THE VOICES OF WOMEN STRUGGLING TO MANAGE
EMPLOYMENT AND MOTHERHOOD

by

Judith Finer-Freedman

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Judith Finer-Freedman 2013
THE VOICES OF WOMEN STRUGGLING TO MANAGE EMPLOYMENT AND MOTHERHOOD

Doctor of Education 2013
Judith Finer-Freedman
Graduate Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
University of Toronto

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of working women when they announce their pregnancies, take maternity leave, transition back to work, and utilize flexible work policies. Using a qualitative methodology, transcripts of in-depth interviews were analyzed utilizing a life history approach. Key findings of the study are that women perceive more negative responses to the announcement of their pregnancies than positive ones. In terms of maternity and parental leave policies, all the participants had access to these benefits. Women found issues with financial adequacy, administration, and duration of these policies. Mothers found that financial support from the Canadian government was inadequate to allow them to take the full duration of the 52-week maternity and parental leave for which they were eligible. In addition, employer “top-up” payments were limited and administrative details of maternity leave were often not discussed fully with pregnant workers. When women returned to work, they found that workplaces did not offer resources such as a phased-in return to work or personnel to help them re-engage with their prior work projects. Women discussed the challenges of managing their dual roles of worker and mother and found that managers and coworkers put them in a mommy mould which lessened the quality of their assignments. New mothers found that they had difficulty juggling their work and home responsibilities, finding time for themselves, and receiving increased domestic support from their spouses. While some workplaces offered women flexible workplace policies, not
all mothers chose to access them as they found these policies often negatively impacted their career progression. Other issues were a lack of flexible workplace policy transparency, inconsistent manager support, and difficulty maintaining a flexible schedule. Findings have major implications for an improved response from managers upon pregnancy announcement, improved dialogue among employers about increasing “top up” maternity leave pay to new mothers, developing a formal transition plan for new mothers returning to the workplace, and expanding the use of flexible workplace policies.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my husband, Jeremy, for being a supportive spouse. Without his being an involved father, I could have never pursued the career I am passionate about and fulfilled my role as a mother at the same time. I am forever grateful to him.

I hope that our sons, Jesse and Zachary, will support their life partners at home and work and encourage them to enjoy their dual roles without guilt. I also hope that if they become fathers, taking a paternity leave will be an expected outcome for them. And for our daughter, Amanda, I hope for the day when she can pursue her career dreams without giving up her life dreams. If she decides to become a mother, may her dual role be a blessing rather than a challenge. May they all find their passions throughout their lives and enjoy full lives at work and at home.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii  

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... iv  

Chapter 1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1  
   Rationale ........................................................................................................................... 4  
   Goals and Objectives of the Study .................................................................................. 6  
   Presentation Flow ............................................................................................................. 12  

Chapter 2 Literature Review ................................................................................................ 14  
   Mother’s Perceptions of the Experience of Pregnancy Including Supervisor  
   and Coworkers’ Response in the Workplace ................................................................. 15  
   Negative Perceptions ..................................................................................................... 15  
   Positive Perceptions ...................................................................................................... 23  
   Maternity Leave ............................................................................................................ 25  
   Development of Maternity Leave in Canada ................................................................ 26  
   Access ............................................................................................................................... 28  
   Financial Adequacy ........................................................................................................ 30  
   Administration ................................................................................................................ 32  
   The Experience of Maternity Leave: Time at Home ......................................................... 33  
   Duration of Maternity Leave .......................................................................................... 35  
   Making the Transition Back to the Workplace ............................................................... 37  
   Flexible Workplace Policies ............................................................................................ 46  
   Positive Perceptions of Flexible Workplace Policies .................................................... 47  
   Negative Perceptions of Flexible Workplace Policies ................................................... 50  
   Role Models for Working Mothers .................................................................................. 52  
   Summary .......................................................................................................................... 53  
   Major Research Questions .............................................................................................. 55
Chapter 3 Methodology ........................................................................................................ 57
Qualitative Research: Characteristics and Appropriateness for this Study .......... 57
Philosophical Approach to Qualitative Research Design........................................ 60
The Research Method: Three Interviews ................................................................. 61
Challenges of Qualitative Research ........................................................................... 63
Validity in Qualitative Research ................................................................................ 64
Member Checking ........................................................................................................ 64
Prolonged Engagement ............................................................................................... 65
Contextual Validation and Triangulation .................................................................. 65
Writing Memos ............................................................................................................ 66
The Researcher ............................................................................................................. 66
Reflections and Fit with Researcher Frame ............................................................... 66
Participants ................................................................................................................ 69
Sampling Technique .................................................................................................. 69
Selection Criteria ......................................................................................................... 69
Characteristics of the Sample ..................................................................................... 70
Procedures .................................................................................................................. 70
Recruitment ................................................................................................................ 71
Instruments .................................................................................................................. 71
Consent Form .............................................................................................................. 71
Interview Process ...................................................................................................... 71
Data Recording .......................................................................................................... 72
Pilot Study ................................................................................................................... 72
Participant Profiles .................................................................................................... 72
Canadian Maternity Leave Policies ............................................................................ 73
Individual Profiles ..................................................................................................... 74
Olivia ........................................................................................................................... 74
Pam ............................................................................................................................. 75
Casey .......................................................................................................................... 76
Sydney ......................................................................................................................... 77
Tracy ............................................................................................................................ 78
Grace ........................................................................................................................... 79
Natalie .......................................................................................................................... 79
Chapter 4 Results .................................................................................................................. 82

Theme I: Pregnancy in the Workplace: Women’s Perceptions of Managers’ Responses to the Announcement of Pregnancy and Planning Pregnancy Around Work Considerations .................................................................................. 84

Women’s Perceptions of Managers’ Responses to the Announcement of Pregnancy .......................................................... 84

Negative Response ............................................................................................................. 84
Positive Perceptions .......................................................................................................... 87

Planning Pregnancy Around Work Considerations ............................................................................................................... 89

Theme II: Maternity Leave: Access, Financial Adequacy, Administration, the Experience of Maternity Leave Time at Home, and Duration of Leave .................................................................................................................. 91

Access ........................................................................................................................................ 91
Financial Adequacy ............................................................................................................... 92
Administration ..................................................................................................................... 94
The Experience of Maternity Leave Time at Home .................................................................... 96
Duration of Leave .................................................................................................................. 99


Making the Transition Back to Work .................................................................................... 103

Limited Workplace Support for Family Needs ........................................................................ 103
The Anticipation of Leaving a Newborn .................................................................................. 106
Conflicts in the Dual Roles of Mother and Worker ................................................................ 107
“Mommy Mould” .................................................................................................................. 110
The Juggle of Organizing Multiple Schedules and Demands .................................................... 112
Leaving Work Early ............................................................................................................... 115
“Face Time” ......................................................................................................................... 118
Surviving the Zombie Years: The Need for Self-Care ................................................................ 120
Support from Spouses .......................................................................................................... 122
“Opting in or Out” of the Workplace ..................................................................................... 127
Theme IV: Flexible Workplace Policies: Access; Issues with Managers: Lack of Transparency in Flexible Workplace Policies, Mothers’ Perceptions of Manager’s Scepticism, Maintaining Reduced-Hour Flexible Workplace Schedules; and Lack of Female Role Models for Working Mothers .................................. 132

Access ........................................................................................................................................... 132

Issues with Managers: Lack of Transparency in Flexible Workplace Policies, Mothers’ Perceptions of Managers’ Scepticism, and Maintaining Reduced-Hour Flexible Workplace Schedules ........................................................................ 135

Lack of Transparency in Flexible Workplace Policies ................................................................. 135

Mothers’ Perceptions of Managers’ Scepticism ........................................................................... 136

Maintaining Reduced-Hour Flexible Workplace Schedules ......................................................... 140

Lack of Female Role Models For Working Mothers ................................................................. 142

Chapter 5 Discussion .................................................................................................................... 148

Theme I .......................................................................................................................................... 149

Recommendation for Theme I ...................................................................................................... 150

Policy ........................................................................................................................................... 150

Administration .............................................................................................................................. 151

Theme II ......................................................................................................................................... 152

Recommendation for Theme II .................................................................................................... 154

Policy ........................................................................................................................................... 154

Administration .............................................................................................................................. 156

Theme III ....................................................................................................................................... 157

Recommendation for Theme III .................................................................................................. 160

Policy ........................................................................................................................................... 160

Administration .............................................................................................................................. 160

Theme IV ....................................................................................................................................... 162

Recommendation for Theme IV .................................................................................................. 165

Policy ........................................................................................................................................... 165

Administration .............................................................................................................................. 166

Limitations of this Research ......................................................................................................... 168

Ideas for Future Research ............................................................................................................ 170

References .................................................................................................................................... 172
List of Appendices

Appendix A Participant Consent Form................................................................. 181

Appendix B Interview Questions........................................................................... 183
Chapter 1
Introduction

Prior to the early 1970s, most families in Canada were comprised of a sole wage earner who was typically the father and if women did work out of the home, they were not likely the dominant wage earner (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010). Marshall (2009) reported that the proportion of couples with both spouses employed was “4 in 10 in the mid-1970s” (p. 6).

In the early 1970s when women entered the Canadian workplace in large numbers about one-third of these women had young children (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010). At this time, there was limited governmental maternity and organizational support they could turn to alleviate the challenges of managing their work and home demands.

Today, the dynamics have changed dramatically for women on the work and home fronts. On the work front, women comprise almost half of the Canadian workplace (Marshall, 2010). According to a Statistics Canada (2010) study, Women in Canada (as cited in Ferrao, 2010, p. 5, Table 1), women comprise 47.9% of the total employed workforce compared to 37.1% just a decade ago. Fifty-eight percent of all Canadian women 15 years and older are part of the paid workforce, up from 42% in 1976 (Statistics Canada, 2010, as cited in Ferrao, 2010, p. 6, Table 2). And there has been a substantial increase in the number of women with children in the Canadian workplace. According to the Statistics Canada study (2010, as cited in Ferrao, 2010, p. 9, Table 5), 73% of all women with children under the age of 16 living at home are part of the employed workforce, up from 39% in 1976. As well, the number of
women with younger children in the paid workforce is increasing. Sixty-four percent of all women with children under the age of three are employed according to the study, which is more than double the figure for 1976 (Statistics Canada, 2010, as cited in Ferrao, 2010, p. 9, Table 5).

On the home front, the dynamics of families are changing for working women. The number of women who are single working parents has increased since the mid-1970s at the same time that traditional marriage in Canada has declined every year since that time (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011, 2012a). As a comparison, the marriage rate in the U.S. has also declined as “less than half of Americans are now married” (Pew Social Trends report, 2011, as cited in Eichler, 2012a, para. 10). According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2011), in 1976, only “44% of working single mothers with children under the age six” participated in the labour force; by 2003, the proportion had climbed to “63%” (Chart: “Social change is changing the Canadian workforce”).

In Canada prior to 1971, there were no government mandated maternity and parental leave policies available to women (Human Resources and Skill Development Canada, 2010). At the same time, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada began its mandate to “inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society” (The Status Of Women In Canada, 1970, p. vii). The commission was the first of its kind with a woman in charge of its outcome. The idea to support working women who were about to give birth began slowly with the recommendation from the Commission to provide a maternity leave period for new
mothers (Cross, 2000). By 2002, the government mandated maternity and parental leave programme, offered up to a year of leave with a limited amount of governmental financial salary “top-up” to Canadian working women (Marshall, 2003). Beyond government support, Bailyn (1993) suggests that organizational change needs to take place “to transform the design of work and assumptions about the priority of work and family roles to successfully support workers with heavy childcare demands” (Bailyn, 1993, as cited in Kossek, 2005, as cited in Bianci, Casper, & King, 2005, p. 99). An article that appeared in a 2012 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* focused on organizations’ lack of support for working mothers. Specifically, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University said,

> In short, the minute I found myself in a job that is typical for the vast majority of working women (and men), working long hours on someone else’s schedule, I could no longer be both the parent and the professional I wanted to be—at least not with a child experiencing a rocky adolescence. (Slaughter, 2012)

As such, with “7 in 10” families in Canada being comprised of dual earner couples (Marshall, 2009, p. 6), the lion’s share of domestic duties still remain the ultimate responsibility of mothers in dual earner couples working full time. Specifically, Statistics Canada (2012) reported that these mothers spent “50.1 average number of hours per week” on unpaid childcare compared to 24.4 hours per week for men (Statistics Canada, 2012a, Table 6).

With the increase of women with children in the workplace and women finding that their jobs have not been designed to accommodate their employment and motherhood demands, this introductory chapter will present a rationale for why there needs to be an in-
depth study that examines mothers’ perceptions of the workplace’s response to their needs as they manage employment and motherhood. The goals of the study will be discussed:

1. to add empirical evidence that solidifies mothers’ lived experiences of becoming mothers in the workplace and to fill gaps that currently exist in the literature,

2. to qualitatively explore mothers’ experiences and perceptions in the workplace that relate to the critical stages they transition through from pregnancy to their maternity leave and their return to work, and

3. to develop comprehensive policy and administration recommendations that will change the paradigm for women once they become mothers in the workplace.

Rationale

In order to best explore women’s perceptions of motherhood at work, it is important to begin when women announce their pregnancy at work. By beginning at this stage, one can examine how women’s perceptions at the time of the announcement are often counter to their pre-pregnancy view of their being seen as committed, hard working employees that will be considered for prime work assignments (Swiss & Walker, 1993). Correspondingly, according to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (2006), discrimination of workers’ family status is described as “negative attitudes or stereotypes about employees with family obligations (e.g., refusing promotions or training opportunities to parents) on the assumption they will take more time off work and be less committed to their jobs than employees without children” (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2006, p. 50). Additionally, as a result of having children, women frequently found themselves unable to advocate, for example, for time for self-care, spousal support, or being able to access flexible workplace policies. One
study by Woodhall and Leach (2010) explores how the climate at work, time demands on women, or the demands that families place on them, causes their work lives to become unstable. For example, Woodhall and Leach (2010, pp. 44–45) asserted:

Other issues intervene in destabilizing women’s work lives, some of these associated with the job itself, such as the “climate” for women at the workplace, and time demands placed on women; others are associated with issues women bring to work, such as experiences of violence at home, or the demands their families place on them. It is increasingly clear that both these sets of issues create complications for women’s work lives that men do not face, undermining women’s ability to get—and keep—decent jobs. (Browne et al. 1999, Joshi et al. 1996, Levine 2009, Lewis 2001).

Additionally, a report by Working Mother magazine which examined women’s pressures at work found that there were issues of self-care for working mothers: “48% of working mothers...say they feel guilty that they’re not doing enough to take care of themselves” (Working Mother Research Institute, 2010, p. 12).

This study is also important because the increase of women with children in the workplace equates to increased child-care and domestic care responsibilities that can create challenges at work and home (Colavecchia, 2009, as cited in Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010). Additionally, the workplace has been slow to catch on that the “old breadwinner/homemaker model” no longer remains consistent with families of today (Moen, 2005, p. 193) meaning that public and private policies and practices governing employment have not keep up with today’s working mothers.

This study will help expand the research that is currently being conducted on the topic of women managing employment and motherhood. Anecdotally, from having reviewed hundreds of studies and articles on working mothers, this researcher found that there are very few studies or articles that have analyzed both the positive and negative impact of the entire
pregnancy experience while working that includes such stages as pregnancy, maternity leave, return to work and the flexibility to care for children that correspond similarly to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission identification of these stages of motherhood (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2010). Most studies anecdotally cover only one aspect of the critical stages of pregnancy and that only provides a limited view of the challenges mothers face when managing employment and motherhood.

**Goals and Objectives of the Study**

The first goal of this study is to examine the everyday lives of women that support the struggles they face when managing employment and motherhood. According to Beauregard (2007, p. 9),

> The gender difference observed in the effect of marriage on career advancement becomes even more pronounced when the impact of having children is examined. A survey conducted by Opportunity Now (2000, as cited in Marks & Houston, 2002) revealed that 83% of female respondents agreed that commitment to family responsibilities impedes women’s progress. The empirical literature would appear to bear out this conclusion. Stoner and Hartman (1990) found that the decision to have children, and the adjustments this decision required in terms of career strategies, was identified as detrimental to career progress by 80% of the female managers who believed their careers were damaged in some way by their household and family responsibilities. Valcour and Tolbert (2003) found that having children was associated with greater career progression within the same organization for men, but reduced career progression within the same organization for women.

Interestingly, workplaces’ commitment to help mothers manage work and family demands more effectively has “been slow to come” (Dell’Antonia, 2012, para. 7). In other words, “most jobs are currently designed without the consideration of family needs and workers are expected to re-configure their family lives around work” (Kossek, 2005, p. 99).
Additionally, there is a gap of research covering the struggles women encounter managing employment and motherhood. According to Kossek (2005) there is more research that focuses on policies that integrate the roles of child-caregiver with work rather than on “policies that address other family or life roles, or that address multiple roles simultaneously” (Kossek, 2005, p. 99). In fact, according to Kossek and Ozeki (1998, 1999, as cited in Kossek, 2005, p. 99), “quality research on the effects of work-family policies is limited.”

This study will empirically substantiate women’s perceptions because of its design to cover a wider spectrum of issues mothers face when managing employment and motherhood. The participants of this study who are in the population of working mothers are the ideal research candidates to share their perceptions of their process to become a mother that begins when they announce their pregnancy at work.

The second goal of this study is to explore the narrative of women struggling to manage employment and motherhood. To accomplish this goal, there are four areas that relate to women managing employment and motherhood that will be examined. These areas are:

1. the responses to announcing pregnancy in the workplace,
2. the access and financial adequacy of maternity leaves and programs,
3. the experience of women transitioning back to work, and
4. the experiences related to accessing flexible workplace policies.
These four areas are similar to the areas found in the Saskatchewan Human Resources Code of:

1. “working through pregnancy”.
2. “becoming a parent” (including maternity leave)
3. “returning to the workplace” and
4. “parenting and the workplace.” (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2010, Table of Contents)

Each of the four areas to further explore under the second goal of the study encompasses challenges and questions unique to each area. For example, the first area of how women perceive the response to the announcement of their pregnancies uncovers that some pregnant women feel the need to hide their pregnancy status. A recent article in the New York Times (Quart, 2012) highlighted this perception amongst pregnant workers where women “hide” their pregnancies and delay the announcement as long as they can. Quart (2012) explained that female workers fear that if they become pregnant they will not achieve promotions as a result of supervisors’ negative perceptions. And some pregnant women are beginning to take action against the negative impact of losing out on promotions or key assignments. For example, according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), discrimination claims “from pregnant women are increasing, having risen 23 percent from 2005–2011” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC] as cited in Quart, 2012, para. 5). Interestingly, in Canada “absolutely no organization tracks complaints and court cases involving parental leave discrimination on a national level” (Balkissoon, 2012, web article, p. 3). Only employees in federally regulated industries can lodge complaints with the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) or the HRSDC-Labour Program and provincial complainants report their grievances to the
Ministry of Labour, the Human Rights Tribunal or court system but it is not known whether either system tracks the complaints related to pregnancy (Balkissoon, 2012). Even so, many women are afraid to voice their complaints, even though it is very clear in the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) that suffering negative consequences in the workplace as a result of being pregnant is against CHRC policy specifications (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2012).

Another question to explore in the first stage of being pregnant at work is when pregnant women’s productivity, commitment and ambition can become suspect by managers. One recent article discussing Yahoo CEO’s Marissa Mayer’s birth of her first child argued that “women – even pregnant ones – don’t lose ambition the moment they deliver” (Eichler, 2012b, para. 15). In addition, a survey completed on TheMomShift, an online campaign celebrating women who achieved success in managing work and home demands, found that “80 percent of the 300 women she (the author) interviewed for an upcoming book were frustrated by the belief that new moms want to take it easy” (Balkissoon, 2012, web article, p. 4). These women went on to assert, “as soon as they announced their pregnancies, their managers assumed they’d prefer to downshift. (Balkissoon, 2012, web article, p. 4).

The second area is the access and financial adequacy of maternity leave programs and policies. In terms of access, the Canadian government provides each pregnant worker who qualifies for maternity leave up to 17 weeks of maternity leave and up to 37 weeks of parental leave “although the combined duration of maternity and parental leave taken by the same employee cannot exceed 52 weeks” (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012b, Section 2: Supporting Working Families, 3. Length of Service Requirements for Maternity, Parental and Sick Leave, para. 1). Balkisson (2012) suggests that many
problems of maternity leave in Canada relate to its duration being too long and that can create some of the negative outcomes when new mothers return to work after their maternity leave. The challenge for Canadian pregnant workers is to make sure that they are fully aware of what the provisions for access of maternity leave are. In terms of financial adequacy, payments provided by the Canadian government, are seen as inadequate. For example, a recent article called the governmental financial payouts as “stingy” and claimed that it is “a sign of how undervalued working parents are in Canada” (Balkissoon, 2012, web version, p. 4).

The third area that examines the transition back to the workplace is when new mothers experience the daily challenges of managing employment and motherhood. According to a recent survey of female managers and executives in Canada, Fraser (2012) found that “three in five (60%) women see managing work and family as the most challenging obstacle that women face” (para. 2). Women managing work and family demands is further complicated through the findings of a recent Ipsos-Reid/Randstand survey in Canada that revealed that “Eighty-two percent of respondents feel that the decision to raise a family has a greater impact on a woman than it does a man looking to advance their career” (Fraser, 2012, para. 10). Furthermore, the Ontario Human Rights Commission on their “Employment” page on their website, describes the negative impact that having children had on women’s careers as follows: “The burden of this juggling act falls disproportionately on women, since women, in addition to their work in the paid labour force, continue to assume the primary responsibility for providing care for children” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012, Employment page). With women assuming the primary responsibility of providing child-care, there is an element of stress that comes along with it. A study from the
Conference Board of Canada (1999) reporting that “women are almost twice as likely as men to report high levels of time stress” (Conference Board of Canada, 1999, as cited in the Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012, Employment page) demonstrates that it is important for women to ask their spouses for help. For example, according to a recent article in the Globe and Mail, “women are expected to be caregivers first and foremost” (Eichler, 2012b, para. 9). Specifically, the Statistics Canada (2012b) study that reviewed time spent on unpaid childcare by working women and men also analyzed women in dual earner couples. The study found that women spend twice the amount of time on unpaid childcare than their spouses and women with children in the home younger than 4 years old spent twice as much time as men on domestic work and one and a half times that amount with children between the ages of 5–14 (Statistics Canada, 2012b, Table 6). The amount of time mothers spend on caregiving comes with increased risks to mothers’ well-being. “The associated risks of caregiver strain can include physical, emotional and financial costs for employees...and risks include higher absenteeism and lower job satisfaction among workers” (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010, para. 16). This caregiver strain complicates working women’s abilities to manage employment and motherhood as missing work and job dissatisfaction increases.

Finally, the area of the experiences related to flexible workplace policies will require an examination of what type of policies and programmes are available for new mothers to utilize and what is the impact of usage to their career progression. For example, many workplaces offer flexible workplace policies such as flexible hours, flexible workplace schedules, telecommuting, job sharing, reduced hour schedules, and leaves of absences (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012). Women who do avail themselves of these
opportunities report higher job satisfaction (Bond, Galinsky, Thompson, & Prottas, 2003). Yet, counter to that job satisfaction, according the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2012), accessing these flexible workplace policies and programs may have long-term negative consequences to one’s career such as triggering manager’s scepticism about commitments to their careers (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012). A publication from the Government of Alberta, Human Resources and Employment (2004) warns employers of “employee backlash” if flexible workplace polices are not open and transparent to all employees (p. 31). Specifically, this publication describing how to develop flexible workplace policies advises that policies be designed to be as “open to as wide a group of workers as possible” (Government of Alberta, Human Resources and Employment, 2004, p. 31).

Finally, the third goal of this study will focus on the evidence gained from the literature review on this topic and the results of this study. The researcher will conduct a thorough examination that will bring forth recommendations for a new paradigm in which workplaces will provide more support through expanded programs and policies to help women manage employment and motherhood. These recommendations will be detailed in specific policy and administration initiatives in Chapter 5.

**Presentation Flow**

This dissertation will present its findings consistent with the flow of a descriptive inquiry. The entire study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the current chapter that provides an overview of the importance, rationale, goals and objectives including a brief overview with rationale of the areas that need to be examined. Chapter 2 introduces the empirical evidence that supports the themes outlined in Chapter 1 within the areas of
government policies and studies and relevant literature in psychology and social sciences. The literature review will serve as a foundation for the qualitative interviews of which the results will be covered in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 explores the rationale for utilizing a qualitative research design with a life history approach in this study. Chapter 4 reflects the results of this study led by the narratives of the participants and their perceptions of managing employment and motherhood. And finally, Chapter 5 illustrates the final results of the study that provides a foundation for action in improving the paradigm for working mothers in their ability to manage employment and motherhood. This chapter also provides observations and analysis as well as implications of the findings on the working lives of mothers and limitations of the study itself.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter will contextualize the current study by providing a review of the empirical research studies that explore the issues mothers face that shape their perceptions of managing employment and motherhood. Specifically, literature and empirical findings will be reviewed covering the four major areas outlined in Chapter 1 of:

1. pregnancy in the workplace including mothers’ perceptions of supervisors’ and coworkers’ response to the announcement of pregnancy;

2. maternity leave historical development, access, financial adequacy, administration, the experience of maternity leave time at home, and the duration of maternity leave;

3. transition back to the workplace including women’s transition experience, perceptions of supervisors and coworkers regarding mothers’ commitment to the workplace, the dual role of worker and mother, “leaving work early” and “face time,” self-care, spousal support, juggling the multiple tasks relating to the responsibilities of home and work, and “opting in and opting out” of the workplace; and

4. flexible workplace practices including the experiences relating to accessing flexible workplace policies, transparency, manager’s scepticism about how policies will be used, maintaining flexible workplace schedules, and lack of female role models. At the end of the chapter the Central Research Goal and Major Research Questions will be presented.
Mother’s Perceptions of the Experience of Pregnancy Including Supervisor and Coworkers’ Response in the Workplace

Several studies have explored women’s perceptions of their supervisors’ and coworkers’ attitudes, perceptions and comments made toward pregnant workers in the workplace. For the most part, the studies findings were negative. However, both negative and positive findings regarding the announcement of women’s pregnancies are detailed.

Negative Perceptions

Several studies have found that mothers perceived that supervisors and coworkers had predominantly negative perceptions toward pregnant workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Brown, Ferrara, & Schley, 2002; Glass & Riley, 1998; Halpert & Burg, 1997; Hebl, Glick, King, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007; Lui & Buzanell, 2004; Majer, 2004; Masser, Grass, & Nesic, 2007; Shapiro, 1982; Swiss & Walker, 1993).

Lui and Buzanell (2004) examined U.S. female workers’ perceptions of the response to their pregnancy in the workplace. The researchers conducted a qualitative study of 15 women who were chosen based on a questionnaire in which they indicated that they were discouraged about their employment and advancement opportunities at the time of their pregnancies and return to paid work. The authors reported that 7 out of the 15 participants indicated that supervisors used women’s pregnancies and maternity leaves as an excuse to demote them or deny them salary raises or job promotions that had been promised to them before they became pregnant. The researchers referred to this type of response on the part of managers as the “set-up to fail syndrome” (Manzoni & Barsoux, 1998, as cited in Lui & Buzanell, 2004, p. 334). The authors also found that supervisors engaged in covert practices, such as indirect messaging, that had a negative effect on women’s well-being and their
ability to meet the demands of work and home. Interestingly, the indirect messaging appeared to be supportive of the women. For example, some of these indirect messages related to the unsolicited help their supervisors were trying to give them. This “help” transformed into covert practices that rendered women as “childlike, helpless and dependent” (Lui & Buzzanell, p. 337). A quarter of the participants of the study described their supervisor’s behaviour as the expression of a negative attitude to their pregnancies. The study found that negative attitudes had a harmful effect on “these particular women’s self-esteem, added to their mental stress, and sometimes worsened their physical state” (Lui & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 335). In addition, the women reported that they were subject to overt, covert, and institutional employment practices that negatively affected their experience of the workplace. Many described actions taken against them such as restricting their work, denying their requests for accommodations and support, and minimizing their opportunities for advancement. Fully half of the participants reported “that they were perceived and treated as unreliable, not valuable, and incompetent after becoming pregnant and having a child” (Lui & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 332). In terms of the stress levels that pregnant mothers experienced at work, the authors identified two main areas of concern: a lack of accommodation of the pregnancy and of advancement opportunities. Many participants reported that they had experienced overt responses to their pregnancy that served to marginalize them and lower their self-esteem. Participants hypothesized that power differentials, references to traditional female stereotypes (e.g., pregnant women are unreliable, emotional, and not deserving of promotion), and/or conflicting principles of traditional justice and care (e.g., tensions between the value of equal treatment and treatment based on considerations of individual circumstances) contributed a great deal to their stress level.
Halpert and Burg (1997) also examined U.S. women’s perceptions of the responses they received to their pregnancies in the workplace. The study found that the women perceived both negative and positive responses to their pregnancies from managers. However, the majority of the feedback provided by the participants was negative. In this study, the researchers conducted interviews with 82 mothers who had responded to ads placed in newspapers, stores carrying maternity clothes, and obstetricians’ offices. All of the mothers were either pregnant at the time of the interview or had been pregnant in the previous 2 years. All of the women were employed during their pregnancy, in a range of jobs from waitress to attorney to real estate agent. The research protocol called for the collection of demographic information, and interviews based on open-ended questions about company policies, reactions of managers, coworkers and subordinates to a woman’s pregnancy, questions on general work-related issues, and questions about concerns about spouses and family. The researchers found that the “negative reactions ranged from coolness and avoidance to specific work-related concerns” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 245). Additionally, “several were threatened with job loss, and others were denied project assignments” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 248). The researchers reported that the women perceived that their managers viewed their skills less positively during pregnancy compared to the period prior. Moreover, the authors found that women perceived that managers and coworkers perceived that pregnant employees were not as committed to work as their non-pregnant counterparts. One participant stated, “I went back to departmental meetings during maternity leave to show commitment” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 247). Furthermore, the women perceived that the negative attitudes of their managers towards their commitment to their work would influence their performance ratings. For example, study participants made the following remarks about
their managers: “[he or she] doesn’t believe that I’m coming back, has taken away all of my projects,” “gave me a hard time for being slow,” and “actual denial of raises or promotions” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 245). Some of the study participants indicated that managers made personal comments about their physical appearance, diet, and hormonal balance. Participants also reported that coworkers made negative comments such as the following: “Why are you eating so much?” “Do you have stretch marks yet?” and “New mothers should not return to work after giving birth but should stay at home to take care of their child” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 246).

In terms of positive comments, Halpert and Burg (1997) also reported that a quarter of the managers took positive actions to support pregnant women. For example, one participant noted that her manager advised, “let me know what time you need off and we’ll work around it” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 245).

Brown et al. (2002) examined U.S. female managers’ perceptions of supervisor and coworkers support at three intervals relating to maternity leave: before, during, and upon their return to work. They also studied job satisfaction. The study participants were 43 female managers who had had a child within the previous 5 years and who responded to a survey that examined female managers’ perceptions of supervisors’ and coworkers’ support or lack of support of their pregnancies, perceptions during pregnancy, and level of satisfaction with maternity leave policies and its relationship to job satisfaction. Over 50% of the women held a college degree and their jobs ranged from teacher to administrative assistant to gaming employee. The researchers discovered that pregnant women perceived that they were viewed negatively by their supervisors with regard to their work productivity, job performance, and effectiveness compared to non-pregnant female managers in the same job. They also found
that these same female managers experienced lower job satisfaction as compared to non-pregnant female managers. Perhaps in response to the attitudes they perceived, it was also found that the pregnant managers in the study took on a greater workload or avoided leaving work early for doctor appointments or because they felt ill. In addition, the participants expressed the concern that their pregnancy would negatively affect their performance review ratings.

It was also found that female managers who received positive responses from supervisors had greater job satisfaction. This satisfaction solidified workers’ career goals and ability to do their jobs once they became mothers. Specifically, “80% of participants indicated that their career goals did not change once they became mothers” and “70% of participants indicated that their ability to do their jobs did not change because of their pregnancies or status as mothers” (Brown et al., 2002, p. 69).

In another study, Majer (2004) examined U.S. women’s perceptions of being pregnant at work from the early weeks of pregnancy until just prior to maternity leave. Majer included the women’s perceptions of the responses of both supervisors and coworkers. This study involved two rounds of interviews with 35 female participants. Of these 35, 15 were pregnant and 18 had babies less than 1 year old. Over half of the participants held professional or managerial level jobs, 23% held mid-level jobs, such as a graphic designer or purchaser, and 27% held lower level jobs. Majer (2004) discovered that 65% of the pregnant workers perceived that managers and coworkers held negative views in what participants identified as moderate to severe threats from managers (pgs. 55 and 56). Of the 65% of pregnant workers, Major (2004) classified “30% of participants as experiencing a moderate threat” (p. 55) and perceived the possibility of receiving fewer opportunities or being less
effective with vendors. Major (2004) also “identified about 35% of the interviewees (12 out of 35) as experiencing a severe threat” (p. 56). The severe threat category was when participants expressed being worried about potential negative consequences facing them. Specifically, pregnant participants perceived that their work was judged more rigorously by managers and coworkers than that of non-pregnant workers. In addition, Majer reported that the pregnant workers increased their workload as a result of negative comments made by managers and coworkers. The women reported that coworkers made comments on their health, energy, or attire that ranged from patronizing to negative. As a result of this, the women perceived that coworkers saw them as “irresponsible,” “slacking off,” and not “serious about work” (Majer, 2004, p. 49). One participant said, for example, “I’ve tried consciously to keep up with my work.... And I show them that because I’m pregnant doesn’t mean that the quality of my output changes” (Majer, 2004, p. 30). Half of the women “chose not to take sick days even if they were not feeling well” so that managers would not deny them training or development opportunities (Majer, 2004, p. 34).

Australia’s Pregnancy and Employment Transitions Survey (PaETS) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) also examined women’s employment experiences during pregnancy and their perceptions of supervisor and coworkers’ responses in Australia. The study used a survey to examine 467,000 birth mothers with young children living in private dwellings. To be eligible to participate in the survey, women had to be birth mothers with at least one child less than 2 years of age living with them. Demographic information was collected along with leave arrangements associated with the birth and reasons for leaving or returning to the workplace. The researchers found that the mothers perceived that they had received inappropriate comments from or experienced difficulties with supervisors or other
coworkers during their pregnancy. Almost a quarter of the mothers reported at least one difficulty in the workplace while they were pregnant. For example, some reported missing out on training opportunities and missing out on opportunities for promotion.

Swiss and Walker (1993) examined how working mothers manage motherhood and how it affects their career in the U.S. In the study, the researchers examined the responses of 902 women who had attended Harvard University to a survey on issues mothers face in the workplace. Of the 902 women, 341 were graduates of the Business School, 332 from the Law School, and 229 from the Medical School; 89% were currently in the workplace. Three-quarters of the group were married and two-thirds had children. Of those who did not have children, 40% said that they planned to have children in the future. Swiss and Walker (1993) used the term “micro inequities” to describe indirect messages the mothers received from supervisors and coworkers and provided the example of mothers in medical school who reported that during their pregnancy, “other physicians stopped speaking to them informally . . . or dropped them from their mentoring group” (p. 24). Also, “in business, many MBAs have noticed that offers of plum assignments diminish with each month of pregnancy” (Swiss & Walker, 1993, p. 24).

Shapiro (1982, as cited in Brown et al., 2002) also examined the attitudes of U.S. medical professionals toward pregnant female residents in the workplace. The researcher found that male and female residents and faculty members had a significantly more negative attitude toward pregnant medical residents relating to work productivity in comparison to non-pregnant female residents and faculty members. Further, it was found that male medical residents were more negative about the possibility that a pregnant resident could juggle motherhood and career than female medical residents were.
On another topic related to a working mother’s experience in the workplace, Glass and Riley (1998) studied the working conditions and benefits provided to U.S. female workers during their pregnancy, maternity leave and transition back to work, and pregnant workers’ perceptions of the attitudes of supervisors towards them. In this study, 324 randomly selected employed pregnant women were interviewed twice: once before childbirth and again following childbirth. The interviews focused on maternity and flexible work practices and their effect on job changing and labour force interruptions among employed women following childbirth. At the time of the initial interview, most participants were in their last trimester of pregnancy. Fourteen percent of the participants were in managerial positions, 21% professional, 45% clerical, 13% service jobs, and 7% in blue collar jobs such as manufacturing, construction, and transportation. The researchers found that women perceived male supervisors to be unsympathetic to their pregnancy. These perceptions caused stress, particularly when the pregnant worker perceived that the male supervisor might limit her upward mobility when she returned to work after maternity leave. The researchers recommended that organizations attend to the interactions between pregnant workers and managers and coworkers, in particular, to make sure that both male and female supervisors communicate the value of pregnant workers to the workplace to them.

Masser et al. (2007) investigated whether there were overt prejudices in U.S. workplace hiring against pregnant women. The study involved having 82 male and female university students rate hypothetical job applications of a pregnant female candidate and a non-pregnant female candidate who were both applying for a position, in one case a job in which one might expect a male, and in another a job in which one might expect a female. The “male” job was newspaper editor position and the “female” job was newspaper journalist. Of
the 82 participants in the study, 57 were women. The researchers found that most of the responses did not recommend the pregnant candidate for hire in both of these hypothetical scenarios. In addition, in the event that a pregnant worker was recommended for hire, she was recommended for hire at a lower starting salary than the non-pregnant applicant. The authors concluded that pregnant women are discriminated against in job hiring and that this study adds to the literature “that pregnancy alone is enough for discrimination in terms of hiring preferences and salary penalties to occur” (Masser et al., 2007, p. 709).

Hebl et al. (2007) examined the responses pregnant women receive under different situations such as being in the role of job applicants or customers. The subjects of the study were 93 female employees and 17 male employees of retail stores in large shopping malls. Sixteen women between the ages of 20 and 32 were confederates whose role it was to act as pregnant and non-pregnant female job applicants or customers in a shopping mall. In the course of the study, the pregnant and non-pregnant female confederates engaged in 110 interactions, 43 as job applicants and 67 as customers. The authors concluded that compared with non-pregnant women, pregnant women received more negative responses as job applicants. Conversely, the confederates portraying pregnant women received more positive responses when they were in the role of store customer than the non-pregnant female confederates.

**Positive Perceptions**

Several studies have indicated that pregnant women perceive that managers and coworkers respond positively upon hearing news of a worker’s pregnancy. Two such studies are those conducted by Bond et al. (2003) and Lyness, Thompson, Francesco, and Judiesch (1999). Positive perceptions found were of managers’ excitement and happiness at the news
that a worker was pregnant and of a workplace that is family oriented and thus more accepting of circumstances such as pregnancy. These studies are detailed next.

Bond et al. (2003) examined female and male workers’ perceptions of the announcement of a pregnancy in the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workplace. In the U.S. study, the authors designed employee interviews that were conducted by Harris Interactive on a sample of 3,504 subjects from a nationwide (U.S.) cross-section of employed adults (Bond et al., 2003). The authors found that male and female workers perceived the attitudes of supervisors and coworkers to be somewhat more supportive of a pregnancy compared to attitudes in the previous decade (Bond et al., 2003). Employees also perceived slightly more support from managers for their taking care of family needs on company time compared to the previous decade. For example, Bond et al. (2003) reported that in 1992 “36% of employees (male and female) said that there was an ‘unwritten rule’ at their workplace that employees could not take care of family needs on company time, versus 32 percent in 2002” (p. 30). Bond et al. (2003) also reported that “with respect to employees feeling comfortable bringing up personal or family issues” that 73% of workers shared concerns about personal or family issues as compared to only 65% of workers in 1992 (p. 30).

Lyness et al. (1999) examined pregnant women’s perceptions of U.S. workplace practices. These included their perceptions of managerial and coworker support and accommodation, prospects for advancement, and workplace demands. The study involved the administration of a survey to 86 women. The average age of the respondents was 31 years of age and 88% were married. Overall, they were well educated: almost half had bachelor degrees and about a quarter of the respondents had graduate degrees. The majority of the
women (91%) were working full time while the remaining 9% were working part time, defined as working less than 35 hours per week. The majority of the workers were in the financial, insurance, and real estate and service industries followed by education, services, and government. Similar to the findings in Bond et al. (2003), Lyness et al. (1999) found that when pregnant women perceive the work culture to be more accepting of their family circumstances, they do not perceive the need to hide their pregnancy. A reason for hiding a pregnancy is the fear that one “will be shunted onto the ‘mommy track’ or taken less seriously in their careers” (Lyness et al., 1999, Discussion Section, para. 6).

Maternity Leave

Canada offers a very extensive maternity policy that has expanded to provide mothers with the ability to take 52 weeks of a combined maternity and parental leave (Service Canada, 2012). The path that led to offering women a 52-week combined maternity and parental leave began decades ago with the 1970 Royal Commission on The Status of Women in Canada that identified changes in the demographics of women with young children in the workplace (The Status Of Women In Canada, 1970). In terms of access to maternity leave, several studies (Findlay & Kohen, 2003; Marshall, 2003, 2010; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011) have explored women’s perceptions of their experiences with access to maternity leave. Findlay and Kohen (2003), for example, reported “among children whose mothers were working before birth, 90% of mothers reported having taken leave” (p. 3). With regard to access, The Canadian Labour code prohibits employers to dismiss or lay off an employee solely because she has taken maternity leave (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012c). Also, in terms of access, self-employed mothers can now access government salary payments while on maternity and parental leave (Service Canada,
In terms of financial adequacy, the Canadian government provides 55% of salary “top-up” that is inadequate as it does not cover a new mother’s salary while she is on maternity leave (Marshall, 2003, Income Section). In addition, several studies indicated that less than a quarter of women receive employer “top-ups” to help cover their salary while on maternity leave (ACTEW, 2007; Marshall, 2003, 2010). In terms of administration of maternity leave, several studies have indicated that mothers have both negative and positive perceptions of the administration of maternity leave policies (Bond et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2002; Glass & Riley, 1998; Halpert & Burg, 1997; Lui & Buzzanell, 1997). However, for the most part, the studies indicated that women perceived the administration of their maternity leave to be inadequate. One of the reasons stated was because women were often asked by their managers to do work assignments at home while they were on maternity leave (Lui & Buzzanell, 1997; Read, 2008). There have also been studies that examined the duration of maternity leave that women chose (Dzakpasu & Pelletier, 2009; Feldman, Sussman, & Zigler, 2004; Findlay & Kohen, 2012; Joesch, 1994; Marshall, 2003; Swiss & Walker, 1993).

**Development of Maternity Leave in Canada**

One of the focuses of the 1970 *Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Status of Women in Canada, 1970) was the improvement of maternity benefits. The Commission’s report recommended:

> the amendment to the federal Fair Employment Practices Act and the adoption of provincial and territorial maternity legislation to provide for (a) an employed woman's entitlement to 18 weeks maternity leave, (b) mandatory maternity leave for the six-week period following her confinement unless she produces a medical certificate that working will not injure her health, and (c) prohibition of dismissal of an employee on any grounds during the maternity leave to which she is entitled. (Status of Women in Canada, 1970, pp. 87, 397)
The Commission’s report recommendation was only partially implemented and “at the present time, the natural mother of a newborn can receive a maximum of 15 weeks of maternity benefits in the period of time surrounding the birth of the child” (Cross, 2000, VIII. Maternity/Parental Leave, #17 and following comment). According to Marshall (2003), “in 1990, 10 weeks of parental leave benefits were added” to the existing 15 weeks of maternity benefits available (para.1). And in 2000, parental leave increased “from 10 to 35 weeks, effectively increasing the total maternity and parental paid leave time from six months to one year” (Marshall, 2003, para.1). After the 2000 amendment extended parental leave, all provinces and territories revised their labour codes to include providing full job protection to all employees on maternity or parental leave (Marshall, 2003).

Today federally in Canada, employed women have access to up to “17 weeks” of maternity leave benefits and up to “35 weeks” of parental leave benefits and adoptive parents can take up to “52-weeks” of parental leave from the date the adoptive child is placed with them (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007, 2.1 Main Features). According to Sadler (2011), as of 2011, new mothers can receive the 55% of their average yearly salary up to $44,200 (para. 1). These payments are made through the Canada Employment Insurance Program (CEIP) and the province of Quebec began their own parental insurance plan, “the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) which started in January 2006” (Findlay & Kohen, 2012, p. 7). In this plan, participants are offered government paid income payments for “18 weeks of maternity benefits, 5 weeks of paternity benefits, and 32 weeks of parental benefits” (p. 7). The Quebec plan is different that the Canada Employment Insurance Programme (CEIP) as it offers a higher rate of income replacement. Specifically, the QPIP offers parents “70% of earnings up to $64,000” (Budak,
The Quebec plan is also different than the CEIP as it includes a paternity benefit exclusive to fathers and also covers self-employed individuals (Findlay & Kohen, 2012). Interestingly, in 2009, “the Fairness for the Self-employed Act was passed to extend EI maternity, parental/adoption, sickness and compassionate care benefits to self-employed Canadians on a voluntary basis” (Canada Employment Insurance Commission, 2010, Section 1.4 Access to Special Benefits, p. 106).

Marshall (2010) examined Canadian employer “top-up” payments for maternity and parental leave recipients. The study used data from the Employment Insurance Coverage Survey to examine which mothers were likely to receive a “top-up” designed to equalize or nearly equalize their full salaries while on maternity leave. The author found the proportion of those receiving “an employer top-up (around 1 in 5) has remained stable” for the last decade (Marshall, 2010, p. 6). Marshall (2010) reported, “the average weekly “top-up” for these mothers, which lasted for an average of 19 weeks, was $300.00” (p. 11). Marshall (2010) said the following, “This implies that many employer top ups cover only the maternity leave portion of public benefits” (p. 11). In Quebec, “employees are 2.7 times more likely to receive a maternity or parental leave top-up from their employers than those living elsewhere” (Marshall, 2010, p. 8).

Access

Findlay and Kohen (2003) examined leave practices of parents after the birth or adoption of young children in Canada. In the study, the authors utilized the 2010 Survey of Young Canadians (SYC) that provided information on children and on their parent’s employment and maternity leave practices during the birth and postpartum periods. The sample included 10,810 Canadian children between the ages of 1–9 years old who resided in
Canadian provinces. The information on the parents’ leave practices was only collected for the children aged 1–3 years of age whose father, mother or both were working prior to their birth or adoption. The authors reported that among children whose mothers were working before birth, 90% of mothers reported having taken leave. Children whose mothers did not report taking any leave (10% of the total) were more likely to be from a lone-parent family, and/or to have a mother with less education, and/or to have a mother with a lower income compared with children whose mother did take leave. (Findlay & Kohen, 2003, p. 3)

Another study from The Employment Insurance Coverage Survey (EICS), a supplement to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) from Statistics Canada studied the extent of coverage of the Employment Insurance program. This survey added a special maternity supplement to examine the differences in access to maternity and parental leave between the years of 2000 and 2001 when maternity and parental leaves were extended to 52 weeks. The supplement asked new mothers questions such as the status of their labour market situation, breaks during work, type of employment insurance (EI) accessed and individual and household income prior to and after the birth of their child (Marshall, 2003). The survey sample included 1,350 mothers with children less than 13 months of age in both the 2000 and 2001 surveys. Marshall (2003) found that “more mothers with paid jobs received maternity and paternity benefits in 2001 (84%) than in 2000 (79%)” (para 6). Marshall reported that the higher percentage of mothers accessing maternity and parental leave might have been influenced by the result of the highly publicized revised extension of benefits.

In the U.S., a narrative from Women’s Health USA (2011) examined maternity leave access and income benefits for employed mothers (U.S. Department of Health Resources and Services Administration, 2011). The analysis was conducted by the Maternal and Child
Health Information Resource Center from data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the National Survey of Family Growth from 2005–2008. The narrative reflected the number of women who took maternity leave by race and ethnicity and how long they took maternity leave. Specifically, the section on Reproductive and Mental health reported that access to maternity leave was, “70.6 percent reported taking maternity leave . . . . nearly one-third of employed women did not report taking any maternity leave (29.4 percent)” (U.S. Department of Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Bureau, Health Status-Reproductive and Maternal Health, 2011, p.54).

Financial Adequacy

Several studies (ACTEW, 2007; Marshall, 2003, 2010) found that maternity leave was inadequate for new mothers as a reflection of the minimal financial support they received from the government and employer salary replacement women received while on maternity leave.

The NGO in Ontario called A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women (ACTEW) called Employment Insurance (EI) benefits not adequate for women’s circumstances (ACTEW, 2007). The ACTEW is an NGO that conducts research and analysis on training and employment opportunities for women. In 2007, ACTEW analyzed the 2005 Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report, Ottawa and concluded “on average, a woman makes 72 cents for every $1.00 a man makes. Because wages determine the weekly financial benefits that EI claimants can receive, women on average receive less support than men” (2005 Employment Insurance Monitoring Report, as cited by ACTEW, 2007).
In terms of financial adequacy, there is a significant difference between the financial support higher paid, professional level women received from the Canadian government and employers than women who bring in a lower salary. Specifically, 50% of “mothers who returned to work within 8 months reported annual earnings below $20,000,” while 29% of women commanded a higher salary and were about to return to work after a year (Marshall, 2003, Income section). Marshall (2003) provided the example of mothers with maternity or parental leave benefits who returned to work within four months who had earnings of less than $16,000: “this suggests that women with lower earnings (and possibly lower savings) may not be financially able to stay at home for an entire year on 55% of their earnings” (Marshall, 2003, Income section). In this same study, Marshall (2003) also reported that the difference of employer “top-up” paid to mothers in large firms was much larger than the payments to mothers in small firms, “31% of those employed in firms of 500 employees or more received a top-up, compared with 18% of those in smaller firms (Marshall, 2003, Overview Findings section).

Another issue of financial adequacy is the employer “top-ups” paid to those who work in the public sector versus the private sector. Marshall (2010) also reported that the majority of “top-up” payments go to mothers in the public sector. Specifically, “48% of mothers in the public sector received a top-up for an average of 22 weeks compared with 8% and 12 weeks for those in the private sector” (Marshall, 2010, p. 11). And of mothers who receive a top-up payment, “80% in 2008, reported receiving payments for less than six months—further evidence that most top-ups do not cover the entire paid leave period” (Marshall, 2010, p. 7).
The U.S. Department of Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau reported that only a quarter of women reported having any portion of their maternity leave paid in the U.S. for more than two months. For less duration of support, the authors reported the following percentages and corresponding duration: 26% - 5–8 weeks; 16% - 1–4 weeks and 33.1% - none” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Survey of Family Growth, as cited in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2011, p. 54).

Administration

Bond et al. (2003) and Brown et al. (2002) found that women perceived that their maternity leaves were administered effectively. Brown et al. (2002) found that when pregnant workers perceived that the administration of their maternity leave was positive they reported higher job satisfaction. However, when asked how they would improve their organization’s maternity leave policies, participants suggested that more leave time be made available to new mothers. Bond et al. (2003) also reported that when maternity leaves are administrated in a formal, transparent manner these procedures create a positive impact on women’s job satisfaction.

The following studies in the U.S., Halpert and Burg (1997), Lui and Buzzanell (1997), and Glass and Riley (1998) looked at the effects of poor administration of maternity leave. Halpert and Burg (1997) reported that mothers in the U.S. perceived that workplaces fail to develop and implement consistent maternity policies. The participants indicated that maternity policies were poorly executed and that this brought about “feelings of inequity between employees” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 250). One example of this inequity was that
support staff in one U.S. company were only eligible for 6 weeks of maternity leave while as reported, “professional and managerial employees, however, could wind up with anywhere from four weeks to four months, depending upon how accommodating their individual supervisors were willing to be” (Halpert & Burg, 1997, p. 250). Lui and Buzzanell (2004) discovered evidence that there is a stigma attached to taking advantage of the maternity leave available. Specifically, they reported “half of the 15 supervisors did not discuss maternity leaves with their direct reports. Instead they sent women to go through highly impersonal, standard bureaucratic processes either to obtain information or to set up leaves” (Lui & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 338). Furthermore, they did not allow women any flexibility in arranging their maternity leaves. The participants indicated that the stigma attached to maternity leave, and the lack of flexibility in manager’s attitudes thwarted the development of a warm and supportive relationship with their managers. Glass and Riley (1998) found that new mothers perceived that accessing maternity leaves might have negative consequences for their career advancement. As a result of how these policies were administered these mothers felt that they had to work harder for longer or return sooner from their maternity leave to protect their careers.

The Experience of Maternity Leave: Time at Home

In terms of the quality of experience of maternity leave time at home, Lui and Buzzanell (2004) found that women on maternity leave expressed guilt for leaving their work to be done by their coworkers. As a result they perceived that they had to work while on their maternity leave in order to assist their coworkers. Often they decided to would return to work before their allotted maternity leave time was up. One participant described her maternity leave:
I worked out of my home quite a bit. I came down for a lot of meetings.... I was on the phone all the time, and coming down for calls, appointments with clients, downtown ... even though it was a maternity leave I really was not gone, I was always on the phone with someone from the company. (Lui & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 336)

The researchers also reported that many of the participants had completed projects and other work during their maternity leaves. They found that some mothers experienced little difficulty working during maternity leave while others perceived that they were in a bind and had to give in to work requests (Lui & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 341).

While Lui and Buzzanell (2004) found that women perceive a need to work during their maternity leave, Read (2008) found the women perceive the need to remain connected to her coworkers during their maternity leave. Specifically, Read (2008) examined the perceptions women had of their time at home during their maternity leaves. In this study, Read (2008) interviewed 170 women across a number of industries, such as manufacturing, education, legal, retail, and financial services. Read discovered that mothers communicated regularly with supervisors and coworkers while they were on maternity leave, reflecting their need to remain in touch with those in the workplace. A participant in Read’s (2008) study described this regular communication in the following quote:

In the first few weeks after having both babies, work wasn’t important to me then as my focus was on being a mum. But after that then I was interested. Work emailed me updates and I could respond if I chose. For women I know who have taken longer away from the office being kept in touch with what’s going on there has been very important to them. So even if you choose not to respond to emails or do anything, I think it’s really important to be valued and kept informed. (p. 48)
Duration of Maternity Leave

The duration of the average Canadian maternity leave was 9–12 months after maternity and parental leave was extended to 52 weeks in 2001 according to Marshall (2003, para. 9). In terms of duration of leave, the goal of the government maternity leave policies and top-up payments is to enable new parents to spend more time and care for their infant longer (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007; Marshall, 2003). For Canadian women “their average leave was approximately 44 weeks” (Findlay & Kohen, 2009, p. 3).

Dzakpasu and Pelletier (2009) utilized data from The Maternity Experiences Survey (MES), which is a national survey of Canadian women’s experiences, perceptions, practices before conception and during pregnancy, birth and the early months after motherhood. The MES is a project of the Public Health Agency of Canada’s Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System (CPSS). The survey was administered to a random sample of 8,244 women where 6,421 (78%) participated in a 45-minute interview at 5 to 14 months after the birth of their baby (Dzakpasu & Pelletier, 2009). Dzakpasu and Pelletier (2009) found that of women who worked during their pregnancy, 11.6% returned to work within 6 months and cited “financial or career as important or wanting to return to work” as the most frequent reasons for returning to work prior to 6 months (Dzakpasu & Pelletier, 2009, p. 196).

Marshall (2003) reported that the most common return time to work for Canadian women was between 5–6 months in 2000 and when benefits were expanded in 2001 to 52 weeks, the leave time was between 9 and 12 months (para. 9). The report describes that between the years 2000 and 2001 that “clearly a result of the longer paid-benefit period, the proportion of women returning to work after about a year off (9–12 months) jumped from
8% to 47%” (Marshall, 2003, para. 9). According to Marshall (2003), one-quarter of mothers took less than 8 months off with “the median time at home for women with benefits increased from 6 months in 2000 to 10 months in 2001” when maternity and parental leave was extended (para. 12).

A more recent study by Findlay and Kohen (2012) utilized data from the 2010 Survey of Young Canadians (SYC). The authors reported that the mothers’ average leave time in Quebec “was longer on average (48 weeks) than in the rest of Canada (44 weeks)” (Findlay & Kohen, 2012, p. 5). Mothers with special needs such as post-partum depression “had longer leaves (50 weeks)” and those with babies “born prematurely took an average of 49 weeks” (Findlay & Kohen, 2012, p. 9).

Conversely in the U.S. where the government provides 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave; The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011) reported “the average length of maternity leave to be 10.3 weeks” (p. 54, section on Health Status-Reproductive and Maternal Health). Additionally, Swiss and Walker (1993) also examined the duration of maternity leave and found “eighty-two percent of the mothers we surveyed took a maternity leave of four months or less. Of this group, 28 percent took two months off and 25 percent, three months” (p. 60).

Joesch (1994) examined the topic of the duration of maternity leave for new mothers. The study utilized data from the 1983–1986 interviewing years of the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), a U.S. nationally representative data set that detailed employment and fertility histories on a monthly basis. The subjects of the study were 597 U.S. women who were between the ages of 18–45 when their child was born and who remained in the PSID sample for the entire observation period. Joesch (1994) discovered “that 18% of
women in the sample interrupted work for 1 month or less” (Findings, para. 1). By the time an infant was 5 months old, the probability of his or her mother “having started work was 50%, and by the end of the 1st year it was 61%” (Findings, para. 1). Joesch examined the same data again 3 years later specifically to look at how paid maternity leave time affected the timing of mothers’ return to work, and discovered that paid leave actually lengthened the time women took for their maternity leave.

Interestingly, shorter maternity leaves had a negative impact on new mothers. In the U.S., Feldman et al. (2004) administered a questionnaire designed to elicit parents’ experiences, attitudes, and leave-taking behaviours. The study looked at dual-earner parents where the mother returned to work at 3 to 5 months. The authors discovered that an increase in maternal depression appeared to be associated with shorter maternity leaves.

Making the Transition Back to the Workplace

The transition back to the workplace is complicated for new mothers. Numerous studies have explored how new mothers perceive their transition back to work. They can be broken down into the following categories: the transition back to the workplace (Glass & Riley, 1998; Grace, Williams, Stewart, & Franche, 2004; Lui & Buzzanell, 2004; Read, 2008); women’s commitment to work after they become mothers (Hrebinak & Alutto, 1972; Lyness et al., 1999; the dual role of worker and mother and “leaving work early” and “putting in face time” (Niles & Goodnough, 1996; Paludi, 1986; Sullivan, Hollenstead, & Smith, 2004); self-care (Families and Work Institute and Real Simple Magazine, 2012); spousal support (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Bond et al., 2003); the juggling of work and home demands (Harris, Raley, & Rindfuss, 2002; Read, 2008), and the decision of
whether to “opt in or opt out” of the workplace (Boushey, 2005; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Moen, 2004).

Lui and Buzzanell (2004) reported in a U.S. study “more than three-quarters either did not return to or did not remain with their employers after their leaves” (p. 324). Of those who did return, “almost half indicated job dissatisfaction after their leaves” (p. 324). The authors indicated that the reasons for this dissatisfaction were the following: (a) women did not receive additional time off to meet the needs of being a new mother, and (b) they were concerned that coworkers were not compensated for doing their work while they were on maternity leave.

Based on a study of over 170 women, Read (2008) described a structured transition plan to assist mothers in their return to work. The author found that an important part of this transition plan was that the returning mother has access to the employee who was assigned to do her work. The study also recommended that mothers be assigned an internal or external coach or “buddy,” such as another mother who had previously gone through the transition from maternity leave back work (Read, 2008, para. 7).

Grace et al.’s (2004) study of women’s experience during their transition back to work involved a group of female Canadian health care workers comprising 42 pregnant workers, 33 workers on maternity leave, and 29 mothers returning to work post-maternity leave. The women answered a questionnaire that assessed health-promoting behaviours based on the Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile II Scale. The authors reported that maintaining a role in the workplace is key for women’s self-worth. The study “suggests that women may value the increased social support, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and economic independence offered through their work role” (Grace et al., 2004, p. 68).
Glass and Riley (1998) also examined the social support women receive as they make the transition back to the workplace. The researchers examined how social support from supervisors and coworkers affected new mothers’ experiences in the workplace. Social support was identified through a variety of factors such as “supervisor and coworker reactions to R’s (respondent’s) pregnancy, and two additional questions listing supervisors or coworkers as either reasons to consider terminating or reasons to consider remaining in their prebirth job” (Glass & Riley, 1998, Family Responsiveness section, Social Support para.). Childcare assistance was also a factor in workplace social support. The authors discovered that social support from supervisors and coworkers made it more likely that women would stay in their jobs as they transition back to work.

Several studies, including Hrebiniaik and Alutto (1972) and Lyness et al. (1999), have covered the topic of working women’s commitment to work after becoming mothers. According to the researchers, too often working mothers’ commitment to work is questioned by managers and coworkers.

Lyness et al. (1999) examined factors that demonstrate mothers’ commitment to their work in the U.S. and found that mothers with less traditional attitudes toward parenting demonstrated their commitment to work by planning to work later into their pregnancies and return to work sooner after childbirth. In addition, women who perceived their managers and workplace cultures to be supportive were more committed to their workplaces and planned to return to work more quickly after childbirth than women who perceived their managers and workplace cultures to be less supportive.

Hrebiniaik and Alutto (1972) examined the relationship between a workplace’s guarantee that a woman’s job would be there for her after maternity leave and commitment to
the workplace. The study included 318 female elementary and secondary school teachers and
395 female registered nurses. The researchers found that commitment to work was strong
among mothers whose workplaces guaranteed their jobs. This study also found that pregnant
mothers with guaranteed positions planned to work later in their pregnancies and return to
work more quickly after childbirth than women without guaranteed positions. The authors
hypothesized that these women may have invested their time and effort in strong
relationships with coworkers or many years with the organization that keeps them committed
to their workplace.

Paludi (1986), through interviews with women from 20–42 years of age, examined
working mothers’ perceptions of the interrelationships between their dual role of worker and
their role of mother in the U.S. The authors discovered that in dual-earner couples women
continue to assume most of the household and parental role responsibilities. The researchers
concluded, “the demands of parenting continue to have a far greater impact on the
achievements and career paths of women than of men” (Anderson-Kulman & Paludi, 1986,

Another study, Niles and Goodnough (1996), examined new mothers’ experiences of
conflict between their dual role as mothers and as workers. The study utilized the U.S. Work
Importance Study (WIS) that applies the findings of the Values Scale and The Salience
Inventory (Super & Neville, 1986a, 1986b, as cited in Niles & Goodnough, 1996). The
Values Scale measures the importance of work values such as advancement and working
conditions. It also measures more general values such as personal development and lifestyle.
The WIS provides a clear picture of the meaning of work, homemaking, leisure, and study in
people’s lives. Niles and Goodnough concluded that the WIS studies indicate mothers are at
risk for conflict between their worker and the homemaker roles. They found that the risk of role conflict is highest during childbearing and childrearing years. Niles and Goodnough (1996) went on to suggest that the role “conflict is exacerbated by the fact that men consistently report lower participation and values expectations for the home and family when compared with women” (Implications section). The authors suggested that by men increasing their participation in home and family, they will share the burden of domestic responsibilities and this will help reduce mothers’ role conflict.

The Families and Work Institute and Real Simple Magazine (2012) examined the difficulties new working mothers in the U.S. have in finding time for themselves. The authors surveyed 3,230 women from a variety of work backgrounds aged 25–54 about the ways women spend their leisure time. Approximately “half of American women say they don’t have enough free time” (The Families and Work Institute and Real Simple Magazine, 2012, Chart 1) and of that free time, “46% say they are often interrupted” (Chart 3). Women who acknowledged having free time said that the time is spent on “children-43%; parents/other elders; 21%; spouses-16%; household chores-16%” (The Families and Work Institute and Real Simple Magazine, 2012, Chart 4).

Bond et al. (2003) and Australia’s PaETS (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) examined spousal support of working mothers. According to the Families and Work Institute (2002), the number of dual-earner couples grew to 78% in 2002 compared to 66% in 1977 (Bond et al., 2003, p. 14). The study suggests that as more dual earners enter the workplace, male partner’s domestic duties will increase.
Bond et al. (2003) examined the perceptions of female and male workers on the topic of spousal support for working mothers. The researchers looked at data relating to spousal support in the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce and found that while men have taken on more responsibility, the women still carry a larger load of the domestic and child-rearing tasks: “77% take greater responsibility for cooking, 78% take greater responsibility for cleaning and 70% take greater responsibility for routine childcare” (Bond et al., 2003, p. 17). When it comes to household chores, women spend one third more time on household chores than men. However, according to Bond et al., (2003) men have increased the time they spend on household chores by 0.7 hours to “2.0 hours” (p. 18, Figure 11) per week over the last 25 years and have increased the time allocated to childcare by 0.8 hours to “2.7” hours per week (p. 19, Figure 12). The researchers also found that women were significantly more likely in 2002 than in 1992 to report that their husbands took greater or equal responsibility for cleaning, “20%” in 2002 compared to “11%” in 1992 and routine child care, “30%” in 2002 compared to “24%” in 1992 (Bond et al., 2003, p. 17, Figure 10). When employees were asked, “Who is most likely to take time off work to stay home or do something with your child(ren) when both of you are supposed to be at work? The proportion of fathers who claimed this responsibility increased from 12% in 1977 to 31% in 2002” (Bond et al., 2003, p. 17). Conversely, the proportion of mothers who took of time from work if their child were ill did not change significantly over the same time period.

In order to provide mothers with more spousal support, the PaETS (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) reported that “of the 378,000 partners . . . . 34% (128,000 partners) used work arrangements in their first main job after the birth to assist with child care” (Partners during the pregnancy section, para. 2). Examples of the work arrangements were: “flexible
working hours, permanent part-time work, work at home, shiftwork, leave” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, Partner Employed After Birth Who Used Work Arrangements Chart).

A few studies, Anderson et al. (1986), Harris et al. (2002), Niles and Goodnough (1996), and Read (2008) examined the multiple demands placed on working mothers often referred to as “the juggling act.”

Harris et al. (2002) examined the behaviour of working mothers of two or more children requiring daycare. In this U.S. study they examined data from four national surveys: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), a longitudinal survey of the labour market experiences of American youth aged 14–21 when the study began in 1979; The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau designed to provide detailed information on the economic situation in 12,000 households; The National Child Care Study (NCCS), a one-time telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of households on non-parent care and early education arrangements for children of working parents; and The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a general purpose study of American family life with a sample of 13,008 mothers aged 19 and over. The authors discovered “for all second and higher-order births, more than two-thirds have an older sibling for whom some sort of child-care arrangements (including care by the mother) have been made when the birth occurs” (Harris et al., 2002, p. 459). As a result working mothers were faced with “the prospect of having their children cared for under two different arrangements, with related logistical, bookkeeping, and transportation issues” (Harris et al., 2002, p. 456).
Read (2008) also found that mothers in her U.S. study had difficulty “juggling” their workload and daycare schedules. As one of the participants stated:

I didn’t have any concerns about wanting to return to work. It was more the practical things like how you juggle timetables and demands when you have people relying on you to be a mother—and also give your best at work. It was really important to me that I felt I could be a good mother and a good employee—not letting anyone down. (Read, 2008, p. 48)

The participant additionally commented:

I’ve been lucky in having support but and this applies to most women I talk to, it’s really hard to feel that you are putting enough in at home and when you’re at work, you’re always compromising and juggling one or the other and you just hope you can get the balance right most of the time. I’ve been really lucky with my employer too. It’s not so much that I’ve needed any additional support; it’s knowing that if I did need it then it would be there. (Read, 2008, p. 48)

Hewlett and Luce (2005) examined the reasons professional women leave their careers. The terms “opting in” and “opting out” of the workplace are replaced in this study by the terms “the role of off-ramps and on-ramps in the lives of highly qualified women” (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, p. 2). The U.S. study was conducted in conjunction with Ernst & Young, Lehman Brothers, and Goldman Sachs. A survey was given to 2,443 “highly qualified” women divided into two groups: aged 41–55 and aged 28–40. Women with a graduate degree, a professional degree, or a high-honours undergraduate degree were categorized as highly qualified. Hewlett and Luce (2004) found that at some point in their career, “nearly four in ten (37%) report that they have left work voluntarily” (Women Do Leave Section, para. 1). Additionally, “among women who have children that statistic rises to 43%” (Hewlett and Luce, 2005, Women Do Leave Section, para. 1). The researchers found that the reasons women leave the workplace vary. Some women leave because they
perceive their jobs as neither satisfying nor meaningful. Others cite their spouse’s income as a contributing factor to their being able to leave paid work. In fact, almost a third of these participants stated that their spouse’s income was sufficient for the family’s needs. Of mothers who opt out, the authors found that the women returned to work as a result of financial needs or because they have found suitable childcare.

Moen (2004) examined why female and male workers opt out of the workplace for either a short or long period. The author conducted the U.S. Ecology of Careers Study of 1,653 middle-class couples over a 2-year period. The majority of the couples were married, most were managers, professionals, or technical workers, and almost all had some university education. Moen (2004) found that “more women (8.2%) than men (6.7%) leave the workforce altogether” (p. 5). The major finding that Moen (2004) asserted was that women left their jobs for the following reasons: “a third (33%) are mothers with a preschool child at home, a fifth (20.7%) retired, and over a third (36.7%) are caring for an infirm family member” (p. 5). The remaining women leave the workplace to work for another employer. The authors concluded that that majority of women who leave the workforce do not do so in order to care for their children full time.

Boushey (2005) also examined the role motherhood plays in women’s decisions to remain in or leave the workforce, that is, what she called the “child penalty” (para. 2). Based on the U.S. Current Population Survey’s Outgoing Rotation Group data, a national survey of labour force participation rates (LFPR) of women aged 25–45 both with children at home and without, Boushey determined that women with children were not opting out of the workplace in large numbers to care for their children.
Flexible Workplace Policies

Several studies have explored the literature on flexible work policies. These can be divided into two groups. In the first group are studies that looked at positive perceptions of accessing flexible workplace policies arising from its role in increasing job satisfaction and in facilitating the dual role of worker and mother (Bond et al., 2003; Corporate Voices, 2011; Glass & Riley, 1998; Moen, 2003; Wellner, 2004). In the second group are studies that looked at negative perceptions based on effects on advancement, issues of access, and negative effects on the perception of the worker by managers and coworkers (Borrill & Kidd, 1994; Glass & Riley, 1998; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Moen, 2003; Sullivan et al., 2004).

Flexible work policies as defined by The Families and Work Institute (2008) are policies allowing employees to access a flexible work schedule and choices about employees’ schedules such as reduced hours, caregiving leaves, sabbaticals, and flexible career paths. The literature reviewed in this section is limited to studies examining employer-established programs such as flexible schedules with reduced hours or telecommuting, that is, working from home. Interestingly, The Families and Work Institute (2008) reported that work-at-home options are the least likely to be offered to U.S. workers.

Flexible work policies are now established in many Canadian and U.S. corporations. According to a survey by CareerBuilder, 43% of Canadian organizations offer flexible workplace options to their employees (Career Builder, 2009, as cited in Government of New Brunswick, 2012, p. 2). In contrast, in the U.S., Hewitt Associates (2001, as cited in Corporate Voices, 2011, p. 5), based on a survey of 1,000 major U.S. employers, reported “that 73% offered flexible work arrangements, up from 67%, 5 years earlier.” Robbins
reported that in the U.S., one in four women now use flexible workplace programs compared to one in 10 in 1984.

In February of 2013, the Canadian Federal Court passed a ruling “that workplaces are obliged to accommodate reasonable childcare-related requests from their employees” (CBCNews, 2013, para. 2). This ruling is designed to assist women with childcare needs and will provide more support for flexible workplace programs and policies and shift hour work (CBCNews, 2013).

Positive Perceptions of Flexible Workplace Policies

Several studies (Bond et al., 2003; Corporate Voices, 2011; Glass & Riley, 1998; Moen, 2004; Wellner, 2004) have found that flexible workplace policies are widely available, heavily utilized, and perceived positively by employees.

Corporate Voices (2011) examined the positive perceptions that employees had of flexible workplace policies using an in-depth survey of both Canadian and U.S. employees from 29 firms and organizations. The survey asked the participants to describe the positive benefits of flexible workplace policies. Participants mentioned benefits such as less stress, increased motivation, and greater organizational loyalty. In addition, employees from 15 organizations participated in in-depth interviews about their experience utilizing flexible workplace policies. Based on a survey that the researchers conducted with Ernst & Young accounting firm’s Canadian employees, they found that “78% said it was ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’ to them to have a flexible work environment . . . 83% of respondents would recommend Ernst & Young as a place to work as it relates to flexibility” (Corporate Voices, 2011, p. 10). In another survey conducted with AstraZeneca employees, the
Researchers found that “96% say flexibility influences their decision to stay at the company; 73% said that flexibility is ‘very important’ in that decision, and an additional 23% say that it’s ‘somewhat important’” (Corporate Voices, 2011, p. 10).

Wellner (2004) interviewed female human resource officers from the U.S. national headquarters of KPMG (a New York-based accounting firm), American Family Life Assurance Company (AFLAC), IBM Corporation, and Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago about flexible work practices and corporate sponsored programs that support mothers in the workplace. The author reported that KPMG offers flexible work schedules for mothers returning to work and a 2-year leave of absence program for both women and men who feel they need to spend more time at home. KPMG’s flexible work program, which begins the moment a pregnant woman announces her pregnancy, signals to new mothers that the company values them and wants them to return to work after maternity leave. AFLAC offers on-site childcare, take-out meals in the cafeteria, and subsidized babysitting services. The company also has a program that assigns new mothers to role models who are successful working mothers. IBM offers an extended leave of absence program that can be used to extend maternity leave. While on leave employees kept their health benefits and checked-in with their manager annually to discuss whether the leave will continue.

Typically, at any given time, about 1,500 of IBM’s 200,000 U.S.-based employees are on leaves of absence that can be extended to as long as three years. About 90% of the employees are women, and most are using the leave for childcare. (Wellner, 2004, p. 76)

Moen (1999) examined working couples’ perceptions of flexible work policies in the U.S. study entitled, *The Cornell Couples and Career Study*. The authors gathered information from employees of seven different organizations and their spouses. The industries
represented were health care and private and public higher education. The authors found that the employees perceived that flexible work programs provide workers with the latitude and flexibility they need to be able to deal with problems arising in their family lives. “Four workplace factors predict whether or not employees plan to remain with their current employers: workload, control over scheduling, working a standard schedule, flextime, and telecommuting” (Moen, 1999, p. 6, para. 2).

Looking at how job satisfaction is affected by flexible workplace policies, Bond et al. (2003) found that employees who had significant access to flexible work arrangements reported a higher job satisfaction percentage, “65%”, compared to “30%” reported by employees with limited access to flexible work arrangements (pg. 33). In addition, male and female employees with access to flexible work arrangements reported greater satisfaction with their personal lives than employees who had limited access to flexible workplace policies. Employees in the survey also commented that they felt greater satisfaction with their personal lives when they received support from their immediate supervisors. Bond et al. (2003) concluded that participants’ perceptions of positive support from managers allowed them to access flexible work arrangements without concern that this would have a negative effect on their prospects of advancement.

Glass and Riley (1998) studied the relationship between the transparency of flexible workplace programs and the retention of new mothers. The authors reported that women perceive the workplace more positively when flexible workplace policies are clear, consistent, and transparent. The researchers also found that when flexible workplace policies are established and fluid they have a positive effect on the retention of new mothers.
Negative Perceptions of Flexible Workplace Policies

The following studies (Borrill & Kidd, 1994; Glass & Riley, 1998; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Moen, 2003; Sullivan et al., 2004) examined mothers’ perceptions of the negative effects of flexible workplace policies.

Sullivan et al. (2004) conducted the Faculty of Work-Family Policy Study, which examined the development, administration, and use of flexible workplace policies in academic settings. The authors found that “twenty-four percent of the respondents cited faculty members’ fear of possible career repercussions as the reason policies were not used as often as they might be” (Sullivan et al., 2004, Successful Policy Making Section, para. 6). The negative career consequences that employees perceived were a delay to or missing out on achieving tenure fear they might be dismissed or might lose opportunities for advancement. In addition, both male and female participants reported a “chilly climate” within their organizations discouraging access to the programs (Sullivan et al., 2004, Successful Policy Making Section, para.6).

Similarly, when Glass and Riley (1998) reviewed the topic of unequal access and scheduling of flexible workplace programs, they found that women perceived that managers varied with respect to their interpretation of formal flexible work practices. The women perceived that some managers encouraged the use of flexible workplace programs while others did not. Additionally, some mothers perceived that if they used flexible workplace programs, they were at risk of being denied promotions or important training opportunities.

Moen (2003) discovered that employees perceived access to flexible scheduling to be unequal, arbitrary, and often an insufficient accommodation for mothers. The study revealed that the perception of unequal access was a reflection of the fact that some flexible workplace
options that were formally unavailable were actually made available to some employees. As Moen (2003) reported, “women negotiate exceptions to help them meet their work and family obligations and are less concerned with the formal availability in their organizations” (p. 308).

Hewlett and Luce (2005) found “35% of the women...report various aspects of the organizations’ cultures that effectively penalize people who take advantage of work-life policies”. Almost a quarter of the study’s participants perceived that workers who accessed flexible programs experienced bias or were stigmatized, which they perceived negatively affected their career prospects. Hewlett and Luce (2005) reported that participants perceived that “there is an unspoken rule at my workplace that people who use these options will not be promoted” (p. 8).

Sullivan et al. (2004) conducted the Faculty of Work-Family Policy Study in the U.S., which examined the development, administration, and use of flexible workplace policies in academic settings. The study used a web-based survey to which employees of 225 institutions, mostly 4-year universities and colleges, responded. A follow-up telephone interview was conducted with 51 of the respondents. The study looked at (a) the type of flexible work policies; (b) eligibility requirements and entitlement criteria; (c) barriers to usage; and (d) the characteristics of environments that facilitate the implementation of flexible work policies. Survey respondents reported, “a ‘chilly climate’ sometimes discourages faculty from taking advantage of work-family policies” (Sullivan et al., 2004, Successful Policy Making, para. 6). The report suggests the following to increase the success of flexible workplace policies: “when chairs and deans make it clear to tenure and promotion committees that faculty must not be penalized for using university policies, attitudes about
the academic value of colleagues with family responsibilities begin to change” (Sullivan et al., 2004, Successful Policy Making, para. 7).

Borrill and Kidd (1994) examined new mothers’ perceptions of U.S. employer attitudes and flexible workplace policies. Borrill and Kidd found that mothers who used flexible workplace programs perceived managers to be biased against their work contributions and to question their loyalty and commitment to the workplace.

**Role Models for Working Mothers**

Catalyst Canada (2011, as cited in Lu, 2011) and Hausmann et al. (2011) examined top leadership positions and found that there are significantly fewer women in Canada represented at this leadership level than their male counterparts. Catalyst Canada released a report stating, “women held 17.7 per cent of top officer positions, up from 16.9 per cent in 2008, an improvement of less than a percentage point” (Catalyst Canada, 2011, as cited in Lu, 2011, para. 3). Hausmann et al. (2011), in a report prepared for The World Economic Forum, examined the gender gap in the workplace. The authors concluded that there are not enough women in top jobs. Without female representation among senior executives, women find it more difficult to learn such things as upper echelon norms and key cultural practices.

While there appears to be a lack of empirical literature focusing on women looking for role models of mothers who are successful in their dual role of worker and mother, two pieces of research indicate how women continue to struggle to find female role models. One article in *Canadian Business* in February 2012 did describe such research, an internal study conducted for Deloitte Canada (Seth, 2012). This study suggested that the majority of women are indeed looking for examples of women who mirror their own struggles to be a successful
worker and mother. Another survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid/Randstad found that “more than four out of five (84%) women polled said their organization had not provided them with a sponsor or mentor to help in their career path” (Fraser, 2012, para. 15).

Summary

The results of studies of women’s perceptions of their managers’ and coworkers’ responses to their pregnancy are mixed; however, a larger majority of the studies found that women perceive the responses to be negative. Working women reported receiving inappropriate, derogatory comments from their managers. They also perceived that managers underestimated their work commitment, productivity, and job performance now that they were mothers. In some studies, women were threatened with job loss or denial of major project assignments. When working mothers perceived a positive response from their managers, it contributed to their desire to stay in their job, increased job satisfaction, and furthered their career advancement.

The literature review indicates that women in Canada find that maternity leave salary payments from government and employer “top-up” programmes are financially inadequate. As a result of this inadequacy of funds, many women return to work prior to the 52-week leave they are entitled to. Furthermore, many studies suggested that pregnant workers perceived that their workplaces have failed to develop and implement consistent procedures around the administration of maternity policies. Women perceived that if they requested any special accommodation, it might negatively affect their performance review or career advancement. The literature indicates that often women engaged in some aspect of their work during their maternity leave. Specifically, the literature indicates that women often communicated regularly with their organizations while on maternity leave.
The studies indicated that as women made the transition back to work, they experienced job dissatisfaction. For the most part, they did not receive any structured transition plan to assist in their return to work, were not assigned to a buddy to help them review the projects that took place in their absence, or have meetings scheduled with their manager to confirm their value to the organization. In fact, the literature confirmed that part of new mothers’ dissatisfaction was the result of their perception that managers and coworkers questioned their commitment to their job or passed them over for job promotions. Additionally, the literature review indicated that the workplace failed to support women in their dual role of worker and mother such that mothers had to learn to juggle their work and home responsibilities so that they would not interfere with work. Conversely, if their employer provided transitional resources, women returning to the workplace experienced higher job satisfaction. Additionally, the support that new mothers received from their spouses was found to be helpful. However, mothers still perceived that the bulk of childcare and domestic duties fell to them. Mothers also reported that with all of the responsibilities that required their attention, they had little time for self-care. As a result of these negative perceptions, women contemplated whether or not to opt out of the workplace altogether.

In terms of access to flexible work programmes, there appears to be studies that indicate that women have both negative and positive perceptions of flexible workplace programmes. The negative indicate that women perceive there are career repercussions to accessing flexible workplace policies and that access can be unequal and arbitrary among female workers. The positive indicate that women perceive higher job satisfaction when they have access to flexible workplace programmes. However, it appears to be important to new
mothers that flexible workplace policies are formally written, clearly communicated, and available to all employees.

**Major Research Questions**

The central research goal is to explore the narrative of women’s perceptions of how the workplace responds to her struggles to manage employment and motherhood.

The four major research questions are:

1. The first question will explore women’s perceptions of the responses in the workplace to their announcement of their pregnancy. The sub-issues such as the type of support or lack of support managers and coworkers provide to pregnant workers and how women time their pregnancy with work schedules will also be explored.

2. The second question will explore women’s experience of maternity leave. The sub-issues to be explored will be women’s perceptions of maternity leave in terms of access, financial adequacy, administration, experience of maternity leave at home, and duration of maternity leave.

3. The third question will explore women’s perceptions of the transition back to the workplace after maternity leave. The sub-issues that will be explored will be: how mothers manage the dual role of worker and mother; what type of transitional resources do workplaces provide for returning mothers; understanding the perceptions of supervisors and coworkers regarding mothers’ commitment to the workplace; what are women’s abilities to provide self-care or ask for her spouse’s
support; and finally managing the multiple tasks relating to the responsibilities of home and work.

4. The fourth question will explore the access that women have to flexible workplace programs. The sub-issues will be to examine how women view the use of flexible workplace policies, the type of management support, if any, they receive, negative consequences on career path of using flexible workplace policies and if role models exist for mothers who also utilize flexible workplace policies and what mothers can learn from them.

The central research theme and the secondary questions and sub-issues will be collected through a qualitative study with a life history approach. The in-depth inquiry will be described in the next chapter with the detailed results of the study to follow in Chapter 4. In the final chapter, the results of the study will be discussed and recommendations of policy and administrative initiatives will be provided. Such recommendations, for example, would be to provide mothers with:

1. more support as they announcement their pregnancy at work,
2. more “top-up” salary payments from employers during their maternity leave,
3. structured transitional programs and policies as mothers return to work, and
4. negating career penalties for accessing flexible workplace programs.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative research methodology that was chosen for the current study. This chapter details the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design and the philosophical reasons behind blending in an overlay of a life history approach to fit the topic of the struggles of women managing employment and motherhood. The methodology of the research is described in detail focusing on the interview protocol of three interviews consistent with the life history approach. Three interviews were employed for data collection and in-depth analysis that explored working mothers’ perceptions of employment and motherhood regarding their specific experiences of pregnancy, maternity leave, and transition back to work and accessing flexible workplace policies. Within the methodology, challenges and validity are also outlined. The researcher’s background is presented with biases, values and beliefs highlighted. The chapter ends with detail on the participants that includes sampling techniques, selection criteria, sample characteristics, recruitment, instruments, a pilot study and individual profiles.

Qualitative Research: Characteristics and Appropriateness for this Study

The choice of qualitative research for this study provided a framework for the women’s perceptions of the workplace’s response to them as first pregnant workers and then new mothers in the workplace. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), “choosing qualitative methods is the nature of the research problem” (p. 11). By taking the women’s words in all their richness, one can further analyze, for example, the experiences women had when they announced their pregnancies at work or accessed flexible workplace policies.
Qualitative research refers to inquiry about “persons’ lives, stories, and behaviour, but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Using a qualitative methodology for this study allowed the essence of the participants’ experiences relative to a particular phenomenon to be uncovered. For example, themes emerged about the women’s perceptions of the responses to their pregnancy announcement. Organization of the data using these themes helped to illuminate how the response affected these workers. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), qualitative methods help uncover “the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes and emotions” (p. 11). As such, mothers speaking about their experience of managing employment and motherhood will have diverse feelings, thoughts and emotions about their experiences.

Another advantage of qualitative research is that its general results and theories are easily related to the human experience being studied. Embracing the participant’s experience is described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as research “conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a ‘field’ or life situation." These situations are typically ‘banal’ or normal ones, reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 6). This advantage of qualitative research fits with the topic of women managing employment and motherhood, as the situations are reflective of the everyday life of working mothers.

Another strength of qualitative research is that it focuses on the data from the perspective of the participant. For example, Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird, and McCormick (1992) spoke of preserving participants’ perspectives: “The strengths of qualitative methods are that they generate rich, detailed, valid process data that usually leave
the study participants’ perspectives intact” (p. 44). For this study’s goal of informing workplaces and society as a whole about the struggles women encounter in managing employment and motherhood, it is imperative that the participants’ perspectives remain intact. Also, the participants’ perspectives remain intact due to the role the researcher plays in qualitative research. For example, Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the role of the researcher is “to gain ‘holistic’ (systematic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study; its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules” (p. 6). In this study, the researcher helps contextualize the participants’ perceptions of the explicit and implicit rules that were inherent in their experience of managing employment and motherhood. An example of this is that while maternity leave is explicit in being available to all mothers who work for organizations of a certain size, the implicit rules are that managers may question a mother’s commitment to work if she takes the full 52-week maternity leave period that she is eligible for.

In qualitative research there is no predetermined research plan, themes are allowed to emerge from the data as the study proceeds, helping to paint an authentic picture of the new mother’s experience in the workplace. In Joseph Maxwell’s book, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (1996), Metzger’s quote “don’t put a tuxedo on your brain” describes the importance of letting themes emerge (Metzger, 1993, p. 16, as cited in Maxwell, 1996, p. 13). In other words, as a researcher, don’t anticipate, let mothers’ responses during data collection and analysis come out spontaneously.

Looking at women’s perceptions of the responses to the announcement of their pregnancies and when they depart and return from maternity leave involves an interpretation of events surrounding their exiting and re-entering the workplace. An investigation into these
transitions lends itself to qualitative methodology. The reason for this is that participants take the researcher on a journey through their experience and corresponding perceptions. “One does not begin with a theory and prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Denzin (1997) describe the process of allowing theories to emerge through data collection and analysis as researchers trying to get a better understanding of a subject matter by using interpretative practices that make the world visible in a variety of different ways.

**Philosophical Approach to Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research allows the researcher to blend different approaches to best highlight the subject matter that is being studied. In this study, for the methodology of data collection, a Life History approach is utilized as it provides a flexible frame to gather data. The unique feature of the flexible frame for data collection is that it fits within the participants’ life histories of becoming mothers while in the workplace that includes the stages of pregnancy, maternity leave, transition back to work and accessing flexible workplace policies.

Seidman suggests developing profiles of individual participants and grouping them into categories. I divided the participants’ accounts of their perceptions into the universal essence of the four major research questions highlighted in Chapter 2: (1) women’s perceptions of the responses in the workplace to their announcement of their pregnancy, (2) women’s experience of maternity leave, (3) women’s perceptions of the transition back to workplace after maternity leave, and (4) the access that women have to flexible workplace programs. As a researcher, I looked for the universal essence that describes each stage. I marked individual passages from the participants, grouped them into categories, and then
analyzed them for “thematic connections within and among them” (Seidman, 1998, p. 102). These steps guided my development of themes and categories. Seidman warns about “dead ends” when the researcher locks into categories too early (Seidman, 1998, p. 108). When a category is assumed too early it can lead the researcher to make assumptions about meanings that are not supported by themes that arise later in the process.

To help minimize the influence of my own experience pertaining to how I viewed the data, I found the seven procedural steps of data analysis identified by Colaizzi (1978, as cited in Phillips-Pula et al., 2011, p. 68) held some similarities to Seidman’s method of developing profiles:

1. Reading and re-reading descriptions of the data to acquire a general feeling for the experience,
2. Extracting the significant statements pertaining to the phenomenon,
3. Formulating meanings to make clear that which is hidden,
4. Generating overarching themes or meanings,
5. Integrating the themes into an exhaustive description including using coding segments of text according to the data,
6. Paring down the exhaustive description into a statement of the phenomenon, and
7. Validating the phenomenon with the participants.

**The Research Method: Three Interviews**

For purposes of this study, I will utilize an in-depth inquiry in the form of interviews. I will utilize the work of Seidman’s (1998) Life History approach wherein the researcher investigates a topic through the participants’ stories of their lives. I utilized Seidman’s (1998) methodology, described in his book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, as a guide for developing my own interview protocol of detailing the stories of one’s career path. The reason for this is the context of the evolution of one’s career and how it intersects with one’s
personal life is very complimentary to cataloguing a life history. Discussing career and personal life information can bring about very personal revelations that would be difficult to discuss in, for example, a focus group setting. For this reason, the use of interviews is particularly appropriate for this study.

Seidman (1998) suggests that the qualitative researcher conduct three interviews with each subject in order to obtain an adequately rich context for interpreting the participant’s account of her experience. As Seidman (1998) said, “I learned to appreciate even further, the importance of language and stories in a person’s life as ways toward knowing and understanding” (p. xx). In Seidman’s (1998) methodology of a Life History, the first interview establishes the context of the participant’s experience. The second interview allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience in context. At the third and final interview, the participant can reflect on the meaning of their experience and what place it holds in his or her life (Seidman, 1998). Following this guide, I used the first interview to reconstruct a “life history” of each woman’s career. The second interview focused on the details of her experience of being back at work. All of the participants were back in the workplace during the interviews except for two. These two participants described the scenario of when they returned to work in prior years after the birth of their other, older children. And during the final interview participants were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of their experience of becoming mothers while working, discuss their careers and examine the choices they made. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000, as cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 15), “The information [from the participants] is then retold and restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology. In the end, the narrative combines views from the participant’s life with those of the researcher’s life in a collaborative manner.” Glaser and
Strauss (1973) argue that data in the form of the “anecdotes” or stories of participants can be trusted if the experience described was “lived” (p. 67). By focusing on how the narrative builds in a chronological order, I will bring the participants stories to life.

In order to administer effective interviews, the researcher must keep participants focused throughout each meeting. For example, since the first interview will be about past experiences that led up to their maternity leave, it will be important to postpone discussion about their present experience until the second meeting. Throughout the interviews, the researcher must stay focused on the concrete details of a participant’s experience before exploring attitudes and opinions about it. The concrete constitutes the experience while attitudes and opinions are about experience. “Without the concrete details, the attitudes and options can seem groundless” (Seidman, 1998, p. 73).

**Challenges of Qualitative Research**

Ethical guidelines for the research were heeded and measures were taken to ensure that the information provided was kept confidential. Because the information was about the participants’ careers and decisions about child rearing, these safeguards were vital. Some of the mechanisms I put in place to safeguard the information were:

1. Keeping the raw data in a locked file;

2. Changing the names, place of employment, and specific job events to maintain the anonymity of the participants;

3. Concealing the names of the participants from the transcriber of the interviews; and

4. Destroying the raw data 2 years after the research is complete.
Validity in Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2009), the validity of qualitative research is based on whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, and the readers of an account (p. 191). Components of validity are “trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility” (Creswell & Miller, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Validity can be determined using the following four methods: Member Checking, Prolonged Engagement, Contextual Validation and Triangulation, and Writing Memos.

Member Checking

Member Checking is when the researcher checks in with each participant throughout the process to make sure she is comfortable and remind her that she can withdraw from the study at any time and does not need to answer any question that she does not want to. As a result of there being three meetings with each participant, the task of member checking was easily accomplished. The transcripts from the first meeting were shared with the participants at the second meeting and also the second meeting transcript was shared with the participant at the third and final meeting. That is, raw data, interpretations, and conclusions were shared and tested with each participant. Furthermore, participants had an opportunity to react to the representation of their life history, correct any errors, and challenge incorrect interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They also had the opportunity to add anything they felt had been left out in an earlier interview. This process allowed the participants to take ownership of the information and marked the beginning of the process of data analysis.
Prolonged Engagement

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that, “it is not possible to understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded—the naturalist spends enough time in becoming oriented to the situation—soaking in the culture through his/her pores” (p. 302). The protocol of three interviews with each participant, each taking approximately 1–2 hours, made it more likely that credible findings would be produced. The repetition of the meetings allowed the researcher fully engage with the participant and her accounts of her perceptions. As a result of this study, divulging information about one’s career and personal stories requires the researcher to be fully engaged. As such, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argued that a researcher’s sustained involvement with the participants reduces the chances that participants will be inhibited from expressing private thoughts.

Contextual Validation and Triangulation

Contextual validation is another way to establish the validity of a study’s findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings in this study were triangulated in a number of ways. Findings were verified the information through a literature search of related topics. A pilot study was conducted to inform my understanding of women and flexible work policies. I attended conferences on flexible workplace policies and practices. I analyzed the transcripts for not only “what” the respondents said, but, also, “how” they said it. I also met with academic colleagues and with my doctoral supervisor at OISE to discuss the progress of the study. And I used my own observations of pregnant women in the workplace and my personal experience of announcing a pregnancy, taking maternity and parental leave, and transitioning back to work. “Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more
measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced” (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966, p. 3).

**Writing Memos**

Writing memos of the data also helps improve the validity of the study. The writing of memos helps the researcher to construct conceptual analyses of the data (Charmaz, 2000). By embarking on this task early in the research, I was able to weave themes together and not lose sight of vital information that was shared by the participants. As Charmaz (2000) points out, by writing memos, “we reduce the likelihood that we will get lost in a mountain of data—memo writing keeps us focused on our analyses and involved with our research” (p. 517).

**The Researcher**

**Reflections and Fit with Researcher Frame**

A qualitative researcher needs to be able to sit back and critically analyze situations and at the same time recognize and avoid bias. A researcher must be able to exhibit theoretical and social sensitivity to the issues being shared by the participant. Also, a researcher must be able to keep a distance from the participants to respect boundaries but at the same time must have good interaction skills in order to elicit the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two examples from my own career path demonstrate my ability to function as a qualitative researcher. The first is from my experience as a published author. In 2010, I conducted research and wrote a book entitled, “Cracking the Code: Unlocking the Potential for Future Leaders in the Legal Profession” (Finer-Freedman, 2010). I was able to exhibit theoretical and social sensitivity to the qualitative dialogue I engaged in with academic
practitioners across North America. This dialogue informed the subject matter of the book. The second example is from my experience as a therapist in an outplacement agency and career coach at the Law Society of Upper Canada. In these settings, I was able to maintain a distance with my clients while creating a strong interaction that encouraged clients to share important information to highlight the essence of their dilemmas.

The narratives I have heard throughout my life from family and friends have shaped my perspective on working women becoming mothers. Prior to my own experience as a working mother my view was based on the experiences of others. Having gone through three pregnancies of my own as a working mother, I am keenly aware that each pregnancy and work situation has its own unique dynamics. As a result, I was able to hear participants’ stories as unique and maintain a reflective stance in relation to my own subjectivity, values, beliefs, and biases. Additionally, while taking career development courses for my Master’s in Counselling Psychology at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at The University of Toronto, I found what appeared to be a gap in the career development literature. More study was needed to fully understand women’s perceptions of the process of becoming a mother in the workplace. There were some early career development theories, such as Astin’s (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice and work behaviour and Farmer’s (1985) model of career motivation that opened up new exciting areas in women’s career psychology. Yet, these were limited in that they did not address the special circumstances of women in the workplace, particularly when they become mothers. These theorists led me to want to explore more about the unique experience of women and mothers in the workplace.
Finally, by blending qualitative theory with a life history approach, I achieved the most effective way as a researcher to gain the insight and information needed to examine women managing employment and motherhood. By developing my own design of Seidman’s (1998) three-step Life History interview method, I helped reduce the extent to which my subjectively, values, beliefs and biases may influence the data. During the actual interviews, when a participant started talking I forgot about my own plans for the discussion and let the themes emerge from what she had to say. The only control I took was to guide the discussion so that we did not, for example, discuss issues appropriate for the third interview during the first. So that the participant would not feel I was attempting to manipulate her if I needed to exercise this control, I shared with each participant the purpose of each of the three interviews.

The vast amount of data can pose a challenge for the researcher. Seidman (1998) offers a method to accomplish this called “winnowing.” Winnowing involves three steps: first, develop profiles of the individual participants and group them into categories; second, mark passages in the interview transcripts and group them into categories; and third, study thematic connections among the categories (Seidman, 1998, pp. 101–102). This process helps the researcher prioritize the data by following it wherever it goes and organizing it according to categories based on the themes that have emerged from the research.

In addition, the writing of memos helped me to identify themes and categories. Since the start of my research study, I have written memos about the meaning of concepts I came across and what role they might play in answering the overall question. Some mornings I woke up with a thought that expanded on a theory I had been developing in my mind, and I quickly wrote it down before it faded away. I have awoken at 4:00 a.m. to write memos.
Memos are a way to step back and look at one’s thoughts to see if they make sense. In summary, after I began to identify themes and categories, my priority was to check with the participants to gauge their accuracy. I believe this was a strength of the three-step interview method as I was about to repeat this check-in with the participant at two points: the beginning of each of the second and third interviews.

**Participants**

**Sampling Technique**

The participants were chosen through a snowball sampling technique. An email went out to a group of women whom I did not know well but whose email addresses I had either through work or the university. This original group of women were asked if they knew of anyone who was or had been on a maternity leave or used a flexible work policy who would be willing to share her experience for a doctoral research study. Women in the original group forwarded my address to possible participants who then contacted me if they were interested.

**Selection Criteria**

When a prospective participant contacted me, I advised her of the criteria for study participants. First, she had to have been employed when she announced her pregnancy. Second, she had to have taken a maternity leave or used a flexible work policy and be willing to share her experiences from before she went on maternity leave, during maternity leave, and after her return to work. Third, she had to come from a work environment that was making efforts to support women in their quest to manage home and work responsibilities as evidenced by a flexible workplace policy or practice it offered.
Characteristics of the Sample

According to Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2003), understanding the phenomenon of a lived experience involves studying a small group of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns of relationships and meaning. Thus, I believe that the sample size I arrived at of 9 participants was sufficient. The age of the participants ranged from 28–43. All of the participants were married, although this was not a criterion for participation. I was open to having single mothers as participants. Of the 9 participants, 7 were Caucasian (Olivia, Pam, Casey, Sydney, Tracy, Carol, and Julia), and 2 were from visible minority groups (Grace and Natalie). All were in heterosexual marital relationships. The children of the participants ranged in age from 5 months to 12 years. With respect to vocation, the participants represented 9 different industries: law, finance, education, market research, consulting, advertising, accounting, mental health, and marketing.

Six of the participants (Olivia, Sydney, Tracy, Carol, Julia, and Natalie) worked on a reduced hour flexible work schedule: Olivia, worked 9 months over a 12-month period; Sydney, telecommuted; Tracy, Carol, and Julia worked on a reduced hour part-time basis; and when Natalie was last employed, she was on a reduced hour flexible schedule. The remaining three participants (Pam, Casey, and Grace) worked full-time.

Procedures

All procedures were undertaken with approval from the Ethical Review Board of The University of Toronto.
Recruitment

Upon receiving emails or phone calls from women interested in participating in the study, I phoned each one to determine whether she met the criteria for participation in the study. Once it was determined that a prospective participant met the criteria, we set a time and place to meet.

Instruments

Consent Form

At the beginning of the very first interview, each participant signed a consent form that detailed the interview process, described the measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality, and made it clear that if at any time she was not comfortable she could terminate her participation in the research. A copy of the form is included in the Appendix A.

Interview Process

The three interviews were conducted at a location most convenient for the participant. The meetings took place in either the participant’s home, work, or at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) building at the University of Toronto. Each interview took from 1.5 to 2 hours. The first interview focused on the participant’s career experience until the announcement of her pregnancy. During the second interview I reviewed transcripts of the first interview with each participant. This process allowed for rich, thick descriptions of the participant’s experience that illuminated how this experience affected her reality. Additionally, the second interview involved a discussion of the participant’s experience from the announcement of pregnancy through to her return to work. In this interview I had the opportunity to clarify the bias that I brought to the study with the participant. This self-reflection solidified an open and honest dialogue with the participant (Creswell, 2003). The
third and final interview consisted of a review of the transcripts of the second interview and a discussion of the participant’s current situation at work and at home. The interview questions are included in Appendix B.

**Data Recording**

The interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ permission. The participant could request that the recorder be turned off at anytime. The tapes were transcribed for review by the researcher and then reviewed by the participant.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the interview schedule and the overall viability of the research design. The participant in the pilot study worked in a private school and had insurance benefits and compensation that provided both professional status and job security. A teacher was chosen for the pilot study because the profession is thought to offer strong support for the work and home demands women deal with and also every teacher has the summer off, which is a form of flexible schedule.

The pilot study generated a number of questions around such topics as maternity leave duration, the administration of provisions before, during, and after maternity leave, mother’s emotions around the transition back to work, and support from spouses, supervisors, and coworkers. These questions informed the final research protocol.

**Participant Profiles**

In this section I describe the background of the 9 research participants. Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell et al., 2007, p. 254) “recommends 5 to 25 individuals to develop
the possibilities of experiences.” The choice to utilize 9 participants for this study is well within the range that Polkinghome (1989) suggests.

Each participant’s occupation, career path, age, marital status, number of children, eligibility for participating in the study, maternity leave provisions including employer top-up, if applicable, and access to reduced hour flexible workplace policies is described.

**Canadian Maternity Leave Policies**

Eight of the 9 participants took maternity leave in Canada. At the time of the study, the leave (maternity and parental) was 52 weeks. As mentioned in Chapter 2, federal maternity leave policies in Canada (Service Canada, 2012) entitle mothers to up to 17 weeks of maternity leave and up to 35 weeks of parental leave. Adoptive parents are also eligible for 35 weeks of parental leave. Some women can claim more benefits if they add their sick leave, up to a maximum of 65 weeks of combined sick leave, maternity leave, and parental leave. A woman is eligible to receive all of parental, maternity, and sickness benefits if she has worked for 600 hours in the last 52-week period or since her last claim (Service Canada, 2012).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the basic benefit rate of maternity and parental leave is 55% of a woman’s average insured earnings up to a yearly maximum insurable amount of $44,200, which translates into a weekly maximum payment of $468 (Sadler, 2011). Women whose family income is less than $25,921 a year are eligible for a family supplement that can range up to 80% of their insurable earnings (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007). Employers are not obligated to pay any additional top-up to new mothers who are on maternity and parental leave, however, some organizations will make up the
difference between what the government employment insurance covers and an employee’s regular salary. Five participants, Pam, Casey, Carol, Sydney, and Julia, received a top-up to their salaries from their employer.

In addition to maternity leave, the government of Canada also provides a program to help mothers find caregivers to ease the stress of leaving her children so that she can go to work (Crittenden, 2001). In the early 1990s, there was a shortage of qualified caregivers, so the decision was made to open the doors to qualified foreign workers. The criterion for entry into the country under this program was that these workers have either academic training in Early Child Development or no less than 4 years of work experience (Crittenden, 2001).

It should be noted that one participant, Natalie, took maternity leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in the United States, which provides 12 weeks off work with no salary or benefits. Under the FMLA, the employee has the guarantee that she will be able to return to her job or its equivalent after her maternity leave is over.

**Individual Profiles**

**Olivia**

Olivia, a primary grade level teacher in a private school, was in her first year back from maternity leave at the time of the study. Olivia was 32 and had her first child after working as a teacher for a decade.

Olivia was also the participant in the pilot study. Olivia was chosen because she worked in a predominantly female environment where it was assumed that the themes of supporting women during their pregnancy, maternity leave, and return to work would be highly salient. Olivia was eligible and took the full 52 weeks of maternity leave since she had
been at the school for more than 600 hours in the previous year. While her employer did not offer a reduced hour flexible schedule, she did have the summers off. Therefore, she was eligible for the study as she worked a reduced-hour schedule over the year.

Olivia chose the field of teaching based on a friend’s recommendation. She had wanted to go into the sciences, then began taking some French courses and really enjoyed them. She then switched her major to French with the intention of going into a translation program. A friend of hers was applying to teachers college and suggested she do the same. She began volunteering in different schools and came to love it. “It became a passion for me, she said. Part of the passion she felt had to do with the connection she developed with her students. “I love working with children and I love to see their expressions when they learn something new,” was how she described her career in teaching.

Pam

Pam was an accountant at a mid-size firm. She was 42 years of age and married with two children. She took 8 months off for her first maternity leave and 6 months for her second. Her firm offered employees a reduced hour flexible program, however, Pam did not take advantage of it.

In addition to the benefits of the 52 weeks Canadian government combined maternity and parental leave, Pam’s firm offered to pay mothers on maternity leave a top-up to up to 90% of their original salary for a 6-month period. Pam was not eligible for this benefit for her first pregnancy as she had just joined the firm, but was eligible for her second pregnancy.
Pam’s university degree was in business and finance. Her original career goal was to go into banking, but very few jobs were available. Through a connection she got a job at an accounting firm and then got her accounting certification on a part-time basis. She was working toward becoming a partner in the firm at the time of the study.

Casey

Casey was 38 years old and a law partner at a large downtown law firm. She had two children and took approximately 20 weeks of maternity leave with each. She was a sole practitioner with her first pregnancy and was ineligible for maternity leave payments at that time. With her second pregnancy she was also not eligible for the government leave or employment insurance payments since she was an owner in the law firm. Casey’s pregnancies took place before self-employed women could be covered by government maternity and parental leave salary payments. However, she did receive her partner salary draw and leftover vacation payment that covered her for 20 weeks and served as a “top up” to her salary. Her firm offered a reduced hour flexible workplace program on a case-by-case basis depending upon which practice group a lawyer was employed. Casey, however, chose not to access the program. Although she worked full-time, she was able to leave work when she needed to.

Casey’s firm fit the criteria for the research since it offered emergency day care to its employees. Any lawyer at the firm could bring her or his child to the daycare for the day.

Casey had planned to go to work for the RCMP after university. Meanwhile, she had a friend applying to law school and thought that would be a solid career that she could be proud of. She applied and was accepted to law school.
When she finished law school she articled at a large firm that she did not enjoy. She took a chance and went to work as a sole practitioner. She loved the autonomy and depth of experience she enjoyed being out on her own. The excitement of being on her own waned when clients, including Legal Aid, were slow to pay her. This coupled with juggling a newborn baby and career caused her to look at returning to an established law firm, where she would be paid on time. She left her own practice and joined a large downtown law firm where she quickly became a partner.

**Sydney**

Sydney was 41 years old and worked as a marketing manager for a large consumer goods company. She had two children and took 6 months maternity leave with her first child and 9 months with her second. Her employer provided a “top-up” to the Canadian government provided maternity leave salary payments.

She was eligible to participate in the research study as she worked on a flexible schedule: 4 days a week in the office and then a fifth day split between telecommuting and being off of work.

Sydney began her career when she moved to Toronto to begin law school. The field of advertising had always intrigued her. A few months before the tuition was due for law school, she decided to instead defer it and accepted a job at a small advertising agency. She found her career in advertising and never attended law school.

Having risen to the level of account director, Sydney stayed in advertising through the birth of her second child. She made a choice mid-career to leave advertising due to the pressure it was putting on her family. She actually left her job in advertising without having
another job to go to. A friend called her who was working for a consumer package goods organization and told her about an opening in brand management. Sydney was offered the job and has been employed by this organization ever since.

**Tracy**

Tracy was 35 years old and an account director at a small advertising agency. She was on maternity leave with her third child when she was interviewed for the study and planned to be off of work for the entire 52 weeks of maternity and parental leave. She took 6 months off with her first child and 11 months with her second.

Tracy was eligible to participate in the study because she worked on a reduced hour flexible workplace schedule. Her schedule was 4 days a week full-time at her firm and the fifth day off.

Tracy began her career by working toward her licence as a chartered accountant (CA) at night and selling photocopiers during the day. She described the courses as boring and realized after a few months that this was not the direction she wanted to pursue. She went into sales full time. She went from photocopier sales into pharmaceutical sales, which she loved. After a time, when she was ready for a change, she joined a pharmaceutical advertising agency. She preferred working in an office rather than being out in the field every day. At the time of the study, she was one of two account directors at the advertising firm who reported directly to the owner.
Grace

Grace was a stockbroker at a large bank. She was 34 years old and had two children. She took 5 months off with her first child and 7 months with her second. There was no reduced hour flexible workplace policy offered at her bank so she worked on a regular full-time basis.

She was eligible for the study because her organization offered employees access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a counselling referral service for counselling ranging from psychological to relocation to financial.

Grace spent the beginning of her career working in investment management with a large financial institution. She had a difficult time in those early years, as the people she worked for were highly critical of her work and unsupportive. She finally realized that her skills were not developing as well as they should in that job so she went to work for another broker in the same firm. The new job was a better fit. A few years later, when she needed to reduce the time of her commute to work, she moved to a branch office closer to her home. At this location, her job position remained the same.

Natalie

Natalie was 39 years of age and left her job as a licensed therapist in California when her family relocated to Canada. She was unemployed at the time of the study, as she did not have immigration papers allowing her to work in Canada. She took her maternity leave in the U.S. for her first child where she was eligible for 12 weeks of unpaid leave per the U.S. government Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
She was eligible to participate in the study as she had worked on a reduced-hour flexible workplace arrangement in California.

Natalie pursued a career as a licensed therapist. Early in her career, she was drawn to working in her own African American community. She wanted to make it easier for the African American community to seek out psychological help when they needed it. She made a commitment to work with people who were in both financial and emotional need.

Carol

Carol was 38 years old and worked for a consulting organization. She was married with one child and had just learned she was pregnant with her second child at the time of the study. She took 11 months of maternity leave with her first child and received a top-up from her employer while she was on maternity leave.

She was eligible for the study as she worked 4 full days per week and had the fifth day off. This reduced hour flexible workplace policy was a first for a female partner in her branch of the company.

Carol received her undergraduate degree in Electrical Engineering in Canada and then went to the University of Cambridge in England on an academic scholarship. There she completed a second Bachelor of Arts in Business. When she began her career in consulting she was one of the first non-MBAs that her firm had ever hired. She was first hired by the consulting firm’s office in California and then later transferred to their Toronto office. For the first 3 years she worked in the energy field. In her third year as a consultant, she switched to the manufacturing practice area. This was an area in which her firm had little experience and part of her job was to develop it.
Julia

Julia worked for a large market research firm. She was the youngest participant in the study at 28 years old. She had one son. She took off 7 months of maternity leave and her employer topped up her benefits for 6 weeks at full salary while she was on maternity leave. She was eligible for the study because she worked on a reduced hour flexible workplace schedule of 4 days per week full-time and the fifth day off. Julia said that being able to work on a reduced hour flexible workplace schedule was a privilege.

Julia began her career in market research directly after university. She felt passionate about research and enjoyed analyzing numbers and making recommendations for clients. She has remained in the same organization ever since her career began. At the time of the study, she had recently been promoted and had a staff member reporting directly to her for the first time.
Chapter 4
Results

The research results are organized around the four main themes that emerged from the research. These themes were derived from the central research goal and major research questions that were identified in Chapter 2. The first part of this chapter covers the first research theme of exploring women’s perceptions of the responses in the workplace to the announcement of their pregnancy. This section details women’s perceptions of their managers’ responses to the announcement of their pregnancies such as support or negative reactions. It also includes mothers’ perceptions about how they planned the timing of their pregnancy.

The second part focuses on the second research theme of analyzing the maternity leave process. It begins with detailed information about the access to maternity leave as mandated by the Canadian government. It continues with describing how mothers’ perceive the financial adequacy of maternity leave salary payments beyond what the Canadian government provides. The women discuss their perceptions of how maternity leave policies are administered in their organizations and the challenges they encounter. Also, the participants discuss their perceptions around the type of environment they are able to create at home while they are spending their time on maternity leave and finally, the duration of maternity leave time they will take off to be with their newborn and their perceptions about what goes into their decisions to return to work.

The third part covers the third research theme of identifying and analyzing the various aspects of mothers’ experiences as they transition back to the workplace. In this section, the participants share their perceptions of the conflicts that arise when they transition back to
work and experience their dual role of worker and mother for the first time. Several of the participants mention their perception of being placed in “a mommy mould.” The concept of how these mothers perceive the need to “juggle” their work and home demands is shared as well as the pressure they face at times to put in “facetime” at work or their perceptions of the consequences to their career when they need to “leave work early” to tend to family demands. An important topic of how they perceive their needs for time to take care of themselves is discussed and also how they interact with their spouses to negotiate receiving support to manage their home demands. Finally, the participants share their perceptions of the topic of “opting in” or “opting out” of the workplace.

The last part covers the fourth research theme of understanding how women perceive flexible workplace programs and policies in their workplace. The women discuss how they perceive the challenges in accessing such programs. In addition, they discuss their perceptions of issues that arise with managers such as:

1. how flexible work policies can often be non-transparent in terms of their availability,

2. how there are challenges that arise from managers’ scepticism concerning the use of flexible workplace policies, and

3. how maintaining a reduced hour flexible workplace schedule is challenging.

Finally, participants shared their perceptions on the topic of the lack of female role models for working mothers. This chapter ends with a detailed summary of all of the results.
Theme I: Pregnancy in the Workplace: Women’s Perceptions of Managers’ Responses to the Announcement of Pregnancy and Planning Pregnancy Around Work Considerations

For professional career women, one of the most important questions in choosing a place to work is whether that workplace will welcome pregnant women, mothers with young babies, and mothers with significant family responsibilities. One of the main themes of this study is how women perceived the responses of the workplace to these questions, specifically, their perceptions of managers and coworkers’ responses to the announcement of their pregnancies.

Of the 9 participants, 4 perceived negative responses to the announcement of their pregnancies, one perceived both positive and negative responses, 3 perceived positive responses and the last participant indicated that her supervisor’s response was neutral: neither overtly negative nor positive. The managers’ negative responses left pregnant workers unsure of whether their managers could fairly appraise their job commitment and career prospects. The participants who perceived positive responses described feeling more committed to their work during and after their pregnancies. They enjoyed the support of their managers and their coworkers.

Women’s Perceptions of Managers’ Responses to the Announcement of Pregnancy

Negative Response

Five women (Natalie, Casey, Carol, Olivia, and Grace) perceived that their managers and coworkers greeted their announcement of pregnancy negatively. Natalie and Casey stated that supervisors and peers indicated that they believed that the quality of the women’s work
and their commitment to their jobs would diminish after they became mothers. In Carol’s work as a consultant, she does not have a direct supervisor, however, she perceived that the majority of supervisors and partners in the company were not supportive in general of pregnant women. She perceived that their negative responses were based on their assumption that a pregnant woman is less committed to her work. Olivia and Grace (with her first pregnancy) reported disappointment in the responses of their supervisors to the news of their pregnancies.

Natalie perceived changes in her work climate after announcing her pregnancy. She felt that her supervisors and colleagues expected that her professional drive, productivity, and job commitment would decline with pregnancy and more so with the demands of motherhood. She said, “I think my commitment level was questioned because they worried about who was going to be there to help with clients.” Natalie described a pervasive negative attitude towards her pregnancy and the detrimental effect it would likely have on her professional capacity. She explained:

I think there’s an assumption that the quality of work is going to diminish. But I think if someone did good work before they were pregnant, and went on maternity leave, then they would still do the same quality of work [when they returned].

Casey’s situation was similar to Natalie’s. She spoke about how she was questioned about whether she was committed to staying at her law firm: “I kind of laughed and said, ‘did you realize we just bought a brand new house, of course, I am going to stay [at work]’.”
Carol observed that managers in her company questioned her pregnant coworkers commitment, which led her to be concerned for herself:

There is a subtle shift when people know you’re not going to be around in 6 months. They’re not going to think of you first for something that is sort of a long-term effort.

Carol noticed that other women in the work environment who had announced their pregnancies no longer received long-term assignments. She said that the partners, who knew her work, knew she was committed to it. However, she said, “there are a couple of people who are pretty sexist and I wonder if they question my commitment. But it doesn’t bother me very much.” Carol remarked of the pregnant woman in general, “the more she was working she found that the more she could keep her career on track.” She wanted to safeguard her own work situation from any changes as long as she could. Therefore, because she perceived a that she would be treated differently in that she would no longer receive direct assignments working with clients once she revealed her pregnancy, she withheld the news as long as she could. “I didn’t want people to know… I didn’t want it to affect the way people thought of me in terms of pulling me into client situations,” she said.

Olivia described the disappointing manner in which her director responded to her announcement. “That’s hard for a woman who is pregnant and is so happy to be told, ‘Oh, great, this has happened.’” The words, “Oh, great” were said in sarcastically and the facial expression also indicated a negative response. Olivia explained:

She had to find someone else to replace me. She had to go through all of the trouble to have to do that. It is a young staff at the school and it happens a lot. And because of that it just involves extra work for her on a continual basis.
During Grace’s first pregnancy, at which time she had a different supervisor than she had at the time of the study, she hadn’t anticipated difficulties and had been unprepared for the discouraging response accompanied by a frustrated look. She said, “When I told my boss, I could just see the look.” Grace had tried to convince her supervisor during that first pregnancy that she remained committed to her work: “I just wanted to make sure that he understood that I had every intention of coming back and assuming the same responsibilities or more.”

**Positive Perceptions**

Four women, Grace (with her second pregnancy), Julia, Sydney, and Tracy perceived positive responses from their supervisors to the announcement of their pregnancies. They all reported receiving support from their managers and colleagues. Pam described perceiving a neutral response to her pregnancy.

When Grace announced her second pregnancy, unlike her experience with her first pregnancy, she perceived a positive response. When Grace announced her second pregnancy, she had recently been hired into a new position in a branch office.

I’m basically joining you in January and I have to leave by the end of July. Then I might be off for a year. That’s asking a lot from you. Let me know your thoughts and perhaps we can just chat about it. So she [the boss] e-mailed me back right away and said, “Come on out. We’ve already hired you. I want you to work with me.”

Grace said it was a “nice feeling” to know that she was seen as a valued member of the staff. And furthermore, she perceived that they knew that she was a committed employee, “I think I’ve been here long enough that they know how I work.”
Julia perceived her workplace to be supportive and her supervisor maintained this initial attitude regarding her workplace commitment throughout her pregnancy. She said, “I think, personally, that I feel that I am proving my commitment with the job that I’m doing.” She perceived that the positive attitude of her supervisor dispelled much of the pressure she would otherwise have felt to demonstrate her commitment. She commented, “My boss, before I went on maternity leave, was the one [who said], don’t come back and feel you need to be a star right away.”

Sydney also enjoyed a positive response to her pregnancy, “They were very happy because they knew I had been with my husband for a while and they knew I was thinking about [getting pregnant].” She speculated that her supervisor’s response might have been influenced by the fact that his own wife worked, giving him first-hand experience of the situation of the working mother and her commitment to work. She said:

He has two kids and he used to joke with me about “Oh, you think you’re tired now! You just wait until the babies come.” I found that he was very understanding as his wife always worked.

When Tracy announced her pregnancy to her supervisor she became emotional and began to cry. She said that her supervisor responded with humour, “Isn’t this a good thing?” Tracy described her manager’s overall response: “He was wonderfully supportive of me.”

Pam reported a neutral response to her pregnancy. She said:

There was no unusual reaction to my pregnancy. Women associates went off on maternity leave and male associates had wives who were having children at the same time.
Planning Pregnancy Around Work Considerations

One of the themes around announcing one’s pregnancy in the workplace is the question of how to time one’s pregnancy. Several workplace factors, such as work schedules, career progression, seasonal deadlines, calculating seniority, eligibility maternity and maternity benefits such as unemployment insurance payments, and the assignment of workplace roles all influenced working women’s decisions about the timing of their pregnancies.

For 4 participants, Olivia, Casey, Julia and Grace, their work was a critical determining factor in family planning. They planned their pregnancies to ensure that they would not disrupt their work timelines and negatively affect their careers. Despite their efforts, these mothers reported that becoming pregnant created challenges in their working life. Olivia spoke about the challenges of trying to have her child born during the summer months to coincide with her time off from the school year. Casey’s challenges were described as needing more financial support from her law firm since she was ineligible to receive government unemployment insurance as a self-employed lawyer. Julia spoke about the difficulty of determining when to have a child given the ups and downs of her work schedule. Grace spoke of observing women delay motherhood in order to advance in their careers.

Olivia resolved to plan her next pregnancy to maximize her income, which she had failed to do with her first: “If we have a second child, we would want to time it so that it would hopefully be born in June, or July, or August so at least I would have that summer pay.” This did not constitute as employer “top up” payments as she explained that her employer would pay her salary for part of the summer until she left on maternity leave.
Casey described how workplace considerations such as clients’ 24/7 demands influenced her feelings about family planning. As a sole lawyer practitioner, she could not rely on the regular government-sponsored leave, “The thought of having another child and taking more time off work without any employment benefits instead of UI…that scared me.” For her second pregnancy, she had already moved to a large law firm where she could receive the support she needed during her pregnancy.

For Julia, the timing of promotions or new work assignments influenced her decision about the timing of her pregnancy: “I knew that I really didn’t want to have a family when my job commitment, my career commitment, my career advancement was so peaks and valleys.”

On the other hand, Grace observed the phenomenon of women putting off having children to accommodate career milestones. It could also be described as the competition between work and family. She described a colleague who was postponing, if not foregoing, motherhood because of career considerations: “It’s difficult, like totally difficult. I mean she would ultimately love to get pregnant, but she doesn’t see that happening.” Grace talked about how some women did so much planning trying to time their pregnancies with workplace events that some missed out on becoming pregnant altogether. Grace remarked, “Perhaps [becoming pregnant] was just something they realized they didn’t have the time and the need for because they wanted to achieve [success].”
Theme II: Maternity Leave: Access, Financial Adequacy, Administration, the Experience of Maternity Leave Time at Home, and Duration of Leave

The second major theme describes the women’s perceptions of maternity leave in terms of access, financial adequacy, administration, the experience of maternity leave time at home, and duration of leave. Maternity leave was available to all of the participants except for two. One (Casey) was a partner in her law firm and the other (Natalie) took her maternity leave while living in the U.S. Five of the 9 participants (Pam, Casey, Carol, Sydney and Julia) received a “top-up” of financial support from their employer and four of those five received the payments in addition to government maternity and parental leave salary payments. When asked about the financial adequacy of the terms of employer-sponsored maternity leave, the women responded that many of the provisions were inadequate. When a participant deemed a policy affecting her “inadequate,” it negatively affected her experience of maternity leave. The remaining subthemes of administration, the experience of maternity leave time at home, and duration of maternity leave focused on specific factors such as inadequate administration and communication of maternity policies, both positive and negative experiences of being at home with a newborn, and the pressures some of the mothers felt to shorten the maternity and parental leave that they were entitled to take.

Access

In terms of access to maternity policies, 7 (Olivia, Pam, Carol, Sydney, Tracy, Grace, Julia) of the 9 women stated they had access to the Canadian government maternity leave benefits including salary payments and duration of leave. Two of the 9 participants were ineligible: Casey and Natalie. Casey was ineligible because she was a self-employed partner at a law firm, so could not participate in government maternity salary payments. It should be
noted since Casey’s pregnancies, as mentioned earlier, the Canadian government policies changed to include self-employed individuals. Natalie took her maternity leave while working in the U.S. and was entitled to maternity leave without pay under the U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Only 5 of the 9 participants (Pam, Casey, Carol, Sydney and Julia) had access to the workplace maternity policy commonly referred to as employer “top-up” payments. Casey was not eligible to receive government salary payments as the four others were since she was a partner in her law firm, however, she did receive a salary draw from the firm and vacation pay which constituted “top up” salary payments. Another example of these employer “top-up payments” was in Pam’s case, her employer, “topped up your salary to 90% on top of employment insurance [supplied by the Canadian government], up to 2 weeks per year of service to a maximum of 10 weeks.”

**Financial Adequacy**

In terms of the financial adequacy of maternity leave policies, the participants perceived these workplace policies as inadequate claiming that they did not have adequate financial support during their maternity leave. Participants perceived the provisions to:

1. have overly restrictive eligibility criteria,
2. provide minimal financial support,
3. provide inadequate financial assistance for medical problems during pregnancy, and
4. negatively impact career progression.
In Pam’s workplace, there was a specific eligibility criterion for employer top-up provisions. Women who had been with the company for a specified period of time could qualify. Pam found the company’s provision of the “top up” inadequate because she was unable to access it: “you had to have worked for the company for 2 years prior to going on maternity leave, which is why I wasn’t eligible for the plan.” Pam explained that the employer top-up policy had been developed by a group of employees who had themselves been on maternity leave, and the details of the policy were based on research into the policies of other, comparable accounting and law firms. From her observation, management implemented the policy that the employees put forward without amendment because they did want to take the time to examine it further: “It was a knee-jerk reaction [from management] to the associates putting it forward.”

Casey also judged the maternity policies of her firm to be financially inadequate. She was not covered by the regular Canadian government employment maternity leave benefits since she was a partner in her firm. Therefore, she was left to negotiate with the other partners how much time she would take off and what she would be paid during that period: “Partners are not employees and they’re not entitled to the same employment standards because they’re business owners.” She discussed how she received employer top-up for 17 weeks and then could access her vacation pay. After that period, she did not receive any further payments from her law firm. She described the process as follows:

You can negotiate your leave, 17 weeks, I think, is what you are paid for. If you decide that you want to take another 3, 4, or 5, whatever weeks off, you take it, but it’s without pay. So after you take your maternity leave and then your vacation, you’re on your own.
Julia perceived that her company’s policies had large gaps in that it did not cover illness in pregnancy. She had had a difficult pregnancy, and there was no policy to cover her situation. She was fortunate that her boss was supportive:

I had a very rocky, not rocky—it wasn’t a risky pregnancy—but I was sick the whole time, and he [the supervisor] was so good. I’d used up all of my sick days and he was like, “if you can’t come in, don’t come in.”

Despite the lack of a formal policy framework, her supervisor allowed her time off when necessary and shielded her from the possible negative consequences she may otherwise have experienced.

Carol noted that there was still concern of the effect taking maternity leave might have on a woman’s career: “The women partners said, ‘the best way to take maternity leave is to NOT take one.’” Carol perceived that the women were operating out of fear, “I think they are speaking from fear, of, being afraid it [taking maternity leave] would damage their careers.” Interestingly, the male partners she worked with said the opposite of the female partners: “Don’t worry about anything. We’ll work everything out.”

**Administration**

Both Olivia and Grace described the administration of maternity policies at their workplaces as inadequate. They stated that these policies were not well communicated by human resources staff. The administrators did not explain what was required for a woman to access various provisions, such as what documents were necessary for filing the maternity leave benefit of an unemployment insurance claim or for providing complete information on the timing of when maternity leave would commence.
Olivia perceived that the Human Resources staff made little effort to explain what was available to employees or the specific steps involved in accessing various provisions. She perceived that the administration took minimal responsibility for providing guidance on how she should prepare the necessary documentation to qualify for maternity leave benefits and medical coverage. Olivia explained: “I approached the principal and asked about the paperwork that I needed to fill out relating to my maternity leave and she told me that I was too early and not to worry about it.” She was relieved and focused on her work, secure in the notion that she had plenty of time to deal with the logistics of her maternity leave. She believed the administration would provide the necessary direction closer to her due date. However, on the last day prior to the beginning of her maternity leave, the school administrator came to her with a barrage of questions and information. At this point, Olivia discovered that she would only be compensated for part of her annual salary; she needed to file certain documents in person at a government office; and she needed to pay a premium for her insurance that was triple the amount she had been paying. “I had asked them if there was anything that I need to do before I went off on maternity leave and they said, ‘No, there’s plenty of time. We’ll deal with that later.’” Olivia was confronted at the last minute with a barrage of paperwork that needed to be filed immediately and was overwhelmed: “I was given nothing and that’s what really frustrated me…no information, and then on the last day being called in and [told], ‘Okay, this is what we need to do now.’ It was too much.” Olivia felt that her workplace could do a much better job of letting women know about maternity leave provisions, what benefits they were entitled to, what documentation needed to be prepared, and what the deadlines for receiving maternity benefits would be. She spoke with the director of the school, who is also a mother, about the need to educate women about their
maternity leave options: “I think she [the director] is going to need to be more sensitive to the fact and speak to people [pregnant teachers and staff] before they go off” [on maternity leave].

Grace’s organization provided incomplete information to assist women preparing for maternity leave. She received an information package, but after she reviewed the material twice, she still had unanswered questions. She described the additional information she would have appreciated having:

A timeline of what they needed to make sure that I got my last pay cheque, you know, what I was going to expect during the time when I was on maternity leave, even how to file my paperwork with employment insurance. A timeline, you know, and what they wanted from me when I was going to return. I didn’t know anything. It was almost scary.

Grace found the preparations overwhelming. While the corporate information package provided some direction, she still required assistance interpreting the policies and procedures. Fortunately, the company improved the package and the information available to her for her next pregnancy: “Oh, it was better with my second one, 3 years later…I got more information.” She described another benefit of knowing what to expect: “You just kind of don’t feel so abandoned, that you’re on your own.”

**The Experience of Maternity Leave Time at Home**

The majority of the participants emphasized that they were eager to focus on their family and their new life status while on maternity leave. Tracy, Casey, and Grace described with pleasure how they were able to create a world centred on their new baby. In contrast, Pam described the different experiences she had on the maternity leave with her first child.
compare to that with her second child. Olivia reported that her maternity leave was frequently interrupted by demands from work.

Tracy called her maternity leave a “wonderful time for myself.” She realized she needed to take this time to follow her own pursuits: “I think you have to take time for yourself. Being home with three kids, I’m realizing that more and more, so I have taken quite a lot of time.” She explained, “I have taken time to go away with girlfriends, to the spa, go skiing, and go to New York, and that sort of thing. I think that is what gives me my sanity.” She was also training for a half marathon and found it very gratifying—having the time to devote to health and fitness, on her own schedule. However, she pointed out that she still kept in touch with work and was available by phone when her input was needed.

Casey described her maternity leave as “beautiful.” She used a metaphor to illustrate the competing priorities of work and home and the relief she experienced on maternity leave:

Did you ever have to get two phone lines and they’re both ringing? You unplug one and you only have one line [to attend to]. I honestly felt I could close the door on that part of my life and concentrate on what I had to concentrate on. I know I only had a limited time, but for that period of time, I needed to concentrate on my baby and I needed to concentrate on my family.

Grace, while enjoying her maternity leave, didn’t resent receiving calls from work: “My supervisor would call me every once in a while. That was fine. I didn’t mind.” Grace felt she was still in contact with the organization, yet her privacy was respected:

It was great that I could be accessible and be useful, and it was sort of a reprieve. I mean, you’re almost isolated with your first because it’s such a new experience. It was really nice to hear from [my boss] every once in a while and he came to visit.
However, for the most part, she was given the space she needed to adapt to her new role.

But mostly I think they accepted the fact that I was at home on maternity leave. I was taking care of a new baby…trying to take care of myself, and they gave me the privacy and that room to kind of become a good mother, a new mother, so it was good.

Pam discussed the two very different experiences she had with her first and second maternity leaves. The first leave was very difficult and the second was easier but somewhat “boring.” She said, “The first time around, I didn’t have help and I had a very colicky baby. It was my first child and for the first 2 months, I don’t remember anything.” She did not maintain contact with her work colleagues during her first maternity leave:

I had my daughter on my last day of work and I didn’t think about work again for 8 months because I was so junior. I had ongoing files, but I didn’t care. It just wasn’t the same the second time around.

During her second maternity leave, she was much more confident about her role as a mother.

The second time around, for a number of reasons, it was easier. I had help. I was more confident as a parent. Physically, I bounced back in 2 days. It took me weeks to do so the time before. It was a different time of year. I was outside. The first time it was winter. I never left the house.

Pam went on to describe her changing needs: “Other than the physical things—getting over being pregnant and all that—I was bored and I was spending a lot of time with a 1-month-old who wasn’t talking to me…I wasn’t mentally challenged.” She let work know she wanted to be included while away on her maternity leave: “The second time around I was e-mailing people and keeping in touch. I wanted to know what was going on.”
Unlike the others, Olivia found that her maternity leave was interrupted by calls and demands from her work. She felt that the boundaries of her maternity leave were violated by work demands when her school required her to participate in school functions during her maternity leave: “I thought when you’re off, you are off.” She resented that her school principal asked her to attend training seminars during her maternity leave: “This is a lot for someone to go through when you’re supposed to be off on this wonderful fairy-tale kind of time and it’s not a fairy-tale kind of time.” Since she had not yet arranged for childcare, she took her daughter along to these school events with her: “The meeting wasn’t her [the baby’s] place, and at the same time, I didn’t think it was my place to be there either.”

**Duration of Leave**

One of the important issues for new mothers is the question of what duration of maternity leave is appropriate for them. Mothers ponder whether they should take the full 1-year government sponsored maternity and parental leave or return to work sooner to meet the needs of the workplace. Six of the participants (Grace, Julia, Casey, Carol, Pam, and Sydney) took less than the 52-week maternity and parental leave period with each child. Olivia took the full 52-week period that she was eligible for. Tracy took less than 52 weeks with her first two children and took the full 52 weeks with her third child. Natalie took the full time allotted by the U.S. Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 12 weeks. Grace, Julia Casey, Carol, and Tracy shared their comments on the duration of maternity leave.

When Grace had her first child she took 6 months of maternity and parental leave which at the time was the full government-sponsored leave duration. After the birth of her second child, she voluntarily returned to work after 5 months because she felt pressured by the needs of the busy RSP season:
Oh, it was something that I agreed to do—to come back for RSP season, and for selfish reasons, too. I mean, I wanted to work with my boss and I wanted to be a part of his business. I wasn’t somebody that wanted to stay home and RSP season was a great time to come back….we’re busy with marketing and trying to get people to make their contributions, so it was the right timing.

Julia also returned to work after only 7 months of maternity leave to demonstrate her dedication and commitment to her boss. It came as a surprise to her that her sacrifice was not recognized: “I was very disappointed that he never mentioned a word about my coming back early.”

Casey perceived that taking a year of maternity leave would unduly burden her colleagues:

Someone else has to take on the burden of your practice if you are gone for the entire year. Partners are business owners and not entitled to [the regular] employment standards, so that a year of maternity leave is not part of any law firm’s policies when the person taking a leave is a partner. You negotiate your leave. Anything above 17 weeks you take without pay.

Casey did not want to take more than 20 weeks maternity leave because she was very busy at work. She was being considered for a partnership and she didn’t want to jeopardize that. She was careful not to be seen as she described, “to be stepping out of line.” “You can tell where that line is—I could take quite a bit of time with little resentment—not the case in all departments.” She used expressions such as, “wanting to maintain goodwill” and “not the time to make a political statement and push people about how open they are.” In a demanding and competitive work milieu, she did not want to find out that her legal colleagues were not open to a woman taking what they perceived to be too much time away from the practice.
Carol noted that her colleagues gave her conflicting advice about maternity leave. The men in her office told her to take as much maternity leave as she needed and the women warned her not to take a long leave because it might jeopardize her career prospects. After surveying her organization regarding what would constitute an appropriate duration for maternity leave, Carol decided to take 11 months off. She was the only woman at her level to take such an extended period. Carol described a particular female colleague who “got right back in there and she found that the more she could work, the better, because it just kept her career on track.” Carol reflected on the motivation of the women who cautioned her against a longer maternity leave:

It’s sort of out of fear that said, ‘I have to do it this way. Otherwise it’s not going to work.’ So actually, I don’t think they’re speaking from experience, having tried it and it didn’t work. I think they’re speaking from fear of what might happen.

Tracy talked about how having a staff member gone for a long period can create problems for a small organization and how she did not want to pass on a higher workload to her coworkers:

The 1-year maternity leave is particularly hard on small companies like the one where I work. They haven’t replaced me and that means everybody else has to, kind of, take on some of my workload for a year, because we don’t have enough business to hire somebody at my level. And then, when I come back, what do they do with them?

For this reason, Tracy cut her maternity leave short and came back early after her second child: “The last time that I went on maternity leave, I had to come back early … my boss was like, we’re about to lose these two accounts. You have to come back.” And for her third
maternity leave, she decided to take a full year and was always reachable by cell or email and commented how it was important to continue to give her clients, “good service.”


This theme captures the difficulties the women described in making the transition back to the workplace. Specifically, they described the stark differences between the pace, demands, and deadlines of work against that of caring for a newborn child. In summary, 5 of the women described how they addressed the challenges of leaving their newborns while dealing with the conflicting priorities in the dual role of worker and mother. Some dealt with these conflicts arising from the dual role of worker and mother by separating the work and home environments while others felt that they were less effective in each aspect of the role because they were enmeshed between them. “Mommy mould” is a term used to capture the perception of some the mothers that their workplace opportunities had diminished as a result of their becoming mothers. The women felt that if they needed to leave work early they had to hide this, or add extra hours to their work schedule to put in “face time” at work to compensate. The participants described in detail how they juggled their home and work responsibilities, and reported that as a result they lacked time to take care of their personal needs. The mothers also described the importance of the support of their spouses. Finally, the issue of whether or not to “opt-in” or “opt-out” of work was a topic that the majority of the participants commented on.
Making the Transition Back to Work

Limited Workplace Support for Family Needs

The physical and emotional changes the women experience when they become mothers makes transitioning from caring for a newborn during maternity leave to the routine of work very difficult. The majority of women felt there was little accommodation and few resources to support them in making the transition back to the workplace after maternity leave. Casey, Grace, Pam, Tracy, Carol, and Sydney commented on the difficulties they had making the transition. These focused on:

1. limited workplace support,
2. a sense of isolation,
3. new workplace relationships forged between others in their absence,
4. other workers taking credit for their work, and
5. unrealistic expectations of the workload they could take on with a newborn child.

Casey gave a succinct summary of this precarious transition stage:

People forget that you just had a baby—you don’t get any sympathy. Afterwards, when you come back and you haven’t slept, you are exhausted, and you’re still trying to nurse—they have forgotten about it—like you came back from vacation.

Casey described the limited workplace support available to her to help accommodate family needs. She managed to arrange her schedule so that when she needed to pick up her children at school or had to take one of them to the doctor, she was able to do so without undue anxiety:
I don’t think working here is easy. I don’t think there’s an awful lot of accommodation made…no formal accommodation or very little….That being said, the individuals I work with and the way I’ve structured my practice, and the decisions I’ve made because of where I work have shaped a lot of my views.

Her workplace granted her the some flexibility to accommodate her need to tend to her family, however, management did not want her focus on family needs so much that she would only work part time: “The corporate culture is understanding about things that happen in people’s lives but, at the same time, it doesn’t say, ‘come in and work part time.’”

Grace, too, perceived a sense of isolation and a lack of support during her transition back to work as a result of not being told by her management that there were resources available to support her. She described how differently she would have felt had she been advised of the available resources: “I just think it’s knowing that you have choices and resources are always available to you….You just kind of don’t feel so abandoned.”

Tracy and Carol had difficulty making the transition back to work because new client relationships had been forged in their absence. These arrangements made it awkward for them to assume their former roles because it involved their coworkers’ making difficult adjustments to accommodate their return. Tracy described the reaction of one of her coworkers to the change in her assignments:

So I came back to try to keep us from losing those accounts, and I remember this one woman in particular who—she’s quite young—had been running two of the accounts that are mine. Then I was coming back and she said, “Well, I don’t understand. Does this mean I’m incompetent?” She couldn’t understand why I had to be [back] on these accounts.
Tracy felt the added strain on working relationships: “She was very uncomfortable because she felt she was losing face with her clients.” Carol confronted a similar situation when she returned to work after her first maternity leave and had to give up some of her prior clients. She realized that the company had to ensure continuity in client service:

Because I was gone so long, there were client situations where I had to create opportunities for other people to take my place….when you come back, you can’t just ask them to leave. It’s actually a bit awkward.

Carol also talked about another difficulty she had to deal with in which a manager she had been working for took credit for the time she had spent on a project:

I got my time utilization report and it was negative. I couldn’t figure out why it was negative. It was because this guy took time out from me to justify that he needed more time, and I wasn’t around anyway, so he would take the days that I had booked. It was unbelievable.

Carol, to her credit, did not become unduly upset:

It’s one of those things where it would have been petty of me to complain about it because, in the grand scheme of things, it doesn’t really matter, but it’s just one of those awful things that somebody does…It’s really thoughtless.

Sydney found the return to work after maternity leave so unpleasant that she quit after only 10 months and before she had secured another position: “Nothing I did was ever good enough...and I was with miserable people.” Her manager and coworkers had unrealistic expectations of what she could do during the difficult transition back after the birth of her baby. She found these expectations were putting a great deal of stress on her home life:
It was like this cloud that I would drag into the house with me. I would snap at my kids. I just had a short wick. I would snap at my husband. I was constantly depressed. I was constantly checking emails at home.

**The Anticipation of Leaving a Newborn**

Leaving a newborn to return to work is a major step for new mothers. The majority of the mothers shared the mixed emotions, from joyous to anxious, they perceived about returning to work and leaving their newborn for the first time. Olivia, Natalie, Pam, Casey, and Julia described negative perceptions of what it would be like to reenter the workplace when their maternity leave ended.

During her first interview, Olivia burst into tears as she described leaving her daughter: “Coming back was hard. It is hard to leave the baby. It really is…it’s been tough.” Olivia was distressed about leaving her newborn even though she had the reassurance of leaving her baby with trusted family members. Her childcare arrangement was that her mother cared for the baby 4 days of the week and her mother-in-law for the fifth day.

When Natalie was preparing for the return to work, she experienced many emotions that she did not expect:

> I didn’t expect the heartstrings…I didn’t expect to be pulled when it was time to go back….when I interviewed a nanny, I didn’t expect to cry. I didn’t expect not wanting to leave my baby anywhere. I didn’t. I wasn’t prepared for it.

She also questioned whether she could trust someone enough to leave her newborn in his or her care: “Am I going to regret it? Can I trust my judgment to choose someone who’s going to take care of him and love him in the way that I do, and not have to worry about him?”
Pam expressed mixed emotions about the return to work. She knew how difficult it would be to leave her baby, yet she felt a need to resume her career, “First time around, I was more torn about leaving this child, and at other times, I would feel I needed to go back to work.”

As a result of the difficulties Casey experienced after returning to work with her first child, she was anticipating a dreadful transition back to work after her second. She said: “I knew it was going to be hard to go back whether I came back after 4 months, 6 months, or 8 months. It’s just hard to come back.”

Julia’s anticipation of returning to work was complicated by the added stress of the possibility that she would be transferred to a new position: “Being a working mother was one adjustment that I needed to get through, without having an entirely new job as well.”

**Conflicts in the Dual Roles of Mother and Worker**

One of the frequent discussions mothers have with others and with themselves is about conflicting priorities of being a worker and a mother. Four of the participants (Pam, Tracy, Olivia, and Grace) were able to manage the conflicting priorities effectively while 3 (Casey, Natalie, and Sydney) had difficulty.

The four women who dealt with the role well attributed their success to deliberately concentrating on their duties as a worker by setting clear priorities while at work. In each case, the mothers maintained a clear separation between work and home. Interestingly, each motivated herself differently. Having limited time with her daughter motivated Pam. Tracy used the visualization of wearing different hats to maintain between the two roles. Olivia
used her “love of work.” Grace focused on the pleasures of work, such as learning about new products, having time to read the paper, and connecting with friends at work.

Pam described her schedule when she first went back to work: “My daughter used to go to bed at 6:30 pm. We used to get home and have dinner and have literally 30 minutes with her.” Pam said, “I realized I had to do better.” She changed her work schedule so that she could be home by 6:00 and she learned how to say “no” to managers who asked her to stay later. On her new schedule, she continued to work very hard to demonstrate that she was still a loyal, productive employee: “If I had to work nights or weekends, I had to do it,” she said.

Tracy attributed the ease with which she dealt with being a working mother to the fact that she was able to compartmentalize her work and her family:

I am very good at taking myself out of a situation and adapting to a new situation….at the office, I take off the mother hat and put on the “I’m now an advertising person” hat. Yeah, I think enjoying everything that you do while you’re doing it is really important.

Olivia was also able to achieve a division between the worlds of work and family because of how much she enjoyed being a teacher. When she first became a mother, she was concerned about “losing identity, giving up something that is the core of who you are.” She felt an internal struggle to maintain her work persona in addition to the added responsibility of being a good mother to her daughter;

[It’s] hard because you don’t want to sacrifice anything, you don’t want to lose anything. I wouldn’t give her up for anything, but it is just different. It’s a family life, but I need that real-life workplace too.
But she did struggle to meet the demands of work and family, “It’s hard to balance both—I love being a mom but at the same time I love being a teacher.”

Grace focused on what she loved about being at work. When she returned after her second maternity leave, she was able to establish a productive workplace routine:

One of the things I love—this is so hard to achieve…with a young family—I love coming to work, having my coffee, reading the paper, listening to a conference call, dealing with my friends at work, getting on the phone, learning about a new product or new ideas coming out of the different firms….Yeah, it was just a good place to be.

Casey, Natalie, and Sydney who were more troubled by the conflicting priorities. Casey had difficulty determining where her focus should be and Natalie and Sydney felt that conflicting priorities negatively affected their children.

Casey described troubling thoughts about the competing roles of mother and worker: “I have conflicting views about what my role is and the balancing of life—mother and worker—and being all those different things.” She talked about how her focus was subject to frequent change: “Some days I feel more strongly that I need to focus on the mother role. Some days I feel more strongly that I need to work.”

Natalie described her struggle to pursue a satisfying career while simultaneously fulfilling her role as a mother:

I would have to find a way to have to work less, because my son needs me, you know. And so I’m going to have to figure out how to do that, how to have a career, because it gratifies me in a way motherhood doesn’t, but then, how to be a good mom at the same time.
In her field of social work there was considerable pressure to put in long hours in the evening when clients were available. Her evening work schedule took a toll on family life: “Working in my field, the longer you work, the more you understand the importance of family.”

Sydney perceived that her family life was suffering as a result of the demands of her dual role of worker and mother. Sunday nights were a difficult time for her:

The weekend’s coming to a close and I think, you know, now I’ve got to put on this other persona, that that’s the work me, not the real me, and I wish I could be more the real me.

She felt unable to give her best to her children: “My kids aren’t seeing the real me because the real me is the weekend me, not the stressed out, screaming shrew.” Her anguish had brought her to the point where she was tempted to quit her job:

It goes through my mind probably once a week….Now we’re gearing up for the workweek and it’s, humph, I wonder if I, you know, what would happen if I did that?

“Mommy Mould”

When both Pam and Grace returned to their jobs, they perceived that their managers and coworkers viewed their job performance negatively. Often this perspective comes from the perception that these mothers could not put in the long hours at the job that they did before becoming mothers.

Pam coined the phrase “mommy mould” to characterize this view. She said:

I saw the division, the idea of being pigeonholed somewhere just because of my gender and the fact that I was a parent. I never thought [management] would act that way.
She described her frustration at being stigmatized for not putting in 12-hour days and her feeling that the number of hours she worked was being evaluated instead of the quality of her work. It also seemed to her that the company’s perception was that she could only give a part-time, half-hearted commitment to her work: “Part of it was being a new mother and trying to figure out what the hell I’m doing now.”

Pam returned to work full time after her maternity leave and used vacation days on Fridays or Mondays for the first few weeks to help ease her transition. This practice led to unwarranted assumptions on the part of coworkers: “For 4, 5, 6 years after that point in time, people here still think I work 4 days a week.” It was very frustrating to her that coworkers failed to realize that she had been using her vacation time and assumed that she had gone on a part-time schedule. Pam perceived that her coworkers believed that she had shifted her priorities away from her work and therefore damaged her career:

I’m sure when it came to giving out certain files or assignments, they said, “Well, we don’t want to involve her because she’ll only be here for 4 days a week.” But I wasn’t 4 days a week. It took years for people to get over that. Years!…I couldn’t believe it.

Grace also found that her status as a valued employee and a good performer had been undermined by her absence during maternity leave. After her return to work, two men with less seniority were assigned to attend an important training program instead of her: “I had to fight for my place. I got what I wanted. It had to do with a little fighting, but I did get what I wanted.” Prior to maternity leave, she perceived that she would not have had to assert herself to obtain the necessary training.
The Juggle of Organizing Multiple Schedules and Demands

This subtheme addresses the complex multitasking that mothers do to organize the competing demands of work and home. Achieving this degree of organization in one’s life requires the coordination of both working parents’ schedules and the management of conflicting priorities. Six participants commented on the “juggling” phenomenon. Sydney, Casey, and Tracy were able to manage multiple schedules fairly well, unless a work crisis, a sick caregiver, or a child’s illness turned the carefully crafted routine into many priorities that needed to be addressed at the same time. Sydney coined the term “juggling,” for example, to describe what happened if her caregiver called in sick: “the juggle began.” Casey talked about when the carefully planned schedule crafted with her husband changed because something came up that required immediate attention. Tracy spoke of being pulled in too many different directions. Olivia, Grace, and Pam talked about their need to be extra organized and efficient to manage the conflicting priorities and multiple schedules in their lives.

For Sydney, “juggling” became a way of life. She described a typical scenario:

I would say in the 2 years she [her caregiver] was with us, maybe 10 times, I got a call from her boyfriend [at the last minute], “Katie can’t make it today” and it would be “Oh, God”—then the juggle began.

Crisis management and contingency planning became a way of life. Sydney found it particularly difficult when her caregiver went on vacation:

We had to beg, borrow, and steal to get our daughter in an after-school program. But my husband and I are juggling, “Okay, today I’m doing drop-off. You get to do pick-up. Tomorrow I’ll do drop off, or I’ll do pick-up and you do drop-off.”
There were other contingencies to juggle as well:

So it’s going to be a mismatch for the next 3 weeks, and then microwave dinners, and a lot of leftovers, and cooking on the weekends so that we’ve got meals.

Sydney felt all the necessary pre-planning to meet demands of their busy lives was draining.

There have been some things on the personal life…you know, in terms of lack of sleep, lack of freedom, and lack of flexibility, just sort of to do something spontaneous and go out to dinner that night or to a movie. No, you’ve got to get a sitter. And all the handcuffs it places on you.

When her first child arrived, Casey described how well she and her husband worked together to coordinate their work schedules with the pick-up deadline at their son’s daycare. Her husband’s job was more flexible than hers so he could almost always pick up their son, however, there were those phone calls:

“I can’t get out. Can you?” And I’d have to zip out. Like basically go downstairs, grab a cab, go to daycare, pick up my son, bring him home…wait for 10 or 15 minutes. By then my husband would be out of his meeting. He would be home. I’d take the car and come back to the office.

Things got more complicated, however, with the birth of their second child.

He was only in daycare for a little over a year when we finally had to get a nanny. We just couldn’t do it anymore. It was too crazy. You had to be there no later than 6:03 or you had to [pay]. It was $10 a minute. It was really expensive and we were just routinely spending $30 or $40 every night to pick-up our children.
Tracy described how she strove to achieve an ideal juggle of her home and working life:

Before I knew I was pregnant with number three, I was sitting at my desk and I had a nanny taking care of things at home. Everything was organized. I felt like my husband and I had our lives back and I really did feel like I had the best of all worlds then because I worked 4 days and had 3 at home with the kids, so everything was great.

Her third pregnancy changed all that: “Then, before I gave birth I had no balance at all. So I just felt like I was pulled in too many directions, probably not doing anything particularly well.”

Olivia, Grace, and Pam described how they worked hard to organize the converging schedules of husbands and children. The challenge to be organized to meet multiple schedules caused these participants to become very efficient in managing their time.

Olivia described how organized she had to be to get everything accomplished—preparing her classes, marking her papers, and home responsibilities such as making meals, her daughter’s school lunch for the next day, keeping the house clean, and doing the laundry. It was a daunting feat of logistics: “I’m already thinking ahead because I have to be super organized. If I’m not organized, then I know I’ll fall flat on my face and I can’t let that happen.”

Grace described having her life scheduled down to the minute,

From the moment I sat down, to the moment, I left I was hard at work. I put in a lot of time to do my job and do it well, so it wasn’t hard for me to say I’m packing up and leaving at 5:00.
This degree of organization and time management was necessary:

It just made life more easy and again there were two people to think about. There was my husband and my daughter. She had to be picked up and I wanted to see her. I didn’t want to just go home, spend 20 minutes with her, and then bathe her and put her to bed. But there were some times, there were a lot nights like that—that was all I could do. Everything had to be scheduled; everything had to be organized. If I was going to be late, that was in the book.

For Grace, transferring to an office closer to her home helped her maintain her tightly organized schedule and juggle when an unexpected crisis occurred. She said:

One of the reasons why I love being in this office versus downtown is that everybody in this office has family and they live and work in this area, so to be 10 minutes away from the office is an asset. If I need to go to a doctor’s appointment with my son, I can do that and come back.

Pam talked about the hours in her day:

There are only 24 hours in a day. I sleep and work for 8 and the rest are for my husband and kids. I can’t do much about them. I guess I could. I could work less or sleep less, but I’m not going to do that.

Pam knew she had to be very organized and strict with her time priorities.

**Leaving Work Early**

Demands on the home front, such as children’s appointments, school commitments and unexpected emergencies, arise that require working mothers to leave work during the workday. Pam, Casey, Sydney, and Tracy perceived that supervisors and coworkers judged them negatively when they had to leave work to address family demands.
Pam made a choice after her first child to leave the office at 5:00 p.m.: “The year after my maternity leave I focused on my education and family and was out the door [at work] by 5:00 p.m.” However, she perceived that this choice affected how her coworkers responded to her: “If you have been there since 7 and they come in at 9, and they haven’t seen you, then if you leave at 5, you are seen to be leaving early.” The time she spent in the office seemed to be more important to how she was perceived than how productive she was. She, for example, often took work home and worked late into the evening to ensure that she fulfilled her work responsibilities.

Office hours were so important in Pam’s accounting firm that managers and coworkers often made critical comments when she left for the day, such as, “Oh, you’re leaving early” or “Hope you’re taking work home.” The implications were clear to her—their perception was that her reduced hours connoted a reduced commitment and contribution to the firm. Even when the comments were made in jest, she felt their resentment was genuine: “They were jabs, but you know it’s the truth.” She felt that not only her working hours, but also her entire future with the company was under scrutiny. She was frequently asked, “When are you going to have a second child?” And it appeared to her that there was a tacit assumption that another pregnancy would mean that she would cease working altogether. In her view, her coworkers wanted to confirm whether or not they could count on her in the future.

Casey’s experience was similar. In her firm, long hours were an indicator of diligence: “There is a perception for some that if you are leaving early you are slacking off.” She perceived that the senior lawyers and partners needed to see workers at their desks to determine whether they were doing their fair share: “If a person says, ‘I’m going to leave at
5:00 everyday regardless of what is going on,’ that’s never going to fly.” In the culture of her organization, less time at the office could be perceived to reflect a cavalier attitude, and, as such, would have a negative effect on advancement. Casey was also commented on the comments she received: “We don’t need the snide comments when you’re walking down the hall and someone says, ‘Oh, leaving early.’ Even if they’re joking, we don’t need it.”

Sydney had a similar experience for the few weeks her caregiver was away. She had to leave the office at 4:30 to be at her child’s daycare before it closed. She said, “I’m tense already,” anticipating her supervisor’s disapproval:

I’m just going to try and go, and hope he doesn’t notice, and I’m wondering if a lot of other working moms feel this way.

Sydney was also concerned about management’s perception of working mothers:

I don’t want to be seen as a liability—[My boss may wonder] why do I have a working mom on my team when I could just get some single guy?

She perceived that part of the problem was that her boss was a workaholic with no children of his own. She questioned his capacity to comprehend the complexities of her situation: “I don’t know if he would understand the challenges of working moms today.” And she worried that his lack of understanding would negatively affect her career progression.

Tracy commented that women who work reduced hours strive to prove themselves in the workplace. She referred to the dilemma she experienced, whether to reproach herself for neglecting her children or her work:

The guilt about leaving the kids early, and leaving work early—and if you leave work early, are you showing commitment? So it seems that there is a lot of effort and energy spent around proving that you’re committed.
“Face Time”

Casey, Pam Tracy, and Sydney described the pressure to be constantly present at their workplace to demonstrate their commitment to their jobs. One participant defined this demand of workers as “face time.” Examples of face time can be coming in early, staying late, or coming in on the weekends. Casey perceived that she was required to put in face time, Pam observed that face time facilitated promotions, Tracy said face time helped her career before she became a mother, and Sydney commented that face time was essential in her workplace’s culture.

Casey’s firm required that one put in face time to prove one’s commitment as a loyal employee to the law firm. She described her thoughts:

> It’s harder when you feel you have to be here…do face time, and prove yourself. But you are 3 years out, and have a new baby at home. It’s hard, really hard.

Casey realized when she joined her firm that she needed to put in face time to establish her equity. She was fortunate that her husband accepted this reality: “It wasn’t like he had any illusions that I’d be coming home at 6:00 for dinner.” She subsequently worked out a schedule with her husband whereby he would cover pick-up and drop-off times at daycare so that she could devote the necessary time to her practice. She knew it was important in her firm to establish a reputation for being available, for putting in the extra hours.

Pam observed that workers who put in face time received promotions much faster within the organization than new mothers who found it impossible to put in longer hours at this stage in their careers. Pam expressed her concerns: “It is a physical presence at work that is important. Why do I need to be here at 6:00 at night when there is nothing to work on?”
She went on to say: “People [single men and women] in this organization have leapfrogged over me.” She felt their work was evaluated by the number of hours they put in, not by their actual productivity: “Sometimes I think, in this business that you’re judged by your quantity rather than your quality, and I just think that’s wrong.”

Tracy described a face time strategy she had executed at work before she had children. As a result of the long hours she put in, when she did access a reduced-hour flexible schedule, she had already established a reputation with her supervisor as a committed member of the team. She said:

I mean, I was always there at 7:30 [a.m.] in an industry where nobody started before 9:00, just because I was so keen when I went into advertising. And I was always there until whatever time at night. So he knows that I’m a hard worker and I don’t have to prove that to him anymore.

Even as a working mother, Tracy was still careful to cultivate the impression that she was putting in long hours of the all-important face time, at least in the morning:

In my office, I’m lucky nobody waltzes in the door until 9:00, so I just have to be there at 8:30, and I’m the keen person who’s there early, which is great. I do leave at 5:30.

Therefore, the hours Tracy put in and the fact that she was “seen” at work demonstrated to her supervisor that she had a “strong work ethic.”

In a prior job, where Sydney worked 4 days in the office and telecommuted from home on Fridays for half the day, she perceived that her coworkers and managers could not accept that she really was working when she was out of the office. She simply was not putting in enough face time. She said:
People would see me leaving and say, “Have a good day off.” I’d look at them and say, “I’m working from home.” Some people wouldn’t call me. They’d say, “I didn’t want to disturb you.”

She had to go to great lengths to prove to her coworkers that she was indeed working at home on those Friday mornings. She said that she would make a point of responding to routine emails, if only to convince coworkers that she was busy at her home computer. She described the face time culture of that workplace:

It was stupid, and it was just—you had to prove that, you know, I wasn’t sitting there watching Oprah all day. I’m working! It was just that mindset, that it was so hard to explain, or for them to accept it. But perception is reality, right? You’re not in the office: you’re not working.

**Surviving the Zombie Years: The Need for Self-Care**

The frantic pace the mothers kept up to meet the demands of work and home often resulted in their neglecting their own needs. Casey, Sydney, Pam, and Natalie reported that while they were successfully juggling work demands and meeting their family’s needs, they were neglecting their own needs. Natalie, who was not working in Canada, described her experience when she was on a reduced-hour flexible work schedule working in the U.S. All of the women described feeling exhausted and pulled in too many directions. All four came to see their own needs more clearly and to feel more able to express those needs, such as by requesting an alternative schedule and feeling less guilty about carving out time for themselves. Casey and Natalie reported that they did not take time for themselves until something at home or at work occurred to make them realize that the lack of self-care was affecting their well-being. On the other hand, Sydney and Pam described finding time for themselves as a priority.
Casey coined the phrase, “zombie years.” She realized that attempting to do everything both at work and at home was not allowing her to take care of herself,

I had this mentality during that whole time that not taking care of yourself was okay because it meant that you were stronger, and a better mom, and a better worker, and a better wife. You haven’t done anything for yourself, then you’re really just going through the motions, and I do think for a lot of years, that I call the “zombie years,” I have few recollections of anything because I was just doing stuff.

This level of self-sacrifice was difficult for her to sustain: “I got really depressed and I really had trouble functioning and…I really had to make…some changes in my life.” She had come to an important realization: “I really believe that if you don’t take care of yourself, you’re completely useless to other people and your children don’t benefit.”

Sydney used her half-day off to take some time for herself:

When you are a working mom, the first thing you sacrifice is your own time. I use that half day to grocery shop, meet a friend for lunch, or get a massage, and then be home early enough to be with the kids.

Sydney’s half-day to herself during the week enabled her to spend more time on the weekend with her family.

Pam talked about making it a priority to find personal time every day, even if it was during the train ride to work, or sitting in the carpool lane, or while preparing dinner. She managed to squeeze in a short break while commuting: “I take 30 minutes on the subway to read, to escape the multitude of things that are happening around me.”
While working on a reduced hour flexible workplace schedule in the U.S., Natalie described why she needed to be on a reduced-hour working schedule:

A 15-minute nap at the end of the day didn’t work anymore. I needed to know that I had a day to look forward to—that I could do whatever I needed, or whatever I wanted.

When she was finally able to gain management’s agreement for her to adopt a 4-day week, the change in her attitude was immediately apparent: “People were happy for me because I think I was happier as an employee.” There were other benefits, of course, and she enjoyed having more time to spend with her son. There were also profound changes in her outlook: “Your life doesn’t have to be perfect, but it has to be manageable in order to take care of someone else.” Natalie found she had to work extra hours during the rest of the week to maintain her Mondays off, but the benefits of that day off far outweighed the burden of any extra hours she needed to put in.

**Support from Spouses**

The majority of the participants spoke about the need for support from their spouses, and help with childcare. In this study, even when husbands took on defined childcare tasks, the lion’s share of the household tasks (such as preparing dinner, making lunches for the next day, or helping children with homework) and organization (such as buying birthday party presents, keeping the social calendar, or arranging for children’s extracurricular activities) clearly fell on the women’s shoulders. Seven of the participants (Natalie, Casey, Julia, Pam, Olivia, Tracy, and Sydney) described how the subject of dividing up domestic duties arose and how each couple ended up dividing the work.
Natalie explained that combining work and family is complex for both working parents:

You do need to accept the fact that if it’s a two-career family, somebody’s going to have to take on more of the responsibility of kids. If you have kids, it’s almost impossible to share everything 50–50.

When Natalie and her husband were first married, the couple focused on her career goals at the expense of his. She was grateful that he had made this sacrifice:

When I wanted to get licensed, he told me that he wouldn’t advance his career because that meant moving to East Coast. We didn’t do it.

How the couple defined their respective roles was particularly important to Natalie since she had to overcome the strong gender role messages about “how women should be” that she had received while growing up. She wanted her husband to know that she wanted something different for herself:

I rebelled against the message I got about women—to cook and clean. I negotiated with my husband when we got married who would clean and cook, and when, et cetera, and we kept to this agreement until his career took off.

Casey and her husband made her career primary so that she could focus on her work when she left her own practice to join a large firm. Casey’s husband was prepared for the effect this would have on their home life: “It wasn’t like he had any illusions that I’d be coming home at 6:00 at night for dinner.” She described their supportive relationship:

I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that none of this would have worked but for my husband, because people say, “How do you do it?” Well, I don’t do it. We do it, and it’s amazing.
Casey attributed the success of their arrangement to their different career aspirations.

As I got more comfortable here, and I got more interested in what I was doing, I actually became much more ambitious about making partner and staying here and creating a practice here. At the same time, my husband—he was very happy staying where he was and being an in-house counsel. He wanted more family life. He really did want to come home at 6:00.

Another factor that made their relationship work was their ability to deal with stress without becoming hostile to each other:

Like we had some crazy things like juggling and that. I don’t think we were ever put at odds, like we never fought about it....If something went wrong, it was a problem we both had to deal with. It never became a source of a fight between us.

In fact, they found some creative solutions to cope with her long hours: “We celebrate birthdays by having chocolate cake for breakfast.” This ritual ensured that she was part of the festivities, since leaving the office promptly at the end of the day could pose a problem: “Most times I do make it home for dinner, but I don’t have that stress, and my husband doesn’t have that stress, ‘Am I going to make it home in time?’”

Julia’s husband was the only one in the study who had taken parental leave to stay at home with the baby when she returned to work after maternity leave. The comfort this provided her was invaluable. However, she found that others in their community had a difficult time relating to a man who had left the traditional male role to be at home with their baby while his wife went off to work. She said:

When he took parental leave, it was pretty wild—the reaction we got, like amongst his family and in our church. It’s just not heard of.
He was very supportive of her career and would even have liked her to work longer hours.

Early in their relationship, Julia set the tone for her career:

> When we were in university, he knew what kind of career path I was on, so that was never really a discussion. And even probably he’d prefer if I was working 5 days because of money. He has no issues with that…like we’ve never talked about, “You should stay home” or anything like that.

Pam’s husband’s schedule enabled him to help out with the children’s after-school activities, giving Pam that time to focus on work:

> His job has always been much more flexible than mine because he works for a computer company. His company was always, “As long as you’re doing the work, we don’t care where you do it.” Whereas I…had to be here.

Their relative workplace flexibility influenced how they divided family tasks: “He probably has more responsibilities with the children and I’ve had more responsibilities with the household.”

Olivia described the adjustment period she and her husband went through when their daughter was born and how they divided household tasks. She commented:

> He thought it was going to be easy. He thought that it would be fine, that everything would get done. He was home with me for a couple of weeks, and he was overwhelmed himself, and he realized that it’s okay, that not everything has to be done at a certain time and on a certain schedule.

Having both been home with the baby helped them determine how they would share parenting: “We kind of work together to make things happen in the household.”
Tracy assumed the primary role with the children and she was able to accept what her husband could contribute: “We don’t parent 50-50. He helps out a little bit, but that’s it.” She described his approach:

He would never think of making dinner. You know, it would be Swiss Chalet or something like that. I mean it’s just a different way of parenting because he doesn’t think, okay, make sure that the kids eat properly. You know, that’s kind of my role. His role is okay, so I got the kids today, so I’m going to order Swiss Chalet.

Her husband viewed his role with the children as less demanding than she viewed hers: “It’s just a different way of parenting. Going out of town, you know, he doesn’t feel guilty leaving the family. It sounds awful to say. He’s the dad, so of course he is a primary caregiver, but he’s not the day-to-day, second-to-second. He’s more a month-to-month type of person.”

Among the participants, Sydney expressed the most disappointment that she and her husband did not divide up the household tasks. She felt the responsibility of her children fell primarily on her shoulders and she was disappointed that she couldn’t rely more on her husband’s help. Matters came to a head one day when they were both home working and one of their children was sick. It became clear to her that he assigned childcare solely to her. He was unaware of his attitude until Sydney pointed it out:

You tell me on the one hand you want me to be a working mom, or you want a working wife, but yet, how am I supposed to get things done when you’re just assuming that, just because we’re both home, I’m the one who will take care of our child?
Sydney summed up her feelings about her disproportionate share of the parenting responsibility:

I don’t know how many birthday parties our kids have been to in their short lives. I don’t think he has ever been to one of them. It’s always been me to … buy the gift, wrap the gift, make sure the kids get to the party on time, either stay, or go away, and then come back and pick them up. He’s never had to do that.

She summed up their respective roles: “We’re very much that classic couple. … The woman still does about 80% of the childcare.”

“Opting in or Out” of the Workplace

Tracy, Sydney, Grace, Casey and Pam discussed the choice of “opting in” to remain at work on either a full-time or reduced-hour basis or “opting out” of work following the birth of their children. They described their perceptions in considering the following, if they opted out:

1. whether they would have difficulty living on one pay cheque,
2. whether they could find a commensurate job after a long absence from the workplace, and
3. whether they could find a job with a company that offered commensurate flexible work policies.

Despite the challenges, Tracy, Sydney, Grace, Casey, and Pam asserted that remaining in their present jobs, or opting in, was their best course of action either because of financial considerations or because they wanted to work. After so many years of working, Natalie was the only participant who opted out of work to stay at home with her son when
she and her husband relocated to Canada. Even though she did not work because she was ineligible to receive a work visa in Canada, she and her husband had planned that she would focus on the family while he focused on his career. She explained, “That is why I am content with being here (in Toronto) because it’s his turn (to focus on his career).”

Tracy shared her fears about what it would be like to opt out of her working life. Her overwhelming fear was that she would sacrifice her career and then find herself adrift:

One of my biggest fears is to be one of those women who give up everything for their children and then, you know, 5 years later, the kids are all at school and my career would be—you know. If I took 5 years off, I would not have the career I have now. I mean, I couldn’t step back into it. And I’ve seen people who kind of feel they’re fish out of water because they’ve given up everything to their children and then they start resenting that.

She felt torn between her former life and her new life as a mother:

Part of my personal identity was the life I had before I became a mom. I spent 32 years becoming the person that I am, and then you have these wonderful children, but, you know, your instinct says give up everything to give everything to them.

Her fear of surrendering part of her identity and uncertainty about her future career prospects if she did opt out ruled out taking a hiatus from work. She decided to return to the workplace after maternity leave: “I’m going back to work. Not because I have some burning desire. I mean I enjoy what I do, but…to keep all the options open.”

Sydney had a very strong desire to opt out of work so that she could be at home with her children, however, at the time of the interview, she had decided to return to work. “I do want, at least all the while they’re young and in elementary school, I do want to stay at
home,” she said. She thought about opting out of work every day, every time she left for work: “This is what I battle with almost daily, is if I’m sure…the answer is “yes” [I want to opt out]. However, she worried about the negative effect even taking a short break could have on her career:

If I had a crystal ball and if I could see that, you know, I’ll take 5 years off and I’ll reenter the workforce, and get a job, and land on my feet. But it’s the not knowing, and the world moves so fast. Technology and the younger generation are working against me.

She felt her age was a real impediment to her prospects of re-entry: “I am almost 42. In 5 years, who is going to hire a 47-year-old?” She felt that if she were 10 years younger, it would be less risky: “If I took a couple of years out, you know, I’d only be 35, 36 getting back in rather than 45, 46, 47.”

Part of Sydney’s concern about taking a longer break from work comes from her observations of a fellow colleague. This woman had taken a break from her career to be home with her children, then had a difficult time getting back into the workforce: “She’s about 45ish and her girls are 14 and 11, and she was off work from about, oh boy, 1990 to recently.” The woman had spent years attempting to reenter the workforce with disappointing results: “It was menial job, after menial job, after menial job, or she’d be juggling three part-time jobs.” While qualifications also played a part, age was a major factor: “There is a perception that someone who is 50 is not keeping up with the times.” She knew of a much younger woman who left her industry for 3 years, returned to the workforce in her mid-30s and, according to Sydney, “didn’t miss a beat.” However, for Sydney, even a brief hiatus from working life was too risky.
One of the reasons Sydney wanted so much to opt out of work was so that she could volunteer at her daughter’s school, where she longed to become involved:

It frustrates me when I see the newsletter from my daughter’s school [call] for volunteers and I don’t want to sign up because I know I can’t commit.

Volunteering at the school would demand an investment of time that she was unable to give:

I don’t want to get myself into something and find myself at 2 in the morning attending to it, because I made the commitment and I want to get it done, but in reality, no, I can’t.

Grace described her reason to opt-in and remain employed on a full-time basis as being able to maintain her family’s lifestyle. She explained:

In the next…15 years I’m going to have to educate my children and we just don’t sit at home. We always like to go out; we like to eat out; we like to take trips. So there’s a lot of financial responsibility just to have that livelihood that we want. So yes, there is a fear…because if I didn’t have this job and earn the living that I am, then I think our family life would sort of be misplaced for a while.

Casey discussed why she opted to stay at work. She lost her father when she was very young and this seemed to have left her with a fear of financial insecurity. Casey described her financial fears:

I don’t mean not having enough money to take vacations or cars. I mean not having enough money to buy food and pay the mortgage and pay the rent. That’s always been a fear of mine and that was what I was afraid of. [We were] going to lose our house, and we never got to that situation. We were never desperate, but I think about it now.
She had more security at the job she was in at the time of the study, yet she still harboured these fears:

I’m not ridiculously careful with money, certainly not anymore, but I don’t take for granted for one minute that the way we live now is the way we’ll always live or that something couldn’t happen so I really do like to have financial security.

Pam wanted to leave the job she was in at the time of the study and find one that would be more conducive to her meeting work and home responsibilities. However, she had looked for a new job and been unable to find a more supportive work environment: “I’m not sure I want to go somewhere else because my competitors in the marketplace aren’t any different…than here.”

Given the difficulty of finding a more congenial employer, Pam talked about opting out to set up her own business. But self-employment presented another daunting set of challenges. Pam described her thoughts: “I think the next step is to leave here and go out on my own—that’s what I’m scared to do.” Pam described the pros and cons of starting her own business:

I need the security of money and the work. If I’m out on my own, then I might have more control of my hours. I don’t have to deal with the problems, the issues, I face here. If I’m happier in my day-to-day work, I’ll be happier in my day-to-day life.

Fear of the unknown kept her in her job despite her unhappiness and the lack of appreciation from the firm for her work.
Natalie was the only participant who, at the time of the study, had decided to “opt-out” of work to stay at home and care for her son. She and her husband had recently moved to Canada from the United States, and she was waiting for a work visa. She was content, as she had been feeling a need to work less to spend more time with her son while they were living in California. “I thought I would have to find a way to work less because my son needs me and so I’m going to have to figure out how to do that.” Moving to Canada provided her with an opportunity to be at home.

**Theme IV: Flexible Workplace Policies: Access; Issues with Managers: Lack of Transparency in Flexible Workplace Policies, Mothers’ Perceptions of Manager’s Scepticism, Maintaining Reduced-Hour Flexible Workplace Schedules; and Lack of Female Role Models for Working Mothers**

The fourth major theme concerns the participants’ perceptions of the challenges accompanying the use of the flexible workplace programs. These difficulties include the following:

1. access to programs,

2. issues with managers: non-transparency of flexible workplace policies, managers’ scepticism and maintaining reduced hour flexible workplace schedules, and

3. lack of female role models for working mothers.

**Access**

In terms of access to these policies, 8 of the participants (Olivia, Carol, Natalie, Pam, Casey, Tracy, Sydney, Julia) had access to some type of flexible work policy or practice. Six of the mothers took full advantage of the policies, but 2 (Pam and Casey) chose not to
because they were concerned that to do so would affect their career prospects negatively. Grace (the ninth participant) was the only participant who had no access to flexible workplace programs in her workplace.

Of the 6 participants who did decide to access the available flexible work programs (Olivia, Sydney, Tracy, Natalie, Carol, and Julia), it should be noted that Olivia, a teacher, worked full-time over the 9 months of the school year. On an annual basis, she was considered to be working on a reduced hour flexible basis, even though her school did not offer any flexible work arrangements for teachers. In addition, while Natalie was unemployed in Canada, she did work on a reduced hour flexible schedule when she worked in the U.S.

Six participants (Carol, Natalie, Julia, Pam, Casey, and Grace) shared their perceptions regarding the accessibility of reduced hour flexible workplace programs. Carol, Natalie, and Julia, who were on flexible workplace programs, shared positive comments about their workplaces’ policies. Pam and Casey, who did not work on a reduced hour flexible workplace policies, shared their observations of the negative consequences to others’ careers as a result of taking advantage of such programs. Grace shared her comments that her workplace did not even offer flexible workplace programs.

Three out of the 6 (Carol, Natalie, and Julia) had a positive experience accessing their flexible workplace programs. Carol’s manager encouraged her to take on a flexible work schedule when she returned to work after her maternity leave: “I had a conversation with the office manager who actually said, ‘Come back part time instead of full time’.” Natalie spoke about how lucky she was that in her workplace unit all of the employees were able to access flexible workplace programs. She remarked that all the employees at her firm should be able
to access flexible workplace programs: “Yeah, [flexible workplace programs should be] available to everyone and not just for someone who’s lucky enough to be on a unit like the one I was on.” Julia’s company had a flexible workplace policy in place that was available to all employees. As Julia said: “I knew the 4-day work week was available and it was made available to [all employees].” She commented that it increased her loyalty to the organization: “I have been loyal because I knew a 4-day work week was available.”

In contrast, Pam and Casey had a negative perception of how others experienced flexible workplace policies. Pam described it as a “battle” that she observed coworkers fight in order to access the programs. She said: “There’s a battle here and there’s a battle in society, and in the working world [for access].” Pam received mixed messages from her organization. In principle, the organization supported women making the choice to access flexible workplace programs. But she found this hard to believe. She said: “Management gave me two sets of comments. Lip service—we are a company that stands behind our people—but no one believed it.” Casey also received mixed messages about accessing flexible workplace programs. She observed reduced-hour flexible schedules being made available to mothers, yet, those mothers who adopted the schedules had not fared well: “Only two women were here part time. One has since left and the other went back to full time.”

In Grace’s case, working full time was the only option available to women in her workplace. “Specifically, part-time, flex-time, job sharing, and daycare are not available to us in this industry.” She commented that the financial industry failed to offer flexible workplace program options that could help assist family needs: “I’ve chosen career-wise where the choices that we [female employees] have available to us was [sic] almost nothing [in terms of] assisting us with family responsibilities,” she said.
Issues with Managers: Lack of Transparency in Flexible Workplace Policies, Mothers’ Perceptions of Managers’ Scepticism, and Maintaining Reduced-Hour Flexible Workplace Schedules

Lack of Transparency in Flexible Workplace Policies

Three of the 6 participants who accessed flexible work programs found that the administration of the programs lacked transparency. Carol, Tracy, and Julia described being instructed to keep silent about their use of flexible workplace programs. This created a workplace environment that was suspicious and resentful toward those accessing the programs. The participants could not inform their coworkers of their flexible workplace arrangements, which created difficulties for them.

Carol carefully planned her work schedule so that she was out of the office on Mondays and the circumstances of her workplace allowed her to keep the arrangement quiet:

Schedules are so crazy and wayward in the office everyday….I’ve done it in a way that it doesn’t really become a burden to people. So I took Mondays off and what I find is, most of the time, people don’t even notice because they’re working on their own things on Monday, and then they don’t get going until Tuesday, and then I’m there the rest of the week.

Tracy described two situations where management requested she be silent about the flexibility she was allowed. The first was when she was particularly concerned about the reaction of her clients when they discovered that she took every Friday off. She commented:

My clients don’t know I work 4 days a week. If a client said, “Let’s meet Friday,” I’d suggest Tuesday, and if Friday was the only (possible) day, I would come in. But I wouldn’t go out of my way to say, “I’m supposed to be home with my son.” It [the subject] just never came up.
She struggled to maintain her ability to use the reduced schedule. To do so she was willing to override it when client needs became a priority: “When you are in a client service position … you put on your ‘game face’ and give good service.” The other situation occurred when she was interviewing for a new job. She described the circumstances of a job offer she received while she was on maternity leave:

I was interviewing with a pharmaceutical company who offered me part time. They said, “We can’t put it in writing.” They couldn’t say, “We are giving you this,” or everyone would want it.

Julia was cautious when she spoke of the flexible work programs she accessed. She explained that because of the working culture in her organization: “I try not to talk about [accessing flexible options] a lot because I don’t want to make people resent me.”

**Mothers’ Perceptions of Managers’ Scepticism**

Natalie, Pam, Casey, and Carol perceived that managers were sceptical of the value of reduced-hour flexible schedules due to their perception that mothers would work less and their productivity at work would decrease. It is important to note that Pam and Casey had the option of accessing reduced-hour flexible schedules but chose not to as a result of their perception of their managers’ scepticism toward these policies. Pam also observed that the perception of lower productivity had a negative effect on mothers’ career advancement. Carol perceived that being on a reduced-hour flexible schedule had a negative effect on her career prospects. Only Julia described a manager who was supportive of flexible workplace policies.
Natalie commented that she worked hard to reverse the perception of her manager that she was being less productive by being on a flexible workplace schedule. The extra hours she put in to complete her assignments undermined her reduced-hour schedule:

I went in on Saturdays sometimes. I went in on Sundays sometimes. I brought paperwork home with me. And at night, sometimes, when my husband and I were having our downtime, and we were watching TV, and our son was in bed, I would be doing paperwork and watching TV, getting a dent in that way. Sometimes on a Monday, I hate to say this, but sometimes on my day off, I would take a moment to do some of my paperwork.

She perceived her employer had yet to address the belief that reduced-hour workers were less productive. Her advice for supervisors dealing with the concern about lower productivity was:

It has to do with the mindset. I would say, don’t come in thinking that you’re going to lose something and that this person is trying to get away with something. Think of it in the positive way—that if you help them figure out their life, you will have someone who probably produces more, rather than, you know, than less—which is my whole mindset. I would work like a dog and I do my paperwork at home for the most part, and see as many people during the day, so that people [vendors] felt like their needs were being met.

Casey’s law firm had been slow to offer reduced-hour flexible schedules to working mothers and she declined to take advantage of her employer’s flexible workplace policies. She perceived that senior lawyers believed that flexible policy use led to lower productivity. She said:

You can hold all the partners’ meetings you want. [They are] not going to believe it until they (the partners) work with a part-time person and get the work done well. In other words, they must experience it.
Casey suggested that if a lawyer on a reduced-hour, flexible work schedule demonstrated strong work productivity then senior partners might be persuaded “that it doesn’t have to be a problem.” On the other hand, she also felt that senior partners needed to let younger lawyers know that it is acceptable to leave the office early when necessary, provided they made up the time later in the evening at home,

If I have extra work from 9:00 ‘til 11:00 at night, but I’m going to see my kids from 5:00 to 7:00, that kind of thing would work. So it’s a lot how you structure it, how you work it.

Pam is one of the two participants in the study who did not participate in her employers’ flexible workplace policies. She indicated that her management was very sceptical of these policies. She also described an underlying assumption that the use of flexible workplace policies “[contribute] to low productivity.” She spoke of the presumption of managers’ attitude that a worker is not actually working if managers cannot see them at their desks: “If they can’t see you, they don’t know that you have been working.” She shared her views about managers’ instituting a flexible workplace policy for employees and then not supporting it:

A policy is a policy. The policy says you can do it—the culture says if you do it, you’re affected [negatively]. Why offer it if you take away future growth?

Pam described how women opting for reduced-hour schedules experienced a negative effect on their career prospects. She explained that her accounting firm overlooked reduced-hour workers when it came to career advancement: “I saw another one reduce her work week and hours and, as a result, didn’t get promoted.”
Carol also remarked that reduced hour flexible workplace policies negatively affected women’s careers in her consulting practice because of managers’ attitudes towards them. While on the one hand, she had been encouraged to use flexible workplace programs by her manager, on the other, she perceived that her manager would not promote her while she was on a flexible work schedule. She explained her difficulty in meeting the demands:

It’s just another huge chunk of time, and I’m finding that I started to do it in the last couple months, but I’m finding it difficult with all the work. I end up working late each night and quite a bit of the weekends to get it done.

She explained that she was expected to move back to a full-time schedule in order to advance, in keeping with the organization’s promotion policy:

The firm...[views] somebody kind of hanging around at a level as blocking an opportunity for the next person. They want everybody to continually move through the system to use up opportunities.

She commented that since her firm recruited female employees, it should make the necessary accommodations for childbearing and the demands of child rearing, to enable them to continue to be productive members of the organization: “I don’t know how realistic [it is to discourage women from going on flexible schedules], if they really want to hire women all the time.”

In contrast, Julia’s perception of the support of her managers for a reduced-hour flexible work schedule was one of the reasons she stayed with her company. Management fully supported women going on a reduced-hour flexible work schedule and it did not have a negative effect on their career prospects. She reported that her supervisor said, “If it was a choice between having you 4 days [a week] and not having you [at all], we would want you
at 4 days.” In addition, Julia perceived that being on a reduced-hour schedule did not consign her to career stagnation. In fact, her career continued to progress: “I was promoted quickly.”

**Maintaining Reduced-Hour Flexible Workplace Schedules**

Natalie, Carol, and Sydney shared their perceptions about the difficulties of maintaining reduced-hour flexible workplace schedules. They found it was not uncommon for working mothers to find it challenging to maintain their hard-won schedules. While managers had agreed to support them, Natalie, Carol, and Sydney found that their schedules did not always coincide with workplace meetings, deadlines, and emergencies that arise. These daily workplace occurrences made adhering to their schedules challenging. Natalie, Carol, and Sydney risked their career prospects by communicating to their supervisors how vital it was for them to keep to their reduced-hour flexible work schedules.

Natalie perceived that she took a risk with her career when she reduced her work schedule after returning from her maternity leave. But for her the risk was justified as her personal safety was put at risk when she worked late hours in high-crime neighbourhoods:

> I remember saying to my boss that I wasn’t going to do parenting groups anymore because that’s when safety became an issue. Prior to that, I didn’t worry about myself. But after that, I started worrying…because I was going into some pretty rough neighbourhoods.

Natalie’s supervisor was concerned that her shorter hours would equate to client’s needs not being met. She informed her supervisor that she would no longer be putting in such long hours:

> When I went back, it was very clear to my boss that I was finally going to work a real 8-hour day and not a 10-hour day.
From the outset, Natalie made clear to her supervisor what he could expect from her on a reduced-hour flexible workplace schedule. Because of the hazards her job involved, she was firm with the boundaries she set: “That’s when I set parameters around my hours.” Natalie said that her boss was initially dubious about the community response to the change, remarking, “As long as parents don’t complain.” Natalie held her ground in her dealings with parents as well: “I’m available between 9 and 5…and you know what? It wasn’t ever a problem.” What evolved for Natalie was more trust in herself because she was able to set these boundaries with her clients:

I would say, “I’m really sorry I wasn’t available and I realize that was really hard for you. However, this is the protocol,” and, you know…I didn’t have the guilt. I just said, you know, “I’m really sorry, but let’s do what we can now.”

Natalie found that her clients were able to adapt to the shorter hours and that there was no reduction in service: “They panic in the beginning, but a year later they realize there was a protocol in place.”

Carol also had to make hard choices and take risks to set boundaries around her reduced-hour flexible workplace schedule. Her salary was reduced by 20% because she was working 4 days a week. “My supervisor told me that I could return to work on a part-time schedule,” Carol said. At times, she perceived that her managers disregarded her schedule by offering her full-time project work:

Last summer there was this client opportunity that arose and it was going to be really more than a full-time job for 3 months in the summer and I thought, “You know what? I get paid 80%. I don’t want to work 120%.”

She was able to walk away from the opportunity without regret.
Sydney reported difficulties getting support from her supervisor for a 4-day workweek. By persisting and setting boundaries with her manager, she was able to implement this reduced-hour flexible work schedule. She worked out an arrangement whereby she worked Monday to Thursday in the office, telecommuted from home Friday mornings, and took Friday afternoons off. However, she watched her carefully crafted schedule erode: her supervisor typically dropped by her office just as she was leaving and kept her at work well after the time she was scheduled to leave. She also reported that he would book Friday meetings, only to be reminded that she was not available:

You can see his face tighten. Sometimes I’ll say, “I’ll come in for it,” and he says, “No.” I’ll call in…but I know he really wants me here.

This left her with the difficult decision of whether to accommodate her supervisor or her family. She persisted with the reduced-hour schedule and, fortunately for Sydney, her supervisor eventually became more supportive: “He now sees that the work can get done.” She saw that setting boundaries with him was effective.

**Lack of Female Role Models For Working Mothers**

The majority of the women perceived that their workplaces lacked female role models who were working mothers. All 9 women in the study had role models who helped guide them in their career path, but only Carol had a female role model to look to who had a successful career and family. As Carol described her:

There is a woman I work with who has always worked part-time, and has a family, and is now a director. So I mean a few women. But there aren’t a lot.

The concept of female role models came up several times in the interviews. Grace, Natalie, Pam, Carol, and Tracy talked about the fact that there were no female role models to guide
them in their quest to meet both home and work demands. The successful professional women these participants had observed had made sacrifices in their personal lives to continue to progress in their careers. Examples of the sacrifices were working long hours or not being able to spend enough time with their spouse or children, which sometimes led to divorce. Pam, Carol, and Tracy suggested that they had become the first female role models managing the demands of work and home for other women in their workplaces.

Grace had no female role model she could look to for direction on how to combine her family life with career demands: “I’ll say it again. There are no role models.” Grace described the complexity of her situation:

It’s just about the decisions I chose to make about having a family, and how to manage that and to be successful, in the way that I want to be successful.

She described another female colleague’s decision,

She and her husband chose not to have children and one of the reasons why is because his role, his career, was as important and as involved as hers was, so they chose not to have children. I have the utmost admiration for her, [professionally] but she doesn’t have to juggle a family life.

She went on to describe another woman who was raising two children after a divorce. This colleague’s professional success had been at the cost of her marriage. The absence of female role models successfully managing work and home demands gave rise to a degree of pessimism. Grace remarked: “You know…both the situations tell me one thing—that you can’t have both.” The women she described had achieved career success, but at a price:

She sacrificed…the relationship with her husband was sacrificed. Without even knowing what happened, that seems to be my perception.
Grace’s values were very different:

I think at this stage, when my children are young, and even when they’re older; I think I would leave in a second to be with them. That’s what I would do. I mean, if I really ultimately wanted the financial success that these women have achieved, I wouldn’t have had a family.

Grace believed that the culture in her industry demanded that work be the first priority. She reflected on the top-performing women in her field:

It’s funny, there’s not a work-life, family-life balance for them. It is one or the other, and if they choose family life over the work life, I’d say that they aren’t the top investment advisors.

Grace concluded that success for women in her industry required the total sacrifice of their family life:

Maybe it wasn’t a matter of them giving that up. Perhaps it was just something that they realized they didn’t have the time and the need for….Clearly some of them never had children. Maybe that was just because they were already on the pace to have this wonderful career for themselves.

With deep emotion, she described the gender differences:

For that same envelope of success that a very successful man has—with a family, and wife, and a home—for women to be equally successful, they wouldn’t have that family life and home life. And I wish I was making it up. I wish I was being very, very overly emotional about it, but it just can’t happen. It just can’t.

This grim example of the women in her field that Grace described had influenced her decision not to pursue advancement in her career, at least for the present. She felt she could revisit this decision when her children were older:
I’m also a realist and believe that there is going to be a certain point in my life, in my career, that I can focus more attention to that over my family, and not sacrifice my family…but I think that right now, it’s just not possible. My children are too young.

Natalie offered a cautionary note about the need for female role models to set realistic expectations: “Women who try to do it all…can be worse for those who are struggling and, for whatever reasons, can’t do it all.” Natalie felt the overachievers were not good role models: “They kind of hurt, they hurt the process for women who want to have really a good balance, and not work more than the time they take care of their kids.” Natalie had no role models for guidance either: “I don’t think I really had someone that I looked at and thought, wow, they were doing it all. I don’t.”

Pam felt at a loss for not being able to learn from other successful working mothers. Those working mothers in Pam’s corporate culture had all resigned: “I don’t have a role model, that I feel, I wish I could be like that person.” This lack of female role models made her feel alone. After her first maternity leave, Pam worked full time and spent her weekends juggling her new baby in addition to studying for a course the firm had sponsored her to take: “I was so alone—definitely so alone during this time.” She still felt isolated, that there was no one at work she could talk to about managing work and family demands. As Pam described it: “I was totally ignorant and oblivious to work-lifestyle issues.” She explained that she had a lot of friends with children, but few had a career as well.

Pam also perceived that she had become a role model for other women in her profession: “Five years ago, there was no one to ask….Women ask me questions and I tell them how I did it.” Pam advised women to be decisive about what they need from their employer: “If a company can’t make a decision—go somewhere else.” She had remained in
her current position because she had negotiated a satisfactory work schedule. She had learned from the example of other women who were unable to maintain their work-life balance effectively:

One of them was having, clearly having a difficult time in separating career and family life….When she was at work, she was on the phone all day long with the nanny dealing with lots of different issues. Not parenting issues. Issues like what the children are having for breakfast. Issues that, frankly, I never cared about and I still don’t to this day.

She found their mistakes instructive: “I just observed what they did. And then over a couple of years, I made a conscious decision to do things my way here, and that’s where I am now.”

Carol was also breaking new ground in her management-consulting firm in a number of ways to be a role model for other women. First, there was her decision to combine motherhood and her career; “I’m only the second female partner in Canada who’s had children.” Then, after her own 11-month maternity leave, she encouraged other women to take the full year sponsored by the Canadian government: “I have a number of colleagues who…[decided] I’m going to take the time off, and they did.” She also assumed a reduced-hour schedule with the encouragement of her supervisor:

I had a conversation with the office manager who actually said, “Look, I think you’re a great role model for women,” and he actually asked me to come back part time instead of full time, but I wanted to do that anyway.

It was a welcome message to her: “He said, ‘I’m totally supportive of this because we need more role models for women, to show them that there are different ways to do this.’”
Tracy had also become a role model for working mothers in similar professions. Tracy shared a note she had received from a woman who worked for her:

You’ve been a role model to me. I hope that I can balance things as nicely as you’ve done, and I strive to be able to keep my career on track the way you have.

She found it gratifying that her experience could benefit other women in her situation. Tracy described two distinct categories of women at work:

There are successful women who could be role models with regard to our business, but they haven’t had the family life, and role models with the ideal family life, but none with both….The successful woman in business doesn’t have kids or a husband and sometimes is too successful to [have either one].

However, she felt that times were changing, and with them, women’s expectations: “I think now we kind of feel like we should be able to have both.”
Chapter 5
Discussion

With the results of the study reported in the prior chapter, this chapter will now offer a detailed discussion of those themes identified in the context of the existing literature and the results of the study. The general themes outlined in this study to examine were how women perceive:

1. the response of their managers and coworkers to the announcement of their pregnancies;
2. their maternity leave in terms of access, financial adequacy, administration, time spent at home and duration;
3. that the workplace offers resources to transition back to work, and
4. the benefits of flexible workplace policies and identify the challenges they encounter in accessing such policies.

At the end of each theme’s discussion, a statement that demonstrates clear implications between the key literature review and findings of the study will be presented. A discussion of recommendations was informed by this study’s research results. Each recommendation will have policy and administration elements. This chapter ends with discussing limitations of this research study that will be considered and ideas for future research that will be offered.
Theme I

The first major theme was based on the participants’ perceptions of the attitudes of managers toward pregnant women in the workplace. The participants perceived both negative and positive responses to the announcement of their pregnancies. Four of the participants perceived that managers greeted their announcement of pregnancy with a negative response and one received both a positive and negative response to her different pregnancies. Some women perceived that managers believed that the quality of a woman’s work and her commitment to her job would diminish during pregnancy. In contrast, three of the women perceived that their managers responded positively to the announcement of their pregnancies and one perceived a neutral response. Several women reported that the positive responses made them feel as if they were valued members of the staff, which they found motivated them to be committed to their workplace.

Several studies confirm these findings. For example, Brown et al. (2002) found that pregnant women in supervisory jobs perceived that their work commitment and the quality of their work were judged more negatively than that of non-pregnant female workers. In another study, Shapiro (1982, as cited in Brown et al., 2002, p. 65) reported that male medical residents and faculty perceived pregnant female medical residents more negatively than other female medical residents in terms of their productivity.

Looking at supervisors’ positive responses to pregnant workers, Halpert and Burg’s work (1997) had similar findings. Specifically, Halpert and Burg (1997) reported that the majority of female workers they studied perceived their managers to be happy and excited for them upon hearing of their of pregnancy.
In the current study it was found that several of the women planned their pregnancies according to workplace schedules. One participant planned for the birth of her baby to take place during the summer months when she was not teaching school. Another woman described colleagues who timed their pregnancies around their career advancement.

A study by Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, Newuschatz, and Uzzi (1994) also reported that mothers planned their pregnancy to meet the needs of their work schedule. Specifically, the researchers reported that women in academic science planned their pregnancies around the academic tenure schedule (Etzkowitz et al., 1994).

In summary, the implication of the findings of this study is that women’s narratives give credence that the workplaces must develop general workplace policies that support pregnant women as they announce their pregnancies at work.

**Recommendation for Theme I**

**Policy**

The policy should describe specific action managers will take to support a pregnant worker that is welcoming and embracing of their new pregnancy status. This policy should include provisions wherein managers:

1. Receive training on how to provide pregnant workers with support prior to maternity leave. Specifically, this training would create awareness among managers about how negative bias toward pregnant workers increases their stress and negatively affects their work productivity. Managers will engage in a values discussion with pregnant workers citing how their commitment is an essential part of the workplace achieving its goals and the advancement of their career. Not all
managers will be comfortable with this type of face-to-face meeting as the policy recommendation suggests. To avoid managers’ not engaging pregnant workers, it will be important that a cost-benefit analysis of the negative financial implications of mothers not returning to work be shared with managers. It is the hope that this information will motivate managers to work more closely with pregnant workers.

2. Examine working conditions of pregnant women and make adjustments, if necessary. Some non-pregnant workers may resent special attention paid to pregnant workers. To address this, managers should be mindful to check in with all employees on their team regardless of status as pregnant or not.

3. Discuss maternity policies and the corresponding paperwork required with pregnant workers. The detail of information may be overwhelming for some pregnant workers. To avoid increasing the stress of pregnant workers, the information regarding the paperwork that needs to be filed should be organized in an orderly manner with sequential steps leading up to the date when maternity leave commences.

**Administration**

Here are the specific administrative tasks that managers should undertake to address the policy recommendations above:

First, managers need to be trained on how to provide pregnant workers with support prior their taking maternity leave. This training should focus on specific exercises that provide managers with the skills necessary to engage in an open dialogue with pregnant workers about career progression, working conditions and any special needs relating to their
health over the pregnancy period. Managers should be encouraged to have regularly scheduled meetings with pregnant workers to ensure their needs in the workplace are being met.

Secondly, managers need to discuss with a female pregnant worker as soon pregnancy is announced about maternity leave policy, timing and documents that are required.

Thirdly, managers’ responsibilities of examining the working conditions in which pregnant workers must operate should include but not be limited to pregnant employees’ workloads being diminished or unfair treatment as a result of their pregnancies.

Theme II

The second major theme focuses on participants’ perceptions of maternity leave policies: access, adequacy, administration, experience of maternity leave time at home, and duration of maternity leave.

Seven out of the 9 participants had access to Canadian government maternity leave benefits of 17 weeks and parental leave of 35 weeks. The remaining 2 participants were ineligible. In terms of employer top-up payments or other payments such as salary draws for business owners, 5 participants had access to such programs. More than 60% of the women in this study received “top-up” employer payments, which is three times higher than the average of 20% of Canadian women who receive top-ups payments from employers (Marshall, 2010).
With regard to the adequacy of workplace maternity leave policies, the women perceived the policies to be financially inadequate, claiming that the financial provisions were insufficient to support them during their maternity leave. One important study, Marshall (2010), revealed that only a small percentage (20%) of women received salary payments that lasted for 6 months or more.

A few participants found that maternity leave policies were not administered effectively. Two participants reported that human resources personnel did not always provide them with complete information regarding maternity leave policies and were often not helpful in enrolling them in the Canadian governmental maternity leave program. One major study, Halpert and Burg (1997), reported that mothers perceived that workplaces in the U.S. failed to implement consistent maternity policies. Also, in Lui and Buzzanell’s (2004) study, 50% of women reported that their supervisors did not discuss their maternity leaves with them.

Describing the experience of the time spent at home during maternity leave, new mothers in this study expressed joy that they were able to be at home with their newborn. However, some participants reported that they had received workplace requests while on maternity leave at home. One important study that confirms these findings is Glass and Riley’s work (1998). The researchers found that women who took maternity leave often perceived pressure to take on workplace tasks during this period to reduce the workload of their coworkers.
Discussing the duration of maternity leave, the majority of the participants perceived pressure to return to work to ease the workload of their work colleagues or to demonstrate their work commitment. The majority of participants returned sooner than 6 months versus the 52-week maternity and parental leave period they were eligible for. This is confirmed by studies in Canada of Marshall (2003) and Dzakpasu and Pelletier (2009) of women returning to work from their maternity and parental leave before 6 months. In the U.S., Swiss and Walker (1993) found that nearly two-thirds of mothers returned to work within 3 months of giving birth since their maternity leave was unpaid.

In summary, the implications of the findings of this study are that organizations need to do more to create financial adequacy, improve the administration of maternity leave policies, and experience of time spent at home and encourage women to extend the duration of their maternity leave.

**Recommendation for Theme II**

**Policy**

Overall, a workplace policy should be developed by senior managers that clearly identify how to improve financial adequacy, administration issues, time at home and duration related to maternity and parental leaves. With 90% of women in Canada eligible to access maternity leaves, there is no recommendation to improve access.

Specifically, the following policies will address the challenges of maternity leave practices in the areas of financial adequacy, administration, time at home, and duration of maternity and parental leave:
1. To improve the financial adequacy of maternity leave and accommodate more mothers being able to take the full 52-week maternity and parental leave that they are eligible for, it is recommended that new mothers’ maternity packages include top-up payments to be made by their employer for a longer period. Many organizations may not place a high priority on providing top-up funds or increasing any current employer top-up already offered. In order to encourage organizations to provide more top-up funds to those workers on maternity leave, a retention analysis of pregnant workers returning to work and remaining in the workplace needs to be administered. If the retention analysis reflects that the organization is losing valuable employees as a result of their maternity leave financial adequacy, it may motivate an organization to offer more financial support to new mothers while away on leave and in turn build retention and loyalty over the long term.

2. To improve the administration of maternity policies, senior managers should a) discuss with mothers maternity and parental leave policy administration requirements immediately upon the announcement of pregnancy and b) clarify expectations with new mothers about how they would like to be contacted during their leave period. For example, if it is agreed that a new mother’s expectation is to not be contacted during her time at home then, managers and coworkers need to avoid contact during the leave period. If managers fail to clarify these boundaries with a new mother, they are risking loyalty from this employee.
3. To alleviate the pressure mothers perceive to return to work earlier, managers need to encourage mothers to take the entire leave period for which they are eligible. On the one hand, a full year of maternity leave is what pregnant female workers are entitled to; on the other hand, a pregnant worker’s absence may put stress on the organization’s output and fellow employees. This stress may cause undue resentment toward a woman who is out of the organization on maternity leave. To help alleviate the stress that fellow co-workers may experience, a pregnant worker’s assignments should be distributed amongst several employees (not just a few) and some duties may need to be put on hold.

**Administration**

Here are the specific administrative tasks that managers should undertake to address the policies above:

1. Senior managers should consider expanding employer top-up policies to match the 17 weeks of maternity leave and 35 weeks of parental leave that new mothers are eligible for.

2. Managers should be available to new mothers to discuss and identify policy specifications and benefits of maternity leave policies.

3. Managers should implement a workplace imperative that new mothers are entitled to both the full 17 weeks of maternity leave and 35 weeks of parental leave. It is the role of managers to reassure mothers that there will be not be any negative impact to their career progression for taking their fully allotted duration of maternity leave. In addition, managers should advise mothers that their workload
would be properly handled while they are on maternity leave. This support will assist new mothers to take the maternity leave duration that they are eligible for without being concerned about their work assignments.

4. Clear guidelines need to be written by managers relating to employee contact during maternity leave. Managers and coworkers should avoid non-emergency communication with new mothers via phone calls, emails, work requests or attendance at office meetings. Managers or coworkers should only contact new mothers on their maternity leave in the event of a work emergency.

**Theme III**

The third major theme describes the difficulties the participants encountered when making the transition back to the workplace. A majority of the women perceived that their workplaces did not provide them with either the support or resources needed to accommodate them in their dual role of worker and mother.

Describing their personal experiences of the dual role of mother and worker, some participants reported successfully managing these roles by separating and compartmentalizing home and work. Others had more difficulty reconciling the roles. Several previous studies support the findings of this study. Grace et al. (2004) found that when managers valued a mother’s contribution at work, it enhanced her ability to manage her roles of worker and mother. Also, Read (2008) suggested that a structured transition plan to assist in the return to work is essential for supporting the dual role.
Several problems in the workplace were described that are unique to working mothers. One problem was what one of the participants labelled the “mommy mould.” The participant used the term to describe mothers being defined as less productive and committed to their work. One important study that supported this finding was that of Lyness et al. (1999). In this study the authors reported that women who perceived their supervisors and workplace cultures to be supportive were more committed to their organizations and planned to return to work sooner than women who perceived supervisors and the workplace cultures to be less supportive.

Another finding under this theme was that participants perceived the need to “juggle” their tasks and priorities to meet the sometimes conflicting demands of home and work. Mothers described how they scrambled for time to organize the diverging schedules of husbands and children. This act of juggling became their normal behaviour pattern. The literature on the topic of juggling tasks is limited. However, Harris et al. (2002) reviewed the strategies adopted by mothers who are juggling their work and family roles. A couple of the strategies noted were: mothers leaving work early to arrive at daycare on time, and mothers juggling work timetables to meet work and home demands (Harris et al., 2002). This study examined the women’s need to leave work early sometimes and the problems that ensued from their actions. Additionally, the need to put in “face time” at work was a perception working mothers had based on their managers’ attitudes. Mothers described putting in face time as the pressure to be present in the workplace to demonstrate their commitment to their jobs. Sullivan et al.’s (2004) work also looked at leaving work early and putting in face time. This study reported that women faculty members in traditionally male-dominated
departments, such as engineering, business, and the sciences, were “watched more” in the workplace.

As a result of these workplace challenges, the women in this study perceived that there is not much time left over for mothers to take care of themselves. The women described feeling exhausted and pulled in too many directions to take time to care for themselves. The theme of mothers’ self-care is also dealt with in a study by the Families and Work Institute and Real Simple magazine (2012). In this study it was reported that mothers do not have adequate leisure time that is not interrupted by childcare or domestic tasks.

Another topic that the women discussed under the theme of making the transition back to the workplace was the support of their spouses. They reported that their husbands did, for the most part, take on defined childcare tasks. However, several of the mothers said that the majority of the domestic tasks still fell on their shoulders.

Several previous studies support the finding of this research that husbands are taking on a greater role in childcare. For example, Bond et al. (2003) reported that increased spousal support has had a significant impact on a mother’s ability to manage work and family demands. However, Paludi (1986) confirmed the finding that the majority of the domestic responsibilities still fall on the women’s shoulders.

Several women discussed their perceptions of what it would be like to opt-in or opt-out of the workplace. The participants expressed concern that their careers would suffer if they left the workplace for a significant period of time to raise their children. They perceived that it would be difficult to find a job with similar compensation and flexible workplace policies when they wanted to re-enter the workplace. Eight of the participants remained in their jobs after taking their maternity and parental leave. Five of the participants discussed
how remaining in the workplace was necessary given financial needs, concerns over negative
effects on their careers, and/or the satisfaction they derived from being in the workplace.
Several previous studies have looked at the opt-in and opt-out phenomenon. Boushey (2005)
found that women with children were not opting-out of the workforce. Additionally, Hewlett
and Luce (2005) reported that many women opt-in or stay in the workplace as a result of
financial concerns as well as career satisfaction and enjoyment.

In summary, the implication of the findings of this study is that organizations need to
create sustainable policies that will support new mothers as they transition back to work.

**Recommendation for Theme III**

**Policy**

In general, managers need to develop specific policies and procedures to help new
mothers transition back to the workplace. These policies and programs should address the
issues the participants raised around an absence of transition policies that exist for new
mothers returning to work and the challenges that face new mothers when they reenter the
workplace.

**Administration**

Here are the specific administrative tasks that managers should undertake to address
the policies above:

First, to address the lack of transition programs that exist for new mothers, managers
should develop a “staggered” return schedule to the workplace for new mothers. This
program allows new mothers to work part time for the first few weeks and slowly transitions
them to a full-time schedule or lets them remain part-time if they are on a reduced-hour
flexible workplace schedule. This transition policy would allow new mothers to test and make modifications in their schedules at home and work. As new mothers grow more confident of their new schedule and its demands, they can schedule self-time and define the assistance they require at home from their spouses. Not all workplaces will be able to support a staggered return to work as a result of the nature of the work such as for certain practices of law, financial roles such a bond trader or the consistent classroom presence of a teacher. In cases such as these, workplaces may need to work more closely with mothers prior to their return to work about their childcare situation. While this may require more time and potential financial outlay (e.g., for childcare services) from an organization, the cost/benefit of having a mother return immediately to a full schedule may outweigh these costs.

Another important transitional administrative task to improve new mothers’ perceptions of the conflicts between their dual roles of worker and mother was found in Read’s work (2008) of a “buddy system.” This transition program guides new mothers to begin to take over their projects from before they went on maternity leave under the guidance of a current worker or buddy. These buddies can serve as role models to help new mothers make the transition to their dual role of worker and mother. They can also being a resource for sharing techniques for juggling work and home demands and discussing such topics as finding self-time or the notion of opting in or out of the workplace.

Second, as part of the transition plan to help new mothers feel supported by their managers, not feel pressured by their perceptions of being placed in the “mommy mould,” or put in more face time and juggle home and work tasks, human resource personnel should include this training to managers about how to engage new mothers in candid discussions
upon their return to work with the other training programs being offered to support mothers in the beginning of their pregnancy. The message throughout these trainings should be consistent to emphasize the mother’s value and equity she has built. These discussions should be mandatory and include such topics as career paths and identifying specific work and personal needs (i.e., staffing, scheduling, child care situations). These discussions would help solidify a mother’s sense of her value to the workplace and ease any concern she may have about her career progression.

Theme IV

The fourth major theme focuses on participants’ perceptions of reduced-hour flexible workplace policies. These perceptions of flexible workplace programs and policies involved access, lack of transparency, lack of manager’s support, difficulty maintaining reduced-hour flexible workplace schedules, and a lack of female role models for working mothers.

Eight of the participants had the option to adopt a reduced-hour flexible schedule, but only 6 out of the 8 participants chose to take advantage of this. Three of the 6 perceived positive responses to their accessing flexible workplace programs. That is, they perceived that managers encouraged the use of these programs, that the administration of the policies was transparent to workers, and that the policies increased their loyalty to their organization. Conversely, the other 3 mothers perceived difficulties in accessing flexible workplace programs. These difficulties were that accessing programs would have a negative effect on their careers and that managers and coworkers would not support them in these arrangements and would often schedule meetings when they knew they would not be at work.
Several studies support these findings. Sullivan et al. (2004) found that female academics whom accessed flexible workplace programs perceived that their careers would be negatively affected. Additionally, Hewlett and Luce (2005) found that managers were biased against mothers who accessed flexible workplace programs and that it was difficult for mothers to maintain flexible workplace schedules.

Several participants in this study reported problems in the administration of these policies. Three of the participants perceived that the policies were not administered transparently nor were they available in writing. Several participants reported that managers asked them to remain silent on their use of a flexible workplace program. As a result, women perceived that coworkers were often ignorant of their use of the program or might resent it. One important study that supports these findings is Moen’s (2003) work, *The Cornell Couples and Career Study*. The researchers found that women believed that supervisors negatively perceived women who used flexible workplaces programs. The authors also found that the administration of the policies were not always transparent. And the authors found that some employees were offered a full range of options regarding flexible work schedules such as working part-time, reduced hours or telecommuting while others were offered limited, if any options.

The participants also perceived that managers were sceptical about the use of flexible work policies. Several participants perceived that this scepticism was based on the perception that mothers on flexible schedules would work less and their productivity would decrease. The women perceived that this would have a negative effect on their prospects for advancement. Several studies support this finding. One important study, Hewlett and Luce (2005), reported that 35% of women perceived that various aspects of their organizational
cultures effectively penalized workers who took advantage of flexible workplace programs. The researchers also reported that participants perceived a bias against them if they used a flexible workplace program. The women also perceived that if they accessed these programs they might not obtain the standard career advancement.

Some of the participants in this study perceived that it was difficult to maintain their flexible workplace schedules. They found that their workplaces often asked them to complete work assignments that required them to stay beyond their set schedules. One important study that supports these findings is Moen’s (2003) study of academic departments. The researchers reported that flexible workplace policies varied by discipline, departmental work assignments, and deadlines, which made them difficult to maintain.

Finally, the participants found it was challenging to find role models of professional women who successfully managed the dual role of worker and mother. The participants perceived that professional women had to make sacrifices in their personal lives to be successful in the workplace. Examples of these sacrifices were working long hours and not spending adequate time with their spouses or children. There are very few previous studies that delved into this question.

In summary, the implication of the findings of this study is that flexible workplace policies’ design must be consistent with their intended use to help women in managing the demands of employment and motherhood. For example, if a flexible workplace policy is designed to help a mother be able to telecommute from home, her career progression should not be negatively impacted should she choose to access and utilize such a policy.
Recommendation for Theme IV

Policy

The following policies are designed to address the challenges of flexible workplace policies and procedures:

1. To address the issue of difficulty of access, managers should develop reduced-hour flexible workplace policies that outline clear and specific guidelines so that mothers know how to access and fully utilize the programs available. On the one hand, many organizations are making a financial investment in offering flexible workplace policies to their employees. On the other hand, if employees have the assumption that if they utilize a policy it will negatively impact their career; this negates offering the policy in the first place. It also appears from this study that this phenomenon is creating ill will amongst employees. To avoid this scenario, workplaces need to make more of a financial investment to develop training so that managers will be more open and supportive of encouraging mothers to utilize flexible workplace policies. Another tactic that will encourage the organizational culture to support flexible workplace policies is for senior management to verbally support policy usage, utilize them personally, and be fully versed in the research that indicates how the usage of flexible workplace policies increases employee satisfaction and retention.

2. To address the lack of transparency of flexible workplace policies, managers should ensure that flexible workplace policies are fully documented, completely transparent to all employees, and open to all mothers, regardless of their seniority. The issue of transparency can become less of a concern for managers if the
concern of “openness” toward policy usage is not synonymous with too many employees taking advantage of flexible workplace policies. In other words, if specific criteria are put in place such as eligibility based upon seniority, or performance reviews or departmental responsibilities, management concerns can be lessened that too many employees will access flexible workplace policies.

3. To address mothers’ perceptions of having difficulty finding female role models, managers need to build a stronger presence of successful women in their organizations who are both workers and mothers. It may not be a corporate imperative for organizations to promote women to become female role models, however, the more female employees can look toward other women in leadership positions the more loyalty and inspiration it will create amongst female employees overall.

**Administration**

Here are the specific administrative tasks that managers should undertake to address the policies previously discussed.

First, it is recommended that in order to improve access, flexible workplace policies should include a variety of programmatic options such as part-time or reduced-hour work schedules, compressed work weeks, reduced workload, daycare, and emergency back-up daycare, job sharing, and/or telecommuting. This will help new mothers’ understanding of what program options that best fit their needs.
Secondly, transparency is essential to the success of flexible workplace policies. Management needs to develop clear guidelines about their flexible workplace policies so mothers will not need to hide their use from coworkers.

Thirdly, human resource managers need to improve the workplace culture to encourage managers to support mothers who access reduced-hour flexible workplace programs. One way to accomplish this is to reward managers in their performance review for actively promoting the use of these programs to their staff. These managers should receive a bonus for providing additional support to new mothers. Another way to promote flexible workplace policy usage is to highlight a mother whose career progression has continued to advance while on a flexible workplace schedule. This can be promoted in an organizational newsletter or an internal web communication. Additionally, training managers to promote the use of reduced-hour flexible workplace schedules should be required for managers. This training can be incorporated in the training already taking place to support new mothers in the workplace. Human resource personnel could develop training sessions for managers to help them to better understand the importance and benefits of flexible workplace policies for mothers. In these training sessions, managers could be provided with a checklist to remind them to schedule time with working mothers to discuss:

1. specific flexible arrangements, such as working on a reduced schedule or telecommuting;
2. career progression;
3. salary and bonuses; and
4. monitoring workload assignments.
In addition, the federal court ruling that passed in February, 2013 to support workers who have specific schedule needs related to childcare should encourage managers to increase the use flexible workplace policies while negating career consequences.

Finally, the question of the lack of role models for working mothers needs to become a higher priority in the workplace. The more workplaces can promote working mothers to senior positions, the more they will be demonstrating that women can indeed have a successful career and home life. Many organizations offer formal mentoring programs in which new hires are paired with more senior employees. These types of programs can be modified to focus on women managers’ role modeling how they maintain a successful work and home life for younger women.

**Limitations of this Research**

This study was limited to women who are employed in professional or business positions around the Toronto GTA. The individuals who are employed in professional level positions may find they receive a more positive response from their managers and coworkers upon the announcement of their pregnancy than blue collar or administrative workers. They also many have more access to increased maternity and parental leave time or financial “top-ups,” and additional transitional resources such as hired child-care assistance and access to a wider range of flexible workplace policies. The findings may not be applicable to non-professional level positions such as administrative or blue-collar jobs as women in those positions do not generally receive the same level of programmatic and policy support. There may be very different perceptions from pregnant workers and new mothers who do not have these benefits.
The location of the participants to the proximity of the Toronto GTA may have limited the sample to those who live near a large, metropolitan area. Therefore, those who live in small towns far away from Toronto were not able to participate. This may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the maternity and parental leave policies in Quebec are more expansive and no women from Quebec were in this study. Therefore new mothers’ experiences in Quebec may be quite different than the experiences of the participants in the Toronto GTA who were in this study.

Another issue, one that arises from the use of qualitative methodology, is role of the researcher in the development of the questions and the analysis of the data. Because I worked by myself gathering the data through an interview methodology, the data may have been affected by my personal biases during the analysis and coding process. To reduce this possibility, I provided each participant with an opportunity to review her transcripts prior to every meeting and confirm their understanding of their personal data against what the transcripts identified. I also wrote memos and discussed my findings with my supervisor. Furthermore, I met with an informal committee of fellow doctoral students to discuss my findings.

Another limitation of this study is the sampling technique of voluntary participation. Voluntary participation may have biased the participant sample to include persons who perceived that the response from the workplace to be negative and unsupportive and wanted to share their experiences. Being that participants self-selected to be a part of this study, the study may have excluded persons who were treated positively and may not have had the same angst to share their experience or those whose treatment was too emotionally painful to discuss.
Ideas for Future Research

I hope that through this study organizations are made more aware of the issues that surround pregnancy, maternity and parental leave, making the transition back to work and the use of flexible workplace policies. I believe that future research is needed to understand the positive and negative effects of specific program elements such as job guarantees, childcare, longer maternity leave, or increased financial support.

I would be interested in conducting this research with a population of non-professional workers such as unionized labourers, non-union blue collar workers, and administrative staff. I am interested in developing new policy initiatives for diverse groups of working mothers and pregnant women. In light of that, I would also be interested in conducting this research with the LGBT population.

In addition, I feel strongly that a survey should be conducted among managers to investigate their perceptions on the subject of mothers and pregnant women in the workplace. With this knowledge in hand, educators and consultants could work with government and organizations to create cultural change in the workplace. The findings of this study could lead to the development of policies to help women successfully fulfill the dual role of worker and mother without fear of career consequences.

Future research could uncover the solution to creating a workplace culture that no longer views maternity leave and flexible work policies as a special accommodation for women.
In my role as researcher, I made a commitment to do all I could to help change policies for working mothers. As a researcher, I know that women cannot continue to be subjected to such inappropriate treatment in the workplace. My feminist lens provides sensitivity to the oppression of women in the workplace, and through this research, I hope that women will see that their perceptions are legitimate and can be used as a force to bring about changes in workplace culture. It is my hope that managers will come to see supporting working mothers as a natural evolution of our society’s workplaces.

The participant Sydney described her dreams of a world where supporting mothers’ managing work and home demands is not seen as a grudging accommodation for working mothers but is integrated into every organization’s routine day-to-day business practices and enshrined as a right. “I hope it will be easier for my daughter when she’s 30 or whenever she’s having children,” Sydney said. That statement sums up the hopes of this researcher that this research study has laid important groundwork for the building of more supportive workplaces for mothers in the future.
References


Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Judith Finer Freedman, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, Counselling Psychology
The University Of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West, #7-229
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3G3

Consent Form

I, ___________________________, agree to take part in a research study on family-friendly policies in the workplace and their affect on working mothers.

I understand that, as a participant in the study, I will be asked to respond to interview questions over three separate sessions for a total time commitment of 3-5 hours. I understand that participation in this study may involve answering questions about:

- my work/professional history
- aspects of my personal life, e.g. my marriage and decisions surrounding having a child
- my feelings/attitudes towards certain aspects of work, including relationships with managers, co-workers and subordinates
- my assessment of family-friendly policies

I understand that the interview will take about 1 ½ - 2 hours and will occur at a time and place that is convenient for me.

I understand that I am under no obligation to agree to participate in an interview. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions, to stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study. I understand that my specific comments and answers will be kept confidential and that my name, company name, and specific events will be changed for inclusion in the research. Furthermore, I understand that neither my name nor the name of my workplace will be identified in any report or presentation which may arise from this study. I understand that the researcher may go on to publish articles and be interviewed about information relating to the findings and conclusions of the study after the dissertation is complete. I understand that only the principal investigator and her supervisor will have access to the information collected during the study. I understand that I will not be paid to participate in the study other than reimbursement for parking expenses related to our meetings.

I understand that while I may not benefit directly from the study, the findings may help assist other women to better advocate for themselves or create family-friendly programs in the workplace. The findings may also inspire companies to create and support family-friendly programs in their organization. If nothing else, the study will raise the awareness of how vital these programs are in helping mothers be successful in the workplace after returning from maternity leave.
I understand that a summary of the findings will be sent to me, and that I may have access to the thesis once it is bound and available in the OISE library. I will also be able to purchase a copy of the final complete thesis document if I so wish from the researcher at cost value.

I understand what this study involves and agree to participate. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature

Date

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the investigators:

Principal Investigator
Judith Finer Freedman
(416) 781-1919
jfiner@oise.utoronto.ca

Project Supervisor
Dr. Mary Alice Guttman
(416) 923-6641
jfung@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix B

Interview Questions

Major Research Question

According to Shipman (1972) the asking of questions is the main source of social scientific information about everyday behaviour (Shipman, 1972, as cited in Oakley, 1981). The major research question for this study investigates the following: “What are the experiences of mothers in the workplace as they transition through pregnancy, maternity leave, and return to work?”

The interview questions and concepts that will guide the discussion are detailed below in the Interview Guide.

Interview Guide

“Here are some of the categories that I hope we will discuss today — how you started your career, your experience being pregnant, the organization and colleagues’ response to your pregnancy — I am looking for your feelings/thoughts/voice on these topics.”

1. Reconstruct “Life History” of Career

- How did you choose your career?
- How did you get into this line of work?
- Why did you pick this company?
- What levels have you been at?
- How would you describe your career track?
- What have the highs/lows been in your career?
- What were your feelings about becoming a mother?
- How did you envision mixing work and family if at all?
184

- Assuming not all things can be planned; did you have a plan for when you would try to get pregnant? How did that fit with your career track?
- What were the events that occurred at work leading up to your maternity leave?
- How did your manager, coworkers, and subordinates respond to your announcement of pregnancy and subsequent work prior to leave?
- How would you describe the company’s family-friendly policies?
- Which ones did you plan to utilize?
- Describe other women in the organization who had been pregnant and went on maternity leave? How did this affect what you perceived your experience to be like?
- Describe positive and negative interactions with employees surrounding your pregnancy and leave.
- Did you work longer than you had planned to? If so, why?
- Did you notice any changes in your workload or assignments?
- What were your feelings about leaving the world of work?
  - Where should public policy go? How involved should government be?
  - Describe the experience of having your salary topped up or not.
  - Did you lose any benefits with the time you took off?
  - How would you describe the closure you experienced in taking your maternity leave, if any?

2. Details of Present Experience Being Back at Work

- What were your anticipations about coming back to work?
- Did you go back to work earlier than planned? If so, why?
- Describe your interactions, if any, with work while you were on maternity leave.
- What care arrangements did you set up and describe the process? Did the company provide any guidance?
• Reconstruct details of what it is like to be back to work.
• Describe your first week and highlight any feelings of what it was like to balance work and home.
• Describe your dual role as worker and mother?
• How would you describe your husband’s support-non-support; provide examples?
• How have your divided up home responsibilities now that you are back at work?
• What were your husband’s expectations and how have they changed?
• How would you describe the struggles and compromises?
• How would you describe how much you multi-task now that you are back at work?
• How do you keep your relationships with friends and family? How has it changed?
• Describe relationships with the corporation, management, direct supervisors, peer relationships, and subordinate relationships; highlight any changes.
• Which family-friendly policy did you use?
• Describe how the policy was executed versus what you had planned.
• Describe how the policy allowed you to better balance work and family.
  • Describe any repercussions from utilizing the policy.
  • Describe any changes in job status and how you reacted to them.
  • What policies would you have liked to see? What would have helped you more?
  • How did your hours change?
• Overall, how would you describe how you felt the company responded to your being back at work?
• How did you feel about negotiating your needs? Scared? Confident? Supported?
3. **Reflections on the Meaning of the Experience**

- Given what you said about how you chose your career and how it has evolved now that you have come back from maternity leave — how do you understand work in your life now?
- What is your future orientation?
- If you could provide advice to the company on how to better support women who utilize family-friendly policies, what would you recommend?
- What additional policies would have been helpful to you?
- Describe the qualities of your best and worst supporter at work?
- What elements need to remain in place for you to feel empowered at work and energized at home?
- What does the government need to do?
- What attitudes/advice will you pass along to others?
- What is your self-perception now?
- How do you feel others perceive you?