THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE TEACHERS RETURNING TO WORK FOLLOWING MATERNITY LEAVE: THE IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY

by

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Abstract

Recovering from birth and caring for a newborn requires time away from other commitments, including one’s job. For full-time teachers, the amount of protected time and how much of this time is subsidized varies depending on country, state and school board. For many reasons, women in the labour force face discrimination. Female teachers returning to work upon the completion of a parental leave are also confronted with a variety of new challenges. This study analyzes journal entries and photographs submitted by female teachers transitioning back to work following parental leave. The intention of the inquiry is to give women a platform upon which to share their stories. The findings are used to evaluate current parental leave policies in Canada and the U.S. and to recommend policies that may help to support this shift.
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**Dedication**

I want to dedicate this paper to the people that I love. To my father, your intelligence and work ethic has taught me to keep learning. Mom, thank you for showing me the number of ways a woman can be educated and successful. To my big brother, a professional role model. To my best friends, my sisters; Joanne you are what happens when strength meets drive. Thank you for your unconditional support. Nadia, you are the most beautiful, brilliant feminist. Thank you for understanding me. Thank you Graeme, my loving husband, for believing in me and for being a true partner. To my niece and nephew, Farah and Leon. And of course, to my daughters, Lila, Gisele and Anastasia. You are my heart, my life, my inspiration. You are everything good and I hope I make you proud. May you all grow up strong and confident.
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Introduction

For several decades, women in Canada and the United States have made up a significant portion of the workforce. This increased involvement, and particularly the participation of women with children in the labour force, has significantly altered familial function as well as the relationships between families, schools and the workplace (Lovell & Negrey). Although federal and state policies may have made some progress in reducing motherhood related discrimination, feminist scholars argue that they are neither sufficiently nor effectively responding to the implications of the changing demographic. According to Lovell and Negrey, “The fact that women continue to be society’s primary caregivers has not led to the significant implementation of programs that make it easier to be both a committed employee and the family’s main provider of care for children, ill or disabled family members or elderly people (2001, p3).” Another argument made by feminist theorists, is that current policies serve to reinforce gender role stereotypes and the subordination of working women by emphasizing that a mother’s place is principally in the home.

Research indicates that male contribution to household responsibilities is rising, however, these duties remain dominated by females (Apter, 1993; Hochchild & Machung, 1989; Lee, 2005; Spain 7 Bianchi, 1996; Zeitlin, 1989). Combined with employment outside the home, Hochschild & Machung consider this “double workday” to have stalled the women’s revolution (1989). As mothers attempt to fulfill the “ideal male work model” celebrated by capitalist society they “often sacrifice time with their families, experience a loss of sleep and leisure time, and struggle with feelings of guilt, being overloaded, and stressed (Arendell, 2000;
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Hochschild, 1997; Presser, 1995). Understanding the experiences of working mothers is the foundation of developing policies to support their satisfaction and efficacy at home and at work.

Theoretical Framework

I learned to fold laundry when I was three years old. I played with dolls until I was twelve. While my siblings studied hard and made good grades in engineering, law and medicine, I chased strong, wide-shouldered boys, attempting to convince them of my wife-worthiness, making dinners and playing house. I never doubted or questioned my role. I assumed I would get married. I assumed I would be a fabulous mother. At the same time, I was in school, I valued my individuality and I believed I was as strong or as smart as just about any man. If, fifteen years ago, you had asked me if I was a feminist, I would have said “no”. But if you ask me today if I were a feminist fifteen years ago, well, then, I am not sure. Now, as I write, I am lost in work that takes me away from my home (literally, I am staying with my sister in Detroit), while my three very young children are cared for by my husband. Does this make me a “feminist”? Does this make me a horrible mother? I am way too tired to worry about what kind of a wife it makes me. Whatever you want to call me, I believe I am where I need to be in order to teach my three daughters that they may go anywhere they want.

Marxist feminism recognizes patriarchy as “a network of power that is tied to economy, religion, law, culture, language, arts, media, education, and state power
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(Mojab and Gorman, 2001, 287).” Through the Marxist feminist lens, this study explores the experiences of women under current parental leave legislations, and suggest how innovative policy and programming may better serve the mothers who are active members of the globalized and economic world. I will reveal the marriage of the feminist movement with Marxist intentions and identify how economic objectives often dictate cultural perceptions of gender roles. Women are the victims of these perceptions that are continually rendering her identity as taboo.

This study is built not only on feminist theory, but also in a way that celebrates a feminist research method. I attempt to understand the experiences of women like myself who balance families and professions and who are challenged by real and imagined judgment, cultural norms, feelings of guilt and time constraints. In order to do this effectively, I study the context in which participants exist. Because “feminist theorists have long recognized that individual experiences and cultural discourse are interrelated rather than separate (Spender, 1985, p 57)” and that because of this notion “the personal is political (Spender, 1985 p 57) a rich investigation of current policies is included. There is some literature focused on the value of researching in a feminist model.

“Feminist propositions insert themselves into the middle ground between subjectivity and objectivity, theorizing relationally rather than relatively (Foster, 2005, p 100).” Accordingly, this study combines fact and emotion by collecting journal entries and photographs. The stories demonstrate the interplay of the personal and professional lives of women using a feminist approach that emphasizes “the dynamic interplay between elements traditionally perceived as
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binary opposites – such as private and public, subjective and objective, emotions and reason, by demonstrating how such elements are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive (Montgomery & Baxter; 1998, p 4).” While subjectivity and objectivity may be addressed this study’s style of data collection, comparing the private and public spheres is directly linked to the battle between family and work.

In order to understand the context within which participants function, it is important to first understand the rise of women in the workforce, and the development and details about current parental leave policy.

Literature Review

Many believe that “the women’s movement is one of the most lasting and influential of the ‘new social movements’ arising from the stormy decade of the 1960s (Eisenstein, 2005, p 494-5).” This movement, according to historians, can be divided into two strands: the revolutionary and radical women’s liberation activists, and the more liberal activists, “who merely sought a piece of the pie for women (Eisenstein, 2005, p 495).” Although their approach may have taken different forms, they raised similar issues focusing on reproductive rights, violence and marriage, childcare, health issues and pornography. However, an overwhelming focus of the movement was women in the workforce (Eisenstein, 2005).

Mainstream feminists have identified women as individuals, self-sufficient, and desperate for the liberation from patriarchal constraints. This independence is only possible with the right to earn a living so not to be reliant on a husband (Eisenstein, 2005). Motherhood has had a complicated relationship with
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professionalism. In order to find a place in the workforce, a woman should be
allowed to realize her abilities and to control her fertility “so as not to be shackled
by endless years of childbearing (Eisenstein, 2005, p 498).”

Parental leave policies have been developing in Canada and the U.S. for the
last 50 years. Although they intend to address the growing number of mothers in the
workforce, these policies continue to be “designed from a masculine perspective,
viewing the ideal worker as a man (J. Acker, 1990; Keene & Reynolds, 2005; Kossek &
Lambert, 2005; Ranson, 2005; Williams & Cooper, 2004).” According to Williams
& Cooper, there persists a definitive character for the ideal worker. These models
who, “...work full time and full force for 40 years without a break, taking no time off
for childbearing or childrearing (2004).” eliminates the candidacy of mothers, who
continue to dominate childcare, housework and nurturing, regardless of a drastic
increase in their workforce participation (Apter, 1993; Hochschild & Machung,
by the “model worker” is more feasible if there is someone else, a wife, to take care
of his children and personal needs (Acker, 1990, p 149). Policies that are not
designed with an understanding of the woman employee cannot address concerns
unique to her. Feminist scholars adhere to the notion that various factors prevent
women from achieving the same economic security that men experience in the
workforce (Lovell & Negrey, 2001). Sex discrimination at work persists around
issues of childcare, home-life balance, pregnancy and parental leave. This study
analyzes the variance of women’s experiences returning to work, in relation to
maternity leave policies. By collecting personal journal entries and self-taken
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photographs, the data supports the essence of Feminist theory as an inquiry that focuses on voice, power relations, socially constructed knowledge and individual experience (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983; Collins, 1990; Fraser, 1989; hooks, 2000a, 2000b).

Good Mother, Good Worker

As the number of women in the workforce continues to rise, so does the number women forced to balance the demands of work and home. In her effort to dominate both domains, she will find herself striving to meet the competing criteria for good mother AND good worker, as outlined by cultural norms. “A substantial body of research has documented the discursive struggles working mothers experience in light of the opposing discourses of good worker and good mother (Buzzanell, et al., 2005). Research focuses on women who are privileged in terms of occupational status, education and income (Turner & Norwood, 2013). This type of research seldom addresses the unique challenges of lower income demographics. Therefore, while understanding these norms could lead to a reduction in discrimination for one group, it does not address the needs of all women.

The good worker refers to someone who is dedicated to his or her job and exceeds the expectations and responsibilities of the average employee (Acker, 1990 & Deetz, 1992). This person sacrifices personal life for the success of the company and is always available to work. He or she is young, professional, fit and is “based on the lives and bodies of men and on (White, upper-middle class U.S.) norms of masculinity (Turner & Norwood, 2013).” As such, women and minorities are at an
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immediate disadvantage. If a woman is breastfeeding and/or also attempting to work within the confines of the good mother (Turner & Norwood, 2013) identity this disadvantage is amplified.

Despite labor horror stories, dreaded weight gain and the promise of sleepless nights, many women still choose to have children. And, despite the reality of these warnings, "Motherhood is a highly anticipated and positive change for most women (Adams, M, 2015, p 143).” For some, the transition to motherhood originates long before pregnancy as they prepare for their impending new identity. They may read books and forums to prepare for the test of motherhood. For others, motherhood may come as a surprise. Regardless of its initiation, the expectations of what this job should entail have already been decided by society. To what extent a woman chooses to internalize this image of good mother will vary, but to some extent, every mother will live within the context of powerful societal pressures.

It remains a dominant presumption that “mothers should be the primary caregivers of children and should engage in intensive mothering, which requires almost full-time physical presence, self-sacrifice, monetary investments, and attention to expert advice on parenting (Hays, 1996).” This notion of intensive mothering plausibly includes breastfeeding, an added challenge for women working outside of the home. Ironically, the wave of intensive mothering occurs simultaneously to the rise of women in the workforce.

The role of women has not only been defined by society but has long been defined by it in order to push political and economic agendas. After decades of keeping women in the home, insisting that their primary duties are limited to taking
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care of husbands and children, there is

a shift in this ideal. Some theorists have suggested that “There is a Kernel of truth in the U.S. propaganda: feminism acts as a cultural solvent, as globalization erodes the traditions of patriarchy (8 p 487).” This argument identifies an eerie connection between the Marxist and Feminist movement as women in the workforce supported economic growth and “the profound ‘restructuring’ of the U.S. and world economy since the 1970s (Eisenstein, 2005, p 487).” In other words, once society recognized the economic benefits of women in paid labour, it became more socially acceptable. Heidi Hartmann notes that the growth of the service industry created a cyclical need for women in the workforce in order to sustain a profitable market. She notes: “The service sector grows because the availability of cheap female labor provides the supply and because the use of women in the labor market rather than at home also provides the demand for replacement services (fast-food replacing home cooking, for example) (Eisenstein, 2005, p 490).”

Of course, encouraging women to see themselves as workers rather than homemakers was more attractive before women began to ask for equal pay. Until gender-neutral working conditions are available these frameworks in fact “rely upon, extend and deepen gender inequalities in order to sustain and strengthen processes of global capital accumulation (Wilson, 2015).”

While literature focuses on the rise of women in the workforce, gender equity in the workforce, and how women are used to promote national economic growth, what is missing is a reflective and personal account of what women are experiencing when they return to work. Insufficient literature also demands an
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inquiry into the realities of parental leave policies, how policies differ and how women experience these different policies. This study attempts to provide twelve teachers in Canada and the US returning to work following varied parental leaves with a voice, and to begin a discussion about policy suggestions based on the experiences of these women.

Maternity Leave and Its Policy Frameworks in the US and Canada

While Heidi Hartmann from the Institute of Women’s Policy Research considered the FMLA a “small step toward reducing inequality between the sexes (U.S. Congress, 1987c, p622),” at the time of its development, conservative women’s groups argued that “the best family leave policy would allow the husband to make a family wage so the woman could have “a better quality of life in the home, so that she could be a full-time homemaker (U.S. Congress, 1987b, p204).” This demonstrate one of the many dialectic views about mothers in the workforce.

In addition to being received differently by different groups, another breakdown in current policies is that they reinforce inequity. Because only certain Americans and Canadians qualify for family leaves, the policies are discriminatory in nature. It is widely accepted that on some level, poorer populations that are overrepresented by ethnic and racial minorities are discriminated against, as they are unable to access these benefits (Armenia & Gerstel, 2006).

Although parental leave policies claim an attempt to remedy the gender inequities of the workforce, many are criticized for being ineffective. These policies
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also do little to ensure the equity of workers who are members of non-white ethnicities. “We find that White men are significantly less likely to take family leaves than White women and men and women of color (Armenia & Gerstel, p 871).”

Furthermore, familial leaves that provide no or significantly reduced pay, including the FMLA and Canadian EI programs, continue to reinforce gender inequity as men tend to earn more in their jobs. It is more likely that mothers will be able to leave their jobs with less pay loss than their male counterparts (Turner & Norwood, 2013).

It is imperative to understand the current policies in order to suggest possible improvements. While current policy has responded to some of the issues that working mothers face, this study clearly demonstrates that it is still a difficult balance for some. This section begins with a discussion about the current policies available to the participants in this study. It concludes with a number of suggested policies that may respond to the challenges exposed by the twelve women in this study.

Federal Policy - The United States

In the United States, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited a variety of employment discriminations based on sex. It was not until congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978, that this definition was amended to include discrimination based on pregnancy and related issues (Rhum, 2011). This was the first National legislation paving the way to more standardized policies, but remained wildly subjective and provided little added protection for mothers in the
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workforce, including female teachers adhering to individual board policies.

President Bill Clinton, “in response to greater tension between the needs of families and those of corporate America (Holmes, 2008),” signed into law the Family Medical Leave Act in 1993. The FMLA provides employees up to 12 weeks of job-secured leave in the event of serious illness, to care for a family member or when a child is born or adopted. With the passing of this Act, teachers (and many other females) were “uniformly guaranteed ‘nondiscriminatory’ pregnancy leave (Kidwell, 2001, 1287)”.

The FMLA was developed in response to growing concerns in America. Congress determined that; the number of households in which both parents worked was increasing; it is important to the development of a child that parents be able to participate in early childrearing; fathers and mothers who work may feel that, unless supportive policies are put into place, they must choose between work and parenting; because women are often the primary care givers at home, polices must address working conditions as to reduce gender inequality in the workforce; and that employment policies that apply only to one gender may result in employer discrimination against that gender and applicants of that gender (FMLA Overview, 2015).

The purpose of the FMLA is to support employees balancing the responsibilities of family and career, by protecting them professionally and economically. It is also intended to “minimize the potential for discrimination on the basis of sex consistent with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (FMLA Overview, 2015)” of the Constitution of the United States, and to
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promote equal opportunity for women and men in their roles both at home and at work.

The FMLA allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave following the birth of a child. This time is allotted to “bond with the newborn child within one year of birth (FMLA Overview, 2015)”. Unless the employer agrees to allow intermittent leave, the twelve weeks must be taken as a continuous block of time (FMLA Overview, 2015).

Eligible employees include individuals who work in the private sector for a company employing more than 50 people, as well as all employees of state, local or federal agencies or local educational agencies (FMLA Overview, 2015). These criteria protect smaller businesses, alleviating the potential economic burden of this leave of employers of less than 20 workers. In order to receive these benefits, an employee must also have worked at least 1250 hours in the year preceding the leave (FMLA Overview, 2015).

The 12-week period is unpaid. However, in combination with bargaining agreements, an employee may be entitled to, or request to use accrued sick leave, vacation leave or personal, paid time in order to be financial subsidized during this time. These days will be included in the 12 weeks of protected time and, if paid leave is used for an FMLA approved reason, then that time is protected by the act (FMLA Overview, 2015). In some cases, an employees contract may insist that sick leave or vacation time must be used (FMLA Overview, 2015).

During the leave, the person continues to be treated as an employee of the company. He or she is also entitled to return to the same or an “equivalent” job, in
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terms of pay, benefits, and other employment terms and conditions (FMLA, 1993).

“If an employee is laid off during the FMLA leave period, the employer must be able to show that the employee would not have been employed at the time of reinstatement (FMLA Overview, 2015).”

FMLA rights are extended to both parents. Respecting the diversity of American families, the FMLA extends this definition parent to include biological, adoptive, step or foster parents, as well as someone who stands in loco parentis to a child (FMLA, 1993). Loco parentis is defined as someone who takes financial responsibility and cares for a child in the way that a parent would (FMLA Overview, 2015).

While supporters consider the FMLA to be important protection for modern families (Holmes, 2008), it continues to be criticized by others. The twelve weeks of protected leave provides job-security for many, yet it is unpaid, favouring those who are financially stable. In order to be eligible for this leave, employees must have worked 1250 hours in the previous year and small companies; those with 50 or fewer employees; are not covered at all. The Act does not assure the reinstatement of certain “key” employees. While this study focuses on teachers working in the public system, restrictions of the FMLA result in the eligibility of only approximately 50% of private sector workers (Rhum, 2011).

Federal Policy – Canada

Canadian and European policies are seen as more “generous than those of the United States (Rhum, 2011),” due to that fact that they offer a paid maternity
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leave for qualified women. It is important to understand the amount of pay being collected. Paid leaves are not universally comparable and it should be remembered that this subsidy varies depending on country, local and employee standards. There is a significant experiential difference between policies that guarantee 80% rather than 50% of total salary. For Canadians who make more than $90 000 a year, maternity leave represents a substantial drop in income.

“The Employment Insurance (EI) program offers temporary financial assistance to unemployed workers (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016).” The policy includes 15 weeks of maternity and up to 35 weeks of parental benefits (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016). This was a significant legislation. In 1970, only three provinces provided job-security for women on maternity leave. By 1981, at least fifteen weeks of protected leave became a federal mandate. Within three decades, protected leave in all parts of Canada ranged from fifty-two to fifty-four weeks, with the exception of Quebec where the duration of leave reached seventy protected weeks. Currently, leave-takers receive 55% of average earnings, a rate that is also higher in Quebec. While the first 15 weeks are reserved for mothers, either parent is entitled to take the rest of the time.

Parental benefits are divided into two categories: Maternity and Parental. While maternity benefits are reserved for mothers, including surrogates, who are unable to work due to pregnancy or childbirth, parental care is offered to either parent who chooses to use this time to bond with a newborn child. It may also be taken by parents who fall into an extended definition of parent including: step and adoptive. Maternity leave is provided for a maximum of 15 weeks and must be taken
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between eight weeks preterm and 17 weeks after the birth of a baby. Its purpose is to offer recovery from the biological event of childbirth (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016). Parental leave is offered to biological, adoptive or legally recognized parents and can last up to 35 weeks (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016). This time may also be shared between two eligible parents (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016).

Qualified workers must be employed in insurable employment and have worked at least 600 hours in the previous year. An insurable employment means EI premiums are deducted from wages to a maximum insurable ceiling. For the year 2015, this maximum was set at $49,500 (Service Canada, 2015). These figures are different in Quebec. Additionally, because leave is legislated at the provincial level, pay and benefits are provided through the employment insurance system. Parents cannot collect more than the yearly maximum of $49,500 (Service Canada, 2015).

She will, therefore, be entitled to 55% of her annual earnings to a ceiling of this amount. For women (and men) who make significantly higher incomes, this could represent a drastic reduction of income while her or she is on leave. To put into perspective what this payment looks like, the maximum payment is currently $1002 bi-weekly. It is important to note that these payments are considered taxable income, subject to both federal and provincial or territorial taxes (Service Canada, 2015).

Families whose net income is less than $25,921 may be considered a low-income family. Depending on the total household income, combined with number and ages as well as total annual income, the Family Supplement may increased
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benefit payments up to 80% of one’s average insurable earnings (Service Canada, 2015).

State Leave Policies

In addition to the federal mandates for maternity and parental leaves, various state-wide programs and policies apply to families. The following policies are implemented in the three US states within which participants work.

An employee must adhere to the regulations of the FMLA. In addition to these rights, the Family Medical Leave in Maine adds more flexibility to the eligibility of employees. In the state of Maine, any business employing 15 employees, as well as any city, town or municipal agency employing more that 25 people, must offer the provisions outlined in the FMLA to their employees.

In the state of New York, the New York Family Medical Leave Act offers extenuating benefits only to military personnel, or in cases of adoption or disability.

The Oregon Family Leave Act differs from the FMLA in a number of ways. Employers with 25 or more employees must grant 12 weeks of parental leave. Instead of the 1250 hours required by the FMLA, candidates must only have worked 180 “calendar” days in the previous year, which, based on a 40 hour, 5-day week schedule adds up to 1040 hours. Employers required to allow the use of accrued, paid sick leave as outlined in employment contracts. There is also additional time available for families who are dealing with sick children and pregnancy related illness. Another significant difference is that both parents are provided with 12
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weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for the birth of a child. If approved by the employer, both parents may take this time together or at different time.

With the exception of Quebec which offers a more generous leave and percentage of pay, there are no specific provisions for individual provinces and territories. The participants in this study reside in either Ontario or Alberta and their leave was subject to the maternity and parental leaves as outlined in the Employment Insurance program of Canada.

School Board Policies in the USA

The American participants in this study belong to one of the three teachers’ federations: The Oregon and Portland Association of Teachers; The Buffalo Teachers’ Federation; or the Westbrook Education Association (Maine). Bound by the FMLA as well as their State specific legislations, each board differs in their approach to family leave.

The Oregon and Portland Association of Teachers’ bargaining agreement provides teachers with 10 sick days per year that shall be accrued without limit (PAT, 2013-2016). As per the Oregon Family Leave Act, these paid days may be used during any FMLA leave. Including the 12 weeks guaranteed by the federal provision, a childcare leave shall be granted for up to one year and another childcare leave may be granted for an additional year if a request is made in time to be approved by the board (PAT, 2013-2016).

Members of the Buffalo Teacher’s Federation may be granted up to 1 year of parental leave, and then, through a second application process may be approved for
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a 2-year extension, totaling of 3 years (BTF, 1999). The Westbrook Education Association respects solely the provisions of the federal and state policies (WEA, 2011-2014).

School Board Policies in Ontario

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation share virtually identical privileges concerning family leaves and sick days. As of May 1, 2013, members of these associations, upon the birth of a child, are granted a salary top up of 100% for the first 8 weeks of their maternity leave (OECTA, ETFO, OSSTF, 2013). This subsidy is provided regardless of the timing of the commencement of the leave (OECTA, ETFO, OSSTF, 2013).

Additionally, teachers receive a total of five, paid “family responsibility days” that may be used to tend to family related issues that may arise during the year. These days are not accruable (OECTA, ETFO, OSSTF, 2013).

Tax Benefits and Government Funding

In addition to parental leaves policies, various taxes, benefits and funds can help to alleviate financial burdens for families with young children. Much like legislation, these benefits may be offered at the federal, state/provincial, or municipal level. In some cases, a family may be eligible for more than one benefit from more than one source.
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In order to better understand the value and impact of these types of subsidies, future studies might analyze experiences of participants gathering information about which benefits they are using. I did not collect this information from the participants in my study. It is reasonable to assume most people use the tax benefits and, based on the demographic of my participants; probably none of the low-income assistance was applicable.

In the US, the Child Tax Credit can reduce the federal tax owed by $1000 per child under the age of 17 years (36?). The Child and Dependent Care Tax is a non-refundable credit for working people who pay for childcare (37?).

Many of the benefits and funding for families are also supplemented at the state level. The federal tax credit is expanded 25% by the Maine Dependent Care Tax; a figure that doubles if a child attends a “quality childcare provider” holding a Quality Certificate (38, 39?). The state of Maine offers a Child Care Subsidy Program that is designed to financially assist parents paying for childcare so that they may continue to work, attend school or participate in an employment training program (Dept of Health and Human Services, 2016).

The New York State Family Benefits Program sponsors “Worksite Child Care Centers” licensed by the state (NY Work-Life Services, 2016). For this program, enrollment priority is given to children of state employees. The program is designed to provide quality care and a licensed program, as well as healthy snacks to children, while providing parents with the peace of mind of having their kids nearby (NY Work-Life Services, 2016).
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In addition to federal tax breaks, Oregon has recently combined two separate tax credits into a single Working Family Child and Dependent Tax Credit for the years 2016-2021. This is an attempt to offset the cost of living for families so that parents may be gainfully employed or continue to attend school (Oregon.gov, 2016).

At the federal level, Canada currently offers a Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), offering families $160 for every child under the age of 6 years (30). Under the Justin Trudeau government, these figures will soon change to reflect a higher payout to families with lower incomes. The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) will be a tax-free monthly payment for families to “help them with the cost of raising children (CCTB).”

Ontario also provides “direct financial support to low and moderate income families (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ontario, 2016)” regardless of their employment status, to a maximum of $1336 per child annually (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ontario, 2016).

In addition to the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC), the Ministry of Human Services in Alberta assists families accessing various licensed childcare services (Ministry of Human Services, Alberta, 2016).

Other factors that may affect a families’ decisions about childcare, and the length of maternity or parental leave, include initiatives such as Full-Day Kindergarten (available for children as young as 3 years of age) and the creation of a curriculum such as the framework for Early Learning and Child Care in Alberta for children ages 0-5 years (35).
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Policy Discussion

This study is not only built on feminist theory, but also uses a method that celebrates a feminist research. I have sought to understand the experiences of women like myself who attempt to balance family and professional life and who are challenged by real and imagined judgment, cultural norms, feelings of guilt and time constraints. In order to do this effectively, I have studied the context in which participants exist. Because “feminist theorist have long recognized that individual experiences and cultural discourse are interrelated rather than separate (Spender, 1985, p 57)” and that because of this notion “the personal is political (Spender, 1985 p 57)” I have included a rich investigation of current policies. There is some literature explaining the value of researching in a feminist model the way that I have. I have chosen to collect journal entries and photographs from participants in order to combine fact and emotion believing that “feminist propositions insert themselves into the middle ground between subjectivity and objectivity, theorizing relationally rather than relatively (Foster, 2005, p 100).” Not only are the intentions and impact of these policy implications mixed, but the interpretation of the intent and impact varies as well.

One might assume that longer parental leaves are beneficial to women and can be seen as an attempt to reduce marginalization in the workforce. Some theorist argue that longer leaves paired with the known statistic that these leaves overwhelmingly taken by mothers, actually reinforce gender stereotypes by emphasizing that the best place for a child is at home with her mother (Evans, 2006).
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Another concern is that while these policies legally prohibit employers from discriminating against employees for taking time to care for their children, they often interpret leaves of absences as a lack of commitment to their careers (Padavic & Reskin, 2003). This could lead to purposeful hiring and be problematic for young women.

Research Methodology

My Story

Born into a family made up of highly educated professionals, I have sought similar successes. I have been teaching fulltime with the Peel District School Board for the last ten years, am completing a Masters of Education at the University of Toronto, and live with my husband and three daughters, ages four years, three years, and three months old. My day is hectic, short and often chaotic. I find great pleasure in time spent professionally and cherish moments with my family. Sick days are often reserved for family responsibility, and hours at home are used to complete assignments and plan lessons. Unfortunately, this mélange of responsibilities results in feelings of guilt, exhaustion and a negative self-image as both a mother and a professional. I am also blessed with the bitter-sweet help of a wonderful (and extremely capable), live-in nanny. This addition to our family has served two competing purposes. On the one hand, she alleviates a lot of my housework and daily responsibilities that would otherwise prevent me from being able to manage work, school and family life. On the other hand, she is a constant reminder that I have failed in my attempt to successfully manage my life on my own
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and therefore, at least in my eyes, she reduces the amount of respect with which people view me as a woman. I suppose a third result of having this lovely woman in our life is that I continue to work in order to afford to pay her, ironically so that I can continue to work. This cyclical lifestyle that I have chosen is an attempt at balancing personal, professional and familial priorities, while maintaining the standard of living, and spending, which we have come to enjoy. I have decided that even if taking time off work to focus on family was financially feasible, which it is not, it is important to teach my daughters that they too can fulfill both professional and personal goals.

Life challenges were amplified when I returned to work following my maternity leaves. Reluctantly leaving my babies home, afraid of added responsibilities and feeling removed from staff and school, my initial experiences felt neither supported nor natural. Two years later, I continue to feel uncertain of and insecure in my current roles. I wanted to give women in similar circumstances, the opportunity to be heard, to share their stories and to use these stories to propose possible policy developments that might support working mothers before, during and beyond this shift. This study is designed to recognize the women like myself, who will not give up on the fight to “have it all”.

Research Question

The time that female educators are absent from school due to pregnancy and/or childcare varies at least in part by the local and board policies in which she works. I will demonstrate that, perhaps surprisingly for many Canadians, the
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amount of protected leave time is comparable for most of the teachers in this study. The greatest variance between Canadian and American policies is in the availability of pay while on leave. While on leave, these educators adapt to new responsibilities of parenthood, health issues, emotional responses and various related obligations. In her absence, she is physically removed from the workplace and inevitably loses subsequent experience, opportunities for professional development and involvement in the school community. When the educators in this study return from maternity leave, they juggle the combination of new challenges, the consequences of absenteeism in the workforce, familial obligations, sick children, meal preparation and laundry. This study investigates the experiences of women returning to work after having a baby. Participants submitted journals and photographs depicting the experiences of this transition.

The research uncovers issues of maternity leave policies and their effects on female educators. After collecting the data, reading candid depictions of daily struggles and celebrations, and sifting through photographs of loving moments and thermometers, I realize that my records demonstrate the experiences of 12, remarkable women, and can be used to spark conversations about the effectiveness of current policies and what types of policies may potentially address some of the challenges that are conveyed. Combining recent literature with the data that I have collected, I assess the effectiveness and inclusivity of applicable programs and policies and suggest potential legislative direction that will help to support female educators as they transition back to work post parental leave. For this study, I use a qualitative data plan. In order to capture the experiences of women balancing a new
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baby and a career, having taken at least some time away from work. I asked the question:

What are the experiences of female teachers reintegrating into work following parental leave, and how are they impacted by the policies in specific Canadian and American school boards?

Because of the widely accepted differences of the maternity leave policies in Canada and the US, I have chosen to consider participants from Ontario and Alberta, Canada, and three American States: Oregon, New York and Maine. The stories of these women demonstrate the interplay of personal and professional lives of women in a true feminist approach that emphasizes “the dynamic interplay between elements traditionally perceived as binary opposites – such as private and public, subjective and objective, emotions and reason by demonstrating how such elements are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive (Montgomery & Baxter; 1998, p 4).

This study identifies the experiences of female teachers who are reintegrating into the workforce following a parental leave. The purpose of the research is to give a voice to women experiencing this adjustment, to interpret their stories within their personal context and to use knowledge about current policy and participant experiences to propose future legislation.

I use a qualitative design in order to study the emotional, personal and professional experiences of women returning to work following maternity leave. My intention is to use a research approach that in itself supported a feminist approach.
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Acker, Barry and Esseveld identify some of the problems associated with feminist research. The argument is that research often victimizes women in that their experiences are not adequately understood within the patriarchal context of social norms (1983). Although I am unable to remove the realities of patriarchy, I attempt to interpret the experiences of the participants from a kindred perspective with which I have personal experience.

I also collect data in the form of written journal entries and participant taken photographs. Elissa Foster, feminist thinker and author of a powerful auto ethnography about the transition to motherhood, chooses her research style “recognizing the power of stories to address both our ways of knowing and our ways of being...integrating emotion and reason (Bochner, 1997; Tedlocks, 1991), imagination and intellect (Coles, 1989), individual experiences and socio-cultural contexts (Richardson, 1990)(2005).” By using a not only qualitative form of research, but one that is open ended and both written and visual, I attempt to weld the objectivity of policy with the subjectivity of emotional response, celebrating a key component of feminist research methodology. Detailed journal entries allow participants to tell their stories, “Recognizing the power of language to construct reality and privileging the subjective and emotional dimensions of knowing, narrative theories reflect a feminist ethic because they oppose phallocentric paradigms by resisting the universal, objective, and neutral stance of privileged ‘masculine knowledge’ (Grosz, 1988, p 97).”
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Sampling

Participants were recruited using different mixed-methods. As this study did not take place on school property, during school hours or as an analysis of specific school programming, approval was not sought from school boards’ ethics’ committees. Once the study was approved by the University of Toronto Board of Ethics, I began to seek out female teachers who were currently on parental leave and returning to work in the fall of 2015. This was done in Ontario through the use of snowball sampling, and in Alberta and all parts of the USA as random sampling.

As a teacher in Ontario, I asked colleagues to place me in contact with teachers that were currently on maternity leave and who may be interested in participating in my study. I received a number of contacts this way. Using board emails, unless personal emails were provided by the participants, I contacted these women first introducing myself and briefly describing my study. If the teacher expressed interest, I then sent out an email with a more detailed description of the study and what her contributions would look like. Candidates were then asked to contact me if they were interested. I also suggested meeting in person or online if she felt comfortable doing so. I was able to meet with all 6 of the Ontarian participants prior to study commencement during which time I conducted an informal interview and introduction to the study. Using a written script as an outline for the beginning of this meeting, I described my own experiences as a teacher with (at the time) two children. I was also pregnant and discussed my fears about returning to work. I allowed this conversation to be authentic, sharing my experiences and prompting the women to discuss their own. This purpose of this
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meeting was to begin the conversation, to build a relationship with participants who were being asked to share personal experiences with me and to outline the details of the study. I provided each participant with a consent form to sign, a copy of the introduction script that guided the conversation and outlined her study responsibilities, a two-page information sheet that participants were asked to fill out and send back to me, and the two prompt sheets recommending the themes that the journal entries and photographs should highlight.

In order to recruit participants from different provinces and the US, I sent out hundreds of invitations to publicly available teacher emails. In certain school boards, staff emails are available on-line at school and board websites. I used a script, again introducing myself and my circumstances as mother, teacher, researchers and briefly described the study and purpose of the research. Because I had no knowledge of which staff members may be eligible to participate, I defined the criteria for candidacy and asked those who were eligible and interested to respond directly to me. I also asked those receiving the emails to forward to the invitation to other potential participants who they felt may consider contributing. With the intent to meet with all participants in person, I began by emailing teachers in Michigan because of proximity to me. I met with one candidate in the Detroit area who did not end up participating, and did not receive any other interest. At that point I randomly chose cities and states, with no prior knowledge about their particular policies about maternity leave. If these school boards did, in fact, offer publicly available email addresses, I continued to the invitation phase. Participants
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were collected in Buffalo, New York; Portland, Oregon; Portland, Maine; and Calgary, Alberta.

Communication with the participants outside of Ontario was done through email. Participants received the introduction speech, consent form, participant information form, the prompt sheets for journal entries and photographs, email instruction form, and a request to terminate participation form.

All of the participants were given a study-specific email to use to send journal entries and photographs to ensure password protection and anonymity.

I was originally able to recruit 13 American and 8 Canadian participants. The number of women who actually contributed, submitting journal entries and photographs, was reduced to 5 American and 7 Canadian participants. It was more difficult to build a relationship with the women who lived further away and that I did not meet in person. One participant submitted only two journals, one week’s worth of participation, in which she expressed that she was having trouble keeping up. Because she did not request that she be removed from the study, I decided to include her contributions in the analysis as her inability to continue, in its self, demonstrated the realities of her experiences.

The Data

Participants were asked to write a minimum of two journal entries per week for a period of four weeks. They submitted their responses by email either as they were completed or in grouped submissions. Following a list of six prompts, journal entries could vary in length with the expectation of approximately two paragraphs.
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In addition to journal entries, participants were expected to take selfies and photographs to capture their experiences visually. The women used their own devices and uploaded images to the email provided. Participants were asked to submit a minimum of five images per week for the four weeks of study contributions. The same list of themes provided for journal entries was to be used to guide photography, with some differences in the examples provided in the subsections of the outline. Participants were asked to attempt to address all of the themes provided at least once.

**Efficacy as a mother.** A study performed in 2007 found that “full-time working mothers in the United States had difficulty meeting the demands of mothering and work (Johnston & Swanson). At the same time, “The dominant voice on motherhood in the U.S. culture says that mothers should be the primary caregivers of children an should engage in intensive mothering, which requires almost full-time physical presence, self-sacrifice, monetary investments and attention to expert advice on parenting (Hayes, 1996).” Coming from the personal perspective of working-mother, I was interested in understanding how participants felt that they were mothering successfully and what feelings this evoked.

**Efficacy as a teacher.** An Israeli study attempting to understand the experiences of women returning to work following maternity leave found that this transitional phase “might be critical to a woman’s identity and well-being (2011)” and that they “did not return to their ‘former’ state as employed, but searched for a different way of working (Alstveit et al., 2011).” This theme was important to the study not only to identify if and how women balancing early motherhood and
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careers have changed as employees, but how these changes have physically and affected her self-image.

**Connection to School and Student.** This study is specifically aimed at teachers. Understanding that the connection to students and school involvement are non-contractual but important aspects of the job, this theme extends the understanding of participants’ efficacy as a teacher. It can also be directly linked to job satisfaction.

**Professional Relationships.** Participants were asked to identify changes in the way that they related to colleagues and administrators. Reflections on professional relationships were intended to describe if and how women returning from parental leaves are welcomed back into the workforce and how supportive this environment is.

**Personal Relationships.** During the transitional phase of early motherhood and returning to work, I experienced an increased dependency on family and a reduced amount of time for socializing. Participants were asked to identify how their personal relationships have changed since taking on this double role. Reflecting on marital relationships can also help to depict the division of labour in the home, either challenging or reiterating the information found in relevant literature.

**Healthy Lifestyle.** “Working mothers are one segment of the population that exhibits particularly high levels of inactivity, which can largely be attributed to the numerous real and perceived barriers of physical activity they encounter (Mailey & McAuley, 2013, p 343).” This portion of the data will demonstrate some of the
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effects of this transition on the lifestyle choices of participants. Because of the well-known benefits of physical activity and a healthy living, these may help suggest meaningful and relevant policy direction.

Procedures

Participants began by submitting their signed consent forms. Once they set up the emails that I had created for the study, they communicated with me and submitted data. Two participants who had difficulty setting up their emails continued through the study using personal emails sent to my study-specific address. Two other participants found it more comfortable to send emails to my University of Toronto address from which I initially contacted them. Participants began submitting data once they returned to work following their leaves. Most of the woman began to participate within a week back at work, while one participant had returned to work over a year ago and combined current experiences with reflections on her earlier experiences.

Participants submitted journal entries and photographs either as they wrote them or on a weekly basis. One participant sent all of her documentation at the closing of the four weeks. The numbers of journal entries and photographs also varied. Allowing participants to contribute in a way that they felt comfortable, I reduced communication during active participation and I did not provide feedback. While I did reach out to participants who had expressed a desire to participate but did not follow through with signing the consent form, I did not force people to
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continue to write, to send more images or to change their format of contributing, once they began.

When participants completed their four weeks of participation, I sent out an email thanking them for their efforts and explaining to them that I would be in contact with them in the next few months. I recently sent out the second consent form ensuring that they felt comfortable sharing their pictures with the other participants in the form of a photo-album.

Analysis

The qualitative data collected in this study was not easily grouped or compared. Submission lengths and content was not consistent across the sample. It was not my intent to collect data that could be neatly organized. I chose the method of journaling and photographing in order to capture emotionally charged stories, openly depicting the experiences of participants The purpose of this study was to give women a voice, and I am confident that it did. I was pleased with the candidness of the submissions.

In order to analyze the material for the purpose of the study while preserving the uniqueness of each participant, I summarized their submissions into case studies. These studies were then used to contrast and compare experiences within the context of each participant's policy regulations.
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Limitations

The study was designed to understand the experiences of female teachers returning to work following maternity leave while evaluating the impact of current policy on these experiences. There were various limitations that affected the results of this study. Simple size, the homogeneity of the sample, the highlighted themes chosen and the structure of the methodology may have increased the validity of the project.

**Sample Size.** Twelve women participated in this study. Initially, 24 women expressed interest in participating. Some of the women who did not end up starting expressed concerns of time constraints. Studying the detailed experiences of 12 women provided an abundance of data. However, the small sample size could not be generalized. Although I originally chose participants from Canada and the USA in an attempt to compare two different federal leave policies. Throughout the study I realize that it is not appropriate to use the stories of a few women to effectively compare the experiences of all women in Canada and US. Ideally, a larger sample would be more representative of the population. On the other hand, I felt that monitoring the involvement of only 12 women became overwhelming. I was not able to respond to the women as quickly as I would have liked to nor was I able to thoroughly understand and share the details of each story. A similar study with a smaller sample size could focus on responses in a more detail oriented way.

**Homogeneity of the sample.** The 12 women in my participant shared many similarities. All of the women were teachers, white, married to opposite sex partners, in their thirties and had either one or two children. This level of
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homogeneity did not represent diverse ethnicities, relationship statuses, socio-economic or employments.

**Themes.** The study is intended to investigate the women’s experiences and the effects that policy has on these experiences. The participants were provided with six themes to focus on. While these themes evoked meaningful discussion, they did not directly address the reactions to current policy. Some of these issues surfaced organically out of the women’s responses. A future study could include more direct themes related to policy implications.

**Timing and Process.** Considering the participants’ busy schedules during this transition, the added stress of this demanding study was likely the reason that many women did not follow through. One participant complained of feeling overwhelmed and only submitted two responses. 12 of the participants who initially showed interest did not continue past the invitation stage. Reducing the amount of involvement may address this concern. A future study could ask for one, perhaps lengthier response or the choice to submit either journal entries or images.

Ethical Issues

Participants chosen for this study are all educated adults assumingly, capable of choosing to take part. Measures were taken in order to ensure that participation was voluntary and their identities were protected in that their employer was not made aware of their involvement. A detailed consent form was signed, explicitly describing the responsibilities of all parties. Participant all agreed to the submission of photographs and were given the option of being visible, and therefor identified, in
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the images. Participants received a second consent form following the completion of their contributions to ensure that they felt comfortable with their images being included in a participation gift. The women were informed about the methods and purpose of the study before signing the consent form and informed of their right to terminate participation at any time. They receiving the termination form before the process began. There were some ethical issues that were not avoided. Some new mothers suffer from post-partum depression, a condition that occurs following childbirth. Because this condition may go undiagnosed, it is possible that a participant with post-partum symptoms may have been involved in the additional stress of this study. For every participant, this involvement added responsibility to an already hectic schedule. While one of the women identified it as an enjoyable activity, one participant explained that she was glad when this study was finished because she had “once again committed to something she shouldn’t have.”

Women were challenged to identify and address emotionally charged issues in their lives. This was done without psychological support and with very little feedback from myself. The extent of the discomfort felt by participants unclear. It is assumed that the benefits of the study, including being given a voice and potential policy implications, far outweigh minor damages.
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**Portraits of Women Teachers and Maternity Leave**

The following is a collection of case studies summarizing the experiences of the participants. I have titled them by their participant number. They received this number as they agreed to take part in the study. The missing numbers represent drop-out participants. The first seven stories belong to women in Canada. The following five cases are those of the Americans. The case studies interpret both the photographs and written submissions provided by the women. While the journal submissions give a detailed, written perception of the women’s experiences that may have occurred hours or days before, the pictures represent single moments that the participant is inspired to share. I believe that the photographs add an emotional and immediate candidness to the written responses. The may also be more subjectively interpreted by the audience and myself, the researcher. This is an interest way of interpreting the experiences of the women by what they are including and parts of what they might be omitting.

**Participant 01**

Participant 01 is an employee of the Dufferin Peel Catholic School Board and a member of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association. She is 35 years old and has been teaching fulltime for the last 13 years in the secondary panel. She is married and has two children. At the time of her most recent maternity leave, participant 01 was teaching grade 10 careers and grade 10 religion. She returned to the same position following her leave. Participant 01 took a 10-week disability leave
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preceding her maternity leave with pay, receiving 90% of her regular salary. As provided by the government of Ontario, she then opted to take the 17 weeks of pregnancy leave and 35 weeks of parental leave for a total of approximately 14.5 months away from work. She received the maximum Employment Insurance payout provided by Service Canada and for the first 8 weeks of her pregnancy leave, she received 100% of her salary, topped up by OECTA. Her older child is currently attending full-day kindergarten and her one-year-old initially attended a daycare facility but then shortly moved to the care of a friend’s nanny who was also caring for two other small children. Participant 01 anticipated that her son’s transition into kindergarten would affect her transition back to work and also worried about balancing her husband’s curling schedule during this time.

Participant 01 pursued teaching with the intention to specialize in physical education and health. She accepted a position in a school with the promise of this opportunity in the near future however, when she was finally assigned her desired position she started her first maternity leave and returned to a different job. As she was under the impression that a teacher is supposed to return to a similar position that she left before a maternity leave, she felt that she had been wronged. A couple of years later, under the jurisdiction of a new administrator, she was again promised a position in phys. Ed. However, she missed her opportunity once more as she began her second maternity leave at the time that the opening presented itself. Participant 01 explains that she does not regret her familial decisions but acknowledges that her maternity leaves have definitely impacted her career.
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Participant 01 returned to work September 2015. She began the year making a conscious effort not to hold resentment towards her colleagues and administration for perceived missed opportunities. She also decided to reduce her involvement in extracurricular activities and leadership initiatives in order to spend more time with her children.

The first hurdle that 01 struggles with upon her return is an unfortunate event with her daughter's daycare center. A health and safety issue involving an infestation leads to a conflict of opinion between her and the supervisor of the facility. She and her husband decide that it is not the right place for her daughter and chose to remove her. “I just couldn’t continue to deal with these selfish, money driven and immoral people.” She quickly contacts her good friend who had previously offered her home and nanny’s services. Participant 01’s daughter is now spending the days at her friend’s home in the care of a nanny who also takes care of her friend’s 3 year old daughter. Although she fears the effects that it might have on her friendship and admitting that it is a stressful choice for her and her husband, she is happy with their decision.

In order to maintain a positive attitude about work, participant 01 depends on her commitment to working out. Working in a secondary school affords her the schedule and facility to do so during her lunch break. Her husband acknowledges that she is a happier person when she is active.

When a desired position in guidance presents itself, participant 01 felt qualified for the job but has a conflict with her principal who decides he is looking for a male candidate to even out the ratio of male to female counselors in the
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department, an issue he does not have with the heavily male represented physical
education department. This discourages 01 at work again.

Participant 01 feels an intensified commitment to spending time with her
parents and family since her mother suffered a serious medical emergency last year.
Her parents moved into the neighbourhood in which she lives and this has added to
the relationships and responsibilities that 01 is balancing. The timing of this change
was not ideal. She feels the pressure of having to meet the needs of her family while
keeping her parents happy. She is also struggling with her son's transition into
kindergarten as he is acting out, hitting other children. She feels defeated. She feels
that she is failing as a parent and fears that his behaviour is a reflection of her and
her husband's parenting. This continues to be an issue as her son is moved to
another class when school reorganization happens. Mom is becoming very
frustrated and emotional.

On the other hand, she feels that her daughter is thriving in her daycare
situation. She seems happy and comfortable, but mom wishes she could get more
daily reports. She feels disconnected but is hesitant to discuss this concern with her
friend because she does not want to cause a problem.

At home mom feels that the house is falling apart. Toys are everywhere and
dishes are piling up. There isn’t enough time in the day to get everything done.
Participant 01 is exhausted, feeling that she is constantly busy. She is realizing that
the responsibilities she assumed while on maternity leave are still being left for her
to do even though she is now back to work. She is angry that her husband is “so
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cheap” and only agreed to a cleaning service once a month. Although she
acknowledges that he is generally helpful, he is not diligent enough in his execution.

Weekends are hectic and filled with visits, chores, extracurriculars and
working out. This leaves little quality time for mom and dad to spend together.
Participant 01 is beginning to feel that her marriage suffers in all of the chaos. New
report card rules at work have increased her workload outside the home as well.
She did not know about these changes because of her absence. Although she would
like to spend more time at work on work, she allots a good portion of her
preparation time to working out because this cannot get done at home.

Participant 02

Participant 02 has been teaching in Shelburn, Ontario for the last 7 years. She
is an employee of the Waterloo Region District School Board, a union member of the
Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario and teaches grade 1 upon her return
from leave. Participant 02 is 32 years old, is married and has one child. Her original
leave began in August 2014 and she returned to work September 2015. She opted to
take the typical 17 weeks of pregnancy leave combined with the 35-week parental
leave as outlined by the Government of Canada’s Employment Insurance Policy. For
the first 8 weeks of her leave, 02 received 100% of her salary, topped up by her
employer. The rest of the year, she received 50% of her pay to a maximum of $35
000 per annum. Unless a parent chooses to return to work early, or unless a teacher
looks to apply for additional board employment (i.e. teaching summer school), the
mother of a child board at the end of the school year is essentially unemployed and
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unpaid until the commencement of the September school term. This would mean that 02 was unpaid for approximately one month. Since her return, her child has been attending a daycare facility.

Participant 02’s first day back is easier than she anticipates and she is excited to be back at school. Although the transition to daycare was difficult at first, baby is now happy and having fun. This confidence and comfort in her childcare choice allows mom to relax and focus on work. The most difficult part of the transition is the reduction in time available to spend with her son. Baby is tired and cranky and there are fewer quality, enjoyable moments together.

Administrators who acknowledge that her transition is a difficult task warmly welcome her back. This is validating. Mom is trying not to make everything feel rushed but this is a challenge. She has no desire to be social at work and is now looking at her co-workers as colleagues instead of friends.

A few days later things are beginning to become more challenging. Baby continues to be cranky and everyone at home is overtired and deprived of sleep. Participant 02’s husband falls ill which increases mom’s workload. This added responsibility becomes overwhelming. Although she is trying to make a point of taking care of herself, mom forgets to grab breakfast.

02 is still not connecting to coworkers on a personal level. She acknowledges that other teacher moms have been supportive and encouraging but she is not looking to make friends. She just wants to be home with her family. No one is sleeping and baby has begun to teeth. She takes a half-day off work in order to catch up on rest and to have a little time to herself. Chores continue to pile up and she is
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becoming increasingly overwhelmed with responsibilities. Mom is grateful that
teachers are in strike action, work-to-rule right now because she has the
opportunity to avoid any extra involvement that she would typically feel compelled
to participate in.

Work is beginning to suffer. She is not feeling as connected to her students
and although family responsibility days allow for her to take time off to care for her
sick baby, “teaching isn’t the kind of job where taking time off is easy”. She is
frustrated that she has to take the days and that daycare pick up makes it impossible
to plan after school. Her husband and her agree to share the amount of days off so
that neither one feels as though they are taking the whole wrath of childcare. Her
coworkers continue to be supportive about her missing work but 02 still feels self-
conscious. She feels that she should be able to handle everything without taking
time away from work. Her husband is supportive and is taking on more around the
house. Baby is sick again and they begin to argue over whether or not to take him to
the doctor. These absences are making it difficult to connect with students at this
point of the year. Mom is increasingly overwhelmed. There is not enough time!
Again, breakfast is forgotten.

Weekends evoke mixed emotions. Although Participant 02 adores spending
the time with her husband and child, she is upset not to have time for herself
anymore. The family is spending less time with friends and relatives and focusing on
immediate family time. When 02 does make plans to see friends, she makes them for
Friday, justifying that she will have the rest of the weekend to spend with baby.
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When the baby is beginning to feel better, mom and dad are feeling more rested. At times Participant 02 does not feel that her relationship with students is different than previous years and at other times she does. There is still a lack of time during the day for adequate planning and assessment and one day she forgets to bring lunch. Another meal missed!

Participant’s perceptions are up and down. Weekends are becoming frustrating because they are no longer refreshing. Instead, they are not a break at all. Baby now has croup and another sleepless night results in her husband taking a day off work again. Both parents are “incredibly overwhelmed”. Mom is feeling bad about her body shape. She is having trouble finding clothes in her closet that fit her. Again she forgets lunch and as baby becomes sick. Both baby and mom are miserable. “This sucks”. There is no time for housework or schoolwork. Participant 02 is left feeling like a horrible teacher. She decides that she is not connecting with students and is forgetting to complete important documentation.

Participant 03

Participant 03 has been teaching in Brampton, Ontario for the last 5 years. She is an employee of the Peel District School Board, a union member of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario and currently teaches kindergarten following her leave. Participant 03 is 32 years old, is married and has one child. Her original leave began in April 2014. She opted to take the 17 weeks of pregnancy leave and 35 weeks of parental leave allotted by Service Canada and respected by the Peel District School Board. She received 8 weeks of top up pay where she
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received 100% of her salary. For the next 44 weeks of her leave she received 50% of her pay to a maximum of $35,000. She then chose to extend her absence, unpaid, until September 2015 as permitted by PDSB. To supplement her income, she supply taught since April 2015 before returning to a full time position at the beginning of the 2015 school year. Her daughter attends a home-based daycare and the family currently lives with her parents.

It is difficult to leave her baby on the first day back to work. She has not worked full time in 18 months. She is unhappy to see her classroom is a disaster and feels a mix of emotions. She is angry, sad, frustrated, and joyful. The dinner she has prepared in the slow cooker burns, baby throws up after eating soap and she isn’t able to change the bedding until after midnight. Participant 03 feels like a failure as a mother believing that she should have had this all done.

The next day at work is rough. Her new principal scolds her and she is beginning to realize that she has been dealt a class with high needs. Seeing her daughter is the best part of her day, reminding her that she has done something right. When the workday interferes with her ability to get dinner ready she feels as though she is ignoring her family. Participant 03 is grateful to live with her parents who are able to help out with the chores and meals.

As work progresses, 03 feels she is putting a hundred percent of her effort into her work and is told at home that she is not giving enough. She feels drained and believes that she is failing at home. Participant 02 forgets to bring her lunch to work. She is surprised at how hard it is to go back fulltime and seeing her daughter is the only thing that makes her day. She continues to be grateful for her parents’
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help, insisting that she would not know what she would do without their support. Even still, she is behind on cleaning, groceries and laundry.

Mom makes time to go to boot camp in order to lose the “baby weight”. At home, she requests alone time with her daughter to counteract the guilt she feels for being away. On the weekend, she manages to get the chores done, play with baby and watch a movie with her husband. She feels cheery and does not understand how people without an extra hand are able to get things done.

Participant 03 begins to set goals for herself. She plans on making dinner every night this week. As work becomes busier, she wishes she could just stay home with her daughter. She is having better days with her students and her daughter as the weeks progress and when she visits a friends with a new baby, she begins to think that she wants another child.

Dropping her daughter off at both sets of grandparents today and not seeing her all day comes with more guilt. Mom feels she is missing her daughter growing up and wishes she could either stay home with her all day or bring her to work with her. When she takes a day off because she is feeling sick, 03 is able to get some laundry done and enjoy her time at home to relax. At the same time, she is guilty for missing work. She uses the day to plan out dinners for the week.

Participant 04

Participant 04 has been teaching in Shelburn, Ontario for the last 7 years. She is an employee of the Upper Grand District School Board, a union member of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation and currently teaches high school
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math and leadership since her return from leave. She is also in a part-time active vice principal role. Participant 04 is 30 years old, is married and has two children. Her original leave began in July 2014. She opted to take the 17 weeks of pregnancy leave and 35 weeks of parental leave allotted by Service Canada and respected by the Peel District School Board. Because her child was born at the end of June 2014, she took a typical 12-month maternity leave from the board which extended into to the summer break and she was off for a total of 14 months. Unless a parent chooses to return to work early, or unless a teacher looks to apply for additional board employment (i.e. teaching summer school), the mother of a child born at the end of the school year is essentially unpaid until the commencement of the September school term. The first 8 weeks of her leave she received 100% of her salary, combining employment insurance and top up pay from her board. The next 44 weeks, she would have received 50% of her pay up to a cap of $35 000. Her daughter now attends a home-based daycare three doors down from her house.

Participant 04 returns to a complicated role combining teaching and administration. Her current administrator is in the advanced stages of cancer and as he helps her to prepare for the role of vice principal, she feels an added sense of pressure. Her husband has also been off work all summer and she believes that this is making their transition back more stressful.

The week begins with a poor nursing session. She is rushing and stressing to get out the door. Her three-year-old is crying, asking her why she has to go to work but she feels fortunate to drop him off to a “wonderful daycare lady”. She rushes to clean the kitchen before work and in the chaos accidentally drives to the gym
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instead of work. She finally hurries into the school where many of her coworkers
seem happy to see her but her vice principal does not even ask her how she is doing
before beginning to run down a list of things to do. As the day flies by, she forgets to
eat lunch and feels guilty for not yet checking with the daycare to see if her kids are
all right. Mom is supposed to go to the gym tonight but will get home late if she does.

Participant 04’s one year old feels warm and throws up. She begins to worry
that he is coming down with something and that she has to work tomorrow. She
finally eats dinner at 8:30 pm.

Solace is found in enjoying a hot chai latte; a moment to herself. After about a
week back to work, 04 realizes that she can only be “average” in every part of her
life. She would like to be a better teacher, administrator, a more available mother,
wife and friend. She would like to be better to herself but she does not have the time
or energy to. She finds that since she has gone back to work her kids are crying a lot
more, and although she recognizes that this situation of working mom may be for
the best, “right now it really hurts”. She is dealing with so much guilt that it is
debilitating. Mom feels anxious all the time, trying to balance everything in her life.
She is finding it hard to cope with all of the change. 04 is feeling “major physical
changes” and a constant burden of worry and guilt. Guilt is an overwhelming reality
for her. She is feeling guilty at home, at work, when she is away from the kids, when
she is at the gym and when she misses the gym. Mom is feeling drained and not
eating regularly. Thankfully she is sleeping well. Participant 04 contacts the board
support network to explain to them what she is going through but she does not
share their response at this time.
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At work she is struggling with two distinct types of receptions. She has identified that her coworkers are divided into two groups. On the one hand, there are those who believe a teacher returning from maternity leave should "pick up the slack" that she left behind. The other group is so protective that they are treating her as though this is a disability. Ideally she would like her colleagues to acknowledge her absence while maintaining respect and confidence in her ability to fulfill her role. She is feeling an increase of pressure at work and facing uncomfortable power struggles with those who were new last year. She does not feel as respected as she did before her leave. Confiding in two other returning mothers, she learns that they are having similar experiences.

Participant 04 is making an extra effort to take vitamins and prepare herself in the morning. She would like to at least present herself with more confidence on the outside to counteract feeling scattered on the inside.

Participant 07

Participant 07 has been teaching in Bolton, Ontario for the last 15 years. She is an employee of the Peel District School Board, a union member of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario and teaches grade 5 upon her return from leave. Participant 07 is 38 years old, is married and has one child. Her original leave began as a pregnancy related sick leave in January 2013. At this time, she received 90% of her pay once her 11 sick days at full pay ran out. Her daughter was born in August 2013 and she opted to take the 17 weeks of pregnancy leave and 35 weeks of
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parental leave allotted by Service Canada and respected by the Peel District School Board. The first 8 weeks of her leave would have been at 100% of her pay. The following 44 weeks she received half of her regular salary to a maximum of $35 000 from Service Canada for the year. She than chose to extend for one, unpaid year, as permitted by PDSB, but returned to a temporary position after March Break 2015, before returning to her full time position at the beginning of the 2015 school year in September. Her choice to extend interfered with the availability of her English as a Second Language position and she was placed into a grade 5 class upon her return. Her daughter attends a home-based daycare. Participant 07 is clear that they do not have extended family in the area to help out. If her daughter becomes ill or needs to stay home for any reason, she will have to use the 5 family responsibility days provided by the school board or her husband will have to take the time off of work.

Participant 07 considers herself to be a social and friendly coworker. She considered this to be part of her “invisible” job at work. Since her return, however, she avoids that staff room and has little time to visit. Instead she attempts to complete the never-ending amount of work that the new teaching placement has presented. She believes that had she returned to her same position her workload would be lighter. She understands that it was her choice to extend her leave and seems to accept that this change was expected.

This year, 07 has little intention to join any extracurricular activities that she had previously been involved in. Her husband does not understand why she is spending more time on work at home. She is shocked to experience such a lack of time both at home and at work. 07 admits to having a hard time keeping up with all
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...the responsibilities. She wonders if others are feeling the same way. She tries different organization strategies but they are not helping enough.

Progress reports are approaching and Participant 07 does not feel as though she even knows her students yet. Coworkers are asking her about programs she doesn’t recognize and she is feeling out of touch. She is trying not to take too much work home and when she does it is difficult to get anything done with a toddler around. 07 is grateful to have her teaching partner to rely on and to keep her calm.

Weekends “go by in a blur” and are taken over by activities for her daughter. She returned to horseback riding in order to have some time to herself. At home she feels that she is the only one doing any cleaning and cannot find enough time for it.

This participant only recorded two journal entries in the first week of her participation. There is no more at this time to report.

Participant 08

Participant 08 is an employee of the Buffalo Board of Education, New York, USA and a union member of the Buffalo Teacher’s Federation. She has been teaching for 12 years. According to The Family Medical Leave Act, she is entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid job security after the birth of a child. Additionally, her collective agreement allows fulltime-teaching employees to take one year of unpaid maternity leave that may be extended for up to a total of 3 years. Participant 08 decided to take a total of 5 and ½ months of maternity leave to spend more time bonding with her baby. She is 34 years old, and married with two children. She currently has a nanny who comes to their home to care for her two children during the day.
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Returning to work, participant 08 feels as though she has never left. She spends hours at home on her couch with her red pen and keyboard, doing schoolwork. Mom does try to work while kids are asleep. She also keeps her weekends open for family time.

She admits that her appearance is no longer a priority as she is out the door by 6:45am. She is up 5-6 times a night with her 6 months old and in the morning “barely has time to breath” before her baby needs to be fed or her 2 year old is looking for attention.

Cookbooks are buried under take-out menus. Mom feels that it takes a lot of effort to balance home and professional life. Conversations with her husband are reduced to who will stay and wait for the nanny to arrive in the morning or who will grab diapers.

Participant 08 is very satisfied with her childcare choice. She is very happy with her nanny and feels confident that her children are cared for and happy. She enjoys that they are at home receiving 2 on 1 care and not “herded in a large daycare setting”.

At work, participant 08 recognizes that her relationship with her students has changed. She feels that she now cares about her students from a maternal perspective. When dealing with discipline, she responds in a way that she would want her child to be dealt with. She also has higher expectation from students. She has been able to maintain a commitment to extracurricular activities such as school performances and family nights. This, she attributes to the fact that she has to good fortune of a “wonderful” husband and strong support system.
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Participant 08 enjoys her career and is committed to being active in the school community. She was welcomed back by her colleagues with “open arms and friendly smiles” and interested in the new addition to her family. Although the beginning of the year is busy, she expects that the chaos will settle down in mid-October.

Participant 08 considers herself a “type A” personality and expects perfection in every area of her life. She reserves her time on the weekends for her family and puts forth a solid effort at work during the week. She now looks forward to weekends even more than before and inspirational school trips remind her why she does what she does. “At the end of the day, as long as I can say my students have learned something that day, my boys are happy, and my husband is fed I feel satisfied with my day!”

The challenge most difficult to overcome for 08 identifies as having nothing to do with her children. Of course, this challenge is directly connected to motherhood. She feels that she has been chained to her breast pump. She pumps 3 times a day, leaving students with a teaching aid for 20 minutes at a time. She recognizes that this takes away from instructional time. She also pumps during prep time and lunch. Although it takes time and dedication, she does not regret her decision to breast-feed.

Mom feels that she is an extension of the home life of her students and is deeply connected to them. Participant 08 also identifies that a dual income family provides more opportunity and experiences for her children. Although she misses
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her own children and on the one hand wishes she could spend every day with them, she does not regret her career choice.

Participant 19

Participant 19 is an employee of a private school in Alberta, Canada. She is entitled to 15 weeks of pregnancy leave and 37 weeks of parental leave following the birth of a child. She received 50% of her pay up to a total of $35 000. She is 30 years old, married and has one child. She has been teaching grade 6, fulltime for 2 years. She decided to take a little less than the 52 weeks that she is entitled in order to start the school year with her students. While she works, her child attends a home daycare.

When she returns to work, mom faces mixed emotions. She tells herself that she is excited to have the professional part of her life back but cries all the way to work. She begins to feel better once she is back in the swing of things and is greeted by a supportive school environment and understanding colleagues. This makes the transition easier but she is still left feeling divided, having to fit into this other role again.

Participant 19 interprets her administrators as supportive while maintaining higher standards of performance. She reduces her responsibilities at school with students, parents and colleagues and takes on no extracurricular commitments. Her administration removes her from coaching duties so that she can pick her daughter up from daycare. Although she is still involved in various committees, she feels that
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she isn’t contributing as much as she could be. She feels that she cannot fully devote herself to work, as her daughter, who is more important, will always take priority.

Mom is continuously multitasking and her relationship with her husband is suffering. By the time she gets home from work, makes dinner, cleans up and puts baby to bed, the evening is over. Her tolerance level is nonexistent and all of her energy goes to her daughter and work. She feels that she has no kindness or patience left for her husband and they are relaxing separate from each other. Mom feels that he is helpful, although she seemingly takes on most of the responsibilities, and expects that they will eventually learn to balance things out.

At work participant 19 feels that she is doing the bare minimum. She lacks time and energy. She sees herself as an adequate, not excellent, teacher. She is connected to students but her lessons lack creativity. She does not have enough emotional or mental capacity to devote to this area of her life either.

Her daughter’s first birthday is difficult and is the first time she wished she were home with her instead of at work. She was emotional that day. Since she has returned to work, most of her free time is spent with family and a few close friends. She reports that the way free time is spent changes after this transition. Expectedly she has less free time and spends less time on social media.

Physically, participant 19 has been dealing with changes as well. A grade 2 prolapse meant that she could not return to running until 9 months post partum. She has reduced her workout time and is dealing with body changes. She feels that women should talk more about this physical challenge.
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Mom is also concerned with her daughter’s behaviour. She feels guilty that she is not spending enough time with her and wonders if her quick temper and certain personality traits are a cry for attention. She wonders if her daughter would behave differently if she were at home with more one on one time with mom.

Participant 22

Participant 22 has been teaching fulltime in Guelph, Ontario for the last 6 years. She is an employee of the Upper Grand District School Board, a union member of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario and teaches Physical and Health Education at the secondary level. Participant 22 is 32 years old, is married and has one child. Since her return to work in September 2015, her son attends a home daycare in her neighbourhood. Participant 22 opted to take the typical 17 weeks of pregnancy leave combined with the 35-week parental leave as outlined by the Government of Canada’s Employment Insurance Policy and adhered to by the school board. Because her child was born at the end of June 2014, she took a typical 12-month maternity leave from the board that extended into to the summer break and she was off for a total of 14 months. Unless a parent chooses to return to work early, or unless a teacher looks to apply for additional board employment (i.e. teaching summer school), the mother of a child board at the end of the school year is essentially unemployed and unpaid until the commencement of the September school term. For the first 8 weeks of her leave, Participant 22 received full pay, combining employment insurance and top up from her board. The
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next 44 weeks, she received up to 50% of her pay, with a yearly maximum not exceeding $35,000. Other than this summer extension, Participant 22 did not combine any extra disability or sick leave preceding or following her leave and she returned to her fulltime position at her school, within the same department from which she was absent.

Participant 22 has been back to work for three weeks now and is feeling as though she has not had a moment to stop. Both school and home life is constantly busy, packed with responsibilities and duties. She is realizing that extracurriculars are cutting into her time with her son and feels as though other teachers need to be doing more work. Her department head has made it clear that he coached when he had a young family and she will too. This makes her fear the next five years as she does not believe she will be willing to give up this family time. This fear remains prominent this week as she begins to wonder how she will be able to balance more kids in the future. She looks for guidance from busy colleagues, asking them when they ever manage to see their kids. Participant 22 is adamant that she loves her job and that she is “lucky that (her) job doesn’t usually stress (her) out on the day to day. At the same time, she is both worried and sad that she is missing so much time with her son. It is comforting to think that he is happy at his daycare.

Participant 22 is enjoying a warm welcome back to work from colleagues who take the time to ask how she is doing and to offer support. She is enjoyed similar experiences with administrators, one of which she knows on a personal level and has been both caring and encouraging about this transition. She feels the same in her professional relationships as she always does in September, “happy to see
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everyone, but wishing we had more time to spend together”. Her school involvement has been the same as before maternity leave, as she continues to coach the same teams, and participate in extracurricular events. This now comes with a new mix of emotion, frustration with such a busy schedule and pride that she is able to balance her new life.

Balance and time management continue to be the most prominent issues. 22 is learning that being prepared, making lunches and doing as much as possible before bedtime helps to make leaving in the morning more manageable. Having her husband’s support and help is extremely important. “He has been helping with dinners, dishes, laundry and getting groceries. Thank goodness.” She acknowledges that they were both “extremely content” while mom was on maternity leave, during which time she would try to take care of all household chores and duties allowing dad to come home and enjoy play time with baby. Her return to work has changed this dynamic, but she feels that they are coping well together. “We are coping well together and I really feel like we have stepped it up as a team. If this area of my life were stressful (i.e. fighting, me doing everything, him not understanding me), I would be an absolute wreck!” At times she is irritated that housework on weekends takes away from time she could be spending with her son. She believes it will take time to learn to balance it all.

Participant 22 acknowledges the value of having helpful grandparents near by to watch her son when needed. Without their help, she does not believe that she could continue this level of school involvement. On the other hand, she enjoys
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having a paid babysitter at times, so that she does not always feel as though she is calling in a favour from family.

Participant 22 is able to enjoy many social gathering with friends while on maternity leave. Now that she is back to work, this has scaled back and she now sees friends once or twice a month after the kids are in bed. Participant 22 accesses the gym to combine a healthy lifestyle with the need to remain social. Because she had taught fitness classes for the last 7 years, she has a network of friends there as well. Since she has returned to work, her opportunity to go to the gym has reduced from a part of her daily routine to twice a week. She is thankful to be teaching physical education, which allows her to exercise and maintain a healthy lifestyle while working. She also makes an effort to pack healthy lunches for her and her husband.

As the weeks progress, Participant 22 begins to express more resentment with her busy schedule. She becomes more frustrated with her husband when he is busy doing “outdoor work” and not helping inside the home. This is fleeting though, as she remains positive about their relationship and joint efforts. Although she remains active in the school, she suggests that new mothers should be mandated not to participate in extracurricular activities in order to make the transition easier. She begins to put less pressure on herself to make “good dinners and lunches” and she is trying to reduce the amount of housework she expects to do.

Looking back, Participant 22 considers surviving to Thanksgiving as a milestone. Her positivity wavers as she begins to wonder how she will sustain the hectic schedule. “I am struggling this week to find balance – I’m letting school stress me out and take up too much of my brain.” She sees a reduction of physical exercise
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as a source of this inability to cope as well. She begins to wish that she were working part-time. Unfortunately, a reduced week that would work for her is not available at the secondary level. She begins to consider a “4 over 5” an option of teaching 4 years for 80 percent of one’s salary and then having a year off paid at the same rate. She struggles with the feeling that she is spending too much time away from home. 22 is grateful that her students are “great”. It makes her time actually teaching the most “relaxing part of her day”.

By week four, Participant 22’s coaching schedule is coming to an end, which promises a less hectic schedule. Passing her daycare provider on a family walk reminds her of how grateful she is to have a place to leave her son that he enjoys so much and that she is very comfortable with. She is hopeful that she can feel less guilty about working on things while her son is awake. While she intends to reduce her involvement with the coming of more kids, she intends to continue to coach, remembering how important these team experiences were for her as a high school student. She has enjoyed journaling about her experiences.

Participant 09

Participant 09 is an employee of the Westbrook School Department, Maine, USA and a union member of the Westbrook Education Association. She has been teaching for 13 years and with this board for the last 7. According to The Family Medical Leave Act, she is entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid job security after the birth of a child. The Westbrook School Department follows the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act for parental responsibilities. Additionally, full time teachers
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receive 10 days of paid sick leave per annum that may be accumulated. Typically, teachers in Maine may use sick pay to compensate for the first 6 weeks of their leave. The second 6 weeks of FML is unpaid. Participant 09 teaches grade 6 science and English. She began the year with her class and left at the end of September. She took 12 weeks of leave, returning in December for one and a half weeks before the holiday break. She is 36 years old, and has two children. Her husband is also a teacher. While mom works, her toddler is in daycare 4 days a week and 1 day a week she is with her grandparents. The new baby is in daycare 5 days a week.

When participant 09 returns to school, for the first couple of days she is welcomed back warmly. It is not too long before reality sets in and talks of meetings and special programs begin. She finds it difficult to start the year halfway through with a beginning of the year mindset while her students are at a different place. She struggles to find balance in the number of hours available in a day. Time is limited and never ample enough. Her husband is also a teacher and they desperately scramble to get themselves and both kids out the door by 6:50 am. Everything is rushed and overlapped.

Leaving the house without her daughter, mom feels like something is missing, as though she is incomplete. However, once she sees students pile in, she begins to regain a part of her identity. She had missed who she was as an educator; funny, confident, smart, friendly. She also worries about the time she has spent away from her class. She wonders if they will like her and if she will be able to make the connection with them that she has had with students in the past.
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In order to handle the balance of work, family and self, participant 09 attempts to compartmentalize her responsibilities. Her intention is to be present in the moment. When she is at home, she is a mom. When she is at work, she is a teacher. This helps her to feel less overwhelmed. She does not want her daughters to feel her stress nor does she want them to feel that they are not her first priority. Making time for herself is the most difficult part of this balance as she feels that she neglects her own needs.

The lack of time continues to be an issue. There is not enough time to plan, to correct or to catch up. She needs more time just to compose herself. As she attempts to balance everything, mom’s biggest challenge is pumping. She cannot just walk away from her job or take a break when she needs one. She spends preparation time pumping, cleaning and storing milk. She needs this planning time for work and compares the rhythmic echo of the pump representing time passing. She is surrounded by the responsibilities of work and motherhood.

When her baby gets her first cold, likely picked up at daycare, participant 09 feels guilty for taking a sick day from work. She reminds herself that her daughter comes first but feels that she is interrupting her student’s connection to her. This absence evokes a great deal of guilt. In addition, her husband and her have been up every hour through the night tending to the sick baby. She is exhausted, craves sleep and to hold a "healthy, happy baby".

Participant 09 is happy to have the teacher side of her back. Sometimes she feels that this is more innate to her than motherhood. She has been teaching for more than 13 years while she has been a mother for only 2. In some ways she feels
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she is a better teacher since having her own children because she is more in tune with parents and sees students as someone’s child. On the other hand, she finds it difficult to deal with the fact that she is not able to devote as much time to her profession. Before she had children, teaching was the most dominant part of her life with nothing pulling her away from it. Now, she is being divided into many areas, none of which, she feels, get enough of her time. Especially herself. Her days are filled with to-do lists and multi-tasking. She is happy to have a chance to give herself a moment to have a tea. Mom feels that she is trying to be there for everyone else and the one who is left behind is her.

After a few weeks back at school, participant 09 feels like her students finally received her best teacher self. She puts extra effort into her lesson and is able to be the teacher she used to be. She feels like she is getting better at balancing everything. Giving her students her best meets with a more enthusiastic response from them. More students come by to wish her a good weekend and offer her a warm smile.

Participant 09 is also balancing writing with work and home life. She is grateful that she is teaching the same grade as she is used to so that she is not learning new curriculum on top of everything. She looks forward to next year when she will not be pumping or getting to know students halfway through the year. Right now she admits that she needs to be kinder to herself and that she has earned it.

While she is being pulled in different directions, her roles as friend and wife have been pushed aside. She reminds herself that this is temporary although she does not know how long it will take to find them again. Her and her husband have
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had one date in the last 5 months. She admits that neither of them gets enough alone
time, nor do they get the time that they need together. They need time to spend
together, laugh together and talk about something other than their kids.

A positive to teaching is that there are many vacations to look forward to.
With time off every couple of months, she is able to shift the balance to only home.

Reflecting on her first month back at work, Participant 09 realizes that she is
her own worst critic. If she is going to attempt to fulfill so many roles, mother,
teacher, wife, daughter, friend, author, athlete and more, she will choose to live in
the moment and not try to be everything to do everything. She intends on enjoying
what she is doing at that time. She recognizes that as hectic and busy this time is, it
is also rewarding and beautiful and before she knows it, this time will have passed.

Participant 15

Participant 15 is an employee of the Westbrook School Department in
Maine, USA and a union member of the Westbrook Education Association. She has
been teaching for 15 years. According to The Family Medical Leave Act, she is
entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid job security after the birth of a child. The Westbrook
School Department follows the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act for
parental responsibilities. Additionally, full time teachers receive 10 days of paid sick
leave per annum that may be accumulated. Participant 15 is 36 years old, is married
and has two children, one 3 years old and the youngest, 4 months. She teaches
English as a Second Language for primary grades. She took 7 weeks of maternity
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leave in combination with 10 weeks of summer vacation. The baby is taken care of in her home by her grandmother who also cares for the 3-year-old, two days a week.

Mom feels that parenting is difficult mentally, physically and emotionally. She has been feeling drained. Her return to work after her second child has been more challenging than following her first. At work, she reports feeling like a “zombie” and pumping during break and lunch makes it even more of a struggle. It seems there is no time to plan for teaching. At the same time, there are four other women who are also pumping in a school closet that they have converted into a “mother’s room”.

Participant 15 interprets her principal’s actions as supportive even though he has changed the space that she and her colleagues can use as a pumping room three times. This room is the source of mixed emotions. Participant 15 has taken ownership of this initiative and feels proud of this. However, she detests what she has to do in it.

Between the hours of 5:00 am and 7:30 am, mom parents alone. She is glad when she has a chance to find time for Yoga in the morning. Participant 15 has been struggling with body image. She is a size 2 but is not happy with her post pregnancy stomach. She also struggles to find time to spend with friends. Between pumping and planning, her time at school is limited as well. She feels that she has not been connecting as well with her students and their parents as she has in previous years. She does not want to come early or stay late for meetings and she is fed up with colleagues who feel that they should be her number one priority. She is fed up with her principal, unresponsive parents and poorly behaved students. She is being
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pulled in so many different directions when she just wants to be home with her husband and kids.

Mom is overtired and her husband and her are at each other’s throats. They are constantly quibbling over things. She feels they need to reconnect instead of just running this “rat race” side by side. It is difficult to be an understanding partner and an effective teacher on such little sleep.

Participant is beginning to have days when she is able to effectively balance being a teacher and a mother without feeling that she is giving up one for the other. She is grateful that her mother watches her children. It is easier to stay a little late at work when someone she loves and trusts is watching her kids. She is glad to receive pictures and updates continuously while she works.

Overall, participant 15 believes that teaching is the right profession for people with children. She gets to do something she loves and still have plenty of vacation time to spend with family. She is happy when her study participation is done as she sees it as another thing that she shouldn’t have taken on. She wants to focus on being the kind of mother, teacher and wife that she wants to be.

Participant 14

Participant 14 is an employee of the Portland Public School Board in Oregon, USA and a union member of the Portland Association of Teachers. She has been teaching 8 years in the secondary panel. According to The Family Medical Leave Act, she is entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid job security after the birth of a child. Additionally, Portland Public Schools allows fulltime teaching employees to take up
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to one year of unpaid maternity leave, and employees may use up to 12 weeks of accumulated sick leave for financial compensation. Participant 14’s son was born in the summer. Her leave did not begin until the commencement of the school year. She took 12 weeks beginning in September, for a total of 4 months post pregnancy. She returned to work November 2014 and has been back just less than one year. Participant 14 is 31 years old, is married and has one child. Her son currently attends a daycare facility from 7am to 4pm every day.

Reflecting on her transition last year, 14 recalls pumping full-time. She pumped before, during and after school. She describes this as problematic because there was no designated space for her to do so. She was offered a space in the girl’s locker room and another where meetings are held. She found both spaces unpleasant and ended up pumping in her classroom which became a “huge problem”.

Participant 14 is feeling more success this year than last. Her first year back, she remembers, was rough. She considers this time to have been one of the most difficult times in her life. Managing pumping, washing bottles and taking care of the house was overwhelming. Today she continues to struggle with “mom guilt”. Her guilt is intensified when she hears her son coughing at night. “To say I feel guilty is an understatement…but I really do feel like this is where she is supposed to be. I am not a hundred percent okay with my childcare choice but I don’t think I would be happy anywhere”. She does recognize that her son is happy and that his daycare providers seem to care about him.
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14 describes her husband as a “great help” but feels that it takes two just to manage. She feels that it is difficult to balance everything but believes that it is important that her son understand that she can be both a mom and a career woman.

Participant 14 submitted only two responses.

Participant 16

Participant 16 is an employee of the Portland Public School Board in Oregon, USA and a union member of the Portland Association of Teachers. She has been teaching 8 years in the elementary panel. According to The Family Medical Leave Act, she is entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid job security after the birth of a child. Additionally, Portland Public Schools allows fulltime teaching employees to take up to one year of unpaid maternity leave, and employees may use up to 12 weeks of accumulated sick leave for financial compensation. Participant 16 chose to take one month leave and the summer break for a total of almost 12 weeks away from work. She has decided to return to a half-time contract, working 2 and ½ days per week. She is married and her son’s childcare is split between her mother, husband and babysitter for the days that she works.

There is not enough time in the day. Working part-time makes mom feel like she is never sure how much she should be doing. She finds there is little time at work where she is not directly working with students and at home she tries to work while baby is asleep. To compensate, she is waking up very early to prepare for the day, including a morning nursing session.
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She is resentful of her husband who is debating whether or not to go camping with friends this weekend. Participant 16 cannot understand why he can just take off and go somewhere. She does not feel that he is devoted to making weekends fun for all three of them. Mom is frustrated with dad because he is unable to watch their son without reluctance. He had agreed to watch him on Mondays but seems eager to know when she will be home from work. She finds herself offering to take him to work with her in the afternoon. Her husband even makes a problem about watching the baby while she gets her hair done. When she gets home he is complaining that the baby cried the whole time. 16 feels like she can’t even get away for an hour.

Participant 16 is lost at work. She is impatient in meeting, rushing and just wanting them to be over. She only wants to talk about what is immediately pressing and then rush home to baby. Any involvement in school committees leaves her just as impatient. She feels that since she is taking time away from her family, the least everyone else can do is participate and be respectful. Some happiness comes from finding a piece of pie to enjoy after a hard day!

Participant 16 continues to argue with her husband and storms off with her son. Dad wants to go to happy hours with some friends instead of attending baby’s 5-month immunization. He is becoming mysterious about who he is having drinks with. When he does agree to come to the doctor’s appointment, he acts as though he is doing everyone a favour. Participant 16 feels that she is waiting around for her husband to want to spend time with them. She does not want to have to ask him to. She would like him acknowledge her hard work, maybe even ask if he could help out. This is not happening.
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Participant 16 continues to feel that she is doing everything around the house and that she is responsible for all of the baby's necessities. She feels increasingly disconnected from her husband and resentful that he can separate himself. She is tired and does not feel that she is taking a real moment for herself. She drinks coffee “like it will save her life”.

Participant 16 is very grateful to have her mother help out as they only have to pay for one day of babysitting a week.

Outside of her relationship with her husband, she feels as though socially, she has a good balance. She exercises, sees friends and writes. Her previous life included coffee, reading, writing and thinking in cafes. Today she stresses about “mom fails” that she coins mishaps like mixing up baby's naps. These days, it seems as though days revolve around baby’s sleep schedule.

Reflecting on the five months that have passed since the birth of her son, mom feels that maybe she is trying to hard. She is afraid of how she looks to her friends and does not want to appear frazzled. She finds it harder to spend time with them, competing to talk, while she has her son with her. However, despite the challenges, she imagines that when she is older, she will want this time back.
Data Analysis

Efficacy as a Mom

Participants were asked to evaluate themselves as successfully maintaining the maternal role. For many of the participants this was a new role, as this was their first child. Returning to work meant attempting to balance both jobs. Most of the participants report feeling pulled in many different directions, having to play various characters at once.

All of the Canadian and all but one of the American participants discuss the lack of time and an ongoing struggle to successfully balance house and school work. Images of unfolded laundry and messy playrooms were submitted. Many of the women, report feeling that they are failing at some of the duties traditionally viewed as mother’s work.

A significant majority from both countries expressed overwhelming guilt. The source of this “mom guilt,” as one participant coined it, includes time spent away from babies, leaving sick children in the care of someone else, and missing birthdays because they fell on a work day. One-mother reports watching her sons as they sleep because she misses them, sending a number of photographs of sleeping toddlers. Three of the Canadian mothers fear that their children’s poor behaviour may be a result of the lack of time spend with her. One of these women is haunted by the assumption that if she were around to spend more time with her daughter, instead of at work, that her daughter may be better tempered. Five of the Canadian participants believe that they are failing their children on some level, particularly because they feel that they are being neglectful. Two of these women generalize this
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sentiment, and decide that they are failing as mothers. One of them decides that she is only “average”.

While about a third of the women express the desire to be at home with their children, a few of the participants are tempted to leave their professions in order to be home full-time with their children. On a more positive note, two of the American participants believe that teaching is the right career choice for people with children because of ample vacation time.

Many of the participants continue to feel overwhelmed, and physically and emotionally drained. A number of them use coping strategies in order to cope. A couple of the women repeatedly stress that they make an effort to compartmentalize each role in order to “be present” in the moment. “When I am at work I am a teacher. When I am home, I am a mother.”

While journals tell (sometimes desperate) stories of non-stop, hectic schedules and guilt born out of neglect and absence, I enjoy many images of moms cuddling babies, relishing in sunny weather together and smiling faces. Combined with images of laundry and take-out menus, computers and schoolwork spread across kitchen tables, are pictures of peace and calm. Overall, both in their writing and their photographs, many of the working mothers depicted a dialectical portrayal of the day to day. On the one hand, I interpret the overwhelming struggle to keep up and on the other hand data depicts families as enjoying life and emotionally bonding.
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Efficacy as a Teacher

For many women, the transition back to work is met with mixed emotion and feelings of insecurity. One of the Canadian participants, although insisting that she did not regret her familial choices, explains that her maternity leaves interfered with the prospect of career of advancement, because she chronologically missed out on specific assignments that she had been working towards. This loss of opportunity, combined with the feeling that she was being discriminated against because she was a woman, led to feelings of frustration and resentment that she attempts to push aside.

The three teachers who changed positions following maternity leave all discussed the added work and anxiety brought on by learning a new grade or understanding how to be effective in a new position. One Canadian teacher, and half-time acting vice principal, reports feeling less respected by her co-workers post-maternity leave. A number of participants express feeling out of touch with new programming and job expectations.

Almost all of the participants describe this shift as additional feelings of stress and anxiety. Inevitably, the return to the paid labour market brings more work and responsibility. In an attempt to balance and fulfill both roles, working mothers bring work into the home. They interpret photographs of laptops and files at home, as well as bags full of schoolwork. Four of the seven Canadian participants report feeling as though they are not putting enough time and energy into work since their return, and one mother explains that she can never again completely devote herself to her career as her daughter will always take priority. A few of the
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photographs show piles of unmarked work and pocket charts that are “finally” mounted. One Canadian teacher who gives “100%” at work is criticized by her husband for not doing enough at home. This common theme of wanting to be a better educator, but not being able to, is often paired with reports of reduced confidence in their role as a teacher. One teacher considers herself an average teacher, while another now see herself as a “horrible” teacher.

Some of the participants take a much more positive position about their return to work following maternity leave. One woman is glad to be back at work and explains that she feels that being a teacher is more innate to her than being a mother. Many of the women report feeling pleased to have the teacher side of them back. A major source of guilt for women who prioritize their careers includes missing work, generally due to familial responsibilities. These absences are seen by participants as interfering with their programs and their connection with students. One participant also reports feeling conspicuous and that other teachers may interpret taking sick time as a lack of commitment to work. A number of these participants recognize that they no longer have the time and energy to devote themselves fully to work because their children’s need will always take precedent.

One woman discusses that being a mother has made her a better teacher, while acknowledging that she struggles with the lack of time and balancing responsibilities. She feels that she is able to connect with students on a maternal level.

Overall, the data continues to demonstrate a conflicting and wide range of emotion, often from the same participant. These teeter-tottered reflections
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represent uncertainty and increased anxiety as participants attempt to marry the responsibilities of work and home. It is important to note that many of the women, and particularly the American participants in this study enjoy being back at work. They experience this shift as a reunion with their former selves.

The participants who use the strategy of being “in the moment” and focusing on the task at hand when they are spending time with their families, also use this technique at work. One teacher shares that she feels it is important that her son understands that she can be a mother and have a career.

Healthy Lifestyle

In Canada, six of the seven participants engage in some sort of regular physical activity. Three women report that exercise provides them with emotional benefits while three are motivated by negative body image since childbirth. Interestingly, one participant includes an image of abandoned beauty products explaining that she no longer has time to spend on excessive grooming while another participant, one who reports some of the highest levels of stress and anxiety explains that she specifically puts more effort into getting ready in the morning so that she “look” put together to counteract the disarray that she feels inside.

An overwhelming number of photographs and journal entries stress the importance of pick-me ups such as coffee, tea and sweets. For some, these treats represent a much-needed break while another woman explains that she drinks coffee for the benefits of caffeine, “like it will save her life.” Some participants have developed poor eating habits, forgetting meals and eating dinner hours later than
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usual. One woman took a picture of pile of take out menus, explaining that they have replaced her cookbooks, while another manages cooking in her busy schedule with the use of her crockpot, in which meals can be made the night before.

Most commonly, the women share feeling of exhaustion and being mentally and emotionally drained. Another consistent message is one of frequent guilt both at home and at work.

Daycare Arrangements

Surprisingly, none of the women identify the age of their baby as a factor in their daycare choice. Five of the seven women in Canada have chosen home-daycares for their children. One of the children attends a daycare facility and one is in the care of a friend’s live-in nanny. In the US, two of the participants send their babies to daycare facilities, one has two children being cared for by a live-out nanny, and three of the women have family members looking after their children during the day. I expected mothers, especially those using daycare facilities to discuss how difficult it is to leave children who are so young. In fact, there is no mention of these concerns. Breastfeed at work is the only age related issue that surfaces in the findings. Even then, age is not directly mentioned.

I have incorporated daycare choice as an added theme because many participants mention childcare in their journals. Almost every woman in this study is satisfied with their choice. This satisfaction is depicted as a source of comfort and gladness. The one exception was one woman’s experience. This participant worked part-time and divided a few days a week of childcare between the maternal
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grandmother, the father and a babysitter. The most difficult part of this arrangement is when her husband, the child’s father is responsible for childcare. He is resentful seemingly unable to care for the baby, resulting in discomfort for the mother. The participant was more at ease when her mother or the babysitter was in taking care of the baby.

Only one of the Canadian participants had trouble with their child’s daycare facility. This mother recognized within the first few days of her return that she did not share compatible visions with the daycare center in which her daughter was enrolled. She quickly removed and her daughter currently her days at a friend’s house where a live-in nanny cares for her. One American participant initially expresses that she is not 100% comfortable with her childcare arrangements. However, she does not attribute this to the caregivers. She wonders if she could ever be completely ok with his transition. In later journals, she acknowledges that the daycare providers care for and love her son. Although one mother expresses that she wished she had more daily updates because she feels a little disconnected from her daughter, and another mentions that receiving pictures during the day is “bitter sweet,” most of the comments about childcare are positive.

Experiences of Mothers Who Breastfeed

Experiences of pumping breast milk at work is another theme that surfaces in the participants’ submissions. A significant amount of discussion and a number of photographs focus on breastfeeding and pumping breast milk at school. It is significant to policy assessment as this factor is only an issue for participants living
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in the USA. This disparity is significant to the policy debate because while the
Canadian participants returned to work after approximately one-year, mothers in
the US took between 10 weeks and five months. Because breast feeding is routinely
recommended for a one-year period, women who return to work earlier than that
are more likely to still be breast feeding. While one Canadian feels “sad” that she has
to stop feeding now that she is returning to work, her full year’s worth of lactation
allows her to terminate this function without much consideration. On the other
hand, every American participant in this study struggles to pump and store breast
milk at work. Furthermore, all of them identify this task as challenging, stressful and
uncomfortable.

Pumping breast milk at school negatively impacts the American women in
this study. Two of them identify it as the most challenging aspect of transition back
to work. Three of the women acknowledge that breastfeeding added to their lack of
sleep and exhaustion. Three of the participants who pumped at work admit that this
task takes away from their planning and/or instructional time, negatively affecting
student learning. While recent federal provisions of the Patient Protection and
Affordable Care Act (2010) insist that lactating women be provided adequate breaks
in order to pump or feed babies at work, this time can be combined with existing
breaks. This legislation forces many teachers to pump during lunch and planning
time. One teacher discusses that her class is covered so that she may use a breast
pump during instructional time. The other teachers use their planning time for this
purpose; time provided for marking and preparation, therefore forcing them to
complete their work on their own time. Also identified is the added responsibility of
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storing and cleaning pump parts. One participant refers to this duty as being “chained to her breast pump”, while insisting that she does not regret her choice. Pictures of inspiring “breastfeeding” quotes and bags filled with breast pumps make up a significant portion of the data.

In addition to the time and discomfort connected to pumping breast milk at work, a number of the women struggle with the challenge of finding an appropriate and private place to pump. One teacher with low expectations considers her principal “very supportive”, even though he changes the space that she is permitted to use for pumping three times. Another teacher takes it upon herself to create a designated lactation room for her and 4 colleagues. Ironically, one participant refers to this challenge as having “nothing to do with her children.”

Connection to School and Students

The shift from “stay at home mom” to “working mom” results in a number of new responsibilities. For many, maintaining previous levels of involvement in extracurricular activities is not only difficult but sometimes impossible. Most of the participants in this study report either reducing or eliminating their involvement in activities not contractually required. For some, this lack of involvement is associated with guilt or shame, while others resent the idea of spending unnecessary time away from home.

An Ontario teacher expresses that she is glad for the current, work-to-rule strike action, as it does not allow for her to participate in commitments that she
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would otherwise have felt compelled to. This suggests that some teachers may feel a cultural or personal pressure to go above and beyond job requirements.

A couple of the participants are able to maintain the same level of commitment to various activities and committees. They not only prioritize, but also enjoy this involvement. One of the American participants returns to all of her pre-baby commitments, immediately following her return. She attributes her ability to do so because she has a strong support system. One of the participants starts the year off positively and begins to feel the strain of her choices a few weeks into the study. She suggests that women returning from maternity leave should not be permitted to take on extra work so that they would not feel guilty if they opt out.

A few of the participants do not address their connection to students. A couple of teachers express a desire to connect with students. These teachers feel guilty when they take time off for family responsibilities. They fear that it obstructs efforts to build relationships with their students. Another teacher expresses her desire to maintain the type of relationships that she had previously had with students (before motherhood) but seems to accept that this was is plausible as she no longer had the same level of “emotional and mental capacity to devote to this area” of her life.

Interestingly, one teacher reports feeling that she is a better teacher and more connected to students than she was prior to motherhood. She explains that she cares more for her students now that she sees them through maternal eyes. She feels that her discipline style has also improved. When dealing with her students she
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now asks herself, “how would I want a teacher to deal with this situation if this were my child?”

Personal Relationships

It is imperative to consider the homogeneity of the sample in this study. All of the participants are white females, in their thirties, married to men, with between one and two children. Personal relationships discussed are mainly with husbands, parents, siblings and close friends.

Overall, participants report having less time to spend with friends. Most of their extra time is spent with their immediate families, close relatives and a few close friends. One woman reports spending significantly less time on social media and checking personal emails.

One participant feels the added pressure of having to meet the needs of her own family while keeping her parents satisfied. Participants who either live with or have the support of their parents and families cannot imagine how others manage without this extra help. And in general women who report having “helpful” and involved husbands are grateful for this partnership. This joint effort between husbands and wives is an important factor in managing this shift.

Three of the participants explicitly stated that they would like to be better wives, mothers and friends, demonstrating their feelings of inadequacy. They attribute their incompetence to their lack of time, emotional and/or physical energy.

Relationships with husbands are a frequently visited topic. Most of the husbands are described as sharing responsibilities and co-parenting, while mothers
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often still report feeling that they are doing more around the house. Many participants report that even though both parents are working hard, they do not always see eye to eye.

One participant focuses a significant portion of her journaling on the stress and disappointment she feels relating to her husband. She explains that he does not spend enough time with her and the baby, does not take responsibility for the child and is resentful of his parental duties. This is an ongoing struggle for mom who feels that she cannot even “get away from her son for an hour to get her hair done.”

While almost all of the husbands maintain an active role in parenting and the division of housework, a few of the participants feel that their relationship is suffering. Many of them believe that they are disconnected from their husband and that their relationship has turned into sharing daily responsibilities rather than relating to each other. One woman explains that she is “too busy to put time into her relationship with her husband and that she has no kindness or patience left for him because everything goes to her daughter."

Participants who record a more positive impression of their bond also share pictures of family time outside, at sporting events and supporting each other’s interests. One mother sent a picture of her and her son at a university volleyball game being refereed by her husband.
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Professional Relationships

Professional relationships for the purpose of this study included connection with colleagues, administrators and ways in which teachers were welcomed back after maternity leave.

One teacher sent two images illuminating a supportive reception. On her first day back, the vice principal left her a note on her desk explaining that she was excited to be working with her and that “her reputation precedes her.” On another occasion, her administrator presents her with a bouquet of flowers thanking her for her hard work. Although this is the most demonstrative show of support, she is not the only one welcomed back warmly. In fact, many participants recall being welcomed back amiably by both colleagues and administrators.

However, a couple of participants did not feel this way. One participant, who struggles with feelings of discrimination based on sex before her leave, continues to feel excluded from relevant career advancements. Whether or not this has anything to do with her leave was unclear. Another teacher, who receives a generous greeting from administrators, feels tension with some colleagues. She feels that her colleagues either her colleagues coddled her, assuming that she less capable now or they resented her absence and expected her to “pick up the slack” that she left behind.

A few teachers, even though they enjoy a supportive reception from their colleagues, do not have any interest in making connections at work. These women report a lack of time and interest in being friendly with staff. One woman who used
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to consider socializing as part of her “invisible” job description now avoids the staff room in order to spend her time on work.

Mandatory staff meetings and committee gatherings evokes resentment for a couple of mothers in this study. These women complain of colleagues wasting time and not respecting the time that is taking away from her child. For many women, the lack of time and energy, time spent pumping and overwhelming responsibility all contributed to a reduced connection to colleagues.

Overall

Despite some limitations, the participants’ candid submissions resulted in a wealth of data. It is inaccurate to use these finding to compare the experiences of Canadian and American teachers returning from maternity leave on a greater scale. However, there are some similarities and some notable difference within this small group. Many of the women, both Canadian and American, reported feeling overwhelmed, changes in eating habits, and conflicting emotions. The lack of sleep due to feedings and sick children resulted in exhaustion. Most of the participants spent less time socializing both in their personal lives and at work. While family time was limited because of an abundance of work and home responsibilities, participants did try to use this time to spend outside or doing enjoyable activities together. Participants reported having difficulty balancing responsibilities and many felt that they were not successfully fulfilling any of their roles. Three of the participants discussed focussing on being present, “in the moment,” as a coping strategy for maintaining this balance. Guilt was a struggle for all of the candidates on
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some level. This did not seem to differ based on the ages of children being left. While federal policies differ significantly, policies at the board level in Canada and the USA, do not. The amount of time offered to all of the teachers except for one teacher in Buffalo, NY, varies between one to three years. The main difference is that, with the exception of those collecting sick leave pay, the American participants were not subsidized. Based on this, it is plausible to assume that finances affect the decision of when women return to work. However, a number of cultural and societal factors may also impact this decision.

There is a common assumption that a shorter maternity leave would likely evoke more stress and more anxiety for mothers. The idea of leaving a baby at twelve weeks may be assumed to be more difficult than leaving a child at one year. This sentiment did not surface in my study. In fact, there was no mention of children’s ages or fears of leaving babies because they were so young. The only age related issue was breastfeeding and pumping. Surprisingly, many of the American participants seemed to transition more smoothly back into their role as educator and reported more positivity towards work and students.

Less of an issue for US participants were feelings of being out-of-the-loop and out of touch with current school initiatives. Many of the American participants reported feeling glad to have this part of their identity back. On average, they seemed to prioritize their career efficacy, programs and connection to students more than the Canadian participants in this study. It may be suggested that the women in this study who took shorter leaves remained more connected to their teacher identities and the schools within which they work. Because the themes
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highlighted in this methodology, and the small sample size, these findings cannot be generalized. It may, however suggest future research that would ask, “do shorter maternity and parental leaves help to maintain a more productive attachment to work for working mothers?” or, “do longer leaves result in an increased disconnect from careers for women who have children?” These findings may suggest that longer leaves reinforce gender stereotypes about women in the workforce.

**Current Policy Analysis and Suggestions for Future Policy Foci**

While Heidi Hartmann from the Institute of Women’s Policy Research considered the FMLA a “small step toward reducing inequality between the sexes (U.S. Congress, 1987c, p622),” at the time of its development, conservative women’s groups argued that “the best family leave policy would allow the husband to make a family wage so the woman could have “a better quality of life in the home, so that she could be a full-time homemaker (U.S. Congress, 1987b, p204).”

Because only certain American's and Canadians qualify for family leaves, the policies are discriminatory in nature. It is widely accepted that this discrimination victimizes poorer populations, overrepresented by ethnic and racial minorities.

Although parental leave policies claim to reduce gender inequity in the workforce, many are criticized for being ineffective. These policies also do little to ensure the equity of workers who are members of non-white ethnicities. “We find that White men are significantly less likely to take family leaves than White women and men and women of color (Armenia & Gerstel, p 871).”
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Furthermore, familial leaves that provide no or significantly reduced pay, including the FMLA and Canadian EI programs, continue to reinforce gender inequity as men tend to earn more in their jobs, therefore reasonably assuming that mothers will be able to leave their jobs with less pay loss than their male counterparts (Turner & Norwood, 2013).

While many see longer parental leaves as beneficial to women and as an attempt to reduce marginalization in the workforce, some theorists argue that policies supporting extended leaves combined with the fact that these leaves are usually taken by mothers, actually reinforce gender stereotypes by emphasizing that the best place for a child is at home with her mother (Evans, 2006).

Another concern is that while these policies legally prohibit employers from discriminating against employees, they often interpret leaves of absences as a lack of career commitment (Padavic & Reskin, 2003). This may determine who an employer chooses to hire or promote.

As a Canadian, I was surprised by the level of distress that pumping at work caused the American participants. Expressing breast milk during the workday quickly became the forgotten theme in this study and one that evoked significant emotion. This was exclusively and American issue. Assuming that most women cease breastfeeding by the end of the first year, most Canadian teachers return to work when breastfeed has, or can be terminated.

Barriers and responsibilities in the work place are attributed to low breastfeeding rates (Murtagh & Moulton, 2011). However, by the year 2009, only 23 states implemented regulations that made breastfeeding in the workplace more
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feasible (Murtagh & Moulton, 2011). In order to address the competing responsibilities of lactation and paid labour, The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act amended section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act, insisting that employers provide reasonable break time and a shielded and private space, dedicated to mothers expressing milk or breastfeeding (FMLA, 2016). To what extent citizens understand this law and whether employers are respecting it is not known.

I chose to conduct this study not only to give female teachers returning to work following maternity leave, a voice, but rather to hear this voice within the context of their legal realities and for the purpose of suggesting possible policy direction. Women and paid labour, mothers in the workforce, the ideals of motherhood and the division of housework have long been at the forefront of feminist theory. The literature review in this essay has outlined a history and description of family-friendly policies and subsidies that target the management of parental responsibilities. Research has also focused on the feminist movement and the role of women as both homemakers and employees. I have acknowledged cultural and societal norms regarding mothering styles and expectations. What is missing from this research, and what is unique about this study is: the investigation of the policy impact on these transitioning women, the combination of American and Canadian participants, and the wide scope of focus, and studying experiences both from a personal and professional angle. The use of images to support the written accounts of these experiences, presents an emotionally provoking and human touch. “To support women during this phase, employers and public health nurses should
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monitor the work in relation to the women’s capacity and value their competence both as employees and mothers (Alstveit, Severinsson & Karlsen, 2011, p 2151).” In order for this statement to matter, we must attempt to define what this would look like in practice. Therefore, I would like to conclude this essay with an in-depth proposal of potential policies in response to challenges present by the contributors.

More effective support for women who are breastfeeding and/or pumping at work

In 2003, the World Health Organization and UNICEF recommended ‘enacting imaginative legislation protecting the breast feeding right of working women and establishing means for its enforcement’ by all governments (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007, p 14).” As noted above, women across the US are guaranteed appropriate break time and a private space that is not a bathroom, to express breast milk. However, the realities of participants did not reflect a manageable experience. Women were shifted from space to space, one of them including an image of the closet that she pumped in. All but one of the participants struggled with time constraints as the provided break time was combined with their planning and lunchtime. Working within the current policy, many of the employers in this study were able to legally dismiss the needs and comfort of their employees. I suggest that the regulations reflect a more appropriate and supportive reality for working mothers who choose to breastfeed. Based on the information provided by participants, designated spaces with certain size minimums and facilities that meet health and safety standards (e.g. a sink, fridge for storage, comfortable chairs) are needed. Time allotted in addition
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to planning and lunch is necessary so that students’ success is not threatened.
Although length of maternity leave could logically be part of this discussion, it is important to note that while the “employment of mothers outside the home, especially full-time employment, has a negative duration of breastfeeding (Murtagh & Moulton, 2011, p 217)...employment appears to have a less deleterious effect on the initiation of breastfeeding (Murtagh & Moulton, 2011, p 217).” Because of these statistics it is plausible to assume that what is critical is the condition in which women are working to provide this human service.

**Improving prenatal education programs**

Although the naïve assumption that the transition to motherhood is met only with elation, is beginning to be challenged, there is still not enough honest discussion about the debilitating disappointment some women face when this “highly anticipated and positive change (Adams, M, 2015, p 143)” does not live up to its expectations. “When this disappointment occurs, an emotional reaction follows, which may be fear, guilt, or shame (Adams, M, 2015, p 143).” In combination with the well known mental, physical and emotional changes that women face during their transition into motherhood, this can be a devastating time for some. In extreme but not infrequent cases, about one fifth of women worldwide are said to suffer from postpartum depression (Adams, M, 2015, p1). It is not difficult to believe that many more women go undiagnosed and that this number is far bigger. These statistics in combination with the dialectical and passionate recounts collected in my study suggests the need for intervention on an emotional front. Although there
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are treatments and medication for postpartum and various anxiety disorders, research identifies a lack of preventative measures (Adams, M, 2015, p 143). Many couples and expectant mothers attend prenatal classes. “Prenatal education should be modified to address the myths of society and help pregnant women create a realistic image of motherhood, potentially decreasing the risk for postpartum depression (Adams, M, 2015, p 147).” In addition to this, I suggest that preventative initiatives be included in an effort to reduce the disappointment that some women experience. Education should also prepare mothers (and fathers) for more realistic expectations of parenting as well as strategies for balancing family responsibilities.

**E-Learning, E-Teaching**

All of the mothers in this study identify a significant struggle with busy schedules and a lack of time. For some, this translated into the desire to spend less time at work and more time at home. A study focusing on how to make education more feasible for working mothers while balancing an already full schedule identifies the value of “e-learning.” “An alternative to the emotional rigours of trying to balance work, family and studies is to opt for online education (also referred to as e-learning) is a viable option for busy and working mothers (Home, 1998).” It seems that the use of technology is an important and relatively untapped market in the direction of feminist policy. E-learning and online options could be made available to teachers in order to stay up-to-date with school and board-wide initiatives, so that reintegration is more comfortable. Online education can also be made more available for career training, such as principal qualification courses and continued
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studies. Although these options are already, at least in part, being used, a more aggressive use of technology could support working mothers. On-line teaching opportunities could be offered to women on or following maternity leave, enabling board members to maintain their positions while spending more time at home. For example, following maternity leave, female teachers may have the choice to teach on-line courses or distance education for a specified amount of time so that they may better balance childcare and work. It is important that this is optional so that it does not reinforce unwanted gender inequity in the workforce. It is also important to recognize added education in any form as well as working from home presents its own set of challenges.

**Option for temporary reduction of teacher contracts**

A number of participants were given the option of extended leave time. With the excepting of the teacher who works in New York State, each of the women are contractually protected for a one to three year leave. None of the American participants took more than 5 months leave and all but one of the Canadian participants returned shortly after the paid leave had expired. Because of this, it is plausible to assume, that one of the factors attributed to length of leave taken is monetary. Teachers in certain Canadian boards may extend their parental leave while they supply-teach. One option that is not yet available is the ability to return to work on a part-time basis, without forfeiting a fulltime contract. One of the participants wishes she could return to a part-time position but does not. Likely, losing the rest of one’s contract permanently would be one deterrent to doing so.
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Parents may appreciate the option of returning to a half-time or part-time schedule for a certain number of years without losing their fulltime position with the board. One downfall of this would be the staffing issues presented to school boards.

**Workout facilities at school**

The physical changes undergone by women before, during and after childbirth have frequently been studied. Cross-sectional studies have consistently shown self-reported rates of physical activity participation among mothers to be significantly lower than those of women who do not have children (Burke et al., 2004; Marcus et al., 1994; Verhoef & Love, 1994). Furthermore, there is evidence that physical activity levels decline across the transition into motherhood, with several studies showing over 50% of mothers who were regularly active prior to motherhood were no longer meeting the national physical activity recommendations after having a child (Albright et al., 2005a; McIntyre & Rhodes, 2009). This problem seems to be exacerbated in working mothers (Mailey & McAuley, 2014, p 343-4).

Exercise is identified as a de-stressor and a source of enjoyment for many of the participants. It offers important personal time, as well as well-known physical and emotional benefits. Two of the women who remained particularly active after returning to work were high school teachers who have the option of working out at school. A few of the women identified a desire to work out more but struggled to find the time and felt guilty for spending even more time outside the home. Many, if not all, secondary schools have exercise facilities and equipment whereas most elementary schools do not. On-site gyms may alleviate some of the barriers for exercise. If schools had workout facilities for workers to use, the opportunity for engaging in beneficial physical activity would increase drastically.
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Onsite Daycares

Onsite daycares at a manageable cost would increase the opportunity for mothers to breastfeed and spend time with young children. This could be combined with academic programs and training for students in secondary schools, colleges, and universities. School buildings themselves already offer many of the necessities of daycare facilities and having children close to mothers and fathers as they teach could be beneficial to both parents and children. In elementary schools, these programs could also be incorporated into peer relationship building and a curriculum of compassion and care. Many mothers expressed their desire to spend more time with their children and that their lives were rushed and hectic. If babies could be cared for at the school where mom works, it would enable breastfeeding opportunity, emotional and physical connection throughout the day as well as reduced travel and preparation before and after school.

Family Involvement at School

Schools are unique places of work in that they celebrate children and families within the context and curriculum of the day. Teachers play a vital role in student’s lives, explicitly and implicitly demonstrating value systems and cultural standards. Schools are therefore the most appropriate places to involve families and connect community. This happens in many schools in the form of curriculum nights, school productions, barbeques and fundraisers. While we as teachers often welcome the family members of students into the school, seldom is the invitation extended to our
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own. One of the participants in this study submitted a picture of her and her son supporting her husband as he refereed a university volleyball game. They not only took this opportunity to increase family time together, but mom and baby enjoyed and applauded an active lifestyle.

I suggest that schools offer more opportunity for families of staff members to connect while performing simultaneous work responsibilities. An example of this might be making school basketball practices and games more family friendly so that mothers can continue to coach while spending time with their own families. Many participants discussed their disinterest in being friendly with co-workers. Teacher-family socials, picnics, movie nights, could encourage staff bonding without sacrificing family time.

**Mentor program for teachers returning to school following leave**

A number of participants reported feeling “out-of-touch” and unaware of new school initiatives. One mother explains that her report card comments took an extra long time to complete because she was unaware of the new expectations. This adds to her already hectic schedule. In one way or another, every participant documented feeling overwhelmed. For a number of years, the Peel District School Board has offered the “Side-By-Side” Mentor-Mentee program, whereby a first year teacher is paired with an experienced teacher. They are allotted a number of days per year to work together and spend on additional planning. The purpose of the program is to support the new teacher in his or her role.
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A similar program could be introduced to support a teacher returning from maternity leave. Recognizing that this employee, regardless of her experience as an educator, is essentially taking on a new role, balancing home and work. In addition to this shift, she is also returning to a position that she has been absent from for a significant amount of time. Being paired up with another teacher, and being provided a certain amount of catch-up time, could help her to make a smoother transition back. The mentor could assist her to update the mentee on anything that she has missed and could be a physical and emotional support as she adjusts.

**Conclusion**

In 1970, only 9% of couples contributed equally to household incomes (Tower & Alkadry, 2008). By the year 2001 this statistic rose to 24% (Tower & Alkadry, 2008). Today, I am sure that the number is even more significant. I am half of one of those couples. At the same time, I am the *only* one who carried, delivered and continues to live with the effects of bearing three children. My husband, also a teacher, did not have to go to work nauseous for eight months. He did not have to decide between the dreaded stairs and the sideways glances of the elevator. He did not gain any weight, or stretch marks, or weird skin tags. My husband is commended for doing work “outside of work hours” because it shows that he is dedicated to his career. He is not accused of being a neglectful parent or unfeeling when he comes home late. My husband, a wonderful father, does not stay awake all night when our daughters are sick nor does he find it necessary to sleep on their floor when they are coughing. He was not raised to cook for his in-laws a couple
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times a month and his parents once a week. The children do not cling on him, quite the same way they do to me, and he does not usually have to peel them from his waste as he squeezes out the door.

I am not saying this with resentment (well maybe the pregnancy stuff), nor am I suggesting that every woman has had the exact same experiences as me. I am, however, suggestion that some women have. We are gendered. I insist that as women we are affected by the social, familial and cultural expectations that define us, and that these expectations become more aggressive once we have children. A quest for self-fulfillment and self-realization that was once considered “cute” is now considered to traumatize our children. The foundation of intensive mothering, deemed crucial for the development of happy, healthy children, is stewed in a broth of self-sacrifice.

This study suggests that the workforce is patriarchal in design and that the ideal worker is male. “Built upon masculine norms and values (Acker, 1990) and around men’s bodies (Trethewey, 1999), the world of work has historically been separated from the domestic domain (Martin, 1990) (Turner & Norwood, 2013, p144).” An example of this is the persistence of the uneven division of labour at home. For example, “office-based work for 8 consecutive hours and 5 days a week may not be easily followed by women (Turner & Norwood, 2013, p144). Because of this, women enter the workforce disadvantaged. This and other challenges of women and mothers in the workforce has been central to the feminist debate. Another challenge working mothers face is the pressure of fulfilling societal norms.
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It may be argued that society’s expectations of women serve political agendas more that the best interest of humanity. On one hand, “Wrapped up in the family and at the heart of patriarchal hegemony is the assumption that the women belong in the home, taking care of husbands and kids (Harp & Bachmann, 2008, p 9).” On the other hand, theorists have suggested that there is truth in the U.S. propaganda that “feminism acts as a cultural solvent, as globalization erodes the traditions of patriarchy (Eisenstein, 2005 p 487),” and that the feminist movement was used “for capitalist interests at home and abroad (Eisenstein, 2005 p 487).”

As mothers continue to enter the workforce, policies focused on maternity and parental leave, expressing breast milk at work, and financial assistance intend to alleviate familial pressures and promote gender equity. However, we are warned to beware of “apparent state action that, in fact, does little to ameliorate the conditions of women’s lives (Boyd, 1997, p 11).” The definition of the woman’s role often serves to push political agendas. Marxist thought has played a significant role in the definition of woman as paid labourer. For example, while most readers likely interpret the women’s movement to be “part of the larger family of movements that seeks progressive change, broadly defined as that left (Eisenstein, 2005, p488),” it also conveniently helps to maintain the U.S. ‘competitive edge at a critical time (Eisenstein, 2005). Following the “‘long boom’ of the post-World War II (Eisenstein, 2005, p489)” the American government and U.S. corporations sought strategies to counter economic decline (Amott, 1993; Pollin, 2003 & Tabb, 2001). One way of reducing costs was through the use of “immigrant labor, primarily female (Fernandez-Kelly, 1989).” Another strategy was to expansion of the service
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industry of the economy (Eisenstein, 2005). This is an interestingly cyclical solution that reinforces the need for women in the workforce.

The service sector grows because the availability of cheap
Female labor provides the supply and because the use of Women in the labor market rather than at home also Provides the demand for replacement services (fast-food Replacing home cooking for example)....And the shift Toward the commercialization of personal services is Required by women’s increased labor force participation. (Hartmann, 1987).

These are not the only ways in which women have been used to support Marxist intentions. Feminist author, Sara Evans points out that,

“By far the single greatest impact of the women’s movement was in the American workforce. Beyond housing, beyond daycare, beyond issues of housework between husbands and wives, it was issues of careers and work opportunities that allowed women to remake the nation (2003, p81-82).”

As more women found employment, their celebrated gain of power became its own market. Working women, and in turn, working mothers, became a new consumer group targeted by Corporations, “from Nike’s images of the powerful woman engaged in athletic competition to Business Week’s presentations of a correct corporate wardrobe for women (Evans, 2003, p498).”

History continues to tell a dialectic story that demonstrating how society’s expectations of women shift and sway depending on what serves its interest. A culture that once frowned upon women entering the paid workforce, now changed its expectations making “traditional homemakers into a dwindling class of women who apologetically introduce themselves as ‘only a housewife’ (Evans, 2003, p 498).” At the same time, the contemporary ideology of mothering, coined intensive
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*mothering,* also idealizes stay-at-home mothers in turn vilainizing women who work. (Garey, 1999; Hays, 1996). Policies that promote longer leaves, which are overwhelmingly taken by mothers regardless of availability to both sexes, are accused of undermining “women’s efforts to achieve parity in the paid labour force and equality more generally (Boyd, 1997, p 11).” These policies reinforce the message that women belong at home raising babies.

The purpose of this study was to give women a voice; to hear that voice within the context of their legal and professional realities; and to propose potential policies that could support them in their transition from stay at home to working mother.

I have three daughters, the youngest of which is just shy of four months old. These precious, beautiful, wonderful creatures are the reasons why I refuse to feel guilty when I leave them home to do work. Yes, I make sure that they are loved and taken care of. But when I look at them, even with tears running down their faces and begging me to stay, I see *their* potential and this sets me free. Once laden with guilt and unsatisfied with myself, my *daughters* have set me free. How could I tell them that they can be whatever and whoever they choose? How can I convince them to chase their dreams, if I don’t chase mine? I am a mother who wants my daughters to be confident, satisfied and successful women.

So, I have chosen to live by example.

The women in my study have chosen to live by example. For their courage and their willingness to share their stories, my daughters and I are eternally grateful.
References


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