NEGOTIATING PARENTAL LEAVES IN CORPORATE ALBERTA

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DEDICATION

To my Dad, a champion of workplace gender equality who inspired the undertaking of this research. You are a role model, mentor, and hero to all who know you.

ABSTRACT

This thesis inquiry has analysed the ways in which parental leaves are experienced by those working in medium to large corporations in Alberta. The aim of this research was to discover the implications of parental leave on workers within a corporate setting and to better understand how these implications differ by gender. Within the broader contexts of feminist political economy and social constructionism, my research uncovered three primary findings. First, leave-taking individuals lack appropriate policy knowledge. Next, leave-taking individuals redefine their leaves in non-standard ways. Lastly, leave-taking individuals struggle to balance worker and parent identities both within and outside of the home and workplace. My findings suggest that a one size fits all maternity and parental leave policy is not enough.

PREFACE

This qualitative research obtained in this document gained approval from the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee as well as compliance with the Tri-Council standards. This included the approval of flyers or advertisements for participants, and participant consent forms. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unforeseeable circumstance that arose during the interviewing stages of my research. Care and consideration was given to the health and safety of myself and participants and the majority of my interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. In the instance that interviews could not be completed virtually, in-person, outdoor, and socially distanced interviews took place.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My research examines the impacts of taking parental leave on workers in medium to large businesses in Alberta. This research is primarily based on interviews with individuals who are currently taking parental leave or who have recently returned to work after parental leave. The Canadian government recently added an option for five additional weeks of parental benefits (if the leave is shared by both parents) effective March 2019. Extended parental benefits and leave, up to 61 weeks, have been available in Canada since 2017 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019b). Workers now have the option for longer parental leaves, and more men may be taking leaves, so concerns about negative reactions by co-workers and employers may be heightened with these changes. Improving workplace attitudes toward leave uptake is especially important to encourage the second parent to take the additional leave that is now provided for them. Additionally, an investigation into the newness of these policies and the knowledge new parents have about these polices is valuable to further understand parental leave experiences. My research evaluates the implications of paid leave on an individual's status within a company in light of these recent policy changes. This chapter will outline my research questions and primary objectives with a concluding discussion of the theoretical frameworks guiding this thesis inquiry.

My thesis contributes to knowledge in the field by using an employment perspective to analyze how the individual's uptake of parental leave is influenced by organizational cultures and corporate attitudes and norms. Organizational culture can be defined as shared sets of values and beliefs that influence employee actions (Hass & Hwang, 2007, 54). Much of the current research surrounding maternity and parental leave

describes how leave uptake influences families more broadly– specifically in regards to domestic labour, divisions of parenting, and childcare (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Doucet 2006; McKay & Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014). When conceptualizing parental leave, the employment perspective I am considering is an interesting facet and at times is overlooked in current literature. I recognize it is valuable to describe the influences of parental leave on families due to the topic's popularity in current research and the practical outcomes it has for families. However, my thesis can provide timely insights in the field in regards to the impact on individuals as employees in light of recent governmental policy changes.

An employment perspective considers the ways in which factors related to an individual's employment, such as position in company and seniority, can influence the uptake of parental leave. As well, an employment perspective considers all the formal and informal interactions with others in the workplace that shape a future parent's decision-making. These factors can influence what type of leave a parent takes (12 or 18 months), the possibility to complete working tasks throughout leave, and what type of position an individual returns to post-leave such as a shift to part-time hours. Tremblay and Genin (2010) underscore the importance of an employment perspective by emphasizing what they believe to be the primary goal of parental leave. They state "[p]arental leave is designed to allow parents to concentrate on family matters for a certain period, to keep their job and to return to their paid employment afterwards without a problem"(533). A smooth return to employment post-leave seems to be a goal of parental leave policies in addition to facilitating space for family matters. An examination of discussions surrounding employment and leave-taking is valuable to better understand the interrelated

experiences of working and parenting, including the return to work within the parameters of government policy.

McKay and co-authors (2016) utilize similar employment perspectives in their research when they state "[l]eaves of absence straddle the intersection of employment relations and family life, and government realms of social/family policy and labour market policy" (549). Taking an employment perspective when discussing parental leave is valuable because it not only recognizes working and parenting to be intertwined but it also functions in unison with feminist political economy to facilitate broader discussions surrounding how inequalities come about. Workplaces are understood by both Doucet & McKay (2020) and Moss & Deven (2015) to be an "unresolved presence" which becomes a determinant of whether parents take leave or not and the environment into which parents return after taking leave (Moss & Deven, 2015, 142). The conjunction between leave as it relates to employment and workplaces more broadly is what this thesis is most interested in discussing. The employment perspective is use in a growing body of literature that attends to connections between parental leave policies and workplace cultures (for example, see Doucet & McKay 2020; Moss & Deven 2015; Tremblay & Genin 2010).

Maternity and parental benefits and leaves in Canada are as follows. A fifteen week maternity leave is given to the birth-giving parent (including surrogates) at fifty-five percent of average weekly insurable earnings. Parental leave can be broken down into standard and extended benefits. Both the standard and extended benefits are open to birth and adoptive parents and can be taken by one parent or shared by both. The standard parental leave includes a thirty-five week leave at fifty-five percent of average weekly

insurable earnings. The extended parental leave includes a sixty-one week leave at thirty-three percent of average weekly insurable earnings.

Lastly, the recently added March 2019 parental leave includes a five-week standard leave at fifty-five percent of average weekly insurable earnings or an eight-week extended at thirty-three percent of average weekly insurable earnings only if the leave is taken by the second parent (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019a). The standard parental leave includes a total of forty weeks of leave with one parent taking no more than thirty-five weeks while the extended parental leave includes a total of sixty-nine weeks of leave with one parent taking no more than sixty-one weeks. The rate of parental leave uptake by men in 2016 was roughly twelve percent (Department of Finance 2018). There also were temporary provisions made to the maternity and parental leave qualifications during the COVID-19 pandemic (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). These provisions will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The Canadian government has shifted the terminology surrounding the recently added parental benefit over the past two years from acknowledging ‘second parents’ to just ‘parent(s)’. My usage of the term second parents across this thesis was influenced by the earlier use of this language by the government. In 2018, a year in advanced of the program, The Department of Finance announced a press release where phrases like “two parent families” and “second parent leave” were used (Department of Finance 2018). Additionally, at the time the benefit took effect in 2019, quotes on the Government of Canada website from The Honourable Maryam Monsef described that the benefit will create "stronger bonds between fathers or second parents and their babies” (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019e).

Furthermore, The Government of Canada provides two parent examples on their website, in addition to single parent examples, through the use of infographics to better explain the uptake of this leave (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019d). It should be noted that even though the term 'parent(s)' denotes multiplicity, the examples provided on the Government of Canada website do not include any type of polygamous family or scenarios where three parents would be sharing parental leave. In addition to these examples, other Canadian scholars like Doucet (2020) who research the recently added parental benefit use the term second parent when describing fathers or other parents who take this leave. These caveats including initial government terminology, current examples on The Government of Canada website, and usage of term by other scholars have led me to apply the term 'second parent' throughout the entirety of this thesis.

According to Findlay & Kohen (2012), the uptake of leave by gender is very disproportionate as Canadian mothers on average take forty-four weeks of leave while fathers only take an average of two and a half weeks (3). These averages differ for parents living in Québec who utilize additional benefits for leave sharing by parents. Overall, parental leaves both historically and currently are still very gendered (Pettigrew 2020). The term 'maternity leave' is often conflated with what is actually parental leave. My research is most interested in the aspects of parental leave. While these policies are nation-wide, they may be received differently in Alberta and across various provinces.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. When individuals take parental leave, what experiences do they have in regards to impacts on their relationships with co-workers or managers?

2. When individuals take leave, what experiences do they have in regards to impacts on their status in the company, their eligibility for promotions or salary increases, or other conditions of work?
3. What are the gender differences of leave experiences in relation to paid work?
4. Does taking leave as the second parent have any particular impacts on individuals' experiences?

1.2 OBJECTIVES

My primary objective regarding this analysis of parental leave is to contribute to sociological knowledge regarding worker concerns and fears over parental leave, especially in light of business culture, employment experiences, and recent changes in government policy. Workers now have the option for longer parental leaves, and the additional weeks dedicated to the second parent may impact the numbers of men taking leaves, so concerns about negative reactions by co-workers and employers may be heightened. My data only includes heterosexual couples therefore I am primarily talking about fathers as second parents.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This section reviews the theoretical frameworks used in this research, specifically social constructionism and feminist political economy. This section begins with a description of my two primary frameworks and concludes with a discussion on how theory may be integrated with literature. As theoretical frameworks, these theories ground my research in the sociological tradition of social relationships, interaction, and society. Social constructionism and feminist political economy provide insights about interventions and moderations of these leaves from managers, employers, co-workers,

and more broadly hierarchies within a workplace. My two chosen theoretical lens, social constructionism and feminist political economy, are used by current scholars and provide interesting insights to this research (Andrew 2003; Armstrong & Armstrong 1990; Jon Maroney & Luxton 2014; Elder-Vass 2007; Vosko 2002).

Social constructionism looks at how interaction creates the meanings that we attach to people, places, and things in terms of our social, cultural, and historical context (Elder-Vass 2007). Social constructionism is useful when conceptualizing issues pertaining to industry-specific policy and workplace stigmatization (Elder-Vass 2007).

Social constructionism is used by authors in the field to conceptualize how different organizational cultures construct norms and attitudes and how individuals interpret these norms. Furthermore, social constructionism can also be applied to the creation of gender roles and divisions of labour within families. For organizational culture, socially constructed norms can differ between departments in a single company or between particular corporations more broadly (Acker 1990). Organizational structures also shape the conditions employees experience before and after taking a leave. These experiences may include apprehensions individuals feel when telling supervisors their plan for leave (Borgkvist et al. 2018). Regardless of the legalities of leave, individuals may feel the constructions of specific organizational cultural norms also influence their decisions. For individual family units, social constructionism dictates how leave is negotiated resulting in divisions of labour both within the household and workplace (McKay & Doucet 2010). If the mother assumes majority of the leave, then social constructionism would suggest that she will take a lead on domestic work as well.

Social constructionism has been useful when deciding how questions should be phrased in interviewing. My interview questions have been framed in ways that allow participants to indirectly speak to the organizational cultures within which they work. Social constructionism has been able to provide multidimensional insights surrounding reactions to leave in the workplace. The questions I asked, within a social constructionist framework, have uncovered biases toward and stigmatization of employees who take leaves. Understanding the ways leaves are constructed in organizational culture have helped me better understand why individuals negotiate the leaves they do.

Feminist political economy focuses on how inequalities are produced. This framework emphasizes economic and political factors to explain inequalities for particular bodies in capitalist economic frameworks (Pupo, Duffy, & Glenday, 2017, 252). Feminist political economy is a valuable theoretical framework because parental leave encompasses gendered and classed experiences of working and parenting. Additionally, feminist political economy can map onto examinations of government regimes and the market (Jon Maroney & Luxton 2014; Meisenbach et al. 2008; Peterson 2005; Vosko 2002). This is an important evaluation when understanding parental leave as part of broader economic structures.

Feminist political economy encompasses many theoretical frameworks that both predate and grow out of its theoretical structures. Much of the literature surrounding feminist political economy tends to pinpoint political economy and historical materialism as the foundation of the theory (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990, 47). More specifically, it has been argued that historical materialism draws attention to economic structures that position different experiences for women and men and for people of different social

classes, creating the foundation for political economy and later feminist political economy.

Authors in the field utilize feminist political economy to understand both women's and men's experiences of parental leave to be unique on the basis of gender differences. Both women and men experience many obstacles to taking parental leaves. Particular policies and corporate norms may hinder the uptake of leaves. Prior to the March 2019 parental leave provisions, feminist political economy scholars would recognize second parents as excluded from leave narratives and therefore removed from particular domestic and parenting narratives, as well as being positioned differently in policy. As well, feminist political economy may help us to understand access to leave policies by those who are not cis-gendered. Without the feminist political economy framework these unique experiences may never be evaluated.

Many scholars from the field utilize elements from both social constructionism and feminist political economy in their research. Secondary theories that grow out of social construction and feminist political economy are helpful to consider. Fleischmann and Sieverding (2015) leverage backlash theory to hypothesize what people's reactions may be to men who take leave. Fleischmann and Sieverding do not look at men's experiences directly rather they ask university students to evaluate hypothetical scenarios. For Fleischmann and Sieverding, backlash theory examines how economic and social sanctions are a response to unconventional behavior (464). This unconventional behavior may include acting in gender-counterstereotypical ways. The usage of backlash theory in Fleischmann and Sieverding's study emphasizes that backlash towards men taking parental leave is socially constructed. The process of researching backlash reinforces the

assumption that backlash may be persistent in the construction of organizational cultures and the norms surrounding men and parental leave. Although backlash was not an official finding of the study, the authors found backlash necessary to study because of its socially constructed tendencies. Backlash theory, although independent of social constructionism, is employed similarly using social frameworks to conceptualize how interactions affect meaning.

The interplay between social constructionism and feminist political economy is clear. Feminist political economy recognizes that both women and men are disadvantaged by particular social constructions in organizational cultures and families. When leave experiences are constructed in different ways, feminist political economy can evaluate gender and class relations and denote new narratives in the shifting economy. Lastly, feminist political economy helps to deconstruct privilege and power dynamics within parental leave policies. Power dynamics may include access to Employment Insurance (EI), hiring practices, social class and the organizational position of workers, and cultural stigmatization surrounding new mothers. These power dynamics are created through social constructions at personal, corporate, and government levels. Backlash theory, social constructionism, feminist political economy, and historical materialism are just some of the theoretical frameworks in the literature today. Each theory helps to shed light on people's experiences in employment, in relation to taking leave.

The remainder of this thesis will begin with a literature review outlining the primary findings and discussions from other scholars in the field. Next, I will describe the methodology for this thesis inquiry including insights into participant recruitment and the qualitative interviewing process. Chapter 4 will begin with discussions of feminist

political economy and the leave experiences of participants. Chapter 5 will describe social constructionism and how it pertains to the reactions of others. Chapter 6 will describe the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to experiences of leave-taking. Finally, my conclusion will summarize the analysis and findings of this research while making recommendations for additional future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I will outline five areas of concern that frame this project. I will first examine geographic comparisons to maternity and parental leave policies in Québec and European countries which are similar to the Canadian federal government's recently added option for five additional weeks of parental benefits for the second parent.[1] This policy is aimed at encouraging both parents to take leave, with the hope that men, in particular, will be encouraged to do so. Other topics I will consider are unpaid domestic work, fathers' reluctance to take parental leave, organizational culture and stigmatization, and structural features in relation to organizational culture. My hope is that the literature review outlines the uniqueness of the employment perspective in parental leave research as well as highlights the timeliness of my thesis inquiry.

2.1 GEOGRAPHIC COMPARISIONS FROM QUÉBEC AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

This section will review studies from places with non-transferable leave policies similar to the recently added parental benefits in Canada. The important points in this section are the positive outcomes this type of leave has on a father's participation in the household and suggestions to further revise Canada's current parental leave policies. I will discuss the following points in relation to Alberta's organizational culture.

Much of the current Canadian research does not reference the recently added parental benefits implemented in March 2019, making my research inquiry very timely for the field. Doucet and co-authors (2020) have recently published an article describing parental leave policy changes in the context of COVID-19 which will be described in

[1] The recently added parental benefit, implemented in March 2019, will be referred to as the *recently added parental benefits* for the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 6. Current research provides comparisons to Québec and various European countries, like Sweden, who have had non-transferable parental leave policies since 2006 and 1993 respectively (Calnitsky 2019; Hass & Hwang 2007, 2008, 2019a, 2019b; McKay & Doucet 2010). There have been many positive outcomes from these leave policies in Québec and European countries, one of the most cited examples being fathers' increased participation in domestic labour (Hass & Hwang 2007, 2008, 2019a, 2019b; McKay & Doucet 2010; McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet 2016).

Since Alberta has a very distinct organizational culture, characterized by conservative ideology and the prominence of oil and gas, I was curious if the recently added parental benefit was working in similar ways to Québec and various European countries. Williams (2017) argues that the oil and gas industry is the most powerful, global, essential, and lucrative industry in the world making workplace policies in this industry vary in regards to its impacts on employees, industry, and even the economy (123). Moreover, Hass and Hwang (2019b), researching in Sweden, highlight how private sector corporations are slower than the public sector to support fathers' leave-taking due to cost concerns and the profit driven nature of companies even in the relatively pro-family climate of Nordic countries (13). I was interested to see if similar corporate values are being negotiated in private sector Alberta. In this section, I will describe what literature is stating about Québec and European countries and consider how this might relate to the experiences of those working in Alberta.

Québec is unique when compared to other Canadian provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Québec utilizes Employment Insurance (EI) programs as well as Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) to provide avenues to maternity and parental leaves. QPIP

departs from EI in four significant ways: A) lower eligibility criteria ($2000 earnings) and inclusion of the self-employed; B) non-transferable parental leave; C) greater flexibility with plan options and; D) higher income replacement rates (McKay & Doucet, 2010, 302-303). The lower eligibility criteria differs from the rest of Canada because EI uses hours of insurable employment rather than earnings. (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019c). The recently added parental benefit policy in the rest of Canada is similar to QPIP under the non-transferable parental leave. QPIP more generally helps couples negotiate parental leaves in a landscape where they may have been previously excluded from accessing leave due to obstacles like low income. McKay and co-authors (2016) describe positive outcomes of QPIP when they state:

> Our comparison of programs reveals that far greater access and equality of access by income are achieved in Québec under QPIP than in the rest of Canada under EI. Further, we found that annual household income makes a difference to mothers' access to parental leave benefits, particularly for families earning less than $30,000 per year in the rest of Canada (555).

Québec's QPIP parental leave model provides insights into what outcomes similar policies in Alberta could have for organizational culture. I was curious to see if the new revisions to leave policy, which lack QPIP's lower eligibility criteria, were as beneficial in Alberta in light of recent economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The non-transferable parental leave portion of QPIP and the recently added parental benefit policy help to combat divisions of gendered roles in domestic work. These non-transferable weeks of leave have come to be known as 'daddy days' as they are aimed at facilitating men taking a lead on domestic labour and women remaining in the workplace. McKay and Doucet (2010) state:

> With a longer leave period now available, we also found that mothers' attachment to work contributed to fathers taking leave. It is also important to emphasize that

> non-transferable paternity leave for fathers - now available in Québec - does make a significant difference, although it, and greater coverage rates for mothers, leads to more fathers taking leave for less time, in comparison to longer leave patterns by fewer fathers outside of Québec, who only have access to gender-neutral leave – the only option in their provinces (317).

A shift in parenting and gendered roles in households is what the recent parental benefit policy in Canada is attempting to achieve. The majority of men will not simply take a lead on domestic labour if they are already the lead financial provider for the household. Non-transferable leave helps to dismantle these notions (Björk Eydal et al., 2015, 178).

Hass and Hwang (2008) describe men's participation in domestic labour in the context of Sweden. Parental leave was available in Sweden beginning in 1974, and non-transferable parental leave became available starting in 1993. Sweden leverages this non-transferable policy to promote gender equality, with women and men having equal opportunities and responsibilities to contribute economically to the family and care for children (85). The organizational culture in Sweden promotes dual earner families opposed to the single earner family model (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014, 20). Policy development in Sweden focuses on encouraging men to take more responsibility for their children, as well as freeing women's time for labour market work (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014, 20).

Hass and Hwang (2008) state "[o]ne important type of family policy that can encourage men's participation in early childcare is government-mandated paid parental leave. Taking leave would presumably help men become more actively involved in sharing childcare with women" (87). Hass and Hwang's description here is very pertinent since I am using the social constructionist perspective as a framework. Understanding parenting as something that is learned, rather than something that is natural, helps in

supporting the non-transferable parental leave policy. As well, viewing parenting as a learned skill helps dismantle heteronormative norms that promote the idea that only women possess maternal instincts.

Many Nordic countries differ in their political climate and strictness of policy. Björk Eydal and co-authors (2015) describe each of the five Nordic countries positioning Norway, Sweden and Iceland as more left wing and Finland and Denmark as more conservative (177). Denmark is the only Nordic country without a dedicated parental leave. Overall, these four countries, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Finland are the leaders in parental leave policy. Björk Eydal and co-authors summarize the primary goal of parental leave policies for the Nordic countries when they state:

> Despite these differences, all the Nordic countries still seem to be moving in the direction of the dual earner/dual care model in the construction of their parental leave construction while in the case of Denmark the development of the parental leave scheme suggests that gender equality is less institutionally supported. (177)

This dual earner and dual care model seems to be a similar goal to that of the recently added parental benefits in Canada. Literature shows that dual parental models have been successful and aid in shaping new cultural norms surrounding uptake of maternity and parental leaves.

Germany has had non-transferable parental leave since 2007. This non-transferable parental leave policy is similar to Sweden and other Nordic countries. While authors have cited similar outcomes for non-transferable parental leaves in Germany, there are nuanced outcomes pertaining to public and private sector corporations that could be similar to Alberta. Geisler and Kreyenfeld (2018) in their article on parental leave in Germany explain "[o]ur analysis also supports prior research that showed that workplace characteristics, sector of employment and type of employment contract are

important determinants of fathers' parental leave usage. Public sector employees were more likely than private sector employees to have taken leave before the reform, and this gap persisted after the reform" (284). The European countries mentioned and Québec are more overtly liberal, as opposed to Alberta, making these suggestions more attainable. I was interested in examining if parental leaves under the new parental benefit policy are working in similar or contradictory ways to Québec and European countries.

This review of the literature from Québec and various European countries answers questions regarding how parental leave policies such as non-transferable leave days are encouraging the second parent to take parental leave. This question is important because organizational culture in Alberta may differ from these other geographic locations. Women's labour force participation rate in Alberta in 2019, among those 25 years and older, was sixty-six percent which is high when compared to other Canadian provinces which sits at fifty-nine percent (Statistics Canada, 2019). I was curious if women's labour force participation in Alberta was higher due to the strength of Alberta's economy and the competitive profit-driven nature of organizational culture in the province.

Men's labour force participation rate in Alberta in 2019, among those 25 years and older, was seventy-nine percent is drastically higher when compared to women in the same category in Alberta which was sixty-six percent (Statistics Canada, 2019), and represents a larger gap then in most other Canadian provinces. If women and men are given equal access to employment and promotions, then these numbers should be more equal. Furthermore, *Forbes Magazine* recently released an article titled "Canada's Best Employers," the 2020 list of best employers was based on criteria including gender equity and work-life balance. Out of the top fifty companies, there was not one Alberta

corporation listed (*Forbes Magazine*, 2020). I was curious if these labour force participation disparities were more influenced by gender dynamics or the characteristics of organizational culture in the province.

Alberta's organizational culture is characterized by right wing ideology tied to long term political conservatism in the province and hegemonic masculinity due to ingrained notions of frontier and cowboy culture. Richards (2019) underscores these notions of masculinity through discussions of the stampede when she states "[m]any of these performance practices produce an affective climate of crude optimism that is politically and economically expedient for the petroleum industry, underwrites settler innocence, and legitimizes the expropriation of Indigenous land" (141). The cowboy ethos is directly tied to masculinity and is intertwined with the prominence of the oil and gas industry in the province (Williams 2017; Miller 2004).

Prior to 2015, the Progressive Conservative PC party (currently known as the UCP) had a four decade hold on the Albertan electorate (Acuña, 2015, 301-305). The conservative agenda typically encompasses a neo-liberal ethos that indirectly, and at times directly, influence organizational culture in the province. Stefanick (2015) furthers this argument stating "[t]he merging of the political arm of government and the administrative apparatus that serves it is part of the legacy of the 'business government' tradition in Alberta" (364). Since the Alberta government has such a strong influence on corporations and organizational culture it is clear that hegemonic masculine ideals prevail.

Alberta business culture situates men in high earning careers and subsequent breadwinner roles in their families (Miller 2004; Richards 2019; Williams 2019).

Williams (2019) describes this masculinity further when she states: "[o]rganizations are structured in ways to benefit men and qualities associated with masculinity. The concept of 'organizational logic' illuminates how the routine features of bureaucratic organizations, including job descriptions, compensation systems, and performance evaluations, are all biased against women" (200-201). These masculine practices within an organization are reinforced by the dominance of the oil and gas industry in Alberta which has historically been known to have social and economic significance on a global scale. Miller (2004) describes how the oil and gas industry becomes inherently masculine through three major processes. She states:

> The dominant, or hegemonic, masculinity in the oil industry is expressed through three major themes, or processes: everyday interactions are characterized by informalism and paternalism based on shared masculine interests that exclude women from power; individualistic competition is combined with a dominant engineering occupational culture effectively to reinforce the division of work by gender; and gendered interactions and occupations are embedded in a consciousness derived from the powerful symbols of the frontier myth and romanticized cowboy hero. The result of these processes and their underlying consciousness is a powerfully masculine culture. (48)

Alberta business culture has arrived at a point where masculinity is not only intertwined within the employee demographic, but in the day-to-day practices and organizational values and assumptions. These masculine practices can become problematic in the face of parental leave uptakes because masculinity remains tightly bound to breadwinning in the family (Williams, 2017, 121). The presence of masculinity, the dominance of the oil and gas industry, and values tightly bound to breadwinning make Alberta business culture a distinct area of consideration for this research inquiry.

2.2 THE QUESTION OF UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK

This section will review how parental leaves effect divisions of gender roles in unpaid domestic work. Most research to date has tended to focus on heterosexual couples, and to combine discussions of maternity and parental leave. My research, however, is focused on parental leave and was open to hearing the experiences of same-sex couples and adoptive couples. The important points in this discussion (covered in this section and the next) are how women are disproportionately responsible for domestic work; how governmental policy creates barriers to parental leave uptake; and more generally how these obstacles perpetuate heteronormative leave experiences. I will be discussing these three issues in relation to parental leaves and in light of the recently added parental benefits in Canada.

Current literature looks closely at how leave uptake affect decisions and roles within the household – including decisions about domestic labour, divisions of parenting, and childcare. The question of unpaid domestic work is one that is popular among current sociological inquires. Research shows that mothers are still disproportionately responsible for unpaid domestic and caring work (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Calnitsky 2019; Doucet 2006; Hass & Hwang 2007; Mariskind 2017; McKay & Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014). Scholars outline many barriers women and men face when negotiating maternity and parental leave and how gender norms and corporate attitudes reiterate heteronormative leave experiences (Calnitsky 2019; McKay & Doucet 2010; Williams et al. 2013).

Feminist political economy scholars ground their understandings in historical materialism which recognizes the impact of capitalism on various aspects of social life.

Family structure and gender roles are not fixed entities, however, they are dynamically shaped by history and culture (Doucet 2019; Kimmel 2000; Comacchio 2000). Gender roles have been socially constructed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century through a separation of public and private spheres and a woman or man's work in relation to these spheres. The separation of spheres provided the foundation for women to primarily work on domestic tasks. Kimmel (2020) notes that the separation of gender roles is experienced by mostly white middle-class families and is not as equally common for other classes, cultures, or racialized groups. Kimmel (2000) describes the separation of spheres and gender roles in the context of twentieth century when he states:

> If men were liberated, women's position was as exalted in popular literature as it was potentially imprisoning in reality. In popular literature, from the nation's pulpits and in high art, women's work was reconceptualized, not as "work" at all, but rather as a God-given mission. While some home-based work was eliminated, such as spinning and weaving, much of women's sphere remained intact; they still cooked meals and baked bread, even if their husbands no longer grew and milled the grain or butchered the meat they cooked. Housecleaning and child rearing were increasingly seen as "women's work" (114)

The above shift described by Kimmel (2000) has influenced the trajectory of family development in North America. Calnitsky (2019) expands upon Kimmel's (2020) above notion culturally locating the separation of gender roles in relation to paid work. He states "[g]iven the combination of the norm that men's wages can sustain an entire family with obstructed work opportunities for women and various forms of cultural sexism, the 'Standard North American Family' (SNAF) model was structurally favored to proliferate, while nonstandard models were structurally disadvantaged or selected against" (39). Luxton (1997) describes the genealogy of the traditional family further when stating "[t]he dominant ideology also asserted that all mothers regardless of class, ideally working full-time in their own homes, provided the best and most suitable child care"

(163). The assumption that women without professional careers are poised to be domestic caregivers highlights a fundamental problem that the traditional family and domestic tasks are organized to be incompatible with wage and professional labour.

Acker (1990) describes the segregation between paid and unpaid work to be intertwined with broader organizational practices that place men in higher earning positions (140). Since men are typically higher earners in heterosexual couples, women take a lead on domestic tasks, such as childcare, and place their careers to the side during parental leaves to mitigate potential losses to household income. (Doucet 2020; Luxton 1997). This model has its roots in Enlightenment period Europe, however, practices and applications of this family form are still present and used today. I will use "traditional family" as a shorthand to refer to this configuration of family roles throughout the remainder of this thesis. The traditional family is understood to be traditional through a North American understanding of gender roles in the twenty-first century.

The current cultural acceptance of heteronormative gender roles in Canadian homes and workplaces are perpetuating a continuing feminization of parental leave. Joan Acker (1990) describes the ‘ideal worker norm’ as an entry point to understand women’s roles within maternity and parental leave. Acker further describes the ideal worker norm when she states:

> The concept refers to a person who is able to give priority to work with no outside distractions. Historically this has been the male worker who, it is assumed, has a female partner at home to look after his domestic arrangements, leaving him free to dedicate himself to work. The ideal worker norm can thus be seen not only to be prescriptive for women but to restrict men's abilities to deviate as well, at odds with supporting fathers to be more involved in parenting (145).

Acker's ideal worker norm highlights how embedded heteronormative ideology is in workplace contexts. It seems women are most clearly devalued in the ideal worker norm in Canadian contexts, but can men be as well?

The concept of the ideal worker norm concept is adopted by Rehel (2014) in a nuanced way to understand how couples negotiate maternity and parental leaves to best fit their households. Many heterosexual couples defer to the mother's preferences when negotiating leave decisions. This deferral is in part due to assumptions made concerning the need for recovery time post birth and the practicalities surrounding breastfeeding (McKay & Doucet 2010). For Rehel, a 'manager-helper dynamic' is created to best facilitate this type of leave. Rehel states "[a] manager-helper dynamic often develops between new parents: mothers are primarily responsible for childcare and related matters, while fathers serve as helpers when needed and asked" (111). The manager-helper dynamic only reiterates the gender stereotypes and norms that current Canadian government policies are trying to escape. These stereotypes and norms may include the feminization of parental leave, hegemonic masculine practices, or patterns of leave-taking. Parental leave policies, especially the recently added parental benefits, are combating these heteronormative leave experiences if the parent decides to take them.

2.3 FATHERS' RELUCTANCE TO TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE

Government policies surrounding parental leaves are impediments to an equalized leave uptake among women and men. Canadian parental benefits are tied to an income-based scale. EI eligibility criteria was changed from weeks worked to hours worked in 1997 (Pold, 2001). While this change is still tied to an income-based scale, it has very practical gender-based outcomes. According to Pupo and co-authors (2017) "[a]lthough

the government argued that the changes to an hours-based system were more fair and equitable, women had a harder time acquiring those hours to qualify because of their increased participation in part-time and contingent work" (96). Since the gender wage gap is still prevalent in Canada – it was thirteen percent between women and men employed full-time in 2018 – couples negotiate a leave to minimize loss, often meaning that in heterosexual couples, the woman takes majority of the leave (Pelletier and Patterson, 2018). Calnitsky (2019) proposes a policy to combat the gendered experiences of leave when he states:

> On these grounds, a new public policy designed around the objective of genderlessness would be geared toward reshaping *both* the material incentive structures in the family and its interior culture. It is these phenomena that in the first place generate the underlying gendered skills, capacities, preferences, and norms often perceived to be outside the ambit of public policy (37)

The federal government's recently added parental benefits work to combat the imbalances in leave uptakes, however, the policy remains primarily income-based. Calnitsky leverages a gender-based policy as a way to incentivize men into early childcare work which therefore deconstructs the power of heteronormative gender roles (42). When providing second parents with a 'use-it-or-lose-it' ultimatum for parental leave, more individuals should be inclined to take the leave that is provided to them despite the potential loss to income. Therefore, a kind of gender-based policy can be achieved. What Calnitsky fails to consider, however, is how second parents (particularly men) use their parental leave. My initial prediction was that many second parents may be using their parental leave for professional development purposes (Hass & Hwang, 2019, 15). If this is the case then perhaps parental leave needs to move beyond being either income-based or gender-based towards something more neutral.

McKay and Doucet (2010) echo Calnitsky's difficulty with income-based leave policy. While McKay and Doucet attribute other impediments to women's unbalanced leave uptake, their insights surrounding policy provide a stepping-stone into discussions of corporate attitudes and norms. They state:

> A combination of mothers' preferences, fathers' greater earnings (and thus greater potential loss to family income while on leave), combined with policy restrictions and a strong set of social norms and ideologies pointing to mothers as primary caregivers of infants meant that fathers spoke of leave-taking or care-giving as a privilege rather than an obligation (314).

A women's perceived maternal bond, reinforces a reluctancy in men to take extended parental leave and participate in unpaid domestic work more broadly. If women are viewed as more naturally inclined to parenting than men, then this may limit a man's involvement. The practice of seeing women as instinctive parental leaders reinforces the notion of parenting as a privilege for men rather than an obligation. The privilege over obligation paradox is one that prevails in Canadian homes and business contexts contributing to men's hesitancy toward parental leave.

This section of the literature review has described how maternity and parental leaves reinforce heteronormative gender roles within corporations and households. This literature is important because it prompts a discussion of the success of the recently added parental leave policy. Current literature has shown how parental leave policies (prior to the parental leave policy added in 2019) can perpetuate heteronormative leave experiences. It will be interesting to work through discussions of heteronormative leave experiences in relation to the recently added parental benefits.

2.4 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES AND STIGMATIZATION

This section will review how women and men negotiate parental leaves within organizational culture. The important points in this discussion include an evaluation of corporate norms and attitudes toward gender roles and the backlash women and men receive when acting in gender-counterstereotypical ways. I will discuss how these points reinforce organizational culture's reluctance towards granting parental leaves for women and men.

Organizational culture is often understood as belief systems that are part of particular workplaces. These ideologies are often widely promoted across these corporations, and impel people to action, justifying people's actions to themselves and others (Hass & Hwang, 2007, 54). However, the values and beliefs of organizational culture are not overtly explained or equally shared by all members of a company. In a particular corporation, what works for employees in a specific department may not work for others in a different department at the same corporation (Ravasi & Schultz 2006). Organizational cultures may differ across certain geographies, industries, and even departments. Organizational cultures tend to be an unconscious element of corporate structures. O'Reilly III and co-authors (2014) highlight the linkages between CEOs and organizational culture stating that "[t]he logic is that a CEO's personality drives patterns of behavior which, in turn, affect how people interpret what is important and how to think and behave" (617). The values of a CEO may not reflect the values of employees in HR departments or lower levels of management making the workplace organizational culture skewed in favour of a particular group or individual (O'Reilly III et al. 2014). It terms of my thesis, examining organizational cultures can point to how the underlying values of a

particular companies go beyond the stated objectives of legal policy and HR documentation.

A father's reluctance to take parental leave is, in part, due to their concerns surrounding perceptions by supervisors, bosses, and sometimes clients (Rehel, 2014, 120-121). These perceptions are important because they are influential in the process of obtaining a parental leave, along with the employee's experience of leave-taking and return to work. Rehel describes an instance with a forty-three-year-old Chicago father who declined parental leave due to the ways he heard executives in his company discuss such matters (120). Workplace ideals surrounding men and stigmatization toward parental leaves are deeply rooted.

Since workers now have the option for longer parental leaves under the recently added parental benefits, and more workers may be taking leaves as weeks are dedicated to the second parent, concerns about negative reactions from co-workers and employers may be heightened. The recently added parental benefits offer five weeks standard leave at fifty-five percent of average weekly wages or eight extended weeks at thirty-three percent (Alberta Employment Standards, 2019). These benefits are marketed under a "use it or lose it" ultimatum for the second parent. Gender roles may still persist despite this policy change making it easier for men to decline the option for parental leave (Hass & Hwang 2008, 2019a).

Many corporations claim to be family-friendly or to have family-friendly policies. These policies, however, can impact organizations and employees within these corporations very differently. In Borgkvist and co-authors (2018) study, men working in finance, IT, research, social work, planning, and administration positions cited that the

use of flexible work arrangement (FWA) increased the quality of interactions with their children (704). In contrast, William and co-authors (2013) discuss how flexible work arrangements decrease the quality of childcare by men in low-wage jobs due to the precarious nature of the work (216). FWA, while viewed by some as a family-friendly policy, can have negative consequences for employees working at different levels within corporations.

Since women are still viewed as the primary care-giver in heterosexual couples, family-friendly policies in corporations often cater to the needs of the mother instead of the needs of both parents. McCurdy and co-authors (2002) further this argument when they state "[i]t may be that female employees make more requests for the implementation of family-friendly benefits, making the benefits seem more essential. Organizations with women and minorities as decision makers, in addition to having more women in the workplace, may offer more programs" (33). Shaping corporate family-friendly policies in relation to only the needs of the mother is problematic in light of the recently added parental benefits which targets second parents.

There is a possibility that men may be excluded from corporate family-friendly policies or stigmatized by co-workers for choosing to utilize these policies. If family-friendly policies are exclusive to women, or are assumed to only be used by women, then men who participate in these policies may receive more backlash. Men work around this backlash by seeking and receiving support from others who have already taken leave (Hass & Hwang, 2019a, 6). Huerta and co-authors (2014) further this argument when they state that "[e]ncouraging fathers to make better use of parental leave arrangements can contribute to changing attitudes and behaviours towards the role of fathers and

mothers in childcare and in labour force participation" (310). If employees who are men can support other men taking parental leave then perhaps a shift in particular organizational cultures can begin to take place.

Both women and men can encounter negative reactions toward their decision to take leave. For men, this discrimination is subsequent to their parental leave whereas women face this stigmatization at the outset of their careers. Women face hiring prejudice due to the assumed obligations toward mothering that are connected to potentially birth-giving bodies. Hass and Hwang (2019a) describe this further: "[e]mployment discrimination against women often rests on the assumption that women cannot be committed to paid work because of their past, present, or future roles as mothers" (55). In particular workplaces, women are viewed as risky hires regardless of their actual desire to become mothers. The option for more extended parental leaves in Canada—now up to sixty-one weeks—may increase this prejudice against women. Employers give greater consideration to the possibility of maternity and parental leave when hiring women and often default to hiring men. The recently added parental benefits work to combat this by giving men greater access to leave, however, men actually need to be taking parental leave for equality to be successful. As Pettigrew and Duncan (2017) mention there are many obstacles men face when obtaining some kind of parental leave. Obstacles may include being isolated in parenting and corporate spaces simultaneously. These obstacles need to be dismantled first before any sort of neutrality in hiring can take place.

To describe corporate stigmatization toward men taking parental leave more clearly, I will draw on Fleischmann and Sieverding's (2015) hypothesis surrounding

backlash. Women and men contemplating leave supposedly face backlash from their employers during many stages of their careers. Fleischmann and Sieverding state:

> Therefore, taking parental leave should result in backlash. As backlash for men and women differs, typical backlash for men in a working setting should include less respect and being seen as less competent. Furthermore, both men and women who act in gender-counterstereotypical ways are preferred less as bosses, and this should lower their probability of being hired (464).

Although backlash was not found to occur in Fleischmann and Sieverding's study, their arguments surrounding how men and women might experience backlash is helpful for my research. It seems that stigmatization towards women may subside in the later years of their career which is tied to a lower likelihood of parenting demands. Dainty and Bagihole (2006) show this to be true in regards to their research on women in the construction industry. Men, however, may face different stigmatization and effects toward their parental leave that is not tied to parenting demands. These effects may include being viewed by co-workers and clients as less trustworthy or competent. This stigmatization may draw from the fact that they left their clients or co-workers 'hanging' to take a leave that is not as widely accepted. Since men do not typically take parental leave, in traditional Canadian contexts, backlash against them may be more long lasting.

It is clear that workplace discrimination surrounding maternity and parental leaves is deeply rooted. Moreover, corporate norms and attitudes towards gender roles are equally embedded. A hegemonic masculine identity is valued over subordinate, marginalized, and complicit masculine identities in the workplace (Siltanen & Doucet, 2008, 74). Hass and Hwang describe this notion of hegemonic masculinity further when they state "[t]he ideology that forms the basis for the gendered substructure of organizational culture is masculine hegemony, acceptance that men have, and should

continue to have, a monopoly of power at the workplace" (56). If workplaces are viewed as dominated by men then it is clear why a man's choice to participate in domestic labour becomes scrutinized. Organizational cultures need to become more welcoming to parental leaves in order to combat this stigmatization.

Parental leaves, and gender norms more generally, perpetuate gendered spaces. This division of space would include domestic spaces for women and corporate spaces for men. Divisions of labour are often influenced by where the individual is accepted. If men are understood to remain working post-birth, then steps toward taking a parental leave become more challenging. McKay and Doucet describe more clearly obstacles to parental leave men face when they state "[w]hile mothers did not encounter problems, couples reported that with rare exceptions, employers did not expect or encourage fathers to take some or any leave. Managers, like many parents and others, regarded this period of infant care as reserved for mothers" (311). Now that the Canadian government has provided a non-transferable leave, will corporations find it harder to defer a man's uptake of parental leave? Surely this is the goal of the recently added parental benefits, however, I suspect particular businesses may find other ways to reject leaves for men.

Maternity and parental leaves are a legal right in Canada, however, the uptake of these leaves are policed and scrutinized within organizational cultures. Women's leaves systematically effect individual perceptions of commitment despite the actual experiences of leave and violates the work devotion schema characteristic of many businesses today. Williams and co-authors (2013) define the work devotion schema as cultural assumptions demanding individualized undivided attention towards work (210-11). Williams and co-authors state "[t]he use of flexible work arrangements can be interpreted by superiors, co-

workers, and even the employee themselves as a signal that the employee is violating the work devotion schema and is therefore morally lacking" (211). Under the work devotion schema, a parent's choice to take leave, or a couple's choice to share leave, affect both their individual careers and their status within companies.

The complexity of organizational cultures make it challenging for researchers to map patterns of parental leave uptake and acceptance across corporations. This difficulty is in part because the face-to-face interactions between employees play an equally important role to the policies themselves, however, these interactions are rarely recorded. An example of this disparity includes an evaluation of family-friendly policies in the workplace. According to Hwang (2018):

> If organizational culture is not supportive of women's family roles and obligations, using family-friendly policies and receiving support from supervisors and coworkers may not be effective for employed mothers; in addition, employed mothers may be afraid of taking benefits or support from organizations because of the possibility that it negatively affects their careers and promotions (662).

There is much happening within specific organizational cultures that makes employees nervous to take parental leave or receive other family-friendly benefits. I initially suspected that daily face-to-face interactions are perpetuating particular stereotypes and stigmatization beyond the stated corporate policies that make parental leave a contested topic. My research has worked to document some of these face-to-face interactions that clearly influence parental leave decisions.

This review of the literature aids in answering two significant questions. First, what biases are created when women or men take parental leave, and how are relationships between colleagues effected by these biases? Second, are women and men experiencing stigmatization towards parental leave in similar or distinct ways? These

questions are important because organizational culture provides the framework within which stigmatization occurs, but it is people who do the stigmatizing. Furthermore, there is not a single organizational culture, although there are similarities among Alberta organizational cultures. Therefore, tracking the influences of parental leaves in career development is employee and corporation specific. Additionally, these questions recognize that experiences for women and men can be different, an important distinction arising from the current literature.

The motherhood penalty, characterized by the gender wage gap, has adverse effects on women's wages and gender equity in the workplace (Van der Lippe et al. 2019, 112). I was curious if men were experiencing some form of the parenthood penalty by taking parental leave, a question explored by Fleischmann and Sieverding. Although Fleischmann and Sieverding suggest that men do not experience the parenthood penalty, the hypothetical nature of their studies urged me to further explore this question.

2.5 STRUCTURAL FEATURES AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

This section will review organizations' structural difficulties with facilitating parental leaves. The important points to consider are how culture interacts with organizational structure and the feasibility of parental leaves for workplaces. Later in this section, I will discuss these organizational difficulties in relation to the gendered substructures in organizational cultures. Current literature describes organizational culture as a source of cues and actions carried out by corporate leaders to reevaluate the conceptualization of their organization as a platform for affecting internal concerns (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, 433). In this vein, organizational culture is defined by supervisors but has effects for the entire company. Furthermore, organizational culture

interacts with various structural features in corporations like size of organizations, understaffing, unionization, division of labour, and gender resulting in broader challenges beyond individual interactions. When describing structural features Gorman and Mosseri (2018) state "[a] defining characteristic of modern organizations is a formal structure, laid out in organization charts, job descriptions, and policy manuals, that provide a template for the way work is defined and coordinated" (3).

Despite the apparently open and supportive attitude of the work environment, implementing leave policies create organizational difficulties and tensions with colleagues that make colleagues and supervisors less open to leave uptake, although they recognize that it is a legal right (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Hass & Hwang 2008, 2007, 2019a, 2019b; Hass et al. 2002; Pettigrew & Duncan 2017; Tremblay & Genin 2011; Van der Lippe et al. 2019). Borgkvist and co-authors (2018) describe an interview with a new father who worked in university administration who did not take a formal parental leave because he was hesitant about approaching his boss and recognized his department was understaffed (707). This father faced both cultural and structural challenges in this scenario: cultural on the basis of his individual interactions with his boss and structural when recognizing his department was understaffed. When discussing organizational perceptions of parental leave, Tremblay and Genin (2011) describe how management can be reluctant to train employees to fill the role of the individual on leave. This not only puts strain on current employees to compensate for the workers absence but also creates an environment where manager and co-worker support is lacking (258). Understanding the perceptions organizations have about parental leave is an important step to conceptualizing structural features in organizational culture, and may shape people's

experiences of planning, taking, and returning from leave. In this section, I will outline general organizational difficulties surrounding the implementation of parental leaves.

There are many organizational cultures and structural features captured by current research in the field. Some are progressive and responsive and others are rigid and traditional. The literature I am working through here does not typically mention particular organizations, rather careers and occupations more generally. If particular organizations are mentioned, they are described in passing rather than extensive detail. Some industries, occupations, and public and private sector variations covered in the literature are: blue and white collar workers in the private sector, both women and men in finance (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Rehel 2014; Hass & Hwang 2007; Hass et al. 2002), IT (Borgkvist et al. 2018; O' Reilly III et al. 2014), research (Borgkvist et al. 2018), social work (Borgkvist et al. 2018), planning (Borgkvist et al. 2018), administration positions (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Tremblay & Genin 2011), and forest processing mills (Mills 2011). Additionally, blue and white collar workers in the public sector, both women and men in construction (Dainty & Bagihole 2006), nursing (Guppy & Luongo 2015), and teaching (Guppy & Luongo 2015) are also considered.

Many of the occupations listed above include rigid structural features like divisions of labour. Positions within these corporations are clearly defined and require specific skill sets. For example, jobs in construction and forest processing mills include many highly skilled workers with organizationally unique knowledge, like safety designations. These workers may not be as easily replaced when taking parental leaves. Contrary to construction and forest processing mills workers, many public sector jobs like nursing and teaching have typically been held by women. Gender becomes an informal

structural feature of these occupations and employers may have more experience facilitating parental leaves creating a more progressive organizational culture. Structural features of occupations, sometimes formal or informal, become products of the prevailing organizational culture within the corporation individuals work.

Continuing with a discussion surrounding specific organizational cultures, Pettigrew and Duncan (2017) capture the essence of corporate resistance toward maternity and parental leave. They state:

> Organizations vary in their gender composition, exposure to leave taking, their comfort with work–family issues, and their cultures relating to gender, which means that some organizations have never had an employee take parental leave, particularly not a father. In addition, not all companies have a collegial relationship with their unions and broaching the parental leave subject with their employee base might be perceived by the organization as potentially providing the union with another issue to leverage during collective bargaining (38).

Corporations are attempting to both work through aspects of parental leave while maintaining their status as a competitive business. While corporations like to claim their support of maternity and parental leave, the particularities surrounding what a leave means for a workplace can perpetuate negative attitudes and organizational difficulties.

Gendered organizational substructures also create challenges in the uptake of parental leave. As mentioned above, gendered issues such as the wage gap and discrimination still persists in Alberta and across Canada. These factors indirectly, and at times directly, influence the feasibility of leaves for women and men today. Hass and Hwang (2008) describe this further: "[t]he gendered substructure of work organizations significantly influences work activities and practices, decisions affecting efficiency and productivity, wage-setting and promotion criteria, and the extent to which employees' family lives are taken into consideration at the workplace" (54). Some organizational

substructures may not be gendered but may become so if women and men are purposely placed in different positions. Hass and Hwang highlight an important point here. If family life is given no consideration in particular corporations, or within particular corporate departments, then perhaps shifting the organization's cultural attitudes toward family could help in changing parental leave perceptions and subsequent experiences. Moreover, what is the gender composition of a workplace which values family life versus one which discourages considerations for family life?

Hass and Hwang (2007) continue the dialogue surrounding gendered substructures by stating: "[w]hen women make up more of the workforce, fathers appear to experience higher levels of informal support for parental leave and reduced hours, and when a company's value system is less masculine, it offers fathers more informal flexibility in integrating work and parenting roles" (70). This example demonstrates most clearly that when a workplace understands work family issues, attitudes and norms toward maternity and parental leave become positive. An ideologically masculine workplace may not support parental leaves because of a lack of understanding. If an organizational culture can understand maternity and parental leave to be positive instead of a burden on business, then perhaps new corporate norms could be developed.

Moving beyond gendered substructures, organizational features, including number of employees, and size of corporation also play a role in the uptake of parental leave. Income loss and overall productivity, or success of sales may be impacted if multiple employees are on parental leave. While income loss may be minimal for larger corporations, it can be detrimental to smaller organizations. The cost to retrain a replacement employee may have serious implications for smaller organizations. As well,

the replacement employee may not be as skilled as the original employee causing a hit to overall productivity. Ranson (2010) continues this argument when she states "[e]ligibility criteria still prevent a sizeable minority of working parents from making use of the leave. And although extended leaves may be feasible in large organizations, they may be more difficult to accommodate in small enterprise where large numbers of Canadians work" (10). It is clear that organizational structures are incredibly complex and may differ in their abilities to grant parental leaves.

This review of the literature related to organizational features and facilitating leaves helps to frame questions about what workplace conditions influence employees who are considering taking a leave and how they are treated on their return. The question of workplace conditions is important because it points to how workplaces may differ in their response to the provision of leaves.

2.6 DISCUSSION: THEORY AND LITERATURE

Applying both social constructionism and feminist political economy to this body of literature is a useful way to grasp the nuances of the uptake and constructions of parental leave. In the contexts of fathering, social constructionism showcases how cultural discourses and social interactions influence couples' willingness and ability to share parenting activities. Moreover, social constructionism draws attention to how organizational culture negotiates norms and attitudes and how particular groups of employees either comply or subvert these norms.

Feminist political economy applies well to the literature surrounding organizational culture and organizational structural difficulties. Since feminist political economy highlights how inequalities are produced, it becomes clear the particular

structural aspects frame organizational cultures differently for various groups of employees either directly or indirectly disadvantaging individuals across departments, employee status, and gender. Furthermore, feminist political economy provides insights to the ways broader economic structures and government policies influences couples' uptake of parental leave and corporations more broadly.

Much of the literature describes organizations' cultural and structural difficulties with maternity and parental leave and the consequences it has for divisions of couples' roles more broadly. As well, the literature describes workplace difficulties surrounding the uptake of maternity and parental leave. These consequences mostly include the division of gender roles in the household and stigmatization for employees.

This review of literature outlines the differences among an individual's parental leave uptake in both the public and private sector and across a variety of industries and jobs (Hass & Hwang 2002, 2007, 2008, 2019a, 2019b; McKay & Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014; Tremblay & Genin 2011; Williams 2017). Hass and Hwang (2019b) cite private sector corporations as being more dominated by men and therefore less experienced in arranging parental leaves (13). Additionally, Hass and Hwang (2019a) highlight an interview with a Norwegian father who agrees parental leave uptakes for men in the public sector are much easier because public sector workers have to "play by the rules" (13). The disparities in parental leave acceptance between the public and private sector are expansive, therefore I initially believed it was important to focus on the private sector in an attempt to understand the potentially negative effects on employees. As my research progressed, I began to see the importance of including both private and public sector to better understand the parental leave experience and its workplace implications.

An individual may decline an extended parental leave due to their concerns including eligibility for promotions, salary increases, and health and wellness benefits. In addition to these factors the organizational cultural norms can subconsciously influence a leave decision. Workers also face many multidimensional obstacles to taking parental leave including corporate norms and attitudes, employee status, and individual personal concerns regarding work devotion and trustworthiness.

My research contributes to current sociological knowledge in the field in light of the recently added non-transferable parental benefits and extended leaves. The current research from Québec and various European countries outlines the positive effects this type of leave can have on second parents and families more generally. As well, evidence from the literature demonstrates how Alberta's business culture is characterized by hegemonic masculine practices, typical of high income corporations, which are only heightened in light of the current economic state of the province. The current economic state is characterized by an increase in unemployment and a decrease in the value of oil and gas due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter has provided a look into the current parental leave literature in the field and has emphasized the timeliness of my research inquiry.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Initially, when I set out to do this research in 2019, much of what I imagined for my methodology was modeled off of Pettigrew and Duncan's 2017 article entitled "Poking a Sleeping Bear: The Challenge of Organizational Recruitment For Controversial Topics." Pettigrew and Duncan did a large multi-stage study which highlighted some of the challenges to which I thought it was important to be sensitive. This article outlined particular organizations' willingness or reluctance to discuss the topic of maternity and parental leave. Where my methodology began to differ from Pettigrew and Duncan's was in my recruitment strategy. When I began recruitment I did not recruit within organizations like Pettigrew and Duncan, rather, I strictly used the snowball sample method. I believe the snowball method was successful for my research due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which I will address later in this chapter and again in Chapter 6. Although my methodology has strayed from my preliminary ideas, this change only aided in the speed and success of participant recruitment and interviewing. The remainder of this chapter will document the various facets of my methodology including ontology and theoretical frameworks, research participants and sampling frame, participant recruitment, interviewing, COVID-19, and data management and analysis.

3.1 ONTOLOGY AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

My thesis topic assumes a specific ontological framework. Not only does my research understand individuals taking parental leave as disadvantaged in the workplace, it also gives consideration to the complexities of organizational culture as an entry point for this oppression. The specific theoretical frameworks I use critique social relations in

organizational culture, policy, and gender discourses as factors influencing the uptake of parental leave. I recognize the constructivist perspective as my primary methodological paradigm.

Constructivism for Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) is the participatory reality created by social interactions (99). They state "[w]e construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society" (103). Constructivism also acknowledges that the researcher is part of the process of construction, in regards to labelling or classifying things in particular ways. The complexity of organizational cultures makes it challenging to code patterns among them. Therefore, the constructivist paradigm allows for reactions towards parental leave to be understood through the interview questions I ask as a researcher and the social interactions I have with participants. I was careful not to project my definition of parental leave onto my participants but rather frame my interview questions in ways that allows for respondents to say they have potentially used the time off in unexpected ways.

There were situations, however, where I provided participants with additional information about leave provisions either during or at the end of the interview. Since a handful of participants were unfamiliar with the recently added parental benefit, I felt obliged to share information about the leave provision so they could better answer particular interview questions. As well, participants who were planning on having second children or who were currently pregnant seemed to ask questions about the recently added parental benefit at the end of the interview. I believe these participants were seeking to educate themselves on the parental leave provisions to help better inform their upcoming or future leaves. Overall, I do not believe sharing information about leave

provisions influenced participants' responses, but rather enriched conversations to indirectly include discussions about why these provisions are not widely known or taken.

I recognize I am an outsider to both motherhood and parenthood. I have leveraged my outsider position to utilize an interview stance similar to what Tracy (2019) calls 'deliberate naïveté' as a way to drop any presuppositions and judgment about parental leave while maintaining openness to new and unexpected findings (160). I believe participants recognized my naïve interview status and engaged with interview questions in ways that were both constructive and informative. This not only helped with building researcher-participant rapport but also allowed participants to feel some power in a situation that typically positions them as less powerful.

Face-to-face interactions during interviewing create ethically important moments in research. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe ethically important moments as the difficult and usually unpredictable situations that arise in the practice of doing research (262). There was hesitancy among my participants to discuss the impacts of COVID-19, affordability of daycare, and avenues to conceiving and birthing a child. These topics were some of the most distinct ethically important moments in this research. Additionally, interviewing via Zoom while there were other adults and children at home created some difficulties regarding participants' professionalism and focus.

3.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING FRAME

Participants in this research included individuals who have recently or currently taken parental leave, and who work for medium to large private companies in Alberta. It was my initial hope that these individuals would have taken the recently added parental benefit aimed at second parents, however, as recruitment progressed I realized there was

a lack of knowledge of this new policy among parents. Therefore, I expanded my parameters to include any parent who had taken any sort of maternity or parental leave. My research on second parents only includes evidence about fathers due to the fact that every man I interviewed was in a heterosexual couple. The second parents in my study will be referred to as fathers for the remainder of this thesis. My sample included individuals working in a wide variety of jobs to help better explore experiences across a range of industries. I suspect that the organizational culture of the dominant industries, such as oil and gas in Alberta, would tend to influence other industries so drawing connections between the dominant and nondominant industries is valuable. A handful of my participants worked in privately funded non-profit organizations and had similar leave experience to those in the private sector for-profit industries. These connections across various sectors help to strengthen the above assumption.

It should be noted that I did not set specific numerical requirements in my consent form for what constitutes a medium to large corporation. Participants typically identified their company as being medium or large in relation to their own definition of the term. The smallest of the medium corporations reported by a participant had around thirty employees, while the largest of the large corporations had hundreds of employees across almost every Canadian province and even some offices internationally.

I was able to interview twenty individuals including, seventeen women, and three men. Participants both lived and worked in Calgary with the exception of one participant who worked in Lethbridge and lived in Fort MacLeod. There were two sets of heterosexual married couples out of these twenty participants. The age range for this sample was twenty-four to thirty-seven with the majority of participants having multiple

children. While participants were invited to discuss their experiences across all leaves, special consideration was given to any leave within the last three years to target discussions surrounding leave provisions including the recently added parental benefit and the extended parental leave up to eighteen months.

Out of my twenty participants, fifteen worked in the private for-profit sector, and five worked in the non-profit sector. Three out of these five participants worked in non-profits that were privately funded. As for the other fifteen participants working in the private sector: four were in oil and gas; two were in health care, including private mental health counselling; two were in construction; and the remaining six worked in various industries including real estate, retail, financial services, technology, beauty and personal grooming, property development, and aviation. Furthermore, fourteen participants held desk jobs while the remaining six participants worked in more physically demanding types of employment such as working on the floor in retail or providing flight attendant services. Only one of my participants held part-time employment prior to leave, however, many participants returned to work that was part-time or with reduced hours post-leave. This was motivated by pandemic lay-offs as well the participants' desire to cut back on work hours.

The types of work my participants engaged in differed by occupation. The occupations of my participants included: two individuals in human resources; senior product marketing manager; director of stakeholder relations; flight attendant; director of programs; councillor; business system analyst; supply chain senior specialist; senior coordinator; social worker; pay roll analyst; part-time retail associate and part-time dance

educator; industrial project specialist; team lead of invoicing support; massage therapist; engineer and business opportunity specialist; operations manager; and support services.

A gap in my research lies within the lack of cultural and sexual diversity of my participants. Participants were not asked to racially self-identify, however, all twenty participants could be considered white-passing. I was hoping to include the experiences of same-sex or adoptive parents, however, I fell short in recruiting such individuals. I recognize that my research includes a particular type of privileged individual, who is in somewhat stable employment and has the financial means to support a child in addition to the six-hundred insurable hours to qualify for EI. This has potentially created some bias in the conclusions of my research due to the fact that financial diversity was not present, and therefore social class differences were minimal.

I realize that including participants from various levels of the work organization may create some disparities in my research. These inconsistencies have included how employees at different levels within a company access leave and subsequently how they are stigmatized. For example, some participants were given top-ups from their employer such as stock shares and trading options (Interview 13). These top-ups were given on the basis of their position in the company, creating different incentives for leaves. Additionally, some participants were offered part-time hours, post-leave, potentially making future access to EI parental leave benefits more difficult.

3.3 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

This research was approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee, in compliance with the Tri-Council standards. This included the approval of flyers or advertisements for participants, and participant consent forms. I

achieved my goal of eliciting participants from a wide range of jobs across different departments by having open criteria for participants working within medium to large corporations.

The major cities I considered as sites of recruitment were Calgary and Lethbridge. These cities were chosen due to their similarities in types of corporations that are present and likely commonalities in private sector business culture in Alberta. Recruitment and interviews took place from July to September 2020. I considered employees located at various levels of the work organization in an attempt to diversify my sample.

My primary method of recruitment was snowball sampling. Connections were initially made with individuals in my networking circle and extended from there. The snowball strategy was an effective approach because parents were likely to know each other due to common activities that are linked to their child's life stage (for example, parenting Facebook groups). I started with interviewing friends-of-friends who worked in technology, aviation and expanded my sample to others in their personal networks. Additionally, three out of the five of my participants who worked in the non-profit sector came from this initial snowball method. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and various quarantine orders, participants had more time in their schedules to connect me with other parents and provide follow-ups to make sure interviews were completed. It is my belief that the increased availability of individuals, due to the pandemic made recruitment more straightforward than what other researchers in the field have faced. I did, however, face a slight stall in recruitment during the end of July after I had spoken to ten individuals.

Pettigrew and Duncan in their research utilized contact with public non-profit organizations and online newspapers when recruitment within work organizations became a challenge (2017, 41). The steps taken by Pettigrew and Duncan provided an outline for my research when faced with similar situations. Near the end of my recruitment period after I had interviewed ten participants and interest was slowing, I posted my research poster on Facebook and gained access to a new set of participants. This type of social media outreach was suggested by a participant and was similar to Pettigrew and Duncan's use of online newspapers. Individuals in this Facebook group were eager to participate in the research and some interviews were even conducted on the same day initial contact was made. I was able to recruit my final ten participants through posting in the Facebook group. These participants worked across various jobs including oil & gas, and massage therapy. Social media outreach was an invaluable form of recruitment for my research as I learned new parents, as well as parents on leave, use social media to create networks. Taking inspiration from Pettigrew and Duncan in conjunction with my participant's suggestion allowed me to reach a wider variety of participants within my ideal sampling frame.

3.4 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

The primary mode of data collection for this qualitative analysis was open-ended interviews with individuals who are currently on leave or who have recently returned to work after leave. The interviews took place primarily over Zoom in my home office (with two interviews taking place face-to-face in the participants' backyard, while maintaining social distancing). Interviews took anywhere from forty-five to sixty-five minutes.

Participants were required to have their names remain confidential in their interviews through the use of a pseudonym. To protect participant confidentiality, details such as locations and identifying features have been altered. Pseudonyms have been chosen with input from participants. I have ensured that using participants quotes do not inadvertently impact the confidentiality of other participants. This is particularly important for the married couples in my study as well as participants' working in similar industries. My interview guide was as follows:

1. Tell me about the job you are on leave from. Did you return to the same job after your leave?
2. Tell me about your decision to have a child at this time.
3. How did you use your (maternity and) parental leave? (i.e what time did you take off)? Did your partner take any time off?
4. How did your co-workers react when you decided to take (maternity and) parental leave? How did they react when you returned? (Only if participant has returned to work).
5. How did your supervisors react when you decided to take (maternity and) parental leave? How did they react when you returned? (Only if participant has returned to work).
6. Have you had any conversations with your co-workers about (maternity and) parental leave?
7. Did the type of job you have make it difficult for you to organize leave with your employer?

8. Are you happy with the current maternity and parental leave policies in Alberta?
9. What recommendations would you make to change the current maternity and parental leave policies in Alberta?
10. On the basis of your experience, do you believe you faced any negative impacts when deciding to take a (maternity and) parental leave?
11. Did you do any work or professional development related to your employment during your leave?
12. This there anything else you want me to know about maternity or parental leave?
13. Is there any advice you have for individuals on maternity or parental leave?

At the end of the interview I used a checklist to confirm that I had basic personal information including gender and pronouns; sexual orientation; age; social class and salary range; current job position and title; and number of children.

Due to the open-ended nature of these interview questions, I did not ask all the questions in the order given in every interview. As well, I used additional probes to encourage participants to expand on their responses. I placed the checklist at the end of my interview guide as most of the questions in the checklist were indirectly answered throughout the interview. Furthermore, some of the questions in the checklist could come across as potentially threatening to the participant. Placing the checklist at the end of the interview helped to protect participant and researcher rapport.

3.5 THE INFLUENCE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON MY METHODOLOGY

Chapter 6 will describe COVID-19 and my findings more directly, although, it is important to describe the ways COVID-19 influenced my methodology in this section. None of my interview questions directly ask about COVID-19, although, I recognized that discussions surrounding the pandemic were inevitable. Discussions surrounding the pandemic came up in a variety of different ways. Some of the most common discussions include the ways the pandemic worked in favour or against a participant's leave; the fear pregnant mothers and new parents felt about being exposed to various illnesses; and how the temporary closing of daycare and day homes affected parenting and leaves. To help mitigate the risk of distress arising from the circumstances of the pandemic I added COVID-19 specific resources into my letter of consent.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has influenced my research in unique and sometimes helpful ways. Pettigrew and Duncan (2017), have done similar parental leave research and outline many reasons companies and individuals declined participation in their research including a tough economic climate, employee fatigue, and lack of interest (42-44). These reasons, and many others have been challenges I have faced within my own recruitment process particularly a tough economic climate and employee fatigue related to the COVID-19 pandemic and various realities including lay-offs and the devaluation of our primary industry: oil and gas. Recruiting participants in a global pandemic has proven to be both a challenge and a blessing. Due to various quarantine orders, participants had increased availability to complete virtual interviews via Zoom. What proved most challenging, however, was various distractions including children and

people's comfort in the home; at times this produced a lack of formality and insight by the participant.

For the majority of my recruitment period (June to September 2020) Alberta Health Services (AHS) restrictions were relatively relaxed when compared to the rest of the year. Despite these lax guidelines, many participants were still working from home which allowed for interviews to be structured into their work days. I found this type of scheduling beneficial because interviews could be conducted quite quickly after initial contact was made. Additionally, online interviews via Zoom removed extra steps that typically make qualitative research more challenging such as arranging meeting spots or entering a participant's home. I did, however, conduct two outdoor in-person interviews in the month of July. The combination of hot weather and the friend-of-friend relationship I had with these participants made the outdoor in person meeting possible.

Although Zoom was mostly beneficial for recruitment, it did come with some challenges. Many participants were facing Zoom fatigue during the summer. This Zoom fatigue was influenced by increased time spent online, lack of in-person social interaction, and saturation of the Zoom platform. Often times, participants blurred the boundaries between what was formal and informal. I recognize doing parental leave research would entail children being around even in a non-pandemic year, however, these children often lacked an understanding of the boundary between the home and work space. In addition to children, many participants were contending with other various distractions including pets, household noises such as televisions and doorbells, and the comforts of being in their own home. One participant even indulged in some beer during their interview. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic provided more benefits than detriments

and helped pull back the curtain on the day-to-day lives of working parents. In the long run, this only helped me better understand my participants.

3.6 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Data files from the interviews have been stored on my personal password-protected laptop. Password-protected flash drives have been used to capture the audio recordings. As a precautionary measure, in case my laptop failed, a back-up password-protected portable hard drive was also been used to store data. The data has not included the names of participants. Data has been maintained in a secure location during this research and will remain in this location after the completion of the project. I plan on keeping materials to facilitate a return to the data to write journal articles and community reports from this material following the research project. I have used email encryption for any emails sent about this project that contain sensitive information. The signed consent forms, lists of confidential names, and transcriptions of interviews have been kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home office.

I transcribed the interviews immediately after they were completed. I used the software program otter.ai to aid in this transcription. In my consent form, I promised participants a chance to read over their transcript and provide feedback within three weeks of the interview. Many participants chose not to read over their transcript. This short time frame of three weeks required quick, diligent transcription. I chose not transcribe the interviews verbatim to lessen the intimidation factor when participants read their transcripts. Bird (2005), in her analysis on transcription, describes the value in writing transcripts in ways that are welcoming for everyone to read (239). By providing participants with a welcoming and easy-to-read transcript, I hoped to create a space for

further thought and inquiry by indirectly pushing individuals to expand on their original responses. Because majority of participants opted not to read over their transcript, coding could be completed quite quickly after the interview and revisited when more coding categories were known.

With regards to my analytical strategy, I read and coded interviews in the days following the interview. Transcripts were read multiple times as coding was done. Turner (2010), in her guide on qualitative interview design, emphasizes the importance of constantly re-reading and coding interviews. For Turner, multiple close readings, in conjunction with new interview transcriptions, allows for a rich analysis and the shaping of new ideas (Turner, 2010, 759). I conducted multiple rounds of coding often circling back to earlier interviews when categories became more clear. As more information from my participants came known, my codes shifted and expanded to best reflect the parental leave experiences from my sample. Once all interviews were completed, these thematic codes went through multiple rounds of revision to arrive at the final format. These thematic codes not only influenced the ways subsequent chapters were organized but also aided in the understanding of the distinct findings of this research.

I used a qualitative thematic analysis to explore my data. Aguinaldo (2012) describes the goals of thematic analysis when he states "[t]he goal of thematic analysis is simply to paraphrase and summarize the dataset as a whole or in part in relation to particular research questions. Analysis typically involves steps that a) identify the content of the data, b) reduce redundancy, and c) group data into representative categories that articulate or describe a particular social phenomenon" (796). Ryan (2000) agrees with the above quote and further states how the investigators general theoretical orientations, the

existing literature, and the characteristics of the topic being studied can influence the themes researchers find (781).

The thematic codes for this research initially came from the literature and then evolved to include participants' own narratives. Initial codes including structural features and organizational cultures influencing leaves were described in the literature and further supported by participant discussions. Other codes, such as redefining leave, came about through participants own narratives. The full thematic coding summary is provided in Appendix A. Braun (2006) describes how thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework (81). Having a thematic approach not tied to any pre-existing theories was valuable for this research which encompassed two theoretical frameworks.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Much of the current literature highlights the challenges of participant recruitment for a research on a topic of this nature. It was my hope that the timeframe of the interviews, anonymity and confidentiality, and the ability to read transcripts made my research desirable for potential participants. I believe the pandemic really worked in my favour in terms of recruitment and interviewing. Since many participants were working from home, online interviews were a simple task individuals could do on their lunch break, during nap time, or in the evenings after children had gone to bed. Additionally, online interviews helped with the speed of recruitment and interviews. It was easier to send a Zoom link and conduct the interview than to plan a face-to-face meeting which would require tasks like driving, cleaning of participants' home, or spending money on coffee at a public place.

This chapter has described the ways in which my methodology was conceived, employed, and changed over the course of this research inquiry. The recognition of my particular methodological and ontological positions, in conjunction with the thematic analysis approach have helped in keeping my transcription and coding established around participant data, alongside consideration of how my personal viewpoints are implicated in the process of social construction.

CHAPTER 4: FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY AND LEAVE EXPERIENCES

This chapter documents the material resources, economic inequalities, and government policies that are influential in the uptake of leave. Often these inequalities and material resources are both produced and redefined through gendered experiences of working and parenting, government policies and the market. In contrast, participants at times have demonstrated how to plan new and creative parental leaves within these predetermined economic and political structures. Participants who redefine their leaves within these sometimes rigid structures showcase what may better suit the needs of both workers and parents.

In this chapter I will use the framework of feminist political economy, which understands gendered and classed experiences of working and parenting to be wrapped up in material resources, the economy, and government influence. The important points in this chapter are the occupational position of participants, gendered experiences of leave and work, structural features influencing a participant's choice of leave, and penalties toward employees who take leave. This chapter also emphasizes the ways in which participants redefine their leaves within the confines of government policy and the knowledge participants have regarding parental leave more broadly. It is important to note that participants often use employment entitlements that might arise from their positions, such as the ability to come back early from leave, to negotiate more desirable leaves.

4.1 FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY

Feminist political economy is primarily concerned with how inequalities are produced. This approach considers economic and political factors to better explain why particular individuals are advantaged or disadvantaged in a capitalist system (Pupo, Duffy, & Glenday, 2017, 252). Using this theoretical lens is valuable when analyzing this research because parental leave encompasses gendered and classed experiences of working and parenting. Feminist political economy is used as the broader framework for this chapter to understand how the experiences of parental leave are embedded in uncontrollable factors such as government policy, the market economy, and gender.

Documenting the material resources influencing leave uptakes, such as government policy and the market economy, is valuable when understanding how inequalities for parents and workers are related to occupational position. As well, feminist political economy helps highlight how certain structural features, such as top-up programs dictated by the success of a particular company in the market economy, can influence participants' choice of leave. Not all participants have access to top-ups due to the fact that not all companies have the same market position. Additionally, not all participants have the same ability to leverage leaves, due to their occupational position or their lack of knowledge about leave options. Using a feminist political economy framework is also valuable for understanding how participants leverage these factors, educate themselves on parental leave policies, and accomplish leaves that do not conform to standard formats. The interactions participants have among themselves and within their workplaces, and towards government policy create particular inequalities and help to better contextualize a participant's choice of leave.

Feminist political economy helps to explain why not knowing about certain parental leave policies, like the recently added parental benefit, is problematic and creates traditional gender roles within a workplace or household. This not knowing produces inequalities between participants because it gives those with appropriate policy knowledge the power to choose, or not choose, to take a certain type of parental leave. For example, those with knowledge about leave for the second parent may choose not to take it, however, those who lack knowledge may choose not to take leave for the second parent due to the fact that they are not properly informed. The following sections will discuss some of these concerns as they arise within my data.

4.2 OCCUPATIONAL POSITION OF PARTICIPANTS

Various groups of workers in my research sample represented different social classes based on their employment. By definition, everyone in my research sample had access to leave. I did not interview persons without employment or in more precarious work positions who could not access leave and benefit provisions. Three of my twenty participants worked hourly and had some concerns about requalifying for Employment Insurance (EI) if they wanted to have a second or third child. There was also concern among seven of my participants in terms of COVID-19 layoffs and their ability to requalify for parental leave benefits or regular EI benefits**.**

In terms of organizational strata, ten of my twenty participants worked in a managerial position with heightened responsibilities and particular skill requirements with a team working underneath them (Interviews 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20). Some of the occupations in this category included director of stakeholder relations, senior product marketing coordinator, and operations managers. The remaining ten participants

worked in lower-level positions such as retail associate, system analyst, or flight attendant either independently or on a team. However, their positions required and they possessed specific training pertaining to their job (Interview 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19). Unfortunately, there is not enough robust data in my research sample in terms participant numbers to know if individuals in managerial positions or individuals in lower-level positions were more easily replaced by a new hire over leave. Research that would include a larger participant sample, over twenty participants, may be able to answer such questions more clearly. However, current literature shows that replacement employees may not be as skilled as the original worker causing a hit to overall productivity despite managerial or lower-level designations (Tremblay & Genin 2011; Ranson 2010).

Industry can play an important role in relation to gendered experiences of leave. Certain industries have shown to be more gendered that others, such as construction and oil and gas, having predominately men working across most occupations in the industry (Dainty & Bagihole, 2006; Williams 2018). Even though these industries primarily employ men, such companies would still have administrative assistants who work for them who are likely to be women. Dainty and Bagihole (2006) document how men are less likely to take parental leave, making leave uptakes by those employees less routine and more detrimental to career progression (Dainty and Bagihole, 2006, 104). Additionally, employers in these industries, including financial services and technology, may have less experience facilitating parental leaves creating a more traditionally gendered workplaces.

All participants in my sample were aware of their experiences of working and parenting in relation to their social class. Many of the participants in managerial positions reported high household incomes between themselves and their partner, and they had fewer concerns about supporting their family on leave. Tori, who worked as a human resources and training development representative for an oil and gas company, made the following statement about her household income:

> And I also, I hate saying this, but I don't have to work financially. My husband makes enough. So it was always my choice to go back to work and to have a career, you know, and then if it was like, I hated it after three months, I could be at home with my kid again. So it's, I guess, I always have options. So I feel like that makes it easier. (Interview 18)

Some participants in lower-level positions made statements opposite to Tori surrounding their income concerns while on leave. Nadine, who worked as a payroll analyst for a construction company, was particularly interesting due to the nature of her husband's employment while on leave. She states:

> And I think it was hard for us - specifically for me - to even take twelve months because my husband got laid-off partway through my maternity leave and he was also on EI. And living at two reduced incomes for the amount of time that, I think it was only like six months, but still that was a struggle. The cap that they have - I don't know all the details behind our current policies with the twelve months, but I know there's a cap and you can only earn so much income while you're on mat leave. EI just doesn't leave people a lot of wiggle room to make ends meet. Like a single Mom, I can't even imagine how she must cope! (Interview 10).

Experiences of working and parenting become inherently class-centric and are based on an individual's employment, their partner's employment, their job position and title, and their ability to be promoted in a workplace. Since COVID-19 created new uncertainties for a significant number of participants, this stability is understood in a pre-COVID-19 context. (More discussion on these uncertainties will be included in Chapter 6.)

4.3 GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF LEAVE AND WORK

This section will evaluate the ways in which gender creates different experiences of work and parental leave in the face of the market economy. Feminist political economy frames this analysis because workplace structures are often unconsciously gendered and can substantially affect leave and employment. Elements of the market, such as wages and job title, are often gendered and can create differential experiences of leave and work for women and men. Main concepts in this section interact closely with second parent leave and include discussions of gender wage gaps and gendered leave experiences. Additionally, this section analyses why men have not taken the recently added parental benefit and stigmatization towards men's uptake of leave, and how EI is structured and experienced by fathers taking the recently added parental benefit.

Gendered experiences of leave and work are often tied-up in elements such as household income and job title. Salaries and wages are higher for men than women, and men are promoted more readily than women (Calnitsky 2019). Consequently, there are gender wage gaps between spouses and these gaps perpetuate gendered leave experiences. Thirteen participants reported a wage disparity between themselves and their partner. These disparities were true for those in upper and lower level positions. Since I was unable to interview both partners, the extent of these wage disparities are unknown. What has been reported, however, were comments made in passing such as "[m]y husband makes twice what I do" (Interview 17).

Two of the men I interviewed, however, were acutely aware of gender wage disparities and often commented on it in ways that perpetuated gendered leave

experiences. Edward, who worked as senior product marketing manager for a software company, made the following statement:

> And, I mean, there's other financial aspects. I mean, there's obviously a gender disparity in wage! I make more in general [than partner] probably, you know, I mean more education and things like that. So for me, having a higher salary, it just made sense for me to be working longer rather than taking the EI for that last month or for longer than that last month. And also, I was working at a small company at the time, and I'm the only person in my role. So it's not that my company wouldn't let me if I wanted to take a year leave - that's on the table for them. But it was more for me. I was really enjoying my work because it was sort of a medium company, about sixty people, I was really integrated into doing things. I had a lot of opportunities to do things that I liked and for me, stepping away from that for longer it felt like not a mistake, or a risk, it felt like I'd be missing out on some career stuff. Whereas within my partner's role, I don't think she felt like she would be missing out on the same sort of opportunities. They don't really exist in the same way, and that's not to say that we don't want her to have opportunities, but it's just in her current career it's not really an option to build in the same way. (Interview 1)

Edward's comments reflect many realities. First, his notions about gender wage disparities showcase how traditional leave experiences come about. Next, his comments about opportunities in the workplace clearly exhibit how men may benefit because it is assumed they will not take any parental leave. Edward does mention how a leave would be an option for him at his company, however, his beliefs surrounding the risk of leave are often characteristic of employees who are men (Hass & Hwang 2007; 2019a, 2019b, Rehel 2014). Finally, his comments may indicate that he sees his role at his company as being more important than his spouse's. Edward's comments about leave, especially his comments about wage disparities, are echoed by Tony, who was a senior coordinator for a publicly-funded non-profit. In a discussion surrounding the factors that dictated his choice of leave, Tony states:

> Income definitely. Just because you do take a financial hit for taking Dad paid leave [sic]. And there is that stigma in the workforce a lot of times. It's like - well, your wife took maternity leave, do you really need to take paternity leave [sic]?

> I've never, heard it expressed openly in that respect, but financially it's definitely something you look at. And it's kind of a sobering thought when you first actually look at it because I found for us, as first-time parents, it was the first time we really looked at our finances. Like to a point where we're like, we need to subtract thousands of dollars. And you're like, oh, wow, shit. (Interview 8)

Income for Tony and his partner played a large role in the way they planned their parental leave. Tony's partner took a twelve month parental leave, however, Tony was laid-off due to the pandemic six months into the leave, and they both took the lead on parenting. Tony also raises an interesting notion in the above quote about stigmatization towards leave for the second parent, and more specifically for fathers. Tony and Edward's quotes demonstrate what McKay and Doucet (2010) refer to as the privilege over obligation paradox, where father's view their domestic duties as a privilege, rather than an obligation, due to their ideologies positioning women as domestic caregivers.

Nine participants who were women reported that their partner's workplace was not understanding of second-parent leave, which influenced their leave choices and subsequently created a gendered leave experience. Christina summarizes this point when she states:

> And he [husband] could take the five weeks, but he would still be working for five weeks, if that makes sense? He's the only one who does his job [in the office]. And he's in sales. So he would – it would be pointless for him to take it because he would still be expected to answer his phone and answer emails. (Interview 7)

It is clear that Christina's husband works in an office that makes it challenging to take parental leave. The couple-based divisions of labour for Christina and her husband are undermined by his workplace. Remy, who was a director of programs for a privately funded non-profit, further strengthens this notion when stating:

> Yeah, I think for us it was a financial decision for sure. In terms of the pay difference that would happen if he was on leave versus myself would be

> substantial. So it was that decision. Also, his workplace would have been far less supportive of the leave and so it was just sort of easier, I think, for me. And you know, selfishly, I was totally okay, taking the full leave. But if other circumstances would have been present, I'm sure we would have shared it. (Interview 4)

Remy took a twelve month parental leave with no time taken by her partner. The above quote highlights the conjunction between wage disparities and supportive work environments, which are often two of the most common factors that lead to gendered leave experiences. Leave becomes gendered when it clashes with elements such as household income and job positions and titles, and especially when men are in higher paying positions. When a participant holds employment with a senior title, they often feel like a leave would pose a risk to their future success in the company. Senior positions also elicit higher paying salaries and are typically positions held by men. These challenges are what makes it difficult for leaves to become less gendered and more neutral.

Another commonly stated obstacle to a gender equal parental leave is EI. EI's structure, application requirements and payment distributions, can at times influence a participant's choices when planning parental leave. Nine of my twenty participants reported that the application process for the second parent's leave was challenging, which discouraged them from taking it. It is unclear if these challenges are general challenges with the EI system, with which participants become easily annoyed. Since only one of my participants successfully took the leave for the second parent, her experience became the constant to which I compared all other experiences. When discussing her husband's experience of leave, Kaitlynn, who worked as a massage therapist, states:

> I think he waited maybe four days to a week and then applied. But he didn't hear anything back for I think it was six weeks. And he didn't get any payment for

> about six weeks after that date so. […] There's bi-weekly statements or something like that you have to apply or put in reports, I think. Yeah, that's what it is, bi-weekly reports that you have to submit and say how many hours - I've worked this many hours. So he was doing that the whole time. And then he finally got a response back from them [the government], I think it was six weeks later. (Interview 14)

Kaitlynn's experience creates a perception: the application for second parent leave is onerous. Also, the six-week wait to receive payment is a timeframe that could be detrimental to couples living paycheque to paycheque. Normal processing time for an EI claim is listed on the Government of Canada's website as one week (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019a). Kaitlynn's husband also had to report bi-weekly work statements. Women do not have to submit any work reports during their leave, making access to leave for fathers more complicated and stringent. Additional steps to access leave, and long timelines for accessing pay, may explain why many fathers have chosen not to go through the process of applying for second parent leave.

It is unclear if Kaitlynn's husband was participating in the "Working While on Claim Program," a designated EI program for individuals working while on leave. The program states that you can keep fifty cents of your benefits for every dollar you earn, up to ninety percent of your previously weekly earning. You must also file bi-weekly reports (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). Kaitlynn's husband could also be reporting statements to his employer as an 'under the table' agreement.

Kaitlynn and her partner were also contending with another EI obstacle to parental leave. Since Kaitlynn was an hourly employee, and returned to part-time hours post-leave, she had some concerns about requalifying for EI benefits. She states:

> Yeah, the only thing is, I have to be very careful. If we wanted to have another kid soon, I couldn't do it until - I have to work for a full year at least before I can take the benefits over again. Whereas, the 600 hours can be done in what is it like three

> or four months if you're working full-time. So I have to be cautious of if we want to have another kid right out the gate, we couldn't. So we'd have to wait timing wise for me to be able to take those benefits again. (Interview 14)

Requalifying for EI is an obstacle to leave that many new parents must consider especially in light of COVID-19 lay-offs and quarantine closures. It is important, more so than ever, that parents are able to quality for leave. A temporary maternity and parental leave benefit provision will help participants requalify from now until September 2021 and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

One of my interview questions asked participants to directly report their feelings regarding parental leave policies in Canada. All of my participants noted they were happy Canada provided parents with generous parental leave benefits. Some participants, however, made note of areas that could be improved. Tori, who worked as a human resources and training development representative, made the following statement concerning improvements to parental leave policies and EI. She states:

> My bigger thing is the, just the money piece. And I don't remember there being big issues, but I remember, a couple of times, you know, I would get my EI payment on a different day than I was expecting. And, again, it was fine. But for some people, there's no way that would be fine. Like you couldn't pay your bills. So there's a lot of room for improvement, just in the general processes. (Interview 18)

As noted earlier, there was not much financial diversity within my research sample, therefore, I am unsure if having payments on different days was a challenging experience for others. What is clear, however, is that the process of EI for parental leave could be amended and improved including applications, reporting, and payments (Doucet et al. 2020).

This section has demonstrated how planning parental leaves can become unintentionally gendered in light of economic elements such as household income,

second parent leave uptakes, and EI challenges more broadly. There is a danger in perpetuating gendered experiences of leave and still much work that needs to be done at the economic level to ensure greater gender equality within parental leaves. Authors in the field have suggested hiring more women at senior levels and being conscious of fair wage negotiations for their employees (Van der Lippe et al. 2019, 115).

4.4 STRUCTURAL FEATURES INFLUENCING A PARTICIPANT'S CHOICE OF LEAVE

This section will discuss how structural features in a workplace influence a participant's choice of leave. I will be focusing on the following structural features: employee entitlements including salary top-ups to one-hundred percent of their wages and stock option shares and trading; HR departments not properly informing individuals of top-up programs; the ability or expectations employees have about working over leave; and if replacement employees are hired while the participant is on leave. The ways in which particular corporations can provide both advantages and disadvantages to employees while on leave, and when returning to work post-leave, are important considerations for this section because the employment perspective is often overlooked in parental leave research. Feminist political economy framework throws light on how corporate structures can at times produce inequalities for workers in a capitalist system.

Participants in my research sample had varying understandings of parental leave policies and I will discuss those in a later section. Understanding different leave policies contributed to more confusion when participants navigated top-up programs and employment entitlements. Participants tended to blame this confusion and lack of knowledge on their HR departments. Tori, who worked as a human resources and training

development representative for an oil and gas company, described her frustrations with HR most explicitly when she states:

> It turns out where I am now tops-up to ninety percent for fifteen weeks or something like that, which is cool, but nobody will give me that information in writing. But I know it exists. It's weird, because of the different provinces, so they can't - some people know about it. Some people don't. It's this weird thing. But there are so many things out there in organizations that people just don't know. (Interview 18)

It is important to note that Tori's company had many offices across Canada. The different provinces she refers to is her corporate office in Québec, which has different parental leave policies under the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). Top-ups are a valuable program to have for the retention and happiness of employees. What makes top-up programs challenging, however, is when they cannot be accessed or understood by those who hope to use them. Since Tori worked in HR herself, it is interesting to hear that she did not have information on the company's top-up program and that no one on her team could give her the company top-up information in writing.

Hannah, who worked as an operations manager for a construction company, described a similar situation. The quotation below describes a situation concerning vacation benefits, which employees on parental leave are entitled to. Hannah's experience is similar to Tori's quote surrounding the structural features and lack of knowledge in HR departments. Hannah states:

> And then even coming back, I know that I'm entitled to vacation. You earn vacation while you're away. So I actually know what my vacation entitlement is, but it's more than what the system will show. And so, I have twenty-seven days of vacation. But the system shows twenty. And so, trying to have that conversation is, well, there's nobody who will validate what I'm telling you, so I'm probably gonna lose out on those seven days. (Interview 17)

These structural features created by the systems in Hannah's workplace have shown to hurt her return to work post-leave and perhaps even influence how she chooses to go about any future leaves. It seems as though this particular workplace has indirectly leveraged its structural features, such as vacation entitlement, to create an organizational culture that systematically disadvantages leave-taking individuals. Therefore, this corporate policy frames parental leaves as unacceptable. The above quote demonstrates how structure and culture can interface to paint parental leaves as challenging practices.

Top-up programs were not as common among my participant sample as I initially expected them to be. Only four participants reported being given top-ups (Interview 6, 7, 15, 18). The nature of these top-up programs have been described by the participants below:

> I was part of a working group at my company to do a top-up program for EI benefits. And then I went on mat leave and thankfully, that [top-up program] got pushed through while I was off. So my company implemented a twenty-six week top-up program for full-time employees. There's a lot of variables to it, but that was an amazing thing to do. Because yeah, my full compensation is really nice, yah know? (Interview 6)

> My work tops up my salary six weeks after birth and if you have a C-section they top it up for eight weeks. (Interview 7)

> So my company implemented five weeks of paternity [sic] leave for all fathers with one-hundred percent pay. And new mothers get seven weeks. So a lot of men have started taking that five weeks with full pay. And I think that's been a really positive shift among the younger generation. (Interview 15).

> It turns out where I am now tops up to ninety percent for fifteen weeks or something like that, which is cool. (Interview 18)

The top-up programs as noted above are great, however, they are not common among participants. Two participants were offered employee entitlements including benefits like share options which painted leave in a more desirable light for employees concerned

about income. These employee entitlements are not universal. Entitlements are specific to particular corporations and the employee's position within that corporation. When discussing the structural features of her organization, Tanya, who worked as a team lead of invoicing support for an oil and gas company, describes her share payout during both maternity leaves. She states:

> I get granted shares over leave. So with my first child, I got money throughout the year I was on maternity leave. But I didn't get them [shares] till I came back. I'd have to be back for ninety days before I got them [shares]. Plus I got dividends that were like a huge chunk of money. But with my second child, it changed, and after 120 days they forfeit them [shares] and then once you're back, they reissue them. (Interview 13)

Tanya's share payout was not formally written in company policy. Tanya's payout was given to her on the basis of her status in the company because she was in a senior position and spent many years with the corporation. This payout is a structural feature of her organization in terms of the company's financial ability to grant such entitlements. Tanya's quote also highlights the ways this payout structure has changed over the years. It is unclear if all the employees at Tanya's company were granted similar entitlements. However, it should be noted that Tanya held responsibility at her place of work and was a highly-valued employee.

Parental leave top-up programs and employee entitlements are avenues that can create positive parental leave experiences. While these top-ups and entitlements can be problematic if not appropriately implemented by HR departments or if not clearly communicated or equally available to all employees, they are an effective way to create a positive parental leave.

An interesting aspect of parental leave uptake is the choice to participate in work over leave. Work for my participants has been described as professional development,

"volunteer work" towards employment, return to work retraining, or actual day-to-day employment tasks. It was my initial assumption that engaging in work over leave would be a terrible experience, however, participants reported otherwise. There is a wide range of experiences concerning working over leave, but, twelve of my twenty participants noted the benefits of this practice.

Some participants, like Sarah who worked as an engineer, did not have a choice in the matter and were obligated to do work over leave due to the structural features of their occupation (Interviews 3, 15). Sarah's experience of work over leave was shaped by requirements set by APEGA, the regulatory body for engineers, and not through her company. If Sarah did not complete thirty hours of volunteer work or professional development over leave she would have lost her engineering license. Despite the obligatory nature of this work, Sarah still found value in this practice when she said "[i]t might help with transitioning back to work. Maybe just to get my head around the industry again" (Interview 15). Sarah found ways to leverage these working hours to best suit her needs by volunteering at her son's preschool and reading engineering specific literature for her professional development hours.

Another working and leave experience was described by six participants who did not work over leave but wished they had. Often times these participants chose to engage in some work or professional development during their parental leave. These participants had multiple children, and had experienced the detriments of not working over leave, and were looking to make a change for their second leave. Ella, who worked as a counselor for a psychology firm, reported feelings of isolation on her first leave. When asked about what made her second leave better Ella reported "[m]aking space for research in my field,

literature in my field, just to bring back a bit of focus for me" (Interview 5). For Ella, this professional development work helped contribute to increased focus and confidence when returning to the workplace. The participants in this category often cited mental health as a contributing factor for their desire to work over leave; I will expand on this in the coming chapter.

A final set of experiences regarding working over leave included four participants who gladly fulfilled work tasks during leave despite their employers not requiring the completion of such tasks. These individuals were often heavily involved in their company although not necessarily in management positions, and were willing to continue contributing and connecting with their team, regardless of leave. Ashley, who worked as a director of stakeholder relations for a non-profit, describes the following two scenarios, the first cites a situation where she actively chose to work over leave. The second describes a situation where her company offered her working hours. Ashley states:

> And we worked out kind of an arrangement because I was in a senior leadership role, I was of course very invested in the organization, and was fully intending on coming back to work. And so the guy who was doing my job really talked with me about how could we keep connecting so I could continue to influence the direction of our development department. And that really worked for me. We connected every two weeks while I was on leave and he would come to my house, walk my baby, and talk with me about what was happening at work. And that was a really good thing for me! (Interview 2)

> Our CEO does a pretty compelling speech at the gala and for a lot of people that's kind of the highlight of why they attend. And prior to my leave, I co-wrote that speech with her [CEO]. And so when it came time to writing her speech while I was on leave, she invited me and made it optional to help her write it. And that was something that I really appreciated because it was something I could do while my kids were sleeping, it was a small enough piece of work that it was manageable. It allowed me to kind of engage in something cognitive, and something that I really cared about, and to be in a relationship with my boss who I really liked, or still do really like. It was those sorts of things that I got to be involved in where the impression that was given to me was there wasn't anybody else in the agency who could help as much as I could and so that didn't make me

> feel pressured, it made me feel valued, that I had something to really offer. (Interview 2)

Ashley did two important things here. In the first situation, she leveraged the structural features of her company, like the use of a replacement employee, to remain involved and informed with the day-to-day happenings of the company. In the second scenario, the structural features of Ashley's workplace, including the yearly gala and emphasis on the speech, were documented in a way where her talents and abilities fostered a sense of self-worth and community within her company. Again, these scenarios demonstrate the conjunction of structural features and organizational culture, however, this time they are contributing to a positive leave experience.

The structural features of a workplace can also have implications for how a participant experiences employment both prior to and post-leave. When a replacement employee assumes the duties of an employee on leave, there is less concern surrounding distributing tasks to the rest of the team. Although, when an employee's position is not filled by a replacement employee, there is more fear that their job could become obsolete and place more pressure on those remaining in the workplace. Both of these experiences have been outlined by my participants during discussions surrounding the structural features of their workplace. Caitlyn, who worked as a social worker for a non-profit, described the experience of replacement employees at her workplace. She states:

> But I always find that they're really bad at having someone ready to go when someone leaves, even though you know for months that a mat leave is coming up. So I always feel bad. I felt bad for the team because they take on the extra work until someone gets hired. And even if someone's hired, they have to figure things out slowly. (Interview 9)

Caitlyn's workplace struggles to replace employees over leave. Caitlyn's quote reflects similar observations made by Tremblay and Genin (2011) about how co-worker and

manager support can lack when an company is strained by the absence of a worker on leave (258). Caitlyn's experience of feeling bad about the situation is systematically produced by the structural features of her company such as the team-based nature of the labour, and the delay in hiring a replacement employee. Katie, who worked as a business system analyst for a property development company, describes a situation opposite to that of Caitlyn's. For Katie, her job became obsolete when her replacement employee got hired full-time during her leave. Katie describes the situation below:

> I came on initially as a full-time role. And then shortly after, I ended up getting pregnant and going on my first mat leave the following year I guess. That was kind of the first mat leave. And then I came back to the marketing team and worked a little bit. And then went on my second mat leave back in June of last year, I kind of started that. And when I return, I'm actually joining a different team, in a different role, with a different manager because that's the only department with space for me. (Interview 6)

For Katie, her employer was still able to find a desirable job for her within the company. It should be noted that Katie was not unhappy with this outcome**.** What is clear, however, is that the structural features of Katie's workplace, such as the team-based organization of work, shifted and changed her job title and duties over the course of her maternity leave. Some employees may not be as lucky as to find a new role in the company so quickly.

Christina, who worked as a senior supply chain specialist for a construction company, commented on the structural features of her organization, such as project timelines and company lay-off practices, when returning from parental leave. Christina opted to come back from leave two weeks early because there was a position for her on a project. Christina's company organizes project completions on a yearly basis. If an employee's leave does not align with the dates of corporate projects, returning to work

can become a challenge. When responding to questions about the return to work process, Christina sates:

> So when I first went on mat leave, I told my HR person I'm going to take the twelve months. And so they knew my return to work date. They can't lay you off before that date, but they can literally lay you off the day you walk into the office. Like leave is job protected to some degree. But if there is no work, then they can lay you off. (Interview 7)

In addition to questionable ethics surrounding lay-off decisions, the way Christina's company has organized project processes makes it challenging for employees to return to work post-leave. Government policy on EI maternity and parental leaves make it clear that employees are required to return to the same or similar job post-leave, however, Christina's experience demonstrates how employers are working around government policy. The way Christina discusses return to work practices is reflective of the structural features of her organization. These structural features include project timelines. Later in the interview, Christina mentions women who were laid-off mere days after their parental leave.

The structural features of an organization can provide the background out of which the experiences of participants, either positive or negative, emerge. Some structural features documented by participants include project timelines, company lay-off practices, team-based organization of work, and complex skilled work which is not easily replaced. It is a valuable practice for particular companies to ensure their structural features are not hindering employees when they take leave. Reevaluating structural features to ensure they do not produce inequalities in the workplace is an important step to further produce positive leave experiences.

4.5 PENALTIES TOWARDS EMPLOYEES WHO TAKE LEAVE

This section will discuss the ways in which participants are penalized in their workplace on the basis of their parental leave decisions. These penalties can include withholding of promotions, withholding of salary increases, and title or position changes. This section considers how such penalties can create inequalities among participants and their co-workers. Additionally, this section describes how employees who are assumed to have children are not promoted as readily as others who do not assume the motherhood role. Employees who are assumed to have children are typically younger, sometimes married, and women (Van der Lippe et al. 2019, 112). Feminist political economy points to how inequalities are produced in particular workplaces through the use of such penalties.

Hypothetically, individuals who take the eighteen month leave option should not be criticized in comparison to those taking the twelve month leave option. However, there seems to be a stigma surrounding the eighteen month option. Christina, who worked as a senior supply chain specialist for a construction company, was fortunate to have this conversation with her employer. This discussion provides insight to how the eighteen month leave may be viewed in the workplace. Christina states:

> And my company would have covered my benefits because they have to legally. But I think there would have still - like my boss said to me, I was telling him how I was regretting not taking eighteen months. And he said, you know, it's a good thing you didn't because we probably wouldn't have had a place for you when you returned kind of thing. (Interview 7)

Those who take a eighteen month leave in Christina's company may find it challenging to return. Additionally, the comments made by Christina's boss reflect the underlying opinions toward eighteen month leaves by company leaders. It can be inferred from the

above quote that individuals in Christina's company may be encouraged to construct their leave in a particular way that aligns with workplace values and features. By constructing leave in a particular way that is desirable to a particular company, employees may hope to be viewed as committed to their work, and get promoted more quickly despite taking leave.

There are many actions one can take to show employers that they are serious about their work, like taking a twelve month leave as opposed to eighteen months. However, there are some instances where employees felt it necessary to verbalize their feelings towards leave and demonstrate their commitment to work. These feelings were characterized by quotes like "[a]nd I would encourage people to definitely ask that [family-friendly policies] in the interview and make sure that that's going to be a fit long-term, because you hope to be at a company for a long time and you hope it's a good fit" (Interview 6). Caitlyn, who worked as a social worker for a non-profit, was preparing for a third parental leave when I spoke with her. Caitlyn's experience of verbalizing the loss of commitment between her and her employer were echoed by another five participants. When asked why she hopes to move to a different non-profit post-leave Caitlyn states:

> […] I don't feel like I'm considered as a serious person to move-up now. I feel this need almost to be like - guys I'm done having kids now. I'm here. But that's not their business either right. I have this weird feeling of being like once I'm done having my third kid, if I want to go back there, I feel the need to be like - I'm done, I'm here now. Because I think that while you're in the middle of your childbearing years, there's this stagnancy that people just expect. (Interview 9)

This stagnancy mentioned by Caitlyn was not uncommon in my research and is reflected by much of the literature in the field in terms of the motherhood penalty (Van der Lippe et al. 2019, 112). For Van der Lippe and co-authors, stagnancy is connected with gender inequality in earnings and a lack of family-friendly policies in the workplace, true of

Caitlyn's employer. Caitlyn's sentiments concerning career progression were influenced by previous workplace experiences - she was overlooked for a promotion due to her parental leave. Caitlyn states:

> But when I was coming back from the second mat leave, I was due back in January. And in December they were hiring for a supervisor and they wanted it to be an internal hire because it was a contract. And to be a supervisor, you have to have your Master's and there's only three of us on the team, including myself, that have the Master's. And my co-workers were like, oh this has come up. But no one contacted me to see if I'd like to apply. And I didn't want to, so it makes it sound like, I'm being petty now. But I really truly would have never applied. But I'm thinking it's weird they didn't contact me because it would have been like a few weeks delay of me coming back to when the position would have been ideally started. And I don't know if they didn't think I was qualified? Or if it was more like she's doing her thing right now. And they hired someone who's had her kids, they're older now. And again, maybe I'm reading too much into it. But I do feel there's this thing when you're on mat leave, you're not considered for it. I didn't feel like I was considered for anything. Any kind of promotion or anything. I'm not really sure if there should be a law, if you're going to have internal hiring, I should have access to that information while I'm on mat leave because I technically still work there. (Interview 9)

Caitlyn's experience is incredibly troubling, however, it is not uncommon in the face of current literature (Hass & Hwang 2008). Caitlyn's experience was similar to Tori's who worked as a human resources and training development representative for an oil and gas company. Tori was eventually recruited by another employer over her leave and returned to a different position entirely, however, her quote describes a situation where her leave jeopardized the possibilities for promotion. Tori states:

> It was a title change. So there's one position and there's these people competing. I've been there long enough, I deserved it. But they were gonna wait for me to come back and then wait until the next performance cycle. I had other supervisors tell me, just come back early, pay your three month dues, and you'll get the promotion but it was like, no, I deserve this year off. I'm not doing it! (Interview 18)

Tori's employer expected an early return to work in order to consider Tori for the promotion. Tori's situation demonstrates clearly how promotions are not typically offered

to individuals taking leave. Promotions are typically tied to performance cycles and strict timelines, and individuals are not engaging with these realities while on leave. This is unfortunate because both Caitlyn and Tori would have made great candidates for promotions had their employers been willing to share information and accommodate their leave.

There were, however, a few instances in my research where participants were promoted over leave, or promised return to work conditions that would allow them to grow into higher paying positions. This situation was only characteristic of two out of my twenty participants, although, they are important experiences to note. The following quotes include Nadine, who worked as payroll analyst for a construction company, and Les, who worked as an industrial project specialist for a real estate company. Both women were offered opportunities to grow in their companies post-leave. They state:

> We had talked about - we're pretty open my payroll manager and I about what I want to do. And she's super supportive about me going back to finish my payroll designation. I'd started it before I got pregnant, and then had to stop it partway through. She's offered to let me go back to do that, if I want to. They're also looking at ways to improve the payroll process and ensuring that I get to be a part of that. And, maybe if I want to stay on and be in a payroll position that maybe there would be opportunities for me, it's a discussion after I came back. (Interview 10)

> Yeah. I did supply chain at university. I have an idea of some of the stuff and supply chain kind of interests me. So warehousing and loading, and all that stuff. That's really interesting. And actually, all the girls that are in our office are interested in industrial. So I know one of them, or two of them, are getting their license. So they'll technically be able to be agents if they wanted to. And then I'm hoping to do it. And they really encourage women to get into it. (Interview 12)

Both Nadine and Les were offered opportunities that encouraged them to stay with their companies and remotivated them post-leave. If more opportunities could have been

provided to Caitlyn and Tori, then perhaps their parental leave and return to work experiences could have been more positive like Nadine and Les.

This section has described how inequalities in the workplace can be produced on the basis of withholding of promotions, withholding of salary increases, and title or position changes. Participants have had to negotiate leaves in ways that underscore their dedication and commitment to the company, while simultaneously experiencing stagnancy in their careers. Work needs to be done to ensure leave-taking individuals are provided opportunities to grow during the years they take leave, not just after they finish having children. Additionally, penalties are relevant in Chapter 5 and will be discussed within differing contexts through a social constructionism lens in that section.

4.6 KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

This section covers the knowledge participants possess about parental leave policies in Alberta and Canada. More specially, this section will discuss the recently added parental benefit for second parents and why the policy is not widely known or taken. Since feminist political economy is interested in inequalities, it recognizes that men, who are candidates for the recently added parental benefit, are often disadvantaged because employers assume men will not take leave. This section considers why knowledge surrounding leave for the second parent is so limited, and why fathers in my research were not taking this leave.

There was significant misinformation among participants when asked about leave for the second parent. Even for myself as a researcher, it is challenging to find detailed information on the policy without opening an EI claim. Since the parental benefit for the second parent is so new, there was often confusion about what the policy entailed,

avenues for taking it, and sometimes even a lack of knowledge altogether. The following quotations demonstrate just some of the conversations I had with participants who were completely unaware of the recently added parental benefit policy.

> I think my husband's gonna take the last month or two of my leave. Because I think that's important. I have a brother who's quite young, he's only ten. So I watched my Dad take the end of my Stepmom's mat leave. It was so cool. So when it came time for us to talk about it, I was like, you should do that. You should be able to single parent, what if I died or something, you know? (Interview 20)
>
> *I inform participant about the recently added parental benefit*
>
> Okay that's so cool. Because my friend was telling me that her fiancé can do that. But she's in B.C. and she works for the government. So I thought her job tops-up her pay. So I just thought it must be something to do with the government. I didn't even think that it's with the job. I mean, not that it was something that we could apply for. So that's super exciting. (Interview 20).

The situation explained by Sarah, who worked as an operations manager for a waxing and beauty boutique, was echoed by Les who worked as an industrial project specialist for a real estate company. Les stated:

> I thought that it [partners leave] was taking away from mine! That's what we kind of understood from it. Right? Wrong or no? (Interview 12)
>
> *I inform participant about the recently added parental benefit*
>
> Okay. Yeah. Yeah, really? From what I understood, it was either, we had a total of this many weeks. So when I was doing it, I was like - do you want me to just take four less weeks and then you can try and apply? And we're like, no, that's okay. We'll just do it and I'll just get the maximum and then he can just take his vacation. (Interview 12)

Both Sarah and Les highlight how much misinformation surrounds the recently added parental benefit. I can infer from the above quotes that the companies these women worked for lacked HR departments or individuals taking leave for the second parent, to provide both education and inspiration. These situations demonstrate that not all

employees or companies are privy to policy knowledge. Before it becomes common in the workplace, the recently added parental benefit needs to be explained to individuals when they apply. Policy knowledge and visual representations of leave for the second parent from others in the office are avenues to improve awareness of the recently added parental benefit.

Ten of the participants in my study knew about the recently added parental benefit, but chose not to take it. These understandings were equally divided between upper and lower levels of employees in the organization. Couples were most times disinterested in both parents taking time off. This was true for Ella who worked as a counselor for a psychology firm and her partner. When asked directly about the recently added parental benefit, Ella states:

> So when I went on leave with my second, we never considered him taking leave. I think he could have, but we never considered him taking it because I wanted it and he didn't. Like I want the whole twelve months and he was like, that's cool. I was like, I want the leave. I want all the time with my babies that I can have. (Interview 5)

The above quote demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the recently added parental benefit. When Ella states that she wanted 'the whole twelve months' it implies that she assumes the recently added parental benefit would take away from her leave time, but it does not. Additionally, Ella and her partner are taking a leave that perpetuates traditional gender roles. Ella's quote touches on gender-differentiated reactions to leave by spouses which will be discussed in Chapter 5. This arrangement is obviously not a bad decision for Ella and her partner, however, it can contribute to challenges like a gender disparity in wage and promotions.

Ella's experience was shared by Leah who worked in HR for an oil and gas company. Leah and her partner both worked in HR and were well aware of the recently added parental benefit. Leah states:

> Yeah, we knew about it. But I mean, at the time with our second there's no way he would have been able to take leave. Just based on the amount of work that he was in and he was at a fairly new job too, right. He had just taken the job. November, I was pregnant. So he was new in his job and they threw him right into their craziest union negotiations and so he really just couldn't take any time off. (Interview 16).

Leah and her partner have constructed a leave that does create a traditional gendered experience. I should note that leave experiences where women take a lead on parenting are not all bad, however, they can systematically impact a women in her career more directly than her partner when she is taking extended time away from employment. What is most interesting in the quotation above is the assumption that Leah's partner could not take time off from work due to the newness of his position and workload. Would Leah feel the same way about her leave if she found herself in his position? Comments from Ella and Leah highlight the hesitancy regarding recently added parental benefit, and the lack of knowledge surrounding the policy that still persists even a year after its creation.

This section has documented the range of knowledge participants have concerning the recently added parental benefit. As well, this section has answered questions surrounding who is privy to policy knowledge, and how do changes in policy influence income and leave experiences. I am unsure if leave-taking individuals are more aware of the policy now than they were last year. It is my hope that the information I provided participants on the recently added parental benefit was distributed to their networks and fosters a greater sense of understanding and uptake.

4.7 REDEFINING LEAVE

This section outlines the experiences of participants who redefined their leaves to create more desirable and convenient uptakes and/or return to work options. The redefining of leave includes scaling between the twelve and eighteen month options, and the unpredictable situations that arise and create unexpected leave experiences. There were thirteen participants, both women and men, who used their leave in some nonstandard manner. Participants redefined their leaves in ways that fall outside of current parental leave policies. Feminist political economy is a valuable framework for this section because participants are acting against or seeking to modify particular government policies.

Participants often expressed frustrations that they could not take a leave that landed somewhere in the middle of the twelve and eighteen month options. This was a critique sixteen participants shared about the current parental leave policies. Sarah, who works as an engineer, critiques the program by stating:

> When you apply for EI, you have to choose either twelve months or eighteen months. It doesn't scale between them. And so I chose twelve because I was planning to take a little bit extra. But I think it would be nice if you could scale it and get your EI spread out over fifteen or sixteen months, whatever you chose. (Interview 15)

Another seven participants echoed Sarah's sentiments. A handful of my participants got smart and scaled their leave between the twelve and eighteen month options (Interviews 3, 13, 17). If participants did not scale their leaves themselves, they often had friends or co-workers who did. This scaling was often achieved through a three-step process. Initially, the participant would tell their employer that they planned to take an eighteen month leave. Next, the participant would apply for a twelve month leave through EI.

Lastly, the participant would tell their employer their return to work plans were somewhere between the twelve and eighteen months. The employer assumed their employee was choosing to come back early, while the participant took a longer leave that better suited their needs. When an employee came back sometime before the eighteen month mark, their employer often viewed them as a committed worker, an unintentional positive benefit that came out of this scaling process. It should be noted that leave-taking individuals receive the same amount of money for twelve and eighteen month leaves, it is simply distributed differently over the two time frames. When participants chose to scale their leave, they just had to be aware of their savings to help them manage their personal finances until they chose to return to work.

The quotations below from Amy, who worked as a flight attendant for a large airline, and Christina, who worked as a senior supply chain senior specialist for a construction company, highlight the point. Amy describes her experience of scaling leave while Christina describes what her friend did. They state:

> So I mean, I've chosen twelve months for EI but I've told my job eighteen months just to give the flexibility. And then I just have to inform them four weeks before returning so they can schedule my return to work training. (Interview 3)

> So what my friend did is she told the government she was taking twelve months, so she gets paid for twelve months. And then she told her work, she's taking eighteen months. So she gets benefits for eighteen months, but there's a six-month period at the end where she's not getting any money. (Interview 7)

Both women discuss these experiences quite casually. This may be more acceptable for Christina, who describes a friend's experience. The lack of formality in the quotes is interesting because these women are basically leveraging government policy and employer goodwill. This redefining is not bad necessarily because it provides these women with a more convenient leave. The informal nature of these discussions could also

be due to the familiarity individuals have with the practice. Hannah, who worked as an operations manager for a construction company, describes her experience of scaling leave. However, her employer had knowledge of this process. She states:

> I wanted extra time. I didn't want to take the full - so the problem with mat leave that I find with the government rules is you have to choose twelve or eighteen months. If you choose eighteen and you go back early, you miss out on the money. If you choose twelve and you want extra time you have to work that out with your individual company. So if there's benefits or top-ups or anything like that, then there are issues around extending. So I had that conversation before I went on mat leave. And I was able to extend up to fifteen months without losing my benefits. So that's what we agreed to do. And I had something put in writing saying that I was allowed to do that. And I'd have my job back and all that jazz for taking fifteen. Now, the pandemic hit, and I wish I had taken the eighteen. (Interview 17)

Hannah's experience is interesting to examine. When participants scale their leaves, they tend to keep their employer in the dark about their decision. Hannah, however, was able to scale her leave in coordination with her employer. Later in the interview, Hannah mentions how her company does not have a formal HR department and the lack of an HR presence could have been a contributing factor to her employer facilitating this nonstandard leave. COVID-19 created options and challenges for planning leaves, and these will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In addition to COVID-19, there were other unpredictable situations that allowed my participants to create atypical leaves and return to work experiences. Ashley, who worked as a director of stakeholder relations for a non-profit, had her baby prematurely and describes her extended leave situation:

> And then when you have a preemie baby, there's lots that you can't do in the first month when you bring them home once they get out of the NICU that people who have normal babies can do. Their immune systems are very compromised. So you can't take them out, you can't see family, you can't have a lot of people in and out of your house. So you can't get the same extra help. And so that's partly why they [the government] acknowledged that additional time. By the time she was about

> six weeks old, that's when we were sort of in the normal newborn time. Now that I think about it, it was six weeks because I was eligible for benefits up to her actual due date. […] I became friends with another Mom in the NICU and she had a nurse who told her about it, otherwise I wouldn't have known. So what happens is it was retroactively applied, but I got the critically ill child [Ill Child Benefit] from July 11 when my daughter was born to August 24, which was her due date. Then I got the thirteen weeks maternity leave starting August 24. And then the remainder was parental leave. (Interview 2)

The benefits for a critically ill child are ones that Ashley could have never predicted. Ashley was able to negotiate a longer leave for herself and this helped rectify many challenges that arise from a premature baby such as increased time spent in the NICU, lack of help and support from family, and other various medical issues that are realities for both the mother and baby. The experience was unique to Ashley among the participants in my research sample, although, not necessarily unique in a broader population of individuals taking parental leave.

An additional unpredictable leave and return to work experience was shared by Leah, who worked in HR for an oil and gas company. Leah describes her situation below:

> Yeah, I was gonna take the full eighteen months and then our company, our HR group has been going through this whole transformation process for like two years now. And so it was kind of coming to a head. So I actually decided to come back a bit earlier. So I didn't take the full eighteen just because I wanted to get enough hours in case I am laid-off here at the end of October. I wanted to make sure I had all my hours so that I could re-qualify for EI so I had to come back a little bit early in order to do that. (Interview 16)

Re-qualifying for EI is a problem some of the hourly workers in my research have faced (Interview 3, 11, 14). For Leah, her requalification was not associated with the desire to go on another parental leave. Being able to qualify for EI in the face of a lay-off is important to protect personal and household income. Both Ashley and Leah experienced situations that influenced their leaves and return to work in unpredictable ways.

This section has highlighted the range of experiences and unpredictable scenarios that allow individuals to negotiate leaves and favorable pre-leave and post-leave working structures. Each leave situation varies in the extent that it is influenced by factors that are either predicable or unimaginable. It is challenging to make recommendations to better accommodate atypical leave and work experiences, however, my limited sample suggests that government decision makers should consider how leave could be scaled between twelve and eighteen months because individuals are doing this anyway. Feminist political economy has been a valuable framework for this section because individuals who scale their leaves are innovating in regards to government policies. In contrast, other workers are often confined within the constraints of EI policy which can limit their leave plans.

4.8 CONCLUSION

Feminist political economy has demonstrated how inequalities are often unavoidable and interwoven within broader corporate, economic, and government structures (Jon Maroney & Luxton 2014; Meisenbach et al. 2008; Peterson 2005; Vosko 2002). This chapter has documented participants' personal experiences taking leave and how these experiences are shaped by the market economy and government policy. The evidence from my research makes it clear that the structural features of workplaces, such as project timelines, company lay-off practices, and team-based organization of work, systematically influenced the ways my participants planned their leaves given their gender, position, and role in their company. Structural features such as the lack of HR departments have also been influential to understand why participants sometimes have partial or incorrect knowledge on leave provisions and policies (Pettigrew and Duncan, 2017). As well, structural features have also influenced expectations for leave-taking

individuals such as work over leave and the ways participants negotiate new and unexpected leaves in the face of rigid government policy.

The analysis of this chapter helps to answer questions regarding the ways parental leave is planned and negotiated in light of corporate structural features such as project timelines, and return-to-work practices. I have suggested that further work needs to be done within corporations on their structural features, and at the government level on EI parental leave policies, before leave-taking individuals can truly create a leave that is right for them. I will discuss this suggestion further in the concluding chapter.

Overall, my data suggests that both corporate and government structures create obstacles to parental leave. However, these structures can become assets, instead of obstacles, if structural features in corporations and policies can take into consideration the varying experiences of leave-taking individuals, and change their patterns accordingly to better suit the needs of those on leave (Hass and Hwang, 2008). The following chapter will discuss similar challenges within a social constructionist framework that emphasizes organizational culture and manager and co-worker reactions as obstacles to taking leave.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE REACTIONS OF OTHERS

This chapter aims to create an understanding of what is acceptable and not acceptable both within and outside of the workplace. Often, interactions from members of a participant's social and corporate networks including co-workers, managers, clients, and spouses can dictate meaning. Additionally, uncontrollable factors like organizational culture can influence interpretations of what constitutes an acceptable leave. The reactions of others often influence a participant's choice for leave, as well as subsequent opinions about leave policies.

I will discuss my data within the framework of social constructionism, which seeks to understand how norms and attitudes are constructed and interpreted. The important points in this section are gender-differentiated reactions toward leave from co-workers and managers, and also from spouses; how organizational culture influences participants' choice of leave; and the worker-parent identity crisis. Social constructionism helps to explain notions of acceptability which is valuable when analyzing identity shifting from worker to parent under the worker-parent identity crisis. It is important to note that interpretive discussions from co-workers, managers, and spouses often lead to stigmatization and backlash regarding parental leave. Individuals in the corporate categories can interact with those in broader society to reinforce messages regarding the boundaries between work and home.

5.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism considers how interaction creates the meanings that we attach to people, places, and things in terms of our social, cultural, and historical context

(Elder-Vass 2007). Social constructionism has been a valuable lens for my research analysis because it conceptualizes the ways parental leave policies are broadly interpreted between co-workers, managers, and workplaces. Co-worker reactions are often influenced by the ideas and feelings of upper management. If management holds traditional views then gendered ideas surrounding leave can perhaps influence the broader organizational culture. Social constructionism is also a valuable lens to analyze personal spousal reactions because it can help evaluate what couples understand to be acceptable parental leave uptake for their family.

Social constructionism is employed as the broader framework for this chapter and its evaluation of how reactions create an understanding of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in the face of parental leave uptakes. Acceptability is often decided by co-workers, managers, spouses or others who have not had a lived experience of parental leave. The interactions participants have with these individuals create meaning, and influence a participant's parental leave uptake and return to work post-leave. These interactions can also have more extensive effects within organizational cultures and workplaces, influencing the ways parental leave uptakes are understood, accepted, and implemented. If a particular organization speaks negatively about parental leave, then individuals may find that negativity present in co-worker reactions concerning their leave. A social constructivist approach outlines how a person moves from policy entitlement at the macro-level to social frameworks at the micro-level – a shift that may prohibit or encourage the uptake of leave. The following sections will discuss some of these concerns in relation to the broader framework of social constructionism.

5.2 GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED REACTIONS TO LEAVE BY CO-WORKERS AND MANAGERS

This section will review the gender-differentiated reactions to leave by co-workers and managers. There are particular gender differences in the experience of taking leaves that are outlined in this section. This includes what kind of leave is expected by employers on the basis of gender; how leave is judged and understood by co-workers and managers in a specific workplace; and the direct criticisms leave-taking individuals might face. There are two important points to consider in this section. First, how do leave experiences differ across gender, similar to how certain jobs become gendered. Second, how can access to leave and the return to work post-leave be different for employees in terms of gender. It is important to note that my research has more data on women (seventeen participants) than men (three participants) so observations and conclusions are focused more on the perspective of women's experience.

Workplace reactions regarding parental leave uptakes at times have been framed by stereotyping and stigmatization. These negative comments are not typically a direct insult at individuals taking parental leave, but rather reactions about the situation more broadly. Women and men in my sample employed different avenues for taking leave. These differing avenues include approaching managers about leave, handling workplace expectations, and dealing with co-worker attitudes surrounding leave and return to work. In all seventeen interviews I conducted with a mother, there was a perception from her employer that she would take a leave at some point during her career. This perception was often characterized by comments such as "[I]'m not surprised" (Interview 5) and "[i]t's about time" (Interview 12) when women shared their plans for leave.

Men who I spoke with were not similarly understood to take any sort of parental leave. This became particularly evident in my interviews, due to the participant's lack of knowledge surrounding the recently added parental benefit. Participants seemed to have some knowledge surrounding alternative avenues men could take for parental leave, such as vacation days, but not specific leave policies that were open to spouses. Interview 14 was my only participant out of twenty whose spouse successfully took this leave. A lack of participant data is influenced by the idea that men have been socially constructed by society to be the breadwinner for their household and thus will continue to work despite the birth of a new child (McKay & Doucet 2010; Rehel, 2014). The practice of seeing women as taken-for-granted parental leaders reinforces McKay and Doucet's (2010) notion of parenting as a privilege for men rather than an obligation (314).

These disparities were summarized by the response of Hannah, who worked in a medium-sized construction company as an operations manager. Hannah anticipated that parental leave would be a challenge for her career progression. She states:

> And that [parental leave] is going to, unfortunately, put women in careers backwards, probably by twenty years. Because I think the primary caregiving role is still always put to women. (Interview 17)

Leave is something that many expect to be experienced by women, but not by men. Hannah's idea that parental leave is going to negatively influence her career trajectory stems from a perception that she is predisposed to motherhood. While career stagnancy is a negative outcome for women in caregiving roles, there are also negative outcomes experienced by men including harsher co-worker and manager reactions (Rehel, 2014, 120-121).

Women who I interviewed reported easier conversations with employers when expressing their plans for leave when compared to the men I interviewed. While not all experiences were simple, women typically described a particular mutual understanding between themselves and their employer. Participants often attributed this understanding to their superior also being in the childbearing years of their career, or previous conversations with employers about their plans for parenthood. Since the recently added parental benefit is relatively new, employers may not recognize it as an employee right and, further, may stigmatize men who might take it. Elizabeth, who worked part-time in retail and part-time as a dance educator, was asked why her partner did not take the recently added parental benefit. She responded:

> What I would be curious to know is how that man would explain that leave decision to his career or to his boss. How would that be accepted? At my husband's job they'd be like, probably don't come back if you take a leave. Because he works in sales, and it's week-to-week, if you don't make your commission then you're out. (Interview 11)

While the above is a hypothetical scenario and not a lived experience, the comment is still valuable for discussion. Organizational cultures, whether advertently or inadvertently, may create an environment that situates leave experiences as different across genders. For women, leave-taking is an accepted and expected experience. For men, there is still much work that needs to be done before a leave can be a culturally and corporately accepted practice.

Considering the leave for the second parent is a new policy, there is a research gap regarding reactions towards this leave experience. A massage therapist named Kaitlynn was my only participant whose partner successfully took leave. Her husband took the leave, however, he declined my request for an interview. Kaitlynn discusses her

husband's experience of second-parent leave and various reactions from her clients when she shared her husband's plan for leave. Kaitlynn states:

> It's a new thing. Half the people don't even know about it. So I remember telling my clients that my husband was going to take some time off, and they were very surprised because they have never heard about it. (Interview 14)

Kaitlynn's comment demonstrates how men are not understood to take any sort of parental leave. Her clients' surprise and lack of knowledge about second-parent leave and the recently added parental benefit is not uncommon among my research sample. Eight out of twenty participants had no knowledge of the recently added parental benefit while another four had incorrect knowledge. All of my participants were aware of alternative avenues for time off, such as unpaid and paid vacation time, however, not all participants were aware of the recently added parental benefit. This reality demonstrates the need for more policy education before leave for the second parent can become an accepted practice in the workplace.

Negative reactions towards leave are unavoidable for both women and men. Although women are typically understood to take parental leave, there are questionable reactions by co-workers and managers. A small sample of women in my research have faced extremely negative reactions regarding their leave (Interviews 9, 15, 17). The following two quotes from Hannah, who worked for a construction company, highlight just how toxic co-worker and manager reactions can become. The first quote highlights a co-worker reaction towards leave while the second quote describes a co-worker reaction about various family demands. She states:

> There was one sales guy, he's retired now. But he's super old school. And he gave me a hard time about coming back and said that my place is in the home, and his kids had the luxury of their mother taking care of them. And I should be doing that too. (Interview 17)

> I had a girl that used to work here, who was in her early twenties make a comment about how she should be allowed some unpaid vacation time, because she doesn't have any kids. And she's not taking extra sick days to deal with her kids. And I'm like, do you think that staying home with kids that are puking and sick and everything is a vacation? (Interview 17)

The above quotes demonstrate how leave is judged to be acceptable or unacceptable by co-workers. In the case of the 'one sales guy' a woman's return to work can even be scrutinized. This is not to say that men do not experience disapproval from co-workers on the basis of their leave; Hass & Hwang (2019a, 2007, 2002) have documented how this occurs across multiple studies. However, disapproval from co-workers and managers is likely to be gendered due to the cultural perceptions of women and men in particular, specifically in respect to caregiving and breadwinner roles.

Hannah described co-worker and manager reactions in the form of comments and jokes. However, Caitlyn describes a situation where similar comments became so extreme that day-to-day experiences and interactions began to influence her work performance. Caitlyn worked as a social worker in a privately funded non-profit organization. When asked to respond to a situation where she was working with a particularly problematic co-worker, Caitlyn states:

> And I have thought about that [situation working with co-worker and manager reaction] so much after because I was, like, you told me you can't treat me differently because I am pregnant. But I just told you I'm not okay with co-facilitating a group where he [problematic co-worker] leads. And then she's like - well you're leaving in four months anyways. And I never brought it up, but I remember thinking that's backwards. And of course you're treating me differently because I'm pregnant. To tell me you're not when it's convenient for you is so wrong. So that rubbed me the wrong way, not her initial reaction to me telling her I was pregnant, but in the stuff that played out afterwards. I was frustrated, but whatever. (Interview 9)

Caitlyn was placed in a work situation convenient for her manager, and the daily operations of the team, despite her expressions of discomfort. Manager reactions typically influence individuals in ways that have impacts on the entire corporate team or organization. Despite the apparently open and progressive attitudes of non-profit organizations, Caitlyn struggled with negative reactions by her manager and co-workers. Caitlyn's situation demonstrates how words and promises in the workplace can be meaningless, or conveniently shaped by the employer creating a perception that pregnancy and leave-taking is problematic.

It should be noted that some companies did create a culture that welcomed parental leave. Christina, describes how interactions with co-workers contributed to a positive experience for both parental leaves. Christina worked as senior supply chain specialist for a construction company. She states

> Both maternity leaves, I kept in pretty close contact with my boss and a few of my co-workers. So it wasn't kind of like they just forgot about me. When I had babies, I brought them into the office and just kind of kept in contact. And it wasn't like, there was no sort of attitude about - oh, you're leaving us, how could you take a year off? Because everybody does it. It's the norm. (Interview 7)

It is interesting to compare Hannah and Christina's experiences as they both worked for construction companies. Christina's experiences provide insight to the benefits of positive manager and co-worker relationships and reactions. Since parental leave was considered something exciting and common in Christina's workplace, constructive manager and co-worker reactions and relationships were positive. Christina's experience was different when compared to Dainty and Bagihole's (2006) study on women in the construction industry where they claim that stigmatization and workplace tensions towards mothers only subsides after their childbearing years.

Leave must be interpreted by employees, co-workers, and managers as acceptable before change can occur in the daily interactions between leave-taking individuals and their corporate networks. Additionally, companies should strive for a more contemporary understanding of women and men's roles as parents and workers (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014). Leave for women and men is constructed in a way to encourage women to take it while simultaneously discouraging men from applying (McKay & Doucet 2010). The important points in this section were how conversations about parental leave in the workplace can influence what participants view as an acceptable leave choice.

5.3 GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED REACTIONS TO LEAVE BY SPOUSES

This section reviews the gender-differentiated reactions to leave by spouses. Reactions were documented in interviews where participants were talking about their spouse. These reactions include why couples plan their leaves in particular, and often traditionally gendered ways. It is important to note that due to the nature of my interviews, participant reactions are often one-sided without input from their spouse. My participant sample includes only two sets of heterosexual couples where both spousal reactions could be documented. The important points to consider in this section are how spousal comments influence a woman's sense of entitlement or responsibility to take the majority of parental leave, and how that experience contributes to a traditional gendered parenting and working model. Social constructionism is a valuable framework here because it can explain how gendered parenting and working models are constructed as acceptable. In contrast, my research demonstrates how less traditional models have shown to be more beneficial and contribute to overall participant happiness.

There were a majority of women in my study who took the entire parental leave due to a variety of reasons. Eight mothers believed taking the entire parental leave was their right because they carried the child and their partner did not. This sentiment was often characterized by comments like "[I] carry the baby for nine months. I'm taking the whole year" (Interview 13). Some mothers even expressed their concerns over the effectiveness of their partner's parenting abilities (Interview 5, 7, 10, 17). The reactions my participants had towards their spouses, and the construction of their parental leave more broadly, often strengthened stereotypes of women in a domestic roles and men as breadwinners. Christina, who worked as senior supply chain specialist for a construction company, demonstrates this assumption. She states:

> It's harder for Dads to take parental leave, I would say if there's a Mom. Because there's just kind of that stigma again - why do you need to take it? That's what the Mom's for and that kind of thing. I mean, my husband jokes, you should take six months and I'll take six months. And I was like, no, cause you'll be at home playing Xbox! (Interview 7)

Christina highlights the challenges men face when taking parental leave. Christina's choice of words "my husband jokes" is an interesting phrase that suggests his parental leave is a humorous idea. Her reaction towards her husbands parental leave is rooted in the idea of women as domestic workers. Since men are not typically understood to be primary caregivers, there is often stigmatization towards men who do so. Christina's quote reflects Rehel's (2014) idea about a manager-helper dynamic whereas mothers are primarily responsible for childcare and related matters, while fathers serve as helpers when needed and asked (111). In the latter half of Christina's quote, she expresses her concerns regarding her partner's parenting style. Again, this statement reiterates the notion that men will not participate in domestic tasks even when they are outside of

working hours. Christina's concerns were echoed by others in my study (Interview 5, 7, 10, 17).

There were also reactions to leave by spouses that generated more positive experiences (Interview 2, 18). These experiences often led to a breakdown of traditional gender roles and the positioning of women in breadwinner careers. Ashley, who worked as a director of stakeholder relations at a privately funded non-profit organization, described her parenting and working situation with her husband. She states:

> But we've definitely set it up that my career can come first. And that has been really critical for allowing me to be fully present at work. It's been really important for the health of our relationship. And I also think it's really important that my daughter gets to see her Mom in a leadership role, and her Dad in a nurturing role. I think that changes what she thinks is possible for her, which I think changes what her expectations of the men in her life will be. (Interview 2)

It should be noted that Ashley did take a majority of the parental leave due to the fact that her daughter was premature and she was dealing with a variety of medical issues. However, the ways in which Ashley and her husband have set up their working and parenting duties has contributed to a positive holistic experience of working and parenting. This experience is echoed by Tori who had a similar working and parenting situation with her husband. Tori worked as a human resources and training development representative for an oil and gas company. She states:

> So my husband does fifty percent of the work and one hundred percent when our baby was born, I don't think I changed a single diaper for three weeks. And my husband works long hours, but he's home for supper every night. But when it comes to the household workload, it's 50/50 at least. And I travel a lot for work, I'll go to Québec for a week at a time or Vancouver for a week at a time and he handles everything at home without complaints or questions. So, for us, we get a lot of comments on how we're very chill parents. But I one hundred percent attribute that to equal parenting. And I don't think that I can name a single other person that has that. (Interview 18)

Tori is correct; equal parenting elicits positive reactions between spouses and from others (Rehel 2014). Both Ashley, Tori, and their partners provide examples of positive spousal reactions and interactions. Their experiences create less traditional working and parenting situations, especially ones where the woman is positioned in a breadwinner role.

Working and parenting must be interpreted as something that can be dynamic and shared between spouses before gendered roles can begin to be broken down. If couples begin to view each other as equals, in both working and parenting spaces, positive reactions and less traditional parental leave uptakes can be realized.

5.4 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND PARTICIPANTS' CHOICE OF LEAVE

This section reviews workplace culture and its influence on an individual's perception of what is an acceptable leave. I examine how workplaces create environments that negatively influence an individual's leave and return to work; how organizational culture provides the background of co-worker reactions to leave; and how organizational culture may sometimes contribute to more positive leave experiences. The following discussion is framed by a consideration of organizational culture and encompassed within a social constructivist lens.

Participants reported many different organizational cultures. Some were more understanding of parental leaves and progressive (Interviews 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20) and some were apprehensive and traditional (Interviews 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17). Organizational culture did not seem to differ between for-profit or non-profit organizations. In some instances, participants working in non-profits (Interview 9) had more negative experiences than participants working for oil and gas companies

(Interview 18). These differing experiences could be due to factors like company size. What is most clear, however, is the presence of a range of organizational cultures, and consequently a spectrum of experiences. For example, Remy, who worked as director of programs for a non-profit organization, describes her team and parental leave. She states:

> And I think, organizationally, we have a culture where we work really hard to make sure there's lots of cross-training and lots of opportunities for people to mentor each other. So there's not often a huge fear that, you know, if someone leaves for maternity leave or any other leave that there's going to be a significant gap. Because we do kind of invest in making sure that people can learn about other people's roles. (Interview 4)

Remy's organizational culture values cross-training and teamwork. Leaves are understood as normal, an event that does not disrupt the productivity of the workplace. The normalcy of leave-taking in Remy's company could have been a contributing factor to the positive experience she had while on leave.

Organizational culture provides the background for manager and co-worker reactions. When a company champions a progressive and understanding organization culture, especially in the face of taking parental leave, then positive reactions and interactions take place. Christina, who worked as senior supply chain specialist for a construction company, characterized both of her parental leaves to be positive experiences. When asked why she thought her experiences were positive, Christina responded:

> To be honest, it almost feels like there's, I don't know if it's 50/50 men and women but it doesn't feel like an old boys club if you know what I mean. […] And when I announced my leave everyone was super happy. I mean both times they threw me a baby shower in the office which was really nice! (Interview 7).

The 'old boys club' referenced by Christina is understood to be a traditional organizational culture. Having almost equal women and men in the company contributes

to an organizational culture that is more understanding and prepared for parental leaves. Again, Christina's experience differs from the experiences of women in Dainty and Bagihole's (2006) study on women in the construction industry where mothers typically face stigmatization. Although Ella reported her parental leave experience to be negative, she provided insight into having an equal gender or women dominated workplace that was similar to Christina's comment. Ella states:

> And I mean, it's [parental leave] also not uncommon in psychology, which is a female dominated field, and a field where a nurturing perspective is valued. Often people who are nurturers if they are able to, and want to, become parents. I don't know a lot of therapists who don't have kids. And so I think it's just part of the culture. (Interview 5)

A workplace that values gender equity, and facilitates parental leave, is only half the battle. Co-worker interactions and general attitudes need to mesh with other aspects of organizational culture before parental leave can be a truly positive experience. As Pettigrew and Duncan (2017) mention, there are many obstacles to parental leave uptake including isolation in working and parenting spaces. Having a workplace similar to Christina's or Ella's, where parental leaves are a routine experience, can aid in dismantling worker isolation.

As previously stated in my literature review, the reactions of CEOs can drive patterns of behaviour for lower-level employees and affect how people think and behave (O'Reilly III et al. 2014). Sarah, who worked as an engineer, reported a negative parental leave experience. Sarah describes a particular situation which captured her CEO's impressions of parental leave. Sarah states:

> I was actually sitting in a meeting with some of the executives, visibly pregnant, and they were talking about how they hated this maternity leave thing and they shouldn't have to hire new people. And if other people can cover the work then that position shouldn't exist. And I was like woah! (Interview 15).

Executive reactions influence a company's organizational culture. According to O'Reilly III and co-authors, even though some departments may feel differently, the executive reactions influence the general ethos surrounding parental leave for all their employees (O'Reilly III et al. 2014). It is unfortunate but not surprising that Sarah had a negative parental leave experience after hearing how her managers discussed such matters. Sarah's experience was mirrored by Hannah who described how "[t]here was some resentment [from co-workers] that I went on mat leave," and "[u]nderlying frustrations between managers and co-workers [about her leave]" (Interview 17). In both scenarios, organizational culture defined by managers and top-level executives affects everyone in the corporation. Executive attitudes regarding parental leave must change before organizational culture will accept leaves.

One of the most common traits of organizational culture that contribute to positive participant experiences, and supportive co-worker reactions, were workplaces with women in senior management positions, or men with children in senior management positions. It should be noted the men in senior management positions, who had children, were reported as being active parents by half of my participants. Participants in my study reported women managers and managers who are men with kids created a more empathetic culture around parental leaves, and the subsequent challenges that arise from raising children while working full-time (Interviews 6, 9, 12). Subsequent challenges included taking time off when children are ill, or taking children to appointments mid-work day (Interview 17). Les, who worked as an industrial project specialist for a real estate company, described her organization's culture to be understanding. When asked why, she stated:

> There was a strong group of women there. Luckily all the guys on my team, well two out of the four of them have kids, and young kids. So they were all like oh it's so exciting [referencing pregnancy and leave]. And the one guy he and his wife just have a three-year-old and a one-year-old and they gave me some of their old baby stuff. (Interview 12).

Les references both a strong group of women in addition to two men having children as a contributing factors to a positive organizational culture. Les' sentiments are reflected by Tanya who worked as a team lead of invoicing support for an oil and gas company. Tanya states:

> I had both female bosses. They're very understanding, both Moms, and have that understanding. My one boss I had for both leaves - my direct boss, she left when I came back with my son. She retired and then I got a male boss. And then my other boss was the one above her and she's great, she's newly divorced. So she's very understanding of the Mom and work kind of relationship. So she was really understanding with being pregnant, any issues with that, if I need to take a day off or even be with the kids and stuff from home. She was really great. (Interview 13)

A member of the management team who is empathetic to the issues of parental leave, in addition to experiencing pregnancy and parenting in their life, can help to create a progressive organizational culture. Negative organizational cultures begin to take hold when individuals in senior management positions lack experiences pertaining to parental leave and parenting. Nadine, who worked as payroll analyst for a construction company, described some of the practices that are typically present within her place of work. She states:

> I feel like it has a lot to do with management because, you know, if you have men in senior positions, they don't have any empathy. They don't know what it's like at all. I mean, yeah, they could have kids, they could have five kids. But if you're not the one at home raising them, or having those conversations with your employer about taking leave, if men had to take twelve months off of work, they would lose their shit! (Interview 10)

Nadine's comment reiterates the point that, in the face of parental leave, men need to be active parents in order to become understanding managers and co-workers.

Organizational cultures do not become progressive because senior managers are women or have children, although this could be a key factor. There is much work that needs to be done to create a understanding organizational culture, however, empathetic individuals in senior management positions is a good start.

Organizational cultures provide the background from which manager and co-worker reactions emerge (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Manager and co-worker reactions can also influence and interact with organizational culture (O'Reilly III et al. 2014). Since social constructionism is interested in how notions of acceptability are constructed, it could be inferred that organizational cultures, in conjunction with manager and co-worker reactions, dictate what is acceptable in the face of parental leaves. There are many steps that go into creating a progressive and understanding organizational culture. Managers and co-workers need to be both aware of these steps and active participants in creating a progressive organizational culture. Corporations need to turn their attention to creating an organizational culture that welcomes all types of parental leave experiences and champions positive reactions from all members in a company.

5.5 THE WORKER-PARENT IDENTITY CRISIS

This section will review the ways workers often struggle with their identity when starting a leave and returning to work post-leave. Often, a worker's identity is negotiated in relation to their employment including factors such as job title, position in a company, and seniority. Employees understand their identity is something that is influenced by manager and co-worker relations. The important points to consider in this section are the constructions of parent identity, the ways leave choices are embedded in identity, and the ways participants can find and negotiate new and exciting identities as both workers and

parents. The worker-parent identity crisis speaks to the ways identity is socially constructed as something productive and important (worker) or isolating (parent).

Participants expressed how their identity for so many years was woven into their employment. When it came time for parental leave, they felt a sense of confusion and loss of personhood (Interviews 2, 5, 6, 16, 18). This experience is described most clearly by Katie, who worked as a business system analyst for a property development company. She states:

> I think you have such an identity at work that you might not have at home. And then even more so is that when you become a Mom, you feel like you're losing even more of that identity, right? So it's just sort of clinging to a past life, even though it's just really on hold. (Interview 6)

> Yeah. I don't know how to describe it. I guess if it hasn't been lived but, you'd spend so much time at work, that it's just such a part of who you are. And then you have to kind of strip all that away into just taking care of one human being and one individual. It's interesting. It's a challenge. (Interview 6)

Many individuals may compartmentalize aspects of their identity to be a productive employee when at work, and be a nurturing parent when at home. Participants on parental leave lose an aspect of their identity. Thus, redefining an identity to fit a particular situation and space was incredibly challenging for the participants in my study. Redefining identities led participants to feelings of frustration and anger when co-workers and managers crossed the boundaries between their worker and parent identity. Tori, who worked as a human resources and training development representative for an oil and gas company, often felt that her parent identity was valued more than her worker identity when she wanted to share news about a professional exam. She states:

> So I went on leave a little bit early to write this exam. And I ended up passing it. And I texted my boss to say - hey, I have awesome news, I passed this exam. And she was like - oh cool, I was hoping it was baby news. It was like I wasn't allowed to care about my career anymore. But I remember being upset about that reaction.

> Because it was like, I've never wanted to be a stay at home Mom or have my life be centered around being a Mom. And that was what everyone else was treating me like, and I hated it. (Interview 18).

The situation Tori references describes both the worker-parent identity crisis and what is culturally expected of women who have children. Since Tori was a younger woman (age thirty) her employer created a situation that positioned her identity as only being valued in motherhood. This manager reaction made Tori feel devalued in her worker identity which systematically produced a negative experience. Ella discusses a similar experience to Tori. She states:

> I think just being cut off for such a long time at least for me, really sort of makes me question what's my standing at that place of employment? Do they even like notice I'm gone? Do they want to have me back? Just a lot of those questions. And certainly sort of the interactions leading up to the leave, at least this time have contributed to that. And the sort of worry about will I have a job. And, I think both of my leaves I've been really cut off from my place of work. When I first took my first leave, I took it really personally, I thought it meant they didn't like miss me or they didn't want to talk to me. (Interview 5)

Similarly, Ella's experience demonstrates how quickly an organization's culture can isolate an individual through co-worker and manager reactions and behaviours. Ella shared some of these reactions and behaviours in her workplace describing them as stressful. Ella asked that many of these stories be removed from her interview transcript which further highlights how unsupportive the organizational culture of her workplace was. If Ella felt supported and valued by her workplace, than perhaps she would have felt more comfortable having her story documented and shared with others.

The intersection between the worker-parent identity crisis and the expectations surrounding young mothers is also described by Amy. Amy states:

> I think across the board, regardless of the sort of the couple dynamics or gender expression, or whatever. There's almost always someone who is more into wanting to take time off or be into the parenting. Even the word maternal role is

> such an interesting choice that I find myself pausing on. I guess when you look at couples then it is the assumption that, it is something maternal, so you end up with a lot of women who don't necessarily identify with that role, and maybe would like to return to work early. And then there's a bit of the - oh you don't want to take the time off that you're allotted? But a lot of people hate the newborn phase and that sucks, you know, for their own mental well-being they'd rather go back to work. (Interview 3)

Amy perfectly describes the ways in which 'maternal roles' are often designated to women without consideration for their desires to work and motherhood. Amy shows how others question women who do not take the full leave allotted to them, thereby constructing women as mothers first. The worker-parent identity crisis affects women so directly because of this lack of consideration for aspirations outside of motherhood. To note, however, my participant sample does lack a significant representation of men so it is unclear if men experience the worker-parent identity crisis as directly as women do.

The worker-parent identity crisis can also influence what type of leave – twelve or eighteen months – a participant decides to take. Some participants reported eagerness to return to work (Interview 6, 7, 18, 20) therefore they opted for the twelve month option[2]. There was also a handful of participants not ready to leave their children at daycare and chose a eighteen month leave option or something in between (Interviews 3, 5, 17). Participant 5, Ella who worked as a counselor for a private psychology firm was not ready to return to her position after twelve months. She states:

> And so then in 2017, my first daughter was born. And that was the beginning of my leave and I had been at my job full-time when I went on maternity leave. And I planned to take twelve months but in the year I was off, the government changed their rules about the extended leave. And so when it came time to think about going back to work, I wasn't feeling ready to go back full-time. I was hoping for a part-time position that they could accommodate me working part-time, because at the time my husband was working full-time and like more than full-time. And he

[2] This is similar to discussions in Chapter 4 about participants being eager about their job and even participating in work while on leave.

> travelled a lot for work so I was solo parenting quite frequently. And I didn't want our kid in daycare all the time. So I went to my employer and said, could I work part-time? They said at that point no, it's full-time only. And then I looked into the leave extension and found out that I qualified for unpaid job protected leave through the province. So I took that. (Interview 5)

The job protected leave involved an extended leave to eighteen months but not extended benefits. Ella was able to leverage a leave that worked well for herself and her family in the face of her preparedness to re-enter the work-force. Leah who worked in human resources for an oil and gas company, reported the opposite. She states:

> I think that's why with the first leave at ten months I was like - oh my god who am I? I need to go back to work just to have some type of sense of like who I am again. (Interview 16)

Leah's return to work situation was strongly tied to her desire to regain her worker identity. Her experience suggests that there is not one correct worker-parent identity just as there is no one correct parental leave structure. Participants understand their identities as both workers and parents in ways that contribute to individualized understandings of self in relation to their parental leaves. Five of my participants attempted to negotiated part-time hours when they returned to work and this could be viewed as an attempt to mitigate the worker-parent identity crisis (Interviews 3, 5, 6, 14, 17).

My understanding of the worker-parent identity crisis is influenced by Acker's (1990) idea of the ideal worker norm and Williams and co-authors' (2013) work devotion schema. For Acker, the ideal worker refers to a person who is able to give priority to work without any outside distractions (145). Williams and co-authors define the work devotion schema as cultural assumptions demanding individualized undivided attention towards work (210-11). Many workers, prior to leave, internalize the ideas of the ideal worker norm and the work devotion schema to understand their identity in relation to

prevailing social norms about employment. Some workers may find the ideal worker norm and work devotion schema do not apply to them and therefore struggle to integrate the parenting role within it. Others may find their identity is strongly tied to the ideal worker norm and work devotion schema and feel challenged to forge a new parent identity, outside of the confines of work, while on leave.

This section has described the ways a participant's identity is often tied to their employment and parenting duties. The work-parent identity crisis makes it challenging for participants, managers, and co-workers alike to understand and recognize boundaries between working and parenting spaces. Additionally, participants often understand that constructive relationships between themselves, managers, and co-workers do positively influence their identity. Leave-taking individuals are often discouraged and frustrated when the previous praise they once received in relation to their work shifts to their abilities as a parent. Lastly, the worker-parent identity crisis helps to explain why participants plan leaves in the ways they do and how leave planning can sometimes be an individualized experience.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has emphasized reactions of others within a framework of social constructionism to better understand the ways leave is framed as acceptable or unacceptable in organizational cultures. The construction of acceptability happens through messages from workplaces, colleagues, and bosses. This construction can also happen through messages from spouses, and a participants own negative self-talk and struggle with the worker-parent identity crisis. The findings of my study help demonstrate that messages of acceptability vary when considering the actual experience of parental

leave and can have detrimental effects for participants both prior to leave and returning to work post-leave. As well, co-worker and manager relationships can create a high degree of stigma and stereotyping which can be differential for individuals of different genders, but damaging nonetheless (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

The analysis in this chapter helps to answer questions surrounding gendered experiences of working and parenting within the confines of organizational culture. I have suggested that further work needs to be done before organizational cultures can fully embrace leave-taking individuals at both the managerial and co-worker levels. Social constructionism has demonstrated that expectations surrounding leave are often a concern of the entire corporation and can influence participant identity in negative and sometimes unhelpful ways. Overall, it would seem that socially constructed reactions to parental leaves are unavoidable, however, I suspect they can become positive if proper work is done to build a progressive organizational culture and the fostering of productive co-worker and manager relationships. I will return to these discussions in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6: COVID-19 AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MY RESEARCH

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unanticipated situation that arose during the interviewing process. COVID-19 affected my participants in direct and substantial ways due to the experiences of both working and parenting during a pandemic. There were various fears for my participants surrounding the fate of their employment in the face of COVID-19 lay-offs, raising a young child(ren) in a global health crisis, and forging a return-to-work scenario that would protect the health of themselves and their family. The pandemic influenced my participants' decision making in terms of how they constructed leave, planned for future children, and even influenced how they answered questions during the interview process. The following discussions outline the ways in which COVID-19 has influenced this research.

6.1 EMERGING RESEARCH ON PARENTING AND WORKING DURING COVID-19

This brief literature review will outline some of the emerging research in the field surrounding COVID-19 and its relationship to working, parenting, and leave. Since literature regarding COVID-19 is fairly recent, I am unable to provide a robust outline of scholarship like I did in my initial literature review section. However, providing a brief discussion surrounding current publications reiterates the timeliness of my research topic, and emphasizes links between the lines of questioning in my research and other research.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a moment of cohesiveness and shared experience among all affected countries in the world. In contrast, COVID-19 has also exposed disparities within and between countries in relation to their response towards the pandemic such as number of COVID deaths, strains on health care systems, and vaccine

roll outs. Much of the literature surrounding COVID-19, work, parenting, and leave is emerging from countries who were strongly affected by the pandemic, such as the United States and Canada. Additionally, there is a strong representation of literature coming from places that have recovered quickly from COVID-19 and are able to discuss the pandemic retrospectively, such as Australia.

First, this section will outline gender disparities of employment during the COVID-19 pandemic (Craig & Churchill 2021; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2020; MacLeavy et al. 2021; Raile et al. 2020). Second, this section will cover gender inequalities that are present in households during quarantine (Craig & Churchill 2021; Doucet et al. 2020; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2021; MacLeavy 2021). These gender inequalities include how the COVID-19 pandemic, working-from-home orders, and quarantines have put an increased emphasis on childcare and domestic tasks (Craig & Churchill 2021; Doucet et al. 2020). Additionally, these inequalities include how domestic tasks and responsibilities are disproportionately placed to the women in a heterosexual couple during COVID-19 (Doucet et al. 2020; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2021; MacLeavy 2021).

Craig and Churchill (2021) describe the gender disparities between women and men during COVID-19 in relation to employment. Women are disproportionately employed in casual or self-employed positions which made them more susceptible to COVID-19 lay-offs (MacLeavy et al. 2021; Raile et al. 2020). Feminist political economy would recognize these workers to be disadvantaged through the interactions between their employment and the governments pandemic response; both uncontrollable factors. The experience of working or being laid-off during COVID-19 might also impact discussions

couples have about having children in light of being able to earn the required hours to requalify for benefits. A later section in this chapter will describe the obstacles with being a self-employed worker and requalifying for Employment Insurance (EI) faced by some of my participants.

Raile and co-authors outline the realities of casual employment and self-employment in the United States when they stated "[w]omen in the United States make up the majority of minimum-wage, lower-wage, and part-time workers. They make up over 90% of health care, early education, and domestic workers and other professions consistent with caregiving — professions which typically suffer lower wages" (2). These statistics from the United States reflect similar numbers documented in Canada. In January 2021, the employment decline for women core-aged twenty-five years and over was twice as large when compared to men in the same core-age group (Statistics Canada, 2021, 12). Those in casual or self-employed positions who were laid-off may find it challenging to access EI benefits and secure employment hours during the pandemic and in the near future (Craig & Churchill, 2021, 68). According to an article published by the Vanier Institute of the Family, 3.1 million Canadians worked fewer hours or lost their jobs during the pandemic thus making it harder for these groups to plan for future parental leaves, particularly for women (Fostik & Kaddatz, 2020, 1). Once again, feminist political economy recognizes those in casual or self-employment to be at a disadvantage due to government policies such as EI and the nature of work during the pandemic.

Having women in casual or self-employed positions can perpetuate a gender wage gap both prior to and during the pandemic (Blundell et al. 2020). A gender disparity in wages is an issue that has only been exaggerated by the realities of the pandemic which is

known to perpetuate more traditional experiences of leave where the women takes the bulk of time off. Due to the rise of lay-offs for employees in these sectors, care work has often become the responsibility of these individuals, which perpetuates traditional gendered experiences of working and parenting. Blundell and co-authors describe this experience further when they state:

> As we have seen, the COVID-19 health crisis and the resulting lockdown have interacted with existing divides by income, age, gender and ethnicity, exacerbating many existing inequalities and opening up new fissures – such as between those whose jobs can and cannot be done from home – which are themselves often correlated with existing inequalities (for example, by income). (313)

Women are systematically disadvantaged by the pandemic based on the types of employment they hold. As well, gender wage gaps can be present within dual earner couples, further perpetuating the idea that women will take a lead on childcare tasks to safeguard the employment of the higher earning parent (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2020). Social constructionism and various notions of leave, work, and parenting acceptability are emphasized during the pandemic further exposing more traditional enactments of working and parenting. This split of gender roles, as it has been magnified by the pandemic, can influence a women's career trajectory through her leave uptakes and subsequent leave experiences.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers found themselves working remotely from home. MacLeavy (2021) describes this shift as 'going digital' where many high-skilled workers are forced to adapt to new working practices in conjunction with government work-from-home policies (139). The working from home moment allowed for many workers, despite gender, to be exposed to the pressure of employment and parenting simultaneously, which has previously only experienced by a

small sector of people working on leave. This experience is best described by Craig and Churchill (2021) when they state "[t]he COVID-19 restrictions temporarily removed a gendered fault line in external constraint, by requiring men and women alike to stay home, even if they were still employed" (67). Working from home evokes a different kind of work, less routine and more casual, which has created what Schieman and Badawy (2020) describe as 'role blurring', a moment of intertwined worker and parent identities that is being experienced by a wider range of workers than before, including women and men. Role blurring will be discussed more directly later in this chapter. The heightened pressures from working and parenting have created different experiences for women and men.

Most authors are hesitant to make sweeping assumptions regarding COVID-19 and impacts on households, however, many note that the pandemic will affect women and men differently (Collins et al. 2021; MacLeavy 2021; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2021). According to Collins and co-authors (2021), during the COVID-19 pandemic, working women have taken on more domestic responsibilities when compared to their working male counterparts (103). This increase in domestic responsibility during the pandemic can have a greater impact on leave experiences. For example, a parent on leave during the pandemic has more to care for than just a newborn, there may be other children at home with increased or nonstandard needs such as online school. Collins and co-authors describe this notion more specifically when they state:

> This indicates that even when both parents are able to work from home and may be more directly exposed to childcare and housework demands, mothers are scaling back to meet these responsibilities to a greater extent than fathers. Ultimately, our analyses reveal that gender inequality in parents' work hours has worsened during the pandemic amongst mothers and fathers with young children, even among those who were able to telecommute. (103)

The assertion by Collins and co-authors above is similar to Blundell and co-author's (2021) notion that the COVID-19 pandemic has only emphasized existing employment divides and gender disparities in domestic work. Doucet and colleagues (2020) describe this idea further, stating:

> Since March 2020, with school and child care centre closures and partial or reduced-capacity openings in the months to follow, an increasingly loud debate has occurred regarding the deepening of this gender divide and the multiple repercussions for women's employment, financial security, well-being, and gender equality. (276)

Women are understood to take a lead on domestic tasks and parenting despite their responsibilities towards their employment. This often means that in heterosexual couples, the woman will be more likely to take a leave. This practice maintains traditional enactments of working and parenting and can have destructive impacts of a women's career trajectory.

Due to the precarity of the pandemic, and differing responses by countries, it is hard to conclude from the current literature what the long-term effects of quarantine working and parenting will be. Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021) have made a few assumptions for England, Canada, Australia, Italy and the United States:

> We still do not know if the effects of COVID-19 will be the same, but new studies from England, Canada, Australia, Italy, and the United States indicate that parents have been under greater time pressure for the last few months and that mothers have spent less time on paid work and more time on household responsibilities as compared to fathers during the pandemic. (269)

Again, research from Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir and others scholars in the field have demonstrated how COVID-19 has emphasized gender disparities and has positioned women in domestic roles, despite employment tasks. Since research on COVID-19 is still emerging, I will be interested to know if these working patterns for women and men are

similar across all affected countries or if differences begin to emerge and how that impacts long term trends in leave uptake.

This small-scale literature review has detailed some of the current publications surrounding COVID-19, working, parenting, and leave. Feminist political economy and social constructionism can be applied to these current COVID-19 discussions. Firstly, feminist political economy recognizes those in particular types of employment to be disadvantaged by the realities of the pandemic such as lay-offs, qualifying for benefits, and the ability to access working hours due to quarantines and business closures. Some of the authors above tie their findings into concerns raised by feminist political economy such as household income by gender and other various inequalities. Second, social constructionism highlights the challenges couples face when working from home while parenting. While both partners are experiencing working and parenting from home simultaneously, there are still notions of acceptability present for heterosexual couples which position women in caregiving roles despite their working commitments. Additionally, this body of scholarship underscores the importance of my research topic which examines the domestic and working roles of women and men in contemporary contexts.

6.2 COVID-19 TEMPORARY PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY CHANGES

In August 2020, the Canadian government implemented temporary changes to the EI maternity and parental benefits. These changes included: a one-time credit of 480 hours; an extended period past fifty-two weeks to acquire insured hours if the applicant received the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB); $500 per week for standard benefits (twelve months) and $300 per week for extended benefits (eighteen months); and

waving the waiting period (typically up to a week) for EI (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). It should be noted that weekly payouts can vary based on individual earnings and region of the country since EI can vary regionally. These temporary program changes will be in effect until September 25, 2021 and have been applied retroactively to March 15, 2020.

It should be noted that my interviews concluded in September 2020, so participants in my sample did not have an opportunity to take these benefits, as requirements stated individuals had to currently be on leave or have recently returned to work post-leave. While only two of my participants were collecting CERB, I believe the one-time credit of 480 hours would provide the greatest benefit for individuals in my research sample. Additionally, the $500 a week for standard benefits and $300 a week for extended benefits, would be helpful for those with lower incomes. Since EI maternity and parental benefits are calculated based on individual income, some individuals may be receiving less. However, it should be noted the government website mentions that weekly pay-outs of $500 for standard benefits and $300 for extended benefits are the base level pay-outs and some individuals could be receiving higher weekly payments (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021).

Doucet and co-authors (2020), in their article on reconceptualizing parental leave benefits in the face of COVID-19, make important suggestions moving forward with parental leave policy reform in post-pandemic contexts. Since CERB has received high levels of support, Doucet and co-authors make the argument that parental benefits and the EI systems more broadly should be changed to ensure more parents qualify for benefits (Doucet et al., 2020, 276). Doucet and co-authors make many reform suggestions but the

most interesting suggestion includes a mixed system that combines EI for those who qualify, and job protected leave with guaranteed family income for one year (Doucet et al. 2020, 277). This suggestion is plausible after witnessing the implication of both EI and CERB during summer 2020.

6.3 COVID-19 AND MANAGING THE RETURN TO WORK

The realities of the pandemic were well-known when I spoke with participants over the summer of 2020. Many individuals had been working from home for several months at the time of their interview and were nervous about how to proceed for both their work and family. Eight participants had recently returned to work post-leave. The top two concerns for this sample of participants included: transitioning into an online working environment when their co-workers had several months of practice; and being able to requalify for EI if they have another child or get laid off due to the pandemic. Katie, who worked as a business system analyst for a property development company, described the return to work below:

> I'm almost at a disadvantage from what happened with COVID because my colleagues were thrust into this working from home environment. Not that I've never done it before, but it would be a day here or there and they've been doing it for the past few months. Every day, that's now their new normal. Where I'm coming back, and I not only have to come back, but I have to come back to a new role, and a new team, and sort of renavigate my way, when I'm not having that person to person interaction. I'm not going to be able to get the same body language cues as you would normally and I'm kind of having a bit of anxious feelings about that. Whereas they've [co-workers] just been doing it. Even though I'm a very technologically inclined person, I'm going to be at a disadvantage. And I'm going to be behind because I haven't been setting up Zoom meetings, so my normal is going to be a little bit disjointed at first. (Interview 6)

Katie's thoughts were not uncommon among participants with eight others stating similar concerns. Ella reported similar sentiments to Katie and stated"[a]nd so I think for me, there's anxiety about what am I going to be stepping back into when I go back to work?

And will I still be a competent employee? Will I fit in with the culture?" (Interview 5). The realties created by the pandemic, such as working from home, have only exacerbated concerns workers have about being seen as committed to their work and competent employees.

There was a large sense of uncertainty among this group regarding their employment and parenting fate in the coming months. Kaitlynn, who worked as a massage therapist, described her fear surrounding family planning and requalifying for EI leave benefits stating "[t]he only thing is, I have to be very careful. If we wanted to have another kid soon, I couldn't do it. I have to work for a full year at least before I can take the benefits over again" (Interview 14). Based on temporary parental leave policy changes, there must be some relief for participants knowing they can requalify for EI with reduced hours. However, during the timeframe of my interviews, participants were forced to make challenging decisions that will influence the course of their family and employment.

In my sample, twelve participants were currently on parental leave. Among these, Participants 8 and 19 were laid-off prior to their leave and used the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to fund a non-standard parental leave while their partners returned to work. The primary concern for this group of twelve was potential lay-offs when they return to work. This group, more than the other participants, struggled directly with the conditions and features of their job, post-leave, especially in the face of COVID-19 layoffs. Amy, who worked as a flight attendant for a large airline, reported the following in terms of her return to work situation:

> I am in that pool of the layoffs but because I went from short term disability leave directly onto maternity leave, I'm protected from layoffs. So I mean, I'm senior

> enough at fourteen years that I will likely be recalled within my the term of my mat leave. So yes, I'll be, in theory be returned to my same position post-leave if boarders open and we can begin flying again. (Interview 3)

Individuals on parental leave are protected from layoffs, however, there is some uncertainty, especially in the case of Amy, if there will be a position to return to given her occupation and industry.

Participants within this sample were happy to be on leave, because it protected them from the day-to-day challenges of working virtually and various COVID-19 exposures if their office was working in person. This group will be transitioning back into work in the coming months. Many who chose the standard benefit option will be returning to a similar working situation they experienced pre-leave, such as working virtually, and this may lessen some of the intimidation for them.

6.4 COVID-19 AND PARTICIPANTS' ANSWERING STRATEGIES

During the interview process, many discussions surrounding COVID-19 were raised in a variety of ways. COVID-19 was discussed in the context of safety and current and future leave uptakes. Since my interview guide did not ask specific questions about COVID-19 and the current pandemic, it was my job as a researcher to filter these discussions and utilize my thematic analysis approach to create coding categories.

Many participants provided hypothetical responses to questions asked during the interview. This uncertainty and lack of definitive answering, grew from the unprecedented moment of COVID-19. Hypothetical answers received during interviews were often accompanied with an air of caution such as "[b]ut we'll have to see what happens with the pandemic" (Interview 20) and "[i]f COVID goes away" (Interview 19). It is my belief that participants, as well as myself, were unsure of the coming months and

quarantine orders, potential vaccinations, and the return to a ‘normal’ economy. The nature of these discussions created some challenges when attempting to probe participants to explain their answers further.

Participants sometimes struggled to provide concrete responses to questions about their future plans. In some instances, discussions surrounding COVID-19 actually helped to create a richer analysis; participants provided many scenarios of their future plans both within and outside of a COVID-19 economy. These rich responses were limited. An example of this rich description came from Ashley discussing COVID-19, return to work strategies, and the worker-parent identity crisis. She states:

> And so I would hope moving forward that I'll be able to continue to work from home. Not as much as I am now, but periodically. I'd really like to be able to do that. The upside of COVID is like, it's the best, I love working from home. So, that's really good. The downside, the hard part, and you've seen this in the media a lot, is the challenge of holding two identities at the same time. And not having time to shift. So the example that I can give you is, if I'm on a Zoom call, and my kid wipes out in the backyard and is screaming, I can hear her, right? Even though it's totally under control. Who's ever taking care of her is fine. But I can hear her crying and I know she's in pain. If I was at the office, this would be the story that she would tell me when I get home, right? I'd say, how was your day, she'd show me her finger with a band-aid, whatever, right? And we would have a nice kind of connecting moment around that. When I'm here at home, and I can hear that, that's hard. No matter what's going on, or how much I know someone's taking care of her. If she's hurt, I just wanna be with her. And so it's, it's wearing both of those identities, at the same time, that is tricky. (Interview 2)

Ashley was comfortable with the topic of COVID-19 and its impacts to her life. For her and others, the interview experience was cathartic because it allowed for discussions about the pandemic to happen in a safe space where their identity would be protected, and thus it allowed participants to be wholly honest. Many participants, however, found COVID-19 and the future unsettling and chose not to elaborate on particular topics.

Ashley's experiences also echo similar discussions from Chapter 5 about the worker-parent identity crisis. Within the contexts of the pandemic, the worker-parent identity crisis is similar to Schieman and Badawy's (2020) concept of role blurring. For Schieman and Badawy, role blurring includes actions like sending an email past standard working hours. Prior to the pandemic, this action could signal to managers that an employee is highly committed to their work. Within the contexts of the pandemic, this same action might be enacted less out of choice, and more due to the difficulties completing work during the day due to outside responsibilities like children (Schieman & Badawy, 2020, 4). Schieman and Badway describe role blurring:

> In one context, multitasking on work and family tasks might signal one's capacity to "do it all." In another context that diminishes agency, the same kind of multitasking activity might be performed to keep up. Role blurring therefore appears less special, to others and oneself, when an individual is *required* to do it, and this compulsory element might have increased during the implementation of work-from-home directives. Viewed through the lens of reflected appraisals, these processes might ultimately undermine the status points one assigns to the self. (4)

In the example Ashley describes above, there are beginnings of role blurring taking root. In this quote, Ashley is wearing both hats which is problematic because both identities are always in play for Ashley. Ashley's quote describes the worker-parent identity crisis. However, if her child hurt herself more extremely, and Ashley had to postpone or reschedule her Zoom meeting to help care for her child, then role blurring would be present. The authors emphasize that role blurring can be problematic because it is something that can become routine and habitual. Role blurring ties to social constructionism because it has the ability to become an expected and accepted practice for those employees working from home. Role blurring will be an interesting concept to

analyse as more data surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is published in the coming months and years.

6.5 REDEFINING LEAVE AND COVID-19

Redefining leave has been explored in detail in Chapter 4. Creating more desirable leave options has been achieved through scaling between twelve and eighteen month options and leveraging unpredictable situations. In addition to these two scenarios, participants discussed how using COVID-19 and various work from home and quarantine orders have been beneficial in the redefinition process.

The current pandemic was leveraged by my participants to create non-standard leaves and unusual working experiences both pre-and post-leave. Some participants were able to extend their leaves or remain working from home due to the shifting nature of government restrictions and protocols. This situation is described by Sarah, who works as an engineer, when she states "[I] was planning to go back but, um, but COVID and kids and daycare and working from home, I just decided to extend it as long as I could" (Interview 15). The COVID-19 experience is one that is interesting to document because these situations may never arise again. As well, due to the risks of pregnancy and COVID-19 infections, employers are more sympathetic to their pregnant employees' needs and often facilitated leaves and working arrangements that were unexpected. Les, who worked as an industrial project specialist for a real estate company, describes her atypical COVID-19 pre-leave working situation. She states:

> And then once COVID hit in March, it was the week before everyone was shut down. There was two people that were just getting tested. They were fine, but we shut down. Just as a precaution. We didn't go back. And then when May, when things were allowed to open, real estate is an essential service, so anyone who wanted to go back was allowed to. They were only allowed to go back two days a week. They coordinated range teams so they could go in on whatever days and

> stuff. But I didn't - they didn't want me to come back as a precaution. So they were like, just work from home that's been working, and we'd rather you be safe before you give birth and stuff. (Interview 12)

Since Les was employed in an essential service, that was allowed to resume in-person operations, it was necessary that she remained working from home to protect the health of her and her unborn child. Since working from home elicits a different kind of work, more casual and less rigorous, Les was able to complete tasks during the day such as nursery preparations and baby-proofing her home, and this contributed to a more relaxed transition onto leave. Tori also experienced a similar situation to Les in terms of pre-leave negotiations. She commented:

> My husband's been going into work the whole time that's never really been impacted. I stay at home. And then in June, I think mid-June, I went on leave for six weeks. Because I was like, I'm not doing anything meaningful workwise because everything is transitioning to virtual. There's nothing for me to do. I am pregnant, and I am raising a toddler and this sucks. So that was when I told my boss I was pregnant, and I took a sick leave. Because that made the most sense financially. But I could have easily just asked for six weeks off unpaid and it would have been fine. Or vacation, I would have had options. But everybody was really understanding and was like, yeah do your thing. And then I came back August 1. So I came back into the office and I've been pretty much full-time from the office, but we can work from home as needed. (Interview 18)

Tori went on leave with her second child in December. Her six week sick leave was a unique negotiation that allowed Tori to utilize COVID-19 realities, the online nature of her work, and pregnancy to take an early leave that was right for herself and family. The COVID-19 pandemic and current virtual working spaces for many employees, can be balanced to create more desirable working and leave negotiations.

6.6 CONCLUSION

COVID-19 and the current global health crisis was an interesting challenge to facilitate as a qualitative researcher. Participant decision making at both levels of physical

leave uptake and hypothetical scenarios were systematically influenced by the pandemic and the post COVID-19 economy. I will be curious in the coming years to compare my research to research that asks directly about COVID-19 experiences. Until then, I suggest that qualitative research include conversations surrounding COVID-19 and its impact to family planning and parenting. I believe this suggestion will not only influence the richness of the analysis but help to create a larger canon of COVID-19 responses and experiences.

Feminist political economy and social constructionism are present throughout discussions of COVID-19 literature and findings. Feminist political economy provides insight into how the pandemic has changed people's access to resources while on leave. The temporary change to EI parental leave policy is helpful in the face of COVID-19, however, there are other issues surrounding the pandemic that perpetuate inequalities. Some of these issues may include women being in employment positions, such as the self-employed, that make them more susceptible to pandemic motivated lay-offs. Social constructionism helps to understand how being on leave or being a good worker shifts within the contexts of the pandemic. For example, the pandemic experience of increased role blurring for many jobs may make parental leaves more challenging. If increased role blurring persists after the pandemic it may be harder for employees to define when they have returned from leave to co-workers or family members. As well, role blurring may become a commonplace practice over leave where individuals are encouraged to participate in work while on leave. Feminist political economy and social constructionism are valuable theoretical lenses for discussing any circumstance or experience that pertains to the uptake of parental leave.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter will discuss the research findings in relation to my four guiding research questions, existing literature, and theoretical perspectives. My research questions emphasized inquiries surrounding parental leave implications including: experiences in regards to impacts on relationships with co-workers or managers; experiences in regards to status in the company including promotions, salary increases and other conditions of work; gender differences in leave experiences in relation to paid work; and if second parent leave has any particular impacts on individuals' experiences. This research used an employment perspective which is often times overlooked in parental leave research. Having an employment perspective as my primary focus allows for discussions surrounding workplace implications of leave as well as corporate culture and its influences on leave. The employment perspective sheds light on areas that may be missed by scholars who focus on domestic interactions which are outside the realm of employment. Additionally, my research inquiry is timely due to the relative newness of parental leave policy surrounding eighteen month leave options and leave for the second parent.

The findings of this research include three main discoveries. First, leave-taking individuals in my study lacked appropriate policy knowledge due to the newness of some parental leave policies and the lack of workplace education from HR departments. This situation is notable because traditional leaves, where women are positioned as domestic caregivers and men as breadwinners, partially stem from a lack of knowledge surrounding parental leave policy. Second, leave-taking individuals redefine their leaves in non-standard ways. Individuals are redefining their leaves within policy parameters to

negotiate atypical, and more desirable, experiences. This redefining, such as taking a fifteen-month leave, demonstrates why current parental leave policies need to be more flexible. Third, leave-taking individuals struggle to balance worker and parent identities both within and outside of the home and workplace. Leave-taking individuals wrestled with their worker and parent identities, often resulting in unexpected experiences such as working over leave, or returning to reduced hours post-leave. These three findings are specific to this research inquiry and require additional analysis from other scholars in the field to see if they are more generalizable. I will make suggestions for additional research and recommendations for change later in this conclusion.

7.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, LITERATURE, AND SUBSEQUENT FINDINGS

In addition to these broad findings, I have concluded that parental leave produces a myriad of reactions from co-workers and managers, influences career trajectory, and impacts women and men differently. Not all parental leaves produce negative reactions and experiences, however, all parental leaves in this research are noteworthy in the course of an employee's career trajectory. The following section will outline my finding in relation to the guiding research questions.

My first research question was interested in documenting the experiences of leave-taking individuals in relation to impacts on their relationships with co-workers and managers. Co-worker and manager reactions and relationships were documented in Chapter 5. Other research has shown that co-worker and manager reactions are influenced by higher level managers in the company and can influence the general organizational culture of a workplace (O'Reilly III et al. 2014). If members of upper management perceive parental leave as positive, instead of a burden on business, then leave uptakes

are less problematic. If negativity plagues the reactions between leave-taking individuals, co-workers, and managers, then challenges arise. Those who had a manager who was a woman, or a manager who was a man with children, felt supported and valued while going on leave and returning back to work post-leave (for example, Interview 12). Organizational culture is important to consider because co-worker and manager reactions are influential in the general ethos of a workplace. Organizational culture provides a framework for the reactions between co-workers and managers. My findings align with research that outlines how corporate reactions are influenced by those in upper management or supervisory positions and can have effects for the rest of the company (O'Reilly III et al. 2014). Co-worker and manager reactions are more likely to be positive when value is placed on the success and retention of the leave-taking employee post-leave. Manager reactions seem to be positive when these managers share the experience of parenting.

The second research question asked about the impact of taking leave on people's status in the company, their eligibility for promotions or salary increases, or other terms of work. Several scholars have pointed out that impacts on status, promotions, salary increases, and conditions of work are often influenced by the organizational culture and structural features of a particular workplace (Hass & Hwang, 2007; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Implementing leave policies can create organizational difficulties such as the time and cost spent to train a replacement employee. This makes colleagues and supervisors less open to leave uptake, although they recognize it is a legal right (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Hass & Hwang 2008, 2007, 2019a, 2019b; Hass et al. 2002; Pettigrew & Duncan 2017; Tremblay & Genin 2011; Van der Lippe et al. 2019).

Both the literature and the findings of this study demonstrate how structural features have an influence on parental leaves. There is not one singular impact on employment in my study for those taking parental leave. To illustrate, some structural features prevent participants from progressing in their company after taking leave. This was true for Sarah. Her company only provided promotions and pay raises based on years of service at the company (Interview 15). Despite Sarah's skill and commitment to the company, her salary is lagging because of her parental leave choices. Structural features can also provide positive impacts. For example, Tanya was granted shares over her leave (Interview 13) and Remy's workplace valued cross-training to aid in smoother parental leave transitions (Interview 4).

The structural features of a particular workplace, and Employment Insurance (EI) policy more generally, can both benefit and disadvantage leave-taking individuals. Beneficial structural features for my participants included top-ups like share and stock options (Interview 13) and disadvantages included requalifying for EI (Interview 14). Structural features and organizational culture need to evolve to benefit leave-taking individuals instead of creating obstacles. As well, the workplace ethos can be intertwined in the structural features of a company such as the organization's project timelines. This was true for Christina who was told by her employer that if she did not come back from leave early there probably would not be a position and project for her to work on (Interview 7).

In addition, the interaction of structural features and organizational culture can be influential in the face of leave and career progression. Despite the apparently open and supportive attitudes in the work environment, leave-taking could create co-worker

tensions and resentment towards those who went on leave. There were a few participants who felt their company's organization culture isolated them over their leave (Interview 5, 9). Both structural features and organizational culture can have differing effects on an individual's career progression. It is important that work organizations ensure that leave does not disadvantage their employees based on their structures and workplace attitudes.

My third research question was focused on gender differences of leave experiences in relation to paid work. Women are often the lead on domestic work, despite their employment and career goals and desires (Borgkvist et al. 2018; Calnitsky 2019; Doucet 2006; Hass & Hwang 2007; Mariskind 2017; McKay & Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014). This was demonstrated in my data due to the lack of participants who had a husband who took parental leave. This gendered experience of leave is often reinforced due to the gender wage gap. For thirteen of the heterosexual couples in my study, a loss to household income would be too detrimental if the man took majority of the parental leave. Additionally, there is stigma and negative consequences for men who take parental leave. This stigma is present in comments from co-workers, managers, and even spouses (Interview 3, 6, 7). This stigma emphasizes the societal messages that women should be the ones to take on domestic duties. More men need to take leave that is provided and act as examples for the policy before negative stigma can be eliminated.

The primary difference in leave by gender was the type of leave participants were taking. Women in my research sample were taking twelve or eighteen months, and sometimes redefining leave options to take an amount in the middle. In my data, the majority of women reported having an easier time approaching their employer with their plans for leave, than what they thought possible for their husbands. It should be noted that

there is hesitancy to take the eighteen-month leave option due to the newness of the policy. Employers and participants lack experience with facilitating and taking these eighteen-month leaves, however, participants are using this option to construct a non-standard leave.

In contrast to the women in my study, two out of the three men in my sample were applying for the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to fund time away from paid work for a defacto parental leave. This was a pandemic specific strategy which lacked similar kinds of dialogues between women and their bosses that accompany EI parental leave uptakes. I am making the provisional claim here that men experience leave differently from women. It is hard to know if this claim is correct due to the lack of men I was able to recruit for this research. The notion that men experience leave differently is based on what most women were saying and assuming during their interviews. Since the recently added parental benefit and leave for the second parent are new, there is uncertainty and possible stigmatization for those who take it. This is clear in the lack of participants who were men that I was able to recruit for this study, and in the lack of women participants whose partners took leave. Men need to start taking the leave, now provided to them, before any pattern can emerge among gender differentiated experiences of leave in relation to paid work.

My fourth and final research question asked whether taking leave as the second parent has an impact on individuals' experiences. Due to the lack of second parents, including same-sex partners and fathers, in my study, I am unable to answer this research question. In addition to a lack of representation, there was a lack of knowledge surrounding the recently added parental benefit and leave for the second parent due to the

newness of the policy. This lack of knowledge was described more specifically in Chapter 4. Even though my results for this question were inconclusive, the importance of the question still holds value. More work needs to be done if second parents, particularly men, are to take the leave that is now provided for them. Some of this work is the responsibility of HR departments as well. It is my hope that men will use this leave once more information can be communicated to new parents about the benefits of this policy.

Literature surrounding geographic comparisons to Québec and Nordic countries conclude that non-transferable leave for the second parent increases a man's participation in domestic tasks (Hass & Hwang 2007, 2008, 2019a, 2019b; McKay & Doucet 2010; McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet 2016). I have learned from the literature that men who take leave are active participants in domestic labour and more acutely aware of gender disparities in wages. Further research with increased representation of men is required to make balanced comparisons between men who do and do not take leave. Hopefully, men can utilize second parent leave, like they have in Québec and Nordic countries, to increase their domestic participation. I believe this outcome is possible, however, men and second parents, more generally, need to learn about the leave for second parents and begin taking it.

Furthermore, the rest of Canada would benefit from adopting a similar system to the Québec Parental Insurance Plan, (QPIP). During summer 2020, my participants, Tony and Glen were using CERB to fund a non-standard parental leave. CERB was not more or less beneficial than EI, however, it allowed for a different avenue towards parental leave that meshed well with the lives and unemployed status of the men taking it. Different avenues should be available to parents attempting to fund parental leaves. This

idea is echoed by Doucet and co-authors (2020) in their discussions surrounding reconceptualizing parental leave benefits where they recommend a shift towards more flexible parental leave policies.

In addition to lacking data to answer the fourth research question, I was unable to comment on the experiences of leave for same-sex and adoptive parent couples. It was my goal to speak with same-sex and adoptive couples, however, I was unable to connect with any during the recruitment process. The experiences of these two groups would be interesting to document in relation to leave for the second parent, and to compare and contrast with the experiences of heterosexual couples. Would traditional leave experiences would be as common? I also did not obtain an interview with a company president or CEO. I wonder if these executives view those who take the eighteen month option as less committed to their job? I am curious what the corporate implications are surrounding the hiring of a replacement employee for a longer duration of up to eighteen months.

Lastly, my research sample included primarily Caucasian-presenting individuals with relatively high household incomes and relatively stable employment. This type of participant sample was not intentional, however, it was a result of snowball sampling and social media outreach recruitment strategies. Those with full-time work are more likely to enjoy the benefit of leave when compared to those with lower incomes or part-time work who may struggle to take leave at a reduced income. If COVID-19 was not a dominant factor during the months of my recruitment, I may have been more cognizant regarding the type of individual I was recruiting, and subsequently searched for a more diverse sample. However, during the months of recruitment, I was primarily concerned with

locating an appropriate number of participants to conduct this study in the event COVID-19, and various realities surrounding the pandemic made it challenging to continue this thesis inquiry.

7.2 RETURN TO THEORY

The two guiding theoretical frameworks for this thesis included feminist political economy and social constructionism. The first theoretical framework that I applied to this research was feminist political economy which documents the importance of the material resources influencing leave uptakes, such as government policy and the market economy. Feminist political economy also helps to understand how inequalities come about through factors like household income and occupational position (Jon Maroney & Luxton 2014; Meisenbach et al. 2008; Peterson 2005; Vosko 2002). This claim is highlighted in my research since many heterosexual couples reported a potential loss to household income if the man took leave. Additionally, this claim helps to explain the whiteness and relative wealth of my participant sample. Since I was initially interested in the workplace reactions to parental leave in relation to second parent leave, feminist political economy has aided in answering how leave experiences can become differential for women and men. Through a feminist political economy lens, the evaluation of leave uptake in an employment setting has helped to provide awareness of various gendered inequalities. As well, this theory brought insight into how a lack of parental leave policy knowledge can be determined by particular structural features in a workplace such as the lack of HR departments. This was true for Hannah who was unaware of the recently added parental benefit, as her company did not have a HR department (Interview 17).

Through a focus on material resources such as government policy and the market economy, feminist political economy has been beneficial for examining penalties concerning parental leave and the ways participants can negotiate or redefine their leave in atypical ways. Overall, feminist political economy was a valuable framework for conceptualizing the ways leave-taking individuals interact with fixed structures. This theory was a focus in Chapter 4 and guided discussions surrounding gendered experiences of leave; structural features of a workplace; penalties associated with leave; parental leave policy knowledge; and the ways individuals can redefine their leaves. Feminist political economy was also used in Chapter 6 and my discussions of government policy such as CERB.

In contrast, my second theoretical framework, social constructionism provided insight in other complementary ways. Social constructionism looks at how interaction creates the meanings that we attach to people, places, and things in terms of our social, cultural, and historical context (Elder-Vass 2007). Social constructionism is a valuable lens to conceptualize the ways parental leave policies are interpreted between co-workers, managers, and workplaces more broadly, and how those who take leaves are consequently defined. This theory helps answer the questions of how leave is viewed and constructed to be an acceptable or unacceptable practice and whether leave-takers are viewed as replaceable or problematic employees. These reactions, particularly corporate reactions, are intertwined with organizational culture and interpreted by individuals within the work organization. Reactions can also be intertwined with broader social norms which construct women, rather than men, as leave-takers. It is a powerful framework to capture how reactions emerge to clarify the leave as acceptable.

Finally, social constructionism has helped me explore the worker-parent identity crisis and the ways leave-taking individuals work through various identities to be both acceptable workers and parents. The findings surrounding the worker-parent identity crisis were influenced by Acker's (1990) ideal worker norm and Williams and co-authors' (2013) work devotion schema. For Acker, the core idea surrounding the ideal worker norm refers to a person who is able to give priority to work without any outside distractions (145). For Williams and co-authors, the work devotion schema describes the cultural assumptions demanding individualized undivided attention towards work (210-11). The ideal worker norm and work devotion schema inform social norms that shape employee ideas of what it means to be a "good" worker. Social constructionism helps to understand why workers internalize these social norms and use them as building blocks in their personal identity. Individuals on leave construct their own identities as workers and parents and wrestle with how to best live in these two identities.

Social constructionism was used in Chapter 5 to help answer questions surrounding reactions to leave from both corporate and personal perspectives, about organizational culture in a workplace, and regarding the worker-parent identity crisis. This theoretical lens was also valuable in Chapter 6 to frame reactions from participants towards appropriate and formal working from home practices. Social constructionism also helped me consider how social norms have led me to frame the participant interview. I viewed participants as 'more formal' when they conducted their interviews in a home office, away from household distractions. This formality, however, had nothing to do with the outcome and analysis of the conversation; it was just a personal, preconceived idea.

A secondary theory I explored in Chapter 2 was backlash theory. Backlash theory works with the primary concepts in feminist political economy and social constructionism. Backlash theory is described by Fleishmann and Sieverding (2015) as examining the economic and social sanctions that are responses to unconventional behaviours (464). Some of these sanctions may include a decreased hiring or promotion probability or a lack of respect form co-workers and managers on the basis of an employee's leave. While I did not employ backlash theory as a primary theoretical framework, its impacts are still valuable to discuss in the big picture of this research. Not all participants in my study received backlash for taking parental leave, however, some experienced isolation and negative co-worker and manager reactions both prior to and during their leaves (Interview 5, 7, 9, 17). Additionally, backlash has the possibility to impact women and men differently. Due to the limited number of men in my participant sample the gender differentiated experiences of backlash are unknown. The experiences these participants had in relation to backlash theory demonstrates how backlash is established in organizational cultures through socially constructed tendencies, and enacted through penalties with economic implications for workers.

Both feminist political economy and social constructionism have been valuable frameworks to understand discussions of the uptake of parental leave and employment-related impacts on individuals in medium to large sized companies. These two perspectives have worked in unison throughout this thesis inquiry providing insightful and complementary frameworks of analysis. These frameworks are complementary due to feminist political economy's focus on structural aspects pertaining to leave and social constructionism's focus on the interpersonal reactions. Both feminist political economy

and social constructionism have helped answer questions pertaining to the material and conceptual obstacles to taking leave.

7.3 RECOMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Research on the topic of parental leave and related themes such as gender roles, gender wage gaps, and workplace culture and structures must continue to be explored. This research inquiry will continue to be relevant as the uptake of leave by second parents increases and the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic are more widely known.

Research should be completed in the future when information on recently policy changes are more widely communicated and parents have more knowledge of leave options. The lack of fathers represented in my research sample is an indicator for how few individuals are taking the options available to second parents. I believe this lack of knowledge surrounding the policy is one of the primary obstacles to its uptake. If more second parents can learn about the policy, and successfully take leave, than perhaps future research will yield higher numbers of second parents in their research samples. Moreover, if people still are not taking leave for the second parent in a few years then research needs to be done about the reasons why. An inquiry on why second parent leave is not taken could yield differing narratives about gender roles and corporate cultures and structures. It is my hope that participants in my study took the knowledge they gained about the recent policy changes and extended it to their parenting networks. I believe it will take a few years before sharing parent leave is commonplace, however, I am hopeful that this practice will become a positive and unstigmatized experience for all who take it,

as it is in Québec and various Nordic countries. As well, I selfishly hope that one day my partner and I will be able to use the recently added parental benefit.

Future research on parental leave within a employment perspective could consider the following items. First, supplementary work needs to be done on men and the worker-parent identity crisis. The worker-parent identity crisis was one of the most interesting findings of my study; however, due to the lack of men in my research sample it was challenging to infer if this experience is gendered based on my study alone. Other research on second parent leave in Québec and Nordic countries has suggested that experiences similar to the work-parent identity crisis could become less gendered if second parent leave is actually taken by more individuals (Hass & Hwang 2007, 2008, 2019a, 2019b; McKay & Doucet 2010; McKay, Mathieu, & Doucet 2016). Both men and women in my study experienced the worker-parent identity crisis in some capacity, although, more research needs to be done on the way it affects people by gender and how this may change over time in Canada given the recent changes to leave policy.

Second, future work on parental leave within an employment perspective needs to be done with a more diverse participant sample. Diversity must be considered in terms of social class, gender, sexuality, and race. Research that emphasizes an employment perspective would benefit from a diverse participant sample to further enrich findings on general disparities and to hopefully help rectify inequalities in the workplace. My research sample included White individuals who were in heterosexual relationships. Further, all individuals reported relatively high, shared household incomes. Moving forward, researchers who explore research of this topic must be aware of the type of individual who typically takes parental leave. Researchers must then search to find more

diverse individuals who complement the usual candidates and can share their differing experience. It was my initial hope to include same-sex couples and adoptive parents and there is value in documenting their experiences.

Lastly, subsequent work needs to be completed exclusively on the topic of redefining leave. I did not anticipate the discovery of atypical leave experiences at the outset of my research. Women in my study redefined their leaves as a way to exercise their agency and make government policy better suit their needs. This suggests that women are becoming active in creating their own model of parental leave to improve the benefits that are offered to them and avoid workplace penalties. Women taking the initiative to leverage the length of leave, outside the current dichotomous formal options, is an interesting parallel to men using other kinds of policy such as vacation days or CERB to fund their "parental leave".

It is also valuable to look back on redefining leave, within the pandemic contexts, because the practices of working and parenting became incredibly intertwined due to various quarantine and work-from-home orders. These experiences may differ by gender. As well, two men in my study were using pandemic specific programing, such as CERB, to fund atypical leave experiences. Use of temporary parental leave policy changes due to COVID-19 and other pandemic specific benefits would also be interesting leaves to examine in comparison to standard non-pandemic parental leave.

Research that examines the impacts of taking parental leave on workers will always be valuable to consider. Moving forward, researchers must be cognizant to the value of framing findings within an employment perspective because the topic is under-researched in the face of emerging policy. As well, parental leave policy is a fluid entity

and must be adaptable to fit the needs of its users. Researchers must do their part to ensure these policies actually reflect demands of new parents.

7.4 FINAL THOUGHTS

The attitudes of Albertans in my study who are currently on parental leave, who recently returned to work post-leave, and those hoping to take leave in the future are consistent: a one size fits all maternity and parental leave policy is not enough! The uniformity of the current maternity and parental leave policies do not accommodate flexibility in the length of parental leaves, as there are only two choices for either a twelve or eighteen month leave. Parental leave policy needs to evolve to better suit the needs of leave-taking individuals who are already finding ways to redefine their leaves within standard policies. Additionally, knowledge of parental leave policies and uptake must become mainstream before any cultural stigmatization and corporate penalties can be dismantled.

Parental leaves for both women and men must become a common and acceptable practice without stigmatizing or penalizing the worker. Similar research questions should continue to be asked in the future to fully understand the continued learning and uptake of parental leave policies such as leave for the second parent. As well, future research should seek to answer how COVID-19 has impacted leave-taking individuals and influenced experiences of working and parenting more broadly. The findings from my research align with other various findings from researchers in the field, and strengthen previous understandings of gendered experiences of working and leave-taking.

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APPENDIX 1: THEMATIC CODES

*Denotes codes that emerged from the interviews.

1. Structural Features Influencing Leave
    a) *Top-up programs.
    b) *Employee entitlements.
    c) *Knowledge and informing of HR departments.
    d) Working over leave.
    e) Influence of replacement employees.

2. Gendered Experiences of Leave and Work
    a) *Gender wage gaps
    b) Stigmatization towards men's leaves.
    c) How EI is experienced by fathers.
    d) Gendered organizational substructures.

3. Penalties Towards Employees Who Take Leave
    a) Withholding of promotions, salary increases, and position changes.
    b) *Inequalities among co-workers.
    c) Workplace assumptions about who will become a parent.

4. Knowledge of Parental Leave Policy Knowledge
    a) *Limited knowledge surrounding the recently added parental benefit.
    b) Why fathers are not taking leave.

5. Redefining Leave
    a) *Redefining leave and COVID-19.
    b) *Redefining leave and non-standard experiences.
    c) *Redefining leave as a second parent.

6. Reactions Towards Participants Choice of Leave From Co-Workers/Managers
    a) Reactions towards leave by gender.
    b) Reactions toward second parent leave.
    c) *Reactions toward extended leave up to eighteen months.
    d) *Direct criticisms towards leave uptake.

7. Reactions Towards Leave by Spouses
    a) How two parent households plan their leaves.
    b) Traditionally gendered working and parenting models.
    c) *Women's sense of entitlement towards leave.

8. Organizational Culture Influencing Leave
    a) Creations of negative working environments.
    b) Creations of positive working environments.

9. The Worker-Parent Identity Crisis
    a) *Constructions of parent identity.
    b) *Constructions of worker identities.
    c) *How leave choices are embedded in identity.
    d) Working over leave.

10. COVID-19 and Parental Leave
    a) Managing return to work.
    b) *Redefining leave.
    c) *Participant answering strategies.