

Marissa Mayer: An Analysis of Media Reaction to a Pregnant CEO

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Abstract Marissa Mayer made headlines when she became only the 20th female CEO of a Fortune 500 firm in 2012 while also the first woman to take such a position while pregnant. Another firestorm of coverage commenced when she returned to work after two weeks of leave following the birth of her baby. The purpose of the current study is to analyze media and public reaction to a pregnant CEO based on the Mayer case. Using qualitative content analysis, coverage and reaction to Mayer's appointment and pregnancy are used as an inkblot test of current views concerning women's ability to combine motherhood with work. Our findings illustrate the underrepresentation of women in high profile public positions makes them hyper-visible and consequently their personal choices can be seen as about women in general, not just about themselves. While most pregnant working mothers do not undergo the degree of scrutiny faced by Mayer, our findings demonstrate that the motherhood mandate is alive and operational in current society. Implications of findings for future research and practice are discussed.

When Marissa Mayer became only the 20th female CEO of a Fortune 500 firm in 2012, she also became the first woman to ever take such a position while pregnant. Media coverage of the news was widespread. Headlines such as "*The Pregnant CEO: Should You Hate Marissa Mayer*" (Forbes, 7/19/2012), "*Marissa Mayer: Is the Yahoo! CEO's Pregnancy Good for Working Moms*" (Time, 7/17/2012), and "*Marissa Mayer, Yahoo CEO's Pregnancy Reignites a Perennial Debate*" (Huffington Post, 7/17/2012) help to illustrate reactions. Another firestorm of coverage commenced when she returned to work after two weeks of leave following the birth of her baby with headlines such as, "*Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer is Making a Huge Mistake by Cutting Her Maternity Leave Short*" (Slate, 10/2/2012).

The purpose of the current chapter is to analyze media reports and reader comments as a way to gauge public reaction to a pregnant CEO via the lens of the Marissa Mayer case. This approach represents a departure from common research

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methods in organizational psychology that tend to be deductive and primarily focus on individual perceptions and biases. We believe our inductive approach and analysis has the potential to provide insight into broader contemporary societal views regarding women who combine leadership positions and motherhood and consequently reveal unique issues and challenges these women face.

To set the stage, we begin with a brief review of research and theory relevant to motherhood, leadership, and pregnancy. We next present the results of our qualitative analyses. Specifically we identify themes from the media coverage and reader comments of Mayer's pregnancy and her subsequent return to work. Implications of these themes for "ordinary" women who combine work with pregnancy and the transition to motherhood are examined. The chapter closes with a discussion of future directions for research.

Background

Historically women in leadership roles have been subject to stereotypes. Role congruity theory suggests that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman than by a man (Eagly and Karau 2002). In support, a large body of research demonstrates that the characteristics commonly ascribed to leaders are more strongly associated with men than with women (Koenig et al. 2011). These stereotypes hinder the advancement of women into positions of leadership, perpetuating the glass ceiling.

Motherhood amplifies role congruity implications for women's careers, as society not only has role expectations for women, but also for mothers. As articulated by Russo (1976, 1979) societal institutions mandate that motherhood serve as the central component of a woman's identity. Women are required to have children and to serve the every need of those children. Accordingly, the traditional exemplar good mother is one who remains home after the birth of children (Gorman and Fritzsche 2002). Moreover, the motherhood mandate rejects the notion that women work to contribute to the financial well-being of the family or for self-satisfaction. Essentially to be a good mother is to be a non-employed mother.

With the advent of attachment parenting and breast-feeding advocacy, motherhood has become further idealized and expectations for intensive mothering have increased (Douglas and Michaels 2005; Loke et al. 2011; Pickert 2012). Some have opined that motherhood itself has become a competitive sport (Martin 2009). The message communicated to women is that to be a decent mother, a woman must devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being to her children 24 hours a day (Douglas and Michaels 2005). What on the surface appears to be a celebration of motherhood essentially undermines the status of women by turning childrearing into the most elevated of callings and pivoting women out of the workplace (Badinter 2012).

The motherhood mandate is illustrated in research investigating perceptions of employed mothers. Research consistently shows that employed mothers are viewed as less family-oriented, less nurturing, less committed to and less effective at the maternal role relative to non-employed mothers (e.g., Bridges et al. 2002; Etaugh and Folger 1998; Etaugh and Moss 2001; Etaugh and Nekolny 1990; Gorman and Fritzsche 2002).

Stereotype-prone judgments regarding combining motherhood with paid work begin at pregnancy (Fuegen et al. 2004). Pregnancy creates a flashpoint at which “womanliness” becomes especially salient and the advent of pregnancy represents a clear departure from the ideal worker norm (Cahusac and Kanji 2014). Norms regarding the ideal worker are framed around the career patterns of the male breadwinner model. Specifically, the ideal worker is always available, has no nonwork responsibilities or interests, and prioritizes work above all else (Williams 2000).

Research shows that pregnant women and mothers are disadvantaged when applying for jobs (e.g., Bragger et al. 2002) and receive lower starting salary recommendations (Correll et al. 2007; Masser et al. 2007). In addition, several studies indicate that pregnant job applicants report experiencing greater interpersonal negativity than do nonpregnant applicants (Hebl et al. 2007; Morgan et al. 2013).

Media Coverage of High Profile Women

Our media analysis approach has been used in the past to reveal sexism. In the 2000 Presidential Republican primary Elizabeth Dole received less coverage on policy-related issues than did her male counterparts (George W. Bush, John McCain, Steven Forbes) (Aday and Devitt 2001). Dole was more likely to receive coverage on personal attributes and attire than were the male candidates. Eight years later sexism was again evident in Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign during which one pundit remarked, “When she comes on television, I voluntarily cross my legs” (Seelye and Bosman 2008).

Women in the public eye and pregnant are held to further scrutiny concerning their fitness as a mother. Jane Swift was pregnant when campaigning to be governor of Massachusetts and later gave birth to twins while in office (Swift 2008). In 2001, she was the first pregnant governor in history, raising the question “*Can Jane Swift fulfill her responsibilities to the public and still be a good mother?*”; a question rarely asked of men (Goldberg 2001). Former Alaska Governor and Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin stated that she hid her pregnancy while Governor over fear that concerns would be raised with regard to her ability to be Governor and be pregnant at the same time (Kantor et al. 2008). Most recently, Loretta Rush was named as the first female chief justice of the Indiana Supreme Court. During interviews she was asked about balancing her responsibilities as a parent and as a jurist, a question that notably was not asked of the three male

candidates for the position (Evans 2014). Such scrutiny is not unique to women in the U.S. Kristina Schröder became the first German cabinet member to give birth while in office and faced criticism concerning the length of her maternity leave (Spiegel Online International 2012). Schröder herself went on to remark on Mayer's pregnancy leave stating that she thought it was a "major concern when prominent women give the public the impression that maternity leave is something that is not important" (Spiegel Online International 2012). In sum, because of their scarcity, high profile women remain the subject of media attention and public scrutiny rooted in ongoing stereotypes concerning the role of women.

Methods

Sample

To conduct our review and analysis, we analyzed a total of 20 online news articles posted in popular online news outlets (e.g., CNN, Slate, The Guardian, The Globe and Mail), as well as online reader commentary in response to these articles. We selected news sites that are among the most popular (e.g., Huffington Post) and that appeal to the business community (e.g., Forbes). Articles were read and added to the sample until data saturation was reached, at which point additional articles did not yield new content above and beyond those in the sample (Miles and Huberman 1994). However, it should be recognized that we cannot infer that our analysis strategy resulted in an analysis that is representative of all media reports on the topic.

The 20 articles were divided into eight segments according to country (U.S. vs. Non-U.S.), time point (CEO Announcement in July 2012 vs. birth announcement in October 2012), and data type (article vs. reader comments). Table 1 displays sampling details, including country, time point, data type, data source, and number of articles/reader comments coded. The same eight U.S. based news outlets were used for both time points. However, non-U.S. based news outlets differed for each time point as we were unable to identify articles from both time periods from the same news agency.

Analysis

All articles were coded independently by two of the authors. The second author served as a facilitator, monitoring the coding process and providing overall feedback on rigor, clarity, and content. The articles were divided by nationality (U.S. vs. Non-U.S.), type of data (article vs. reader comments), and time point (CEO/pregnancy announcement vs. birth announcement). Each combination of

these categories was considered a segment of data. Thus, a total of eight segments of data (2 × 2 × 2) were coded (see Table 1).

An emergent coding strategy was used in which authors developed their own codes independently based on the data in each segment (Miles and Huberman 1994). Informed by the purpose of this chapter, the authors coded themes on reactions to the behavior of Mayer, her ability to function as a mother and a CEO, and anything that spoke to attitudes/stereotypes about mixing motherhood, pregnancy, and career. Each author maintained an Excel codebook with codes, definitions, and exemplary quotes. Codes derived from one segment could be used in another segment if applicable. Each segment was read multiple times in its entirety to identify codes for the segment. Codes were identified using repetition (sentiments repeated multiple times throughout a segment) and constant comparison (grouping of unique sentiments as they arose within segments; Glaser 1965; Miles and

Table 1 Sample structure

Segment	Nationality	Time point	Data source	Number of articles/comments
1	Non-U.S.	CEO	Articles	2
2	Non-U.S.	CEO	The Guardian	102
2	Non-U.S.	CEO	BBC	311
3	Non-U.S.	Birth	Articles	2
4	Non-U.S.	Birth	The Daily Mail	68
4	Non-U.S.	Birth	The Globe and Mail	91
5	U.S.	CEO	Articles	8
6	U.S.	CEO	CNN	171
6	U.S.	CEO	Fox News	0*
6	U.S.	CEO	Forbes	70
6	U.S.	CEO	Fortune	0
6	U.S.	CEO	MSNBC	0
6	U.S.	CEO	Slate	0
6	U.S.	CEO	The Huffington Post	9
6	U.S.	CEO	The Wall Street Journal	11**
7	U.S.	Birth	Articles	8
8	U.S.	Birth	CNN	55
8	U.S.	Birth	Fox News	0*
8	U.S.	Birth	Forbes	0
8	U.S.	Birth	Fortune	0
8	U.S.	Birth	MSNBC	73
8	U.S.	Birth	Slate	0
8	U.S.	Birth	The Huffington Post	89
8	U.S.	Birth	The Wall Street Journal	3

*Did not allow comments

**109 comments were reported on the website, but the coders could only access 11 because they were not Wall Street Journal subscribers

Huberman 1994). The unit of analysis was the segment. Consequently, each individual sentence and/or reader comment was not coded. Instead, the authors pulled exemplary quotes for each code as it was identified during the process.

The two authors met twice to discuss the emergent codes, once for all non-U.S. segments and once for all U.S. segments. Comparing independently derived codes allowed the authors to assess validity and clarity of codes for capturing sentiments expressed in the segments (Armstrong et al. 1997; Miles and Huberman 1994; Ryan and Bernard 2003). All codes that were consistent between coders were noted, and codes that were inconsistent (i.e., one coder created, but the other did not) were discussed and merged with other codes and/or added to a merged master codebook containing agreed upon codes and definitions. Discrepancies were due to hesitancy as to whether codes were relevant or important (e.g., discussion of Mayer's age or physical attractiveness), codes that were slight but distinct variations of one another (e.g., 'Mayer's short maternity leave is hindering maternity leave for others' is a variation of 'Mayer should take more maternity leave to help other expectant mothers'), or codes that differed in specificity (e.g., 'Mayer is stupid' is a subset of 'incompetence as a CEO'). These issues in coder framing are prominent among even the most experienced qualitative data analysts, and do not necessarily indicate a lack of validity in the findings (Armstrong et al. 1997). Of the 48 original unique codes generated, 28 were defined the same between coders. The remaining 20 codes were discussed and agreed upon. In no circumstance was there a code that one of the authors was surprised about or outright disagreed with the alternative author. The authors also discussed and made note of overall impressions that were not captured in coding (e.g., non-U.S. sources did not mention Mayer's husband).

The final 48 codes were then reduced by grouping codes into conceptually broad themes (i.e., qualitative factoring; Miles and Huberman 1994). To create these themes, the lead coder used the cutting and sorting technique (Ryan and Bernard 2003), in which codes were cut and sorted into thematic groups determined inductively by co-occurrence and similarity in meaning; initially, cutting and sorting yielded ten themes. To assess the clarity and validity of these themes, the second coder independently sorted codes into the ten themes based on the theme names and definitions (Ryan and Bernard 2003). Discrepancies in sorting occurred for 14 of the 48 codes. These discrepancies were primarily due to one unclear theme (Mayer's abilities), which was then discussed, redefined, and split into two themes (motherhood choices and CEO). Through discussion, the coders further factored the themes into four meta-themes for parsimonious presentation of the data.

Each author also independently coded source (predominantly in the articles, reader comments, or both) and country (U.S., non-U.S., or both) for all codes to identify patterns in code prevalence for these dimensions.¹

¹Detailed results not presented here. Results are available upon request from the first author.

Results

Final codes, themes, meta-themes, and exemplary quotations are displayed in Table 2. We discuss each of the meta-themes and its subsumed themes and codes in turn.

Gender and Work-Family Performance

Many articles and commenters discussed Mayer's capabilities and choices as a mother, a CEO, and a woman. Most of these discussions centered on the ever-popular question of whether or not women can "have it all" (Slaughter 2012). Some individuals were supportive, pointing out Mayer's numerous qualifications and previous successes working at Google. Others felt Mayer has the intellectual and financial capabilities to provide a good home for a child, noting that her CEO status did not preclude her involvement as a mother. However, these perspectives were generally the minority. Individuals more commonly felt Mayer was doomed to be an absent, work-obsessed mother due to her obligations to the job. Some of the most poignant comments came from Non-U.S. articles, which described Americans (and Mayer) as work-obsessed and selfish, portraying Mayer's "poor child" as a helpless victim. Many also criticized her capabilities as a CEO, commenting that motherhood would detract too much time and attention from the job. In short, the majority of commenters felt Mayer could not have it all, and that she would be naive for thinking she could fully devote herself to roles as both a mother and CEO.

In addition to simultaneously managing performance at work and home, some articles and comments focused solely on Mayer's current and future performance as a CEO. Nearly all objective comments about work performance (e.g., comments about Mayer attending meetings, answering email, making changes at Yahoo) were discussed in U.S. sources. Indeed, six of the eight U.S.-based articles announcing the birth of Mayer's son primarily discussed either Mayer's plans or accomplishments in her role as Yahoo CEO. Focusing on Mayer's work performance communicated competence on the job, and articles that focused on the objective information seemed to portray her in a positive light in comparison to more subjective pieces.

Focusing on CEO performance also highlighted the fact that Mayer's situation is an exemplary glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam 2007). The glass cliff phenomenon occurs when women are promoted to positions that have a high risk of failure (Ryan and Haslam 2007). It is well known that Yahoo is on the verge of failure, and commenters noted that they have cycled through several CEOs in recent years trying to turn the company around. Therefore, her appointment is a high-risk position and may be seen as another form of discrimination against Mayer as a woman and as a mother (Ryan et al. 2007).

Table 2 Qualitative analysis themes and example quotations

Meta-theme	Theme	Code	Example quotation
Gender and work-family performance	Motherhood choices	Bad mother	Poor baby, why have a child when you can't spare it any time to hold it, care for it, and just be a mum. Disgraceful, she should be ashamed not proud
		Not a bad mother	First of all to imply that women that work are abandoning and irrevocably damaging their children is completely offensive to those families where both parents have to work. Are you suggesting that only those rich enough to have a parent stay home can have children? Secondly not one person on here has any idea what her plans are! How do you know her husband isn't going to stay home? How do you know whether or not her mother is going to care for the child? How do you know anything about what is going to be happening here? Not to mention she has already said she will not be out the normal length of a maternity leave (which I believe is like only 2 months) and even when out would be working remotely. Pleasant? Probably not, but it is possible
		Short maternity leave	"I like to stay in the rhythm of things," she said. "My maternity leave will be a few weeks long and I'll work throughout it"
		Naïve	First of all this women has no idea what she got herself into. Not taking maternity leave, what a great example, I feel sorry for all the women that are working for her. She will denied all the maternity leave paper that comes across her desk. After having a baby you are tired and have less sleep than your body used too. My question is, what is more important the well being of herself and the baby or a company that she works for?
	CEO	Competent	Mayer is a hard-working, highly talented executive with a proven track record. This doesn't suddenly vanish because she's expecting. Yahoo knew they were getting 1.5 people when they hired her
		Incompetence	And Yahoo wonders why its in a mess!! (On its third CEO in no time.) Good luck to Ms Mayer and all who sail in her but do the sisterhood REALLY believe she can give full attention to the job for the next 12 months? (pre and post foaling) I don't believe she can—indeed she is a more rounded person if she cant. Most important lesson from this? Sell Yahoo!
	You can't have it all	CEO incompatible with motherhood	I anticipate she will leave this position post baby for a few years—CEO of any company is a 200 % job that requires significant personal sacrifice—woman or man baby or yacht
		Can't have cake and eat it too	She will be an absentee mother or an absentee CEO. There are only 24 h in the day. Why do women have children if they just want to drop them off at daycare? Great white sharks are more maternal than these women
		Why bother?	Why have a kid if you're not going to raise it?
	Traditional Gender Roles are alive and well	Traditional Gender Roles	And why is this question even coming up? Does anyone ask whether or not a male CEO is a poor father because he isn't staying home full time? I mean come on. Where in the universe is this archaic thinking
		Dad	The key to making this work for both family and Yahoo, according to some of these mothers: a phalanx of nannies, a solid leadership team and a husband ready to shoulder more of the hands-on parental duties

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Table 2 (continued)

Meta-theme	Theme	Code	Example quotation
Mayer's characteristics	Mayer needs to stay focused on the job	Women should stay at home	Women are good for nothing but making babies
		Glass cliff	Yahoo is in a strategic hole. Anybody taking the job is rather likely to fail. If Ms. Mayer goes the way of previous Yahoo CEOs, a lot of this celebratory press comment will look rather silly
		Yahoo news	Mayer recently held an all-hands meeting with Yahoo's staff to unveil her business strategy, which focuses on expanding Yahoo's user base, talent pool and advertiser partners. She hopes to breathe new life into offerings like Yahoo's aging homepage and its neglected Flickr photo service. She has also shuffled Yahoo's top management and pledged to return \$3 billion to shareholders from the sale of Yahoo's Asian assets
		Back to work	Apparently, the new baby hasn't been named yet. Journalist and consultant Jeff Jarvis tweeted that Mayer has emailed a large number of her contacts asking for suggestions for a baby name. That means Mayer's already back online mere hours after giving birth. It seems likely that she won't be missing much work as she recovers
		Business first	Who Cares????????????? Just do her job and get Yahoo mess fixed...or get out of the way.....
		Unicorn	Maybe she's an outlier—or making a mistake—and shouldn't be held up as an example that mere mortals should emulate
		Wealth and status	The fact that she is very very rich is (obviously) going to be a big help. She, no doubt, already has a full quota of cleaners, gardeners, chefs, and chauffeurs, so she'll just hire extra help for the child. Could she run a major company and raise a family (and make a success of both) without help? Unlikely
		Paying for childcare	The baby was promptly handed to a team of highly-qualified nannies, never to be seen again
		Limited applicability	The vast majority of women going back to work after two weeks have nothing in common with Marissa Mayer. They're dragging their weary butts back to work, and wrapping up their boobs because there's no place to pump at work. They're getting paid by the hour. Or they're military women, like Robyn Roche-Paull, the author of "Breastfeeding in Combat Boots," who went back to work after six weeks because it was required. When her son wouldn't take a bottle, she co-slept with him so he could nurse all night and sleep all day while she was at work
		Job design	They have these things called "computers" and "telephones" now. It's amazing what you can do with them. Why, I've even heard that you can do this thing called "teleconferencing" on them
Mayer's characteristics	Mayer's characteristics	Bring baby to work	Business Insider's sources have said that Mayer plans to bring her baby into the office with her. She may even "knock down one wall of her office" to accommodate the little guy
		Age	Mayer, 37, previously has said she would take off just a few weeks of maternity leave
		Workaholic	Seeing Mayer's chosen work-life imbalance might put pressure on all of us to get back to the spreadsheets and clogged inboxes before our bodies and minds are really ready. That seems like a warranted concern to me, both in the general working world and specifically at Yahoo, where Mayer's job is to set the standards

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Table 2 (continued)

Meta-theme	Theme	Code	Example quotation
Reactions to motherhood and CEO announcement	Negative implications for women	Setting the bar too high	The one thing I worry about is that some working mothers may try to emulate her a bit. Or that working mothers might feel that they need to be the superwoman executive and ignore those times when they really would want to spend time with their children but feel they can't without feeling they're shirking their working responsibilities
		Hinders maternity leave	Galinsky will be watching carefully to see how Mayer's plans for a brief maternity leave evolve and not only what example she sets, but her explicit messages and policies for the Yahoo workforce around parental and medical leave. "I would be very worried if she didn't figure out ways to encourage other women and men who work for Yahoo to take leave," she says
		Sacrificial cow	In a rather heated email exchange on Monday, some of my Slate colleagues took a libertarian approach to the Great Maternity Leave Debate of 2012, which I'll sum up here as: "Lay off. Mayer should do whatever she wants to do." I agree! She should do whatever she wants to do, but she should want to do something different than what she wants to do. Because it's nuts to ignore that there is a BABY involved here
	Positive implications for women	Not a role model	"We all applaud her," Slaughter said. "But she's superhuman, rich, and in charge. She isn't really a realistic role model for hundreds of thousands of women who are trying to figure out how you make it to the top AND have a family at the same time"
		Breaking ground for women	Yahoo's decision to anoint a soon-to-be mom as its CEO was hailed as a breakthrough for women seeking to prove men aren't the only ones who can balance a high-powered executive lifestyle and early parenthood
		Role model	OK, this woman rocks! I doubt there's a single male CEO out there thinking, "Oh yeah, I could do that"
	What's the big deal?	Why the big fuss?	It is great that Marissa Mayer is pregnant. But intensity of reaction is slightly depressing. Kind of as if they'd hired a yeti
		Pregnancy doesn't matter	There is nothing wrong with her choosing to have a child and continue as CEO. Will she take some time off? Of course. But please explain to me what's the difference between a male CEO taking some time off for medical leave and Mayer having a child?
		Non-Issue if male	If a man had been appointed to that post it would barely have received a brief mention. Because it's a woman, it even gets a discussion on the BBC site. Those who complain that we still don't have equality are right
		Do what she wants	Her choice to take a huge job when she's pregnant isn't going to hurt you, or your daughters, or women in general
		Yahoo doesn't care she has a baby	She clearly is working in an environment that will accommodate her family life. The type of work she does and the people she works with and for will be progressive enough and open to working with a baby in the room with them. She also has the resources to make it work for her....the vast majority of us don't have these options and in most situations it wouldn't be appropriate so I won't be too judgmental on this woman or family. Good for her

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Table 2 (continued)

Meta-theme	Theme	Code	Example quotation
	Support for Mayer	Old Hat	I am bemused at the idea that women can't work and be mothers. The idea that women rarely worked outside of the home over 50 years ago is just ridiculous. Many women were maids, washerwomen, etc. and worked 12-14 h a day away from their children. Children throughout time have been left in the care of older siblings and grandparents in order for women to provide for their families
		Well wishes	I want to see Mayer succeed as CEO of Yahoo, as well as be a good mother to her child. And since everyone talks about her brilliance, she'll likely pull it off with ease and grace
		Cautious optimism	If she succeeds, it will be a landmark case for women everywhere
		Yahoo for yahoo!	[Mayer's pregnancy] didn't faze Yahoo's board when they were considering her for the job
		Brave	I still love the concept of her moving in life the way she is, because so many women are grappling 'do I do this or do I do that?' You know what's interesting though, the early choices she made as a young woman to go into the world of IT and computer programming that may have been almost as brave as what she is doing today
		Boo you, naysayers	Well, you know what sets a worse precedent? Assuming that Mayer's going to fail, and that this one choice of hers is what's going to change—or not change—attitudes toward pregnant women in the workplace. All this back-fence nattering I'm hearing ('She's in for a rude awakening! She's gonna regret this! Why's she even having kids?') makes me so ashamed. For feminists, for women, for the human race
Other	Other	Publicity stunt	I'd say this is just a publicity stunt by Yahoo to distract unwanted attention from the poor state of their business
		Different types of moms	This is just one more case of "You cry-it-out, I co-sleep. You nurse on demand, I supplement with formula. You give birth in your tub at home with a midwife, I head to the hospital and demand an epidural." Let's call the whole thing off
		National policy	If paternity leave was equal to maternity leave this would be a non-issue and the debate would be over. That's the situation in California (where Yahoo's head office is). Paid Family Leave is available equally for new Mums and Dads (approx 66 % of salary from the state). Therefore there is no discrimination. Why not make it the same in the UK?
		Chili Pepper	She's cute and smart. Just the way I like 'em
		Pregnancy is not the same as medical leave	Mayer is 37, has been CEO for less than a week and it is her right to CHOOSE to have a child. Steve Jobs unfortunately didn't have a choice
		Stupid	Mayer has no brain
		Impressive hubby	Her husband is a lawyer who recently launched Data Collective, an investment fund focused on "big data" startups. The baby born this week is their first child

Mayer's Characteristics

Mayer's unique personal and situational characteristics were prevalent throughout all eight segments. Authors and commenters set her apart from the lay-public, calling her "rare," "an outlier," "exceptional," and "superhuman." People also discussed her ample resources, including the design of her work, which allows her to work from home and bring her baby into work. Paying for childcare was also a very common (and often negatively expressed) sentiment, in which people discussed the army of nannies Mayer and her husband could hire to help care for their child. Less often, people commented that Mayer's career path was exceptionally advanced for a person at 37 years of age. Finally, articles often portrayed Mayer as highly work-centric, devoting super-human time and effort to working. For example, articles noted that she was on her Twitter and emailing coworkers shortly after having the baby. All of these exceptional characteristics make Mayer a proverbial unicorn—a mythical creature with more skills, resources, and work-directed energy than the normal human. However, this unicorn status also sets Mayer apart from lay-people, and many felt her situation was unattainable and inapplicable to the plight of the average working mother.

Reactions to Motherhood and CEO Announcement

Reactions to Mayer's pregnancy and CEO announcement included four variations: negative, positive, supportive, and indifferent. Negative reactors felt Mayer was setting a bad standard for women for two primary reasons. First, as previously mentioned, Mayer's situation was often regarded as inapplicable for the average woman. Consequently, some felt Mayer set a standard that was too high for women without ample education, finances, and job resources. Others felt she served as a bad role model because she focused too much on her new CEO role and not enough on her role as a mother. Consistent with the motherhood mandate, many commenters felt she should extend her leave to make a statement about the importance of being at home with one's child even when occupying a high-status professional position. These sentiments were especially prominent in Non-U.S. articles, which frequently discussed maternity leave length and advocated for extended leave time to facilitate child development.

Positive reactors felt Mayer was creating new hope for women and setting a ground-breaking standard in gender roles. Commenters in all segments described Mayer as a role model for professional women and working mothers. In a similar vein, supportive reactors specifically cheered on Marissa, wishing her well in her new venture as a CEO and mother. Many individuals expressed support for Yahoo's decision, regarding it as informed and supportive of women and mothers. In some articles, authors even shamed nay-sayers, criticizing negative reactors for their failure to support a woman who is greatly in need of societal support due to

both her precarious CEO appointment and new motherhood status. Although positive reactions and well-wishes were more common in U.S. sources, many well-wishes were tainted by a cautious optimism. Commenters hoped Mayer would succeed, but also felt the situation seemed stacked against her.

Finally, a substantial portion of individuals expressed apathy, or a “who cares?” attitude when it came to the news of Mayer’s CEO and pregnancy statuses. Commenters felt Mayer’s pregnancy was not newsworthy because it does not affect her ability to serve as CEO. Commenters sided with Yahoo, saying that if Yahoo doesn’t care that she has a baby, lay-people should not care either. Similarly, individuals both in and outside the U.S. noted it is Mayer’s private business as to whether and when she would like to have a baby, and she should be able to do what she wants without enduring public scrutiny. Commenters also expressed indifference because pregnant women had been prominent in the workforce for decades. These individuals felt Mayer was not a unicorn, but rather another working mother joining the existing masses of mothers juggling parenthood and work responsibilities. Finally, people felt the announcement should not be a big deal, because if Mayer were a man, her situation would never have made the headlines.

Other

Codes subsumed in the “other” meta-theme did not fit into any of the above themes, but were determined as prevalent, unique, and meaningful in the analysis. With the exception of the “publicity stunt” code, codes subsumed in this meta-theme also occurred relatively less frequently compared to those in the previously discussed meta-themes. Some of these codes were idiosyncratic to the content of the news articles. For example, one CNN article focused on Mayer’s “brain” in its title and content, resulting in several comments referencing Mayer as “stupid” or “having no brain.” Similarly, a Huffington Post article pointed out different types of moms and the “mom wars” over how to raise children, giving rise to comments about different types of parenting.

Across the U.S. and Non-U.S. articles, authors and commenters described hiring Mayer as a “publicity stunt,” primarily done to generate interest and revenue for Yahoo or to distract customers from noticing its failing business. These comments imply Yahoo’s decision to hire Mayer was influenced by the novelty of her gender and pregnancy status, rather than her qualifications. Thus, although Mayer purportedly garnered media attention for being a strong mother and executive, many people see her media coverage as Yahoo’s attempt to draw in new business.

U.S. articles and commenters focused on more superfluous details, such as Mayer’s successful husband or her attractive physical appearance. In contrast, Non-U.S. articles and commenters were more likely to discuss national policies, particularly maternity leave policies. Consistent with the high prevalence of ‘bad mother’ comments in the Non-U.S. articles, Non-U.S. articles and commenters

tended to favor longer maternity leave policies and discussed the need for such policies to help working mothers.

Discussion

We used media coverage and reader reaction to Marissa Mayer's CEO appointment and pregnancy as a type of inkblot test of current views regarding women's ability to combine motherhood with work. We speculated that an analysis of anonymous blog comments could provide a glimpse into views about pregnancy and female leaders that may not be captured in usual survey research using college students or working professionals. This is important because college students and working professionals may hold views that differ from that of the general population. For example, college students tend to hold more liberal attitudes with regard to social issues (Gross 2012). Further, our methods allow us to unobtrusively observe norms and attitudes at a societal level, rather than the more commonly assessed individual level. Our analysis revealed themes consistent with existing theoretical perspectives as well as new avenues for future research. We discuss these themes and implications for working women in general.

One theme revealed that gender norms and the motherhood mandate are alive and well. Mayer was most often judged with respect to her performance as a mother, particularly in Non-U.S. contexts. These judgments assumed women could not "have it all," and people saw Mayer primarily as a workaholic, absentee mother who would give up her childcare responsibilities by hiring nannies. Women should be aware of phenomenon such as the double-bind created by role incongruity (Eagly 2007) and the glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam 2007), which can serve as subtle forms of discrimination. Indeed role congruity theory and glass cliff theory provide useful perspectives from which future research on mothers and leadership can be developed. The unreasonable standard of parenting set by the motherhood mandate makes it virtually impossible for women to be successful both at home and at work. When people engage in behaviors that align with personal values, they tend to be more satisfied and committed than those whose behaviors do not align with their values (Carlson and Kacmar 2000; Edwards and Cable 2009). Thus, rather than ascribing to detrimentally ambitious societal norms, it should be up individuals to define for themselves what "having it all" means by identifying and fulfilling their own personal work and family values. Tests of theory concerning work-family balance as articulated by Greenhaus and Allen (2011) may be useful in determining how life role priorities shift across the life course, particularly after the birth of children, and correspond to the notion of "having it all."

Second, people were negative and unsupportive of Mayer's appointment. Many attributed Mayer's CEO status to a "publicity stunt," criticized her for being naive, stupid, and a bad mother and expressed doubt as to whether or not she could succeed in her new work and home roles. The conversation could be made more constructive by learning from Mayer's situation and what she is doing successfully,

rather than by searching for her failures. For example, individuals commented on Mayer's ability to access quality childcare and change the design of her work as key to managing the motherhood transition while working. Future research and policy changes could target these issues, making quality childcare more widely accessible and exploring ways in which workplaces could be redesigned to allow mothers to meet caregiving responsibilities without having to forgo work opportunities. Organizational culture that is supportive of women's roles in the home by providing emotional or instrumental support (e.g., paid leave) could also help women in transitioning to motherhood while continuing career progression.

Third, despite this negativity, there was some evidence of people accepting and supportive of professional women and mothers. Comments revealed that many want to see a shift in gender norms, and that men and women should be held to similar standards in both caregiving and work roles. These more egalitarian attitudes are particularly prevalent in the U.S., where articles and comments tended to focus more on Mayer's work performance and capabilities and the presence of her husband when compared to Non-U.S. sources. Several individuals expressed well-wishes and even shamed nay-sayers for being unsupportive of Mayer's and women's career advancement in general.

Finally, the extreme scrutiny placed on Mayer's ability to fulfill the motherhood mandate also highlighted the fact that men hold relatively less responsibility for childrearing in the eyes of the public, particularly in Non-U.S. contexts. Many noted that a male CEO would not receive publicity if his partner was expecting, and Mayer's husband was rarely mentioned. Although our analyses show gender norms for fathers are stereotypical, recent individual level data show both attitudes (Gerson 2010) and behaviors (Craig and Mullan 2010; Harrington et al. 2010) are shifting to favor increased father involvement in the home and caregiving activities. Research shows fathers are influential for their partners' employment experiences and well-being (King et al. 1995), as well as a child outcomes (Stewart and Barling 1996). As the importance of fatherhood continues to gain attention, the intensive pressure and unrealistic standards applied to working mothers may be alleviated. Policies and practices designed to help working women should consider the role of fathers as well (e.g., provision of paternity leave).

Future Research

We offer several additional suggestions for future research to those noted above. New methods and theory for assessing biases associated with combining work and motherhood are needed. The application of conditional reasoning theory and assessment (James 1998; James et al. 2004) to the study of gender-based discrimination may be one potential future research direction. James and colleagues developed conditional reasoning as a new theoretical approach and item format for assessing personality by indirectly testing reliance on cognitive biases associated with specific traits (James et al. 2005). Conditional reasoning tests are different

from traditional self-report measures in that they assess implicit cognitions and inhibit response distortion (LeBreton et al. 2007). They are based on the premise that unseen biases in what people believe to be reasonable points of view reveal their implicit personalities (James and LeBreton 2010). These biases are referred to as justification mechanisms.

To date, conditional reasoning theory has been applied to personality measurement, but the methodology lends itself to other applications. We speculate that individuals with gender biases frame and reason about the world in a unique way. Our findings provide insight into some of the justification mechanisms that individuals use to support bias against pregnant women and mothers and could potentially help serve as a foundation for the development of a conditional reasoning approach to the measurement of gender bias. One illustrative justification mechanism is “children need their mother.” Such views are used to rationalize why women should remain at home and out of the workplace. Another is “derogation of target.” Derogation of target as a justification mechanism represents an unconscious tendency to characterize those we wish to dominate as evil, immoral, or untrustworthy (James and LeBreton 2010). Comments reflecting concern for children (“Poor baby, why have a child when you can’t spare it any time to hold it, care for it, and just be a mum”) and the derogation of Mayer (“Mayer has no brain”) were prevalent. From a theoretical perspective, system justification theory could be used to further inform such measurement development. System justification theory explains the “process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized, even at the expense of personal and group interest” (Jost and Banaji 1994, p. 2).

Another clear future research need includes longitudinal research designs. One interesting method by which this research could be conducted is through the use of sociometrics. Created by the Human Dynamics group at MIT, the sociometric badge is a wearable sensing device that is used to collect data on face-to-face communication and interaction in real time (Waber 2013). The badge can be worn around the neck with a lanyard and is the size of a smart phone. Data on face-to-face conversations and interactions (including volume of speech, interruptions, turn taking, speaking speed, and duration of different forms of interaction such as listening, speaking, and interrupting) can be collected through the device and the data can also be used to infer emotions or states such as stress, trust, anxiety, and interest. Sociometric methods could be applied to the study of coworker interactions with a pregnant employee as her pregnancy progresses. Such approaches represent a methodological advancement in that data are collected by means other than self-report and are done in real time thus enhancing our understanding of the nature of coworker interactions with pregnant employees during the transition to motherhood in the workplace. This data could be useful in furthering the development of interventions and/or training designed to make employees aware of and ways to eliminate interpersonal negativities shown to pregnant employees.

As long as “firsts” remain for women (e.g., first female president of the United States), women like Marissa Mayer will continue to find themselves in the position of “pioneer.” Such women may be more subject to microaggressions as the result of

being viewed as a threat to the status quo (Thomas et al. 2013). Microaggressions are brief but commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental incivilities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults directed at women (Nadal et al. 2013). Research investigating the frequency and content of microaggressions faced by women in visible leadership positions could be useful to prepare and enable women entering such positions.

Conclusion

We note that there are limitations associated with our analyses. We can't infer that the themes we derived from our review of media content and reader comments are representative of any given population. We offer this analysis as one way to triangulate existing research as well as bring potential avenues for future research to the fore. We hope the present findings shed additional light on the barriers faced by women in leadership roles as they transition to motherhood.

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