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## Penalizing fathers who use family-friendly measures. A comparative study with university students from Ghana and Spain

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### ABSTRACT

This article provides experimental empirical evidence on the penalization of a father of high professional status who decides to use a family friendly measure (FFM) offered by his company. A cross-cultural sample of university students (in the field of Business Administration and Economics) from Ghana and Spain was used to evaluate a hypothetical male employee who after the birth of their child either used a reduction of the working day or worked traditional hours. We compared the results with those obtained for an identical female employee. We considered several variables that mediated the effect of using the FFM on the behavior proxy items. We also considered the participants' (explicit and implicit) attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies. We obtained strong empirical evidence on the penalization of a father who uses a reduction of the working day. However, and contrary to expectations, in Spain this penalty experienced by the father was similar to that experienced by the mother, while in Ghana it was greater.

### 1. Introduction

Very rarely do fathers with the right (and also the inclination) to use the family friendly measures (FFMs) offered by companies actually request them. Many feel that these measures “are not for them”. This may be due, in part, to the existence of a limited corporative culture supporting a work family balance, but it could also be due to the lack of a specific sensitive corporate culture towards men's use of FFMs (Burnett et al., 2013).

On the one hand, companies are still affected by significant inertia concerning the work devotion schema (Blair-Loy, 2003) and the ideal worker norm (Williams, 2012). Work is designed for people who, when they have family responsibilities, delegate care to someone else (traditionally a stay-at-home wife). From a context like this there emerges the phenomenon of the “flexibility stigma” (Williams et al., 2013). Parents who use the FFMs offered in their companies are usually seen as less productive workers and less committed to the company. They tend to be penalized in aspects such as wages and promotion. This problem affects both working

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mothers and working fathers. On the other hand, there may be some differential factors between the penalties for working mothers and those for working fathers (and for women and men in general). For instance, according to [Rudman et al. \(2012\)](#), people violating stereotypes that justify the gender hierarchy are most at risk of a backlash. For instance, a working father using the FFMs offered in his company may be seen as an atypical man.

In this article we focus on analyzing the extent to which participants tended to penalize a father with a high professional status who decided to use a family friendly measure (FFM) existing in his company. This case was compared to that of a mother with the same characteristics (although in our design we included both a male and a female target, in this article we focus our attention on the analysis of the male target). In this regard, we were interested in knowing to what extent the penalty experienced by the father had the same intensity as that experienced by the mother.

We based our analysis on the experimental methodology designed by [Vandello et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Cuddy et al. \(2004\)](#). Participants evaluated a hypothetical male or female employee who after the birth of a child either used a reduction of the working day or worked traditional hours. Our design was a  $2 \times 2$  factorial where factor 1 was the gender of the target (male, female) and factor 2 was the use of reduced working hours (use, not use). After a random assignment of the participants to each of the four resulting experimental conditions, we were able to obtain causal evidence about the biases discussed previously. This experimental design (instead of a standard survey approach asking participants about these questions) confers a high internal validity on our results.

Additionally, we considered several variables that mediated the effect of using the FFM on the behavior proxy items. Another novelty of this research is the consideration of the participants' (explicit and implicit) attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies. We wanted to know if more traditional attitudes in this domain increase the penalizing effect on fathers when they use the FFM.

The evaluators (participants) in our research were university students (acting as if they were human resources managers) and not real employers. There are some studies where a field experiment with real employers was carried out after first performing a controlled experiment with students. This was the case for [Correll et al. \(2007\)](#), and the results achieved with both methodologies were very similar. In addition, 93.2% of all students participating in our research were studying bachelor or master's degrees in the fields of Business Administration, Economics and other similar fields (Human Resources Management, Banking and Finance, Marketing, etc.), which are areas quite closely related to the management of human resources (that is to say, our participants are potential human resources managers). These aspects also confer an important external validity on our results.

Another merit of this research is that we use a sample of university students in two countries: Ghana and Spain. On the one hand, it is of great interest to know to what extent the norms of the work devotion schema and the ideal worker (two concepts that were developed in an American context) apply to Ghana and Spain. On the other hand, Ghana and Spain are two very different countries, which provides our research with a cross-cultural comparative study dimension ([Aycan, 2008](#)). One of our aims was to grasp how cultural differences influenced how our target (a male professional working father) was penalized for using the FFM.

Gender attitude and values may be more traditional in Ghana than in Spain. For example, according to The Global Gender Gap Index 2016 ([World Economic Forum, 2016](#)), which ranges from 0.516 to 0.874, the index for Ghana is 0.705 (rank 59), whereas the index for Spain is .738 (rank 29). Or according to the [World Values Survey Wave \(2016\)](#), 68.8% of Ghanaian respondents and 14.1% of Spanish respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that "on the whole, men make better business executives than women do".

These strong differences in cultural features between Ghana and Spain could lead to differences in the predicted outcomes of our experiment. Specifically, we consider that a culture, like that of Ghana, that is more traditional in terms of gender than Spanish culture, can give rise to a more marked role for the father as provider (and not so much as carer) than in Spain. For example, the percentage of participants in our research who claimed to "strongly agree" with the statement "In childhood, the love and presence of the mother and father are essential, but with a newborn baby the role of the mother is really the most important" was 14.6% in the case of the Spanish sample and 46.7% in the case of the Ghanaian sample. The latter leads us to expect a greater penalty in Ghana than in Spain for the (atypical) father who uses a reduction in working hours.

## 2. Theoretical justification

### 2.1. The flexibility stigma and the ideal worker

The "flexibility stigma" refers to the fact that often workers who use the FFMs offered by their companies are penalized for this ([Williams et al., 2013](#); [Stone and Hernández, 2013](#); [Coltrane et al., 2013](#)). This phenomenon relates to what [Blair-Loy \(2003\)](#) calls "the work devotion schema". This schema specifies the cognitive belief, moral commitment, and emotional salience of making work the central focus of one's life ([Williams et al., 2013](#)).

According to [Williams et al. \(2013\)](#) the work devotion schema is both coercive (many workers feel forced to comply) and seductive (workers may also believe that a strong work ethic helps form their sense of self and self-worth). In this context, the use of FFMs could be interpreted by superiors, co-workers, and even the workers themselves as a signal that they are violating the work devotion schema and are therefore morally lacking.

This schema is closely related to the figure of the "ideal worker". The ideal worker is an individual who is unencumbered by family responsibilities ([Rehel and Baxter, 2015](#)); and who, when they do have family responsibilities, delegates the care to someone else (traditionally a stay-at-home wife). Despite a dramatic shift in attitudes, workplaces are still largely organized for the ideal worker. That is, the norm of the ideal worker remains a key aspect in the culture of many organizations. For example, according to institutional theory ([Scott, 2005](#)), which considers the process by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior, the norm of the ideal worker can be considered as a deep and

resilient determinant of the structure and culture of many companies.

In this sense, employees who use FFM may be considered as people who do not comply with this norm of the ideal worker and they may be penalized for that. Empirical evidence points to this (Stone and Hernández, 2013) in experimental studies (Correll et al., 2007; Benard and Correll, 2010), in studies about the gender pay gap (Budig and England, 2001; Molina and Montuenga, 2009) and in qualitative studies (Baker, 2012).

The norm of the ideal worker may have more or less force depending on social class and the status of the occupation. According to Williams et al. (2013), professionals and managers (workers in high-status jobs) are typically given much more control over their working hours and are considered to be “trusted workers” who are not felt to need close supervision. Instead, they often rely on norms, workplace culture, and informal sanctions to ensure compliance with their time mandates (Stone and Hernández, 2013). That means that the pressure of the norm of ideal worker is particularly important for this type of trusted worker.

## 2.2. Warmth and competence judgments: the stereotype content model (SCM)

One way of explaining the penalty experienced by many professionals and managers when deciding to use FFM is the stereotype content model, SCM (Fiske et al. 2002, 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004). The model posits that when people spontaneously interpret behavior or form impressions of others, warmth and competence form the basic dimensions that, together, account for how people characterize others. So the model differentiates stereotyped groups using these two dimensions, resulting in four combinations of warmth (high/low) and competence (high/low) stereotypes.

People perceived as warm and competent elicit uniformly positive emotions and behavior (usually these people are ingroup; in American samples, this includes people who are white, middle class, and Christian), whereas those perceived as lacking warmth and competence (for instance, in American samples, the homeless, “on welfare”, etc.), elicit uniform negativity. People classified as high in one dimension and low in the other elicit predictable, ambivalent affective and behavioral reactions. For example, in the case of women, homemakers are viewed as warm but not competent; they are viewed as a low status and cooperative group, eliciting paternalist emotions. In contrast, female professionals are viewed as competent, but cold, eliciting an envious prejudice (they are viewed as high-status competitors).

What does the SCM predict in the case of a professional/manager having their first child, depending on whether or not they use a FFM (in this article, a reduction in working hours)? For a female manager, in both cases it would be perceived ambivalently (high in one dimension and low in the other): If she does not use the family-friendly measure she is probably viewed as competent but not warm (being penalized for this); if she uses the measure she is probably viewed as warm but not competent (very similar to the homemaker case), being penalized for this (Cuddy et al., 2004). For a male manager, if he does not use the family friendly measure he will probably be viewed as high in both dimensions (competent and warm), not being penalized; whereas if he uses the FFM he will be viewed as warm but not competent (the same as for the female professional who uses the FFM), being penalized for this. So comparing the situation of not using versus using the family-friendly measure, the perception about the male professional deteriorates.

## 2.3. Social role theory and role incongruity: gender differences in backlash

Social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Wood, 2016) is a social psychological theory that tries to explain gender differences and similarities in social behavior by emphasizing the social component of those behaviors. Its basic principle is that gender differences and similarities arise primarily from the distribution of men and women into social roles within society. That means that perceivers infer that there is correspondence between the types of actions people engage in (“there are many women in caring activities”) and their inner dispositions (“so women are better as caregivers”). Thus gender stereotypes follow from observations of people in gender-typical social roles—especially, men's occupancy of the breadwinner and higher status roles (with perceivers attributing agentic traits to them) and women's occupancy of homemaker and lower status roles (with perceivers attributing communal traits to them).

In this framework, Eagly and Karau (2002) identify two kinds of expectations or norms: descriptive norms (consensual expectations about what members of a group actually do); and injunctive or prescriptive norms (consensual expectations about what a group of people ought to do). These gender norms or roles have pervasive effects. Gender is a personal characteristic that provides a strong basis for categorizing people, and stereotypes about women and men are easily and automatically activated (with the corresponding consequences).

A derivation of the Social role theory is the “role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders” proposed by Eagly and Karau (2002). This theory proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender roles and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: first, perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles; and second, evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. One consequence is that attitudes are less positive toward female than male leaders or potential leaders.

Returning to the case of a professional/manager who has their first child, and who decides to use/not use the FFM, there may be several cases of role incongruity. For instance, if a female professional does not use the FFM after having a baby, that can generate the already signaled perceived incongruence between her role as a mother (who should use reconciliation measures) and her role as a professional or manager, with the corresponding consequences for prejudice and penalizing behaviors. However, a very interesting case is that of the male professional/manager who uses the FFM on becoming a father. As already stated above, a male manager who uses the FFM would be viewed as warm but not competent (with the corresponding penalization for this). Additionally, according to

the incongruity approach, a perceived incongruence could arise between his role as an involved father using the FFM and his role as breadwinner and higher status person, which could lead to an additional penalty. This is another reason to expect a higher penalization for fathers that use FFMs compared to mothers in the same circumstances.

A line of research related to the previous one is the “Status Incongruity Hypothesis” (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman and Mescher, 2013). This hypothesis states that defending the status quo provides a strong motivation for backlash; as a result, people who violate stereotypes that justify the gender hierarchy will be at most risk from a backlash. According to Moss-Racusin et al. (2010), the backlash emerges when atypical men or women are judged more negatively (e.g., as less likable and employable) compared to identically behaving members of the other gender. With respect to the specific case of men, they show that not conforming to masculine stereotype prescriptions (being a winner, powerful, dominant, agentic, etc.) is associated with a set of risks. They make reference to some evidence suggesting that, relatively compared to women, men are penalized for passiveness, emotional self-disclosure or achieving success in feminine domains. In particular, they analyze the case of a “modest man”, finding evidence that modest men were perceived as falling into men's proscriptions linked to low status (weakness, uncertainty, etc.), as well as violating agentic men's prescriptions linked to high status (confidence, ambition, etc.).

In line with studies on men and masculinities (Pleck, 1981; Connell, 1995; Kaufman, 1999; Kimmel, 2017), another interesting contribution to the justification of the backlash against atypical men is that of the approach of precarious manhood (Bosson and Vandello, 2011; Vandello and Bosson, 2013). This theory posits that manhood is seen as a precarious social status that is difficult to achieve, tenuously held (compared with womanhood), and something that must be earned and maintained through publicly verifiable actions. Because of this, men (especially heterosexual men) experience more anxiety over their gender status than women, particularly when gender status is uncertain or challenged (this is related to the concept of homophobia; see McCormack and Anderson, 2014). This can motivate a variety of negative behaviors, one of them affecting the domain of the work-family balance. Indeed, some men could avoid using FFMs in order to avoid seeming weak or effeminate; on the other hand, male “flexibility seekers” could be seen as less masculine and be penalized for this.

## 2.4. Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1.** According to the stereotype content model and role incongruity approaches, the working professional father who uses the FFM (reduction of the working day) is penalized at work (in terms of hourly pay rise and being recommended for promotion) compared to the working professional father who does not use the FFM.

**Hypothesis 2.** As suggested by the role incongruity approaches, the working professional father who uses the FFM (an atypical father) is penalized at work to a higher degree than an identical working professional mother. In other words, we expect to obtain a statistically significant (and negative) effect of the “using working day reduction  $\times$  male target” interaction on our dependent variables (recommendation for promotion, hourly pay rise, perceived job commitment).

**Hypothesis 3.** The effect of using the FFM (reduction of the working day) on hourly pay rise and recommendation for promotion is mediated by the variable “perceived job commitment”. In particular, the working professional father who uses the FFM is considered to be less committed to the company than the one who does not use it; and being considered less committed has a negative effect on pay rises and on recommendation for promotion.

**Hypothesis 4.** The effect of using the FFM on “perceived job commitment” is mediated by variables related to masculinity. Specifically, the working professional father who uses the FFM is considered to be less masculine and has less masculine prescriptive traits, and this has a negative impact on his “perceived job commitment”.

**Hypothesis 5.** The effect of using the FFM (reduction of the working day) on hourly pay rise and recommendation for promotion is moderated by the participants' explicit and implicit attitudes towards the father caring for their baby. Specifically, if participants have a higher score in the “explicit traditional attitude to baby care” and “implicit traditional attitude to baby care” instruments, the penalizing effect of using the FFM is higher.

**Hypothesis 6.** Ghanaian society is more traditional and conservative than Spanish society, and this should be reflected (at least in part) in the attitudes of their university students. There should be statistically significant differences between the Ghanaian and Spanish samples of university students, both in the results obtained as well as in the estimated path analysis model. Specifically, we expect that the father who reduces his working hours will be rated as less masculine in Ghana than in Spain, and we also expect that in Ghana there will be a greater penalty against this (atypical) father compared to an identical mother.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants

928 university students participated in the experiment. 498 of these were from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and 430 of them from the Complutense University of Madrid and the ESIC Business & Marketing School, both located in the region of Madrid, Spain. Sampling was performed in each institution separately over the period October 2016 and June 2017. All the participants were studying bachelor or master's degrees (865 in the fields of Business Administration, Economics and other similar fields, and 63 in other areas of Social Sciences). 386 were female students and 542 were male. In the Ghanaian sample, 0% of the students were

immigrants and 1% were foreign students; in the Spanish sample these figures were 7.8% and 9.2% respectively. The average age of the participants was 23.6 years in Ghana and 21.8 in Spain.

### 3.2. Materials

Participants had to complete two questionnaires and perform an IAT (the latter only in the case of Spain). The first questionnaire was based (with some slight modifications) on Vandello et al. (2013) and Cuddy et al. (2004). It presented participants with a brief description (see Appendix 1) of a high status female employee (Esi/María) or a high status male employee (Oko/Manuel). The employee was described as a 32-year-old associate consultant working for a prestigious Accra/Madrid consulting firm. The job was well-paid and desirable. After some information about gender-neutral hobbies (running and music), the description noted that the target and their spouse had recently had their first baby. Participants then read that the consulting firm offered employees the option of working part-time (25–30 h per week) to accommodate personal circumstances. Half of the participants read that the target decided to enroll in the program and is currently taking afternoons off to help care for the baby at home, while the other half read that the target decided not to enroll in the program and works in the office 5 days a week, 40 h a week. All other details remained the same across the two conditions.

### 3.3. “Male prescriptive traits” and “masculine” ratings

Following the description, participants rated the target on 42 traits (Vandello et al., 2013 used 36 traits) using a seven-point (1 = not at all; 7 = extremely) Likert scale. These traits are basically those used by Cuddy et al. (2004) and Vandello et al. (2013), most of them coming from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1977). With these 42 traits it is possible to construct instruments to measure male and female prescriptions and proscriptions. In this paper we are using two instruments: the first is “male prescriptive traits”, obtained as the average score of the following five traits: “leadership ability”, “career oriented”, “business sense”, “high self-esteem”, and “competitive” (Cronbach's alpha = .739). The second (following Vandello et al., 2013) is the single item “masculine”.

### 3.4. Perceived job commitment

Next, the students were asked to imagine themselves as an executive of the company and to evaluate the target by answering or evaluating eight questions (1 = not at all; 7 = extremely): “How committed is this employee to her/his job?“, “How reliable is this employee?“, “How dedicated is this employee?“, “How valuable is this employee to her/his company?“, “How comfortable would you be giving Esi (María)/Oko (Manuel) an important assignment?“, “Esi (María)/Oko (Manuel) is a key member of the team“, “Esi (María)/Oko (Manuel) is persistent in completing job tasks“, “Esi (María)/Oko (Manuel) is an efficient worker“. The instrument “perceived job commitment” is the average score of these eight items (Cronbach's alpha = .889). The range of values is from 1.78 to 6.22. The higher the score, the higher is the perception that the target is committed to the company. (Appendix 2 offers the descriptive statistics corresponding to this instrument).

### 3.5. Behavior proxy items

After answering the questions from the previous block, participants were asked two questions about their behavior in relation to the target. The first was “how likely would you be to recommend Esi (María)/Oko (Manuel) for promotion? (1 = “with very low probability”; 7 = “with very high probability”). The second was “what percentage hourly pay rise (ranging from 0% to 8%) would you give this employee? As emphasized by Vandello et al. (2013), in order to minimize the possibility that lower rises could be assigned to flexibility seekers simply because they work fewer hours, the fact that it was an “hourly” pay rise was highlighted (in the initial presentation made to the participants of the tasks to be carried out). Through these two items we want to capture possible discriminatory behavior (penalization) towards the father who uses the working day reduction.

### 3.6. Explicit attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies

After filling out the previous questionnaire, the participants had to complete a second questionnaire that included demographic and attitudinal questions, including attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies. Specifically, we constructed the instrument “explicit traditional attitude to baby care”. This instrument is composed of 2 items: “men are just as qualified as women when it comes to caring for their baby and connecting emotionally with it”; and “at some point in the future men will make as much use as women of the measures that companies offer to achieve a good work-family balance”. The scores for the two items were reversed. The measure is the average score of these two items (Cronbach's alpha = .556). The range of values is from 1 to 5. Because we reversed the scores for the items, the higher the score of the instrument, the more traditional the attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies.

### 3.7. Implicit attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies

Finally, 338 Spanish students (from a total sample of 430 Spanish students) performed an implicit association test (IAT). The IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998) assesses attitudes without the necessity of asking the participant for a direct verbal report, the responses to



these measures being less likely to be affected by socially desirable responding (Haddock and Maio, 2016). Several IATs have been designed to assess implicit stereotypes in the domain of gender roles (for instance, Rudman et al., 2001; and White and White, 2006). In our research we use an IAT that is a modification of the “gender-career IAT” developed by Nosek et al. (2002) (see also Banaji and Greenwald, 2013).

We want to measure the underlying automatic associations between females and baby-care activities and between males and paid work activities. There are four categories in the test: “Female”, with five stimuli (she, woman, feminine, girl, wife); “male”, with five stimuli (he, man, masculine, boy, husband); “baby-care activities”, with eleven stimuli (pictures of feeding bottle, diaper box, baby bath, etc.); and paid work activities, with eleven stimuli (pictures of laptop computer, meeting room, office, etc.). The IAT captures attitudes towards “fathers caring for their babies” by comparing the speed of completion of two different sorting tasks: the non-stereotyped combination (“female + paid work” and “male + baby-care”) and the stereotyped combination (“female + baby-care” and “male + paid work”). In order to obtain the IAT score we used the algorithm of Greenwald et al. (2003), administered through the program FreeIAT (Meade, 2009). In order to correct for problems of kurtosis we performed a transformation of the IAT score (adding 1 to the score and squaring it). The range of values is from 0.03 to 5.50. The higher the score, the higher the automatic association between females and baby-care (more traditional attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies). Pearson's correlation coefficient between “explicit traditional attitude” and “implicit traditional attitude” was  $r = 0.162$ ,  $p < .01$  for the Spanish participants. This correlation is statistically significant but not very high. This result may relate to the fact that there are participants who explicitly believe that a father can take care of a baby as well as a mother but yet, for cultural reasons, they automatically associate caring for babies with mothers and not so much with fathers. Precisely, the fact that this correlation coefficient is not very high shows the interest of considering in our study not only the explicit attitudes but also the implicit ones.

### 3.8. Other variables

In the different analyses that we are going to perform, our independent variable is “Using reduction” (using the working day reduction) (dichotomous variable: 1 = yes; 0 = no). We also use the variables: “Male target” (dichotomous variable: 1 = Oko/Manuel; 0 = Esi/María); “Spain” (dichotomous variable: 1 = Spain; 0 = Ghana); “female participant” (dichotomous variable: 1 = yes; 0 = no).

### 3.9. Procedure

The students participating in the study performed the tests either in two phases –the Ghanaian students- or in three phases –the Spanish students-: First, they filled out the questionnaire with the target evaluation; second, they filled out the demographic-attitudinal questionnaire; and third –only in the case of Spanish participants-, they performed the IAT. In the case of the University of Cape Coast, the first and the second questionnaires were distributed in classrooms (the four experimental conditions in the first questionnaire were randomly assigned). In the case of the two Spanish universities, 46.0% of the participants completed the first and second questionnaires in classrooms. Keeping their identification numbers, these participants completed the IAT on a computer located in the researchers' office. The remaining 54.0% of the Spanish students performed the three tasks in the researchers' office. 78.6% of the Spanish participants performed the IAT. The four experimental conditions of the first questionnaire were randomly assigned in all the cases.

## 4. Results

The analysis of the penalization against fathers using a family-friendly measure was carried out following the completion of these three parts: analysis of variance; path analysis with mediating variables; and analysis of the attitudes as moderating variables.

### 4.1. Analysis of variance

As a first approximation to the results obtained in the experiment, and using the complete sample, it becomes clear that the working professional using the reduction of the working day was penalized in behavior proxy items (recommendation for promotion, hourly pay rise) compared to the working professional not using the FFM. Indeed, according to the four-way ANOVA reported in Table 1, there was a significant main effect of “using working day reduction” on these two variables. For instance, when the target did not use the FFM the participants offered them an average hourly pay rise of 5.52%, but when the target used the FFM the average pay rise was 4.77% ( $F(1, 911) = 45.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which means that there was a penalty of 15.8%. Something similar happens with the variables “perceived job commitment”, “male prescriptive traits” and “masculinity”.

There are other statistically significant main effects and interactions. One interaction of particular interest for this study is “using working day reduction  $\times$  male target”. Using the complete sample, this interaction only has a marginally significant effect on “perceived job commitment” ( $F(1, 911) = 3.12$ ,  $p < .1$ ). As we will see in more detail in the next subsection, this result hides the fact that, according to our results, the penalty for using the FFM may be greater for working professional fathers than for identical working professional mothers only for the sub-sample of Ghanaian participants and not for the sub-sample of Spanish participants.

Table 2 offers more detailed results (evaluations) according to whether the target did or did not use the FFM. Given the hypotheses being tested in this article, we focus on the penalization of the male target. Both with the sample of students from Ghana and with the one from Spain, it is observed that, in keeping with Hypothesis 1, the working professional father who uses the FFM is

**Table 1**  
Four-way ANOVA analysis.

	Recommend promotion	Hourly pay rise	Perceived job commitment	Male prescriptive traits	Masculinity
	F	F	F	F	F
Using working day reduction	37.49***	45.86 ***	88.36***	33.90***	18.65***
Male target	.07	7.67 ***	2.19	2.44	420.77***
Spain	6.49**	55.24***	.00	1.21	.05
Female participant	1.06	4.44**	1.70	.18	.03
Using working day reduction × Male target	2.56	.28	3.12*	.21	1.22
Using working day reduction × Spain	.95	.00	4.35**	.08	.14
Male target × Spain	3.19*	2.36	5.53**	.07	22.63***
Male target × Female participant	.02	4.06**	.09	.28	2.94*
Spain × Female participant	7.29***	3.19*	7.61***	16.96***	.02
Using working day red. × Male target × Spain	1.46	.14	2.48	1.43	2.96*
Using working day red. × Spain × Female Part.	2.27	6.37**	8.68***	1.93	.01
Male target × Spain × Female Part.	3.67*	5.80**	.32	.84	.17
N	927	927	925	925	926

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.

penalized at work (in terms of pay rise and recommendation for promotion) compared to the working professional father who does not use the FFM. The corresponding one-way ANOVAS are statistically significant. For instance, looking at the increase in the hourly wage and the Spanish sample, [Table 2](#) shows that when the male target did not use the FFM the participants offered him an average hourly pay rise of 4.95%, while when he used it the average pay rise was 4.09% ( $F(1, 210) = 13.83, p < .001$ ). This means that the male target using the working day reduction was penalized 21%.

The penalty for using the FFM tends to be greater for the male target than for the female one. However, this result is statistically significant only for the sample of participants from Ghana. Indeed, for the participants at the University of Cape Coast, for the variable “Recommend promotion”, the ratio between the mean score for the target “not using” and for the target “using” is 115.3 in the case of the male target and 106.2 in the case of the female target. This difference is statistically significant since the interaction “Using × Male target”, obtained in a two-way ANOVA is significant ( $F(1, 494) = 3.88, p < .05$ ). Additionally, the variable “Perceived job commitment” –which is an important mediator in the effect of “using working day reduction” on the two behavior proxy items–also presents a statistically significant difference between ratios “not using” and “using” corresponding to male (116.3) and female targets (108.3). Likewise, if we disaggregate the Ghanaian sample according to the sex of the participants, we can see that this “differential penalty” is actually more intense (and statistically significant) among the male Ghanaian participants. This result is in agreement with the literature on gender attitudes and biases ([Koch et al., 2015](#)), which indicates that normally more traditional gender attitudes are observed among males, which give rise to more intense gender biases.

Thus, our results provide empirical evidence for [Hypothesis 2](#) (the father who uses the FFM is penalized at work to a higher degree than an identical working professional mother) only for the participants from Ghana, while for the participants from Spain it cannot be ruled out that penalties for fathers and mothers are similar.

#### 4.2. Path analysis with mediating variables

We now want to explain how using the FFM affects the recommendation for promotion and the hourly pay increase offered to our male target. According to hypotheses 3 (the effect of using the FFM on behavior proxy items is mediated by the variable “perceived job commitment”) and 4 (the effect of using the FFM on “perceived job commitment” is mediated by some variables related to masculinity), in [Fig. 1](#) and [Fig. 2](#) we present two path analysis models for the dependent variables “recommend promotion” and “hourly pay rise”. These models have two main characteristics: first, the effects of using the reduction of the working day on “recommend promotion” and “hourly pay rise” are mediated by the variable “perceived job commitment”. Second, in turn, the effect of using the reduction of the working day on “perceived job commitment” is mediated by two variables related to masculinity (“male prescriptive traits” and “masculinity”).

In addition we want to identify whether these direct and indirect effects are different for the samples of students in Ghana and Spain. As such, we conducted a multigroup analysis.

These two path analyses (for the two behavior proxy items) were performed with the Amos 22.0 program in the SPSS 22.0 software package ([Arbuckle, 2013](#)). Multigroup path analysis (through structural equation modeling) was used to analyze cross-cultural data, comparing the Ghanaian and Spanish samples. Multigroup analysis raises the question of whether a path model (with several mediating variables) is consistent across two (or more) groups. The two groups are the actual levels of a “moderator variable” (in our case, the participant’s country). So the purpose of multigroup analysis is to determine whether the path model is moderated by levels of the moderating variable, and if it is, which paths in the model present differences between the two groups ([Tammelin et al., 2017](#)).

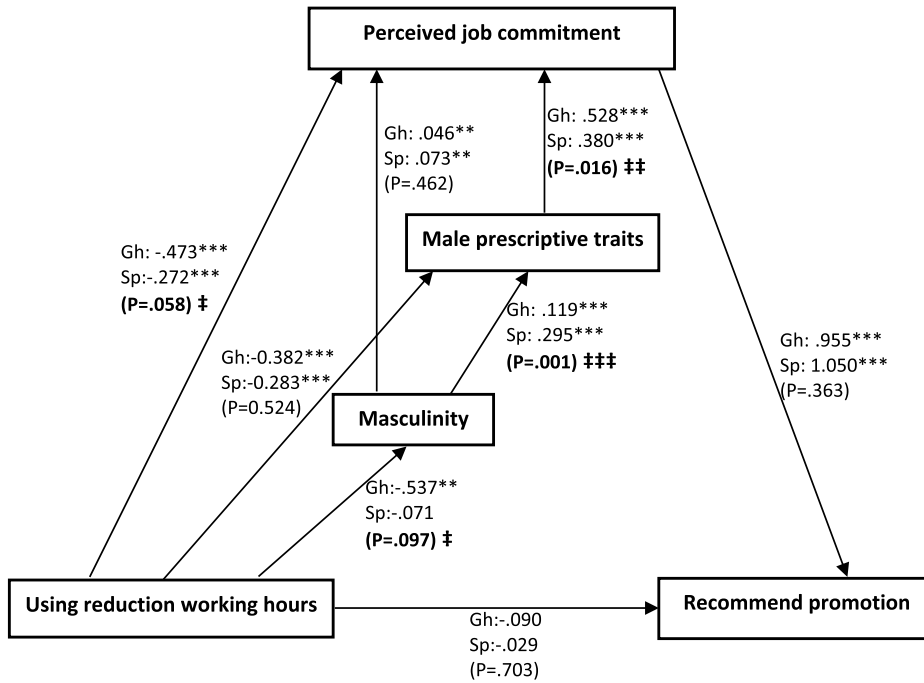
Both the path analysis for “recommend promotion” ([Fig. 1](#)) and the path analysis for “hourly pay rise” ([Fig. 2](#)) present quite acceptable fits (“recommend promotion”:  $\chi^2 = 0.596, df = 4, p = .963; TLI = 1.038; RMSEA = 0.000$ . “Hourly pay rise”:

**Table 2**  
Detailed results (evaluations) according to whether the target did or did not use the FFM.

	Recommend promotion						Hourly pay rise						Perceived job commitment						Male prescriptive traits						Masculinity											
	Male target			Fem. target			Male target			Fem. target			Male target			Fem. target			Male target			Fem. target			Male target			Fem. target								
	N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean		N	Mean							
<b>Ghana</b>	<b>Female participants</b>																																			
	Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using		
	45	5.933	51	5.529	45	5.956	51	6.010	45	5.200	51	5.089	45	5.280	51	5.490	45	4.778	51	2.784	45	4.778	51	2.784	45	4.778	51	2.784	45	4.778	51	2.784				
	53	5.208	43	5.093	53	5.038	43	5.163	53	4.394	43	4.504	53	4.823	43	4.949	53	4.094	43	2.442	53	4.094	43	2.442	53	4.094	43	2.442	53	4.094	43	2.442				
	114%***			109%			118%***			116%***			113%***			109%***			111%***			111%***			117%*			114%			111%***			114%*		
	(Interaction)																																			
<b>Male participants</b>	<b>Female participants</b>																																			
	Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using		
	79	5.975	80	5.700	79	5.709	80	5.885	79	5.259	80	4.944	79	5.582	80	5.328	79	4.519	80	3.013	79	4.519	80	3.013	79	4.519	80	3.013	79	4.519	80	3.013				
	91	5.148	56	5.464	91	5.132	56	5.304	91	4.569	56	4.708	90	5.153	56	5.389	91	4.066	56	2.482	91	4.066	56	2.482	91	4.066	56	2.482	91	4.066	56	2.482				
	116%***			104%			111%***			115%***			105%			108%***			111%***			99%			111%***			121%*			111%***			121%*		
	(Interaction)																																			
<b>All</b>	<b>Female participants</b>																																			
	Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using		
	124	5.960	131	5.634	124	5.798	131	5.934	124	5.237	131	5.001	124	5.473	131	5.391	124	4.613	131	2.924	124	4.613	131	2.924	124	4.613	131	2.924	124	4.613	131	2.924				
	144	5.170	99	5.303	144	5.097	99	5.242	144	4.505	99	4.620	143	5.031	99	5.198	144	4.076	99	2.465	144	4.076	99	2.465	144	4.076	99	2.465	144	4.076	99	2.465				
	115%***			106%*			114%***			113%***			108%***			116%***			104%			109%***			104%			113%***			119%*			113%***		
	(Interaction)																																			
<b>Spain</b>	<b>Female participants</b>																																			
	Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using		
	38	5.434	55	5.664	38	4.750	55	5.455	38	4.909	55	5.149	38	5.553	55	5.724	38	5.132	54	2.407	38	5.132	54	2.407	38	5.132	54	2.407	38	5.132	54	2.407				
	53	5.151	48	5.563	53	4.191	48	5.354	53	4.782	47	4.901	53	5.272	48	5.279	53	4.925	48	1.792	53	4.925	48	1.792	53	4.925	48	1.792	53	4.925	48	1.792				
	105%			102%			113%			103%			105%***			108%***			104%			108%***			104%			134%***			104%			134%***		
	(Interaction)																																			
<b>Male participants</b>	<b>Female participants</b>																																			
	Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using		
	64	5.453	58	5.483	64	5.063	58	5.086	63	4.942	58	5.069	63	5.298	58	5.445	64	4.781	58	2.707	64	4.781	58	2.707	64	4.781	58	2.707	64	4.781	58	2.707				
	57	4.868	56	4.839	57	3.991	56	3.943	57	4.312	56	4.599	57	4.919	56	5.046	56	4.750	57	1.877	57	4.750	57	1.877	57	4.750	57	1.877	57	4.750	57	1.877				
	112%***			113%***			127%***			129%***			115%***			110%***			108%***			108%***			101%			144%***			144%***					
	(Interaction)																																			
<b>All</b>	<b>Female participants</b>																																			
	Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using			Target Not using			Target Using		
	102	5.446	113	5.571	102	4.946	113	5.265	101	4.930	113	5.108	101	5.394	113	5.581	102	4.912	112	2.563	102	4.912	112	2.563	102	4.912	112	2.563	102	4.912	112	2.563				
	110	5.005	104	5.173	110	4.087	104	4.594	110	4.538	103	4.737	110	5.089	104	5.154	109	4.835	105	1.838	110	4.835	105	1.838	110	4.835	105	1.838	110	4.835	105	1.838				
	109%***			108%***			121%***			115%***			109%***			108%***			106%***			106%***			102%			139%***			139%***					
	(Interaction)																																			

“Ratio”: ratio between the mean score for the target “not using” the working day reduction and for the target “using” it. One-way ANOVA test of the statistical significance of the difference between these two means: \*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.  
 “Interaction”: statistical significance of the interaction “Male target × Using”, obtained in a two-way ANOVA (a statistically significant result means that the penalties experienced by the male target and the female target are different). ‡p < .1; ††p < .05; †††p < .01.





- Ghana, N = 268; Spain, N=212.
- Unstandardized Regression Weights are provided for each path. Gh: Ghana; Sp: Spain. \*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.
- P-value for critical ratios for differences between each pair of regression weights (for Ghana and Spain) are provided for each path; ‡ p<.1; ‡‡ p<.05; ‡‡‡ p<.01.
- Direct effect of “Use reduction” on “recommend promotion”: Ghana=-.090; Spain=-.029.
- Indirect effect of “Use reduction” on “recommend promotion”: Ghana=-.700; Spain=-.412.
- Total effect of “Use reduction” on “recommend promotion”: Ghana=-.790; Spain=-.442.

**Fig. 1.** Mediating variables in the effect of using the FFM on recommendation for promotion (male target). Multigroup path analysis for Ghanaian and Spanish samples.

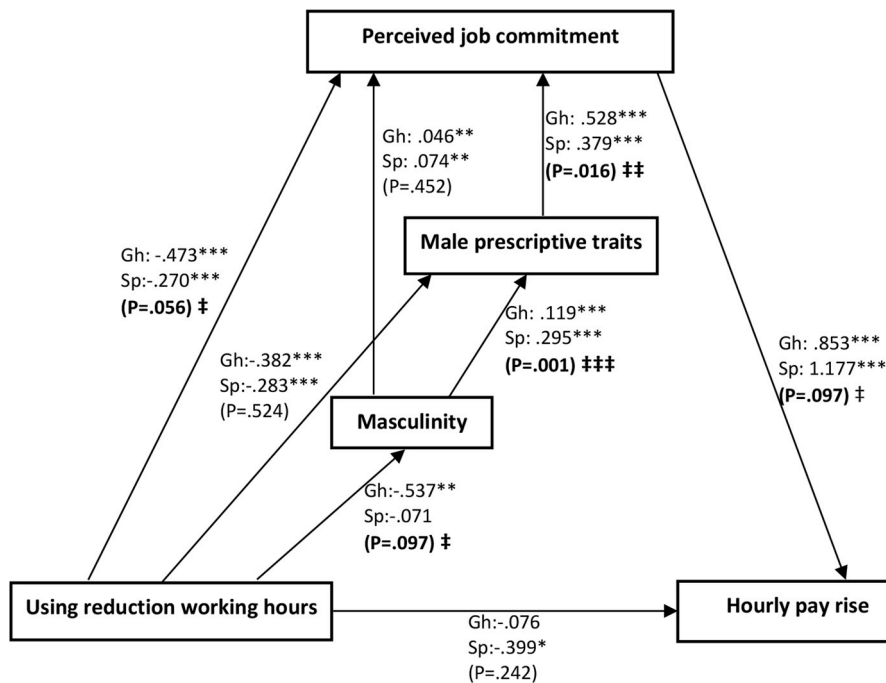
$\chi^2 = 1.997$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .736$ ;  $TLI = 1030$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.000$ ). On the other hand, and within each of these two path analyses, we reject the null hypothesis that the corresponding models for Ghana and Spain are identical (“recommend promotion”:  $\chi^2 (8) = 26.63$ ,  $p = .001$ ; “hourly pay rise”:  $\chi^2 (8) = 31.92$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This evidence that the models corresponding to Ghana and Spain are different (the “country” variable moderates the results obtained) represents certain support for [Hypothesis 6](#) (there must be some statistically significant differences between the Ghanaian and Spanish samples of university students).

[Figs. 1 and 2](#) show that “using reduction” has a statistically significant negative direct effect on “Perceived job commitment”. In addition, this effect is more intense in Ghana than in Spain (the difference is marginally significant).

However, “using reduction” also has the predicted indirect effect on “Perceived job commitment” through the “masculinity” and “male prescriptive traits” variables. Using the reduction in working hours causes the male target to be perceived as having a lower degree of male prescriptive traits. And, in turn, having a higher degree of male prescriptive traits has a positive effect (more intense in Ghana) on the variable “perceived job commitment”. Thus, using the reduction has a negative indirect effect on the variable “perceived job commitment”. Likewise, it is interesting to highlight the path from “using reduction” to “masculinity”. It seems that (in line with [Hypothesis 6](#)) the use of the reduction of the working day results in the male target being seen as less masculine in the case of Ghana ( $\beta = -0.537$ ,  $p = .014$ ), but not in the case of Spain ( $\beta = -0.071$ ,  $p = .685$ ). And, in turn, having a higher score in “masculinity” has a positive effect on “male prescriptive traits”.

On the other hand, “perceived job commitment” has a positive effect ([Figs. 1 and 2](#)) on the two behavior proxy items (“recommend promotion” and “hourly pay rise”). For example, in the case of the Spanish sample, when “perceived job commitment” goes up by 1, “hourly pay rise” goes up by 1.177.

Finally, taking into account the direct and indirect effects, two aspects are worth noting: first, the indirect effects of using the working day reduction on the two behavior proxy items are more important than the direct effects (there is only one statistically significant direct effect: the direct effect of “use reduction” on “pay rise” corresponding to the Spanish sample ( $\beta = -0.339$ ,  $p = .068$ )). Second, the total negative effect of using the working day reduction on “recommend promotion” seems to be greater in Ghana than in Spain, whereas the total effect on “hourly pay rise” seems to be similar (see at the bottom of [Figs. 1 and 2](#)).



- Ghana, N = 268; Spain, N=212.
- Unstandardized Regression Weights are provided for each path. Gh: Ghana; Sp: Spain. \*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.
- P-value for critical ratios for differences between each pair of regression weights (for Ghana and Spain) are provided for each path. ‡ p<.1; ‡‡ p<.05; ‡‡‡ p<.01.
- Direct effect of “Use reduction” on “wage raise”: Ghana=-.076; Spain=-.399.
- Indirect effect of “Use reduction” on “wage raise”: Ghana=-.625; Spain=-.460.
- Total effect of “Use reduction” on “wage raise”: Ghana=-.701; Spain=-.859.

Fig. 2. Mediating variables in the effect of using the FFM on pay rise (male target). Multigroup path analysis for Ghanaian and Spanish samples.

In short, these results support the idea that the effect of using the FFM on behavior proxy items is mediated by the variable “perceived job commitment” (Hypothesis 3), and the idea that the effect of using the FFM on “perceived job commitment” is mediated by some variables related to masculinity (Hypothesis 4).

#### 4.3. Attitudes as moderating variables

We now carry out an analysis to determine whether the relationship between “use reduction” and the main response variables depends on (is moderated by) the participants’ explicit and implicit attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies.

We first conduct a simple moderation model. We estimate the coefficients of several regression models (OLS) in which the impact of the male target’s condition of using (or not using) the reduction in working time, X, on the dependent variable (“recommend promotion”, etc.), Y, is allowed to vary linearly with the attitudes of the participants (M). This is achieved by including the product (the interaction) of X and M as predictor of Y along with X and M (Hayes, 2013).

Table 3 shows the results obtained with the five response variables used in this study (the same as those appearing in the anova analysis in Tables 1 and 2). At the top of the table we consider the case where the moderator variable is the explicit attitudes of the participants towards fathers caring for their babies (the average score of this variable was 2.36 for the Ghanaian sample and 1.90 for the Spanish sample). Remember that a higher value of this variable indicates more traditional attitudes (“men are not as skilled as women in caring for a baby”). The table shows the coefficients corresponding to the interaction “using reduction” x “explicit traditional attitudes”. As can be seen, in the case of the Spanish sample the explicit attitudes of the participants moderate the effect of “use reduction” on “recommend promotion” ( $\beta = -0.454$ ,  $p = .015$ ) and the effect on “perceived job commitment” ( $\beta = -0.285$ ,  $p = .015$ ). As a visual example of this kind of relationship, the graph corresponding to “perceived job commitment” is presented in Fig. 3. In the case of the Ghanaian sample, no statistically significant interaction was obtained.

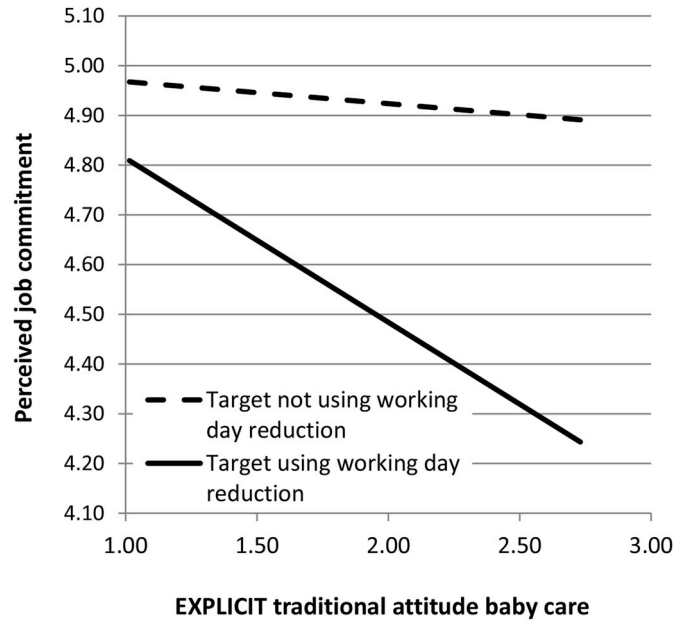
At the bottom of the table we consider the case where the moderator variable is the implicit attitudes of the participants towards fathers caring for their babies (“implicit traditional attitudes”). Now only the Spanish sample appears (338 Spanish participants performed the IAT). The higher the score, the higher the automatic association between women and baby-care. The table shows the

**Table 3**  
Explicit and implicit traditional attitude towards fathers caring for babies as a moderating variable (male target).

	Moderation of the effects										
	Spain					Ghana					
	N	Interaction Coeff	P	R-sq	N	Interaction Coeff	P	R-sq	Interaction Coeff	P	R-sq
Interaction "Using reduction" x "EXPLICIT traditional attitude"	Using → Recommend promotion	209	-.454**	.015	.105	268				.979	.099
	Using → Hourly pay rise	209	.023	.937	.065	268	-.005			.787	.058
	Using → Perceived job commitment	208	-.285**	.015	.189	268	.072			.987	.164
	Using → Male prescriptive traits	208	-.072	.602	.076	267	-.002			.576	.054
	Using → Masculinity	208	-.279	.194	.042	268	-.087			.256	.047
Interaction "Using reduction" x "IMPLICIT traditional attitude"	Using → Recommend promotion	167	-.110	.374	.094					-	-
	Using → Hourly pay rise	167	-.478*	.071	.090					-	-
	Using → Perceived job commitment	166	-.168**	.043	.122					-	-
	Using → Male prescriptive traits	166	-.265**	.050	.066					-	-
	Using → Masculinity	166	.136	.498	.016					-	-

The p-values derive from heteroskedasticity-consistent standard error estimators (Hayes, 2013).

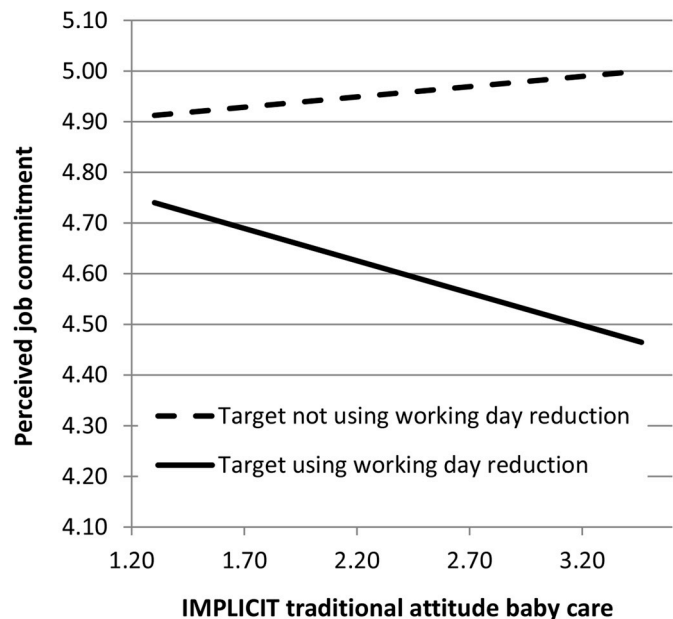
\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.



**Fig. 3.** A visual representation of the moderation of the participants' explicit attitudes in the effect of "use reduction" on "perceived job commitment" (male target). Spanish sample.

coefficients corresponding to the interaction "using reduction" x "implicit traditional attitudes". The implicit attitudes of the participants moderate the effect of "use reduction" on three response variables: "hourly pay rise" ( $\beta = -0.478$ ,  $p = .071$ ), "perceived job commitment" ( $\beta = -0.168$ ,  $p = .043$ ), and "male prescriptive traits" ( $\beta = -0.265$ ,  $p = .050$ ). As a visual example of this kind of relationship, Fig. 4 shows the graph corresponding to "perceived job commitment". As the figure shows, the greater the participant's association between caring for a baby and the mother, the greater the tendency to penalize the father who uses the working reduction.

The analysis carried out so far in this subsection has been based on a simple moderation model. It would be very interesting to now complete this analysis using the conceptual scheme provided by the model of path analysis in the previous section. Now the dichotomous variable on which the multigroup path analysis will be performed will not be the country (as before) but the fact that



**Fig. 4.** A visual representation of the moderation of the participants' implicit attitudes in the effect of "use reduction" on "perceived job commitment" (male target). Spanish sample.

**Table 4**

Total effect, from our path analysis model, of “Use reduction” on “recommend promotion” and “pay rise”. High and low explicit/implicit traditional attitudes as a moderating variable. Male target.

Moderating variable:	Moderation of the effects (total effect):	Attitude score	Spain				Ghana			
			N	Total effect	Lower bound	Upper bound	N	Total effect	Lower bound	Upper bound
“EXPLICIT traditional attitudes”	Using → Recommend promotion	High	102	-.643***	-1.032	-.251	132	-.732***	-1.094	-.377
		Low	107	-.279	-.611	.068	136	-.845***	-1.268	-.417
	Using → Hourly pay rise	High	102	-1.027***	-1.641	-.373	132	-.644**	-1.109	-.118
		Low	107	-.662**	-1.292	-.020	136	-.758***	-1.244	-.251
“IMPLICIT traditional attitudes”	Using → Recommend promotion	High	67	-.654***	-1.076	-.221	-	-	-	-
		Low	100	-.368**	-.717	-.020	-	-	-	-
	Using → Hourly pay rise	High	67	-1.571***	-2.238	-.834	-	-	-	-
		Low	100	-.359	-1.054	.319	-	-	-	-

Explicit traditional attitudes: High (above the 51st percentile of “explicit traditional attitude baby care”); low (below the 51st percentile).

Implicit traditional attitudes: High (above the 60th percentile of “implicit traditional attitude baby care”); low (below the 60th percentile).

Bootstrap bias corrected confidence intervals.

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.

participants have a high or low score in their (explicit/implicit) traditional attitudes. For this we dichotomize the variables “explicit traditional attitudes” (high score = above the 51st percentile; low score = below the 51st percentile) and “implicit traditional attitudes” (high = above the 60th percentile; low = below the 60th percentile). In addition, we now carry out the analysis separately for the Spanish and Ghanaian sub samples.

Due to space constraints, instead of giving a detailed and visual presentation of the results (as was done previously), these are presented in a summarized way in Table 4. In particular, this only shows the total effects (sum of the indirect and direct effects) of “use reduction” on “recommend promotion” and “hourly pay rise” for each of the groups of participants with a “high” and “low” score in the traditional attitudes scales.

In line with the results obtained previously in Table 3, only for the Spanish sample the penalizing effect (on the male target) for using the working reduction is greater when the evaluators (the participants) have traditional attitudes towards baby care (high score) than when these attitudes are more advanced (low score). For example, if a Spanish participant belongs to the “high score” group in implicit attitudes (they have traditional implicit attitudes), the total effect (penalty) for using the working reduction on “hourly pay rise” is  $-1.571$ , while if the participant belongs to the “low score” group (more advanced attitudes), the total effect is  $-0.359$ .

In short, the results obtained in this sub-section seem to support partially Hypothesis 5 (the effect of using the FFM on behavior proxy items is moderated by the participants’ explicit and implicit attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies), at least in the case of the Spanish sub sample.

## 5. Discussion

In the first place, this article has offered causal experimental evidence on the flexibility stigma phenomenon (Williams et al., 2013). According to our results, the participants in our study tended to penalize, in terms of the two job indicators (hourly pay rise and recommendation for promotion) working parents who decide to use a reduction of the working day after having their first child. The use of this family-friendly measure by the (male or female) target could have been interpreted by the participants as a signal that the target (the employee) was in some way violating the so called “work devotion schema” (Blair-Loy, 2003). Or, to put it another way, the use of this “individual accommodation policy” (Correll, 2013) could have fueled the ideal worker norm by clearly signaling who is not an ideal worker. In addition, this result is consistent both with the stereotype content model (the target is viewed as warm but not competent, being penalized in the work sphere for this) and with the social role theory and role incongruity (perceived incongruity between the caring role and the professional/leadership role).

This penalty similarly occurs in two very different societies: Ghana and Spain. A homogenizing factor across the two samples is that in both cases the evaluators are university students; that is, they are a relatively privileged, young and cultured group. However, the Ghanaian and Spanish cultural environments introduce an important cross-cultural element of differentiation between these two samples (Aycan, 2008).

It should also be remembered that the target’s profile considered in this study also delimits the applicability of the results achieved. The target evaluated has a profile of a worker in a high-status job (professional and potential manager). As discussed earlier, these are “trusted workers” (Williams et al., 2013), on whom the pressure from the norm of the ideal worker is particularly intense. In this sense, it would be interesting to perform this type of experiment with a target from a very different social group (for instance, a target with a low-wage job). On the other hand, the fact that in the levels of our two behavioral variables no gender gaps are detected against women (in fact, for Spanish female participants it happens rather the other way around), can also be related to the type of target evaluated and could be subject to further investigation.



One result to be highlighted is that the penalty for using the family-friendly measure tends to be higher for the male than for the female target only for the Ghanaian participants, while for Spanish participants it is not possible to reject the hypothesis that penalties for fathers and mothers are similar. Again, it is possible that this last result has to do with the characteristics of the target considered in this study (a “cool” high-status professional).

This differential gender penalty obtained in Ghana is in line with those obtained by [Vandello et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Moss-Racusin et al. \(2010\)](#). It also provides (partial) empirical evidence in favor of the “role congruity theory” of [Eagly and Karau \(2002\)](#) (when the father uses the working time reduction, this could lead to a perceived incongruity between his role as an involved father using the FFM and his role as the breadwinner and higher status person); and in favor of the “status incongruity hypothesis” of [Rudman et al. \(2012\)](#) (backlash emerges when atypical men are judged more negatively). However, these results are also consistent with the theory of “precarious manhood” ([Bosson and Vandello, 2011](#)) (male flexibility seekers could be seen as less masculine and penalized for this).

Another aspect to emphasize is the important role of several variables that might mediate the effect of using the FFM on the proxy behavior variables. The main mediating variable (as suggested by [Cuddy et al., 2004](#)) was participants' perception of how committed the target was. We have obtained strong evidence that working professional fathers who use the FFM are considered to be less committed to the company than those who do not use it, and being considered less committed has a negative effect on pay rises and recommendation for promotion. However, some variables related to masculinity and gender stereotypes also acted as mediating variables. We have obtained evidence that working professional fathers who use the FFM are considered to be less masculine and have less masculine prescriptive traits, and this has a negative influence on their “perceived job commitment” (this result is similar to that obtained by [Vandello et al., 2013](#)).

One of the novelties of this article is the consideration of attitudes toward fathers caring for their babies as a moderating variable. We have provided empirical evidence, for the subsample of Spanish participants, that the effect of using the reduction of the working day on recommendation for promotion and on the hourly pay rise is moderated by the participants' explicit and implicit attitudes towards fathers caring for their babies. If participants have more traditional (explicit or implicit) attitudes (they think that men are not as qualified as women to care for their baby and to bond with it) the penalizing effect of using the FFM is higher.

It is helpful to remind ourselves of some of the cross cultural results from this study. Nowadays, in some societies, like the Spanish one, there are growing expectations and norms for men to become carers ([Aumann et al., 2011](#); [Kaufman, 2013](#); [Meil et al., 2017](#); [Adler and Lenz, 2017](#)). In Spain, three groups of fathers can be distinguished ([Abril et al., 2015](#); [Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2017](#)): “traditional fathers” (probably a minority group); “committed fathers” (also a minority group), with advanced attitudes toward caring and gender equality; and fathers belonging to a third, more intermediate group. This classification of fathers is consistent with the existence in Spanish society of a range of ideals (attitudes) towards fatherhood, which should be reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of the young males and females participating in our study. Although in Ghanaian society things are also changing, it is quite possible that in this country the ideal of paternity is still less diverse and more traditional (on average) than in Spain. This cultural difference may contribute to explaining some of the differences observed between these two social spaces. Here we highlight three such differences.

First, the penalty for using the family-friendly measure is higher for the male than for the female target only for the Ghanaian participants, and not so much for Spanish participants.

Second, as has been shown previously, it seems that our “explicit traditional attitude” scale only moderates the relationship between using the reduction in the working day and the penalization in the area of promotion and salary in Spain, while this does not happen in the case of the Ghanaian participants (there may be a greater homogeneity in terms of attitudes towards fatherhood among Ghanaian participants than among Spanish participants).

Third, it is worth noting that using the working day reduction leads to the male target being judged as less masculine in the case of Ghana, whereas in the Spanish case it seems that this effect does not occur. It is likely that in Spain (at least among university students) the model of the involved father is socially normalized, to the point where using the working reduction is no longer seen as something that raises questions about masculinity.

Although the findings of our experiment make important contributions, they do have limitations. The main limitation of the study is the fact that it is based on a sample of university students (and not on real HR managers). This fact deserves two comments: first, and as commented above, most of our participants were studying degrees in the fields of Business Administration and Economics, which are quite closely related to the management of human resources. And secondly, it is possible that our experiment is providing the minimum threshold of existing flexibility stigma since university students are normally more progressive than people randomly selected from the population.

What can be done to reduce the flexibility stigma (and its possible differential effect on male workers)? First, being aware that these biases exist (for women and for men) and then trying to neutralize them ([Correll, 2013](#)); second, promoting a change in the workplace in favor of balancing work and family (without any gender biases); and third, encourage men to use FFM to the same extent that women do, as a means of accelerating this shift towards a business culture that is sensitive to the work-family balance. To encourage men to use FFM it is necessary to generate gender egalitarian role models in the family and in the workplace (for instance, equalizing the parental leave system through equal and non-transferable parental leave for the father and the mother; see [Castro and Pazos, 2016](#)).

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## Appendix 1. Resumé given to the student

### *Description-Spain (English translation of the original Spanish text)*

**Manuel [María]** is a 32-year-old associate consultant who graduated with an MBA. **He's [she's]** been working in his current job at (...) Consulting Madrid office for six years. The company specializes in consulting with organizations to function more efficiently through effective management of employees. Consultant jobs with (...) are well-paid and desirable, and very competitively sought after. When working with a client, **Manuel's [María's]** duties include identifying issues, planning and conducting interviews and analyses, synthesizing conclusions into recommendations, and helping to implement change in his client's organizations. **Manuel's [María's]** hobbies include jogging and music.

**Manuel's [María's]** and **his [her]** wife **[husband]** recently had their first baby. A few years ago, (...) Consulting instituted a facility that allows employees the option of working part-time (25–30 h per week) if they have personal circumstances that makes working full-time difficult. **Manuel [María]** decided to take advantage of this facility, and **he [she]** currently takes afternoons off to help care for the child at home. {While **Manuel [María]** could have made use of this facility, **he [she]** decided not to take advantage of it, and works in the office five days, 40 h a week}.

### *Description-Ghana*

**Oko [Esi]** is a 32-year-old associate consultant who graduated with an MBA. **He's [she's]** been working in his current job at (...) Consulting Accra office for six years. The company specializes in consulting with organizations to function more efficiently through effective management of employees. Consultant jobs with (...) are well-paid and desirable, and very competitively sought after. When working with a client, **Oko's [Esi's]** duties include identifying issues, planning and conducting interviews and analyses, synthesizing conclusions into recommendations, and helping to implement change in his client's organizations. **Oko's [Esi's]** hobbies include jogging and music.

**Oko's [Esi's]** and **his [her]** wife **[husband]** recently had their first baby. A few years ago, (...) Consulting instituted a facility that allows employees the option of working part-time (25–30 h per week) if they have personal circumstances that makes working full-time difficult. **Oko [Esi]** decided to take advantage of this facility, and **he [she]** currently takes afternoons off to help care for the child at home. {While **Oko [Esi]** could have made use of this facility, **he [she]** decided not to take advantage of it, and works in the office five days, 40 h a week}.

Notes:

- Our design was a 2 × 2 factorial where factor 1 was the gender of the target (male, female) and factor 2 was the use of reduced working hours (use, not use). These four experimental conditions were randomly assigned to participants.
- The factor 1 is indicated in the text through the use of bold. The factor 2 is indicated in the text through the use of italics.
- The following text with the instructions preceded the resumé:

Welcome! We are asking you to take part in a research study conducted by researchers at the Complutense University of Madrid (University of Cape Coast). The study explores how people quickly form first impressions, making important decisions from little information.

It is about filling out a brief questionnaire consisting of a brief description of a person's professional profile, followed by a series of questions.

We'd like you to read the profile of an employee at a large consulting firm in Madrid (Accra) and give us your first impressions of him [her]. Imagine that you were the human resources director of this consulting company and that you have to evaluate this person; or imagine you're a client, trying to choose a consultant from very little information. Please try to respond with your first and sincere impressions and decisions.

## Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics for the eight items of the instrument “perceived job commitment”. Sub-sample of male target

	Spain						Ratio not-using/using
	Not using			Using			
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
How committed is this employee to his job?	102	<b>6.186</b>	.6998	110	<b>4.991</b>	.9335	<b>124%</b>
How reliable is this employee?	102	<b>5.549</b>	.7124	110	<b>5.427</b>	.7598	<b>102%</b>
How dedicated is this employee?	102	<b>5.863</b>	.8210	110	<b>4.918</b>	.9874	<b>119%</b>
How valuable is this employee to his company?	102	<b>5.422</b>	.7763	110	<b>5.255</b>	1.0443	<b>103%</b>
How comfortable would you be giving Manuel an important assignment?	102	<b>5.402</b>	1.0173	110	<b>5.227</b>	1.1860	<b>103%</b>
Manuel is a key player in the team	101	<b>4.950</b>	1.0332	110	<b>4.873</b>	1.2643	<b>102%</b>
Manuel is persistent in completing job tasks	101	<b>5.663</b>	.9927	110	<b>4.909</b>	1.2081	<b>115%</b>

Manuel is an efficient worker	102	5.333	1.1461	110	5.245	1.0509	102%
<b>Perceived job commitment</b>	101	<b>4.930</b>	0.539	110	<b>4.538</b>	0.672	<b>109%</b>

	Ghana						Ratio not-using/using
	Not using			Using			
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
How committed is this employee to his job?	124	6.218	.9067	144	5.271	1.2015	118%
How reliable is this employee?	124	5.556	1.3513	144	4.833	1.2792	115%
How dedicated is this employee?	124	5.968	1.0815	144	5.056	1.3524	118%
How valuable is this employee to his company?	124	6.145	.9686	144	5.347	1.2137	115%
How comfortable would you be giving Oko an important assignment?	124	6.056	.9044	144	4.819	1.4943	126%
Oko is a key player in the team	124	5.669	1.2924	144	4.868	1.4544	116%
Oko is persistent in completing job tasks	124	5.774	1.0883	144	5.042	1.3683	115%
Oko is an efficient worker	124	5.750	1.1089	144	5.306	1.2363	108%
<b>Perceived job commitment</b>	124	<b>5.237</b>	0.720	144	<b>4.505</b>	0.919	<b>116%</b>

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