wage earners in such a way that they are the most surprised to see them in these positions, feel that they are the most overqualified for their jobs, and reward them the most. Therefore, I predict the following:

Hypothesis 4: There will be a three-way interaction of target person sex, target person wage earner status, and participant sex such that male participants will: a) be the most surprised to see male secondary wage earners, b) be the most likely to say that male secondary wage earners are overqualified for their jobs, and c) give the highest rewards to male secondary wage earners compared to female participants.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 312 male and female juniors and seniors in a business course at a large university in the South who participated for class extra credit during the spring of 2008. However, six participants were dropped from the study because they failed one or more manipulation checks. Thus, the final sample included 306 participants. Of these, 61% were females and 39% were males. Most participants (84%) were Caucasian. In all, 61% of participants had at least one year of full-time work experience while 81% had at least one year of part-time work experience. The average age of participants was 21.

In order to test the hypotheses, a 2 x 2 x 2 between-participant factorial design was used. The independent variables were target employee sex (male or female), target employee wage earner status (primary or secondary wage earner), and participant sex (male or female). Participants were randomly assigned to conditions.

Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the study was a web survey that included demographics such as sex (coded as 0 = female, 1 = male) as well as a question asking participants to rate the social status of men and women in society as most people see them on a scale from 1 = *low status*, to 4 = *neither high nor low status*, to 7 = *high status*. In order to avoid a demand characteristic (Fisher, 1984), this question also asked participants to rate the status of various other groups (e.g., Caucasians, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans), and these questions were mixed together with items about modern racism, authoritarianism, and political opinions. In addition, there was a four- to six-week time gap between the web survey (first phase) and the second phase of the study.

For the second phase of the study, participants signed up for one of several times slots in which to come to a classroom and complete the study. Upon arrival, they were asked to complete a packet with a work-related scenario and some questions about the scenario. After participants completed the packet, they were given a debriefing sheet about the study, thanked for their participation, and asked not to speak with others in their class about the study.

The Phase 2 stimulus materials were as follows. The first part of the scenario included a description of a fictitious organization and explained to the participants that they were being asked to rate one of the individuals in the role of Corporate Training Manager. This job title was selected based on the neutral job scenario (i.e., neither a masculine nor a feminine job) used by Heilman et al. (2004). The neutral job was selected so that the results would likely be due to the manipulation of the independent variables as opposed to reactions to the gender of the job (Heilman et al., 2004). While Heilman et al. (2004) used the title “Assistant VP of Training,” a high corporate-level position for their job title, I changed the title to a lower-level manager

position “Corporate Training Manager.” Because the manipulation for this study requires a job that could be occupied by either a primary wage earner or a secondary wage earner, having a lower-level title made it more believable that an individual occupying this job could be the secondary wage earner in their family.

In order to avoid confounding reactions to the wage earner status with reactions to the gender of the job, it was important to use a gender neutral job description. Following Heilman et al. (2004), the neutrality of the job was established not only through the job title but also through two pieces of information given in the background about the fictitious company. First, the background information stated that of the employees who occupied the position of Corporate Training Manager, 53% were male and 47% were female. Second, the stimulus materials included ten names of current Corporate Training Managers, with the participants being asked to rate only one of the names). Of the ten names, there were four overtly male names (Michael Edwards, Nathan Adams, John Stevens, David Jones), four overtly female names (Karen Parker, Nancy Smith, Andrea Washington, Jessica Johnson), and two gender neutral names (Pat Hill, Sam Jenkins). The choice of names was patterned after the manipulation in Heilman et al. (2004) as well as the most popular baby names during the years when the participants would have been born (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2009).

The independent variable, target employee sex, was manipulated using the employee name (Michael Edwards or Jessica Johnson). The independent variable, target employee wage earner status, was manipulated by providing two pieces of information. First, both the salary of the employee being evaluated and the total annual household income for that employee were provided. When the employee was the primary wage earner, the scenario stated that the employee's annual salary was \$100,000 and that the total annual income for their household was

\$150,000. When the employee was the secondary wage earner, the scenario stated that the employee's annual salary was \$50,000 and that the total annual income for their household was \$150,000. Second, the scenario also contained a statement that explicitly stated whether the employee was the primary wage earner or the secondary wage earner in the family.

In addition, it was important to demonstrate that the target employee was competent in his/her job in order to avoid negative reactions to women due to ambiguous statements about their competence (Davison & Burke, 2000). Thus, participants were given a description of job responsibilities and told that the employee had recently gone through the organizational review process and been rated as a stellar performer. The rest of the information in the scenario was identical across all conditions and included birth place, college attended, degree, GPA, number of employees managed, and years of job tenure. See the Appendix for the complete scenario.

Dependent Measures

Surprise. To test if participants were surprised to see female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners, I used one item from Heilman et al. (2004): "How surprised were you to find this individual in this wage earner status?" (1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*).

Perceived overqualification. In order to measure whether male secondary wage earners would be seen as overqualified while female primary wage earners would not be seen as overqualified, I created two items: "This job is beneath this individual." (1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*) and "This individual should aim to get a better job." (1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*). The reliability for these two items was $\alpha = .75$ (Cronbach, 1951).

Reward recommendations. To measure specific reward recommendations, I used the measure from Ivancevich (1983), where participants were asked to allocate a reward ranging between 0 and 20% using five percentage point intervals: "What percentage of salary merit

increase do you recommend for this individual?"

Finally, although employee evaluations (i.e., job performance) were not a dependent variable, I used Heilman et al.'s (2004) measure of employee evaluations to ensure that participants perceived that the employees in all four conditions were performing equally. The items included: "Overall, how would you rate this individual?" (1 = *very low* to 9 = *very high*), "Rate this individual's potential to excel in his/her career." (1 = *very low* to 9 = *very high*), "How successful do you think this individual will be in this organization?" (1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*), "To what degree do you recommend retaining this individual in the organization?" (1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*), and "This individual is a good performer." (1 = *not at all* to 9 = *very much*). The reliability for this measure was $\alpha = .89$.

Results

In the following analyses, I present eta-squared (η^2) values for all analyses of variance. These values are eta-squared as computed in Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), not partial eta-squared values. Thus, the effect sizes reported are conservative because partial eta-squared values are typically larger than eta-squared values (Pierce, Block, & Aguinis, 2004). In addition, I report Cohen's d as the measure of the effect size when comparing across the condition means because Cohen's d is meant to compare the means of two different groups (Cohen, 1988).

Manipulation checks

Two manipulation checks were included. The manipulation check for sex was: "This individual was a male." (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the manipulation was effective $F(1, 304) = 5339.03, p < .05, \eta^2 = .95$, with participants in the condition where the target employee was a female ($M = 1.21, SD = .78$) being much less likely to agree than the participants in the condition where the target employee

was a male ($M = 6.80$, $SD = .54$).

The manipulation check for primary wage earner status was: "This individual is the primary wage earner in their family." (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). An ANOVA showed that the manipulation was effective $F(1, 304) = 3411.42$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .92$, with participants in the primary wage earner conditions ($M = 6.59$, $SD = .82$) being much more likely to agree than the participants in the secondary wage earner conditions ($M = 1.37$, $SD = .34$).

In addition to these two manipulation checks, I included three other robustness checks. First, because the scenario aimed to establish gender neutrality for the Corporate Training Manager position, participants were asked: "The people holding this job were _____." (7 point scale ranging from 1=*all males* to 4=*about equal numbers of males and females* to 7=*all females*). Responses to this question show that participants noticed that the job was gender neutral ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .57$). I conducted a one-sample t-test in SPSS, where I defined a test value of 4, which represents the gender neutral answer on the scale, and I had SPSS determine whether the mean for this question was significantly different from 4. Results showed that the mean score was not significantly different from 4 ($t = .61$, $p > .05$). As a second check, I wanted to be sure that all candidates were seen as equally successful in terms of their job performance. An ANOVA on employee evaluations using the condition as the independent variable showed no differences across the conditions, indicating that the candidates in all four scenarios were seen as equally qualified performers, $F(3, 302) = 1.75$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Third, because I made the assumption in the theory section of the paper that men have higher social status and hence higher social capital than women, I compared participants' answers about the overall status of men and women in society (collected in Phase 1). Mean status for men was 6.02, $SD = 1.08$ while mean status for women was 5.14, $SD = 1.07$, and this difference was statistically significant ($t = 15.33$,

$p < .05$) indicating that participants agree that men have higher social status than women.

Data Analysis

Table 1 displays the mean, standard deviation, and the correlations for all measures. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on each of the three dependent variables: surprise, perceived overqualification, and reward recommendations. Results indicated significant main effects for target sex $F(1,298) = 10.25, p < .05$, target wage earner status $F(1,298) = 12.52, p < .05$, participant sex $F(1,298) = 5.56, p < .05$, the interaction of target sex and target wage earner status, $F(1,298) = 13.38, p < .05$, and the interaction of target sex, target wage earner status, and participant sex $F(1,298) = 2.82, p < .05$. Univariate analyses of variance and covariance (ANOVAS and ANCOVAs) were then conducted on each of the dependent measures using the step-down approach recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), which takes correlations between multiple dependent variables into account. In this step-down procedure, priorities are assigned to the dependent variables (I assigned surprise as the top priority followed by overqualification and reward recommendations). Then, the highest priority dependent variable was tested in a univariate ANOVA while the others were tested in a series of ANCOVAs with the higher priority dependent variables included as covariates. Inter-cell comparisons were also made in order to directly test Hypotheses 1-3.

Surprise. An ANOVA on surprise to see the target person in the wage earner status showed no significant main effect of target sex, no significant main effect of participant sex, a significant main effect of target wage earner status, a significant target sex x target wage earner status interaction, and a significant target sex x target wage earner status x participant sex interaction (see Table 2A for the ANOVA, Figure 1A for a plot of the two-way interaction, and Figure 2 for the three-way interaction). Inter-cell comparisons using an ANOVA with Tukey's

post hoc tests showed some significant differences between cells, $F(3,302) = 16.96, p < .05$. As shown in Table 3, participants were the most surprised to see male secondary wage earners (the mean for this cell was significantly higher than that of the female secondary wage earner, $d = .92$, the male primary wage earner, $d = 1.07$, and the female primary wage earner, $d = .47$).

Participants were significantly more surprised to see female primary wage earners than female secondary wage earners, $d = .42$, and male primary wage earners, $d = .56$. However, participants did not report differences on surprise between male primary wage earners and female secondary wage earners, $d = -.15$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Although there was a significant three-way interaction on surprise, contrary to what was hypothesized, the plot shows that the female participants had a stronger reaction to the male targets in the scenario than did the male participants. This provides no support for Hypothesis 4a.

Perceived overqualification. An ANCOVA on perceptions of overqualification with surprise as a control showed a significant main effect of surprise, a significant main effect of target sex, a significant main effect of target wage earner status, a significant main effect of participant sex, and a significant target sex x target wage earner status interaction (see Table 2B for the ANCOVA and Figure 1B for the interaction). Inter-cell comparisons were run with an ANOVA with Tukey's post hoc tests. This showed that there were some significant differences between cells, $F(3,302) = 16.02, p < .05$. As shown in Table 3, participants were the least likely to say that female primary wage earners were overqualified (the mean for this cell was significantly lower than that of the female secondary wage earner, $d = -.67$, as well as the male primary wage earner, $d = -.41$, and the male secondary wage earner, $d = -1.15$). Participants were significantly more likely to say that male secondary wage earners were more overqualified than female secondary wage earners, $d = .46$, as well as male primary wage earners, $d = .66$

However, participants did not report significant differences on overqualification for male primary wage earners and female secondary wage earners, $d = -.22$. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported. No three-way interaction was found on overqualification controlling for surprise. Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

Reward recommendations. An ANCOVA on reward recommendations with surprise and perceived overqualification as controls showed no main effect for surprise, a significant main effect for perceived overqualification, a significant main effect of target sex as well as target wage earner status, no significant main effect of participant sex, no significant target sex x target wage earner status interaction, and no significant target sex x target wage earner status x participant sex interaction (see Table 2C for the ANCOVA). Cross-cell comparisons using an ANOVA with Tukey's post hoc tests showed some significant differences between cells, $F(3,302) = 12.41, p < .05$. As shown in Table 3, participants gave male secondary wage earners higher rewards than female primary wage earners, $d = .96$, female secondary wage earners, $d = .51$, and male primary wage earners, $d = .44$. Female primary wage earners received significantly lower reward recommendations than male primary wage earners, $d = -.53$, and female secondary wage earners, $d = -.49$. Finally, there were no differences between the reward recommendations of male primary wage earners and female secondary wage earners, $d = .05$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported. No three-way interaction was found on reward recommendations controlling for surprise and perceived overqualification. Therefore, Hypothesis 4c was not supported.

Discussion

The results of this study mostly support the hypotheses. Participants were more surprised to see female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners than male primary wage

earners and female secondary wage earners. Participants were most likely to say that male secondary wage earners were overqualified for their jobs and that female primary wage earners were not overqualified compared to equally performing peers. Male secondary wage earners received the highest rewards while female primary wage earners received the lowest rewards. Finally, results did not support the proposed three-way interaction of participant sex x target sex x target wage earner status on the three dependent variables. While a significant three-way interaction was found for the surprise dependent variable, it was not in the predicted direction (possible reasons for this are discussed below).

Implications for Theory

Theoretically, the results demonstrate how the lack of fit model (Dipboye, 1985; Heilman, 1983, 2001) can be applied to settings where gender-incongruent behavior extends into the work situation to produce ramifications for the employee. While previous research has investigated men and women's incongruent behavior within their job-related roles and duties, this study shows that acting outside of one's prescribed gender role in terms of family wage earner status can produce consequences at work. This is similar to other findings showing how workplace discrimination may result from a spillover of gender role expectations from society being manifest at work (Nieva & Gutek, 1980) and how sexual orientation in one's personal life can lead to penalties at work (Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005). However, this is the first study to show how violating stereotypical roles in terms of family wage earner status can have effects at work.

A second theoretical implication of this study is that gender bias and an awareness of status differentials exist even among young people in the United States today (recall that the average age of the participants was 21). The pattern of main effects found for the reward recommendations dependent variable indicates that while some attention was given to need and

fairness (in that there was a main effect of secondary wage earners getting higher rewards), there was also a main effect of sex (in that males got higher rewards than females). This suggests that although the participants were young, they still showed bias by rewarding males somewhat more than females.

However, one other finding that is interesting to note theoretically is that there was a three-way interaction of participant sex x target sex x target wage earner status for the surprise dependent variable (Figure 2). The lowest levels of surprise were reported by female participants rating male primary wage earners, whereas the highest levels of surprise were rated by female participants rating male secondary wage earners. Perhaps this is because women are accustomed to seeing men in positions of power (Catalyst, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). The finding that women are more surprised than men to see male secondary wage earners and less surprised than men to see male primary wage earners is similar to other findings in the discrimination literature showing that members of the lower status social group are particularly attentive to the outcomes of their own group members compared to those of the dominant group members because they are used to seeing discrepancies in treatment (Crosby, 1984; Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

Implications for Practice

The practical implication of this finding is that this may present a new form of sex discrimination, referred to here as “home-related spillover discrimination,” against women, which has not yet been considered. If characteristics of an employee’s home life which are irrelevant to job-related performance (such as being a female primary wage earner) lead to women incurring penalties at work, then exhibiting gender-role incongruence in terms of wage earner status in the family could result in a new form of sex discrimination in addition to what we already know about sex discrimination at work (Cleveland et al., 2000; Cleveland, Vescio, &

Barnes-Farrell, 2005).

Furthermore, it is important to note two more things from a practical perspective. First, the results of this study may be conservative. Note that the manipulation used in this study presented a scenario where the candidates (both men and women) were unambiguously and highly qualified for their jobs. Heilman (2001, p. 661) notes that when women demonstrate that they are successful at masculine types of jobs they are seen as “having what it takes to succeed at ‘man’s work,’ eradicating any perceived lack of fit deriving from the descriptive aspect of gender stereotypes.” The fact that the manipulation in this study presented the female primary wage earner as unquestionably qualified for her job means that it should have been harder to detect effects, thereby making this a conservative test. Had the female primary wage earner’s job performance been ambiguous, the penalties against her would have likely been greater. This suggests that review and reward recommendations in work settings should always be made with the most complete performance information available.

Second, the manipulation in this study, which showed evidence of the female primary wage earner succeeding in the stereotypically male domain, could explain the small effect sizes found in the study. Although the effect sizes presented in this study are the more conservative eta-squared values, the effect sizes are still small. However, in terms of practical implications, these small effects can be substantial. Research has noted that micro inequities (Haslett & Lipman, 1997) can accumulate and change the way the target is treated and feels at work over time. Small differences in wages can have a large cumulative effect over a person’s working life. Small amounts of discrimination can also have large impacts on companies. A simulation by Martell, Lane, and Willis (1992) found that rating biases against women of 4% or smaller could lead to violations of the 4/5 rule of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and skew

sex composition at the top levels of the organization. Therefore, this is a case where small effect sizes can have a large practical impact.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

The primary strength of this study lies in its experimental design (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The independent variables, target sex and wage earner status, were experimentally manipulated, which greatly improved the internal validity of the study. The participants were also randomly assigned to conditions. However, the limitation of an experimental design lies in its generalizability. Although the study captured the reactions that people have to female primary wage earners and male secondary wage earners in a controlled experimental setting, it remains to be seen how this will generalize to real workplace settings. The sample used in this study consisted of college students at a politically conservative university and therefore may not generalize to some employment settings. Ideally, future research could replicate these findings with employees in an actual work setting.

Another limitation is that while sex is generally a very salient characteristic that can be easily ascertained by others in the workplace, the identification of wage earner status is likely to be more subtle in a real-world setting. However, in an organizational setting the people who are most likely to know whether someone is the primary wage earner in their family are those who work closely enough with that employee to know about their family background. This would likely include people on the same project team, people within the same reporting structure, and the employee's supervisor. These individuals who would know the most about the employee's family life are also the people who are in a position to judge the employee's performance and provide feedback for the annual review process. Still, although I argue that colleagues at work are likely to know about an employee's wage earner status through self-disclosure (Hessing,

1991; Tardy & Dindia, 2006), the base rate with which this information is disclosed in work settings is unknown. Future research may investigate how often people disclose wage earner status information to their colleagues.

A similar problem to the home-related spillover discrimination described in this study might also affect gay and lesbian employees in the workplace. Because they, too, exhibit incongruence to the traditional gender roles for their sex and they may also choose to self-disclose their sexual orientation to others at work, they may face similar difficulties. The degree to which such home-related spillover discrimination based on gender role incongruence in sexual orientation occurs in the workplace would best be studied in future field research, assuming such data could be made available to a researcher.

One other limitation of the study is the use of single-item measures for surprise and reward recommendations. A limitation of this approach is that inter-item reliability for the scale cannot be estimated. However, although this is a limitation, several studies have also demonstrated that single-item measures can be both valid and reliable (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001; Wanous & Hudy, 2001; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). In addition, especially for recommended salary increases, it is difficult to ask participants to state a percentage increase in more than one way without being too repetitive, which is probably why others have used single-item measures in the past (Ivancevich, 1983).

Another relevant avenue for future research could be to study female-only wage earners with husbands who are stay-at-home dads. Not only are females increasingly becoming the primary wage earners, but they are also increasingly becoming the only wage earner. The U.S. Census indicates an 18% increase in the number of stay-at-home dads from 1994 to 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). By 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 159,000 men had stayed

out of the labor force for more than a year in order to take care of their children (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Couples in which the male is a homemaker and the female is the primary wage earner are challenging the traditional gender stereotypes about the male being the financial head of the household (Robertson & Verschelden, 1993). It would be fruitful to investigate how people react to female sole wage earners married to stay-at-home dads. It might also be interesting to study coworker reactions to other non-traditional family arrangements such as reactions to single mothers versus single fathers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to begin to understand possible sources of discrimination in a work setting based on incongruent gender roles in terms of family wage earner status. Results suggest that gender-incongruent behavior in family wage earner status may serve to punish and under-reward female primary wage earners at work and over-reward male secondary wage earners. These results suggest that acting outside of your family gender role could in fact hurt you at work, if you are a woman. This study has uncovered a potential bias that people in the workplace may hold against those who violate their traditional gender stereotypes in their family life, resulting in home-related spillover discrimination. The first step in preventing such an insidious type of workplace discrimination is to demonstrate that the problem exists in a controlled experimental setting such as this study.

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Appendix

The Scenario

The ABC Corporation, based in Dallas, TX, has just completed its annual review process whereby all of its employees receive their yearly performance reviews. There are several Corporate Training Managers within the Human Resources Training Division who supervise training teams. The average age of the Corporate Training Managers is 38 years, and 53% of the Corporate Training Managers are male and 47% are female. Below are the names of ten of the Corporate Training Managers. You are being asked to rate one of them.

Michael Edwards
Nathan Adams
Karen Parker
Pat Hill
Sam Jenkins
John Stevens
Jessica Johnson
Nancy Smith
David Jones
Andrea Washington

Please rate the following employee:

Name: Michael Edwards/Jessica Johnson
 Birth Place: San Antonio, Texas
 College Attended: Texas Tech University
 Degree: BS in Human Resources
 GPA: 3.8
 Position at ABC: Corporate Training Manager
 Employees managed: 5
 Tenure at ABC: 5 years
 Total Compensation: \$100,000 per year, or \$50,000 per year
 Personal: Michael/Jessica is married and has two children. He/she enjoys playing tennis with his/her family on the weekend. He/she is the primary/secondary wage earner in the family. Together, he/she and his/her wife/husband make \$150,000 per year. The family lives in an upper middle class neighborhood in the Dallas area.

Responsibilities and task requirements for the Corporate Training Manager are as follows:

- Supervises a unit within Human Resources that provides skill training to employees who seek to upgrade their positions within the company.
- Helps inform employees about job advancement opportunities through individual appointments and in-house workshops, and refers them to professionals who can aid them in developing long-term career goals.
- Needs to be a good communicator and knowledgeable about job and career planning.

Michael/Jessica has recently undergone the company-wide annual performance review and received consistently high evaluations based on number of employees serviced, quality of workshops offered, and satisfaction ratings from employees serviced. He/she has been designated as a "stellar performer." His/her performance is in the top 5% of all employees at his/her level.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Target sex	.50	.50					
2. Target wage earner status	.50	.50	.01				
3. Participant sex	.39	.49	.01	.01			
4. Perceived overqualification	4.62	1.80	.20**	.31**	.21**		
5. Surprise	4.74	2.10	.08	.15*	.07	.36**	
6. Reward recommendations	3.16	.99	.25**	.22**	-.01	.30**	.20**

Note: $N = 306$.

Two-tailed tests.

Target sex coded as 0 = female, 1 = male.

Target wage earner status coded as 0 = primary, 1 = secondary.

Participant sex was coded as 0 = female, 1 = male.

* $p \leq .05$.** $p \leq .01$.

Table 2A
ANOVA for Surprise

Variable	<i>df</i>	Sums of Square	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Intercept	1	6541.33	6541.33	1779.50	0.00	.797
Target sex	1	7.49	7.49	2.04	0.15	.001
Participant sex	1	9.47	9.47	2.58	0.11	.001
Target wage earner status	1	18.67	18.67	5.08	0.03	.002
Target sex x participant sex	1	1.88	1.88	.51	0.48	.000
Target sex x target wage earner status	1	129.15	129.15	35.13	0.00	.016
Target wage earner status x participant sex	1	17.63	17.63	4.80	0.03	.002
Target sex x target wage earner status x participant sex	1	22.70	22.70	6.18	0.01	.003
Error	298	1095.43	3.68			
Total	306	8203.00				

N = 306

Table 2B
ANCOVA for Perceived Overqualification Controlling for Surprise

Variable	<i>df</i>	Sums of Square	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Intercept	1	493.05	493.05	208.51	0.00	.066
Surprise	1	74.95	74.95	31.70	0.00	.010
Target sex	1	35.33	35.33	14.94	0.00	.005
Participant sex	1	29.75	29.75	12.58	0.00	.004
Target wage earner status	1	59.87	59.87	25.32	0.00	.008
Target sex x participant sex	1	8.93	8.93	3.78	0.05	.001
Target sex x target wage earner status	1	10.14	10.14	4.29	0.04	.001
Target wage earner status x participant sex	1	4.73	4.73	2.00	0.16	.001
Target sex x target wage earner status x participant sex	1	5.08	5.08	2.15	0.14	.001
Error	297	702.30	2.37			
Total	306	7522.50				

N = 306

Table 2C

*ANCOVA for Reward Recommendations Controlling for Surprise and Perceived**Overqualification*

Variable	<i>df</i>	Sums of Square	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Intercept	1	141.29	141.29	167.22	0.00	.042
Surprise	1	3.08	3.08	3.65	0.06	.001
Perceived overqualification	1	7.46	7.46	8.83	0.00	.002
Target sex	1	10.97	10.97	12.98	0.00	.003
Participant sex	1	1.19	1.19	1.41	.24	.000
Target wage earner status	1	5.26	5.26	6.22	.01	.002
Target sex x participant sex	1	.06	.06	.07	.79	.000
Target sex x target wage earner status	1	.36	.36	.42	.52	.000
Target wage earner status x participant sex	1	.04	.04	.05	.82	.000
Target sex x target wage earner status x participant sex	1	.12	.12	.14	.70	.000
Error	296	250.11	.85			
Total	306	3355.00				

N = 306

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, Confidence Intervals, and Sample Size by Dependent Measure

	Surprise at wage earner status for:	
	Primary wage earner	Secondary wage earner
Male		
<i>M</i>	3.87 _a	5.91 _c
<i>SD</i>	1.94	1.86
<i>95% CI</i>	3.43 - 4.31	5.49 - 6.33
<i>N</i>	76	77
Female		
<i>M</i>	4.99 _b	4.16 _a
<i>SD</i>	2.07	1.93
<i>95% CI</i>	4.52 - 5.45	3.73 - 4.59
<i>N</i>	77	76
	Perceived overqualification	
	Primary wage earner	Secondary wage earner
Male		
<i>M</i>	4.43 _b	5.54 _c
<i>SD</i>	1.85	1.49
<i>95% CI</i>	4.01 - 4.85	5.21 - 5.87
<i>N</i>	76	77
Female		
<i>M</i>	3.70 _a	4.82 _b
<i>SD</i>	1.70	1.66
<i>95% CI</i>	3.32 - 4.08	4.43 - 5.20
<i>N</i>	77	76
	Reward recommendations	
	Primary wage earner	Secondary wage earner
Male		
<i>M</i>	3.18 _b	3.62 _c
<i>SD</i>	.96	1.04
<i>95% CI</i>	2.96 - 3.40	3.39 - 3.85
<i>N</i>	76	77
Female		
<i>M</i>	2.70 _a	3.13 _b
<i>SD</i>	.86	.89
<i>95% CI</i>	2.51 - 2.90	2.94 - 3.32
<i>N</i>	77	76

Note: _{a,b,c} For each dependent variable, means with different subscripts are significantly different from one another.

Figure 1. Summary of results for: A (Surprise) and B (Perceived Overqualification).

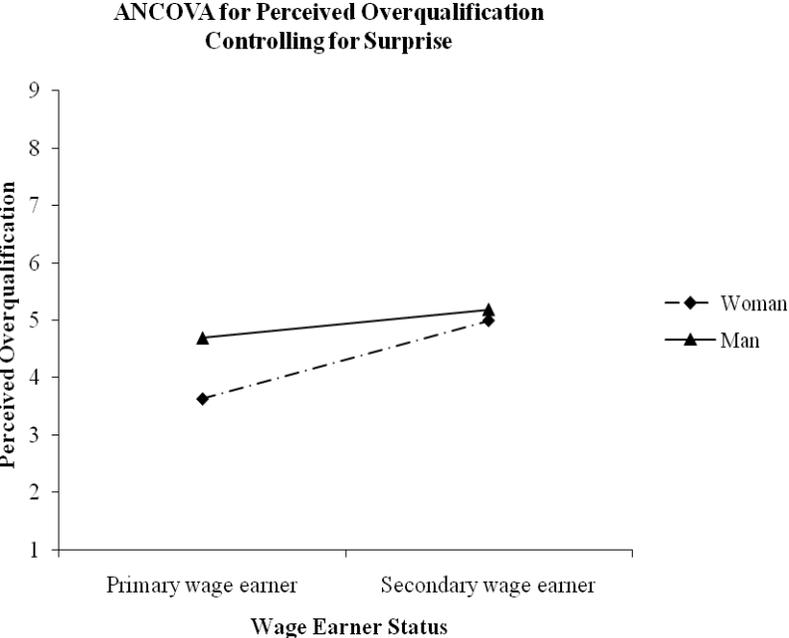
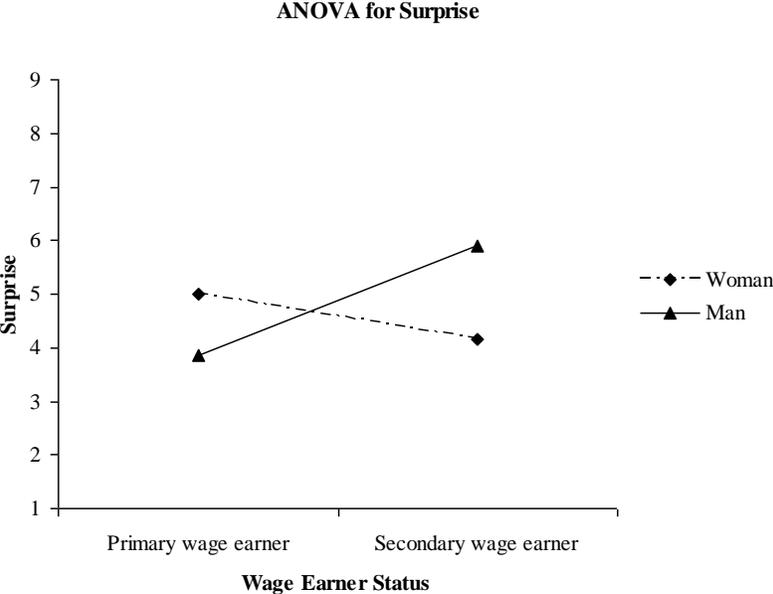


Figure 2. Three-way interaction of target sex, target wage earner status, and participant sex on surprise.

