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The Clayman Institute at Stanford University releases a new video resource for mothers in the tough economy

Stanford researcher investigates the motherhood penalty in the workplace

Stanford, CA. – With over 200,000 new layoffs in October, the search for work gets tougher; but not all applications will be considered equally. In a new video released by Stanford University's Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Professor Shelley Correll informs mothers about the hurdles they face with workplace stereotypes.

The [video](#), available on the Clayman Institute YouTube channel, is a quick overview of Correll's research on the Motherhood Penalty. Mothers looking for employment are less likely to be hired, are offered lower salaries and are perceived as being less committed to a job than fathers or women without children, according to a recent study of gender inequality in the workplace. What's more, the pay gap between mothers and childless women is actually bigger than the pay gap between women and men.

"At some level, there is still a perceived incompatibility between family and the workplace, which disadvantages mothers," said Stanford researcher [Shelley Correll](#), PhD, an associate professor of sociology. "My research finds that mothers are judged by a harsher standard, which leads to a 'motherhood penalty' in getting hired and being offered a good salary."

In one test, Correll and her colleagues found that evaluators consistently ranked mothers as less competent and less committed workers than childless women but ranked fathers as more competent and committed than non-fathers. In a follow-up study, the researchers responded to more than 600 newspaper ads for high-level business positions by sending out fake resumes for two equally qualified candidates that varied only in very subtle references to parenting activities. They found that the childless female candidate was twice as likely to be called in for an interview as the mother. Fathers experienced no call-back penalty.

Correll's study points to a pervasive and almost subliminal discrimination that also affects business outcomes. Her study, "[Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?](#)" has received several awards, including the 2008 [Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award](#) for Excellence in Work-Family Research, which is co-sponsored by an alliance of human resources professionals.

"Organizations may be making errors in judgment based on stereotypical assumptions that prevent them from hiring the best person possible for the job," she said. "Raising awareness of this problem may reduce bias. We've found that many organizations are willing to respond and are interested in changing their policies."

The next steps, she added, are to examine the extent legal and organizational policies can reduce bias. She also is identifying other ways that mothers are stereotyped. For example, studies have shown that mothers are often perceived as not working hard enough; however, when mothers demonstrate intensive effort, they are often seen as unlikable and selfish. And mothers are judged by a harsher standard when it comes to calling in sick or taking time off. “Whether being seen as working too hard or not working hard enough, mothers experience discrimination,” said Correll.

As the Incoming Director of the [Clayman Institute for Gender Research](#), Correll plans to encourage interdisciplinary investigations among researchers in business, psychology, social science, law and medicine on a thematic focus she terms “Beyond the Stalled Revolution: Advancing Gender Equality in the 21st Century.”

“From the ‘60s through the early ‘90s, there was tremendous progress in gender equality—the wage gap shrunk, women entered professional fields, more women joined the labor force, work-life issues improved,” she said. “But progress has stalled. I hope to bring together people from a wide array of perspectives to try to understand why there has been a stall and to kickstart progress again. The Institute is multidisciplinary by nature: My challenge is to figure out how to bring scholars together to collectively focus on this important issue.”

Applications for [Faculty Research Fellowships](#) are due on December 15, 2009. Correll, who was a [Clayman Graduate Dissertation Fellow](#) in 2001, begins her term as Director of the Clayman Institute in September 2010.

Note to Editor: Hi-Resolution photo of Professor Shelley Correll is available upon request. Please contact Lori Mackenzie at lorim@stanford.edu for files.

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Founded in 1974, the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University is one of the nation’s most distinguished research organizations devoted to the study of gender. The Clayman Institute creates knowledge and seeks to implement change that promotes gender equality at Stanford, nationally, and internationally. Our current focus is on gendered innovations in science, medicine, and technology. For more news stories, visit us at <http://gendernews.stanford.edu>