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Motherhood and Employment Among Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks: A Life Course Approach

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Abstract

Research has shown that having children reduces women's employment; yet, how this effect differs for racial minorities has received less attention. Using random effects models and data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth ($N = 4,526$), this study investigates the association between motherhood and employment among Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks over women's entire reproductive span. Results indicate that having children reduces labor force participation primarily by deterring full-time employment. This effect is stronger and lasts longer among Whites, smaller and shorter among Hispanics, and brief among Blacks. Motherhood reduces part-time employment for young mothers, but temporarily increases it for older mothers. Early childbearing partly explains Black and Hispanic women's low employment rates at young ages; interestingly, the evidence indicates that their employment prospects would benefit the most from delaying childbearing. This study highlights the relevance of intersectionality and the life course perspective for investigating inequality in the labor market.

Keywords

Intersectionality; labor force participation; life course; maternal employment; motherhood; race

Women constitute nearly half of the U.S. labor force, however, they still face significant challenges to remaining employed when they have children. A vast literature demonstrates that women pay a penalty in labor market outcomes when they become mothers (Budig, 2003; Budig & England, 2001; England, Garcia-Beaulieu, & Ross, 2004; Kahn, García-Mangano, & Bianchi, 2014; Killewald & García-Mangano, 2016). Most research on the motherhood penalty has focused on the returns to employment, investigating the drop in wages and occupational status among employed women (Budig & England, 2001; Budig & Hodges, 2010; England, Bearak, Budig, & Hodges, 2016; Glauber, 2007; Miller, 2011; Taniguchi, 1999). Fewer studies have examined how motherhood shapes the dynamics of women's labor force participation over the life course, and less attention has been paid to the experiences of racial minority women. Although investigating the impact of motherhood on the returns to employment is important, it fails to capture the experiences of women whose labor market participation is jeopardized by having children. Analyzing how motherhood intersects with race, differentially shaping the employment trajectories of women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds is crucial for obtaining a more holistic understanding of the impact of motherhood on labor market outcomes.

Feminist scholars have challenged hegemonic gender and motherhood ideologies, claiming that motherhood elicits distinct cultural expectations that differently impact the work decisions of women of color (Browne, 1999; Collins, 1990; Dow, 2016). Scholars have argued that White and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic mothers are more strongly influenced by an intensive motherhood ideology that pressures mothers to prioritize child rearing over paid work, whereas Blacks are subject to an alternative ideology that compels mothers to be economically self-sufficient (Blair-Loy, 2003; Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Damaske, 2011; Dow, 2016). Consistent with these arguments, some studies have found that Black mothers are more likely to be employed, indicating that motherhood has a stronger deterrent effect on employment among Whites and Hispanics (Budig, 2003; Dow, 2016; England et al., 2004).

Although prior research has provided important insights into the racial variation in the effect of motherhood, most of these studies have either focused on the early childbearing years, or have provided aggregated average racial differences over a period of time (Budig, 2003; England et al., 2004; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Miller, 2011). As women increasingly postpone childbearing to older ages, it becomes important to also evaluate how motherhood affects employment at later stages of the life course. Prior studies have indicated that early childbearing exacerbates the impact of motherhood on employment, whereas delaying childbearing improves mother's employment prospects (García-Manglano, 2015; Miller, 2011; Taniguchi, 1999). Yet, it is unclear whether the benefits of delayed motherhood apply to racial minority women. Although it is well-documented that Hispanic and Black women are less likely to postpone motherhood, often beginning childbearing at younger ages than Whites, little research has explored the extent to which the variation in the onset of childbearing shapes racial disparities in employment over the life course.

Drawing from the intersectionality and life course perspectives, this study advances research by investigating how motherhood shapes the employment trajectories of White, Black, and Hispanic women, examining the role of early and delayed childbearing in shaping racial differentials in women's labor force participation across stages of the life course. This study further disaggregates labor force participation into full-time and part-time employment. The results reveal important differences in the effect of motherhood over the life course, with significant variation by race and level of involvement. Interestingly, the findings suggest that delaying motherhood is more beneficial for the employment prospects of racial minority women. Averaging the effect of motherhood over time and across racial groups obscures these important variations. This study provides new evidence of the intersection of gender, race, class, and family processes in the labor market.

Background

The entry of mothers to the labor force has been a key component of the growth of female labor force participation in recent decades. In 1948 only 17% of married women with children under 18 were in the labor force, a figure that reached 70% in 1995, and then plateaued (Cohany & Sok, 2007). Despite progress towards gender equality, women still bear a disproportionate share of domestic and child rearing responsibilities that limits their time for paid work (Damaske, 2011; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Stone, 2007). A body of literature continues to show that having children hinders women's employment (Budig,

2003; England et al., 2004; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Kahn et al., 2014; Killewald & García-Mangano, 2016). Nonetheless, the dynamics of employment and motherhood among women of color have received less attention. Black and less advantaged women have historically had higher employment rates than White and privileged women. But, as education and other forms of human capital gained importance in the labor market, this pattern reversed. White and more advantaged women are now more likely to be employed than Blacks and Hispanics (Browne, 1999; England et al., 2004; Reid, 2002). Yet, less is known about when in the life course the racial gaps in women's employment emerge, how they evolve over time, and how they are shaped by having children. This study addresses these important issues drawing from two major theoretical frameworks, namely the intersectionality and the life course perspectives.

The intersectionality framework posits that inequality is the result of the interplay of multiple dimensions of privilege and disadvantage (Baca Zinn & Dill, 1996; Browne & Misra, 2003; McCall, 2001). Women of color hold multiple marginalized positions in gender, race, and class that differently shape their work trajectories and family experiences (Browne & Misra, 2003; Collins, 1990). Because women have historically been economically dependent on their parents or husbands, the entry of women into the labor market in recent decades has often been explained using an economic independence discourse. Yet, feminist scholars have questioned the applicability of this narrative to Black and disadvantaged women, whose employment histories have responded to historical slavery and economic need (Collins, 1990; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Reid, 2002).

Feminist scholars have also challenged the implicit assumption of a homogenous gender and motherhood ideology prevalent in the literature, arguing that motherhood elicits different work expectations among women of color (Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Collins, 1990). Research has indicated that Whites and, to a lesser extent, Hispanics are influenced by an intensive motherhood ideology that presumes a conflict between motherhood and employment, and expects mothers to prioritize their time investments in child rearing over paid work (Blair-Loy, 2003; Damaske, 2011; Hays, 1998; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This ideology exerts a greater influence on middle-class White mothers, who are often pressed to reduce their work hours or justify their decisions to remain employed (Blair-Loy, 2003; Cooke, 2011; Damaske, 2011; Stone, 2007).

By contrast, Black women are subject to a different gender and motherhood ideology that challenges the assumed incompatibility between paid work and motherhood, encouraging mothers to be economically self-reliant (Collins, 1990; Damaske, 2011; Dow, 2016). Because Black mothers are expected to be employed, they do not need to justify their decisions to work (Dow, 2016). This alternative motherhood ideology has roots in historical legacies as Black women have traditionally been laborers and were not allowed to excuse themselves from work when they had children. As a result, relying on kin support for child care emerged as an accepted child rearing practice in Black communities (Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Dow, 2016). Among Hispanics, economic need and the prevalence of extended kin families have also increased the acceptance of child care arrangements for working mothers; conversely White mothers are more harshly judged for relying on child care support (Blair-Loy, 2003; Damaske, 2011; Dow, 2016; Stone, 2007). Prior research has

provided evidence indicating that motherhood deters employment more strongly among Whites than among Blacks and Hispanics (Budig, 2003; Dow, 2016; England et al., 2004). Yet, how motherhood affects the racial disparities in employment over the life course has not been fully investigated.

Marriage and economic resources also differently impact women's labor force participation along racial and ethnic lines. Marriage has rarely represented an economic safety net for Black women because of their low marriage rates and the marginalized economic position of Black men. Conversely, Whites and Hispanics are more likely to have a breadwinning husband (Browne, 1999; Glauber, 2007). The economic benefits of marriage may be less tangible for Hispanic women given the lower earning power of Hispanic men (Browne, 1999; Glauber, 2007; McCall, 2001). Nonetheless, White and Hispanic mothers are more often seen as secondary earners in the labor market, whereas Black mothers are regarded as main economic providers (Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Collins, 1990; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Although family economic resources influence employment decisions, some studies have indicated that husbands' wages actually have a relatively small impact women's employment (Blair-Loy, 2003; England et al., 2004; Killewald & García-Mangano, 2016). Instead, scholars have argued that women's wages play a more important role because women tend to use their own earnings to pay for child care and outsource domestic chores to reduce work and family conflict (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Cooke, 2011; Damaske, 2011; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Nonetheless, the extent to which women's earnings translate into higher employment among racial minority mothers requires further investigation.

Adding to these complexities, the onset of childbearing greatly varies by race, often occurring at younger ages among Blacks and Hispanics. The life course perspective states that the impact of life transitions varies depending on the stage of the life course when they occur (Dannefer, 2003; Moen, 1991, 2001). Having children during the teens and early 20s more strongly affects employment trajectories because it often disrupts education and inhibits the early accumulation of human capital (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Miller, 2011; Taniguchi, 1999). By the mid to late 20s, most individuals have completed their education and have entered full-time employment; nonetheless, motherhood at this stage can disrupt the period of rapid occupational progression and career building (Moen, 1991, 2001). Women who enter motherhood at later stages are usually more established in a career or occupation and can capitalize on the early accretion of human capital and more established social networks (Miller, 2011; Moen, 1991). Yet, the current literature has provided little insight into the ways that motherhood affects labor force participation at later stages of the reproductive span. Some research has indicated that postponing childbearing increases women's employment (García-Mangano, 2015; Miller, 2011); however, whether delayed motherhood similarly benefits women of color has remained an open question.

This study contributes to current research by investigating not only the association between motherhood and labor force participation and its variation by race and ethnicity, but also the role of early and delayed childbearing in explaining this variation. This study further investigates how these associations differ by full and part-time employment. Reducing the analysis to labor force participation conceals great variation in individuals' level of involvement in paid work over the life course (Moen, 1991). Part-time employment is more

prevalent at younger ages; whereas full-time employment peaks at later stages. In addition, women often switch from full-time to part-time employment when they transition into motherhood (Budig, 2003; Damaske, 2011; Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999), yet how this pattern varies by race and over the life course has not been fully explored. Although intersectionality has been theorized as fluid and situational, most quantitative work has approach it as static, providing average racial differences (Browne & Misra, 2003). I argue that a more comprehensive account of the impact of motherhood needs to consider women's labor force participation by level of involvement, and its intersection with race and class over the life course. Analyzing the racial variation in the impact of motherhood through the lenses of the life course perspective provides an opportunity to evaluate the fluidity of intersectionality in labor market outcomes.

Method

Data

Data for the analysis come from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, NLSY79. The NLSY79 is a nationally representative survey of individuals who were ages 14 to 22 in 1979, corresponding to the cohort born during the second half of the baby boom period. Respondents were interviewed annually through 1994, and biennially thereafter. By 2012, respondents were between the ages of 47 and 55, an age when most women have ended their reproductive lives. The NLSY79 oversamples economically disadvantaged Black and Hispanic populations, providing a sufficient sample size to make racial comparisons. The original sample included 6,283 women. The military subsample (456 women) and the oversample of economically disadvantaged Whites (901 women) were excluded from the study because these respondents were not followed after 1990. The exclusion of the latter group should not bias the analytical sample because they were part of an oversample, and Whites compose the majority of the cases. Excluding these groups, 4,926 women were eligible for the study. To investigate the relationship between childbearing and employment throughout women's entire reproductive life, the observation period spans from ages 17 to 55. Respondents who were not re-interviewed after age 17 or who had missing data on employment and the main independent variables were excluded from the analysis. A total of 9 respondents were not re-interviewed after age 17, an additional 10 respondents did not have valid data on employment status, and another 244 were missing the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score, considered an important exogenous measure of cognitive skills related to labor market outcomes (England et al., 2016). Finally, an additional 137 women had missing values in one or more of the independent variables. In total 400 respondents were excluded, representing 8.1% of the original eligible sample. The resulting sample consists of 4,526 women, including 882 Hispanics, 1,343 Blacks, and 2301 non-Hispanic, non-Black women, who are primarily White, hereafter *Whites*. Together they contribute to 94,335 person-year observations.

Measures

Labor force participation—The dependent variable is a dummy indicator of labor force participation that equals 1 when women worked on average at least 10 hours per week during the prior calendar year to the survey, and 0 otherwise. Labor force participation is

further disaggregated into full-time and part-time employment. *Full-time employment* is defined as working 35 hours or more per week, whereas *part-time employment* is defined as working fewer than 35 hours per week. Years when respondents reported working fewer than 10 hours per week were coded as not employed, occurring only in less than 10% of all person years. Bottom coding work hours was necessary to prevent outliers from overestimating labor force participation. Nonetheless, supplementary analyses treating these cases as part-time employment produced substantive similar results.

Explanatory variables follow the conceptual discussion on intersectionality, and include life course indicators and their interaction with race. *Race* is coded into mutually exclusive dummy variables for Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks. *Age* is a time-varying measure of the respondent's age, categorized into mutually exclusive dummy indicators, roughly corresponding to stages of the life course, including ages 17–19, 20–24, 25–29, 30–34, 35–39, 40–44, 45–49, and 50–55. *Motherhood* is measured by the number of children, a time-varying indicator of the cumulative number of biological children women reported at each survey, plus any additional adopted or step children living in the household. The number of children is categorized into zero, one, two, and three or more children. *The timing of motherhood* is assessed by the mother's age at first birth, measured in four categories: under 20, 20–24, 25–29, and 30 or older.

I control for home-oriented expectations and gender ideology at young ages. *Home-oriented expectations* is assessed by the question: “What would you like to be doing at age 35?” asked in 1979, 1980, and 1984. A dummy variable is coded as 1 if the respondent stated that she expected to be married or raising a family at age 35, and is used as an indicator of having more family- than work-oriented attitudes, regardless of actual work status at age 35. The most recent valid value is used in the analyses. *Gender ideology* is assessed with an index measuring the respondent's level of agreement to the following statements: whether traditional husband/wife roles are best, women are happier in traditional roles, and women's place is the home, asked in 1979, 1982, and 1987. The index ranges from 1 to 4, where 1 indicates least traditional, and 4 indicates more traditional gender values.

Marital status is measured with a time-varying dummy indicator coded 1 if the respondent was married at the time of the survey. Given the low marriage rates among African Americans, rather than controlling for husband's earnings, I include net family income as a control for economic resources available to women. *Net family income* is estimated by the family income minus the respondent's earnings at each survey year. This measure includes all income from family members in the household, and captures not only husband's earnings, but also other sources of income, such as governmental transfers, that could influence women's employment decisions. Net family income is adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, expressed in 2012 constant values, and log-transformed to account for skewness in the distribution. *Mothers' own economic resources* are measured by the hourly wages of their most recent job prior to their first birth, expressed in 2012 constant dollars. To avoid potential distortion by outliers, hourly wages are top coded at \$150. Wages for women who were not working before the first birth and those with missing values are set to zero, and a missing value indicator is included in the analyses.

Education is a time-varying covariate measured in four categories for less than high school, high school, some college, and college degree or higher. *School enrollment* is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether the respondent was enrolled in school at the time of the survey. *Work related cognitive skills* is a control variable measured by the standardized score on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) taken in 1981 and is coded in percentiles. *Socioeconomic family background* is assessed by parental education and corresponds to the respondent's parent with the highest education. Parental education is also measured in four categories for less than high school, high school, some college, and college degree or higher.

Analytic Strategy

The multivariate analyses are conducted using random effects logistic models. Random effects models were chosen because they are appropriate for estimating group differences that can be generalized to the population level, which is not possible to do with fixed effects models. The main advantage of random effects is that it exploits within- and between-individual information and, thus, it can estimate the effects of covariates that do not change over time, such as race and age at first birth. As with fixed effects, random effects models also include individual specific random intercepts that account for unobserved heterogeneity (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2012). One limitation of random effects is that these models assume that the random individual intercepts are uncorrelated with the variables in the model; when they are correlated, the models are subject to omitted variable bias. Nonetheless, the robustness of the results and the significance of interactions were corroborated using alternative model specifications, including multinomial regressions adjusted for clustering of observations within individuals, random effects linear models, and fixed effects models, yielding substantive similar results. Given the study's main interest on racial and ethnic variation, I report results from random effect models. Random effects represent a suitable tool for investigating intersectionality over the life course because these models can estimate "average trends as well as individual differences" (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2012, p. 228).

A first set of random effects logistic regressions predicts labor force participation by race across stages of the life course, which are represented by age intervals, adjusting for covariates. These models include all observations in the sample. Models for full-time and part-time employment are also provided. A second set of random effects regressions predicts women's employment by race following the onset of childbearing, thereby, restricting the sample to mothers. The observation period spans from 4 years prior to the first birth to 10 years following the birth. In these models time is introduced in splines representing each of the years following the first birth, the referent is the average employment rate during the preceding years. Differences by race were tested using a pooled sample interacted with race; significant racial differences are indicated with a superscript letter next to each coefficient. Predicted probabilities were estimated from the multivariate models to aid with the interpretation of results. Given space limitations, only the results for full-time employment are shown for the second part of the multivariate analyses. Nevertheless, the models for labor force participation and part-time employment, as well as the results using fixed effects, are available from the author upon request.

Results

Table 1 reports weighted means and percentages for the dependent and explanatory variables by race. Consistent with prior research, White women exhibited higher rates of labor force participation (75%) than Hispanic (68%) and Black (65%) women (Browne, 1999; England et al., 2004). The rates of full-time and part-time employment were both higher for Whites than for Blacks and Hispanics. In this cohort, 80% of White women eventually became mothers, as did 86% of Hispanics, and 85% of African Americans. White women had on average 1.8 children, whereas Hispanic and Black women averaged 2.2 and 2.1 children, respectively. Table 1 reflects the well-documented racial disparities in the onset of childbearing and marriage rates. Whereas only 19% of Whites became teenage mothers, fully 47% of African Americans and 37% of Hispanics did so. By contrast, 22% of Whites delayed motherhood past age 30, compared with only 12% of Hispanics and 9% of Blacks. White and Hispanic women spent a higher proportion of the observation period in a marital union, 57% and 50%, respectively; by contrast, Black women were married only 28% of the time. Consistent with distinct racial work and motherhood expectations, only 11% of Black women expected to be married and rising children at age 35, rather than working or doing something else, compared with 23% of Hispanics, and 27% of Whites. Nonetheless, adherence to traditional gender values did not vary much by race. Table 1 also confirmed large human capital and socioeconomic disparities across racial groups, showing advantages for White women relative to Blacks and Hispanics.

Figure 1 illustrates the racial disparities in employment over women's entire reproductive span, disaggregating labor force participation into full-time and part-time employment. In general, women's labor force participation increased quickly during young adulthood, greatly driven by the growth in full-time employment. Conversely, part-time employment was relatively higher during the teens and early 20s, decreasing with age. Figure 1 revealed that most of the racial disparities in labor force participation were concentrated at younger ages, with little racial variation after the mid-30s. White women started with higher rates of labor force participation that increased until the mid-20s, and then leveled off. Hispanics and, notably, Blacks began with lower rates of labor force participation at young ages ($p < .001$), but their rates continued rising into the late 30s, when the racial differences narrowed down. Figure 1 also revealed that a substantial part of White women's advantage in labor force participation derived from their higher rates of part-time employment at most stages of the life course, whereas their rates of full-time employment were higher only until the early 30s. During the late 30s and 40s, African Americans and Hispanics, to a lesser extent, surpassed Whites in full-time employment ($p < .05$).

Table 2 presents the net coefficients by race from random effects models using a pooled sample interacted with race predicting women's labor force participation over the life course. The results are further disaggregated into full-time and part-time employment. Significant racial differences are indicated with a superscript letter next to each coefficient. The results were robust to model specification, as multinomial regression and fixed effects models yielded similar results. Model 1 includes race and age interactions to assess whether the racial differences in employment at various stages of the life course were statistically significant net of controls. Controls included marital status (interacted with race), net family

income, home-oriented expectations, gender values, respondents' education, school enrollment, AFQT test scores, and parental education. Although most control variables were significant, preliminary analyses showed that they did not substantively reduce the racial disparities in employment at young ages. Model 2 investigates how motherhood shaped these differences by introducing controls for number of children, interacted with race. The results indicated a substantial reduction in the racial differences in employment, primarily during young adulthood.

To illustrate this finding, Table 3 presents the predicted probabilities of full-time employment estimated from the models in Table 2, holding control variables at their mean values. Without controlling for the number of children (Model 1), the predicted probability of full-time employment during ages 20–24 was 62% for Whites, 55% for Hispanics, and 34% for Blacks. Controlling for the number of children (Model 2) reduced the racial differences in the predicted probabilities to 39% for Whites, 38% for Hispanics, and 29% for Blacks. These results indicated that, net of other factors, motherhood explained a substantial part of Hispanic and Black women's lower employment rates relative to Whites at early stages of the life course. This is not surprising given that Hispanics and Blacks exhibited higher rates of early childbearing, and as Table 2 showed, children were associated with lower rates of labor force participation ($p < .001$), having a stronger effect on full-time employment.

I now explore more directly the role of early and delayed childbearing in shaping employment across racial groups. Figure 2 illustrates the observed employment trajectories for women who eventually became mothers from up to 4 years before to 10 years after the transition into motherhood by age at first birth. The first column in Figure 2 shows that labor force participation declined for all women immediately after the birth of their first child, regardless of the stage in the life course when the transition occurred. Nonetheless, the racial gaps in employment varied by the mother's age at first birth. Among younger mothers, the racial disparities in labor force participation before birth were large, but converged, to some extent, after the first birth. By contrast, among older mothers, the racial gaps in labor force participation before birth were small and, instead, diverged after birth, showing higher employment rates among Black and Hispanic mothers. Nonetheless, labor force participation masks considerable racial variation in full-time and part-time work.

Disaggregating labor force participation, the racial differences in full-time employment were minimal among women who transitioned into motherhood in their teens. At this stage the racial disparities in labor force participation were driven by White mothers' greater involvement in part-time work. Having a child during the teens mainly reduced part-time employment for all groups. This is the only stage in the life course when entering motherhood was associated with a significant decline in part-time employment with apparently little effect in full-time employment. This pattern reflects the higher prevalence of part-time employment common at young ages.

Among women transitioning into motherhood in the early 20s, having children was associated with a reduction in both, full-time and part-time employment, with a deep decline in full-time employment. Whites exhibited higher rates of both full-time and part-time

employment before birth than Hispanics and Blacks; however, full-time employment recovered more quickly among Black mothers. After birth, the rates of labor force participation were similar for Whites and Blacks, but only because White mothers worked more in part-time jobs; whereas Black mothers surpassed Whites and Hispanics in full-time employment.

By contrast, among women who began childbearing after age 25, motherhood had offsetting effects, reducing full-time employment, but temporarily encouraging part-time employment. These offsetting trends cannot be detected when labor force participation is aggregated, or when employment rates are averaged over the life course. The substantial surge in part-time employment during the first two years after the first birth suggests that switching from full-time to part-time jobs was a common strategy among older mothers. This phenomenon was more noticeable among White women. Among older mothers, the racial disparities in full-time employment were reversed after birth, with more rapid returns to full-time jobs among Black and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic mothers.

Overall, with the exception of teen mothers, most of the reduction in women's labor force participation after a first birth resulted from the decline in full-time employment. This finding has important implications because full-time employment is more consequential for women's and children's economic well-being. Full-time jobs not only provide higher earnings, but also greater stability and more employment benefits than part-time jobs. The next section examines more closely the racial differences in the effect of motherhood on full-time employment after the first birth, controlling for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

Table 4 presents the coefficients from random effects models predicting full-time employment for the 10 years following the first birth relative to the average rate in the 4 preceding years. Following the tenets of intersectionality, the models were run separately by race, implying full interactions between race and all other variables in the model. A model using a pooled sample with race interactions was used to test significant racial differences, which are indicated with a superscript letter next to the respective coefficient. These models controlled for the same demographic and socioeconomic variables from the full model in Table 2 and, in addition, included the mother's age at first birth and hourly wages prior to the birth. The shaded negative coefficients highlight the years with significantly lower employment relative to the pre-birth rate.

Table 4 confirmed that full-time employment declined significantly for all women after they transitioned into motherhood, with substantial variation by race. White women did not recover their pre-birth rates of full-time employment until the tenth year after becoming mothers. By contrast, Hispanic mothers recovered their pre-birth rates of full-time employment by the fourth year after giving birth, and surpassed those rates by the sixth year. African Americans regained their pre-birth levels of full-time employment after only two years of giving birth, and then exceeded their pre-birth rates, surpassing White mothers in full-time employment ($p < .001$). Having additional children further reduced full-time employment for all women, but more so for Whites and Hispanics than for Blacks ($p < .001$).

To better illustrate these variations, Table 5 presents the adjusted predicted probabilities of working full time following the first birth by race for mothers with average characteristics. The shaded areas indicate estimated probabilities that were statistically significantly lower than the pre-birth probability ($p < .05$). As Table 5 shows, the probability of full-time employment prior to the first birth for mothers with two children was 57% for Whites, 31% for Hispanics, and 27% for Blacks. One year after first birth the probability declined to about 5% for all mothers. By the fifth year, when most have already had their second child, the probability was 23% for Whites, 32% for Hispanics, and 50% for Blacks. By the tenth year, the probability raised to nearly 80% for Hispanic and Black mothers with two children, but only to 52% for White mothers. The results indicated that Black women's employment was less constrained by motherhood. These findings are consistent with the racial diversity in motherhood expectations, showing that White women experienced the greatest retreat from full-time employment after the onset of childbearing, and took longer to return to full-time jobs; whereas Hispanic and, particularly, African American mothers more quickly returned to full-time employment.

I now show how early and delayed childbearing affected employment across racial groups. Preliminary models without controlling for women's wages prior to their first birth (not shown) indicated negative effects of early childbearing on full-time employment, but strong and positive effects of postponing childbearing past age 25 for all groups, consistent with prior research (García-Mangano, 2015; Miller, 2011). Nonetheless, the advantages were greater for Hispanic and African American women. Controlling for women's pre-birth wages reduced the effects of age at first birth, and reversed the coefficient of early childbearing for White mothers. This is not surprising given that wages, a proxy for employment marketability, increase with age and gains in human capital (Miller, 2011; Moen, 1991; Taniguchi, 1999). The results in Table 4 revealed that for Whites, the positive effect of postponing childbearing was due to the better labor market standing (higher wages) of older mothers prior to having children. By contrast, the effects of delayed motherhood for Hispanics and Blacks remained positive and mostly significant. These findings indicated that, although Black and Hispanic women were the least likely to postpone motherhood, their employment prospects benefited the most from delaying childbearing.

Exploring the role of marriage and economic resources provided further evidence of the salience of intersectionality. Marriage was significantly associated with higher rates of full-time employment among Black and Hispanic mothers, having a stronger effect among Blacks ($p < .001$). Supplementary analyses (not shown) indicated an initial negative effect of marriage on full-time employment for White mothers, but, controlling for net family income, which included husbands' earnings, rendered this effect not significant, as seen in Table 4. This finding suggested that marriage confers economic benefits to White mothers that may allow them to withdraw from the labor market when they transition into motherhood, but less so for Black and Hispanic mothers, among whom the effect of marriage remained positive. Consistent with prior research, these findings provided evidence of racial inequality within marriage, suggesting that marriage may not represent an economic safety net for Hispanic and Black mothers (Glauber, 2007). It appears that if marriage is a sign of privilege, it may be less so for women of color.

Family income was significantly and similarly associated with lower rates of full-time employment for all women; by contrast, mothers' own wages were instead associated with higher rates of full-time employment. This result supports prior research indicating that women often rely on their own earnings, rather than on their husband's earnings, to ameliorate the effect of motherhood on employment (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Cooke, 2011; Damaske, 2011; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Killewald & García-Mangano, 2016). Interestingly, this effect was significantly stronger among Blacks than among Whites ($p < .05$). The results were consistent with the claims that middle-class White mothers face greater pressures to devote intensive time to child rearing that may reduce their ability to use their own resources to remain full-time employed compared with Black mothers (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1998; Stone, 2007). Overall, the results suggested that motherhood ideologies intersect with economic resources differently affecting women's employment along racial lines (Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Damaske, 2011; Dow, 2016). To conclude, the results provided strong evidence of a complex matrix of intersections among gender, race, class, and family processes that differently shaped the work trajectories of women over the life course.

Discussion

A vast literature has shown that having children reduces women's employment, yet, less attention has been paid to how this effect varies by race, class, and over the life course. Drawing from the intersectionality and life course perspectives, this study followed the employment trajectories of White, Hispanic, and Black women throughout their entire reproductive span, investigating the variation in the association between motherhood and employment. Consistent with prior research, White women averaged higher rates of labor force participation than Black and Hispanic women (Browne, 1999; England et al., 2004; Reid, 2002). Nonetheless, the results indicated that most of White women's advantage in labor force participation emerged during the teens and early 20s, and was largely driven by their higher rates of part-time employment at most stages of the life course. Net of education and other background characteristics, early childbearing accounted for nearly half of the lower rates of labor force participation among Hispanics and Blacks during young adulthood.

The results provide strong evidence of significant interactions between race, class, and family processes in the labor market. Motherhood was associated with lower employment rates for all women, however, the associations were stronger and lasted longer among Whites, smaller and shorter among Hispanics, and very small and brief among Blacks. These patterns are consistent with claims that racial minorities and disadvantaged women are affected by alternative gender and motherhood expectations that compel mothers to work and be financially self-reliant (Browne & Kennelly, 1999; Collins, 1990; Dow, 2016). The lower rates of full-time employment among White mothers are in line with prior research indicating that White women are more pressured to prioritize intensive mothering or justify their decisions to remain employed full-time (Blair-Loy, 2003; Damaske, 2011; Hays, 1998; Stone, 2007).

Economic resources and marriage also played important roles. Consistent with prior research, family income, other than women's own earnings, was similarly associated with lower employment rates for all groups. Conversely, mothers' own wages were associated with higher rates of full-time employment. This finding supports prior research suggesting that mothers use their own earnings to pay for child care or outsource housework to remain employed, implying greater privilege for middle-class, high earning women (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Cooke, 2011; Damaske, 2011; Killewald & García-Mangano, 2016). Nonetheless, this effect was greater for Black than for White mothers. Possibly, middle-class White women may be less able to translate their own resources into higher employment given stronger pressures to conform to the intensive motherhood ideology (Blair-Loy, 2003; Damaske, 2011; Hays, 1998; Stone, 2007). These results indicated that class also interacted with motherhood expectations differently shaping women's involvement in paid labor. Moreover, marriage was associated with higher rates of full-time employment among Black and Hispanic mothers, suggesting that these mothers may be less able to rely on their partners for economic support (England et al., 2004; Glauber, 2007). This finding suggests that if marriage is increasingly becoming a symbol of privilege, it may be less so for women of color.

In line with the life course perspective, the analyses confirmed that delaying childbearing increased full-time employment (García-Mangano, 2015; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Miller, 2011). Surprisingly, the results revealed that the gains in full-time employment associated with delayed motherhood were larger and significant for Hispanics and Blacks. This finding is highly relevant for policy makers as it challenges the implications of the *weathering* hypothesis. The weathering hypothesis suggests that postponing fertility is not as beneficial for the birth outcomes for Blacks as it is for Whites, given the rapid deterioration of Black women's health with age (Geronimus, 1996). This argument has been used to question the effectiveness of policies aimed at delaying childbearing as a strategy to reduce poverty (Cohen, 2016). By contrast, the results of this study indicate that although Black and Hispanic women are the least likely to postpone childbearing, their prospects of full-time employment would benefit the most from delaying motherhood. The findings of this study suggest that policies aimed at delaying first births among disadvantaged groups, coupled with improved job opportunities, have the potential to reduce poverty and mitigate racial inequality among families with children.

This research is not without limitations. One limitation is that this study does not investigate the impact of policies that could moderate the effect of motherhood, such as family leave policies and the availability of affordable child care. A prior study using the same data found that the maternity leave act introduced in 1993 did not significantly affect women's job continuation after childbirth (Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999). Nonetheless, other work and family policies could play an important role, particularly during the first years after a birth (Reid 2002). This study attempted to mitigate this potential problem by extending the observation period to the ten years following the first birth. The results of this study may be conservative given that White women are more likely to have jobs that offer better family benefits, whereas Black and Hispanic women more often hold jobs that are temporary and offer few family benefits (Browne, 1999; Cooke, 2011; Reid, 2002). It is possible that the effects of motherhood among Whites would be larger were it not for these policies. Future

research should investigate the extent to which structural conditions, such as work and family policies and the availability of affordable child care, moderate the racial disparities in the effect of motherhood on employment.

Another limitation is that this study did not directly investigate the reasons for mothers' withdrawal from the labor market at the onset of childbearing. Employment decisions among new mothers may respond to factors other than expectations and values at young ages, socioeconomic background, or social pressures. Assessing the real motives for women's labor market withdrawal after a birth can be a daunting task. Prior research has shown that opting out narratives tend to mask pressures to conform to social expectations that are often coupled with employers' discrimination of mothers in the labor market (Blair-Loy, 2003; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Stone, 2007).

To sum up, this study shows the importance of analyzing motherhood and women's employment taking an intersectional and life course approach. The findings provided new evidence of significant interactions among race, class, and family processes shaping the work experiences of women as they age. The results also showed that restricting the analysis to labor force participation obscured important variations in the ways that motherhood affected full-time and part-time employment over the life course. In general, motherhood decreased labor force participation primarily by reducing full-time employment. Having children reduced part-time employment at younger ages, but, instead, encouraged part-time employment at older ages, revealing that switching from full-time to part-time jobs is a more common strategy among older mothers. The significant decline in full-time employment was associated with motherhood is of crucial relevance given that mothers, particularly disadvantaged racial minorities, are increasingly responsible for their families' and their own economic well-being. Full-time jobs not only provide mothers with higher wages and more employment benefits, but also often provide retirement plans that can substantially improve women's well-being at older ages. This study illustrates how the intersectionality and life course perspectives can be used as theoretical frameworks and analytical tools to investigate the forces that shape gender and racial inequality in the labor market.

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FIGURE 1.
Women's Employment Rates by Race and Age

FIGURE 2.
Employment Rates After First Births by Race and Mother's Age at Birth

Table 1

Sample Characteristics: Weighted Means and Proportions by Race (N = 4,526)

	White		Hispanic		Black	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Labor force participation ^a	0.751	(0.433)	0.680	(0.467)	0.650	(0.477)
Full-time	0.451	(0.498)	0.417	(0.493)	0.417	(0.493)
Part-time	0.300	(0.458)	0.263	(0.440)	0.234	(0.423)
Mothers ^b	0.801	(0.399)	0.864	(0.343)	0.848	(0.359)
Mean number of children ^b	1.8	(1.3)	2.2	(1.5)	2.1	(1.5)
Mother's age at first birth ^b						
19	0.194	(0.395)	0.366	(0.482)	0.465	(0.499)
20–24	0.308	(0.462)	0.338	(0.473)	0.320	(0.467)
25–29	0.276	(0.447)	0.170	(0.376)	0.120	(0.325)
30 or older	0.222	(0.416)	0.125	(0.331)	0.095	(0.293)
Expectations and gender values						
Home-oriented expectations ^c	0.266	(0.442)	0.233	(0.423)	0.115	(0.319)
Traditional gender values index ^d	2.0	(0.5)	2.1	(0.5)	2.0	(0.5)
Married ^a	0.566	(0.496)	0.496	(0.500)	0.275	(0.447)
Education ^b						
< High school	0.042	(0.201)	0.167	(0.374)	0.087	(0.282)
High school	0.397	(0.489)	0.378	(0.485)	0.386	(0.487)
Some college	0.247	(0.431)	0.292	(0.455)	0.320	(0.467)
College	0.314	(0.464)	0.163	(0.369)	0.207	(0.405)
AFQT score percentile	7.0	(2.4)	4.4	(2.5)	4.0	(2.3)
Net family income (<i>ln</i>) ^b	7.5	(5.6)	6.1	(5.9)	4.8	(6.0)
Hourly wage prior birth ^e	16.2	(13.0)	13.8	(8.3)	12.4	(7.5)
Parental education						
< High school	0.171	(0.377)	0.627	(0.484)	0.436	(0.496)
High school	0.448	(0.497)	0.230	(0.421)	0.365	(0.482)
Some college	0.145	(0.352)	0.074	(0.262)	0.111	(0.314)

	White		Hispanic		Black	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
College	0.236	(0.425)	0.068	(0.252)	0.087	(0.282)
N	2,301		882		1,343	

Note:

^a Average from ages 17–55.

^b Last observed value.

^c Desired to be married, raising children at age 35.

^d Index ranges from 1 to 4, 1 = *Least traditional*, 4 = *More traditional*.

^e Hourly wages in 2012 constant dollars for mothers working before their first birth.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) 1979–2012, women from ages 17 to 55.

Coefficients (Standard Errors) from Random Effects Logistic Models Predicting Labor Force Participation, Full-Time, and Part-Time Employment: Women from Ages 17–55

	Labor Force Participation									
	Model 1					Model 2				
	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Age										
17–19	–0.73**	(0.06)	–1.10***	(0.09)	–1.77***	(0.08)	–2.00**	(0.07)	–2.32***	(0.11)
20–24	–0.15**	(0.04)	–0.41***	(0.07)	–0.88***	(0.06)	–1.02**	(0.05)	–1.16**	(0.08)
25–29	0.09*	(0.04)	–0.23***	(0.07)	–0.18***	(0.06)	–0.26**	(0.05)	–0.49***	(0.07)
30–34 (ref.)										
35–39	0.03	(0.05)	0.10	(0.09)	0.36***	(0.07)	0.21**	(0.05)	0.24**	(0.09)
40–44	–0.01	(0.05)	0.23***	(0.09)	0.23***	(0.07)	0.22**	(0.05)	0.42**	(0.09)
45–49	–0.14**	(0.05)	0.13*	(0.09)	–0.17*	(0.07)	0.10	(0.06)	0.34***	(0.09)
50–55	–0.44**	(0.07)	–0.19	(0.12)	–0.53***	(0.09)	–0.24**	(0.07)	0.03	(0.12)
Number of children										
0 Children (ref.)										
1 Child							–1.61**	(0.05)	–1.34***	(0.09)
2 Children							–2.32**	(0.06)	–1.98***	(0.10)
3 or more Children							–2.44**	(0.07)	–2.29**	(0.12)
Person-years	94,335						94,335			
χ^2	7331.8						8714.9			
Full-Time (vs. Not Working)										
	Model 1					Model 2				
	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Age										

Labor Force Participation																			
	Model 1						Model 2												
	White		Hispanic		Black		White		Hispanic		Black								
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE							
17–19	–2.43	**	(0.10)	–2.89	***a	(0.16)	–4.21	***ab	(0.17)	–4.25	**	(0.11)	–4.57	**	(0.19)	–5.12	***ab	(0.18)	
20–24	–0.51	**	(0.06)	–1.06	***a	(0.09)	–1.71	***ab	(0.08)	–1.75	**	(0.07)	–2.13	***a	(0.11)	–2.18	***a	(0.09)	
25–29	0.11	*	(0.05)	–0.42	***a	(0.09)	–0.41	***a	(0.07)	–0.42	**	(0.06)	–0.79	***a	(0.09)	–0.55	***b	(0.07)	
30–34 (ref.)																			
35–39	0.00		(0.06)		0.20	(0.11)	0.44	***a	(0.09)	0.28	**	(0.07)	0.40	**	(0.11)	0.52	***a	(0.09)	
40–44	0.01		(0.06)		0.38	***a	(0.11)	0.42	***a	(0.09)	0.36	**	(0.07)	0.65	***a	(0.11)	0.53	**	(0.09)
45–49	–0.11		(0.07)		0.22	*a	(0.11)	–0.07	b	(0.09)	0.23	**	(0.07)	0.51	***a	(0.11)	0.05	b	(0.09)
50–55	–0.44	**	(0.08)		–0.13	(0.15)	–0.63	***b	(0.11)	–0.13		(0.09)	0.16		(0.15)	–0.51	***ab	(0.11)	
Number of children																			
0 Children (ref.)																			
1 Child											–2.29	**	(0.07)	–1.77	***a	(0.12)	–1.19	***ab	(0.10)
2 Children											–3.23	**	(0.08)	–2.69	***a	(0.14)	–1.67	***ab	(0.11)
3 or more Children											–3.41	**	(0.10)	–3.07	**	(0.16)	–1.61	***ab	(0.13)
Person-years	68,604										68,604								
χ ²	7621.6										8515.5								
Part-Time (vs. Not Working)																			
	Model 1						Model 2												
	White		Hispanic		Black		White		Hispanic		Black								
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE							
Age																			
17–19	0.03		(0.07)	–0.31	***a	(0.10)	–0.81	***ab	(0.08)	–0.80	**	(0.08)	–1.18	***a	(0.12)	–1.33	***a	(0.09)	
20–24	0.20	**	(0.05)	0.05	(0.08)	(0.08)	–0.27	***ab	(0.06)	–0.36	**	(0.06)	–0.47	**	(0.09)	–0.55	***a	(0.07)	
25–29	0.15	**	(0.05)	–0.07	a	(0.08)	0.05	(0.07)	(0.07)	–0.04		(0.05)	–0.24	***a	(0.08)	–0.03	b	(0.07)	
30–34 (ref.)																			
35–39	–0.04		(0.06)	–0.14	(0.10)	(0.10)	0.13	b	(0.09)	0.06		(0.06)	–0.05		(0.11)	0.18	*	(0.09)	

Table 3
Adjusted Predicted Probabilities of Full-Time Employment by Race and Age at Mean Values

	Model 1			Model 2		
	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black
17–19	19%	16%	4%	5%	5%	2%
20–24	62%	55%	34%	39%	38%	29%
25–29	75%	70%	65%	71%	70%	67%
30–34	73%	78%	74%	79%	84%	78%
35–39	73%	81%	81%	83%	89%	86%
40–44	73%	84%	81%	84%	91%	86%
45–49	71%	81%	73%	82%	90%	79%

Note: The probabilities were estimated from the models presented in Table 2. Model 1 controls for marital status, net family income, home-oriented expectations, gender values, education, school enrollment, AFQT score, and parental education. Model 2 adds the number of children.

Coefficients (Standard Errors) from Random Effects Logistic Models Predicting Full-Time Employment (versus Not Working) After First Birth by Race

Table 4

	White		Hispanic		Black	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Years after birth (pre-birth ref.)						
0	-0.22	(0.15)	-0.18	(0.24)	-0.20	(0.22)
1	-3.20**	(0.16)	-2.21***	(0.25)	-1.91*** <i>ab</i>	(0.23)
2	-2.95**	(0.15)	-1.78***	(0.26)	-0.60*** <i>ab</i>	(0.21)
3	-2.26**	(0.15)	-0.89***	(0.24)	-0.01 <i>ab</i>	(0.21)
4	-1.96**	(0.16)	-0.32 ^a	(0.25)	0.45* <i>ab</i>	(0.21)
5	-1.56**	(0.16)	0.11 ^a	(0.25)	1.01*** <i>ab</i>	(0.22)
6	-1.30**	(0.16)	0.89***	(0.26)	1.70*** <i>ab</i>	(0.22)
7	-0.99**	(0.17)	0.85***	(0.27)	1.88*** <i>ab</i>	(0.23)
8	-0.68**	(0.17)	1.28***	(0.28)	2.22*** <i>ab</i>	(0.24)
9	-0.52**	(0.17)	1.36***	(0.28)	2.42*** <i>ab</i>	(0.24)
10	-0.25	(0.18)	2.20***	(0.30)	2.74***	(0.25)
2nd Child	-1.58**	(0.11)	-1.75**	(0.19)	-0.96*** <i>ab</i>	(0.15)
3rd+ Children	-2.85**	(0.17)	-3.14**	(0.27)	-1.85*** <i>ab</i>	(0.22)
Mother's age at first birth						
19	0.65*	(0.27)	0.23	(0.34)	0.05	(0.27)
20–24 (ref.)						
25–29	0.28	(0.22)	1.62***	(0.40)	1.26***	(0.35)
30 or older	0.31	(0.27)	0.80	(0.47)	1.29***	(0.42)
Expectations and gender values						
Home-oriented expectations	-0.10	(0.13)	0.01	(0.19)	0.41	(0.22)
Traditional gender values	-1.10**	(0.18)	-1.03**	(0.29)	-0.90**	(0.24)
Married	-0.13	(0.11)	0.57***	(0.16)	1.00*** <i>ab</i>	(0.14)
Net family income (<i>ln</i>)	-0.08**	(0.01)	-0.09**	(0.01)	-0.11**	(0.01)

	White		Hispanic		Black	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Hourly wage prior birth	0.04 **	(0.01)	0.07 **	(0.02)	0.12 ** ^a	(0.03)
Hourly wage missing	-1.31 **	(0.26)	-1.08 **	(0.41)	-1.13 **	(0.37)
Person-years	13,183		5,467		8,343	

Note: Data from mothers from up to 4 years before to 10 years after first birth. Models control for women’s education, school enrollment, AFQT score, and parental education. Shaded coefficients highlight years with lower employment than the average pre-birth rate ($p < .01$).

^aSignificantly different from Whites ($p < .05$).

^bSignificantly different from Hispanics ($p < .05$).

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) 1979–2012.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 5
Adjusted Predicted Probabilities of Full-Time Employment after the First Birth by Race and Number of Children at Mean Values

Year	1 Child			2 Children			3 + Children		
	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black	White	Hispanic	Black
Pre-birth	86%	72%	49%	57%	31%	27%	27%	10%	13%
0	84%	68%	44%	52%	27%	23%	24%	9%	10%
1	22%	21%	12%	5%	4%	5%	2%	1%	2%
2	26%	29%	35%	7%	7%	16%	2%	2%	7%
3	41%	50%	49%	13%	15%	26%	4%	4%	12%
4	49%	64%	60%	17%	23%	36%	5%	7%	18%
5	59%	73%	73%	23%	32%	50%	8%	11%	28%
6	65%	85%	84%	28%	50%	67%	10%	20%	44%
7	72%	85%	87%	35%	49%	71%	13%	20%	49%
8	78%	89%	90%	42%	59%	77%	17%	27%	57%
9	80%	90%	92%	46%	61%	81%	19%	28%	62%
10	84%	95%	94%	52%	79%	85%	24%	48%	70%

Note: Pre-birth rates include the average employment rates for up to 4 years prior to the first birth. Estimates control for age at first birth, marital status, net family income, hourly wages prior to the first birth, home-oriented expectations, gender values, education, school enrollment, AFQT score, and parental education. Shaded areas highlight statistically significantly lower probabilities than the pre-birth probability ($p < .05$).