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The Mother Of All Decisions: How Women Make Career Decisions Around Motherhood

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania
Advisor: Steve Hart, MSOD

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The Mother Of All Decisions: How Women Make Career Decisions Around Motherhood

Abstract

This capstone seeks to discover how women make career decisions around motherhood. Specifically, what types of factors are involved when a woman chooses to become a mother and how workplaces can support their workforce around motherhood. With no government mandated paid maternity leave, organizations are required to meet the call of supporting the female workforce around motherhood, which inevitably can cause some friction and opportunities for bias. Through interviews of eight women who recently became mothers or are looking to start a family in three years, this research provides findings on how women are influenced in their decision making. The research dives into the history of women's rights in the United States and the current state of government involvement, with trends and experiences in the workplace. The interviews determine how external and internal factors impact how women make decisions and provides suggestions to mothers, coworkers, and organizations on how to make the transition easier for women.

Keywords

career decisions, motherhood, female workforce, supportive workplaces

Comments

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THE MOTHER OF ALL DECISIONS: HOW WOMEN MAKE CAREER DECISIONS
AROUND MOTHERHOOD

by

Sarah M. Dusinberre Brennan

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics
College of Liberal and Professional Studies
in the School of Arts and Sciences
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AROUND MOTHERHOOD

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ABSTRACT

This capstone seeks to discover how women make career decisions around motherhood. Specifically, what types of factors are involved when a woman chooses to become a mother and how workplaces can support their workforce around motherhood. With no government mandated paid maternity leave, organizations are required to meet the call of supporting the female workforce around motherhood, which inevitably can cause some friction and opportunities for bias. Through interviews of eight women who recently became mothers or are looking to start a family in three years, this research provides findings on how women are influenced in their decision making. The research dives into the history of women's rights in the United States and the current state of government involvement, with trends and experiences in the workplace. The interviews determine how external and internal factors impact how women make decisions and provides suggestions to mothers, coworkers, and organizations on how to make the transition easier for women.

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CHAPTER 1

The following study was conducted to understand the implications of cultural norms around working motherhood and how they influence women's decisions around their careers. Through research into the history and current working trends, evaluating prior work and studies around working motherhood, and interviews with eight women in the current workplace, I will provide insight into how to support working mothers, whether through policy changes or organizational culture initiatives. We have made great strides in women's equality in the workplace, but this must match the equality that is in society to work effectively. By acknowledging the realities of working motherhood, we can better address an equitable workplace for both men and women.

Background

Women have made many strides over the years in the effort to gain equality in the workplace. The 1960's Women's Liberation Movement led to an increase in female college graduates and women who continued on to obtain graduate degrees, which in turn led to more women going into fields previously dominated by men (England, 2010). As female participation in the labor force increased substantially, gender discrimination laws were enacted to ensure gender equality in the workplace, such as the Family Medical Leave Act (Shepherd-Banigan and Bell, 2014), Title VII (Suk, 2010), and the Family Responsibilities Discrimination Act (Williams and Bornstein, 2008). These laws and regulations have supported women legally, but many women still feel that there are barriers and penalties when having a child and continuing to work.

Some researchers have noted a large reason for this gap is the delay in achieving equality in the home space (England, 2010; Scarborough et. al, 2019; Waldfogel, 2007; Brooks and Bolzendahl, 2004), with less than half of heterosexual mothers saying their households evenly split responsibilities even as younger generations become more egalitarian (Krivkovich et. al, 2021). While the regulations and policies organizations have put in place support equality in the workplace, motherhood doesn't stop when the workday ends.

Researchers have studied the impact that motherhood has on organizations and what policies do not address. Observing their own mother's and their coworkers' experiences of motherhood in the workplace and its subsequent impact on their career trajectory has impacted how women make decisions about motherhood and how they approach handling motherhood in the workplace. The aim of this capstone study is to understand the factors impacting women's decisions around motherhood and career and provide insight on how to address better those challenges in the home to provide a fuller, more gratified employee in the workplace.

A Personal Journey

Roughly five years ago, there was a rush of weddings among my friends and coworkers. After the dust had settled, the rumblings of motherhood started to take place. As we started going to our family get togethers, we heard side comments on "when will they make me a grandparent?" and felt intense glances on the wine we poured ourselves, this group started to discuss motherhood, noting the maternal clock we heard ticking in the distance. We also discussed the unintended consequences of parenthood. I

had recently received a promotion, was looking at the end of receiving my Masters degree and the thought of motherhood felt... stalled.

As the first child in my family, my mother had received a college degree, worked her way to a top-level position in her organization, only to get pregnant at 30 and decide to step back into part-time employment to be able to focus on raising me. Once my younger brother was born, that slowly changed to full-time stay-at-home mom, partially due to my brother's need for more attention due to his ill health and development, partially due to the demands of raising two children. When my mom felt that she was ready to enter the workforce again, it was not at the same level, role, or capacity she once had. This story is not unique - many of my friends were raised under similar circumstances. For those that had working mothers, their moms had roles that accommodated motherhood, such as a teacher, or held a job with different hours from the father so that one parent was home at all times.

We watched our mothers sacrifice their careers to raise us, putting their hopes and dreams in us so we could have more opportunities to succeed. And now that we were considering motherhood ourselves, it felt like we were at a crossroads - one where we could follow the paths of our mothers and start back at square one, or pursue a different path - one where we could persevere and attempt to "have it all". So what was the problem?

Just like watching our mothers, we had watched our older female colleagues navigate motherhood. We saw some women come back to the workplace, only to leave after a few months to become full-time mothers. We also saw women come back and struggle to balance the workload and need to be in the office (pre-Covid) with doctor's

appointments, kids being sent home from daycare, and overall missing their children. I watched not only one, but two women return from maternity leave only to receive “demotions” thinly veiled as organizational restructuring, with the colleagues who helped provide support to cover their workload while out receiving promotions during the “restructure”. One thing was clear - once we had our child, our career would not be the same. In fact, it appeared that motherhood would mean our career prospects would become severely limited.

These conversations weighed heavily on me as I delved deeper into the thoughts behind these decisions. A friend stayed at her firm because they notoriously had one of the better maternity leave policies among organizations in her area and industry. Another switched roles to have better working hours. I felt myself staying in a non-challenging role due to the flexibility and laid back culture of my firm. Sometimes it was deeper - a friend had made a choice years ago to not take a job in New York in order to be able to focus on a career and being a mother. Another chose a less stressful career in medicine to accommodate a home life.

These decisions are made many times before, or independently of, current employment. And at times made from experiences irrelevant to those at their organization. However, there are experiences and observations made during current employment that impact women’s career decisions when they enter motherhood. It seems that organizations have met the challenge of ensuring equality in the workforce, but it’s not solved and there are still inequities, particularly when it comes to motherhood. As I have embarked on my own decision around working motherhood, understanding how organizations can better support this vital group of women has

become important to me, not only for my own journey, but for the journey of all future working mothers to come.

Focus and Purpose

Women's proportion in full-time work drops significantly after the birth of a first child from 80% to around 20% during the first year after birth (Paull, 2008). The Great Resignation of 2021 and 2022 has shown that retention is imperative to maintaining a workforce as the war on talent has required increased salaries and additional benefits to attract highly sought after employees (Cook, 2021). The data notes that workers between the ages of 30-45 are leaving at the fastest rates (Cook, 2021) which overlaps with the age of women with bachelor's degrees having their first child (Bui & Miller, 2018). A McKinsey study on women recently noted that 1 in 4 women, which increases to 1 in 3 when looking solely at mothers, are strongly considering leaving the workforce (Burns et al., 2021), largely a Covid-induced reflection, but one of notable concern nevertheless. I should also note that with Covid, the landscape of working motherhood has changed significantly – whether it's increased women's roles with “Zoom School” or having to deal with the implications the pandemic has placed on childcare. Some of the reflections laid out in my conversations are most likely direct causes because of the pandemic, and less because of the general situation women face in the workplace. It should be noted that while the pandemic shifted some perceptions, the post pandemic world is reacting to life in the future and these shifts are only underlining the issue women face when become working mothers.

Keeping women in the workforce not only saves money on recruitment and onboarding costs, but gains returns from the investments in years of training and

development for the employee. Companies with women in leadership and management positions outperform those with fewer women (Krivkovich et. al, 2021). Women have also led the charge in providing leadership and management, and have been the drivers of DEI initiatives in the workplace (Burns et. al, 2021). Much worse, workplace discrimination lawsuits around the Family Responsibilities Discrimination Act are on the uptick (Williams & Bornstein , 2008) and by denying focus on this group can at best create disengagement and at worse, a lawsuit.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight those that this study excludes. While my study does not focus on race as a variable, it does eliminate those who are forced into situations due to the lack of opportunities and privileges afforded to them. My study focuses on women who not only have higher levels of education and opportunities in their careers, but are also given the option of choice when it comes to motherhood - they are not forced to continue working due to the lack of financial resources or forced to quit working due to the inability to afford childcare. These are issues that need to be addressed and are included in maternity leave, but will not be addressed in this study.

Layout

The first section of this paper will explore the history of working motherhood up to where we stand today. I will go through the last fifty plus years of laws, regulations, and policies and the statistics that accompany these changes in American employment history. I will explore the studies and research that have been previously conducted to verify the gaps in knowledge that need to be explored through my own research to help provide a more thorough understanding of working motherhood.

Chapter Three will review the methodology I used to conduct my research and Chapter Four will dive into the data that was collected through the interviews I conducted with working mothers. I will then provide an analysis of the data collected, summarizing key findings and themes. I will also share recommendations for organizations and individuals on how to navigate working motherhood. By the end of the paper, the reader should understand the environment and culture around working motherhood and how these factors impact women's views on working motherhood. The reader will also have a better understanding of how to handle working motherhood as a mother themselves, as a colleague to a new mother, or as a member of management for an organization.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are many efforts being made in the corporate world to decrease bias and discrimination and address the needs of different groups - efforts spanning across racial, religious, sexual, and gender equality lines. But within gender equality, there is another segment of employees who experience bias and discrimination. They tend to be overlooked as such, however, because they are not seen as “different” or “other” (Krivkovich et al., 2021). While women make up just shy of half the current workforce, almost one third of the workforce (or over half of women in the workforce) have children (Krivkovich et al., 2021). Yet these women are also the largest group to be considering *leaving the workforce*, as one in three are making that decision since the Covid-19 pandemic (Krivkovich et al., 2021).

Women provide a variety of benefits by being and staying in the workforce. More experienced women in the workforce increase confidence and expectations for younger women, providing them with role models that demonstrate they can continue work, learn how to negotiate for themselves, and deal with gender discrimination (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). However, the pool of experienced women dwindles after the birth of a child. While 80% of eligible women with no children participate in the full-time workforce, that number decreases to 20% after the birth of their first child, post organizational maternity leave (however, the maternity leave timeframe is varied in this statistic) (Paull, 2008). This number does gradually increase after this first birth, but never returns to the same level, whereas men’s participation has

little to no change throughout their careers (Paull, 2008). Around 21% - 33% of women report the birth of their first child created a perception amongst their coworkers that they were uncommitted, lacked motivation, or were overall less capable in their work (Villablanca et al., 2017). And of these women, most say it makes them want to “leave their organization” (Villablanca et al., 2017). In the same report by Villablanca, there were performance reviews captured of the same individuals focusing on superficial attributes such as the tone of voice or their time availability versus a focus on their capabilities and skills such as attention to detail or ability to identify the client’s problem (Villablanca et al., 2017).

Studies on womens’ impact in the workplace has shown there is a negative perception of motherhood in the workplace, but organizations that support working mothers succeed more (Villablanca et al., 2017, Watt & McIntosh, 2012, Williams, 2000). A quantitative study on nurses’ career progressions with and without children found that motherhood has a negative effect on women’s careers with the birth of each child until they are of school age, while men experience no negative impact (Watt & McIntosh, 2012). A study on women in academia found that there were negative implications to women with mention of children, such as longer term to tenure and more biasing language used in recommendations for tenure (Villablanca et al., 2017). However, institutions that had less bias towards working mothers had more women on their faculty and a higher representation from women in faculty was in direct correlation with better faculty reputation (Villablanca et al., 2017). A bevy of other researchers have found similar findings in their research, to be discussed more in the chapter, including J. Eccles (1984), Paula England et al. (2016), Claudia Goldin (2014),

Gillian Paull (2006), Jane Waldfogel (1998), and Joan Williams (2000). The overall takeaway - there are prevalent negative perceptions of women in the workplace when they become mothers and, at times, there are even negative implications of having a child while continuing your career.

Why should organizations care about women leaving the workforce? First, organizations with more women on their management team tend to perform better than their counterparts (Burns et al., 2021; Cabrera, 2009). They are also better able to identify with their coworkers and clients alike (Cabrera, 2009). After having spent money on employee training and onboarding an employee, losing an employee is costly for firms. Firms also find it costly to lose those employees beyond direct costs, such as managing client satisfaction and retention (Cabrera, 2009). Yet when presented with the statement “I struggle with work / family conflict”, 71% of women say they agree (Brown, 2010).

In the following sections, I will present the literature that evaluates the experience of women in the workforce over the last fifty years, and what implications parenthood has had on the workforce in that timeframe. First, I will review many common terms and phrases that will be used throughout the chapter and the remaining paper to help the reader understand the topic more in-depth. I will then review the last fifty years of women’s equality in the workplace and the laws and regulations that have come and gone to lead us to where we are today. With the understanding of how we got to the current state, I will then discuss the way societal and cultural beliefs impact how we see working mothers in the workplace and how the past fifty years have brought about changes and stalled progress in line with those beliefs. From there we will discuss the current state of

work in relation to women and working mothers to understand the importance of addressing women's needs in the workplace and what organizations have to lose. This will lead to how the United States government is supporting working mothers and organizations and contributing to how women handle navigating the workforce with parenthood. This detailed background is imperative to develop an understanding of the main issue that working mothers face around maternal wall bias - how that presents in workplaces, what impact it has on women with and without children, and what happens to organizations based on these actions. Finally, I'll highlight what can be done to help remedy these issues and what still needs to be addressed, which will be examined in detail through my research.

Definitions

There are a handful of words and phrases that I will use throughout this research that require definitions for making the reader aware and clear on common frameworks, or to establish how I am using those phrases. Some of these terms may be used differently in other contexts, but the following terms should be understood in the context as defined in this section. First, I refer to the traditional family structure or makeup throughout the paper. The traditional family structure refers to heterosexual monogamous couples where the male partner is seen as the breadwinner, the main earner of the family income, and the female partner as the primary childcare provider (Cabrera, 2009).

Another term I use throughout my research includes gender ideology which in this work references "the underlying concept of an individual's level of support for a division of paid work and family responsibilities that is based on the notion of separate spheres" (Davis & Greenstein, 2009, p. 89). This comes into play when discussing how people see

parenthood roles based on gender. In the same world as the traditional family structure and gender ideology, I speak about an egalitarian society or egalitarian views. When I refer to egalitarian views in the home, I am referring to the break up of responsibilities into equal parts and sharing the load of responsibilities equally regardless of gender or assumed gender roles (Brinton & Lee, 2016). While some families try to be egalitarian, many working women still find that the division of labor at home leans more towards them than their male partners. The need to be a financial provider as well as a child care and homecare provider is known as taking on the “double shift” (Krivkovich et al., 2021) or “double burden” (Paull, 2008).

While one may be familiar with the gender pay gap, the difference of pay for men versus women (Glauber, 2007b), I also refer to the family pay gap. Both of these terms could be used interchangeably as they are referring to the pay gap between men and women, but the family pay gap more specifically refers to the gap in pay that occurs at the onset of childbearing between a man and woman within the same household (Glauber, 2007b; Taniguchi, 1999; Waldfogel, 1998). Similarly, the fatherhood wage premium refers to the increase in men’s salaries due to the birth of a child (Glauber, 2007a).

One of the more common frameworks that I refer to throughout the literature review, as well as in my research, is on the maternal wall bias. The maternal wall bias “occurs when colleagues view mothers—or pregnant women—as less competent and less committed to their jobs” (Williams, 2000, p. 28). The maternal wall bias can present in a variety of ways - sometimes blatantly negative suggesting a woman is unable to do her job due to her status as a mother, but at times it can also be present when someone

suggests a woman is unable to do something out of consideration for her role as a mother without asking the mother herself if that is her reality (Williams, 2000). Maternal wall bias is not just for women - men can be victims of this bias, too, when they take on the more traditional family role of the mother, as discussed earlier in this section, in the household (Williams, 2000). Similarly to the maternal wall bias, and opposite to the fatherhood wage premium, the motherhood penalty is when, beyond just bias, women are negatively impacted when becoming a mother (Gangl & Ziefle, 2009).

I refer to different generations throughout my research and, while imperative to clarify for this paper, it is also important to clarify to dispel any discrepancies around which ages I am discussing since the media tends to misnomer certain ages as the incorrect generation, i.e. Generation Z as Millennials. The general consensus is that a Baby Boomer was born between the years of 1946 and 1963 (England, 2010), a Gen X'er, or Generation X, was born between the years of 1964 to 1980 (England, 2010), and a Millennial was born between the years of 1981 and 1996 (Baralt et al., 2020). It should be reinforced that those born after 1996 are not considered Millennials and are not included in any of my research.

Understanding some generalizations about the millennial generation is also helpful when reading the response to motherhood and parenthood in its current context as they are the current primary generation in childbearing years and they are the sole generation interviewed in this study. Each generation tends to hold more progressive beliefs than the ones before them, and Millennials are no different in that regard - more specifically, Millennials have had the largest gap in belief on gender roles in comparison to the views of the generation before (Generation X) (Baralt et al., 2020). Millennials are

also more individualistic than prior generations and see issues that impact themselves in a more experiential way than in the broader picture (Baralt et al., 2020). This is a helpful context in understanding where many of the research participants may be coming from when discussing how they view motherhood and maternity leave.

While discussing societal and cultural impacts on parenthood, I will be discussing Cohort Replacement Theory and Societal Structural Theory. Cohort Replacement Theory believes that experiences from childhood and adolescence impact how humans think as adults (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004) while the Societal Structural Theory notes that the economic situation and societal implications throughout childhood formulates the thoughts and attitudes of humans into adulthood (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004). By defining common phrases and terms used in the literature and my research, I hope to provide you, the reader, with a foundation on the content.

The Gender Revolution and Its Impact

Women started making moves towards the workplace in the 1900s with clerical work growing in need and importance. Before this time, work was split into two capacities - hard labor and intellectual work (Yellen, 2020). Aside from certain tasks such as cooking, housekeeping, and sewing, hard labor was left to the men taking into consideration women's "fragility", while intellectual work was left for those with extra schooling - primarily a man's game (Goldin, 2006). With the invention of the typewriter, there was a need for typing which became a woman's skill - too simplistic for college curriculum, not physical enough for "real men". With that, women were able to gain employment in the workplace, but were required to leave those roles once they married due to the law in the United States at that time (Goldin, 2006). As the demand for

clerical work grew, women completing high school education and perhaps continuing into higher education increased (England, 2010). Even though women gained the ability to work after marriage in the 1940s, thanks in part to their contribution to the American economy in World War II, they were still encouraged and sometimes *forced* to leave once they became pregnant and became full-time housewives (Yellen, 2020). By the 1960s and 1970s, women entering college had grown up with mothers who came of age during and after World War II and grandmother's who were alive during the Women's Suffrage Movement in the 1920's with the arrival of the 19th Amendment (Yellen, 2020). The women's liberation movement was primed and ready to take place with women taking the mantle of their mothers and grandmothers efforts before them.

Luckily for this generation, things were changing - the Vietnam War made this generation question their future and distrust authority (Yellen, 2020) and the invention of the birth control pill made the future of women seem to have more possibilities (Goldin, 2006). With this invention, women could not only postpone motherhood, but they could no longer be discriminated against for getting pregnant, as the government passed the first regulations around maternity with the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (Yellen, 2020). This act "forbids discrimination based on pregnancy when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, such as leave and health insurance, and any other term or condition of employment" (US EEOC). By 1970, 40 percent of married women were participating in the workforce (Yellen, 2020) and by 1975, over half of mothers with children at home were employed in some capacity (Davis and Greenstein, 2009).

Changes did not just happen during this time around women choosing to join or not join the workforce solely on their marital or parental statuses. With the invention of the birth control pill, societal changes, and regulations in play, women were now seeing the possibilities of their career and future. Women began to increase their education and skills, putting more time and effort into their education and what they studied (Scarborough et al., 2016). In 1960, 6% of medical degrees, 3% of law degrees, and 4% of MBAs were held by women until the 1970s when these degrees rapidly grew to now an almost equal split amongst both genders (England, 2010). This increase in education and studies into male dominated industries helped decrease the gender pay gap (Yellen, 2020).

With all of this progress made over three generations, the subsequent generations have continued the efforts of their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers for equality in the workplace. Now, women make up 49% of medical degrees, 47% of law degrees, and 44% of MBAs as of 2007 (England, 2010). They outnumber men in four-year degrees and beyond, and make up an equal amount of the workforce (Scarborough et al., 2016). Additional regulations were passed to support women in the workforce when it came to childbearing, including the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993 (Yellen, 2020), to be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, but since the 1970's, women have met the task in increasing their opportunities, even if they have not seen the same rewards as their male counterparts.

Multiple researchers and academics, including Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman (2011), England (2010), Goldin (2006), Scarborough, Sin, and Risman (2006), and Yellen (2020) believe that a large reason for the stall in progress is due to the focus on

equality in the workplace, while equality in the home has remained overall the same as it was fifty years ago. Women have increased in the workforce, but an equal or even sizable proportion of men have not *decreased* to match the demands of the household (England, 2010). Household demands include activities such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, and childcare. In many cases, women are encouraged to be whatever they want to be, until motherhood, when they are encouraged or pushed, whether explicitly or implicitly, to take a backseat to their husband's careers and give their children the love, support, and care they need (Yellen, 2020).

To be clear, much of the blame is not on the husbands for not supporting their wives. Later in this chapter, I will explain our current societal beliefs and the impact on the family structure and makeup as well as how men are impacted by childbearing. A common phrase during the Women's Liberation Movement was "The Personal is Political" pushing for women to join the men, but little was done to bring men to join the women (England, 2010). Women still dominate the same careers they did in the 1960s such as nursing, social work, and library sciences (England, 2010). The point of the liberation movement was on "...liberal individualism [which] encourages a commitment to 'free choice' gender egalitarianism (such as legal equality of opportunity, ironically, orienting toward gender-typical paths) has probably been encouraged by the emerging form of individualism that stresses finding and expressing one's 'true self'" (England, 2010, p. 160). While many have been supportive of that liberation within the workplace the same cannot be said when they go home and look within their own household structure (Scarborough et al., 2016).

Women's entrants into more male dominated industries has presented a benefit with wages in those industries increasing for both men and women over the years. However, women-dominated industries have only seen a decrease in average wages. Again, this is not due to gender but other impacts such as technological advancements or ability to outsource (England, 2010). That said, women still dominate those careers and as such, tend to incentivize those employees to take a backseat to their careers to support the demands of the household because the pay is not significant enough to continue on when weighing the costs of childcare (England, 2010). The pay issues women face are not solely based on their career choices. As of 2020, women still earn ten percent less than men when comparing employees in the same role with the same qualifications (Yellen, 2020).

Some may argue that gender can't be the reason for why women make less than men because it is illegal (England, 2010), and they are absolutely correct. It *is* illegal to decide on someone's pay solely based on gender (as well as other factors such as race or religion). But it is not illegal to base an employee's pay on performance evaluations, qualifications, and promotional opportunities. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how our organizational cultures are based around a male dominated workforce and how that negatively impacts women, but it's these avenues for salary increases that are to blame for the discrepancy. And as some researchers have noted, almost all focus around the demands of motherhood and caretaking (Anderson et al., 2002; Benard and Correll, 2010; Budig and Hodges, 2010; Corinaldi, 2019; Glauber, 2007a; Glauber, 2007b; McIntosh et al., 2012; Paull, 2008; Tesch et al., 1995; Williams and Bronstein, 2008).

Women in the 1960s and 1970s worked hard to transform the way they lived their lives (Goldin, 2014). As men have been taught for centuries, women finally are able to see their work “as a fundamental aspect of their satisfaction in life and view their place of work as an integral part of their social world” (Goldin, 2014, p. 16). Goldin (2014) also notes that “leaving the workplace involves a loss in identity for a woman.” (p. 16). Many of the women who saw their mothers and grandmothers pave the way for them to gain careers at some point, too, become mothers, only to see a need to leave their jobs due to the lack of supportive workplaces for women with childcare responsibilities. These women are in the generations we know as Generation X and Millennials (Scarborough et al., 2019). These children watched as their mothers gave up their careers to be back to where they started - at home - and the impact was not just on women, but on men, too.

Researchers have noted that these generations, particularly the Millennials, are bringing more egalitarian views to the workplace and the home (Scarborough et al., 2019). Men are staying home with children more and more, advocating for paternity leave, and splitting the childcare responsibilities more than their fathers and grandfathers before them. But the workplace hasn't changed its view of what the “home” looks like for others and how an equal workplace doesn't always translate to an equal home life. Less than half of organizations offer some sort of paternity leave and less than 10% offer some sort of payment with leave (Scarborough et al., 2019). Anecdotes are shared that women are still called first by the daycare even though the father is listed as the primary contact or when a woman goes out to an event after hours she is asked who is babysitting her child when the obvious answer is they are in the care of their father

(Williams, 2000). Millennials may be changing, but until they are the ones in charge, we are still living in a post-revolution world - and that's fifty years old at this point. The women's liberation movement made strides in the overall views of women in the workplace, but the societal and cultural beliefs we had about mothers before the movement have not changed.

Societal and Cultural Beliefs

Policy is only effective if it supports how society actually operates (England, 2010). As highlighted in the previous section, much has been done to increase women's ability to work outside of the home, but what has been done *inside* of the home? The 1950s ideal of men working "outside the home" with women's place "inside the home" would seem a thing of the past but in reality it's turned into more of a men working "outside the home" and women working "outside *and* inside the home" (Corinaldi, 2019). While few may see women in the workplace as an uncommon trend, most would also disagree that the work of the home is done by men or men and women equally.

While we have not made these strides, only 17% of households have women working fully in the home and not in any capacity outside of the home (Cabrera, 2009). While there was a lost decade between 1994-2004 where gender egalitarianism declined, overall it has been on a steady incline since the 1970s (Suk, 2010), with numbers rising of women in the workforce versus at home decade to decade. However, in similar circumstances, dual competing relationships usually means that if one object does one action, the other object does the opposite action and when that changes the objects adjust. However, in the case of American households, when women start working, men don't *stop* working. In fact, the change of men at home has barely changed

since the women's liberation movement while almost triple the amount of women have entered the workforce since that time (England, 2010).

When women become mothers, society's view of who they are and what they represent changes. This is called a status characteristic - "categorical distinction among people such as a personal attribute (e.g., race, gender) or role (e.g., motherhood, manager), that has attached to it widely held beliefs in the culture that associate greater status worthiness and competence with one category of the distinction than with others". (Corinaldi, 2019, p. 2). Due to this status characteristic, many believe that a woman's first responsibility will be her children - whether that is accurate or not. This is in direct conflict with the view of corporate America that requires employees to be loyal and available at all times (Corinaldi, 2019). Instead of reframing how we view women in their new roles of mothers *and* employees, women have made attempts to match societies views of both.

Mothers are three times more likely than fathers to be responsible for housework and childcare and average out to taking on three or more hours per day of work than their male partners (Krivkovich et al., 2021). If you are a man reading this, you may disagree and the statistics would support you - 70% of men think they split the work evenly amongst themselves and their partners whereas women do agree... but less than 50% of them (Krivkovich et al., 2021). Women are burdened with the responsibility of taking care of the housework and childcare, but not to the detriment of their careers. A good mother is one who is involved and always available to her child by societal standards, even though there is no proof that a working mother has any detrimental effect on a child's development (Waldfogel, 2007). However, this is a "catch-22" as women who

are top workers are seen as inadequate mothers, and vice versa. This is *not* an issue with equality in the workplace - women are receiving equal treatment, but when they bring in their motherhood responsibilities that don't match those of fathers, it brings to light their differences in gender (Corinaldi, 2019).

In the workplace, hours have increased overall since the 1990s from 10% of the workforce working over 50 hours per week to 25% working over 50 hours per week - and there has also been an increase in stress and burnout (Waldfogel, 2007). As women are placed under the pressures of matching expectations of the workplace and at home, they become stressed and overwhelmed. This in turn causes women to fall back into caring for the home, sometimes reducing their roles in the workplace and at other times, leaving the workforce completely (Corinaldi, 2019). Below, Table 1 shows a gradual decrease of women's hours as they have children (Paull, 2008). You will note that men's hours increase at the onset of the first child but remain stagnant with the birth of the second and so forth. Paull (2008) estimates that this is because men feel a sense of responsibility to provide for their children while their wives take care of the family at home. The explanation for women's hours never reaching the "no children peak" after motherhood is because women who leave the workforce to focus on childcare rarely ever make it back to a role of the same level when they do return (Paull. 2008).

Hours Worked by Parental Status

Parental Status	Women	Men
No Children	38.3 hours	42.9 hours
Youngest Child Pre-School Age	25.4 hours	47 hours
Youngest Child School Age	27.9 hours	47.2 hours
After Children	32.5 hours	47 hours

This decrease in time also reduces “face time” in the office which is associated with productivity (Corinaldi, 2019) and a “lessening of capacity” (Corindaldi, 2019, p. 3). We shouldn’t blame men for not stepping up and taking off some of the load from women, though. Many men, particularly younger generations, want to be more involved in housework and childcare. However, when men do take on this role, it bucks up against what society expects of a man and he, too, is held to a standard that wonders if he truly is capable or committed to his career, particularly in the views of older generations (England, 2010). There’s little benefit to men for taking up the mantle to support their partners in the home - they benefit from women exiting the workforce as that increases the gender pay gap in their favor (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). But where does this all stem from?

A study by Davis & Greenstein (2009) found that the more egalitarian a couple acts in the home around tasks and responsibilities, the more likely their son will be egalitarian in his own home. Unfortunately for the men out there, while it may be easier being a parent in the workplace as a male, it’s harder being an example of future responsibilities in the home. Fathers who engage their children in traditionally stereotypical gender roles, such as asking daughters to pick out their suit and tie for the

work day, and showing their sons how to change the car oil, reinforce gender roles within the home that transfer to the child's adult life more so than the mother's impact on gender roles (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Through cohort replacement theory, men show their sons how to behave and interact with their wives in the home (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004). Women do play a part in cohort replacement theory, as their interactions at home do play a part on their sons and daughters, but it's not as firm - many believe this is because women encourage different lives for their daughters and their son's future wives and instill feelings of egalitarianism to them to try and change the pattern of behavior (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Later in the paper, I will address ways to remedy some of these issues within your own household to lessen the variation of gender roles.

The cycle is seemingly never broken as women are forced to do more of the housework and childcare due to the beliefs that society views them as mothers, and will continue that way until men step in to do the work for them and make this change more common. To do this would be going against the grain and potentially make people feel uncomfortable as it differs from how they naturally view the world. Even in my own household - my husband and I both saw our mothers take back seats in their careers to raise their children while our fathers supported the families with their careers. I have seen even prior to having children the two of us fall into line with the gender roles that were shown to us in taking care of a household. I cook dinner just like my mother, I take care of the household chores, do the laundry, purchase the groceries, schedule the veterinarian visits just like she did. My husband watched his mother do the same. Naturally, he does not think of or address these activities on his own as something to help out with, because he rarely saw his father do them. The difference being - we

both are working. So why is the keeping of our home my responsibility (and to his credit, the care of the lawn, his responsibility)? Through the influences of our childhood and how society views our gender roles, women and men fall in line to traditional family roles even if their views do not match.

Women in the Workforce

Understanding women in the workforce as a whole can give greater context to how women navigate the workplace before, during and after having children. In 2020, half of the women make up the workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2022). To that end, one-third of working women are working mothers and it can be assumed that of the two-thirds that are not working mothers are not solely childless - the non-working mother designation does include women with children *over 18* (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2022). It also should be noted, as I have done in the prior section and will do so throughout the literature review, that women tend to be the primary caretakers in all aspects - of the home, of the pets, of their parents, of their children. This would also include elderly parents, and many of the women who are no longer working mothers have experienced working motherhood and also have, will have, or are currently experiencing eldercare, which at many times can have similar impacts on them as having young children did years ago. Some may also argue that while one-third of the workforce is working mothers, that may be a small percentage of the population as many working mothers stay home. According to data from multiple sources such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics as well as the U.S. Department of Labor, 75% of mothers are employed in some capacity whether on contract work, part-time, full-time, or self-employed (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

As noted earlier in the chapter, women have come a long way over the last fifty years in the workforce. As more women have joined the workforce, the concept of the ideal worker has changed (Villablanca et al., 2017). Some of the stereotypes of women - that they are more emotional, caring, and sensitive - have taken form in the eyes of their coworkers (Villablanca et al., 2017). The views of men in the workplace are that they are independent, assertive, decisive and women are unselfish, friendly, and concerned with others (Parks-Stamm, Heilman & Hearn, 2008). Whether you are someone who believes this is a positive or negative perspective due to people expecting genders to fit the stereotypes, overall many can agree that having more empathy in the workplace tends to make a more positive working atmosphere.

While it may not show in their formal promotions or roles, women tend to be the leaders and trendsetters of the workplace - they are more likely to mentor younger employees and be allies to their minority coworkers (Burns et al., 2021). This is doubly important as organizations have seen a need for their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) sponsors to be successful and remain competitive (Burns et al., 2021). Even if this important initiative is one that is not of priority or importance, it should be noted that organizations with high levels of female representation on their executive team tend to perform better than those with fewer women (Krivkovich et al., 2021). With all of these positive contributions from having women in the workforce, you would think it'd be easy or smooth sailing for women, but unfortunately that is not the case.

On average, women are promoted at lower rates than their male counterparts, even with higher education rates (Burns et al., 2021). At times, this even begins before motherhood, making it harder for women to work their way up the proverbial "ladder" to

become managers and executives. If they are lucky enough to be promoted at equal or higher rates than their male counterparts, they tend to stall in momentum once hitting motherhood with either delayed or stagnant promotions (Burns et al., 2021). It should be noted that women of color are impacted more than their white female counterparts - a large reason for the lack of minority executives in many organizations (Burns et al., 2021).

The pandemic has not made the situation for women much better. A McKinsey study found that one in four women are considering downshifting their career entirely due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Krivkovich et al, 2021). That number is greater for women with younger children increasing to one in three for women with young children (Krivkovich et al., 2021). The levels of women reporting burnout has increased in 2021 from 2020 which is at twice the rate of men reporting the same thing (Burns et al., 2021). The reason for these decisions is that women are feeling undervalued, overworked, and having little done to address their concerns - and it's only worse for those women with children (Burns et al., 2021). Women with young children were also reporting lower levels of well-being than men with young children - while the egalitarian split of duties may have happened during off-hours, dealing with children during the working hours presented new challenges, many of which were determined by the women of the house (Krivkovich et al., 2021).

As noted earlier, with working mothers making up one-third of the workforce, there are benefits to their presence in the workplace. Studies have found that working mothers tend to have higher ambition levels than their other female counterparts (Krivkovich et al., 2021). One could argue that this may be because women have less

opportunity within their workplace, impacting their higher levels of ambition and that should not be discredited, but a desire to work and grow in an organization should not be discredited. Women with children also make up a large percentage of the part-time employment workforce which at times is incredibly valuable as there are many important roles that are difficult to roll into a full-time position - and many qualified people who turn them away for more money or benefits (Cabrera, 2009). That said, many women who see part-time work as viable at the time, usually end up quitting the workforce entirely as they do not feel their work is valuable enough to warrant the few hours away from their family for the little pay (Cabrera, 2009). Women *want* to stay in the workforce and see leaving the workforce entirely as “career suicide” due to the difficulty in workforce reentry (Cabrera, 2009). To ensure women see part-time work as viable and keep them in the workforce, organizations should focus on making part-time work meaningful and not a filler position that is seen as an afterthought (Cabrera, 2009), to be discussed further later in the chapter.

Another area to note in discussing women in the workforce is that of STEM / male-dominated industries. Women in these industries feel even greater pressure and hostile work environments that some have noted over 50% of women quitting their careers in the industry prior to retirement (Schieder & Gould, 2016). If that statistic isn't hard enough to swallow, it should be noted that over 60% of women in these fields (STEM) has reported sexual harassment in the industry (Schieder & Gould, 2016). Laura Brown (2010) notes in her research on women's career advancement that family-friendly and women focused policies are imperative in supporting women in the workforce. Without this support, women are likely to leave the workforce and go where

they feel they are more needed and appreciated - the home. By losing one employee, an organization can lose between 1.5 to 2 times that employee's salary in order to replace them (McFeely & Wingert, 2019). However, it's difficult to retain employees when governmental policies provide no incentive or relief.

Governmental Regulations and Organizational Policies

The United States currently does not provide any form of guaranteed paid parental leave (Cabrera, 2009). There are only three other countries that similarly do not mandate a minimum period of paid parental leave - Lesotho, Papua New Guinea and Swaziland (Cabrera, 2009). When evaluating women in the workplace and the barriers they face, it only proves more daunting or maybe to some, uncoincidental, that without laws protecting working women's job and financial security there could seem to be no option but to leave a hostile workforce (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). Similar nations to the United States, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, have laws requiring mandatory maternity leave and job security ranging between 14 and 52 weeks with the minimum 75-100% of wage replacements (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). Understanding the regulations currently in place and the comparisons throughout the world help understand how organizations have gone about enacting policies within their own workplace.

As highlighted earlier in the chapter, the only regulation that supports some form of maternity leave is the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) passed in 1993 (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). Prior to the creation of the act, the governmental bodies in the United State had no policies on the books addressing maternal leave until the 1940s, when some states began offering temporary disability insurance that would replace wages lost from pregnancy-related absences (Suk, 2010). Some states did not classify

pregnancy as a disability until 1974 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Geduldig v. Aiello* that California was lawful in omitting pregnancy from the Equal Protection Clause, ruling it wasn't exclusionary based on gender but rather based on situation (Suk, 2010). Another case came before the Supreme Court two years later and resulted in a similar ruling (Suk, 2010). Due to these rulings, Congress felt the need to step in and passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) of 1978, which amended Title VII by codifying that discrimination on the basis of sex also included discrimination against pregnancy. This was a major victory at the time; the change meant one could not be discriminated against on the basis of pregnancy status and also meant that some women would qualify for wage replacement under their organization's disability insurance plan (Suk, 2010). The victory was a narrow one, however, as women could still lose their job if they had to take maternity leave and were not required to receive their wages if their organization didn't have a disability insurance plan (Suk, 2010).

After these regulations and rulings, it may seem like a breath of fresh air when the United States enacted FMLA, noting the aim of the act is to "promote the goal of equal employment opportunity for women and for men" (Mayrhofer et al., 2006, p. 2) and that "the primary responsibility for family caretaking often falls on women, and such responsibility affects the working lives of women more than it affects the working lives of men" (Mayrhofer et al., 2006, p. 2). Because of this, the law allows for employees who not only birth a child but also adopt, need to care for a family member, or take care of their own health issue to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave and are entitled to return to the same job or one equivalent in pay and benefits after the leave period is complete, a major improvement from the policies in place prior (Gangl and Ziefle, 2009). What the act

does not account for is the difference between someone needing the leave for medical purposes (childbirth or their own illness) and need leave to support someone through a medical event (adoption, paternity leave, or caregiving of a family member) (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). It should also be noted that this does not apply across the working economy of the United States - to qualify, you must work for an organization with more than 50 employees and have worked 1,760 hours for the organization you are taking the leave from in the previous year (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014).

Organizations have taken ownership since then to provide maternity leave policies on behalf of their female employees for a variety of reasons. First, under certain group insurance plans, organizations are required to honor maternity leave as part of those plans (Mayrhofer et al., 2006). Another reason is to care for women's health and not be held responsible for requiring a woman back to work before she is able (Waldfoegel, 2007). As women entered the workforce in droves after the women's liberation movement, organizations were finding that some of their top employees were leaving completely because they could not afford or were not supported after having their children (Suk, 2010). Leave policies became a retention and acquisition tactic for organizations, and soon other organizations caught on in order to compete in the market. But while a welcome development, it does not mean that maternity leave became a universal policy that organizations implemented internally throughout the nation. On average, American organizations offer the shortest amount of time for maternity leave in the world (Cabrera, 2009). The average paid maternity leave offered by organizations in the United States is 3.3 weeks, with only 31% of that offering some form of wage replacement (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). Some additional form of maternity leave beyond what is offered

with FMLA is only offered to around 40% of working women - and the women who do have these benefits tend to be non-Black or Hispanic women who are privately insured and earn higher wages, enabling them to afford time off (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2014). Even with the expansion of organizational leave policies and FMLA being offered, many women still do not end up taking the full amount of time allotted. A variety of causes to why this is the case have been researched.

For those who only have FMLA or unpaid leave available, a large reason for not taking advantage of the regulation or offered policies is the inability to afford taking that amount of time off with no wage replacement (Suk, 2010). While some may highlight that FMLA would give parents a combined amount of twenty-four weeks of parental care for a child, research has found that 30,000 new parents in an 18-month period did not take advantage of this time off as they were unable to live off of one salary (Suk, 2010). Another study by Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2014) highlighted that more than half of women do not take as long of a maternity leave as they would like, and of these women, over 80% highlight that the main reason for the return is due to financial constraints. Due to the inability to fully take time off and live off of one salary, and the need to support and care for children, many women tend to take roles with shorter working hours or flexible schedules to accommodate the needs of their family, even if that's not what they truly want. This action has been highlighted as the largest cause of the gender wage gap (Glass, 2004; Glauber, 2007a; Shieder and Gould, 2010). While it is technically illegal under FMLA to decrease a woman's pay due to her use of the policy, some women have found that returning to work after an extended time off leads to less desirable positions and an unsupportive organizational culture (Cabrera, 2009).

Where is the hesitation with using and implementing an organizational or standing maternity leave coming from? Researchers Glass (2004) and Suk (2010) both pose that combination of maternity leave with sick leave in both the FMLA regulation and some organizational policies. Organizations have found that usage of FMLA tends to be costly, highly administrative, and unpredictable. Suk (2010) argues that this is valid when accounting for those who are utilizing the act to take care of family or for their own medical needs not related to pregnancy - but when it's maternity related, these issues are not as prevalent. From an administrative and cost standpoint, maternity leave is easy to classify and document and is also predictable since employers usually have at minimum, thirty days notice prior to the leave. Some organizations have felt "burned" by users of the policy who have "abused" it, such as inventing situations to take the leave without proof or exhausting all options to not have to return to work. When a woman has a baby, Suk (2010) notes, it's not something that's hard to prove, as there is another life documented to prove the reason for the leave. Because of the issues with FMLA, organizations tend to not promote changes or amendments to the act to better suit the variables for which a person may need to take time off of work (Glass, 2004; Suk, 2010). The European Union has noted this issue and taken steps to remedy it by separating long term sick leave from maternity leave as they are utilized for different reasons (Suk, 2010), a decision that the United States has yet to make, which contributes to bias (McIntosh et al., 2012).

Even beyond FMLA, there are negative effects women find with taking full advantage of their organization's maternity leave policy. Due to the disruption of maternity leave to the flow of work or other forms of bias, highlighted in detail later in

the chapter, employers tend to favor those who return sooner than required, showing eagerness to get back to work, or those who don't request reduced work hours or flexible schedules, as it shows loyalty and commitment to the organization (Glass, 2004). In studies of wage trajectory around policy use, women who took advantage of maternity leave and flexible schedule policies after childbearing were negatively impacted with more wage stagnation than men or women who did not take advantage of these policies (Glass, 2004; Villablanca et al., 2017). Not to mention, due to the structure of medical care in the United States, many organizations already are footing a hefty bill with private insurance when the woman gives birth (McIntosh et al., 2012). When deciding how to navigate the policies on their own accord, women either pivot their actions based on their own experiences, or adjust based on those they notice of their fellow coworkers. While policies and regulations have been created with good intentions in mind, they have not necessarily helped much in the support of female coworkers.

Some researchers have noted that one of the easiest ways to remove stigma around work-life policies is to have more use of the policies, particularly by men (Cabrera, 2009). Organizations and nations alike have started pushing the envelope on policies and regulations by enacting paternity leave. Ninety countries currently offer paid paternity leave and 40% of organizations provide additional leave beyond FMLA (Krivkovich et al., 2021). However, less than half of these eligible fathers take the full benefit offered by their government or organization (Krivkovich et al., 2021). This can have both positive and negative consequences - positively, organizations may find that with their policies and the regulations not fully utilized, they won't be out of time and money that they may have been expecting and still have a happy and satisfied employee -

win-win. The negative consequence, however, is it makes organizations negatively impact those who take, and may need, the full time off.

Anecdotally, my own firm gave an equal amount of time off to male employees as they did to the women actually having a child. While great that they strived for equality and recognized the important role of a father in the early stages of life, men were finding they didn't need the full time off but women did due to the physical recovery necessary. This could be perceived as women taking advantage of the leave policy, indicating they aren't team players when that's not necessarily the case, whereas men take what they need and come back as soon as possible, showing more loyalty. The policy was created with good intentions, but also created an environment for bias. When participation in these programs is normalized, it helps to equalize the playing field for all who use them (Krivkovich et al., 2021). A McKinsey study conducted in partnership with McGill University found that men who took paternity leave were happy they did so, and there was very little regret for taking advantage of the full benefit (Krivkovich et al., 2021).

Organizations that feel maternity leave and other benefits that support women at home are only a loss leader may be interested in noting the positive attributes that have been found with maternity leave regulations and policies. A variety of positive findings have been found related to longer periods of parental leave for both women and children including "lower maternal depression; lower infant mortality; fewer low birth-weight babies; and higher rate of breastfeeding, preventative health care and immunization" (Waldfogel, 2007, p. 263). Similar findings were highlighted in the study by Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2014). In the same study by Waldfogel on children's cognitive

development in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, children with mothers who took full-time employment the first year of their child's life were more likely to have children with cognitive development or behavioral problems than mothers who did not (2007). Another study found that increasing maternity leave from six weeks to three months decreases postpartum depression symptoms by 15% (Cabrera, 2009) which could be considered preventative care. Overall, women who are able to take adequate time off to heal after childbirth and take care of their families are more likely to return to work in their previous capacity, tend to be healthier, costing less money on insurance plans, and are more willing and able to focus on their work (Burns et al., 2021).

No matter the level of support currently being offered, women are finding the balance of work and home to be more difficult (Brown, 2010). While the pandemic has proven, as noted earlier in the chapter, to be very difficult for workers - particularly women and those with children - the pandemic has brought more organizations to find ways to support their female employees including adding mental-health benefits and offering more paid leave to support sick family members (Burns et al., 2021). The continuation of these benefits beyond the pandemic can be utilized by more than just women, but those who are juggling the balance of work and home - highlighting the opportunity to support your life outside of work, particularly beyond maternity leave, can start to move the needle in childcare and housework to a universal role because it is supported in the workplace for all.

Maternal Wall Bias and The Family Pay Gap

As discussed earlier in the chapter, women have been spending the last fifty years increasing their presence in the workforce due to increases in supportive government

policies, birth control options such as the birth control pill, and more egalitarian views on gender roles amongst younger generations. However, these policies have since stalled over the last twenty-five years and gender bias related lawsuits are more frequent than any other bias under Title VII (Cornaldi, 2019; Suk, 2010). A deeper dive into the types of gender bias lawsuits show that many revolve around discrimination around mothers in the workplace, and the stigmas attached to them. In the next section, I will discuss perceptions around women in the workplace and how they manifest into forms of bias that at best make women feel uncomfortable in their roles and at worst create monetary and earning potential impact.

Forty-five percent of working mothers have noted that children have had a negative impact on their career (Brown, 2010). Research has shown that bias against women as mothers is a heavily present issue in many organizations even now as society has taken a focused look on creating a more equitable workplace (Cornaldi, 2019; Krivkovich et al., 2021; McIntosh et al., 2012; Paull, 2008; Schieder & Gould, 2016). Most commonly, maternal wall bias is most present once a woman becomes a mother (Williams & Bronstein, 2008), but at times it can begin sooner than that such as pregnancy, marriage, or even when a woman announces her engagement to marry (Williams, 2000). This bias is observed by women in the workforce prior to these milestones occurring. In a recent McKinsey report, one survey respondent noted that “women with children always have some stigma attached to them in the workplace. I never want that stigma to be attached to me and my work...” (Krivkovich et al., 2021, n.p.). Navigating motherhood is something that women well know prior to embarking on

the journey themselves and start making plans to support themselves if and when that time comes.

In research on the negative perceptions of full-time women in the workplace, Corinaldi (2019) found that there were a variety of judgments placed on working mothers that lead to unfair standards and requirements for women to meet in order to succeed in their careers. One such standard starts at the beginning of the hiring process - the resume review and interview process. In a study of resume bias selection, researchers placed a variety of similar resumes in front of hiring panels for review. When controlling for women with children, resumes were shared highlighting the same education, work experience, and skills but changing volunteer associations to highlight parenthood on some and absence of parenthood on others. The resumes that used the phrase “member of the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] “ were 79% less likely to be recommended for hire (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). The resumes that were passed along were evaluated for job offers and in the cases of the motherhood acknowledgment, offered \$11,000 less for the role than those same resumes without mention of motherhood for the same position (Williams & Bronstein, 2008).

In a study conducted by Bernard & Correll (2010) on how motherhood impacts hiring decisions, there were two videos showing certain interactions between a team of candidates for hire. In one video, a candidate is played by a visibly pregnant woman and in another, the same candidate is played by a non-pregnant woman. After watching the video, participants are asked to evaluate the candidates and recommend for hire. They not only picked the non-pregnant version of the candidate more times than the pregnant version, but used terms like “selfish, cold, or devious” when describing the pregnant

candidate even though the script for that character was exactly the same in both videos and played by the same actress (Benard & Correll, 2010). The same study compared results with a similar study evaluating resumes for attorneys and found correlations between this piece and the video (Bernard & Correll, 2010).

Once women are employed, they find a variety of ways they are discriminated against due to their role as a mother. When women share that they are pregnant or have children, it is common for negative perceptions about their expected work output to suddenly come to light (McIntosh et al., 2012). Many see women with children as “lower-status actors” which means they are not expected to be high-performers and thus have to work twice as hard to get the same recognition as their counterparts who do not have children (Corinaldi, 2019). Women sometimes leave the workforce completely when they feel they cannot meet the expectations of either society, the workplace, or both by juggling a career and a family (McIntosh et al., 2012). This does not absolve them from maternal wall bias discrimination. Even as women decide to leave the workforce and return at full working capacity, they are still paid less than those who remained in the workforce due to their break in career (Joshi, 2002). Sometimes this is not the desired option - to leave your career to take care of your children - but sometimes the cost of childcare and the lack of family support require a parent to stay home (Budig & Hodges, 2010).

In a similar study to that on the resumes, capabilities that were noted to have a difference based on motherhood versus non-motherhood or fatherhood included capability metrics on work commitment, competency, promotability, and recommendation for hire (Budig & Hodges, 2010). These raters had less tolerance for

tardiness when knowing a person was a mother and also raised employment-related test score requirements when evaluating women known to be mothers (Budig & Hodges, 2010). Many organizations value facetime and responsiveness - for example, the people who put in more hours in the office, the people who respond quickly to emails, the people who are willing to go the extra mile in order to succeed (England et al., 2016). These values are difficult to meet when children enter the picture, regardless of the work or commitment level, and many times men exemplify these values (Brown, 2010). Unfortunately, these values do not highlight any form of work output or quality, but metrics that are socially seen to represent commitment and loyalty.

These discriminations are not brought to awareness solely by researchers and studies in how motherhood impacts women in the workplace. Women have highlighted that they are aware of these inequities whether they have felt them themselves or have watched them placed on their female coworkers and note that they feel they have to work twice as hard to get the same recognition as their peers (McIntosh et al., 2012). Some have noted that they did not feel discriminated against or unfair standards being held against them until they became mothers, noting that they felt the standards changed for their performance after motherhood and their role seemed primarily as a mother first and an employee second (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). At times they are viewed as less competent and their commitment or work output should be expected to be mediocre at best because they won't be able to focus on tasks once they become mothers (McIntosh et al., 2012). This manifests in lower performance reviews and salary increases directly after taking maternity leave or other absences around childcare (Brown, 2010). While some may say "of course, people should not receive salary increases when they haven't

done work,” the issue is that the negative impact is based on the leave, not the work done prior to or after the leave. For example, a woman who receives an annual review and takes maternity leave between the prior review and the current review should be measured on the months in the office, not the year in total - the absence to have the child is seen as a “vacation” or “voluntary break” from doing work, even though they were doing positive work prior and post leave (Brown, 2010).

Blatant discrimination around pregnancy in the workplace is illegal, also known as FRD (Family Responsibilities Discrimination) (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). As of 2008, the largest and most visible form of discrimination in the workplace was FRD - something that many forget is a form of discrimination (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). In the case of *Back v. Hastings on Hudson Union Free School District*, an employee sued the school she worked for because she did not receive tenure due to the presumption that she would not succeed as a mother of young children and won the lawsuit (Corinaldi, 2019). In this case, she won because the reason for her lack of promotion was directly related to an assumption around her childcare responsibilities - the potential, not the documented actual output.

Some of the discrimination comes from well intentioned coworkers such as benevolent sexism where one employee gives another grace around parenting, but to the detriment of their career, as a gift or favor, without request (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). Or role incongruity where people highlight the positive attributes of the employee as a mother but denote that those reasons are why they are not a good employee and better suited for full time motherhood than a career (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). Observations have shown cases of attribution and recall bias (Williams &

Bronstein, 2008) where people assume the reason, or attribute the reason, for an action is due to the responsibilities of motherhood while they forget to recollect, or recall, the times someone who is not a mother had the same actions. While some organizations have created a limiting factor to control for bias with starting salaries at the same base rate for all employees regardless of experience or negotiation, monetary amounts are still one of the largest indicators of gender bias around motherhood.

The gender pay gap is a highly publicized datapoint around discrimination in the workplace. While some reports may vary on the actual amount women are paid less than their male counterparts, women are paid between 79 cents (Schieder & Gould, 2016) and 83 cents (Yellen, 2020) for every dollar paid to men. It should be noted that these amounts are not controlled for experience level or part-time / contract work, but is an overall average of female salaries in the United States versus male salaries (Barroso & Brown, 2021). However, even when controlled for experience and part-time work (as in comparing “apples to apples” and removing skewing factors like hours worked), Harvard economist Claudia Goldin (2014) found that 32% of the gender pay gap would be closed and in fact, some researchers (Brown, 2010; Bui & Miller, 2018; Goldin, 2014; Paull, 2008) see signs that women are equally or more well-paid than men when controlling for experience, education, and hours worked when evaluating non-mothers. These researchers and the “naysayers” of the gender pay gap have found one area where it still persists - women with children versus men or women without children (Barroso & Brown, 2021).

Some refer to this difference in pay as the “family pay gap” (Waldfogel, 1998) or the “per-child wage penalty” (Corinaldi, 2019). In Michelle Corinaldi’s (2019)

sociological study on the impact of children on women's workplace performance, she found that each child born to a woman created a 5% wage decrease (p. 2). This is a more recent study, which matches the gap narrowing over recent years, however other studies do give a range of between 5%-18% wage decrease per child, which can be even more dire (Anderson et al., 2002; England et al., 2016; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009; Waldfogel, 1998). Diving deeper into the research, it should be noted that the discrepancy between the wages does have to do with decreases in hours, higher utilization of flexible work solutions, or other factors that support working parenthood, but the 5% rate still seems to be true regardless of hours worked or use of these flexible policies. A large reason for this gap is that as we have focused on promoting equality between men and women in governmental policies, the impact of parenthood has not been part of the conversation (McIntosh et al., 2012).

The number of children is an important factor to consider as this has a large impact on women's earnings, partially due to their ability to be in the office and support their family. A study of work hours for women and men with and without children (Paull, 2008) found some intriguing findings that support the differentiation in gender when becoming a parent. As highlighted in Table 1 earlier in the chapter, women and men without children have little differentiation in their work hours which matches the lack in discrepancy with their wages (Paull, 2008). With the birth of the first child, women's hours decrease approximately 15% while men's hours increase about the same amount, again matching the wage discrepancy findings - particularly using a similar tactic of average hours and average wages without controls on experience (Paull, 2008). With the birth of another child, women's hours continue to decrease, as does their

pay, but men's hours remain stagnant (Paull, 2008). One would expect based on the trends, that men's wages would also remain stagnant with their hours but they actually *increase* per child, even with no increase in hourly work (Paull, 2008).

Overall, the general trend is that mothers' hours decrease with each child until the youngest child is in full-time school (whether pre-school, kindergarten, or first grade). At the same time, fathers' hours tend to increase at the onset of the first child but do not change with any additional children (Paull, 2008). The assumption is that while women are required to be at home more for childcare during the younger years, men "make up" for the difference in hours when the first child is born but find no need to do so after that initial adjustment. A variety of research (Brown, 2010; McIntosh et al., 2012; Paull, 2008) find that men receive no penalty for having children - and most infuriating at times receive *increases* to their pay due to the need to "provide for their family" (Brown, 2010, p. 481). When polling working mothers whose hours compare to those of working fathers, women note that they struggle to balance the needs of work and home while men do not feel as much pressure or need to do so (Brown, 2010).

Societal perceptions of home life, as discussed earlier in the chapter, have not transferred to match the lifestyle of the working mother. Women are still expected to do the same tasks that they were expected to do when they stayed at home over 50 years ago, but they are to do that in addition to the work and expectations placed on their male counterparts (Schieder & Gould, 2016). The different ways people structure their families has evolved with only 17 percent of families saying they are structured in the same manner as that of the 1950s norms (Brown, 2010). However, we still tend to view fathers as "babysitting their children " when the mother is not present or mothers as the

ones who are to be called when there's a problem at school (Williams, 2000). Women are still seen in this traditional role, which has been termed the "second shift" (Brown, 2010) where women who hold careers continue to do the work of those women who stay home with their children. This is an overwhelming thought when you consider that 83% of households have women earning comparable amounts if not more to their husbands (Brown, 2010). Sixty-eight percent of women have also stated that becoming a mother has hurt their career, so women are not necessarily *enjoying* this dual role in their lives (Brown, 2010).

The acknowledgment of differing gender roles happens much earlier than one may realize, with a critical study in gender role perceptions finding it begins as early as third grade in the United States (roughly the age of eight). In a study of subject aptitude amongst girls and boys in various stages of schooling, Herbert and Stipek (2005) asked parents, teachers, and children to rate their expectations of aptitude on math and literacy for both boys and girls. Prior to third grade, the ratings were relatively accurate to test results. However, around third grade, while teachers could accurately estimate the aptitude of girls and boys in both subjects with their test results, parents tended to rate girls and boys accurately in literacy but rated girls lower than their true aptitude and boys higher in math. What's even more telling, is that boys were able to rate their aptitude relatively accurately, but girls *also* rated their math skill expectations lower than the reality. By the time of fifth grade, girls start rating themselves lower than boys in both math and literacy, as do their parents, even though they continuously outperform boys through grade school in both subject areas (Herbert & Stipek, 2005).

The researchers posited that the reason for these discrepancies match to stereotypical gender norms that women are better at reading and writing while men are better at math and science. These cultural perceptions are then expectations of gender roles when raising children and either consciously or subconsciously presented to each gender. A blatant example could be as striking as “don’t worry, you aren’t expected to do as well in math, boys tend to be better at math than girls” (Herbert & Stipek, 2005, p. 289) to something less subtle when fathers take care of the finances and mothers read the bedtime stories (Herbert & Stipek, 2005). This study highlights the earliest stages that women perceive themselves under the stereotypes of gender which ultimately leads to perceptions around women’s roles as they age.

These perceptions continue as women choose their area of study when entering post-secondary education, which in turn tends to steer where women choose a career. I say this with the caveat that your college major does not always denote what work you will continue to do for the rest of your life, however, it is a large indicator of career aspirations. Women look towards their career for a variety of reasons, many of which are not a direct impact of wanting a child, but are influenced by their perceptions of women’s capabilities - what they think of themselves, the guidance they receive from mentors, experiences shown through women and their family, and overall perceived norms (Schieder & Gould, 2016).

Schieder & Gould (2016) highlight that people point to voluntary decisions made by women as part of the reason for the gender wage gap, as women choose work that pays less and is more family friendly. The researchers note that these decisions are not always made because there is a desire to make less but that higher paying careers tend to

require difficult hours or responsibilities from women that put child rearing in jeopardy and require women to make a decision, prior to having a child or even a spouse, on what's more important to her - a career or a family. Motherhood is a direct correlation in the jobs women "can take, prefer, or are offered" (McIntosh et al., 2012, p. 358). As highlighted earlier in the chapter - jobs that are dominated by women have decreased in pay as opposed to those preferred by men, diminishing the work that is done by women and disincentivizing men to take the pay cut (England, 2010; Levanon et al., 2009).

As a reminder, 37 percent of women have a college degree as opposed to 32.5 percent of men, so having career aspirations is not limited to those who do not want a family (Schieder & Gould, 2016). Yet there are a variety of studied factors as to why women choose less-paying female-dominated careers. One study has looked at the impact of sexism in the technology industry that deters women from wanting to join the field (Schieder & Gould, 2016). Another study found that as jobs increase in starting wages, so do the levels of hours worked and job commitment that do not accommodate female workers with children as well as lower paying jobs (Goldin, 2014). It can be surmised that, while it makes logical sense that less hours receive less pay, men are not making career decisions based off of the time they may need for child and house care. If men aren't incentivized to take the lower paying jobs, why would they? If they aren't required to do any of the child care or home care, why would they consider it?

The wage gap increases as women's wage distribution increases with women at the top 95th percentile suffering the largest gender pay discrepancy (Anderson et al., 2002; Schieder & Gould, 2016). In a study of working mothers with MBAs, Claudia Goldin (2014) noted the increase in leaving the workforce completely when having

children, as opposed to women with bachelor's degrees either remaining full-time in the workforce or decreasing their work hours. Goldin finds that a large reason for women with postgraduate degrees leaving the workforce completely is due to the fact that they tend to work in more demanding roles such as consulting, law, medicine, etc. which require more time worked and less flexible work policies (Goldin, 2014). While there is the benefit that many of these women also marry high-earning men and can afford leaving the workforce, the ability to decrease their responsibilities like other women is less feasible and thus they are required to leave the workforce completely (Goldin, 2014).

There are varying regression analysis studies including fixed-effects regressions, ordinary least-squares models, and first-differencing approaches (Budig & Hodges, 2010) about who amongst women suffer most with the wage gap. Anderson et. al (2002) notes that white women have a greater overall earning variance on average than women of color and due to this, they tend to be impacted more by the family wage gap as their earning potential increases. Another fixed effect model highlights married white and Latino women having an increase in earnings with the birth of a child, but gender inequality is stronger in white marriages than Black or Latino marriages (Glauber, 2007a). Williams & Bronstein (2008) had different findings, where Latina women received no penalty based on marital status or number of children, Black women were only penalized once they had two or more children regardless of marital status, and white women were penalized when they were married with one child. Budig & Hodges (2010) viewed the age of childbearing as most important to the gap, noting that the significant penalty was for mothers who had their first child prior to the age of 28 and smallest for college-age educated women with their first child past the age of 30 (Bui & Miller, 2018;

Budig & Hodges, 2010). It should be noted that many women have shared in studies the reason for deferring childbearing to later in life was due to the need to obtain a place in their career where they were satisfied with their roles and salaries that they could afford to take a break from promotions and increases in salary (Brown, 2010). England (2010) also highlights that while those with higher earning potential tend to have more paid options available to them, they are also more likely to not have family support due to having children later in life and therefore older parents or tend to move further from their families due to earning opportunities and are therefore required to sometimes step away from their careers. One study that compared wage gaps in different countries in relation to their maternity and family leave policies highlighted Germany as having some of the worst discrimination amongst mothers in wages (Gangl & Ziefle, 2009) recognizing that regardless of a universal leave policy, women are still impacted by societal views around childbearing. In all cases, regardless of race, nation, and age, all researchers unanimously agreed that there was more detriment to women than men, particularly when having a child (Anderson et al., 2002; Budig & Hodges, 2010; Bui & Miller, 2018; England et al., 2016; Glauber, 2007a; Schieder & Gould, 2016).

Even though progress has been made through the generations to bring more and more women into the workforce, it is clear that there are societal and organizational changes that need to be instituted in order to make a more equitable workforce when it comes to working parenthood (Corinaldi, 2019). While research has shown that men in younger generations have started to “step up to the plate” in responsibilities at home (Williams & Bronstein, 2008) there has been little to no progress in policies to support

the current or affirmational lifestyle of the parental workers since the passage of FMLA (Williams, 2008).

How to Move Forward

After discussing all of this, it may seem like a daunting task to determine how organizations and women can move forward with such a multi-layered problem that often is beyond an organization's culture. Fortunately, this issue is gaining more light as organizations make efforts to address bias and discrimination in the workplace over the last few years (Krivkovich et al., 2021). However, with a multi-layered problem, there is a need for a multi-layered solution - organizations should make efforts to acknowledge maternal wall bias and support this group of employees, but it can be hard to offer appropriate benefits without the support of government legislation. Government legislation is only effective if it truly addresses the issue it's meant to solve. Legislation and policy are only as effective as the implementation and usage within an organization. Some researchers have found possible solutions that paired together, could create positive change.

When it comes to the Family and Medical Leave Act, an extension of current policy or a new policy all together could support the call to action in supporting mothers, particularly in a separate format from those who require time off in other circumstances. These edits include paid maternity leave, adding familial leave policies, and creating access to universal childcare services (Brown, 2010; Bui & Miller, 2008). Paid maternity leave will allow women to take time off when they may not be able to afford taking unpaid time off to care for their new family and their bodies after childbirth. It also removes the burden on organizations to offer pay to their employees

when they are not working and may need to pay additional money to find support while the employee is out. Removing this burden makes taking maternity leave less stressful on organizations and therefore provides less opportunity to discriminate (Brown, 2010).

By adopting policies that encourage and support other members beyond the birth mother to take time off makes the leave more universal, eliminating bias for a certain group of people as it's a more common leave to take across the board with similar additional benefits like that of the paid maternity leave (Krivkovich et al., 2021). By offering universal childcare, women will be able to stay in the workforce, allowing them to eliminate the family pay gap with no gaps or breaks in employment and reducing the need to go part time (Waldfogel, 1998). By adding these government benefits, organizations will have the baseline support they need to care for their employees without detriment to their organization's profitability.

Elizabeth Cabrera (2009) highlighted five main ways organizations can retain female talent. First, she notes that organizations need to reframe how they view the concept of work and what quality work looks like. As discussed earlier in the chapter, workplaces are designed around ideals that are hard to match for women with young children, including no time off, working long hours and putting in facetime (Burns et al., 2021; Williams & Bronstein, 2008). During the Covid-19 pandemic, organizations learned that many people are able to do their work in a more flexible environment (Krivkovich et al., 2021). In a McKinsey study, only eight percent of women said they would like to go back to work in the pre-pandemic format (Krivkovich et al., 2021). Using this positive experience during a negative time as an experiment in changing structure, organizations should continue these flexible work policies to support

those with more child care responsibilities (Goldin, 2014; Waldfogel, 1998). An important way to implement this change is by showing use of flexible work hours from management all the way down (Villablanca et al., 2017). By utilizing flexible work policies across the organization, employees are able to reframe their views on what good work looks like and remove the stigma around women who need to step away for childcare during the traditional working hours.

The next change, focuses around caregiving support in general, from maternity, childcare, to elder care (Cabrera, 2009). People with these responsibilities still may need to take an official decrease or downgrade from their careers that the flexible policies will not accommodate. Employees who make decisions like going part-time should not be treated as “second-class citizens” in their roles. Many times employees who go part-time end up leaving their roles overall due to the lack of acknowledgement and consideration to their contributions (Krivkovich et al., 2021). Some organizations, like Ernst & Young, have made efforts to remove the stigma around part-time work by allowing employees to still be eligible for promotion, something many organizations overlook (Cabrera, 2009). This signals to the organization and the employee that it doesn’t matter the number of hours worked but the contributions you make within the time you work as denoted by your own role (Cabrera, 2009). Even without promotions, women are able to make lateral moves within their organizations to better accommodate their personal lives as long as they are able to control their pace, workload, location / schedule, and role (Cabrera, 2009). Cabrera (2009) posits that if they feel comfortable in those four dimensions, they will feel valued and stay in their roles and organizations.

At times, even flexible work policies and accommodating childcare are not enough in supporting working mothers. These women who find a need to leave the workforce entirely may at some point want to return to their organizations or their former roles, but find that reentering the workforce where they left it is near impossible. As discussed earlier in the chapter, this is a large reason towards the gender pay gap. By adding “reentry programs” or “returnships” to an organization, women can spend the few months they need for acclimation back into the workforce and then return to their prior role or level and use the knowledge and experience they developed before leaving (Cabrera, 2009). This also removes the stigma or fear from leaving the organization or workforce completely because they know they have a role for when they are able to return (Krivkovich et al., 2021). You can keep in contact with these employees as well by creating alumni networks or adding them to special project contract work so they stay involved during this time and still bring benefit from the years of investment the organization put into the employee (Cabrera, 2009; Krivkovich et al., 2021). This also helps hiring managers and those reviewing resumes for roles know their organization will support any gaps in employment due to the pause in work for top candidates who would otherwise be eliminated due to their break for caretaking (Krivkovich et al., 2021).

These policies are incredibly helpful, but can only be successful with a positive culture around working mothers (Cabrera, 2009). The first step in changing a culture is to address the issues head on and provide a means by which employees can explore their biases to understand, identify, and address bias from their day-to-day work and with their coworkers (Krivkovich et al., 2021). By changing the performance standards in which employees are measured, organizations can help change their culture where they promote

capabilities, skills, and behaviors that are not impacted by childcare and decrease bias (Krivkovich et al., 2021). Additional benefits convey to mothers that their needs are important to be met for success in the workplace and to others that motherhood is embraced and should not be seen as a limitation to work. These can include a lactation room for nursing mothers, backup childcare services for when childcare falls through, support groups and seminars to address issues in child rearing, and summer camps for children or summer hours to accommodate for the long summer school break (Cabrera, 2009).

By offering these benefits, organizations are likely to increase representation of women and mothers in positions of leadership which increases organizational success (Brown, 2010). Having working mothers in your organization provides positive skills like negotiating and showing empathy (Cabrera, 2009) and support for diverse workplaces (Burns et al., 2021). They will also increase engagement not only with working mothers, but overall throughout the organization (Schieder & Gould, 2016). Organizations will also increase overall morale and a keen sense of “wanting to contribute” leading to higher retention rates (Krivkovich et al., 2021). There are many ways organizations can support working mothers but how many of them are actually being done? As we continue to push forward on eliminating discrimination from our organizations, why are gender discrimination lawsuits on the rise (Williams & Bronstein, 2008)? By conducting research amongst eight women in the midst of childbearing and weighing the decisions around how to navigate motherhood and their careers, I will identify what types of bias and hurdles still remain in the workplace as well as areas for

improvement and how organizations can support and change their cultures to be more inclusive and supportive to their whole workforce.

Conclusion

Women have come a long way since the 1950s. Due to advances in technology, such as the birth control pill, and sentiments following the Vietnam War, women advocated for legislation to support their participation in the workforce. As women started receiving more and more degrees and matching men in the workforce, the need for regulation around maternity leave was necessary to support the female workforce. The addition of the Family Medical Leave Act in 1993 provided some semblance of governmental support around childbirth, but was tied to a variety of other reasons to take a pause from work, and did not provide any payment for the time taken. Since then, little has been done in legislation to support working mothers.

Society hasn't helped much more. Since the 1950s, little change has been made in familial structure. While families with a mother, father, and children are no longer considered the norm, the concept of the father as the breadwinner and provider to the family and the mother as the one to take care of the house and children has made little moves since that time. Due to this change, even with the acceptance of women in the workplace, many still perceive these roles and demand women to be all things - *mother, chef, caretaker, and top employee*. And due to these perceptions, the pressures and lack of acknowledgement that women may not be all these things, makes women tend to fall in line with the past beliefs, as do their husbands. Many times, it's because it is what they knew growing up. Other times, it's just because it's simply easier to do.

Women make up half of the workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) yet one in three are considering leaving the workforce (Krivkovich et al., 2021). If between ten to fifteen percent of your workforce was considering leaving, you would think that organizations would be interested in why and how to keep them. Women lead the charge in creating more diverse organizations and providing allyship to their coworkers (Burns et al., 2021). Their presence in leadership positions helps organizations succeed more than those with fewer women in leadership positions. They tend to be more educated, more ambitious and better managers. These qualities and benefits do not change based on parental status. Yet women are reporting higher levels of gender discrimination around motherhood than ever before when filing Title VII lawsuits. Why is this?

Maternal wall bias is “when colleagues view mothers—or pregnant women—as less competent and less committed to their jobs” (Williams, 2000, p. 28) and it is all too common in the workplace. Even after the Covid-19 pandemic, organizations continue to reward success around the number of hours put into a career and the amount of face time a worker puts in more than their capabilities and outputs. Women balancing the pressures and costs of childcare with the demands and requirements of a fulltime job tend to decrease their workload by going part-time or leaving the workforce altogether. If women do choose to leave the workforce for a time being, they find it incredibly difficult to reenter, particularly at the same level as they were when they left. These issues and the eroding ability to balance work and home is the primary reason for the gender pay gap in the United States.

Overall, through my own personal experiences and through the literature, I have come to acknowledge the bias that comes with having a child and being a working

mother. However, when speaking on the ways women handle motherhood, I wonder how we as a society are posing our views on to women and how early are women considering motherhood when making those decisions. To that end, with all of the potential solutions to this, what can be done to make women feel more secure in their careers and stay in their organizations? As we look to create more equitable workplaces, how do we support parents and break our preconceived notions of parenthood and home life when we go to work each day? How do we make parenthood something that we embrace in our coworkers instead of seeing it as an annoyance or limiting factor?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how women perceive the implications of pregnancy and motherhood in the workplace and the potential impact on their career trajectory, I have focused on the qualitative method of research through individual interviews. The following chapter will discuss why I opted for this methodology in my research as well as the questions I asked and the rationale behind those questions. I will also discuss the criteria required to participate in the interviews and the rationale behind this criteria. Finally, I will walk through my role as the researcher and the limitations and assumptions both I and the research brought to the methodology.

Data Collection and Methods

“Research [that] seeks to explore meaning and perceptions to gain a better understanding and/or generate hypotheses” (DiCicco-Brown & Crabtree, pp. 732) is best done through the method of individual interviews (DiCicco-Brown & Crabtree). Reviewing my hypothesis posed in Chapter One, I am using deductive research methods to understand how the *perceptions* of motherhood in the workplace are impacting how women make career decisions. To understand perceptions, the art of the narrative best captures how one not only sees the world but interprets it as well. DiCicco-Brown & Crabtree note in their piece on the reasoning behind qualitative interviewing in the medical field that “The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees,” (pp. 732). By utilizing the individual interview, I am able to understand the life experiences of the interviewees.

The prior literature has focused on more quantitative approaches focusing on the positive, negative or non-actual effects of motherhood in the workplace by evaluating tenure, promotional opportunities, and pay discrepancies. At times, there is a comparison or an evaluation of present policies and the usage metrics around these policies. Some of the researchers, such as McIntosh, Paull, and Williams used qualitative methods in conjunction with quantitative ones to give further explanation to their studies and gain a better understanding on the actions in the studies without making assumptions during the analysis portion of the data collection, as discussed in Chapter Two. By using narrative research (Bhandari, 2020), I will be able to learn how women are perceiving motherhood for themselves based on their perceptions and how that is impacting how they make decisions moving forward.

With eight interviews, I was able to review transcriptions from the interviews, find common themes and emotions that would be coded and viewed with other statistics derived from the quantifying criteria survey to infer what trends in organizations are contributing to perceptions and how those perceptions were impacting career decisions. What this study did not take into account was the views of the organization and the organization's reasonings behind the decisions or actions that were impacting perceptions. One interviewee was a personal friend, who after the formal interview on a separate occasion, spoke to me about her struggles as a manager with an employee who went out on paternity leave for three months. Her struggles and frustrations with staffing were potentially leading her to make decisions that had significant impacts on her female subordinates, just as her boss before her, which ultimately impacted her views of motherhood. There are always two sides to every story (and depending on the lore you

choose, sometimes a third) but in the qualitative analysis, I am focusing solely on the experiences of a mother, her perceptions, and her experiences – as opposed to those of a father, a manager, or even a non-parenting coworker.

After obtaining authorization from the International Review Board, I posted a call to action on LinkedIn for my followers to access and share across their networks requesting volunteers to participate in my study. To be most efficient, I included a qualifying survey, requesting information to make sure potential participants satisfied the criteria that I was requiring (which will be discussed in detail later). After reviewing the submitted criteria information, I validated which willing participants qualified and reached out to them via email (gathered during the survey process) to share further information about the interview process and gauge interest. The interviews took place via Zoom, were all recorded, lasting between 45-60 minutes each. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and reviewed for logistical wording. Once reviewed, the method of open coded from grounded theory was employed on each interview and an analysis of commonalities and differences took place in line with thematic analysis (Bhandari, 2020). The data categorization process will be discussed later in the chapter.

The qualifying survey contains the following information as shown in Table 3.1. The survey starts with a consent form and agreement in line with IRB standards. The first question requests a selection of gender. As my study focuses on how women make career decisions, both men and those who wished not to disclose were disqualified from the study. The birth year for qualification is between the years 1986 and 1993.

My study focuses on women who have completed four-year degrees or post-graduate studies. As noted in Chapter Two, women in higher level positions sometimes have the highest amount to lose in having a child (Landers, et. al, 1996). Moreover, women with these degrees tend to have higher earning potential and start childbearing later in life (Livingston, 2020) therefore having more time for promotion and growth in their careers as well as higher earnings and savings. This is important context for my study because I want to eliminate financial implications as much as possible - a woman may make a career decision regardless of perceptions if her hands are tied financially. Similarly, the relationship status is important to qualify, primarily as I want to interview those with dual incomes when focusing on child-rearing.

Qualifying Criteria for Interview Participants

Number	Question	Answer	Qualifying?
1	Gender	Male	No
		Female	Yes
		Wish Not To Disclose	No
2	Birth Year	Pre-1986	No
		1986 - 1993	Yes
		Post-1993	No
3	Relationship Status	Single	No
		Married / Civil Partnership	Yes
		Divorced / Widowed	No

4	Level of Completed Education	Some high school	No
		High School / GED	No
		2-Year Degree / Professional Training	No
		4-Year Degree	Yes
		Post-Graduate Studies	Yes
5	Career Position	Entry-Level	No
		Middle Management	Yes
		Senior Management	Yes
		C-Suite	No
6	Do You Have Children?	Yes - under five	Yes
		Yes - both under five and over five	No
		Yes - over five	No
		No - do not want children	No
		Yes - want children in more than three years	No
		Yes - want children in less than three years	Yes

Financial hardships around child-bearing should be addressed in further research but were eliminated as much as possible to focus more on the perceptual impact on decision making.

Research on children's impact on women's working hours finds that women with young children are viewed with a more negative connotation by their managers and their peers, more so than their male counterparts with young children or parents of school aged children (Paull, 2008). As the decision and impact of having a child does not often happen in a vacuum or at a specific time in life, I want to include people who are faced with the decision of having a child whether leading up to motherhood or recently becoming a mother. The motherhood penalty is most heavily concentrated on women who have children under school age, which in the United States is approximately the age of five (Paull, 2008). This narrowed my study towards women who had young children under said age. I, however, do not want to eliminate women with serious ambitions of starting a family. At the time of beginning my research, I myself was in this position on the precipice of motherhood, yet this study and the thoughts around it circled my brain more often than not on *when is the right time*. By interviewing women who are also ready to start a family, I'd be able to get insight into how women are processing these perceptions in real time.

In line with both degree level and age of children / desire to have them, the age of the participants was also important to gather. A Pew research study noted that women with four-year degrees or higher started families between the ages of twenty-eight (bachelor's degree holders) and thirty-five (post-graduates) (Livingston, 2020). At the time the criteria and survey were under approval in 2021, those birth years were in the said age range. Finally, I request information on where the participant stands in the organization. If the participants are a level as high in the organization as C-Suite, they are be in a position to make decisions and have little to no impact on their career progression with the birth of a child as they are at the top of the corporate ladder. If the

participant is in an entry level position, they are at such a place that progression is “only up from here”. In these situations, it is harder to truly understand what decisions are made around a career as there are more options when starting in an entry level position. At the end of the survey, an email address is requested as the main source of getting in touch after the survey to note qualifications and next steps. Those who qualify are alerted of further information on the interview process and requested to respond if still interested with a date and time to conduct the interview. Those who do not qualify receive an email thanking for their interest and participation but noting their inability to qualify for participation.

After gathering eligible participants, I selected eight for the interview. The following statistics of the participants can be found in table 3.2. Note that to participate in the study, all participants needed to be women and married or in a civil partnership which is not captured in the table.

Demographics of Interview Participants

Number	Pseudonym	Birth Year	Education	Position	Child Status
1	Claire	1989	Post-Grad	Sr Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
2	Jackie	1990	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
3	Riley	1991	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	No - Want in < 3
4	Andrea	1991	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
5	Carol	1991	4-Year	Sr Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
6	Taylor	1988	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	No - Want in < 3
7	Rhys	1990	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
8	Jane	1990	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	No - Want in < 3

At the beginning of every interview, I read the consent with a reminder that I was studying how women make career decisions based on their perceptions and understanding of working motherhood. I made sure to not share too much of the study at the beginning and promised to give more context at the end of the interview and answer any of the interviewee's questions, in order to keep their thoughts as unbiased as possible.

I started the conversation by asking for background information on the interviewee's career. The purpose of starting on this question was to understand the career trajectory of the interviewee with no questioning around parenthood. Most interviewees would start from the end of school and go through their career with promotions, job changes, and even career changes, many dotted with additional schooling. This also helped me get cues from the interviewee to press for more information when asking more personal questions around motherhood to connect and dive deeper into their rationale for their actions.

After setting the stage, I asked for background information on the birth of their child or children (if they noted they had them). The questions included asking what the interviewee had available for their maternity leave at the time, what they chose to do, and what their partner's benefits and actions looked like as well. Understanding what the interviewee had to work with from a policy standpoint made it easy to ask more probing questions when noting a difference in what was done. It also allowed me to gauge more insight in the decision making process. For example, if an interviewee noted they were allotted less time than they took, their decisions around their career may not be financially driven and that may be something to clarify or discuss further as we have learned in Chapter Two.

I also requested a more personal question be answered on family planning - was the child planned or not? This was important to understand, as sometimes parenthood is not planned nor in line with career goals and therefore must be addressed in a context that would be different from a planned pregnancy. In almost all cases, the pregnancies were planned but “sooner than expected” which could have had an interesting skew on the analysis.

For those who had no children at the point of the interview, I still asked about the maternity leave policies at the interviewee’s and partner’s organizations as well as “if you were to find out you were pregnant tomorrow what would you do”. An extra question was to see how they felt about their maternity leave policies. Many times that insight was naturally shared when speaking with the interviewees with children, but by asking this explicit question to those without, I was able to get more insight into if (and if so, how much) policy was influencing the interviewee’s decision to have children or not.

With the questions on background “out of the way,” I then shared that I would be asking questions about the interviewees’ upbringing and childhood. Questions revolved around what the interviewee’s parents did for work and childcare, how the interviewee looked at it then and now, and what influences their upbringing may have had on their career or ideas of motherhood. This was one of my personally favorite parts of the interview as all participants became very retrospective and many, at times, declared they were coming to realizations they never thought about before. I also asked if they specifically had conversations with their parents about their decisions to see if these explicit conversations had any impact.

The purpose of understanding the upbringing of the interviewees was to see if there were trends or patterns in upbringing that translated to how women were acting upon motherhood in their career. As noted in Chapter Two, girls start developing perceptions of themselves as “different from boys” from a non-biological standpoint around the age of eight. At many points, they are watching their parents in their respective roles and developing their sense of self based on what they see of their mothers versus their fathers. Understanding the interviewees upbringing could show trends between upbringing and decision making.

Next, I request information on childcare and household structure - either in actuality or planned based on the interviewee’s parental status. Questions here include what is the set up and how is that working for the family? I also ask questions on what would be the optimal situation - would a woman stay home if she was financially able? Are these decisions based on what’s best for the child or how best to work with the interviewee’s career? It was also helpful to ask this question as policy came back into play - if there were policies or benefits that supported mothers versus if the benefits stopped after maternity leave.

I then change the trajectory of the interview leaving the personal individualistic questions and moving towards conceptual and perceptual questions around working motherhood. I ask how the interviewee perceives working motherhood and how those perspectives compare to those of others - in American society and in their workplace. I also ask how those views or assumptions of motherhood compare to the perceptions of fatherhood. This is always a favorite that at many times strikes up intriguing

conversation. This also helps accelerate the conversation into a retrospective of motherhood in the workplace.

The acceleration purpose is to garner anecdotes of the interviewee's career where they watched, heard, or inferred situations around motherhood that impacted their own perception of motherhood for themselves whether within their current organization or one prior. I ask about these experiences and how they impacted their way of thinking when taking on motherhood in their own right. I wrap up the conversation asking what they think their organization or other organizations could do better to support working mothers to see what is missing and give concrete suggestions to help organizations better support their workforce. I finally close out with any final thoughts to ensure I have addressed all of the items on the interviewee's mind after the discussion.

The overall structure of the interview is aimed to gain a few valuable insights to help support my initial hypothesis - (1) to understand the landscape of motherhood in the workplace (2) to understand how women navigate motherhood in the workplace and (3) understand how perceptions from childhood and prior work experience have formed the actions that they have taken around motherhood. The questions were formed to elicit as unbiased opinions as possible and encourage anecdotes and personal narratives. The particular goals around this study are not common in the academic literature and thus the questions were based on the gaps in understanding and literature on the topic, not ones that have been asked prior. The interviews were able to garner themes that were then focused on in the data categorization process. A full example of the interview script can be found as Appendix A.

Data Categorization

After conducting the interviews, which were recorded with permission from the participant, I utilized the online software system, Otter.ai, to transcribe the recordings. After reading the transcripts initially to validate the automated processing, I re-read the transcripts to highlight certain themes from each of the interviews. Using the process of open-coding, as part of the grounded theory framework, I sorted “through the data, categorizing events and concepts by their properties and dimensional range” (McCaslin). By utilizing open coding, I read through each line, starting with overarching views. This process was to eliminate the “temptation of being too selective” (McCaslin). The beginning process highlighted themes around policies, Covid-19, upbringing, mentorship, prior experiences, financials, and gender roles. As I continued to read through the transcripts, I was able to code more sentences to really identify the central themes.

After coding, I was able to analyze eight interviews to deepen my understanding and make connections from how women saw childbearing whether during youth or in the workplace, and how that impacted how they were making career decisions as they took on motherhood themselves. This analysis made me able to confirm suspicions towards my hypothesis as well as consider outside factors that were impact these decisions. As well, I was able to identify ways organizations could be more supportive of their working female population prior, during, and post-childbearing.

Limitations and Analysis

There are limitations that should be considered when discussing my research. First, due to the depth of interviews and the strong number of qualifications

necessary to participate, I was limited to a small sample size. A small sample size does limit the depth of analysis to be provided. My recruitment tactics started within my own networks, which did contribute to more than half of the interviews. While I conducted each interview in the same manner, there may have been more comfortability between myself and the interviewees that I knew prior to the interview that I was able to steer conversations in more directions with my prior knowledge of the participants.

While race, location, and socio-economic status were not qualifiers, I will note that all of my interviewees were white, lived in the northeast of the United States, and were in similar brackets of socio-economic status, most generally upper middle class. While I did desire to eliminate financial limitations it would be careless to not address that there could be differences in upbringing, perception, or reality amongst women who qualify that did not fit in these other non-qualifying segments. I would suggest to further researchers to expand the search to other locales, and other races. I also did not limit my survey to heterosexual couples but it would be interesting to do further research if women in homosexual or polyamorous relationships had similar experiences to my own participants.

Finally, as the research-observer, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my own bias. As I noted in Chapter One, a large part of my desire to conduct this research was to address certain questions and feelings I had within myself on the subject. Over the course of my research, I became pregnant and noted that my research seemed to take on new meaning straddling the line between "aspirational understanding" to "future reality". I acknowledge that many of my own perceptions from my upbringing and career have formed my own assumptions and hypothesis that may drive some of my

analysis of the data. I believe that my passion around the topic is ever present, but hope that my bias does not sway any of my conclusions from the analysis.

Future Research

While I have more clarity on how women make career decisions based on their experiences inside and outside the workplace, there are further questions I have that could be addressed in additional research. First, it would be interesting to understand how men view parenthood and if that has any impact on how their partners handle childcare. While there are cases where there is only one parent, in cases where two are involved, it should be noted that the decision on how to raise the child and what is needed to do so is normally a joint decision.

Another question I have is on how partners of the same gender are impacted by having children. I was only able to speak with heterosexual women in relationships, even though homosexual women were not omitted from qualifying for the interview - this was not done intentionally but I had no submissions from homosexual women. I would be interested in women who are not the birth mother, if they are impacted the same as their partner who had the child, or are they treated similarly to the men. Same with those who adopt or use a surrogate - does the maternal wall bias impact them if they adopted or did not physically have the child?

Finally, I would implore researchers around the gender pay gap to do deeper analysis on why the gender pay gap exists and what the triggers are for the gap. My research found that the gender pay gap is highly concentrated around parenthood status (Corinaldi, 2019; Goldin, 2014; Waldfogel, 1998) and due to lower starting salaries and promotional opportunities. By understanding and getting a stronger understanding

around why women are being paid less and what the triggers are for creating such a discrepancy, will give people the ability to highlight where work needs to be done and offer more concrete solutions to organizations to close the pay gap.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW RESULTS

The following chapter will dive into the results of my eight qualitative interviews that I conducted, as noted in the previous chapter. I will provide a summary of the data and highlight common themes and insights that I found in my discussions as a result of the coding I completed at the end of the discussions. The data I collected will help answer the question I pose in Chapter 1:

What factors influence the career decisions women make when evaluating childbearing?

The findings I discuss below will impact my analysis on how women are making these decisions and what organizations can do to support this group of women. They will also inform if the hypothesis that these decisions are made based on observations and expectations more than on policy and actual interactions around childbearing and the workplace is correct.

Qualifying Survey

As noted in Chapter 3, I utilized a qualifying survey of six questions through Google Forms to identify women who qualified for my interview series. This survey was included in a link to a LinkedIn Post that was posted through my personal profile with the ability to share beyond my network. For full transparency, I did interview three close friends, three good acquaintances, and two people I had never met prior to the interview. While I asked the same questions to all participants in line with the IRB-approved interview questions, I may have been able to ask follow up questions through my prior knowledge of the person and their situation. An example of this would be

asking someone to talk about their additional schooling or certifications that they may not have highlighted naturally when discussing their career trajectory.

I received between twenty and thirty responses of interest to my study. Approximately one third of these respondents did not qualify for my interview for a variety of reasons such as their age, age of their children, or marital status. I reached out to all of the qualifying respondents to schedule a time for an interview with eight being interested and able to continue with the interview and help out in my research. As a reminder from previous chapter, the below table shows the interview participant's qualifying information.

Qualifying Information of Interview Participants

Number	Pseudonym	Birth Year	Education	Position	Child Status
1	Claire	1989	Post-Grad	Sr Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
2	Jackie	1990	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
3	Riley	1991	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	No - Want in < 3
4	Andrea	1991	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
5	Carol	1991	4-Year	Sr Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
6	Taylor	1988	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	No - Want in < 3
7	Rhys	1990	Post-Grad	Middle Mgmt	Yes - Under 5
8	Jane	1990	4-Year - 2 Degrees	Middle Mgmt	No - Want in < 3

As a note, the pseudonyms in the above table were decided upon at the onset of the interview by the participant.

Career Trajectory

I began the interview by seeking to understand each woman's career trajectory - where she started her career, if she did additional schooling, what promotions or organizational changes she made, and the reasons or catalysts behind those changes. I also was keen to understand where they were in their career when they had their first child or were hoping to have their first child to understand the actual career position they were in at that time. Varying responses were found which can be shown in Table 4.

Participant Career Status

Pseudonym	Organizations	Roles	Industry	General Role
Claire*	1 Organization	8 Roles	Finance	Manager
Jackie*	3 Organizations	4 Roles	Finance	Account Executive
Riley*	3 Organizations	8 Roles	Higher Education	Assistant Director
Andrea*	2 Organizations	5 Roles	Higher Education	Coordinator
Carol	2 Organizations	7 Roles	Supply Chain	Director
Taylor*	4 Organizations	5 Roles	Accounting	Manager
Rhys*†	1 Organization	2 Roles	Health Care	Resident
Jane*†	6 Organizations	7 Roles	Primary Education	Teacher

Women with an asterisk (*) all completed or were in process of completing their masters or similar degrees - the reader may note that all have masters degrees except for Carol, which was an unplanned commonality. However, none but Rhys had beyond a masters degree. Rhys, due to being in the healthcare industry as a resident, would technically be considered as the only one to have completed beyond a masters degree. I

highlight both Rhys and Jane with crosses to note that they both have different career paths than the others, particularly due to their industries - Rhys is a doctor and therefore has spent more time in school with fewer opportunities for promotion; however, her earning potential and rank within the hospital makes her eligible for the study. Jane started her career in biomedicine and went for her masters in education to make a career shift to teaching. As such, there is little hierarchy aside from tenure, which she has secured, which qualified her for the interviews.

Some common themes came up in this first conversation around a desire for career growth prior to starting a family, needing additional schooling for the ability to grow in their careers, and choosing organizations and locations in line with their family goals.

All but one of the interview participants noted they had made calculated decisions in their career that ultimately led to their comfortability in having a child. Two participants (Claire and Rhys) noted that they needed to be at a certain point in their career to feel comfortable to have a child. Two participants in particular noted specific reasons for changing their career, stating:

That's actually the reason [the maternity leave policy] I went to the company I'm at now because I wanted a job and organization that were like a "real" job (Jackie, personal communication, March 31, 2022).

I got pretty burned out of DC pretty quickly, knowing that it's not where I wanted to raise a family, it's not sort of really where I wanted to settle down. And I happened to meet someone from this area [Philadelphia], who very much wanted to stay here. So I started looking in Philadelphia, at programs. So I moved to Philly in 2016 (Andrea, personal communication, March 24, 2022).

Another theme, noting that almost all of the participants had masters degrees, was that these women felt they needed more than their work experience and commitment to

the work to be able to grow in their careers. Claire noted the long time commitment she spent working on her masters degree that she wanted to complete prior to marriage, home ownership, and parenthood (personal communication, March 23, 2022). Andrea noted that she was passionate about her studies and masters topic, but it was not something she was able to do with a bachelor's degree alone. Even though she was pregnant and having a baby when beginning her program, she didn't want having a child to put her dreams and desires on hold (personal communication, March 24, 2022). In a more dramatic fashion, Jane highlighted her need to change industries entirely. After working in the biomedical field for a couple of years, Jane noted that she was not passionate about the work and the stress and long hours were taking a toll on her, even before she was married or having children. Because of this, she made the decision to continue her education to become a teacher, highlighting that part of the allure was the ability to have similar hours to her future children and summer's off to be more involved as a mother (personal communication, May 16, 2022).

Like Jackie noted about the organization she worked for and Andrea noted about the location, two other participants noted similar aspects to their careers:

I didn't totally know what I wanted to do when I graduated, but figured the organization was big and had a global private presence, which was important to me and it had a focus on, like, training and upskilling employees development. And just a really good reputation. So I figured I would start there and sort of see what happened and at least I would have this like company's name on my resume if I decided to move on. (Claire, personal communication, March 23, 2022).

In relation to why Carol decided to move from Boston to Pennsylvania at the beginning of her career:

I wanted [to be with] my now husband, yeah, we decided that we wanted to live in Pennsylvania. So as a personal decision, I sought out, I was only willing to move

if I could find a job that I was actually interested in (Carol, personal communication, March 22, 2022).

Overall, some of the women made decisions explicitly due to plans for their future families, but almost all of the women made decisions to advance their careers and achieve a certain level of success prior to having their first child. The rationale and inferences for these changes will be discussed later on in this chapter when answering further questions, as well as through my analysis in Chapter 5.

Maternity Leave Policies

The next question posed to the participants asked about the maternity leave policies at the organizations where the participants worked either when they had their first child (all but one participant, Rhys, had only one child at the time of the interview) or that currently stands at their organization if they were to have a child tomorrow, and therefore assuming this is the maternity leave policy influencing their decision on having a child.

Participant Parental Leave Status

Pseudonym	Fully Paid Leave	Partial Paid Lead	Unpaid Leave	Total Maternity Leave
Claire	16 Weeks	0 Weeks	8 Weeks	24 Weeks
Jackie	16 Weeks	0 Weeks	8 Weeks	24 Weeks
Riley*	12 Weeks	0 Weeks	4 Weeks	16 Weeks
Andrea	12 Weeks	0 Weeks	4 Weeks	16 Weeks
Carol	0 Weeks	8 Weeks (80% Salary)	4 Weeks	12 Weeks
Taylor*	18 Weeks	3 Weeks (Unknown \$)	0 Weeks	21 Weeks

Rhys	10 Weeks	0 Weeks	2 Weeks	12 Weeks
Jane*	8 Weeks	0 Weeks	4 Weeks	12 Weeks

Overall, almost every woman was offered their full salary for at least eight weeks or approximately two weeks post baby aside from Carol. While she only received 80% of her salary for the first two months she took, she noted that when she first joined the organization, there was no maternity leave at all, so this was considered an improvement. The women who are denoted by an asterisk are currently not mothers or taking advantage of their organization's policy, but note these policies as the ones in place at their current organizations.

I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of women I interviewed who received fully paid benefits in line or exceeding the trends. As noted in Chapter 2, many women, like Carol, receive no fully paid maternity leave, so to have 7 out of the 8 women get some sort of fully paid leave, let alone 16 weeks in some cases, was incredibly impressive. I will speak more to how these increased policies also put a focus on other factors aside from the benefits package offered at organizations for how women frame their understanding of motherhood in the workplace.

A final note for all of the women and their maternity leave policies – of the women with children, only one did not take or was not planning on taking full advantage of their fully offered organizational policy. Jackie noted that she would have enjoyed the additional 8 weeks of leave without pay, however she and her husband were not in a position to afford this (personal communication, March 31, 2022). This does highlight trends I've seen in the research where women are unable to take unpaid time off due to financial constraints.

Another factor of understanding the policies in play when having a child included the leave policies for the partner. It should be noted at this time, that all participants were in legal heterosexual marriages, therefore their husbands were considered under parental or paternity leave policies. Table 5 shows each interview participant's partner's policy and what they actually did or were planning to do when the baby arrived.

Participant Parental Leave Policies

Pseudonym	Policy	Actual
Claire	0 Weeks	3 Weeks PTO / unpaid
Jackie	0 Weeks	3-4 Days unpaid
Riley*	4 Weeks	4 Weeks
Andrea	14 Weeks	4 Weeks + 2 week intervals of the remaining 10 weeks
Carol	0 Weeks	3 Weeks PTO / unpaid
Taylor*	Unknown	Dependent on Season†
Rhys	0 Weeks	1 Week PTO
Jane*	2 Weeks	2 Weeks

While I was surprised by the respondents parental leave policies, I was just as surprised by the parental / paternity leave policies for the partners. In my own personal situation, I am given twelve full weeks of paid maternity leave plus unlimited unpaid time off and flexible return possibilities such as part-time or delayed reentrance. More impressively, my husband is given six weeks of fully paid parental leave which he can take any time in the year of birth. In essence, we could have him take off a week or two when the baby first arrives, and he could then take the remaining time unused once I return back to work. This is similar to the only partner who received a comparable leave to their spouse - Andrea's partner.

Andrea noted that her partner was taking advantage of his time off in different “sprints”:

He [her partner] took off in the beginning. And then has sort of intermittently taken time like intermittently. So they work in sprints, so, like two week intervals. So, he's been able, like he took off around Thanksgiving he took off, which was when we got our son baptized, he took off around Christmas. He's taking off again next week. So his company's actually been a lot more flexible than mine. In terms of when he can take leave, it wasn't written in the policy, but it was pretty clearly implied, like you didn't sort of like, mess around with like, you sort of took in a chunk, and then you were expected to come back. Whereas with his company, he's been able to, to break it up a little more. But yeah, four weeks in the beginning, and then sort of an intermittent chunks since then (Andrea, personal communication, March 24, 2022).

Claire did mention that her partner, who was not “awarded” paternity leave, planned to do something similar taking three weeks at the onset and then three weeks once she returned to work, however, she noted their nanny was able to start then and, not wanting to lose her for a three week delay, forwent the additional three weeks. This “breaking up leave” with the non-birthing partner has been a more common trend - for example, a cousin of mine used his PTO for the birth of his first and second children, then utilized his parental leave when his wife went back to work to extend the time off with their children, and therefore the payment of childcare.

Two interesting situations were brought up in my interviews with Jackie and Taylor. Jackie’s partner is self-employed and in the landscaping business. Their daughter was born at the end of March which is the beginning of his busy season. Between the timing and the entrepreneurial nature of his career, taking any time off was not feasible - something I had not considered in my research but made much sense when I thought about it, but also that if it impacts a man, it most certainly must impact a woman. I would be curious to understand in the research how self-employed

women are considered when reporting time off. If they are considered, I would assume they are with no mandatory time off. This note brings up the importance of a governmental maternal leave mandate.

Similarly to Jackie's husband having a seasonally impacted career, Taylor's husband is in a similar position as a college athletic coach with his primary season for the team being in the fall. Taylor noted that there was an informal parental leave policy but much of that was impacted by the time her husband would need to take off. For example, he would most likely be able to take time off around the times of year when he wasn't needing to heavily recruit players or they were not playing conference games (Taylor, personal communication, March 30, 2022). These two examples made me ask questions around planning for the child - both Jackie and Taylor noted that they did take these times in to consideration but other factors such as age or desire to get pregnant superseded this and they would "have to make it work".

Finally, I asked each participant with children if their pregnancies were planned and what factors went into planning for the children. Overwhelmingly, all participants said they planned for their pregnancies and most factors for doing so were around age, comfortability in finances, and friendship - all of their friends were having children, too. Some notes on these themes are as follows:

My mom had me when she was 30. So like, just kind of in my head. I was like, oh, yeah, that seems reasonable. But by that point, my husband and I had already been married, three, four years. And we've been together for over 10. So like, we generally knew we wanted kids. So it felt right (Claire, personal communication, March 23, 2022).

A lot of my friends were having babies. [My husband] has a couple of sisters who had young children that I just adored. And I just, I don't know, I just like I wanted it (Jackie, personal communication, March 31, 2022).

Well [it was just right] financially, timeframe, maturity, it was all planned (Carol, personal communication, March 22, 2022).

A lot of factors, I think ... my current age... lifestyle and friends that are having children (Taylor, personal communication, March 30, 2022).

We started trying when I found out my sister couldn't get pregnant naturally, so we knew we needed to get started as her issue was, you know, genetic. In the meantime, as I couldn't get pregnant we started considering IVF and that quickly became clear that it would need to be an option and luckily my husband's insurance covers much of it. He doesn't want to stay there forever so we decided to just go for it so we can at least utilize that benefit for more than one kid and he doesn't have to stay there forever because, you know, he doesn't love it... (Jane, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

These themes are not surprising to me, as I have heard them throughout my career from other women on why they started a family, and have felt similar feelings whether it's because my husband and I wanted to have more financial stability before starting a family, or waiting for my closest friends to "take the plunge first." I will note, both Jackie and Taylor also noted their organization's maternity leave policies as consideration for having a child as did Jane with her husband's insurance through his employer. It seems that while many external factors impact when women decide the timing to start a family, internal organizational factors like workplace policies do come into consideration.

Childhood Experience

The next section of the interview took a departure from discussing the current world of parenthood but from a reflective perspective of how the interviewee perceived parenthood growing up through observing their own parents. As I noted in Chapter 2, through cohort replacement theory (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004) girls and boys view themselves and their gender roles through the examples provided by their mothers or fathers respectively. Due to this, it was important for me to hear about the examples the

interviewees observed when growing up to see if they had any impact on how they made decisions around motherhood. Table 6 shows each participant's family breakdown when growing up.

Participant Family Situation

Pseudonym	Mother	Father
Claire	Worked Full-Time	Worked Full-Time (Traveled for Work)
Jackie	Stay-at-Home Mom	Worked Full-Time
Riley	Stay-at-Home Mom	Worked Full-Time
Andrea	Stay-at-Home Mom	Worked Full-Time
Carol	Stay-at-Home Mom	Worked Full-Time
Taylor	Stay-at-Home Mom	Worked Full-Time
Rhys	Worked Full-Time	Stay-at-Home Dad
Jane	Stay-at-Home Mom	Worked Full-Time

In what shouldn't be a surprise, almost all of the participants had stay-at-home mom's with one set of parents both working full time and the other set having the opposite gender roles (an interesting story to be told later in this section). Six of the participants noted their mothers worked full-time or part-time at the beginning of parenthood with at least one if not two children, but decreased their work once they had their final child to commit to being a full-time parent.

Three of the participants with mothers who were stay-at-home during the majority of their childhood went back to full- or part-time work before the interviewee was in college. Almost all of the stay-at-home mothers also did other forms of work, whether side hustles such as selling things on Ebay (Riley, personal communication, March 29, 2022) or doing volunteer work (Andrea, personal communication, March 24, 2022). The

only father who stayed at home did so due to extenuating circumstances around employment due to some personal issues, which made him the de facto caretaker of the participant and her siblings (Rhys, personal communication, April 28, 2022).

Another interesting insight was how little many of the participants remember their caretaking situation beyond their mothers or fathers. One participant noted her grandmother taking care of her when she was not in daycare, but had little memory of daycare (Claire, personal communication March 23, 2022). Another participant said she knew she went to daycare until her mom stayed home, but did not remember those years (Riley, personal communication, March 29, 2022). Most of the participants who had little outside care from their own parents said that they did not grow up close to family nor had family who were able to care for them - something that is not seen as, but truly is, a luxury for women who want to stay in the workforce (Krivkovich et al, 2021).

With all interview participants I asked how their parental observations made an impact on how they thought about their own careers. I also was curious about when they started reflecting on their role as a mother. A common theme amongst all of the participants, regardless of their mother's role, was that the participant made a decision to work relatively earlier than when they actually needed to make the decision - most highlighting really thinking about it, and remembering thinking about it, around high school. As opposed to my hypothesis that a mother's role would have impact, it seemed that in most situations, it was a discussion with a friend or interaction with a friend that made the participant consider how they saw themselves as a mother in the future.

And then the earliest I remember, like actually reflecting on it was probably at some point in high school, because I had a girlfriend who just like really wanted to get married and not work... And I just remember the time being like, like I want to be able to provide for myself. Like if I decide at some point in the future

that I want to stay home, if I have kids and I want to stay home like fine, but that's my choice. But I remember feeling pretty strongly of like, I don't really want to do that. Like I want to go and like provide for myself and contribute something because I remember we had like some pointed conversations of like, why wouldn't you want to just stay home and somebody provide for you and like, I feel like at that point in time, I didn't, I couldn't put my finger on the why but I was like, I just, I just don't want to like I want to do my own thing (Claire, Personal Communication, March, 23, 2022).

I think it was probably later like in high school, maybe when I started, like middle school, high school, when you know, you would start to go over and visit like other families and see like some other working parents and like, I don't know, it's just like exciting to kind of hear not that you really knew anything about what they were doing. But like, know, when your friends did talk about, like some things their parents did. I thought that that was probably part of it. And then trying to think I just I think it's like feeling like my mom had so much potential that was maybe just not being fully utilized? (Taylor, Personal Communication, March 30, 2022).

When discussing how parents' roles did impact how the participant viewed their own life, a common trend, regardless of whether the parent worked or not, was that it showed the person they wanted to do the opposite. Similar to Taylor in the above quote, wishing her mother was using her full potential, some women did not want to be like their mothers, not for lack of admiration, but for lack of potential or mental capacity (Riley, personal communication, March 29, 2022).

Most of the highlights around how parents' roles impacted the participants were around the role of the mother, and how her actions impacted how the women viewed motherhood themselves.

I think maybe I was more impacted by my mom going back to work of just like, kind of feeling like, Oh, now she's not around as much. And I just felt like she didn't... have good work life balance, it was either, like, once she went back to work, it was like she was working all the time. So I think that is mostly what impacted me as I, I think I realized, like the importance of even needing to have work life balance as you have a family (Carol, personal communication, March 22, 2022).

Like when I was young, I always wanted to be a doctor. And I'm sure that's just because that's what my mom was doing. Like I remember she would go in for the weekends and go do rounds on her patients Saturday and Sunday mornings, and she would take me along sometimes, and I would like to sit in the nursery with the nurses and like, look at the babies and stuff. So I really enjoyed going and doing that with her (Rhys, personal communication, April 28, 2022).

Oh yeah, like I thought I wanted to be a working woman but when I started envisioning myself as a mother, and thinking about, like, everything I wanted to give to my own kids, I only could think of what my mother did for us and how, like, that was all because she was home and I couldn't do that, you know, as a working woman, so like I think that really impacted my career. I knew I needed to work to afford the life we, like, want. Don't get me wrong, my husband makes good money... but I considered how being a teacher would help us afford more things and like, make me have time at home with our kids (Jane, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

This is not to say that there weren't highlights on how a father's career also impacted women as they looked at their relationship with their partner. Jackie in particular highlighted this in her interview, particularly noting her parent's contentious divorce and how that impacted her as well:

So I'll say that for my dad, the way that he approached, balancing parenthood and work made me resent his choice, if that makes sense. And it is actually, it's something that comes up with my husband and me where he'll be like, I just need to work really hard so that we can make more money and I'm like, oh, no, no, that is the opposite of what I want, I would rather have you here with less money than me be alone. Single parenting, while you're out working like that, to me, it isn't, I don't want to replicate that in my family (Jackie, personal communication, March 31, 2022).

The final question around having discussions with parents on parenthood were interesting as overwhelmingly, all participants noted that they really hadn't had conversations discussing their childhood and the parenting decisions their parents made, now that they were adults. Maybe it's because of my own interest in the topic, but I knew for years about the decisions my parents made in raising my brother and myself growing up, and it was something that I reflected upon as I graduated college and married

my husband. This knowledge - that many do not reflect upon their childhood and how their parents navigated that - was shocking to me, but also shows that it's the perceptions of why, versus the actual understanding of why, that impact us as we grow up.

Current Household Set-Up

In the interviews, I shift back to understanding the current situation for the interviewee and their partner when raising their child (or in cases for non-parents, what their plans are when having a child). Table 7 below shows the different childcare arrangements by each interviewee. It should be noted that those with an asterisk do not have children but this is their anticipated plan.

Participant Childcare Situation

Pseudonym	Daycare	In-Home Care	Family
Claire		X (Daytime Nanny)	
Jackie	X (3 days / week)		X (2 days / week)
Riley*	X (Hybrid)		X (Hybrid)
Andrea	X (3 days / week)		X (2 days / week)
Carol	X (4 days / week in summer)		X (1 day / week in summer)
Taylor*	X (Hybrid)		X (Hybrid)
Rhys	X		
Jane*	X		

One of the most surprising insights to come out of this question was not only how many interviewees utilized a hybrid model, with their parents in almost every situation stepping in to take on some of the support, but how this was not necessarily the original intention of the childcare situation. Both Jackie and Andrea noted that they were

hoping to have their children in daycare full-time but were unable to do so because of the waitlists for their daycares - Jackie said that at the time they could only afford three days a week and it stuck because they couldn't extend due to capacity other days (personal communication, March 31, 2022) whereas Andrea told about a heart wrenching story where she was unable to find logical childcare when she went back to work that she and her husband were both working from home and taking care of their son, only to have a breakdown one day to her supervisor, who then interceded and got her a spot at her organization's sponsored daycare (personal communication, March 24, 2022).

The one outlier, Claire, had not intended to have a daytime nanny as her primary childcare provider, but also highlighted capacity issues as the catalyst for the choice - the daycare she and her husband had chosen for their child was unable to take their son when she was ready to go back to work, and a friend recommended their former nanny who happened to have the availability at the right time (personal communication, March 23, 2022). A major discovery for myself out of these conversations was the need to secure childcare six months in advance to returning to work, which for perspective, would be three months before the birth of the child in my case. While this paper doesn't go into depth about childcare choices and the state of childcare in the United States, this industry is one that should be evaluated in future studies on the impact in the workforce.

Another common theme that came out of the conversation was the cost of childcare. Almost all of the participants highlighted that their situation was financially beneficial or necessary. One of the missed opportunities I have found from myself was asking the costs of childcare and how that compared to the salary of the participant. In the case of my own situation, my husband mentioned that if childcare cost more than

what I was bringing home annually, he would encourage me to stay home. I did not ask any of the participants if they were paying more for childcare than they were bringing home themselves.

When asked if they would have done anything different, most of the interview participants have potential wishes such as not having to pay for childcare and having their parents take the child all the time (Jackie, personal communication, March 31, 2022), wanting to be able to afford staying home all the time (Jane, personal communication, May 16, 2022), or the unreliability of depending on one person to provide care (Claire, personal communication, March 23, 2022). Most interestingly, was how two of the participants actually highlighted that even if they had another option, their child has enjoyed daycare so much that they enjoy taking them there (Carol, personal communication, March 22, 2022, and Jackie, personal communication, March 31, 2022).

One casual suspicion I had was if women chose to work due to necessity and not desire. While I didn't explicitly ask this question, I would note any mention of it was very casual and in more ways that it would be convenient versus it was the desired outcome. At most, Jane noted that she would love that but joked it was more because she didn't like her job and dreamed of hanging out with her kid, a Starbucks, and watching television while they napped instead of dealing with the drones of a negative workplace (Jane, personal communication, May 16, 2022). It may have been the specific segment I spoke with, as stay-at-home mothers would not qualify for my study, nor would be easily recruited through LinkedIn, but I did find it interesting that the desire wasn't even there with the interviewed segment.

Perceptions of Working Motherhood

I shifted the remainder of the interview questions to perceptions of working motherhood, particularly around how it was seen in the workforce. When asked how the participants see working motherhood, most of the participants had themes of positive insights, using words such as “strong”, “resilient”, “rockstars”, “independent”. When asked how the participants think others view mothers, many of the participants started to highlight similarities with how they view mothers, but almost all of the participants noted the difficulty that women have when navigating the workforce and dealing with how their organizations react to their motherhood status.

Some women highlighted the difference between how women are viewed versus their male counterparts and not acknowledging the difficulties that are presented in the workplace. For example, Rhys notes that she does not believe men are held to the same standard as women in the expectation of who is supposed to raise the child, particularly in her industry of healthcare (personal communication, April 28, 2022). Taylor brought up a meme she saw on Instagram that depicts the difference between men and women as parents - the father is shown giving the kid a snack and someone says “what an attentive father” whereas the mother is seen giving the same snack to her child and the person says “can you believe they gave them THAT as a snack?” implying that the snack wasn’t healthy (personal communication, March 30, 2022).

Some of the women, including Carol, Riley, Claire, and Taylor all brought up how they felt that things were getting better for women and that they have seen organizations and women making a point that working mothers should be supported.

I was reading... [an] interview with the CEO of my former company. And she just won some type of award. And they are interviewing her about her role and the

advertising industry and what's been changing and how they've been innovating. And then at the end, it asks her, how do you manage all of this while being a mom to four kids, blah, blah, blah. And she answered something pretty generically about finding balance, but then at the end, and it's the last line in the interview, it said, but I don't think you would have asked this question if you were interviewing my husband (Riley, personal communication, March 29, 2022).

This theme did seem to continue - a sort of optimistic outlook with hints of snarky comments about the differences and lack of full equality. This was not necessarily surprising but the overall positive feeling this section of questions initially elicited from the participants was a bit unexpected. What I did believe would happen was women highlighting times from a negative light when they saw how women were treated differently for having a child, whether from male coworkers or female coworkers without children.

One of the most comforting themes from the interviews was the way that women with children became examples for the interviewees as supporters or beacons to how to navigate the corporate world with children. Claire mentioned a supervisor who was incredibly supportive of her time commitments so that she could make the most time with her son while he was awake (personal communication, March 23, 2022). Carol mentioned observing a former supervisor who was a mother and noting that as she observed her, she made mental notes on what things she did or did not want to do as a mother (personal communication, March 22, 2022). Rhys brought up one of her supervisors who had older children, doing a really commendable job in setting boundaries, particularly in health care, where she had to leave to take care of her responsibilities at home. This impacted Rhys by showing how to handle that when she is in the same position and acknowledging it's okay and it needs to be done and to not be

apologetic or guilty for it (personal communication, April 28, 2022). These situations show that women are taking to heart how others are navigating the workforce as mothers.

Some of the stories weren't all positive. Andrea did note the negative perceptions she has had to deal with at her organization, particularly in the view of her as an employee and then as a mother:

Yeah, I actually really control who I told that I was a working mom... I told one person, one man in that office, that I'd had a baby, and it was in person. And I just got the grossest, like up and down like, sort of assessment of like, oh, like it, it made me so uncomfortable, that I was just like, I'm really going to be selective about who I talked to about him (Andrea, personal communication, March 24, 2022).

In this case, the example is a negative one about an interaction with a male coworker, which was more along the lines of what I was expecting. What was most shocking, were the negative comments or interactions the interviewee's highlighted coming from women. Both Andrea and Jane brought up one of the common tropes from older women to younger women about being a mother.

I feel like with some of the women I've talked to, they're still this, like, oh, it's not that bad, or just you wait or this will get better. Or, like when I had a baby, this was so much harder than what you have like that sort of like comparison, which like I feel for those of us who have had kids in this time period [the Covid-19 Pandemic], like you're in such like survival mode, sometimes where it's like, I appreciate that your experiences were probably really hard, too (Andrea, personal communication, March 24, 2022).

I was telling a coworker about how tired I was near the end of our field day outside, all day, and how I'm not getting a lot of sleep and what not and she's like, just you wait you're never going to sleep again, and I think she, you know, means to be supportive but that doesn't make it any better. I'm swollen and tired, can you like have a little sympathy for me instead of like, kicking me when I'm down? It's just a big pet peeve of mine, I think, like lots of women keep trying to think they have it worse (Jane, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

Overall, many of the participants did highlight that there were definitely differences between how men and women are viewed in the workplace, particularly around

motherhood, and that could be frustrating, but it did not seem to impact the interviewees, aside from Andrea, as much as I expected. However, I do analyze these perceptions in how the women themselves were anticipating or navigating motherhood in the next chapter.

Recommendations

Closing out the interview, I ask for what recommendations the participants would give in supporting women in the workplace. Overwhelmingly, the most common response was around breastfeeding and pumping. Only one of the mothers interviewed did not bring this up as something that needed to be addressed, and even one of the non-mothers highlighted it as an issue. Some of the women highlighted that there are “supports” for breastfeeding at their organization, however, they weren’t practical and didn’t eliminate the issues with having to breastfeed at work. These “mothers rooms” seem to be benefits that are put in place but do not fully work the way they are intended such as being too far away from their actual office (Andrea, personal communication, March 24, 2022, and Riley, personal communication, March 29, 2022). They also are seen as a highlight of a private and sometimes uncomfortable moment for women (Jackie, personal communication, March 31, 2022). It’s such a problem for Rhys who at times has to leave immediately during a busy shift at the hospital in which she works and she notes that she is so thankful for supportive coworkers, but acknowledges that it’s not that way for every woman in her industry and empathizes with them (personal communication, April 28, 2022). The one mother who did not address it later informed me that she stopped breastfeeding right before she went back to work so that she did not have to deal with it while working.

Other suggestions included accepting more flexible work hours and policies and truly sticking to them and not penalizing people for utilizing them - making them more concrete and less something that you are able to do to normalize the use of them (Claire, personal communication, March 23, 2022 and Taylor, personal communication, March 30, 2022). Jackie went beyond that to note that when her child is home sick, she has to use PTO and with the Covid-19 pandemic, daycares were shutting down for one positive case, causing her to have to find childcare for ten days at a time. At the time of the interview, she was already seeing her PTO dwindle just to take care of her sick child and not take the time for mental health or vacations with her family (Jackie, personal communication, March, 31, 2022).

Overall, I was surprised at the lack of policies that women noted and more shockingly, but understandably, the most recommendations came from policies post-birth of the child - many of the women felt that they had enough or sufficient policies for taking the time off, but the thought of coming back to work with the policies in place was most disappointing to all of the participants.

Closing Thoughts

Overall, I felt that I gained sufficient knowledge from the interviews to surmise how women are conceptualizing motherhood as well as what to recommend to organizations in the future to help support this segment of the workforce. I would have liked to diversify my interview participants a bit more as two pairs of interviewees worked at the same organizations so there was some overlap. Being able to interview someone in healthcare and education were both interesting as they are industries that are

corporate but have different structures and policies than the average corporate organization.

In general, I found the responses to be in line with my expectations, particularly from the research. I was mostly surprised by the lack of women desiring to stay home and how many women were comfortable with their maternity leave policies. I was also shocked, not by the request around breastfeeding supports, but by the almost universal desire for them by the participants. That said, many of these women showed that they were taking many different experiences into play when evaluating their own role as mothers and these experiences were impacting how they went about their careers.

CHAPTER 5

DATA INTERPRETATION

Through the literature and research discussed in Chapter 3, combined with the interview insights I discussed in Chapter 5, I have evaluated the information of my study to answer my initial question, *what factors impact and influence women when making career decisions around motherhood?* The following chapter will discuss the insights that have been gleaned from these activities - what experiences, whether from work or their homelife have impacted their career decisions, what types of workplace policies and supports have helped or hindered the female workforce when having children, and what activities would help women when having children and remaining in the workforce. I will then provide my recommendations for organizations and discuss what remaining or new questions I have around the topic. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss my role in the research and how I have remained impartial to the information I have gathered, keeping my own personal thoughts from influencing the discussion.

Homelife Experiences

Through the understanding of cohort replacement theory (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004), I believe that the actions of parents, particularly the differences between mothers and fathers, are observed by their children who then take these as examples of their future actions for when they are in similar positions based on their gender. Daughters watch their mothers and take stock of the activities they perform, while also acknowledging the actions of their fathers as roles of the man. The same happens for men only with the roles reversed. While women do not necessarily see these roles as required or “set in stone”, particularly by traditional family standards (Brown, 2010) nor think this is

required of their roles, they subconsciously fall into the roles of those that came before them as the only option.

Herbert and Stipek (2005) found in their study on how girls and boys are treated differently around certain school subjects due to gender associations that different genders are expected to be better at certain subjects than others. In the particular study, they found that these changes and thoughts begin around the age of 8. These differences in subject carry throughout the young girl's life, continuing through college with the selection of a major, usually opting for roles that are considered "female focused" or "family friendly" (Schieder & Gould, 2016). The delineation of labor and the family role breakdown, particularly on how the father's role plays a part, have been found to impact children when they go on to become parents themselves (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). This research created my hypothesis that women start developing thoughts around motherhood and their future roles at some point in their youth, and the breakdown of their family structure is similarly emulated when they become parents themselves, regardless of their own desires.

Through the interviews, I found that while there's no proof women started having thoughts of their gender roles as early as 8, I did find that the participants started thinking and considering their future as mothers as early as high school. It did not seem that the women chose their college majors based on their desire to have a family, aside from one participant who went back to school after being in the workforce and determining they were not interested in the career path they chose in line with their goals to be a mother. However, like Jane, the woman who went back to school to become a teacher, many of the participants did highlight certain decisions within their desired careers that

were made in line with their aspirations for a family - whether it was Carol or Andrea who both moved to their current locations with their family in mind, or Jackie who went to an organization to have the necessary needs met in order to start a family.

What I did not find in my interviews was a correlation between the family structure of the interviewees and their parents. In almost all of the cases, every participant had a stay-at-home mom, while all of the women were working mothers. In only one case did I interview a mother of more than one child who had a full-time working mother growing up with a stay-at-home dad and now a working husband. Most of the participants noted that their mothers still worked in some capacity after their first child, which would be similar to the interview participants. In the future, I would increase my qualifying pool to allow for mothers of older children, as it seems that when there are multiple or older children, women start to stay home. In line with the research presented by Davis & Greenstein (2009), I would also be interested in the delineation of parent roles in the families of the interviewee's partner. I did ask each interviewee what their husband's role was in their family structure, but only in one interview (Taylor) did we discuss the family structure of their partner's family growing up. By understanding this information, I could see if there's more of a correlation between the father's family structure versus the mother's family structure growing up influencing their present reality.

Workplace Experiences

In Chapter 2, I discuss how the Family Responsibilities Discrimination Act has had the most discrimination cases since 2008 in the workplace (Williams & Bronstein, 2008). Women find they are discriminated against in a variety of ways, whether through

their wages (Williams & Bronstein, 2008), getting hired (Bernard & Correll, 2010), or their work performance (Corinaldi, 2019) - and it's only worse when they become mothers and acknowledge it in their workplace.

From personal experience, I have surmised that women observe the treatment of their female coworkers who go through maternity leave and then return to work and take those observations and internalize them. When it comes time to evaluate their own impending motherhood, women take these experiences and evaluate how they should navigate their own maternity leave based on these experiences. Through research I found many different examples of women who were discriminated against (Bernard & Correll, 2010; Brown, 2010; Budig & Hodges, 2010; Corinaldi 2019; England et al., 2016; McIntosh et al., 2012) whether through hiring practices, pay negotiations, promotions, or less extreme cases like subtle comments, missed opportunities, or microaggressions.

While the research brought this up explicitly, much of the conversations I had with my interview participants did not bring up these types of experiences and they did not seem to have had impact on how the women made their decisions. Some did note, such as Andrea, they faced issues post-childbirth where they felt their colleagues treat them differently, and others such as Carol and Rhys noted women they observed navigate motherhood as examples of how you can juggle a career and motherhood. Jackie did highlight that she chose her current organization due to the maternity leave policy offered, but the change of career was driven more by career goals than the policy, with the policy being a selecting factor. It did not seem that the women were completely unaware of what women go through or experience in the workplace. From the research and conversations, I believe that women acknowledge their experiences in the workplace

when navigating their own career, but those experiences are not the driving forces behind their decisions and are more examples of how to navigate once their decisions are made.

HR Policies and Benefits

As the United States does not have any form of mandated paid maternity or parental leave (Cabrera, 2009), the support women receive from their organizations comes in the form of internal policies and benefits (Gangl and Ziefle, 2009). The only form of leave around having children from a governmental perspective is the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which allows for 12 weeks of unpaid leave to take care of family for medical reasons, including the birth of a child, amongst other medical issues (Mayrhofer et al., 2006). Beyond this, organizations are not required to offer any further support but many do so for supporting their employees or to remain competitive with other organizations.

Luckily, many organizations in 2022 offer some sort of paid or partial paid leave, particularly those who work in corporate jobs requiring bachelor's degrees. The research has found that many women do take less time than is offered by FMLA, but that is due to the fact that they are not paid. Overall, most of the research finds that there is a direct correlation with the amount of time taken off to how much of that time is paid for in line with the household income - those who receive little to no salary replacement are more likely to take less time off than those who receive more replacement (Shepherd-Banigan and Bell, 2014; Suk, 2010, Waldfogel, 2007). To the same end, the lower the household income, the more likely women would either go back to work to end their lesser or no wage time off, or quit the workforce entirely to care for their family (Glass, 2004; Suk, 2010).

Through the interviews, I found that most women were offered between eight to twelve weeks of fully paid time off, where some were offered more time off, or in varying payment degrees. I also found that most of the partners received little to no official time off, even for no payment. All of the women took full advantage of their paid time off and almost all of them took advantage of additional time off, whether offered by their organizations or in conjunction with FMLA. When asked if this time off was sufficient, each participant noted that they would not have taken less time and some even said they would have wanted more if financially able.

However, when asked if there were other things that could be done to support new mothers, many of the participants highlighted the lack of support and policies that come after maternity leave when women enter the workforce. Many focused on breastfeeding - the expectation that you are able to do your job to the same capacity when you return is almost unfeasible if you are breastfeeding. This takes on an even more important tone during the recent formula shortage in the United States. Beyond breastfeeding, flexible work policies and childcare options that support children while parents are working would give women the opportunity to focus on their work.

Career Decisions

Through research and my own interviews, I was able to analyze how women were making decisions around their career, as desired for my initial study and hypothesis. I believe that women start to piece together the image of their working life through the examples of their parents growing up and acknowledging what they wanted from their own lives in relation to those examples. As women start their careers, they make decisions with the knowledge of the workforce and these examples, but tend to make

those decisions independent of how the organization operates. This means that regardless of how the organization treats women with children or the policies they have in place for women with children, women make their decisions around their career and how they will navigate motherhood long before joining the organization.

Recommendations

To address the high level of women considering leaving the workforce (Krivkovich et al., 2021) and the level of discrimination women are facing when it comes to the maternal wall bias (Williams & Bronstein, 2008), I recommend organizations take a look beyond maternity leave policies and address the societal and cultural issues that plague corporate America when working with women. Specifically with organizational policies, I recommend organizations take the “end of the pandemic” to upgrade how they do work from the learnings of the past two years. Organizations have found that work does not need to be done in the office during a set number of hours. By not only allowing, but promoting flexible work policies such as working from home and flexible hours, parents will be better suited to support their childcare responsibilities while managing their work.

Beyond policies, organizations can provide a variety of benefits towards working mothers to help them focus on their jobs and remain in the workforce. For mothers coming back to work after maternity leave, organizations should look towards flexible scheduling such as ramping up with part-time work as the mother adjusts to coming back to the office. For women required to be in the office, schedules and spaces that are convenient for the worker to breastfeed will alleviate the stress and problems that come with balancing a hard to control schedule with work responsibilities. Daycare facilities

such as on-site childcare, sponsored daycares, daycare subsidies, or emergency childcare would also remove the constant balancing that mothers deal with to be able to go to work each day. Acknowledging and supporting the work women are required to do after hours in order to be able to meet office expectations will not only help the mental health of the female employees but create a sense of trust and loyalty with the employee towards the organization.

Furthermore, it shouldn't go unsaid that many of the issues women face in the workplace once they have a child, are much deeper than an organizational issue. American culture has made moves towards a more egalitarian society, but it is still far behind true equality when it comes to the delineation of tasks in the home, we are still quite divided (Krivkovich et. al, 2021). Until our workplace gender divide matches that of the home, there will be differences in roles and responsibilities that may impact work. In the past few years, the different privileges of different groups of people have been brought to the forefront in understanding how to make a more equitable workplace. The necessities and expectations automatically placed on women are at times inevitable and uncontrollable. When conducting diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings, particularly for hiring and management practices, working through different biases around parental status should be addressed so that employees can account for their personal biases and make adjustments to how they operate with that knowledge. By providing benefits that support women and including maternal wall bias in DEI initiatives, organizations will be able to support the female workforce with their needs at home to make them more engaged employees.

Role of Researcher-Observer

If you have made it this far in my paper, you know that this topic is close to my heart and one that, as I am writing this, impacts my mind on a daily basis with my impending motherhood. It would be foolish of me to not acknowledge the fact that my own personal thoughts and beliefs have been brought to this research and are part of my understanding of the topic. In my role as researcher-observer I have had to make conscious decisions to hold myself accountable when I may be impacting the research with my own views. During the interviews, I used a transcription service to help my focus on the conversation with the participants as well as keep my own biases from interpreting the words of the interviewee within my notes.

With the participants themselves, I gave them little information from my research prior to the interview to keep their answers as uniquely theirs as possible. At the end of the interview, I would give them some insights to satisfy their curiosity, but this was after the interview was complete. Through the qualitative coding process, I used common words and phrases to find trends in the data and evaluated with each insight my own role and biases. I have hopefully provided as unbiased an evaluation as possible, with full acknowledgement of my role throughout the experience.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The women's equality movement of the 1960s and 1970s made incredible strides in culture and in American policy, increasing opportunities for women in education and the workplace, including increasing accommodations around maternity leave and working motherhood. By the 1990s, however, progress began to stall, leading women who grew up during this time, myself included, to have merely the same opportunities around motherhood as our own mothers – a policy environment that differs greatly from the policies of many similar developed nations today.

Observing this lack of progress over the years, I was curious how women were perceiving motherhood in the workplace, and if their experiences from adolescence through adulthood and motherhood impacted how they analyzed their own roles and responsibilities. I was determined to delve deeper to examine how cultural and lived experiences are impacting women's career decisions, and additionally seeking to understand how organizations played a part in those decisions. My aim was to explore how these decisions were made and provide recommendations to organizations on how to support the female workforce in order to retain more workers while also addressing their needs.

Through eight interviews with new and aspiring mothers to be, I learned about each woman's upbringing, the impact it had on her evaluation of motherhood and working motherhood, how these experiences impacted how she navigated her career, the policies and support systems that her organization has in place for working mothers, and the joint influence of those policies in tandem with each woman's experiences on their

decision-making processes. These interviews brought to the fore the complexity of the decision-making process around motherhood, highlighting the considerations that matter most and those that are just “icing on the cake”. More importantly, these interviews showed me how strong and resilient women are when faced with mounting pressures from work, home, and general society on being “the perfect woman”.

In the remaining chapter, I will discuss how women, organizations, and any reader interested in supporting working motherhood can influence organization change that demonstrates a better understanding of this group in the workforce. I will then provide recommendations for further research on the topic and other, similar topics. Finally, I will conclude with my personal thoughts and discoveries throughout this process.

Implications and Suggestions

Through my research, I have learned how women navigate motherhood in the workplace, how organizations could provide further support for this cohort, and what needs to be done culturally to continue organizational progress around supporting working mothers. These suggestions are just that – suggestions – and should be taken into consideration with the understanding that each may not work for every individual or organization, nor may they solve every working mother’s issues. I hope that they will at minimum spur further thought and examination from those who wonder “what else can I do?”, and demonstrate areas where progress is possible, allowing working mothers to better serve their organizations and employers to get the best out of this important cohort in the labor force.

Working Mothers

Based on my interviews, a woman's decision to have a child is largely made independent of her working situation – but the *timing* of that decision may be influenced by occupational policies and considerations. Crucially, women should know what types of support is available for them when navigating working motherhood, an area where organizations can play a role. First, there are laws in place to protect women from being discriminated against when pregnant or during motherhood - FMLA requires organizations to give time off. The Family Responsibility Discrimination law exists to prohibit organizations from discriminating against any woman for the status of motherhood - whether that's through pay, promotion, or some other aspect. Unfortunately, this can at times be challenging to fight against without enough proof, but these rules are in place in the United States.

Furthermore, I recommend that women advocate for themselves, holding organizations accountable. A comparison of benefits offered by competitors is an excellent place to start; note what is available and request that your own organization evaluate their policies and align them with the rest of the marketplace. Even if advocacy for policy change is unsuccessful, take full advantage of what is offered - if your organization offers the ability to work from home, utilize the policy if/when necessary. Organizations have these policies in place to support working mothers, and not availing yourself of them is only a disservice to yourself and your organization. Finally, if these policies aren't enough, know that there are organizations out there that are hearing the call of women and doing something about it. Know your

worth and be willing to make a change that can benefit you and your family in the long run.

Organizations

Organizations have done through workplace policy what our government has not through legislation by adapting their internal policies to accommodate their female workforce largely in line with trends that have become commonplace internationally. Workplace policies are increasing the support provided to working mothers more and more - particularly in white collar careers. Fully paid maternity leave is becoming the market standard, with the minimum amount of time off appearing to be around 12 weeks - a standard timeframe in other nations, as well as the time off for our most supportive maternity leave policy in the US - the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Women don't necessarily make their career decisions around the maternity leave policy at their organizations, but if given a choice between two organizations and acknowledging they may soon be a mother, the policy around maternity leave is certainly part of the consideration.

More importantly, organizations at present seem to largely stop providing support to working mothers once maternity leave has ended. Postpartum does not necessarily end when a woman is required to or feels she must return to work. Breastfeeding is particularly a large hurdle women must navigate when returning to the workforce; this issue takes on even greater salience now that the World Health Organization (WHO) has published recommendations for mothers to breastfeed their children for up to two years (World Health Organization, 2021). Breastfeeding is an uncomfortable, time-intensive activity that interrupts work, creates awkward situations, and at times is difficult to

accomplish between finding the right location and the time to be able to step away to do so.

Another issue facing women is that despite the high cost of external childcare, it is not a fail-safe option that never interferes with work life. Daycares have long waitlists to secure positions, creating uncertainty and stress, and are costly once a position has been secured. In addition, many policies are in place to support the children and teachers, but even though they are in the best interests of the staff and the children under their care, they nevertheless can present issues and introduce conflict with work for mothers, like available hours and policies and closures around sickness. Women have to rearrange schedules around these requirements, and at times feel the disappointment at work for requiring grace. Organizations can support women by helping provide childcare, offering beneficial services like emergency babysitters, and, at the very least, offering flexible work policies around working hours and dealing with family illness.

Beyond workplace benefits and policies, organizations can make efforts to include maternal wall bias training with other diversity and inclusion efforts and training. For managers, it is important to highlight areas of bias that are common when considering and evaluating their working mother subordinates. Human Resource Departments can support these efforts by removing the ability to evaluate employees on non-skill based areas such as the amount they are in the office or their “level of commitment” to an organization. Hiring practitioners should focus on bias-free resume reviews to eliminate any bias during the screening portion. By acknowledging that there are biases around working mothers, employees may begin to evaluate how they are perceiving working mothers and tailor their actions to be more supportive.

As discussed throughout the paper, women tend to leave the workforce not because they want to necessarily be full time mothers, but because the demand they experience when balancing work and motherhood becomes too great. Women don't start to leave the workforce right when they have a child, but as they have more children and those children start to age, making it difficult to accomplish the same level of work they achieved pre-motherhood. By adapting and expanding policies to meet the needs of growing families, organizations will be able to help mitigate the overwhelming statistic that 1 out of 3 working mothers are considering leaving the workforce, helping keep consistency and quality in their workplace (Krivkovich et. al, 2021).

Others

Not everyone who wants to support working mothers is one themselves or occupies a role that can make change within an organization. For coworkers, even if there is not any formal training around removing bias against working mothers, there is always an opportunity to be an ally to working mothers and speak up when you see biases at play in your organization. This includes offering opportunities to everyone, regardless of what their situation at home might be, shutting down any assumptions around the impact of childcare on work, and asking outright how you can support them.

Fathers also can play a role in helping alleviate the issues women face in the workplace. First, taking the full paternity leave offered by their organization is one of the most important things men can do to support women in the workplace. By taking the offered leave in full, men are signaling the importance of the benefit to other employees and are removing the stigma around the inconvenience of taking leave, as it is an equal opportunity benefit for *all* parents. Particularly for fathers in management roles, it is

important to take on elements of the childcare responsibilities and be open about them. While this may benefit their partner, allowing them to work more than they would in a more traditional family structure, this also signals to their organization the importance of being a parent for both mothers and fathers and lessens the gender stereotype and potential biases it may create. Everyone can play a part in ameliorating the issues faced by working mothers, regardless of their parental status.

Further Research Recommendations

My research posed some gaps in study as well as brought up new thoughts and questions that are worthy of exploration in further research. First, my research focused on a very specific demographic - women in middle management with bachelor's degrees in dual partnerships. Of the participants I was able to speak with, all were white women, living on the East Coast of the United States, in heterosexual relationships. While I wanted a more privileged class to identify what problems still remain in maternal care that need to be addressed across all groups of women in the United States, it is worthy to note how women of color, women in other locations, or women in homosexual relationships may differ from those with whom I spoke.

As my research discovered how women are heavily impacted by the experiences of their childhood and make decisions long before they enter the workforce, this poses further questions. How can organizations prepare and support their workforce with external personal factors impacting their employees? Are trends in motherhood predictive of the future female workforce? How can workplaces influence societal change, for example around a more equalitarian homelife?

I also discovered how policies have little influence on decision-making around how to navigate motherhood, but that after motherhood happens, there are extreme gaps in support for women maintaining a career while being a parent. This could explain why women tend to leave the workforce not immediately after they have their first child, but as their child ages, and particularly as they grow their family. It would be worthwhile to probe deeper into the reasons for *leaving* the workforce - are there policies at play? Do the women feel they need to return because of the maternity leave they just took from their organization? Is there too much pressure that makes them feel they can't work and be a mother? As I did not do much research into the policies post maternity leave, it would be interesting to do an analysis on which one of those exist, the retention rates at organizations with those policies, and if governments have any of those types of acts or laws, such as universal childcare, what are the implications on the female workforce?

As motherhood in the workplace is not a trend that will go away, there are many ways organizational researchers could evaluate ways to improve organizations and the workforce alike. As we strive for greater equality, it is imperative to continue to focus on ways there are still differences, and evaluate solutions to reach our goal.

Personal Reflection

When beginning my study, I knew the personal connection I had to the topic from the onset. I often grappled with my own ideas of working motherhood and questioned the impact having a child would have on my career – I felt I had worked hard to meet my career goals and was finally feeling satisfied with what I had accomplished. In the midst of my research, my husband and I decided to start a family, and as I write this, I am now weeks away from becoming a working mother myself. The topic has enveloped my life,

and has helped validate feelings I have had for years, helping to bring a sort of comfort and reassurance about making the jump into motherhood.

In conversations with the interview participants, I learned that my negative experiences around motherhood in the workplace were not commonplace, and that many women are not dissuaded by their organizations on when to have children. To that end, while we have yet to make efforts for a universal maternity or parental leave standard in the United States, the corporate world has largely stepped up to meet the needs of their employees, putting leave policies in place comparable to international legal standards more and more to support the working mothers amongst their workforce. In reality, it's watching our mothers and fathers navigate parenthood that starts shaping our views. Women overwhelmingly look up to their mothers, and whether or not they choose to work or stay home with their children, the admiration we have for our mothers is a driving force for how we eventually navigate motherhood ourselves.

When evaluating how I will apply this information and experience to being a mother myself, I think how my husband and I show work to our child is imperative, regardless of gender. If our child is a daughter, one of the main examples I want to set for her is that working is something I do for myself, and not out of necessity or requirement. I want my daughter to know that working while raising a child or staying at home are both incredibly valuable experiences, but should be chosen because that is what she wants to do. More importantly, particularly if we have a son, the example I provide will not only be imperative, but the example my husband provides will be as well. In the home, showing our children that dad is able to clean, cook, and run carpool, and mom

goes to work, fixes a broken toy or electronic, and balances the checkbook, are all important to creating a more equal homelife which will translate to their adulthood.

Finally, I think the overall takeaway is where I need to be a champion for working mothers - as one myself. All the fear I had would only ever be that until I became a mother myself. While I could support my working mother colleagues as much as my heart's desire, no meaningful change to the places I worked at and work for currently would be had until I became one myself. By understanding how policies and benefits play or do not play into how women interact with their organizations, I can evaluate what is needed to make my life and those of my fellow mothers easier as we work. I can speak up when a policy is helpful or when one is not, when I see inequities in the workplace around how women are treated when becoming mothers, and how mutually beneficial policies can be enacted to support women and keep them contributing to the organization. We have come a long way, and it should not be discredited, but with a few changes at home and work, we can truly continue to make great strides in equality and change what working motherhood looks like for the next generation.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Thank you for being willing to participate in this interview for my Masters capstone. The title of my capstone is *The Mother of All Decisions: Exploring Social and Cultural Expectations Impact on How Women with Young Children Make Career Decisions*. The purpose of this research is to learn how women of childbearing age and desires make career decisions based on the social and cultural expectations of women of young children. I am particularly interested in learning about the different steps and decisions that women with children or strong interests in motherhood have taken to get to their current position. Research shows that American society largely sees the traditional view of the mother staying home with her children as a concept of the past and women are outpacing men in undergraduate and graduate degrees. However, part-time employment is largely made up of mothers and according to a McKinsey study, one out of three women are considering leaving the workforce since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. My research will be focused on trying to better understand the influences and factors affecting young, professional women – both personally and professionally – when they decide (or are deciding to) have children.

The format of this interview will be via Zoom and will last approximately 45 minutes. At the beginning of the interview I will ask you to choose a pseudonym that will appear in the transcript and which I will use to refer to you in my research. Your identity will be known only to me, Sarah Dusinger Brennan. Please choose your pseudonym now.

_____ [Interviewee Pseudonym]

As part of the interview process, are you willing for me to record this interview?

Yes or No

[If yes - Thank you, I will start the recording of the interview now; If no - No problem, I will take notes instead.]

As a reminder, this interview is completely voluntary. As such I will now read you the consent form.

Read consent form as included in the above document

[If yes - start interview; If no - end interview]

We will begin the interview with some questions on background.

1. First, I would like to ask some questions about your career and motherhood. Can you tell me about where you started your career?

Information to gather: Where they started, promotions, job changes, additional schooling / certifications, roles & responsibilities, length of time at current organization

Where did you go next? Where are you now?

2a. [If the interviewee has children] You noted that you have X children under the age of

5. Can you tell me about what you did when you had each child, specifically what the maternity leave policy was at your company at the time?

How much time did you take off with each child?

What type of leave did your partner / spouse have at the time and how much time did they take off?

Were these pregnancies planned and if so, what factors contributed to deciding it was the right time to have a child?

2b. [If the interviewee does not have children] You noted that you are interested in having children in less than 3 years. Can you tell me about what your current maternity leave policy is at your company?

If you were to find out you were pregnant tomorrow, what would you plan on doing for your maternity leave?

What type of leave does your partner / spouse have at their company and what would their plan be?

Why are you considering having a child now and what is influencing this timeframe?

How do you feel about the benefits offered by your organization?

3. The next questions are to understand your thoughts on cultural influences with working mothers. First, can you share some experiences about your upbringing in regard to your parents' work?

Did both of your parents work full-time?

What was the role of your mother and what was the role of your father?

What was the experience like for you?

How did your parents explain "adulthood" or "parenthood" to you?

What were the other family supports and / or childcare options that your family utilized to assist them?

What was that like?

How do you think these experiences made you approach your career?

When do you think you started making those decisions?

Have you spoken with your parents about why they chose to make those decisions around parenthood and what factors were at play?

How do you think these experiences made you approach motherhood?

4a. [If the interviewee has children] What is your current household set-up in relation to childcare?

How did you make those decisions?

How are they working out and what would you do differently?

How do these arrangements impact your work?

How do these arrangements impact your homelife?

4b. [If the interviewee does not have children] Have you already made a plan for childcare if you were to have a child?

How did you make this decision?

How do you see this arrangement to impact your work?

How do you see this arrangement to impact your homelife?

5. How do you see working mothers?

What do you think is the general perception of working mothers?

How is child-bearing viewed at your current organization or past organizations?

Where do you think these views come from?

How do you think this compares to fatherhood?

6. What considerations have you made when considering motherhood in your career?

Would you have done something differently?

What experiences have you had observing working motherhood in your current or former organizations?

How have these experiences impacted you?

7. How could organizations better support working mothers?
8. Do you have any final thoughts or comments you would like to share on this topic?

Do you know of other people who would be interested in participating in this study?

Thank you for participating in my research. I will now end the recording. I will be compiling my interviews and analyzing my findings. At the completion of my capstone, I will share my final analysis and review with you for better understanding. If at any point you have any questions or follow-up, please let me know.