

**A YEAR “OFF”: HOW MOTHERS CHALLENGE AND CONFORM TO GENDER ON
MATERNITY LEAVE**

by

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Abstract

What actually happens on maternity leave? Leave involves long-term employment interruption but do new mothers completely trade career for caregiving? Moreover, what happens if they do? Using longitudinal interviews, this research investigates the influence of Canadian mothers' jobs on their leave and return-to-work experiences.

Intensive mothering dominates mothers' leave experience. Successfully "doing" leave, according to gendered cultural notions of proper maternal behaviour, means mothers are responsible for the baby at all times and put babies' needs first. However, this research finds that Canadian mothers construct their leaves in response to the pressures of both intensive mothering ideology and ideal worker norms that demand consistent career attachment. Efforts to resolve the emerging tension between caregiving and career produces a variety of leave and return-to-work approaches. Mothers' unique job context dictates the degree to which they experience ideal worker pressure and, as a result, the extent to which they can detach from their careers.

Mothers who strongly detach from their jobs are more likely to experience work anxiety, diminished professional confidence, and skill stagnation. Those remaining strongly attached experience insufficient caregiving time. Regardless of degree of work attachment, inflexible returns to full-time work increase work-family conflict, often resulting in job-specific concessions to preserve caregiving time. Mothers who cut-back on job duties or hours to preserve caregiving time may risk wage and achievement penalties after leave. In contrast, mothers integrating a moderate degree of professional activity with caregiving, both on leave and during the return-to-work transition, the report the most work-family balance.

The benefits associated with moderate integration of career and caregiving are contingent upon mothers' ability to control the nature of their career attachment. However, the extent of new mothers' work activity is largely determined by their jobs and fathers' participation in caregiving. As such, only some have the opportunity to challenge intensive mothering after childbirth, should they require an alternative work-family approach.

Lay Summary

The goal of this research is to investigate how mothers' jobs affect their maternity leave and return-to-work experiences. Specifically, this research explores whether or not new mothers spend all of their time on child care or if some continue to work. The results suggest that jobs are central to what leave looks like: some mothers focus completely on their babies, while others take part in a variety of both paid and unpaid work activities. Those with senior management responsibilities, heavy workloads, and those expecting future promotions are more likely to work on leave (both officially and unofficially). These findings indicate that work and family are not separate spheres, even during maternity leave. To best address the needs of Canadian mothers with different jobs, government and workplace policies must include options to combine work and family in the year after childbirth.

Preface

The design, data collection, and analysis of this research was conducted by the author with approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (certificate #H13-02518). The results of this research have not been previously published.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The transition to motherhood is associated with significant gender inequality at work and home following maternity and parental leave. If they return to work, mothers risk wage and achievement penalties (Boeckmann et al. 2015; Budig and Hodges 2010; Waldfogel 1998). At home, mothers risk the reversion to a more traditional domestic division of labour. They likely assume a disproportionate share of the child care and housework and this division may persist after returning to paid employment, regardless of the intensity of their job demands (Coltrane 2000; Jaris-Tichenor 2005). Understanding the negative impact of motherhood on women's labour force attachment, career achievement, and domestic equality has long been the focus of sociological inquiry. However, few existing studies have emphasized the role that leave may play in these outcomes. The goal of this research is to address this particular gap in the existing literature by investigating the leave period in-depth.

Existing research tends to focus on the social construction and reproduction of gender within couples after becoming parents, emphasizing the effects of culture (e.g., Fox 2009; Hays 1996; Walzer 1998). In these analyses, the influence of mothers' paid employment is often overshadowed by evidence indicating the persistence and ubiquity of intensive mothering ideology (Hays 1996).

Hays (1996) asserts that intensive motherhood is the dominant mothering ideology in North American culture. It is an exaggerated gendered standard outlining the behaviours that are characteristic of "good" mothers, regardless of employment (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Garey 1999). This ideology says that mothers should be the primary caregivers to children and expend a significant amount of time, effort, energy, and financial resources guiding their development

(Hays 1996; but see also Dow 2016). For school-age children, intensive mothering may involve vigilantly overseeing and assisting the completion of homework and enrolling children in language or music classes (and chauffeuring them to and from these activities) (Hays 1996). For employed mothers, it is further reflected by deliberate efforts to re-arrange work around parenting to make sure they are home to cook meals and take part in the bedtime routine, for example (Garey 1999). For infants, intensive mothering includes the expectation that new mothers are, at all times, responsible for their babies (Fox 2001; Walzer 1998). “Good” mothers are expected to always be thinking about their babies to be able to attend to their needs as quickly as possible (Fox 2001; Walzer 1998). Consequently, intensive mothering of infants often involves the subordination of mothers’ own needs to those of their children and male partners (Fox 2001; 2009).

In the existing literature, when employment is central, the leave period may not be clearly distinguished from mothers’ efforts to integrate work and family during their children’s pre-school and school-age years (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Garey 1999; Hochschild 1997; Stone 2007). Many of these employment-focused analyses offer pointed criticism of ideal worker norms for women’s ability to combine professional work with family, specifically. Workplaces governed by ideal worker norms, such as law, finance, and business, often require and reward long hours and continuous labour force attachment, which renders lengthy interruptions for caregiving unacceptable (Hochschild 1997; Stone and Hernandez 2013; Williams et al. 2013).

“Ideal” workers demonstrate commitment to their organizations by putting in “face time,” working long hours (including evenings and weekends), and staying connected even while on vacation (Cahusac and Kanji 2014; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Schieman et al. 2006, 2009;

Williams 2000). They prove their dedication and organizational worth by routinely privileging work responsibilities over family demands.

My research offers an in-depth analysis of the leave period, paying particular attention to the impact that mothers' jobs have on their negotiation of work and family immediately following childbirth. My contribution to the already rich body of work-family scholarship is an investigation of the interaction between intensive mothering and ideal worker norms in the context of mothers' maternity and parental leaves. The leave period is uniquely suited to examine this interaction because its defining characteristic is the transition from full-time paid employment to full-time caregiving and often back to paid labour.

The ideology of intensive motherhood would require "good" mothers to devote the majority of their efforts and energy towards caregiving once on leave (e.g., Hays 1996, 131). Canadian mothers' jobs are protected while they are on leave and many receive financial benefits for twelve months. These supports enable mothers in this policy context to concentrate on their families for a full year following childbirth. As such, intensive mothering is expected to go unchallenged during leave and the work and family spheres should be largely separate throughout this time. However, the longitudinal interviews conducted with Canadian mothers in this research strongly indicate that, even with generous leave entitlements, mothers construct their leaves in response to both the pressures of intensive mothering and ideal worker norms. These coinciding pressures generate considerable variation in continued employment activity.

Consistent with existing feminist arguments, I assert that work and family cannot be separated, even on leave (e.g., Hochschild 1997; Williams 2000). The legal entitlement to a leave free of job demands does not eliminate the pressures associated with ideal worker norms. Mothers on leave still confront the need to behave in accordance with intensive mothering while

also living up to the standards of the ideal worker, which creates tension because these pressures are inherently oppositional (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996). The conflict is strongest for senior management professionals whose employment context is informally structured by ideal worker norms to a much greater degree relative to other forms of paid work (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). In response to these dual pressures, mothers “do” leave quite differently and this difference is strongly associated with the type of job that they are on leave from (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Chapter Outline

The next two chapters provide the foundation for the study. To contextualize this research and its intended scholarly contribution, chapter two provides an overview of the existing literature. The literature review outlines the effects of leave policy as it relates to mothers’ labour force outcomes. The review examines the findings of the dominant strain of research, which emphasizes the cultural reproduction of traditional gender roles following childbirth. Finally, I state my case for the importance of incorporating job variation to better understand mothers’ leave and return-to-work experience. Chapter three outlines the study methodology. The data collection and analysis procedures are described including participant recruitment, interview questions, and coding processes.

The research results are examined in chapters four through six. Chapter four provides an in-depth description of what it is like for new mothers to be on leave: the day-to-day experience of exchanging full-time paid employment for full-time caregiving. Overall, the dominant cultural model of intensive mothering structures mothers’ leaves, which is consistent with Hays’ (1996)

argument. However, chapter five introduces the analytical concept of the “leave-work continuum,” which captures variation in the degree to which new mothers actually detach from their jobs and focus on caregiving. Three types of leave are identified and described: intensive, ideal worker, and integrated leaves. Four types of returns to paid employment are identified and described in Chapter six: “standard” full-time, reduced, early intense, and early gradual returns. Each leave and employment return approach is analyzed considering the on-going dual pressures mothers experience to be both “good” mothers and ideal workers in their particular employment contexts. Certain approaches better position mothers to satisfy the requirements of these opposing social constructs. As a result, mothers may “fail” to live up to the standards of one or both, depending on the approach they take.

Chapter seven critically examines the persistence and reproduction of the intensive mothering ideology, given the variation in approaches to both leave and returns to paid employment. I argue that intensive mothering is structurally embedded at multiple levels, including federal and workplace policy, but is not inevitable. For instance, having a partner sharing leave can facilitate increased and earlier professional engagement after childbirth. As a result, only certain Canadian mothers are positioned to challenge intensive mothering in a meaningful way.

Finally, chapter eight summarizes the study’s main findings, describing the theoretical and applied policy implications of the results. The strengths and weaknesses of the study are examined and suggestions for future research are explored in light of both my findings and the limitations of this initial exploratory investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A review of the literature indicates that mothers' labour force attachment and achievement are greatly supported by access to leave policies (Baker and Milligan 2008; Waldfogel et al. 1999). However, upon childbirth, mothers face significant pressure to engage in intensive motherhood and primarily direct their effort and energy towards their children. Such behaviour enables them to more closely embody the (largely unattainable) standard of the "good" mother (Hays 1996). This pressure ultimately contributes to the widespread reproduction of traditional gender roles between couples once they become parents, even when mothers are employed in demanding careers (Fox 2009; Jaris-Tichenor 2005; Stone 2007). Mothers continue or at least feel compelled to assume more of the child care responsibilities, which creates tension between their work and family obligations once they return to work (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996; Stone 2007; Walzer 1998).

Overall, the literature indicates that mothers' work-family integration around childbirth is influenced by a multitude of factors including personal preferences, gender role attitudes, and access to family policies (Hakim 2000; Kangas and Rostgaard 2007). However, a critical assessment of the existing evidence suggests the need to more closely examine the role of mothers' paid employment.

Hakim (2000) says that mothers in contemporary western society are able to choose their preferred level of career and parenting activity. Nevertheless, the extent of mothers' labour force participation may be inconsistent with what they prefer or had planned (e.g., Houston and Marks 2003). The degree to which mothers can focus on their children, as intensive motherhood requires, depends upon more than abstract notions of "good" or "proper" maternal behaviour.

The desire to work notwithstanding, mothers experience a variety of different economic and institutional constraints that force their hand when it comes to time spent in paid employment or caregiving. These constraints are often related to their specific position in the employment hierarchy and influence mothers' practical work-family options including financial resources, part-time employment opportunities, and access to child care services (Crompton 2006; Garey 1999; Hochschild 1997; Kangas and Rostgaard 2007; McRae 2003; Stone 2007). In other words, intensive motherhood is influenced by more than gendered cultural pressure and not all mothers have the same opportunity to engage in this behaviour (Fox 2009).

This chapter is divided into three parts, designed to make the case for emphasizing the role that mothers' jobs and workplaces play in structuring their leave and return-to-work experiences. The first two sections present the dominant patterns identified by the existing literature. Section one demonstrates the largely positive effect that leave policies have on mothers' labour force attachment and achievement. The second section examines the influence of gendered cultural ideals in structuring parents' roles following childbirth. Finally, the third section illustrates how mothers' experience of leave policies, their benefits, and the pressure to fulfill gendered cultural expectations are shaped by their unique job contexts.

The Benefits of Leave Policy

In general, maternity leave entitlements are associated with a wide array of positive long-term outcomes including improved physical and mental health, increased breastfeeding, and decreased incidence of accidents in children's first year (Baker and Milligan 2008). However, the primary emphasis here is the way in which leave policy is positively related to mothers' employment

participation and experiences: the effect of leave length, likelihood of job continuity with pre-birth employers, and wage effects.

Length of Leave

One concern of job-protected leave is the extent to which such protections may prolong work interruption. Modest leave entitlements (about seventeen weeks) do not contribute to longer employment absences in Canada (Baker and Milligan 2008). Likewise, Baum (2003) does not find a significant increase in leave-taking among U.S. mothers with access to leave policy. Hofferth and Curtin (2006) find that access to twelve weeks of job-protected leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in the U.S. encouraged mothers to return to paid work an average of two-and-a-half months sooner than prior to the enactment of the FMLA. American mothers with leave coverage are more likely to take a leave of twelve weeks but these mothers are also more likely to return to work faster after this leave (Berger and Waldfogel 2004). Whether or not new mothers are employed prior to childbirth matters a great deal for the length of their labour force absence.

Women who engage in paid employment prior to giving birth (or during pregnancy) return to their jobs much faster than those not working prior to childbirth in the United States (Berger and Waldfogel 2004; see also Hofferth 1996, Hofferth and Curtin 2006). Employed mothers are almost fifteen times more likely to be working within the first year post-partum compared to those mothers who did not work beforehand (Berger and Waldfogel 2004). Aside from returning sooner, returning to the same employer can be particularly beneficial from an earnings standpoint.

Job Continuity

Maternity leave coverage supports job continuity, increasing mothers' attachment to their pre-birth employers. Waldfogel et al. (1999) document a sixteen percent increased likelihood of job continuity after childbirth in Britain, twenty-three percent in the U.S., and seventy-three percent in Japan. Similarly, Canadian data indicates that job continuity increases through longer leave protection because mothers who would otherwise have sought part-time work with a new employer are now able to take a longer leave and return full-time to their previous job (Baker and Milligan 2008). Those who would have totally exited the labour market to provide child care are also able to re-enter the workforce (Baker and Milligan 2008). American mothers working more hours pre-birth and those with more job experience are more likely to return to the same job after birth but the evidence also suggests that the effect of work experience is non-linear, declining at the highest levels (Hofferth and Curtin 2006).

Returning to one's previous job has significant implications for mothers' economic achievement because the positive wage effect of job-protected maternity leave is found to be a direct consequence of mothers' decision to return to their pre-birth employer (Waldfogel 1998; see also Hofferth and Curtin 2006). Likewise, Canadian mothers returning to work with a different employer experience a greater wage penalty than those returning to the same employer after a child-related interruption (Phipps et al. 2001). This association is understandable, given the amount of existing workplace experience and skills mothers have acquired and their employers' investment in them. It is expensive to hire and train a new employee and it will take time for that person to become as skilled and productive as the more experienced, departing worker.

Wages and the Family Gap

The wage protection function of leave policy is particularly important because an earnings gap exists between employed mothers and their childless female counterparts called “the family gap” (Waldfogel 1998; see also Boeckmann et al. 2012). Thirty-year-old American mothers earn approximately seventy percent of their male counterparts’ income, while women without children earn approximately ninety percent, demonstrating a family gap of twenty percentage points (Waldfogel 1998). Similarly, Canadian research indicates that full-time employed mothers’ wage penalties are larger for child-related interruptions (longer absences than those incurred by maternity/parental leave) as compared to health-related absences from work (Phipps et al. 2001; see also Zhang 2007).

Women in both the United States and Britain with access to maternity leave coverage, who subsequently return to paid employment, receive a wage premium that serves to offset the negative wage effect associated with children (Waldfogel 1998; but see also Mandel and Semyonov 2005). In the U.S., access to leave coverage has a six percent positive effect on mothers’ current wages, net of employer size and union presence, and this positive effect is comparable for employed British mothers (Waldfogel 1998). The wage effect of maternity leave coverage is insignificant in the first year after returning to work but both American and British mothers receive the greatest positive benefit after two years. The positive effect disappears by the eighth year after returning in the U.S. (fifth year for Britain), indicating that American mothers without leave coverage at work need eight years, on average, to make up the ground they lose by temporarily leaving the labour force (Waldfogel 1998).

The literature generally indicates that access to leave policy is beneficial, particularly in terms of mothers’ employment attachment and wages. However, mothers returning to work after

leave cannot simply pick up where they left off. Upon return, mothers are constantly negotiating their work and family roles and the associated demands. This can be a challenge on its own but is made more difficult by gendered cultural notions of what it means to be a “good mother” (Hays 1996; Blair-Loy 2003).

Reproducing Traditional Gender Roles

While there is some evidence to the contrary (e.g., Dow 2016; Ranson 2010), the existing literature indicates that gendered cultural ideologies generally maintain and reproduce traditional gender roles following childbirth in heterosexual families, even amongst higher earning employed mothers (Blair-Loy 2003; Fox 2009; Garey 1999; Jaris-Tichenor 2005; Stone 2007; Walzer 1998). These ideologies exert influence through parents’ exposure to and subjective interpretations of “proper” or “desirable” behaviour. Accordingly, the “doing gender” framework is often applied to explain migration towards the male breadwinner and female caregiver division of labour upon parenthood (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Doing Gender

West and Zimmerman (1987, 126) assert that gender is “a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment.” While individuals are the ones who “do gender,” the “doing” occurs in the presence of other people and, thus, gender emerges through social interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126), for example, between new parents and under the watchful eye of the rest of society, including family and friends.

According to “doing gender,” individuals must successfully and repeatedly demonstrate their gender in each and every situation, and they also attend to the behaviour of others in the same way, deciding whether or not someone is acting appropriately or inappropriately. Individuals are “accountable,” aware of how particular actions will appear to others and what others will think of them and so they self-regulate their behaviour. Gender, then, is “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 127).

Given that sex category is always relevant in interaction, men and women are nearly always held accountable for their behaviour as men and women. How one appears in any given situation may support or diminish their success in “doing gender” in other situations as assessed by others (West and Zimmerman 1987). Paradoxically, actively constructing gender through social interaction in this way actually makes gender differences and qualities appear to be “natural,” as in the case of the maternal caregiver/paternal breadwinner division of labour. Consistent with intensive motherhood, this process makes mothers seem naturally “better” or more qualified to care for infants. Mothers are “the best person for [that] job” (Hays 1996, 8). As a result, gender differences appear to be objective, reinforcing the legitimacy of differential experiences and treatment of men and women, such as the gender wage gap (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Intensive Mothering

Mothers face immense societal pressure to privilege their caregiving responsibilities over their jobs and careers because that is what “good” mothers are supposed to do. Mothers successfully “do gender” by conforming to the dominant cultural ideology of “intensive motherhood” (Hays

1996). Hays (1996) asserts that this ideology is widespread in North America and all mothers are held accountable to its standards of conduct. Mothers working in health care are found to arrange their schedules so that they can still “be there” to “do things” for their children, such as choosing overnight shifts that enable them to read stories, make dinner, and help with homework before heading off to work (Garey 1999).

Similarly, Walzer (1998) finds that parents approach their roles in response to culturally defined and, therefore, socially constructed conceptions of mother and fatherhood. Gender differences in “parental consciousness” are to be understood in reference to both the relational and structural context. The approach that couples take toward parenting is defined as a way of “doing gender” but relational in the sense that the way in which mothers “do motherhood” depends upon how fathers “do fatherhood” and vice versa (Walzer 1998). Mothers’ parental consciousness, in particular, is shaped by the idea that they “must always be there” for their children and must worry about their children when at work, reinforcing traditional gender divisions (Walzer 1998, 177).

Walzer (1998) comments that such gender differentiation is partly reinforced through the labour market: occupational segregation and the gender wage gap institutionalize gender differences where women hold lower paying jobs, which is an obstacle to moving beyond traditional roles once becoming parents. Employed or not, mothers are essentially unable to satisfy the idealized criteria for what it means to be a “good” mother whereas fathers can more easily surpass the benchmark of good fatherhood, which is often reduced to financial support. Any additional caring or nurturing fathers provide beyond breadwinning signals that they are going above and beyond (Walzer 1998; but see Hofmeister and Baur 2015).

Even if mothers are able to live up to some of the tenets of intensive mothering, employed mothers who dedicate too much time to their families cannot live up to notions of the ideal worker, which are examined later in this chapter (e.g. Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Stone 2007). The conflict results from the antithetical nature of career and caregiving norms.

Factoring in Job Differences

Blair-Loy (2003, 2-4) describes the influence of work and family devotion schemas that express culturally defined morality and identity issues around intensive commitment to employment and family. A mother who is too dedicated to work violates the family devotion schema and a career-oriented woman who spends too much time attending to family matters disrupts the work devotion schema because there are contradictory values embedded in the domestic and paid employment spheres. As mothers, women are expected to heavily invest in their children without receiving any immediate return on this investment. In contrast, paid employment demands productivity and rewards employee efforts with markers of achievement, including pay and promotions. As employees, mothers confront the tension between being driven by self-interested gain and the logic of selfless nurturance, reflecting the “cultural contradictions of motherhood” (Hays 1996; Walzer 1998).

In these studies, the analytical narratives are anchored by the interaction of gender and culture when explaining how parents’ work-family behaviour is structured. As a result, the emphasis remains on the idea that there is one singular “right” way to go about being a mother, for all mothers, despite diversity within this group (see also Fox 2001). Comments on the role of occupation, labour market experiences and, in some cases, class are comparatively limited. These

tend to be used to generally subdivide mothers and fathers into groups that may or may not coincide with the overarching, culturally approved approach to work and family.

For example, Hays (1996) asserts that intensive mothering is the dominant contemporary cultural model. It is what is socially acceptable and legitimate. Working and middle class mothers hold “different baseline standards for what ‘good mothers’ should provide for their children as well as differential means and different images of how to achieve what is best for them” (Hays 1996, 86). However, these significant differences do not “seriously challenge” the dominance of the intensive mothering ideology (Hays 1996, 95). This statement is loaded with important questions about how and why such differences exist but concludes that these differences do not matter that much in the end.

While intensive mothering may remain intact across diverse groups of mothers, working and middle class mothers’ ability to engage in particular intensive mothering behaviours is impacted by their economic circumstances (e.g., the ability to take part in extracurricular sports or enrichment classes). Moreover, it takes financial resources for mothers to be able to privilege caregiving over full-time employment activity (i.e., taking maternity and parental leave). To do so often requires the presence of a higher earning male partner, reflecting (and reproducing) a more traditional division of gender roles (Fox 2009). In dual-earner households, resources necessarily include mothers’ jobs and their relative position in the socioeconomic hierarchy as these determine the amount of money and time mothers can spend either at work or home.

Incorporating the impact of mothers’ jobs into the analysis more clearly emphasizes diversity in their work-family circumstances and enables the identification of particular barriers to being a “good” mother (e.g., long weekly work hours). To understand mothers’ experience of both leave and employment following childbirth, it is essential to examine the role of job

variation. The existing literature suggests that leave policy benefits and parenting in accordance with gendered ideals is related to mothers' unique job contexts.

The Case for Job Variation

Without denying the importance of gendered cultural ideals, employment context is crucial to understanding the leave experience since mothers are transitioning to and from very different jobs. The kind of work that mothers do can either facilitate or impede their work-family integration during and after leave, regardless of their preferences or pressure to behave in a gender “appropriate” manner. The evidence indicates that mothers in demanding professional careers may have a particularly difficult time taking a lengthy leave characterized by full-time child care.

Variable Demands and Resources

High and low wage work is characterized by very different job demands and resources that can either aid parents' engagement in employment and caregiving or increase conflict. Professional and managerial jobs usually allow employees significant flexibility and control over their work and schedules. These jobs often include “family-friendly” benefits, like paid leave or child care subsidies, while lower skilled service or manual jobs typically do not (Crompton 2006; Haddock et al. 2006; Henly and Lambert 2003; Perry-Jenkins 2003).

Part-time work is less likely to offer paid leave, sick time, child care assistance, and flex-time (e.g., Dodson 2013; Perry-Jenkins 2003). Flexible work arrangements that give employees discretion over their weekly schedules are least likely to be offered to low income single

mothers, who would benefit most (Moen and Roehling 2005; see also Swanberg 2005). Less than five percent of lower wage U.S. employees report any kind of child care subsidy and a mere four percent are afforded job sharing opportunities (Perry-Jenkins 2003; see also Henly and Lambert 2003). Access to flexible work is important because such arrangements can prevent negative work-to-home spillover, disproportionately facilitating work-family integration for those in the upper half of the employment hierarchy (Haddock et al. 2006; Perry-Jenkins 2003; White et al. 2003). However, high status job resources may not be totally advantageous.

Even though professional jobs may confer certain benefits, like schedule control, flexibility, and autonomy, they also place great demands upon employees. Highly educated Americans are more likely to work in higher status occupations and these occupations are more likely to be characterized by an increased number of weekly work hours and come with more job pressures that are, in turn, associated with time strain, work-to-family conflict, and the blurring of work and non-work roles (Schieman et al. 2006, 2009; Schieman and Glavin 2011). Part of the reason that demands and resources vary by job is because high and low wage work are each characterized by different norms dictating the required level of employee effort and commitment.

Workplace Norms and Associated Penalties

The “flexible worker” norm is more prevalent in lower wage service work as these jobs may be designed to be part-time and transitory with higher staff turnover (Webber and Williams 2008, 764). The work is thought to be flexible because shifts are flexible. These jobs can be conducive to work-family integration for those whose child care needs coincide with a non-standard work schedule (Webber and Williams 2008; Williams 2000). However, this benefit comes at the expense of “permanent consignment to low status, low wage, [and] dead end work” (Williams

2000, 82-3). In the U.S., these jobs are often highly supervised and the job design is actually most supportive of the organization's flexibility because employers can overstaff shifts and send unnecessary workers home on a moment's notice (Webber and Williams 2008; see also Swanberg 2005).

American mothers in lower wage "flexible" service work experience a very particular kind of work-family conflict that largely results from rigid and unpredictable shift schedules that make it difficult to plan and secure child care. Mothers are often late or absent from work to deal with care issues and this can mean pay deductions and even job dismissal (Dodson 2013; Henly and Lambert 2003; Perry-Jenkins 2003, 2012).

In contrast, the "ideal worker" norm tends to dominate high wage professional work and workplace culture (Stone and Hernandez 2013). This norm is masculine: more easily achieved by those without caregiving demands who can put in long work hours, constantly "be there" and put in "face time" (Cahusac and Kanji 2014; Kelly et al. 2010; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Webber and Williams 2008). As such, the ideal worker norm demands that mothers privilege their career responsibilities, which may force them to choose between their jobs and family (e.g. Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1997; Stone 2007).

The existence of ideal worker norms means that access to the "family-friendly" benefits provided by high status jobs does not necessarily come without barriers or penalties, which discourages parents from exercising their workplace options (Hochschild 1997). There is a real difference between "policy in practice" and "policy on paper" (Lambert and Haley-Lock 2004, 182).

Multiple studies find flexibility policies to be associated with lower performance evaluations and a reduced likelihood of promotion (Williams et al. 2013). Part-time work in

professional contexts may result in an informal demotion to the “mommy track,” where employees often have less skilled and more marginal jobs (Stone and Hernandez 2013, 248; see also Cahusac and Kanji 2014; Webber and Williams 2008). Professional mothers may also receive lower quality assignments and have trouble finding mentors to support their career advancement (Williams et al. 2013). Wage penalties are also a possibility (Williams et al. 2013). For American professional mothers, working from home at least five hours per week is associated with a \$2.36 per hour wage reduction, whereas mothers working less than thirty hours are penalized at \$1.90 per hour (Glass 2004; see also Budig and Hodges 2010; Mandel 2011; Mandel and Shalev 2009).

In a U.S. study, mothers of young children working in demanding professional positions, in fields like business and publishing, report that the inflexible nature of their jobs contributed to their decision to quit and become stay-at-home mothers (Stone 2007). Professional mothers may not reap the benefits of high status job resources. The nature of “all-or-nothing” careers can mean that part-time is not a realistic option and employees may actually exercise very little control over their schedules, dictated by client and employer needs and the amount of time that is required to complete the work. Those able to negotiate a part-time arrangement often find themselves working full-time hours despite their official change in work status (Stone 2007; Webber and Williams 2008).

Professional and managerial job contexts may be particularly problematic for leave and the transition back to paid work. These mothers may have trouble satisfying the definition of the “good” mother due to their simultaneous duty to fulfill notions of the ideal worker, who maintains consistent career attachment (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007).

Job Variation and Maternal Labour Force Attachment

There is evidence that American mothers with more educational attainment, those earning higher wages, and those with more job-specific training are more likely to take shorter maternity leaves (Desai and Waite 1991; see also Hofferth and Curtin 2006). However, job characteristics generally influence mothers' leave-taking and subsequent job continuity, supporting the investigation of a diverse range of work contexts.

In the U.S., the likelihood of mothers working immediately prior to birth and at just two or three months post-birth is dependent upon the rewards conferred by the job and the ease of which it can be combined with motherhood (i.e., availability of part-time work or a high proportion of employees with children) (Desai and Waite 1991). Similarly, Hofferth (1996) finds that the availability of part-time work, generous unpaid leave, flexible spending accounts, and workplace child care are all determinants of faster returns to work after leave for U.S. mothers.

As with leave length, job and workplace characteristics influence job continuity. Reduced hours (including a longer leave period and avoiding overtime upon return), schedule flexibility, and social support in the workplace are found to decrease rates of job turnover for U.S. mothers (Glass and Riley 1998). However, it is important to consider workplace culture and colleague and supervisor support more closely.

An Ontario study finds that colleagues hold negative perceptions of leave takers (Phillips et al. 2000). In addition, a Québec study notes that parents who have taken leave perceive an absence of supervisor, colleague, and organizational support with mothers reporting a particularly negative impact on their careers (Tremblay and Genin 2010). Mothers' decisions regarding the length of their leaves and whether or not to return to the same job may be influenced by the organizational culture of their workplace. They may return to work sooner,

rather than later, or change jobs because of the way in which leave and leave-takers are perceived and treated (see also Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1997).

The factors that support job continuity are different from those that contribute to labour force exits after birth in the U.S. (Glass and Riley 1998). Leaving the job market entirely after leave is more likely amongst mothers working in temporary occupations or working a less challenging job. However, maintaining contact with employees during leave and providing them with the option to return to work on a part-time basis increases the odds that mothers will return to their pre-birth employer (Waldfogel 1998).

Beyond demands, resources, and norms, mothers' jobs can directly influence the kinds of leave benefits that they receive from the federal government. The dialectical association between the existing Canadian leave policy and mothers' employment further indicates the need to consider jobs as a constituent element in structuring the leave experience (Dengate 2016). Mothers' jobs determine whether or not they are eligible for federal benefits as well as their total benefit amount, based upon their yearly salary, and whether or not they receive an employer top-up.

Canadian Policy and Job Variation

The majority of the literature discussed, thus far, is largely derived from the United States and specific European contexts that are characterized by a relative lack of leave benefits, compared to Canada (e.g., shorter leaves and lower or no financial compensation). The Canadian policy context has unique features that bear directly on the research problem, influencing both the impact that jobs may have on mothers' leave transitions, and length of leave for claims of being "good" mothers and ideal workers.

For context, the following sub-section first describes the Canadian leave policy in detail including a description of who takes leave, within-country differences, and reasons for returning to paid employment. The latter half of the discussion critically examines how the existing policy varies along job lines and, finally, the impact of the Canadian context on mothers' experience of conflict between intensive motherhood and ideal worker norms is explored.

Canadian leave policy

In Canada, the federal government's Employment Insurance program (EI) is responsible for providing job-protected maternity and parental leave benefits for non-Québec residents.¹ This program is also responsible for approving and administering temporary financial benefits to Canadians needing support during a period of general unemployment. As a result, many of the same eligibility criteria (e.g., employment hour minimum) also apply to those pursuing financial support for leave.

Under the federal policy, maternity leave is only provided to biological or surrogate mothers and requires proof of pregnancy (e.g., expected due date or date of birth). Non-Québec mothers are entitled to fifteen weeks of paid maternity leave, receiving fifty-five percent income replacement. In addition to maternity leave, biological, adoptive, or legally recognized parents may take parental leave. Both parents are able to share a total of thirty-five weeks of paid parental leave with fifty-five percent income replacement (Service Canada 2016). Parents are allowed to divide these thirty-five weeks however they see fit but the time must be taken within

¹ Since 2006, Québec has held jurisdiction over the administration of its own leave policy.

one year of the child's birth/placement, making the entitlement rather inflexible for integrating work and family long-term. Parental leave payments can begin as soon as the child is born/adopted which, on paper, enables fathers/partners to immediately take concurrent leave with mothers.

To be eligible for leave payments, all Canadian parents residing outside of Québec must have paid EI premiums through their job, have a reduction in normal weekly earnings by more than forty percent, and have accumulated at least 600 hours of insurable employment during the previous twelve month qualifying period (Service Canada 2016). The requisite 600 hours of insurable employment must be logged within the last fifty-two weeks leading up to the leave period being requested, or in the last fifty-two weeks before the applicant's last EI period (if it occurred in the previous year), whichever is shorter (Service Canada 2016). Parents can count employment from more than one employer to reach this amount. However, for both parents to receive parental leave benefits, both must independently meet the eligibility requirements (Service Canada 2016).

Yearly insurable earnings are capped at \$50,800 (as of 2016), meaning parents can receive a maximum of \$537 per week while on leave. The recipient's benefit amount is calculated using their "best" or highest earning weeks during the fifty-two week qualifying employment period, taking into account "regional weeks of unemployment" for their province/territory of residence. If the applicant lives in a region with the highest rate of unemployment, their benefit amount is calculated based on their fourteen "best weeks." If residing in an area with the lowest unemployment, twenty-two best weeks are used to calculate the benefit amount (Service Canada 2016). Including fewer weeks of employment may help protect the total benefit amount by discounting weeks of low (or no) earned income.

Parents are able to work while receiving leave benefits but every dollar that mothers earn while officially on maternity leave is deducted from their benefit amount. In contrast, those working for pay during parental leave can earn up to \$50 a week or twenty-five percent of their weekly benefit amount, whichever is higher. Any earnings above this allotment are deducted from their leave benefits (Service Canada 2016).

There is important jurisdictional variation, as Québec administers its own benefits through the Québec Parental Insurance Program (QPIP). Their autonomy has resulted in more flexible and, in some ways, more generous leave options and benefits compared to the rest of country.

To be eligible for QPIP, parents residing in Québec must cease employment, or experience an income reduction of at least forty percent, and demonstrate \$2,000 in earnings during the previous year, regardless of number of employment hours² (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity 2016). This difference in eligibility criteria results in a much higher coverage rate for Québec mothers. Almost forty percent of Canadian mothers outside of Québec with insurable earnings do not receive leave benefits, largely due to the 600 hour employment minimum required of non-Québec residents by the federal government. In contrast, just ten percent of Québec mothers do not receive paid benefits, reflecting a serious gap in access to benefits within the country (McKay et al. 2016).

In addition, the Québec benefit plan offers a greater measure of flexibility as parents can choose between basic and special plans for maternity, paternity, and parental leave. Special plans

² Moreover, the eligible qualifying period for this earned income can be doubled from fifty-two to 104 weeks if the applicant was unable to work or collect insured income because they were receiving EI/QPIP or other government indemnities a year prior to the leave period being requested (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity 2016).

allow parents to receive higher income replacement over a shorter period of leave. Québec mothers can take eighteen weeks of maternity leave and receive seventy percent income replacement, or fifteen weeks of maternity leave at seventy-five percent (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity 2016). Likewise, Québec parents (biological) can share thirty-two weeks of parental leave. Seven of these weeks are remunerated at seventy percent and twenty-five are remunerated at fifty-five percent. Alternatively, birth parents can take a total of twenty-five weeks and receive seventy-five percent income replacement (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity 2016). However, the earned income caps for both maternity and parental leave are similar to those applied to parents residing in the rest of Canada (RoC). Québec mothers are unable to keep any income earned while receiving maternity leave benefits and parents can earn up to twenty-five percent of their weekly parental leave benefit without deduction. If the gross weekly parental leave benefit is less than \$200, Québec parents can earn up to \$50 without deduction (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity 2016).

Who takes leave in Canada? The short answer is mothers. Sixty-five percent of employed Canadian parents took either paid or unpaid leave from their jobs from 2001-2006 to care for a newborn or adopted child. Almost ninety percent of mothers take leave, compared to forty-five percent of fathers, though men are increasing their participation (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007). Like receipt of benefits, the gender gap in leave-taking is also influenced by jurisdictional differences between Québec and the RoC. Between 2001 and 2006, the total number of fathers taking leave increased from under forty to fifty-five percent. This upward trend is the result of both the increase in parental leave weeks (from ten to thirty-five weeks) and Québec fathers' unique access to *paternity* leave (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).

Québec is the only province that provides paternity leave, exclusively for biological fathers. Fathers can take either three or five weeks of paternity leave, remunerated at seventy-five or seventy percent, respectively. In terms of gender parity, Québec mothers still take more leave but the paternity leave option has been successful in increasing fathers' participation (Beaujot et al. 2013; Findlay and Kohen 2012; Marshall 2008). Québec fathers' leave claims increased from thirty-two percent in 2005 to fifty-six percent in 2006. This increase drove the overall increase in all Canadian fathers' parental leave claims in 2005-2006 from fifteen to twenty percent (Marshall 2008). Moreover, Québec fathers availing themselves of paternity leave are still eligible to share parental leave with their partners (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity 2016). Fathers in the RoC can only share the thirty-five weeks of parental leave offered by the federal policy.

However, access to limited weeks of paternity leave also risks shortening the total length of time fathers take. There is evidence that Québec fathers take only the paternity leave available (three or five weeks), as opposed to also taking additional weeks of parental leave. Québec fathers' time off declined from thirteen weeks in 2005 (*parental* leave) to just seven weeks in 2006 (Beaujot et al. 2013; see also Findlay and Kohen 2012).

Despite the boost provided by Québec fathers, only nine percent of all Canadian fathers report taking paternity leave between 2001 and 2006. Overall, fathers are more likely to use their annual paid leave (vacation or personal) or opt for unpaid leave from work (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007; Findlay and Kohen 2012). Even though fathers in and outside of Québec have legal access to some type of leave, there are persistent barriers to increasing their participation. The gender wage gap often means that fathers earn more money than their female partners, so the financial penalty incurred is larger when fathers take substantial leave. Parental leave

continues to be gendered and is assumed to be “for mothers,” so fathers may encounter implicit or explicit stigma that prevents many from taking substantial leave, maintaining the gender gap (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).

Of those parents taking leave between 2001 and 2006, almost eighty percent returned to paid employment but fathers continue to return in greater proportions after taking much shorter leaves than mothers (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007; Findlay and Kohen 2012). Seventy-five percent of children between the ages of one and three, residing outside of Québec, have mothers who were employed in the year prior to their birth. Ninety percent of these children’s mothers took either paid or unpaid leave, and approximately sixty-seven percent are again employed (Findlay and Kohen 2012). Similarly, for Québec children between the ages of one and three, just under seventy percent of mothers were employed prior to birth, nearly all took paid or unpaid leave, and just over seventy-two percent are back in paid work (Findlay and Kohen 2012).

In contrast, over ninety percent of fathers both in and outside of Québec return to paid work after shorter leaves (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007; Findlay and Kohen 2012). Most fathers’ leaves are under six months and, of these fathers, approximately two-thirds return to work within four weeks’ time. Mothers’ leaves range between six to almost fifty months total. Approximately thirty percent of mothers rejoin the labour force between six and eleven months following childbirth (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007). Those parents who return quickly are more likely to use annual or unpaid work leave or other employer benefits, while parents who take longer leaves avail themselves of federal maternity and parental leave benefits (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).

The majority of parents (almost eighty percent) cite financial reasons for labour force re-entry and over half report their return is due to desire, or because their career is important to them. Approximately twenty-five percent of mothers are more likely to return to work because

they feel isolated at home, whereas forty percent of fathers are more likely to fear losing their job. Just over eighty percent of parents say they would take longer leaves if it was financially possible or if leave benefits were higher and extended over time (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).

Some parents also report negative consequences associated with leave-taking including lost promotion opportunities (ten percent), required re-training or re-education (eight percent), and having to take a less desirable position upon return (seven percent). Mothers report the transition back to work as being more stressful than fathers do. Over half of mothers experience stress during the transition back to work, while most fathers report the transition as not at all or not too stressful. This disparity may be partly attributed to the gendered division of labour at home, given that mothers are more likely to assume the majority of the domestic work. Mothers report that work-family balance, including time spent on household labour and family responsibilities interfering at work, is a primary stressor after leave (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).

Job-dependent benefit differences

Under the existing policy parameters, Canadian mothers on leave from particular types of employment are more likely to qualify for and receive both basic and supplemental benefits. Highly educated and skilled women, those with higher income professional jobs, those working secure full-time jobs, and those working for large employers, the public sector, and in unionized workplaces are better positioned heading into leave (Marshall 2010).

First, parents' jobs directly determine whether or not they are eligible for any federal financial benefits. Highly educated women with job security will be more likely to be eligible for paid benefits, compared to less educated women and those working part-time or more

precariously, since secure jobs virtually guarantee that mothers meet the 600 employment hour minimum (e.g. Phipps 2000). It is more apparent that part-time and seasonal work is less economically secure, however, the prevalence of temporary work within the Canadian labour market also includes women at the higher end of the socioeconomic spectrum and includes professionals in science and academia, for example (Fuller and Vosko 2008; Galarneau 2005; Vosko 2000). Since insecurity does not necessarily discriminate, job variation remains important for understanding Canadian mothers' leave experience. Salary is another crucial factor under the existing policy.

Canadian benefits are calculated based upon the recipient's most recent income so mothers with "better" jobs and higher pre-leave earnings will receive higher leave payments, up to the ceiling of \$537 per week. Low wage mothers receive fifty-five percent of their already low wages during leave unless they qualify for the low income family supplement that may boost their income replacement to eighty percent. Such earning variation means that some mothers may be more likely to need to continue working on leave or take short leaves. Self-employed mothers may be particularly vulnerable under the current policy.

Mothers who are self-employed are only eligible to receive benefits if they pro-actively register to pay EI premiums prior to leave and also meet the forty percent wage reduction requirement, in addition to the 600 work hour minimum. Some may not see the point in taking these extra steps and simply rely on their own savings during leave. Many self-employed mothers, instead, take short leaves and return to work quickly (Marshall 2003; see also Findlay and Kohen 2012). These mothers' livelihoods depend upon continuous employment and, if they do happen to insure their earnings to receive EI payments, any additional income they pursue

will be subject to the aforementioned maternity leave earnings deduction and parental leave earnings limit.

Parents' jobs also directly determine whether or not they receive additional income replacement on leave. Employers may create and finance their own Supplemental Unemployment Benefit (SUB) plans that provide eligible mothers with additional leave income on top of their federal payments (Marshall 2010). The total percentage of income replacement included in these limited time "top-ups" can sometimes exceed ninety percent but the duration of the additional benefits varies by employer. Just one-fifth of all parents receiving EI/QPIP benefits in 2008 also received a top-up. Payments were, on average, \$300 per week and lasted approximately eighteen weeks, mostly supplementing maternity leave payments (Marshall 2010).

Employer size and working in the public sector are the strongest predictors of top-ups. Firms with over 500 employees, government employers, universities and public schools, and hospitals are more likely to offer top-ups because these organizations tend to have the financial and human resources for administration (Marshall 2010). Approximately half of Canadian mothers working in the public sector get a top-up and about forty percent of union jobs include this benefit (Marshall 2010, 8). These employment-related patterns may also exacerbate existing financial inequality during leave.

Those with skilled or professional jobs with higher earnings (who will receive higher basic weekly leave payments) are more likely to receive SUB payments because they have skills that are difficult to replace (Marshall 2010, 9). Canadian mothers earning more than \$20 per hour are significantly more likely to receive a top-up. Thirty-six percent of mothers earning \$25 or

more receive top-ups compared to just nine percent of mothers earning less than \$20 an hour (Marshall 2010).

The existing scholarly literature indicates that job variation is related to post-leave labour force attachment (e.g., access to part-time hours and co-worker support). Moreover, this literature suggests that job variation could also greatly impact leave: different types of work are characterized by particular demands and resources (e.g., long weekly work hours or schedule control) and norms that may impact the length of mothers' career interruption.

In addition, the employment dependent nature of existing federal financial benefits in Canada disproportionately rewards mothers going on leave from certain types of employers (see also Dengate 2016). However, the exact manner in which mothers' jobs influence their leave experience and subsequent employment re-entry remains unknown.

In sum, the evidence suggests that while higher earning professional mothers in demanding long hour careers may receive more government and employer leave benefits, they may also be more likely to experience greater pressure to limit their work interruption and remain involved with their job. Limiting leave and, perhaps, continuing to engage with work on leave is consistent with ideal worker norms but violates the standards of intensive mothering.

If lower earning mothers face less pressure to limit their leave time, it may be due to the fact that they are more easily replaced, job protection notwithstanding. Mothers in lower wage and more precarious work risk financial issues related to a reduced income, if they are able to satisfy the employment criteria to collect benefits. However, mothers employed in relatively less prestigious, less lucrative, and less demanding forms of employment may not experience the intense pressures associated with ideal worker norms (at least to the same degree). As a result, it

may be more realistic for these mothers to take long leaves and focus entirely on their babies, which is more consistent with being a “good” mother on leave.

The goal of this study is to shed some light on how Canadian mothers’ jobs contribute to the structuring of their leave and return-to-work experiences alongside of gendered cultural ideals of proper motherhood behaviour. Incorporating job variation enables an examination of the extent to which the presence (or relative absence) of ideal worker pressures can maintain or challenge intensive mothering during the leave period. But how detrimental can taking leave be in a policy context where twelve months of leave is not unusual, or where a lengthy period of full-time child care may be expected immediately after childbirth?

A large proportion of Canadian mothers take leave (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007; Findlay and Kohen 2012). As a result, lengthy career detachment may be assumed, posing less of a threat to professional mothers’ career performance, in particular. The Canadian leave policy may protect mothers from accusations that they are failing to live up to ideal worker standards because employers and colleagues already anticipate they will be on leave for up to a year. The lack of research into the leave period, thus far, means we have no evidence to indicate if Canadian policy does sufficiently mitigate ideal worker pressures during leave or if they retain their strength even under employment protection.

Moreover, many of the same problems affecting British and American mothers can still influence Canadian mothers’ future career experiences because the Canadian policy does not explicitly address work-family integration after leave when mothers face pressure to be both good mothers and ideal workers *at the same time*. Once leave has ended, Canadian mothers wanting to reduce to part-time hours to do more caregiving may be unable to find a reduced hour position (see also Houston and Marks 2003). Those that do reduce hours risk signalling that they

are choosing motherhood over career, potentially damaging their fulfillment of ideal worker expectations (Stone 2007). Such unexplored questions and the persistent possibility of work-family conflict reiterates the importance of investigating Canadian mothers' leave experience.

The research methodology is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study utilizes a grounded theory approach to explore the influence of mothers' job variation on leave. Such an approach allows the central concepts and relationships to emerge from the data rather than testing a preconceived hypothesis (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The methodology section begins with a description of the data: participant recruitment, data collection procedures, and interview guide questions. The analysis approach and procedures are then discussed in detail, including conceptual and theoretical coding and memos.

Research Data

The data for this study are sixty-four in-depth, longitudinal interviews with thirty-three Canadian women either expecting or who had recently given birth. Most mothers took part in two interviews: during and after leave. Four expectant mothers (who had not yet given birth) participated in a total of three interviews: before, during, and after leave. Six mothers were unable to continue after their first interview but their insights are incorporated into the analysis of the day-to-day leave experience in chapter four. In total, twenty-seven mothers took part in both during and after leave interviews.

Pre-natal interviews took place two to eight weeks prior to the anticipated due date, approximately. Mothers already on leave were interviewed at various points in time, ranging from two to eleven months into leave. The final follow-up interviews took place approximately two to three months upon mothers either returning to work or after the maximum twelve month leave period, as returning to paid employment was not a requirement for inclusion in the study.

Participant Recruitment

The study was conducted in Marine, a large city in Western Canada. Participant recruitment included poster advertising and in-person presentations. Advertisements were posted in the waiting rooms of five clinics in a large women's hospital, five midwifery offices, the office of a community birth program, community centres, various family doctor practices, and maternity wear and baby stores in several city neighbourhoods. Only two mothers were recruited through poster advertising. They contacted me by email after seeing the advertisements in the maternity/baby stores.

The majority of the participants were recruited via in-person presentations to pre-natal and mother-baby health/fitness classes and various infant activity group sessions held in five community centres, located in different areas of the city. Class instructors were contacted and gave permission to address each group. Presentations were made to approximately twenty-five classes, research flyers were distributed, and interested mothers later contacted me by email and phone.

In addition, five mothers were recruited through snowball sampling through three mothers who had already joined the study. The additional five mothers were friends of the initial three that had signed up to participate. One mother recruited three others, representing a network of four casual friends that had previously met as a result of their pregnancies. The other two initial participants each recruited one other to join. Social isolation and support were important early topics for understanding the leave experience and these existing relationships were taken into consideration in the beginning stages of the analysis. Ultimately, social support and friendships on leave did not emerge as a core conceptual or theoretical component and, thus, prior existing relationships did not introduce any apparent undue bias into the analysis.

Despite efforts to include mother and baby classes in various neighbourhoods with different socioeconomic profiles, recruitment from paid fitness and activity classes resulted in a final sample of highly educated mothers with middle to higher income professional/managerial occupations, many of which were in the health field. The mothers attending these classes considered them to be important and were already inclined to sign up, reflecting a very specific kind of maternity leave experience and their existing knowledge of health protection. The extent to which these particular mothers differ from those not included in the study because they did not participate in such activities cannot be fully determined. Accordingly, the results are not intended to be generalized beyond the particular sample in question.

Sample Description

Overall, the sample consists of highly educated, white, heterosexual mothers in long-term, dual income relationships. The participating mothers are between the ages of twenty-eight to forty-four with the majority in their early to mid-thirties. Twenty-five are first-time mothers, six have two children, and two mothers have three children. Three of the eight mothers with more than one child have school age children and the remainder are pre-school age.

All but one of the mothers are in heterosexual relationships with a male partner. One, who subsequently dropped out of the study, is single but also heterosexual. Of the mothers who are in relationships, twenty-nine are married and three are common law. The vast majority are white, including just three visible minority ethnicities. Seven of the mothers previously immigrated to Canada.

Twenty mothers hold graduate level university degrees; and nine have bachelor's degrees. Three mothers' highest level of education is a high school diploma but they all hold

additional technical or specialty certificates required for their professions (e.g., Early Childhood Education accreditation).

In terms of occupation, mothers' jobs skew towards the professional/managerial level and include a variety of public and private sector organizations in several fields. Health and mental health is the most dominant but the mothers hold a variety of different positions within that general field: nurses, lab technicians, counsellors, therapists, non-physician specialists, social workers, community services, and researchers. Elementary and high school teachers, accounting, law, telecommunications engineering, and project management in construction and design are additional jobs unrelated to the health field. Mothers are also employed in child care, in both management and junior positions. One mother is self-employed part-time (multiple positions).

Nine of the twenty-seven mothers interviewed both during and after leave have management responsibilities. It is notable that the vast majority (eight of the nine) are employed in more male-dominated professional fields in the private sector: construction, law, accounting, and insurance. Only one mother working in the more female-dominated public health field was a manager, which is broadly consistent with research linking public sector employment to family-friendly but female-typed, lower paid employment (Mandel and Semyonov 2005). At the same time, however, three mothers have senior management roles with the government, which indicates that "feminized" public sector employment does not always stunt women's career advancement.

The socioeconomic privilege of the sample and the public/private sector divide is further reflected in mothers' maternity leave benefits. Seventeen of the twenty-seven mothers interviewed both during and after leave report receiving supplementary financial benefits from their employer, in addition to federal leave payments. Consistent with Marshall's findings

(2010), those receiving more generous top-ups work for large organizations and/or in the public sector (e.g., health, government, and education). Fourteen mothers working in the public sector received between eighty to ninety-five percent of their usual salaries on leave. Moreover, these extra funds were paid out over a longer period of time, ranging anywhere from three to six months. In contrast, just three private sector mothers received a top-up. Theirs was more likely to be smaller (e.g., sixty-five percent total income replacement), be paid as a lump-sum bonus (e.g., \$1,000), or in installments once returning to their job.

Fathers' occupations are, likewise, mostly professional/managerial but a handful are manual/blue-collar, still in school, or just beginning to establish themselves outside of school. Typical fields include law, finance, real estate, business, engineering, insurance, construction, trades, and teaching/education and research. Three fathers are self-employed. In general, the fathers are the primary earners in the family and only three mothers report earning more than their male partners. While fathers were not interviewed, their jobs did have a significant impact on mothers' leave and return-to-work experiences. Fathers' long hours, non-standard hours, autonomy over work tasks and location, and travel help shape what mothers did on leave, especially regarding continued work involvement. This dynamic will be examined in detail in chapters five and seven.

In terms of socioeconomic status, the sample is best described as middle or upper-middle class. Both parents are employed in good, if not very well-paying, jobs. However, Marine is a city with a relatively high cost of living and these families require two healthy incomes to function. While most couples report that they are "doing ok" or "good" financially, many state that they are doing their best to budget and save, given the added cost of a new baby and the reduction in mothers' maternity leave income (especially if they have older children in child

care). Overall, these families are not having difficulty making ends meet but most are tightening their belts and many do not have a great deal extra to spare. Two of the thirty-three mothers initially interviewed report less stable financial circumstances and shared that they went into debt during leave.

In terms of residence, many interviews took place in cafés and community centres so the type of family home could not, in those instances, be observed and factored into an assessment of socioeconomic status. Of the homes visited, the majority are either apartments, rental suites, or multiple family dwellings. Detached, single family homes are less common.

It is notable that, during leave, a handful of (now larger) families transitioned from apartments to single family homes in order to gain more space. These homes are located farther from the city in the less congested (and somewhat less expensive) suburbs. For those residing in single family detached dwellings, it is unclear whether or not they own their homes, as opposed to renting. This question was not included in the brief demographic questionnaire.

Nevertheless, all of the participating families' residences are in middle or upper-middle class neighbourhoods, located on the more "affluent side" of the city, or close to the desirable centre of downtown.

Data Collection

I conducted interviews over a period of approximately eighteen months from 2015-2016. The majority of the interviews took place in-person, usually in mothers' homes but also in local coffee shops and community centres. Several of the pre-leave and post-leave interviews took place at mothers' jobs, for convenience. In addition, three follow-up interviews were conducted

via Skype to allow mothers who relocated during the course of the study to continue to participate.

The retention rate for participation in follow-up interviews is quite good. Thirty-three mothers were interviewed in the initial round (either pre-leave or during leave). All four of the pre-leave mothers participated in all three interviews before, during, and after leave. Another twenty-three mothers were interviewed both during and after leave for a total of twenty-seven longitudinal interviews. In total, six mothers dropped out of the study after their first interview and did not participate in a second. Multiple attempts were made to arrange follow-ups by telephone and email. The sample attrition that did occur was, understandably, related to scheduling conflicts and increased work-family demands after leave.

Interview questions

The interviews were semi-structured and three interview guides were prepared to assist in each pre-leave, during leave, and return-to-work interview. Three pilot interviews with mothers on leave were conducted to test and edit the questions before beginning data collection. Consistent with a grounded approach, the interview questions remained flexible and were revised in a cumulative fashion as the data collection progressed. Ineffective questions were eliminated and additional questions were added based on the emerging importance of particular concepts and topics gleaned from previous interviews.

Pre-leave interview questions focus on mothers' job duties and their connection to their work, their transition from work to leave, plans and expectations for leave/motherhood, work-

family integration (including the division of domestic labour at home), and general demographic queries.

The questions asked of mothers on leave were designed to understand what a typical day/week was like (including responsibility for the child care and household chores), social interaction and support during leave, and involvement in mother-baby activities. Mothers were asked to describe both the enjoyable and challenging aspects of being on leave, as well as their feelings about their jobs, whether or not they remained involved with work, and their feelings about returning to employment. They were also asked about their experience dealing with workplace and federal leave policies, including suggestions for improvement. The revised questionnaire for the “during leave” interviews can be found in Appendix A.

Post-leave questions capture the experience of transitioning back to paid employment, including decisions to change jobs or remain out of the labour force, at least temporarily. Mothers were asked to reflect on their leave experience in order to ascertain if their feelings about leave and work had changed from the previous interview. They were asked to describe their new approach to work-family integration, including the division of child care and household chores. Most importantly, they were again asked about involvement with their jobs throughout leave: the benefits of such activity, whether or not they would have liked to have been more involved, and if increased involvement would have helped facilitate their return after leave. Mothers were asked to describe their return and re-orientation to the workplace to help inform both employer and federal policy, including the process of securing child care and how mothers “caught up” upon resuming employment. The revised questionnaire for the “post-leave” interviews can be found in Appendix B.

Research Ethics

All guidelines regarding the treatment of human subjects, including voluntary participation and informed consent, and the storage and protection of hard-copy and electronic or digital research information have been followed, as outlined by Tri-Council Research Ethics Policy.

In lieu of an honorarium, mothers received a complimentary baby book at each interview as a token of appreciation for their participation.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for mothers, their partners, and their children. To that end, the gender of the children has, in some instances, been altered. In addition, mothers' jobs are referred to in general terms (e.g., accountant or government department manager).

Analytical Approach

The basic intent of this study is to explore the role of occupational difference for mothers' maternity leave and return-to-work experiences. As such, the analysis is not a strict application of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990; LaRossa 2005). However, the lack of theorizing around the role of jobs during the transitions to and from leave provide sufficient room to allow original concepts and relationships to emerge directly from mothers' experiences, largely unfettered by preconceived hypotheses. Instead, the existing conceptual frameworks of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987), the Stress of Higher Status Hypothesis (asserting the potential disadvantages of schedule control and autonomy) (e.g., Glavin and Schieman 2012), and border theory (Clark 2000) are used to help explain and theorize the patterns of mothers' leave behaviour identified in the data.

Analysis Procedure

The digital interview audio files were transcribed by a research assistant and analyzed using NVivo 10 qualitative software and Microsoft Word. Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously. Jot notes were taken during all of the interviews and these were later expanded into comprehensive field notes that were typed and coded immediately following each interview (within a day, at the latest). This process was essential to begin identifying important and recurring codes, potential theoretical concepts, and associations. Questions were formulated based on the notes. Handwritten and typed memos were drafted, in conjunction with coding, to help identify additional information needed about particular topics to be able to revise the interview guides and address emerging questions.

Coding

Interviews were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding, and the method of constant comparison was utilized throughout the analysis. Though discussed here in a linear manner, the three types of coding took place concurrently (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The analysis began with open coding of both field notes and interview transcripts where initial concepts were identified, defined, and properties and dimensions began to emerge (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Lofland et al. 2006).

Initial concepts and dimensions included “gendered labour,” like breastfeeding, traditional domestic division of labour, job-related leave worries (e.g., preferring the maternity leave replacement), caregiving-related leave worries, types of leave transitions (abrupt or gradual), “before baby identity” (i.e., mothers’ interests and goals prior to birth), and “beyond

the baby connection,” referring to the preference to make and associate with friends during leave with whom mothers share interests aside from their babies.

Axial coding helped to identify the various types of “leave work” mothers had to do, including basic caregiving, routine housework, leave benefits administration and paperwork, and the well-being work mothers did to protect and enhance their own mental, emotional, and physical health (e.g., attending fitness classes). It was clear that leave was a job, of sorts, and not “time off” or a “vacation.”

Early on, it also became apparent that there was work involved in order for mothers to transition to leave, in the first place, and that mothers were still connected to work during leave. This led to the development and elaboration of the concept of “bridge work,” detailing the various ways in which mothers help ensure the transition to leave is smooth for themselves and their employers (e.g., training a leave replacement and answering co-worker emails on leave). This was the first significant analytic and theoretical product as it established that mothers’ jobs did, in fact, affect leave and the two could not be distinctly compartmentalized. Through memos, various properties and dimensions of “bridge work” were developed. It became apparent that this work was mostly minimal, in terms of the time it required, did not require a lot of effort on mothers’ parts, and was sporadic.

However, the relationship between mothers’ jobs and leave expanded beyond bridge work to include different kinds of formal and informal professional engagement that could be further broken down and categorized as maintaining social ties, career development activities, and actual part-time, volunteer, or contract work. Approximately half of the mothers only took part in bridge work and occasional social interactions with co-workers. They were “minimally

attached” to their jobs and, as a result, many did have a more “conventional” leave experience, where they spent as much time with their babies as possible.

When it became apparent that a continuum of attachment to work existed, mothers were classified as minimally, moderately, or significantly attached, based on interview field notes/transcript codes. In order to further tease out the differences between these mothers and identify factors that facilitated or inhibited continued work involvement, I began alternating the coding of transcripts to compare mothers’ experiences. I would first code a “minimally attached mother,” then select a “moderately attached” transcript, followed by a “significantly attached” mother.

After proceeding in this fashion, I then focused on each of these attachment categories, in turn, comparing all of the mothers within each category to one other. This helped achieve a more robust understanding of who was more likely to integrate leave with work, why they did so, and the professional and personal effects of this behaviour. The same alternating and within-category comparisons were applied to the return-to-work interviews. Mothers were classified as having an “immediate full-time,” “temporary gradual,” “early intense,” or “reduced” return.

The constant comparison approach enabled an examination of the conditions and context under which mothers more or less integrated their leaves with work. It became clear that particular circumstances had to occur for mothers to more thoroughly combine their careers with leave, including heavy professional job demands, management responsibilities, and fathers’ increased participation in caregiving.

The refinement of the relationship between mothers’ job variation and the different degrees of work-leave integration provided the foundation for the overarching theoretical

argument that mothers construct their leaves in response to both the pressures of intensive mothering and ideal worker norms.

The results chapters are next and proceed in the following order: mothers' daily experience on leave, continuum of work attachment on leave, and continuum of returns. Mothers' daily leave experiences indicate the continued, overarching dominance of intensive mothering ideology (Hays 1996). However, the second results chapter demonstrates that there is also considerable variation in the extent to which mothers remain attached to their jobs, ranging from minimal to significant attachment. This heterogeneity reflects an entire spectrum of influence where intensive mothering dominates the minimally attached mothers' experience and ideal worker norms promote increased attachment.

Similarly, the continuum of returns indicate the strong influence of both intensive mothering and ideal worker norms. The former is reflected by reduced return mothers who cut back on their employment hours after leave, and the latter is characteristic of early returns to paid employment.

The final results chapter critically examines the power and persistence of intensive mothering, identifying and explaining the factors that impact how different mothers "do" (or challenge) this ideology as they transition to and from their particular work contexts.

Chapter 4: Successfully Doing Leave

For mothers to successfully “do” leave, according to gendered cultural standards, they must adhere to the tenets of intensive mothering, as much as possible. In this research (and regardless of job variation), the vast majority of all mothers’ daily leave activities are consistent with this ideology. Their behaviour reflects the “selfless nurturing” characteristic in intensive motherhood (Hays 1996). However, the results also demonstrate that new mothers’ conscious participation in intensive motherhood ideology varies and evolves.

Early into leave mothers are, without question, “intensively” caregiving because infants require constant attention, and mothers are the primary caregivers while their partners are employed full-time. During this time period, mothers do not assert that they are attending to their child’s needs in this manner because it makes them “good” mothers. Nevertheless, always feeling responsible for babies, putting the baby’s needs first, and responding to every need as soon as it arises, is consistent with intensive mothering ideology (Fox 2001, 2009). Mothers’ engagement in intensive mothering, as an ideology, becomes more deliberate as leave progresses: when confronted with the option to engage in some career activity while on leave, and at the end of leave when debating their return to full- or part-time employment. In both situations, mothers are deciding how much time, effort, and energy they will devote to work and family.

In these two situations, mothers more closely adhering to intensive mothering “choose” to spend time with their babies, rather than pursue career opportunities (e.g., a two day workshop). They also return to work part-time or at temporarily reduced hours explicitly because they want to preserve as much caregiving time as possible to “be the one to raise [my] kids.”

Similarly, those without the option to reduce work hours to increase caregiving after leave vocally lament that they are not giving their all as mothers because they are only spending a few waking hours a day with their babies. With this distinction in mind, this chapter examines the intensive mothering behaviour that is more representative of the early stages of leave when mothers are engaged in full-time, routine child care.

During leave, on a day-to-day basis, mothers put their babies' needs and schedules first. According to mothers, the purpose of leave is to bond with their children and this is achieved by spending an incredible amount of time together. This time includes repetitive basic tasks, such as breastfeeding and diapering, but also comparatively more stimulating activities, such as walking to a regular drop-in infant play group or meeting friends for lunch. Consequently, mothers spend a lot more time in the home and take on the lion's share of the child care duties (Fox 2001). Mothers on leave are performing full-time child care that is, in many ways, more demanding and stressful than the paid employment that they are on leave from.

Leave as a Job

The ubiquity of the intensive mothering ideology during leave is illustrated by mothers taking on the role as primary caregiver to their babies, day-in and day-out. Mothers routinely report being responsible for between eighty-five to one hundred percent of the child care during the week and at least fifty percent on weekends, which is a conservative estimate. They explain the inequality by asserting the need to breastfeed and comparing their "opportunity" to stay at home to the time their partners spend in paid employment. Consistent with these rationales, most mothers say that they "should" be the ones to provide most of the child care on leave because they are the ones "at home."

Constance, a medical academic researcher and first-time mother explains the allocation of the caregiving duties, estimating that she “[does] the majority of that [child care]. We – I mean, [sighs] it’s just because I’m here though....My husband will... help....He’s been really busy with his work...He’s been coming home to do our bedtime routine and then going back into work to do more work [so] it’s like, ‘well, fair enough....I shouldn’t really ask you to start doing jobs when you’re home if you’re gonna be working that hard’.”

As the primary caregiver, mothers’ job on leave is to put the babies’ needs and schedules first. As Constance concludes, “your time is not your own.” Though mothers do (technically) dictate what happens and when, it is mostly in response to their children.

The Chaos of Putting the Baby First

Prior to and early into leave mothers have different opinions as to whether or not they are interested in letting the baby control the day-to-day plans. Contrary to the intensive mothering ideology, mothers like Gwen, Daphne, and Paula want the baby to fit around *their* schedules as much as possible.

I spoke to Paula in her home on a sunny spring morning. I sat at the kitchen counter while she stood and paced behind the island, hair bobbing in a loose ponytail, as she diced and microwaved vegetables for her daughter, Summer’s, mid-morning snack. According to Paula, “we – [my husband] and I decided when we wanted to have the baby or kids in general that we want the kids to fit into our lives.”

In spite of these initial attitudes, all mothers’ leave schedules put the baby first. As Cara explains, “it’s definitely based on his schedule. We...learned early on that... you have to kind of schedule things around the baby’s schedule or else it’s – you’ll just be miserable.”

Moreover, mothers' leave schedules are not static but fluid, changing along with their babies' continual development. As the primary caregiver, mothers have more or less time and independence depending on the baby's stage of development. Margo says that her leave revolves around her daughter, "'cause they're always changing...I feel like there are certain periods where I'm like 'I know what I'm doing. I've got this'.... but then she'll change and...well now she needs to have like a two hour nap in the morning and then a two hour nap in the evening or in the afternoon and she takes an hour to eat and so then it makes it really hard to get out of the house."

As a consequence of deferring to the baby's needs, mothers' daily leave schedules are unpredictable. This makes it difficult for mothers, like Eileen, to make any concrete plans:

It's all around her [daughter, Lily] and entirely unpredictable and just in like the last few weeks started to become predictable... And it's just like... if they're not on a schedule, you can't really plan your day at all and you just kind of do it day-by-day and minute-by-minute almost. Or you text someone, you're like "Okay, well she just went down. She might sleep for forty-five minutes or she might sleep for two hours, I don't really know. How about I text you when she wakes up and then maybe we can meet at the park."

The baby's privileged status is clear in this scenario and I experienced it first-hand. Eileen took a considerable break in the middle of our interview to collect Lily from her crib, fresh from a nap. We continued to pause while Eileen prepared and tried to feed Lily her lunch, even though Lily seemed far more interested in pestering the family dog, who was trying to enjoy his own nap on an overstuffed living room chair.

Privileging the baby and focusing on child care on leave is not a hardship for most of the mothers in this study. They relish the opportunity to take this "break" from paid work to bond with their children. However, the pressure of intensive mothering actually means that mothers have very little time, on a daily basis.

How Time Off Becomes Work

Mothers' leave time is not their own: the baby's changing needs take priority and, as a result, leave days can be quite unpredictable. Such facts challenge the general societal assumption that leave is time off. Audrey explains, "it's not a long holiday, like some people think... 'You're off! How awesome!'"

Mothers, themselves, are often under the impression that they will have much more time than they actually do, especially at the start of leave. Lab technician and first-time mother, Roberta, confides that maternity leave is not at all like she had anticipated:

I thought you could put the baby down and she'll nap and you can go off and do stuff but didn't turn out to be that way....I thought I would have a lot of time but that wasn't the case....My co-workers, a lot of them are moms and they said "Oh, you're gonna be really busy" and I was like "Oh, why – why am I gonna be busy? They're gonna be sleeping this many hours of the day. I have so much time on my hands."

First-time mothers are not the only ones guilty of this miscalculation. With a self-deprecating scoff and shake of her head, Andrea admits that she, too, thought she would have more time confessing that "it's kind of silly. Like even though I had a leave before, at the beginning I was thinking like 'Oh, leave; that will be so nice. Look, I'll have some time for myself.' Yeah, who are we kidding?"

In reality, leave is busy and mothers like Sue quickly learn that there is little point in making too many plans other than caring for the baby:

I learned better from my first one because when I [first] went on maternity leave, of course people can tell you all they want to tell you but you don't know until you do it, right? So I had all these projects lined up for when I was on maternity leave...and got nothing done...and [chuckles] I was like surprised what it was gonna be like. So this time I was – I thought a lot more realistic.

Mothers on leave have little time for themselves or *by* themselves. For Jeanette, who has three children, alone time on leave consists of small pockets of time, late in the evenings, where she

might watch one television show, have a cup of tea, or read the newspaper. At times, her “alone” time includes nursing the baby.

Any alone or “me” time is occasional and irregular when mothers can obtain child care, either from their partners or family and friends. Esther loves the time she gains whenever her husband attends a morning father-baby class on the weekend. This “break” lets her indulge in a massage now and then. “That was like once a month, maybe once every two months. I’d like to do it...every week but actually when my husband is around more on Saturdays, he goes to a class at the [community centre] with [Elise]. So usually, yeah, I’ll have like an hour or two to myself on Saturday mornings.”

An hour or two, once or twice a month/week, to oneself is certainly not indicative of a vacation from work. Actually, these mothers likely had more consistent breaks during a typical day at their full-time paid jobs. The lack of time on leave is directly related to the assumption and pressure for mothers to take full responsibility for babies on leave (see also Fox 2001). The next section examines the exact nature of child care work on leave.

Child Care: “A Different Kind of Work”

The most sensitive issue in this research is whether or not leave can be appropriately characterized as “work” or a “job.” According to the ideology of intensive mothering, it is “ludicrous” to compare the work of child rearing with paid employment, partly because the emotional investment and rewards inherent in parenting cannot be rivaled (Hays 1996, 8). The attitudes of the mothers interviewed support Hays’ (1996) assertion.

The verdict is that leave is “a different kind of work,” compared to paid employment, because motherhood is unlike any other job. As Eve put it, the work of leave “moves at the pace

of your kids,” reinforcing that mothers’ primary “job” on leave is to respond to their baby’s needs. Mothers may disagree about the terminology used to describe their child care labour but, consistent with intensive mothering, generally maintain that they receive unparalleled benefits from their caregiving efforts relative to their careers.

Stephanie agrees that leave is hard work but does not describe it as a job. When her partner took a short two month parental leave, saying it was “so much work,” Stephanie thought, “well, duh.” To her, leave was always going to be a lot of work. Even though “you work really hard,” it still feels like “time off” because she spends “so much time outside and not at a desk.” She is “always wearing yoga pants” and “rarely wearing make-up,” compared to her paid job.

Siobhan also agrees that leave is a lot of work and that being a stay-at-home mother is stressful because moms are expected to “do everything.” At the same time, she prefers leave to her Information Technology job in that it is more “fun” and she is able to watch her daughter, Hazel, grow. Like most of the other moms, Siobhan carefully chases any hint of criticism about leave with a clear statement of enjoyment, holding herself accountable to the standard of “appropriate” maternal attitudes and conduct (West and Zimmerman 1987). The overriding perception is that, not only should mothers become the primary caregivers on leave, but they should also *enjoy* this role.

From these mothers’ perspectives, leave can hardly be called “work,” the same way that their careers are work because they are spending time with their baby. The parallel between parenting and work may be uncouth, in mothers’ estimation, but not critically examining their assertions ignores the influence of strong cultural pressure to engage in intensive mothering. In addition, accepting the idea that they are not “working” further devalues unpaid domestic labour and minimizes the demanding nature of caregiving.

The full-time child care that mothers provide on leave *is* work, albeit poorly paid. Child care supervisor, Paula did not mince words when I broached the subject, asserting that “it’s definitely no benefit.... it’s great that we get EI but like, I’m like \$20 is nice, too, but like it’s shit pay. It really is. You can’t live off of it....really should I have taken a year off? Probably not.” The undervaluing of caregiving on leave becomes even more apparent when mothers’ leave payments are weighed against the amount and specific nature of their child care labour.

The Characteristics of Caregiving

Celeste, a law firm partner and first-time mother, contrasts child care on leave with her demanding (and rewarding) paid work, saying that maternity leave is a “totally different beast.” Employment and leave are “categorically different” in terms of what each requires on an “emotional and intellectual level.”

In the spirit of giving mothers credit for this work, the following section describes what it is like to provide full-time child care and juxtaposes this with paid work, which continues to garner disproportionate financial rewards and respect. Leave hours are twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, you must be able to work alone. If you’re a first-time mother, you must also teach yourself how to do the work, on-the-job. The core tasks can be mundane, there are no clearly outlined procedures or goals, and the emotional stakes are high.

Like Esther, who romanticizes that returning to her paid job would be a “break,” Celeste says that employment is easier in some respects. The workday generally has an end, while child care on leave is “constant” and moms are always “on.” Paula adds that there are no breaks and mothers cannot call in sick. If a “real job” is nine-to-five, Monday to Friday, then the work of leave is always overtime and “always double shifts.” Daphne concedes that child care “does kind

of replace your job because...it takes up way more of your time than your job...it's always in the back of your mind." Each mother, in her own way, communicates that, on leave, there is "no off-switch."

In addition to working all day, a substantial portion of child care takes place overnight and mothers are generally responsible for this as well. Moreover, they feel that they should be responsible for it since caregiving is their job while not engaged in paid labour (Fox 2001). Daphne feels that, during the week, her husband should be primarily concerned with his job. It "doesn't make sense for him to be looking after [Jackson] at night time. I don't agree with him having to be sleep deprived if I – like what's the point in two of us being wrecked so I just do everything at night time." Consistent with the pattern identified by Fox (2009) in her examination of how gender is reproduced among first-time Canadian parents, mothers are likely to privilege their husbands' paid labour, at the expense of a heavier child care load, because fathers are the primary breadwinners while mothers are on leave.

Because a significant portion of the child care occurs overnight and regularly interrupts mothers' own sleep, it impacts their physical and mental well-being throughout the following day. Mothers perform full-time child care while constantly sleep deprived, which makes Sue feel like a "walking zombie."

Similarly, construction project manager, Violet feels like her "brain shrunk" and says she is not "on [her] A-game," reporting issues with both her memory and vocabulary. She feels "stupider." Similarly, Daphne describes her mental fuzziness related to a lack of sleep stating, "you just get really brain dead as well... your brain just doesn't – mine just doesn't work the same way it used to." The resounding consensus is that sleep deprivation is the hardest part of leave but many also cite the boredom of mundane care tasks.

Overall, child care does not provide a great deal of intellectual challenge, compared to mothers' careers. While a handful maintain that having a baby is "so engrossing" and stimulating enough, many, like Andrea, describe their leave as less than cerebral:

I mean... the kid's great and I love him and everything. But there's a limit how exciting being with him can be [chuckles]...it can get a little monotonous with baby....and I miss, you know, what I had in my work, so the constant learning and the constant challenges. With kids, it's constant. Like... it doesn't really – you don't really overcome it because you move to another one [chuckles] or they change and there's a whole different challenge.

In addition to being routine, child care also lacks clearly defined goals relative to mothers' careers.

A paid job generally has identifiable goals. In some ways, Celeste feels that she is better at her paid job since it is easier to know if she was succeeding because there are measurable outcomes (e.g., meeting your quota of billable hours). This is in contrast to parenting where the nebulous objective is to nurture a happy, healthy child. Andrea, on her second leave, eloquently concludes the same and contrasts child care to the more apparent achievements of housework, even:

Somehow... I guess it's hard to quantify child care. Like when you sit – like when I sit and, you know, hand him something and take it back like fifteen billion times, it's hard to quantify that but you can quantify housework. You can look at the clean floor or clean dishes or whatever else that you're doing; folding laundry. Only stuff you can quantify but, okay, what did I do today? I sat on our mat and I exchanged [toy] keys for like fifty minutes. It's like... it kind of sounds – doesn't sound very good when you say that, does it?

While mothers often seek advice from family, friends, and by doing research, there are many conflicting approaches to infant feeding, sleeping, and development. They encounter a lot of uncomfortable ambiguity because there is no clear "right way" to parent. Nevertheless, intensive mothering pressure supports the notion that a right way does, in fact, exist. As a result, mothers

are constantly judging themselves about their mothering because they all want to ensure their child is developing optimally. Margo's internal struggle about what activities and schedule are appropriate on leave illustrates this tension:

I think there's so much [parenting information] out there where you can feel like, you know, I didn't take her to the park for a really long time and then I started feeling... "Well, am I bad mom? I've never taken her to the park" and then – or if I get out to some activity, uh, but she's tired then I feel like "Well, I got her to the activity, she's playing with other babies but am I bad mom 'cause she's not napping." So I think there's always that... self-imposed guilt.

Paid employees often receive training and guidance. In contrast, learning how to be a parent is largely self-taught with the added desire for moms to "put their own stamp" on it. Daphne tries to look at leave as her job in that she puts a lot of effort into learning and educating herself, reading up on infant development and food training methods. She wants to be responsible about her parenting and "do it well" and tries to apply the same energy to it as she would to a "normal job."

Finally, paid work usually provides social interaction via co-workers and the public. Sue asserts that "it's very isolating being at home and making sure they have their nap time and doing all the things that babies want to do." Her assessment is particularly revealing, connecting the isolation of being at home to the expectation that mothers on leave put the baby first and "do all the things that babies want to do."

The bulk of mothers' leave time is spent in caregiving labour, bonding with their new baby. Leave provides a concentrated period where mothers can just be parents without employment responsibilities but this also increases the likelihood that most of the routine housework responsibilities fall on mothers (Coltrane 2000; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Like child care, mothers' share of the housework increases with their transition to leave. Like child

care, mothers on leave feel they “should” take on these tasks because they are “at home” and can more easily “see” the need to clean, compared to their partners.

A More Traditional Division

None of the mothers interviewed before and after leave are single parents but, while their partners are at work, mothers shoulder all of the responsibilities at home. Like their female partners, many fathers are employed in professional jobs that are either consistently or intermittently demanding (e.g., engineering or real estate). When work demands are high, fathers work more hours per week. In addition to the sheer number of hours, the timing of these hours is crucial. Young infants sleep a great deal and are often put to bed for the night early. Mothers reveal that the bedtime routine (e.g., bath, clothing change, and feeding) often starts as early as 5:30 p.m. Even fathers employed in a strict 9:00-5:00 p.m. job would have difficulty making it home to assist with these tasks.

Eileen’s husband, Brian, has a demanding job with a rotating (though predictable) shift schedule and rarely makes it home before their daughter is in bed. Likewise, Jordan’s partner is employed in an industry characterized by special evening events, in addition to regular daily work hours. This means that Jordan’s partner is not home to assist her with evening care or housework during those times.

In addition to rotating schedules, unexpected “peaks” of increased demands and hours are detrimental to domestic equality. Nora and Sue’s partners’ work demands fluctuate, intensifying for a limited period of time and then levelling out. Nora reflects on how her husband’s work schedule impacts her daily leave experience:

In the past few months, he's had a couple of big deadlines and so he's been working really late which has been hard on both of us 'cause often, you know, he comes home and [our daughter, Chelsea, is] going to bed. So, you know, maybe he sees her for fifteen minutes, 'cause [she's] still asleep when he leaves and then it's also harder on me 'cause it means I'm with [Chelsea] all day.

During leave, this means distinct periods when mothers' already significant, full-time child care responsibilities increase to an even greater degree. Sue's well-being is negatively impacted by her husband's changing work hours because she has to, somehow, find a way to squeeze in more child care to compensate for his extended daily absence:

[M]y husband working really long hours stresses me out because I just don't look forward to the day when it's long, having to juggle the kids and they get upset with me when I'm trying my hardest and I can't spend individual time with each one of them and, you know [...] I feel like I'm like – I'm stretched too thin so I feel like that's kind of stressful, especially when it goes through the whole weekend. You're just like "Oh my god." I'm like how do single parents do it? I think [they] are amazing.

Mothers also appear to contribute to the maintenance of more traditional gender roles when fathers *are* at home, effectively co-producing a traditional division (West and Zimmerman 1987; Fox 2009; Walzer 1998). However, such behaviour is more a reflection of intensive mothering pressure than it is individual choice or preference. As Fox (2001) finds, new mothers are to take responsibility for the baby at all times, even when fathers are providing care. Moreover, this ubiquitous "responsibility" extends to housework since the home environment directly impacts babies' health and well-being (Fox 2001).

Few mothers ask or require their partners to do more child care or housework after they return home from work. When asked if they would like to do less domestic labour on leave, the vast majority express general satisfaction with the lop-sided division and praise their partners for their small contributions (Fox 2001), for instance, feeding the baby or watching the child while Mom is in the shower. Mothers tend to overestimate fathers' contribution to the housework, in

particular, and conclude it is about “fifty-fifty,” anyway. Yet, when pressed for a ratio, nearly all mothers contradict themselves and acknowledge that they do considerably more housework (about seventy percent) than their partners.

Most mothers laughingly admit that, of course, they would like to do less housework but that they perceive their share to be “fair,” under the circumstances. From mothers’ perspectives, because they were not working for pay, they have the time and “should” take on these responsibilities. Daphne strongly asserts that it is “fair the way that it is now....He’s – he doesn’t have time. He’s working. Like if he was here all the day, I would think he should do what I was doing, you know. That’d be fair.”

Daphne’s calculation devalues the domestic labour she performs each day, reflecting a well-established gendered hierarchy that ranks paid masculine labour above feminine care and housework. Even mothers like Audrey, who desire a more even chore load, fall back on this “fairness” reasoning. She “recognize[s] that he is still having to put in time at work and I am home more. So in that way...it makes sense that I’m doing more because I do have more of that space and I have time to do it but intrinsically I would like it to be a little more even [laughs].”

Most do not think it is fair to ask their partners to tackle the chore list after work. Instead, consistent with existing research, mothers help to manufacture fathers’ caregiving experience during leave by removing some of the more unpleasant characteristics of full-time child care, such as changing diapers or trying to comfort a crying baby (Fox 2001; 2009). Mothers describe concerted efforts to allow fathers to have enjoyable one-on-one time, “bonding” with their babies immediately after work, rather than helping Mom cook dinner or finish laundry.

The mild dissatisfaction mothers express with the division of chores is not found for child care. Consistent with intensive mothering, almost none of the mothers wish (out loud) to do any

less. In contrast to housework, mothers have little trouble declaring that they do nearly all of the caregiving (about ninety percent) while on leave because they are, for the most part, at home alone all day during the week. In a way, this inequality is a badge of honour: proof they are “properly” doing gender on leave.

Overall, the general dominance of intensive mothering did contribute to the adoption of more traditional gender roles between most couples on leave (see Fox 2009). In this sense, my results support the scholarly research asserting the power of gendered cultural norms and ideology in constructing mothers’ experiences after childbirth (e.g., Fox 2009; Hays 1996; Walzer 1998). However, mothers on leave do not just provide child care and clean the house. While all mothers take part in at least some intensive mothering, many continue to engage with their jobs. The next chapter describes an entire spectrum of leave approaches that reflects either intensive mothering, ideal worker norms, or a combination of both, challenging the idea that the work and family spheres are distinctly separate following childbirth.

Chapter 5: The Continuum of Leave-Work Attachment

Despite the pervasive influence of intensive mothering ideology, there is still not just one way to “do” leave. Nearly all of the mothers in this study are on leave from jobs in which they are highly invested and love, many of which required years of training and formal education. Their professional identities, goals, and ambitions have not suddenly disappeared now that they are on leave.

Without a doubt, many closely follow the intensive mothering approach, having little to no involvement with their jobs. At the same time, a handful are either consistently engaged with paid work or continue to perform many of their usual job duties without pay. These mothers’ leaves are more consistent with ideal worker norms that encourage employees to minimize family-related work interruptions. Finally, a considerable group of mothers craft leaves that allow them to spend a great deal of time caring for their babies, while also taking part in a variety of formal and informal professional activities. This approach to leave is relatively more moderate, combining caregiving with continued career dedication and interests.

As Hays (1996) contends, the cultural contradiction of motherhood lies in the simultaneous pressure mothers experience to engage in selfless intensive mothering and also work in paid labour, where success requires selfish investment of their time and energy. The contradictory ideologies embedded in paid and unpaid labour create tension and conflict between work and family. I argue that this contradiction can emerge soon after mothers make the transition to leave, well before returning to paid employment.

Mothers’ various approaches to leave are the expression of this tension. While some mothers are employed in jobs that are more amenable to lengthy employment interruptions, like

teaching, others are not. Demanding senior management professional contexts, like finance and law, are strongly governed by ideal worker norms and adhering to these norms is often necessary for career success (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). Nevertheless, all of the mothers on leave experienced some form of ideal worker pressure valuing consistent job commitment.

In the most basic sense, all “ideal” workers across job contexts are expected to be physically present at work (they must “be there”), to be aware of the workplace’s needs, and positively contribute to satisfying these needs. Satisfying these basic requirements, at the very least, maintains mothers’ career standing by preserving their current level of seniority, skills, and reputation. Interrupting work to go on leave necessarily disrupts all mothers’ execution of these fundamental pillars of being “good” employees. As a result, even mothers who seem to have “leave-friendly” jobs and are not hoping to advance within their organizations in the near future experience anxiety because leave encourages mothers to be absent from the job, unaware of what is happening, and prevents them from continuing to contribute. In contrast, those eyeing promotions or working in stronger ideal worker contexts must go above these basic requirements to protect their current (and future) career success.

Due to job variation, some mothers are much more successful in distancing themselves from their careers after childbirth and, therefore, are also better positioned to follow the tenets of intensive mothering. Mothers less able to detach from their careers still attempt to live up to this parenting standard but while also continuing to address the increased demands of their stronger ideal worker employment contexts. As a result, after childbirth they engage in varying degrees of continued career activity or “leave-work integration.”

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of three different leave approaches and their consequences. Intensive mothering leaves are characterized by the least amount of

continued job attachment (minimal attachment). Integrated leaves involve a moderate level of on-going career activity (moderate attachment). Finally, ideal worker leaves involve the greatest degree of professional engagement (significant attachment). However, mothers do not choose their level of work activity in isolation. A variety of external work-family constraints and opportunities shape women's employment activity over the life course, including the transition to parenthood (Damaske and Frech 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to preface this section by first commenting on the broader work-family context influencing mothers' career engagement on leave, including fathers' participation in caregiving (Fox 2009; Walzer 1998), access to affordable child care services, and having family close by.

Contextualizing Mothers' Work Attachment on Leave

Variability in mothers' continued work activity is influenced by several work-family factors. Mothers require opportunities to engage with their job but also child care support so that they can turn their attention to career activities when available. The role of mothers' jobs in their attachment is discussed throughout this chapter and in chapter seven. This sub-section addresses the role of various family constraints and opportunities for work attachment.

Several mothers on leave enjoy a great deal of child care support because they have family living in the area. Those who do, sometimes call on their own parents or siblings to provide child care. However, mothers do not usually ask family to babysit in order to work. Margo is one rare exception. Her mother provided care for her child for a few hours so she could attend conference events at a local hotel over the course of a couple of days.

Similarly, mothers rarely use daycare services to work on leave. A handful of mothers with older (but still pre-school age) children have their older child in part-time daycare during leave. However, this is a necessary solution to manage the demands of infant care while their partners are working full-time. It is simply too taxing for mothers to care for both an infant and pre-school child five full days per week by themselves. That being said, both local family members and child care services are essential for mothers' return-to-work experience and are revisited in chapter six. In contrast, fathers' caregiving participation greatly affects mothers' attachment to work during leave.

Fathers' Role in Attachment

As illustrated in the previous chapter, the migration to a more traditional division of labour, with fathers working outside of the home, helps establish and reinforce mothers' disproportionate share of the domestic labour once on leave. Consequently, the severity of this shift is a significant determinant of mothers' on-going work attachment: the more time and energy mothers spend on child care and housework to compensate for their partner's lack of participation, the fewer of these resources they have available for competing interests or obligations, like career activities (e.g., Greenhaus and Beutell 1985).

Audrey's majority share of both the child care and housework leaves her very little time to pursue other interests. She is also experiencing diminished physical and emotional well-being due to considerable sleep deprivation. The sleep deprivation is a direct result of her son's erratic sleeping habits and Audrey's almost total responsibility for providing the over-night child care to allow her partner to rest for work the next day (see also Fox 2009):

Sleeping has also been a challenge because he [Audrey's partner] has to go to work in the morning and so he has to be up at 6:00 or 6:15 [a.m.]...to get to work... and so [sighs] at night, when [Barney's] up still like every couple hours...it's hard because I end up being the person who goes to him to try to give [partner] more sleep... I'm up every couple hours so only getting probably about six hours of sleep in total and that's never in a chunk. I'm maybe getting, you know, an hour and a half in – in chunks kind of throughout the night.

Assuming almost exclusive responsibility for the baby and home generally leaves Audrey little time, motivation, or mental capacity for professional engagement. Moreover, on the one occasion that she broke the well-established routine and shifted her attention to her career, not knowing what was happening at home was too much. Audrey attended a short gathering for a professional organization while her partner provided child care on the weekend but struggled, wondering if her son was upset and needed her to comfort him. Likewise, she can still attend one or two day intensive training sessions but feels that these are “off limits.” Her world has almost totally “narrowed” to the baby on leave and she says she “[doesn't] need” more work involvement because it is hard enough to “just stay on top of things at home.”

As Audrey's experience illustrates, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for mothers to commit to even minimal and occasional professional involvement when they are responsible for most, if not all, of the daily child care and housework demands. This workload can take a toll on mother's physical and emotional well-being to such a degree that, even if they do find time, some may be unable (or uninterested) in career activities.

In contrast, mothers whose partners are more engaged in child care and housework throughout the week have more time and energy to devote to professional interests. The pivotal role of partners in mothers' work attachment is illustrated by Jeanette's experience.

Government department manager, Jeanette, is acutely aware that her skewed share of the housework and household management is to blame for not taking part in as many professional

development as she would like. When Jeanette is not actually performing the child care and housework, herself, then she is responsible for managing and directing it. She compares her current arrangement to a previous relationship. On an earlier maternity leave, her partner also took leave and shared the domestic labour, giving Jeanette more time to write. At that time, she was better supported in continuing to get her “name out there.” This is in contrast to her current partner, who has a successful demanding professional job that often requires travel. He has not taken any leave, works at least full-time hours, and Jeanette is in charge of the children and home. She has to be selective about her own career activities this leave because most of her time and energy is spent “just trying to keep the wheels on the bus.”

Jeanette’s experience strongly communicates that it is important for mothers’ partners to be responsible for their share. Despite having hired (female) domestic help who provides some child care on leave, Jeanette feels that she should not be asking her nanny to watch the children while she works on additional professional projects. She would feel less “guilty” about doing that type of work on leave if her partner was the one doing the child care.

Consistent with previous findings (Fox 2001, 2009; Walzer 1998), the way that mothers do motherhood on leave emerged through interaction in response to how fathers did fatherhood. As a result, continued career activity is related to the degree to which mothers’ partners share the domestic work. Having a more engaged partner enables mothers to devote more time and attention to work interests. Keeping this in mind, the focus of the rest of the chapter is mothers’ experiences. The method used to assess their varying degrees of work attachment is described next.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Work Attachment

Mothers' work attachment is based on their estimates of how attached to their jobs they felt during leave. The question is also intended to gauge whether or not they felt truly able to "leave" work. They were asked, "How involved with your job were you during leave, on a scale from completely attached to completely detached?" Regardless of actual behaviour, most offered a marginal assessment of their degree of involvement, asserting that they left work behind once on leave.

That mothers' estimates often contradict their behaviour suggests the power of intensive mothering that requires mothers to devote the majority of their attention to their babies while on leave. The speed and tone with which the mothers speak about (or, rather, gloss over) work involvement communicates that they have definitely distanced themselves from work. It was typical for mothers to nonchalantly mention (with a dismissive flip of the hand) that they occasionally reply to work emails before eagerly awaiting the next question.

Mothers on leave are surprised when asked about work involvement: they stop speaking, altogether, to consciously consider whether and to what extent they are still connected to their jobs, even though every one of them continues to retain some form of contact. This is in stark contrast to the effortless speed and effusiveness they display when explaining what they enjoy most about new motherhood. The impression given is that work questions are decidedly off-topic in a study about maternity leave.

This behaviour is understandable, given the strong and consistent assertion amongst mothers that the purpose of leave is to bond with and focus on their child, not keep tabs on work. However, it also indicates that mothers have mentally separated work from leave, taking the

dominant cultural cue that leave is supposed to be free of career activity. Accordingly, mothers' self-reported degree of attachment was considered less reliable compared to their behavioural accounts, for classification purposes.

Border Blurring

The existing work-family literature often refers to work and family “spheres” or “domains,” a conceptualization which enables an examination of the extent to which work and family can be separated. Feminist scholars argue that work and family are not separate spheres (e.g., Hochschild and Machung 1989; Hochschild 1997; Williams 2000). In keeping with this tradition, the continuum of leave-work attachment applies the concept of “blurred borders” where caregiving and career activities are blended and occur at the same time or in the same place (e.g., Glavin and Schieman 2012; Schieman and Glavin 2008, 2011).

Clark (2000) views individuals as actively molding work and family borders to achieve work-family balance. Work and family activities can blur along psychological, temporal, and physical lines depending on the flexibility and permeability of the borders surrounding each. Flexibility is the degree to which borders can expand or contract (e.g., starting work at a later hour), whereas permeability is the extent to which work or family elements can cross over: parents may think about work on non-work time, allow work to encroach into family time by working late, or work from home. A strong border has little flexibility or permeability and a weak border is relatively more flexible and permeable (Clark 2000).

Clark's (2000) original characterization of individuals as “border-crossers” is highly agentic and optimistic. By focusing on “balance,” which has a distinctly positive connotation, work-family conflict is minimized. Moreover, this emphasis obscures the interactional and

structural forces that compel certain parents to blur borders, reflecting important patterns of difference. To that end, Clark's (2000) framework is utilized in sociological research investigating the influence of classed job characteristics on work-to-family conflict (Glavin and Schieman 2012; Schieman et al. 2006, 2009).

In the existing literature, border theory is the central analytical mechanism used to elaborate the "Stress of Higher Status Hypothesis," which demonstrates the importance of job context for work-family integration processes and outcomes (Schieman et al. 2006, 2009). This hypothesis posits that high status job resources (e.g., schedule control and autonomy) increase border flexibility and permeability, enabling work to encroach into the family domain, which may exacerbate parents' experience of work-to-family conflict (Schieman et al. 2006; 2009). Similarly, I apply border theory to illustrate the potential for high status professional characteristics to promote leave-work blurring.

Existing applications of border theory to work-family integration include parents in both the United States and Canada (Schieman et al. 2006, 2009; Glavin and Schieman 2012). Given the relative lack of research into the maternity leave period, this is the first application of both border theory and border blurring to mothers' employment transitions around childbirth, to my knowledge. Moreover, the degree of job demands and career status or prestige in this particular sample varies to a greater extent than in these previous studies, as not all of the mothers are employed in professional/managerial jobs, strictly defined (e.g., Crompton and Harris 1998).

Previous research distinguishes between work-to-family and family-to-work conflict, indicating the potential for bi-directional influence (e.g., Frone et al. 1997). Likewise, the direction of border blurring on leave may occur in one of two ways, either *work-to-Mom* or *Mom-to-work*. In the former instance, the workplace is actively seeking out the mother's

involvement and in the latter, the mother is the initiating party. Consistent with border theory, mothers' integration of work during leave may be psychological (e.g., reflecting on or worrying about their jobs), temporal (spending time engaged in work-related activities), and physical (going to the workplace or meeting co-workers elsewhere in the community with the baby) (Clark 2000).

“Bridge Work”

Mothers' categorization on the attachment spectrum includes their involvement in bridge work, which encourages border blurring. Bridge work refers to the work that mothers do as a result of their transition to leave but it may occur both prior to and during leave. Mothers “bridge the gap” left by their absence to help their workplaces keep functioning smoothly.

Bridge work prior to leave occurs in preparation for maternity leave. Mothers may be required to help interview, hire, and train their interim replacement weeks or months prior to the start of their leave, or develop a plan and hold meetings about redistributing their workload amongst other team members. It took Sue, a nurse, a couple of months to prepare her replacement and she recalls, “there’s a lot and so just making sure that was super organized....I had to make sure I colour coded absolutely everything and gave her a legend that was like...two pages long.”

This work is often incorporated into mothers' duties so it is paid and does not generally increase the total workload leading up to leave. As such, it is an additional but “managed stress.” Approximately two months before her leave, Nora, an academic scientist, liaised with her supervisor regarding on-going administrative issues and began training her co-workers on how to perform several of her tasks as they came up:

I had to go through and...give back all of the lab's financial accounts to my supervisor and say "Alright, here are all – here's where we are. We are set up to this date. Here [are] the bills...these haven't been processed. These have been processed" and, you know, reminder, "Ethics are due [chuckles] on this day" 'cause these are all things that I've taken care of. So I just had to, in advance, redistribute everything to make sure things got taken care of...There were definitely random things that came up where while I would have normally just did it, what I would instead say [to the other lab workers] is "Why don't you come watch me do this?"

However, whether or not mothers' workload and hours increase immediately before leave depends upon the job. Esther, a telecommunications engineer, is one of the few whose work demands intensified. She worked longer hours to redistribute all of her work and admitted "it was really busy. Up to like the last minute, I had meetings. Like the last hour, I was having phone calls."

Bridge work before leave can also be unexpectedly cancelled, usually because of a pre-term birth. As a result, some mothers perform bridge work during leave, having been denied the opportunity to prepare beforehand (e.g., organizing files for colleagues). Bridge work prior to leave does not factor into the continuum of attachment but bridge work *during* leave is relevant.

Occasionally, mothers already on leave may have to assist co-workers or their replacements because they have particular experience and knowledge, or need to deal with a specific work issue, themselves. Bridge work on leave is unpaid and usually occurs during the first few weeks or months, but might also occur sporadically if the need arises. Mothers describe two types of unpaid bridge work on leave: assisting co-workers/leave replacements and dealing with administrative issues. In terms of assisting others, mothers occasionally field questions about job duties, work procedures, or clients over the phone or via email.

The amount of bridge work on leave is not necessarily more likely if mothers' workloads are redistributed or a replacement is hired. Replacements are able to consult with co-workers

which reduces the need for them to contact mothers on leave, in theory. Health counsellor, Margo, had an approximately two week overlap with her replacement where “we were able to kind of cover the main things and then the rest of it, she was able to ask.” However, the most important factor is mothers’ specific knowledge and experience.

Siobhan, for example, has a leave replacement but her expertise has required a considerable amount of on-going bridge work that has contributed to her classification as moderately attached. Siobhan is responsible for developing and managing the online department of a small private business. In fact, she is a one-woman department and referred to it as her “baby” prior to the arrival of her daughter, Hazel. Siobhan takes great pride in her role and is highly invested in both her work and co-workers, referring to them with great affection. This dedication (coupled with her expertise) makes her feel obligated to assist her leave replacement, responding to his emails three to four months into her leave, totaling a few hours per week.

Administrative bridge work includes work on mothers’ part to meet the requirements necessary for them to remain in good standing as employees (e.g., getting a flu shot for those licensed in the health care field or being present for a performance evaluation). These instances are “one-offs” and are rare but they highlight the importance of job variation for understanding the degree to which mothers are able to detach from work.

In contrast, the most frequent and widespread type of administrative bridge work is related to leave benefits that requires both mothers and their employers to interact with the federal Employment Insurance (EI) program. Mothers apply and are eligible for EI benefits based on their number of employment hours and benefit amounts are tied to their income. The forms require birth information in order to be fully submitted which means that the process is delayed until after birth. Mothers comment on the absurdity of this facet of the process, forcing

them to wait to complete an important task that could have been finished before they had a screaming infant demanding their attention. Grace says she was “on top of things” prior to leave, ready to complete the application, and so “not on top of things when it was the right time” to finish and submit. Likewise, Nora describes the EI forms as “atrocious”:

It seems like you could enter all of the parent’s information and...the last twelve pay stubs and just ridiculous things like that that they ask for, you could enter that in advance...you could save the file in your user account before and then go in and hit submit. You know, fill in...the five extra data points you needed. That seems like it would be so much better...than having to do it all, again, when you’re sleep deprived and... you have a newborn and you don’t know what’s going on.

The most common issue is late or incorrect benefit payments that are usually resolved with little inconvenience. The fact that these problems have to be handled by mothers and most often occur at the outset of leave, when they are both recovering from childbirth and acting as the primary caregiver of a new infant, creates additional (and comparatively irrelevant) bureaucratic work at the worst possible time.

Account work

In addition to bridge work, mothers have to remain vigilant in monitoring both their EI and workplace “accounts” while on leave because their federal benefits are inextricably connected to their particular employment contexts, and human resource (HR) procedures and regulations can conflict. Where present, this unpaid administrative work adds to mothers’ degree of work-leave attachment.

Mothers also experience temporary but stressful financial problems that sometimes mean multiple phone calls and in-person visits to either Service Canada locations or their workplaces

to fix (with the baby in tow, of course). Mothers, in effect, became responsible for managing their own leave payroll, ensuring that they are receiving the correct benefits. Paula describes her leave administration duties stating, “my paperwork got a bit messed up...so I still had...the first couple months having to, like, go back and deal with...cheques and paperwork [for maternity leave and extended medical benefits] and all that and that was a little bit annoying.”

School teacher, Eileen, describes her experience with EI after her benefit payments were incorrectly delayed by four months:

It was very frustrating having...a crying baby in your arms while you're waiting on hold on EI trying to get a hold of somebody or spending all of your naps fighting with people on EI and trying to figure out, like, “Well, which forms do I need to get you?” and “Who do I need to email in order to send you the right thing so that you will stop – like you will retro-pay this?” It was... it was crazy....It was a lot of work. It was nuts....I think I went in there twice with [my daughter] and waited to talk to people.

While these issues are relatively minor, Violet faced much more difficult issues, to the extent that she had an integrated, rather than intensive leave. For Violet, employed in the male-dominated industry of construction, maternity leave was an anomaly, despite the presence of other female employees (many of whom worked in the HR department, ironically).

Violet is a project manager who individually negotiated a leave benefit deal, doing her own research into comparable industries' benefits to make a case for herself to her superiors. She made a presentation and enlisted the help of a more senior male colleague in order to secure and justify her special deal.

While eligible for EI, Violet still needed to apply for and be granted leave from her company through their administrative process.³ Her company does not have a comprehensive

³ The potential for employer-government interaction is further increased by jurisdictional variation. For example, when mothers reside in one province and their employers are based in other provinces that have their own policies around relevant financial issues, such as whether or not mothers accrue paid vacation time during leave.

maternity leave policy, ostensibly because not many of their employees are women. The policies are so out-of-date that she was required to officially go on short-term disability to collect benefits. She recalls that she “couldn’t fill out [half of the forms] because they were like ‘what is the prognosis?’ and ‘what treatment is required?’ And my midwife’s just like, ‘What the hell do I write here? Like have the baby’ [laughs] you know?” She is “appalled” at her company’s standard policy and remains deeply offended that her pregnancy is being characterized in such terms. Violet’s company is paying an additional ten percent of her salary on top of the standard fifty-five percent offered by EI, for a total income replacement of sixty-five percent for a six week period of “disability.”

Additionally, Violet has secured a confidential, one-time leave top-up “bonus” and is entitled to receive her full salary for one month, due to her significant role in the company’s recent success. She cannot tell anyone at her company about this bonus, which makes her feel like a “traitor” to women. Half of her bonus was paid out at the start of leave and the other half is contingent on her returning to work and remaining there for an additional year. She was initially denied half of her top-up due to a workplace clerical error that reported the funds were due to be paid during her maternity leave. Because the EI policy deducts every dollar mothers earn during maternity leave and Violet would have technically “earned” her top-up while on maternity leave, she did not receive her entitled EI benefits once her leave began and has expended considerable effort during leave to have it remedied, on top of the financial strain.

In addition to calling and emailing Service Canada, she made several (mostly unanswered) calls and sent emails to “harass” her HR department about the issue. Doing so made her feel like “a pain in the ass” and an “unusual” employee. Her deviant maternal status within her company was further magnified when the company subsequently delayed paying all annual

bonuses, due to the administrative headaches caused by her earlier EI problem. Violet was visibly agitated and angry when recounting her experience, still frustrated at her employer's handling of the situation.

While making a few phone calls and trips to government offices might not seem like a great deal of work, it adds up and takes away from mothers' leave time, in addition to the stress it can cause. For example, Nora spent approximately twelve hours of her leave just making calls and filling out required EI reports. In addition to filling out job applications and replying to occasional work emails, Nora's issues with EI contributed to her increased job-related activity on leave.

Since all mothers maintain casual social ties with co-workers (e.g., lunch once a month) and most do some bridge work, increasingly frequent and intense amounts of paid and unpaid professional activity on top of social ties and bridge work indicate a greater departure from an intensive mothering approach to leave. Minimal attachment is the most common: fourteen of the twenty-seven mothers are classified as minimally attached (about fifty percent). These mothers only remain connected to their jobs through casual social ties and a small amount of bridge work. Integrated leaves are the second most frequent, including some unpaid work in addition to social ties and minimal bridge work. Eleven mothers, or about forty percent, fell into this category. Finally, ideal worker leaves are the least common with just two mothers having this kind of leave experience. Such leaves include paid and unpaid part-time work, in addition to social ties and bridge work. Each of the three types of leave are now presented in detail, beginning with intensive leaves which are most consistent with the intensive mothering ideology.

Intensive Leaves

Approximately half of the mothers experienced an intensive leave, characterized by minimal attachment to work. They focused primarily on their babies for the duration of leave (usually the full twelve month entitlement) partly because they could distance themselves from their pre-leave jobs. These mothers work in a variety of fields, including child care, teaching, counselling, public health, insurance, interior design, laboratory technology, academic medical research, and telecommunications engineering. The wide range of occupations is an additional indicator that the larger institutional culture assumes mothers will and should separate from their jobs during the leave period to engage in full-time caregiving.

The intensive mothers describe a strong mental or psychological border between work and leave, as illustrated by Esther and Cara, who both say that they do not “spend a lot of time on work or thinking about work.” While they engage less than mothers taking integrated or ideal worker leaves, intensive leaves are still characterized by occasional social visits, the maintenance of casual social ties with colleagues, and discrete instances of minor unpaid bridge work. Insofar as these minor connections are maintained, work and family are not completely separate, even for those experiencing the most baby-centered leaves.

Casual Social Ties

The most common examples of social attachment include visits to reconnect with co-workers under the stated purpose of “introducing the baby,” having lunch with co-workers, and dropping in for special workplace events, such as retirement or holiday parties. The contact Paula, a child care supervisor, maintained on leave exemplifies minimal ties:

I've gone back and I've probably visited – like I go back like once a month, once every two months I pop in and say hi and...they'll be like “Oh, like, our Valentine's party's coming up,” or like “Oh we're going on this field trip if you want to join us” so...they've been keeping me, like, in the loop to – to be part of things which has been great.

These interactions reflect minor Mom-to-work blurring and usually consist of mothers going to the workplace, but also include occasional coffee and lunch dates with colleagues (and even leave replacements) either out in the community or in mothers' homes. Keeping in occasional contact with co-workers and superiors mainly serves a social purpose, providing a reason to get out of the house and experience adult conversation. However, even brief social encounters still function as a means to remain professionally visible and informed.

Audrey, a school counsellor, states that her social time with co-workers on leave helps her to remain connected to her “professional identity” and field. This is important to her since she has only been out of school and working for a brief time. In addition, casual social encounters are a chance to “talk shop,” allowing mothers to remain somewhat “in the loop” with what is happening or changing at work. Compared to the other two groups of mothers, these conversations are more often downplayed as “gossip” by mothers on intensive leaves. This label stresses the social as opposed to professional function of their behaviour, which is more consistent with intensive motherhood on leave.

The common practice of taking approximately a full year of job-protected leave may also discourage Canadian mothers from continued social involvement, contributing to more intensive leaves. Daphne was invited to several events but declined, stating that it would have “felt weird.” She feels like she would not have “anything to say” since she is not aware of her firm's on-going projects.

Bridge Work

Intensive leaves include a small amount of bridge work but mainly to ensure mothers meet all of their basic job and licensing requirements. Mothers also engage in bridge work to assist colleagues, especially if they have particular expertise.

Sue and Jordan (both employed in the health field), went for flu shots, as per health authority regulations. They are also taking part in a minimal amount of routine professional development to help satisfy their annual quota while on leave (e.g., tutorial on proper hygiene techniques). Such routine professional development ranges from one-time tasks to a more regular commitment every few months but still only requires a few hours of these mothers' time altogether.

Beyond these isolated instances, bridge work more often reflects mothers' willingness to help and their particular expertise. Daphne, an interior designer, dropped into work a week into her leave to tidy her desk and check-in with her colleagues. She answered questions about her on-going projects that had been redistributed. This initial check-in curbed the need for her co-workers to call and email her throughout the rest of her leave, maintaining her minimal level of attachment.

Constance, an academic medical researcher, occasionally assists colleagues with experiments because she is the only one who knows how to perform a particular test. "I've been in a couple of times because...the only person that could isolate the cells for one of the projects is me. Just because no one else has bothered to learn [laughs]. So we've [Mom and Caleb] been up to [the lab] a couple of times and done that."

Even mothers who prefer to have little contact with work do not mind supporting their colleagues, as evidenced by Cara's feelings about visiting her veterinary clinic:

I bring him in once a month and...have lunch with them and we catch up. I – it's really valuable to me to hear what's going on. It means more to me than it does to them, I swear [laughs]...I love getting to keep in touch with them and that they've gotten to meet him and see him...as he gets older.

Even in the case of job requirements, where mothers do not have a choice and could not have opted out, they describe this mandatory bridge work as a minor inconvenience. They even praise these activities as “breaks” that provide a small opportunity for intellectual stimulation and a change of pace from routine child care. Jordan, a health counsellor, says it is nice to have her head back in that “old part” of herself the few times she had to do some administrative work. Nevertheless, these positive feelings do not change the fact that work is still seeping into their leave time, contradicting the idea that work and family can be clearly separated on leave.

Emerging Tensions

Esther, a first-time mother taking the intensive leave approach, concludes that “we work enough” and feels “no need” to engage with her job beyond infrequent social encounters. Similarly, Jordan and Eve feel strongly about limiting their involvement, implying that work and leave are largely incompatible. To these three mothers, the inherent conflict renders increased attachment a moot point, encouraging them to fully immerse themselves in an intensive, baby-focused leave. They state that the advantages of separating from work are gaining distance and ensuring that their leave time is protected from unwelcome obligations.

Eve maintains that detachment allows her to distance herself from workplace drama and gain some “perspective.” Jordan favours detachment as a pre-emptive strike against unwanted conflict because she worries that even opening the door to a monthly meeting could pose a serious risk to her family time on leave:

It's almost better to be out of it....All of a sudden it's like "Well, you were there, Jordan, what are your thoughts? Could we maybe chat on the phone with you about this?" And you know...you put your toe [in] and all of a sudden it's like "Well, why don't we talk about this? Why don't we meet and...if we include you in the email chains with this"....And it snowballs....My experience has been that...you're in or you're out.

Overall, the minimally attached maintain strong impermeable physical and temporal borders, spending little to no time or effort on work activities. However, they are in the minority amongst this group of mothers. Many intensive leave moms continue to grapple with their employment role during leave, even if they are not *acting* to address emerging work concerns. The tension between career and motherhood is reflected in their attitudes toward continued work involvement: how, in hindsight, increased contact would have been beneficial during leave.

Eve, employed in community services, says that she would have liked to have been in greater official email contact to both stay in the loop and to also be aware of new job postings. Her organization is not required to notify everyone about open positions, which would have greatly helped Eve towards the end of her leave. She was weighing her options (i.e., hours and take-home salary) against her increasing child care costs but remained in the dark about job openings unless she happened to hear of one from a colleague.

Several minimally attached mothers describe preferred leave-work integration scenarios: arrangements that they would have considered, if they had been an option. These configurations range from occasional casual work to consistent part-time work. Some prefer minimal but more formal activities than they actually took part in, such as attending staff meetings, either monthly or once every two months, around three months into leave. Daphne maintains that "you always learn when you go to meetings and get updates." Likewise, Eve would have been willing to assist with some project work, especially if she were able to do so remotely from home.

Others would have been open to working part-time, describing a hybrid form of leave that diverges greatly from the ones they actually experienced, and that strongly contradicts the vision of the existing federal leave policy. Paula would have considered working part-time if she could be paid, having no interest in volunteering. Working part-time would have helped her to understand and acclimate to workplace staffing and policy changes prior to her return, assisted her own search for child care, and supported her continued performance as manager.⁴ Similarly, Sue, would have liked to have consistently worked as a nurse part-time but over a longer two year leave:

I feel like it's really hard going from one hundred percent with your kids [on leave] to... ninety percent... [at work]. People are like "You have to enjoy every moment [of leave]." You're like "Screw you. I can't enjoy every moment because I'm exhausted. He's screaming. I'm not getting any sleep" [chuckles] you know?...If I could go to work two or three days a week... switch in the week, you know. Like a couple days on, a couple days off...

She feels that this arrangement would have allowed her to keep up with workplace procedural changes, as they occurred, reducing her learning curve. It also would have helped foster balance at home after leave ended, mitigating the stress mothers feel integrating work and family after a full year focused totally on caregiving.

Indeed, the beneficial effect of continued contact is supported by the experiences of their counterparts upon their return. Being completely or highly detached can have detrimental personal and professional consequences.

⁴ Paula's workplace directly impacted her child care plan. She had developed an arrangement based upon the old policies that would have allowed her work shifts and her daughter's daycare timeslot, at the same facility, to coincide. Subsequent rule changes during her leave rendered this arrangement impossible when it came time for Paula to return, requiring her to obtain different care.

Consequences of Detachment

Despite insisting that they did not really think about work, many mothers on intensive leaves describe the very opposite. Several worried about what it was going to be like to return after leave. Anxieties around the future transition constitute one negative consequence of near total detachment that can emerge during leave.

The nature of Paula's job as a child care supervisor means that she will be returning to an entirely new group of children (and their parents):

If somebody [a parent] has questions or concerns, they can go to any staff but if they're, like, "I need to have a meeting, I need to talk to like the supervisor,"...then it would be me....But [child's] parents don't know me. They haven't known me for a year, you know? So, yeah, I'm really nervous to... yeah, scary.

Her care centre is divided into age groups and some of the children she previously supervised would "age-out" by the time she returned. In addition, several employees had either quit or temporarily gone on leave during her own leave, which means she will also have to manage a new staff. Anticipating the new, unknown work dynamic occupies some of her thoughts during leave, creating stress and worry.

In addition, several mothers taking the intensive approach, in their own way, describe a loss of confidence about returning to paid work. Still on leave, Stella is struggling to acclimate to being at home with a baby for the first time. A health counsellor, she fears that the lack of motivation and energy she is currently experiencing will continue after she is back at work. At the moment, she is unable to manage much of anything, aside from caring for her daughter, Rose. She is frustrated by this because she had hoped to regularly volunteer with a professional organization while on leave. Eve also describes the return transition as "intimidating." Stella and Eve's experiences are quite tame in comparison to the effect of detachment on Audrey.

Audrey, a first-time mother on an intensive leave, feels she will now be at least “a year behind” her colleagues. Hearing her co-workers discuss where they currently are, professionally, makes her acutely aware that she is “not there.” The valuable time she lost over leave is going to be further compounded because she will need to take extra time to “retrain” her brain to catch up to where she was prior to leave. Months after returning, she confided that sometimes she still does not feel like she knows what she is doing.

Those taking the most intensive approach to leave experience some conflict between their caregiving and professional roles. While this tension is relatively minor, compared to the other mothers, the fact that it is still present and exerting influence is significant. These mothers spend the vast majority of their time on leave bonding with their babies, focusing on taking care of their families at home, and making the most of their time away from employment. However, they pay a price for doing intensive mothering on leave. Extreme detachment from their work allows anxieties to grow, diminishes their professional confidence, and even sets some back in terms of their skill development.

For intensive mothers, like Gwen, work and leave feel like “two different planets.” Relatively speaking, they achieve the greatest separation of work and family. However, this separation of work and leave is superficial because mothers’ career obligations are merely set aside for a period of time, not eliminated. That many acknowledge, if not reconsider, this approach to leave in favour of increased career involvement suggests that a more thorough integration of leave and work may support mothers’ on-going labour force attachment and achievement. To that end, the next section explores the other extreme end of the attachment continuum. Are mothers who remain significantly attached to their jobs during leave any better off?

Ideal Worker Leaves

Ideal worker leaves are the least common approach. Just two mothers, Brianne and Celeste, exhibited the most significant attachment to their senior management jobs in accounting and law, respectively. These mothers blurred every line between work and family imaginable.

Their attachment includes formal employment activities, in addition to bridge work and maintaining social ties. They continue to perform many of their usual daily job tasks despite being on leave. In fact, all of the formal work that Brianne does on leave is unpaid. Celeste continues to work for pay because she did not previously insure her earnings to receive leave benefits. Therefore, it is paramount for Celeste to retain her clients and continue to earn money. She has no illusions, recognizing that “if I’m not there for a year, they’ll just go find another lawyer.” To understand why their leaves are consistent with ideal worker norms, it is essential to understand their work contexts and usual employment demands.

High Demand Professions

The fact that Brianne and Celeste have been unable to create much distance from their work on leave is not entirely surprising, as both of their professions are informally governed by ideal worker norms that demand long hours and consistent productivity (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007; Stone and Hernandez 2013). Moreover, their level of seniority is consistent with increased job demands and characteristics, like autonomy, that encourage significant work-family blurring (Schieman et al. 2006; 2009).

Both Brianne and Celeste are in management positions, responsible for several other staff members. Brianne is a senior accountant at a large firm who manages a dozen other junior

employees and is responsible for local, national, and international clients. The nature of Celeste's position means that she functions as both an employee and a boss, shouldering the responsibility for herself, her firm, and its employees.

Their jobs are characterized by extreme autonomy and considerable flexibility, deciding what to work on and when. Their weekly work hours are completely self-determined, guided by the work that needs to be done. Brianne and Celeste regularly work upwards of forty hours per week. Brianne, at times, works sixty-five hours per week, during the busy "quarters" when major reports are due (and has, in the past, logged eighty hours in one week). Brianne and Celeste routinely blurred the borders between work and home prior to leave, constantly checking work emails and working in the evenings and on weekends. This behaviour demonstrates immense dedication, indicating that, prior to childbirth, their work responsibilities were a top priority, if not *the* top priority.

Consistent with ideal worker norms, Celeste and Brianne always intended that they would be "working" on leave. From the start, they both consciously planned to work during a short leave, divide leave more equally with their partners, and return to work quickly. Deciding to only take very short leaves would limit their work interruption and allow them to more closely approximate the masculine professional employee, who takes little to no time off for child care purposes (e.g., Cahusac and Kanji 2014).

Their approach to leave is "strategic," less flexible, and they planned for their return to employment before they even left. Given the very specific quarterly cycle that characterizes Brianne's job, she deliberately planned a short five month leave so that she would not have to return at one of the more demanding times. Brianne and Celeste continued working immediately, more intensely, and in more structured ways during their short leaves (i.e., going into the office

to work for seven hours). Due to their management positions, their attachment on leave is largely comprised of bridge work.

Bridge Work

Their senior management roles and the self-directed nature of their work require a great deal of bridge work to ensure their workplaces run smoothly in their absence.

Overseeing junior staff members means that they are both still responsible for on-going management issues because they cannot allow problems to fester while they are away. In addition, their work is client-based. They are the “experts,” having the most extensive knowledge about their clients’ files. These clients continue to have needs during leave and the remaining staff has to be in touch with Celeste and Brianne to handle them appropriately. Because the staff needs these mothers’ input and because Brianne and Celeste both feel that they need to keep working, their attachment involves a lot of work-to-Mom and Mom-to-work blurring, initiated from both sides.

Formal Employment Activities

Brianne and Celeste remain consistently attached to their careers, both mentally and temporally. While they cannot not log their usual number of hours, staying in consistent (albeit reduced) contact allows Brianne and Celeste to continue to demonstrate their commitment.

Brianne attends meetings and has done so from the time her daughter, Justine, was born. She regularly takes phone calls and sends emails while taking care of Justine. She has also gone into the office to attend a four day training session, reflecting additional administrative bridge work that breaks the physical border between work and leave. Continual professional

development is a standard part of her particular profession which means that this training is more of a necessity than a choice to meet her yearly quota.

Celeste integrates work and leave in an intermittent fashion that has obliterated all borders between work and family. She took the first two months officially “off,” but still remained involved. She laughingly explains that she was on her phone sending work emails a mere five hours after her baby was born and made an important court appearance at two-and-a-half months. She officially began working part-time from the time her son, Charlie, was three months old (for a period of two months). She then took an additional month “off” no work which has divided her short leave into periods of both work and leave, always keeping one foot in each and never settling into either completely.

She worked approximately twenty hours per week during the two months that she was working part-time on leave. She usually went into her office two days per week for seven hours each day but occasionally worked from home. Between emails and phone calls, she reports working another one or two hours the other five days of the week at home. Aside from this consistent part-time work, she also recalls attending and presenting at a conference three months into leave.

Emerging Tensions

Compared to the less attached groups of mothers, the tension between employment and motherhood demands is much more obvious for those remaining significantly attached throughout leave. Brianne and Celeste worked during their short leaves because a lengthy and fully detached absence from their positions is untenable. The nature of their senior responsibilities ultimately means that they can choose when and where to keep working, not

whether or not they will keep working. By living up to the ideal worker norms of their demanding professional careers, Brianne and Celeste “fail” to do intensive mothering on leave (Hays 1996; see also Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). However, they both assert that continued work engagement is a more desirable approach.

From an employer perspective, Celeste believes that “the one year off system isn’t good” because mothers feel disconnected. She suggests that mothers should, at least, come to monthly meetings and bring the baby along. Alternatively, they could come in for an occasional lunch or conference. For Celeste, combining work and leave would lessen “the shock” to both the employee and their co-workers compared to when mothers are “M.I.A. for an entire year.”⁵

While both mothers were very much looking forward to spending a lot of quality time bonding with their new babies, they also reject the idea that they should spend the vast majority of their leave time this way (see also Dow 2016). Though Brianne did not experience any overt criticism of her approach, Celeste was held accountable for her “choice” to challenge the dominant cultural ideology of intensive mothering (Hays 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987):

One of my... more frustrating experiences when I was talking with a [male] friend and he...said, “Oh, you’re gonna want to [have] a few months off one hundred percent just with the baby, not – not working at all.” And I said like “Oh, how many months did you take off?” He’s like “Well, I didn’t. I took a week.” I was like “Yeah. And so why would it be different for me?” and it was like obviously the answer is like “Because you’re a woman.” But...I would like you to say it out loud in front of our group of friends that like the reason you feel you can go back to work after a week and I can’t is because I’m a woman.

⁵ “Missing in Action”

Seemingly fine with swimming against this gendered tide, the problem is that mothers in their job positions cannot exercise enough control over their career demands or the extent to which they invade leave.

Despite saying that she prefers to remain attached, Brianne's explanation communicates a certain degree of resignation: that it is the lesser of two evils, rather than an exercise of her own free will. She says that she does not mind working so much because not dealing with the management issues that have arisen would make the return to her already demanding job even more difficult. In her view, it would have been easier to detach if she had taken a full year of leave but, had she done so, there would have been so much more "catch up" to do and her skills would have declined in that time.

Really, then, what were Celeste and Brianne supposed to do? If they took the intensive mothering leave approach, they would fail to satisfy the obligations of their demanding careers and, in Celeste's case, risk a serious financial hit in the process. Staying involved with work was the only acceptable compromise to not damage their professional standing (or make life at work harder for themselves after leave ended). On leave, Celeste and Brianne did much less work each week than they did before leave. The irony is that this "small" amount of work was, by far, the most career activity that any of the mothers engaged in during leave. To my surprise, despite being the second most attached to work, Brianne only estimated being "thirty percent attached" to her job. Doing intensive motherhood for more than a short period of time after childbirth was just not an option for these two.

Consequences of Significant Attachment

Many of the minimally attached mothers taking intensive leaves found that they were too detached from work over leave. Similarly, the significantly attached mothers ultimately concluded that they were too involved with their jobs. As with significant detachment, fulfilling ideal worker norms on leave has its own serious drawbacks.

The primary disadvantage of short, ideal worker leaves is having insufficient time with family before fully re-immersing oneself into a highly demanding, long hour job. Looking back, both Brianne and Celeste harbour some regrets. Celeste would have liked to have had more of a separation. Instead, she felt “backed into a corner” and does not feel like she “actually left.” Likewise, Brianne says it would have been better if she had worked part-time over an entire year of leave, rather than returning to work after five months. Her statement echoes that of Sue, the minimally attached mother, who would rather work part-time over a two year leave than be fully detached for one year.

Thus far, the evidence indicates that mothers taking intensive and ideal worker leaves already wrestle with the contradictory ideologies embedded in caregiving and paid employment. Both groups of mothers embarked upon the leaves that best suited their particular employment circumstances but also suffered penalties unique to these approaches. While the intensive mothers enjoyed a concentrated period of caregiving, they also experience diminished professional confidence and skill stagnation. In contrast, the ideal worker mothers demonstrate unquestionably strong commitment to their organizations, working when they do not technically have to, but do not get a “break” to just parent.

Can a happy medium be reached between caregiving and career on leave? If so, what are the implications of such a compromise for both intensive motherhood and living up to the unique

expectations of one's career context? The next section examines the nature and consequences of integrated leaves, characterized by moderate on-going career attachment.

Integrated Leaves

A considerable number of new mothers experienced an integrated leave: they dedicated a great deal of time to their babies but, at the same time, maintained moderate attachment to their jobs. Just under half of the mothers interviewed took this approach. They are employed in a variety of fields including government, academic and health research, social work, and information technology (IT). The size of this group and variety of their occupations indicates that, while intensive mothering is still dominant, heterogeneity in new mothers' leave behaviour cannot be ignored. Almost as many mothers preferred or needed this increased career attachment on leave, as totally detached from their jobs.

Several mothers taking the integrated approach hold senior positions in their respective organizations, subject to many of the demands and ideal worker norms experienced by Brianne and Celeste. For example, Jeanette, Grace, Violet, and Avery have management positions, in charge of departments, staff, and major projects in science, construction, and community services in both the public and private sector. Similarly, Siobhan is the only member of her IT department, completely responsible for its functioning and success.

Several have multiple positions. Stephanie is a senior management health position and is also self-employed as a clinician. Nora, an academic medical scientist, and Margo, a health researcher and clinician, are employed in fields where success requires continuous independent achievement and are notorious for long hours and significant autonomy. Likewise, Grace holds

an academic appointment that enables her to engage in additional research projects on top of her usual demanding Monday-to-Friday role as a government research manager.

In addition to occasional social interactions and courtesy bridge work assisting colleagues, moderate attachment entails formal and informal job involvement, which includes various professional development activities. Formal involvement refers to tasks related to mothers' actual professional position and duties whereas informal involvement refers to "work-esque" activities that are relevant to career success but not technically required (e.g., conference presentations). Both of these instances of blurring cross either psychological, temporal, or physical borders between work and leave.

Moderately attached mothers think about, spend time on, and occasionally go into work, depending on the activities they are engaged with. However, almost all consistently and regularly blurred the borders between work and home *prior* to leave, as well. These mothers did occasional or regular work in the evenings at home, checked work emails on non-work time, and did some work on weekends, demonstrating pre-existing flexible and permeable borders (Clark 2000; see also Haddock et al. 2006). As such, remaining moderately attached to work during leave maintains their work-life status quo.

Formal Work

Mothers' formal work on leave includes bridge work to make sure their offices continue to function smoothly but a large proportion of their career endeavours are for their own interest and to stay informed. As an unfortunate side effect, the majority of this work goes unpaid, increasing mothers' already heavy and poorly paid domestic workload.

These mothers often monitor work emails (if they still retain access), sometimes attend regular or monthly meetings, and participate in occasional teleconferences related to previous or on-going projects they had been involved with. They assist their leave replacements, colleagues, and clients via phone and email. They also go in to the office multiple times, sometimes for one or two hours at a time, to organize their files for their team's use. This level of work involvement also includes a small amount of paid contract work (between thirty minutes to two hours per week for a few weeks). Mandatory formal unpaid bridge work included, on one occasion, attending a performance evaluation and addressing leave benefit problems stemming from conflict between the EI program and mothers' own human resource departments. The work activity undertaken by Danica and Andrea is worth highlighting in-depth, as it represents the integration of both paid and unpaid formal leave employment.

First-time mother Danica is employed by a municipal government in a moderately demanding job with occasional periods of increased workload and stress. On leave, she is completing a part-time paid research contract to not "lose any brains that I have." For her, it feels "really nice, just to have something else and to know that your skill set before is still valued and needed."

The work can largely be done from home whenever Danica is able to find the time. However, it has to be tackled in little pieces every day because "there's no chance to...have a big chunk of time" and often requires working at night. As her first deadline approached, she "basically just did most of it the couple of nights before. It wasn't a huge amount of work but it just was like 'Okay, I have to sit down and actually do this.'" If work has to happen during the day outside of the home (e.g., a trip to the library), she takes advantage of an "amazing nap" and brings her daughter, Kaeleigh, along.

In contrast to Danica's paid formal work, Andrea has continued to perform many of her usual social work duties during her second leave. She volunteers one day per week, for a minimum of two hours in the evening. Recent lay-offs and facility closures prevent her from receiving any pay but she does all of the same tasks that she was paid to do prior to leave, including locating and connecting clients with essential welfare services, and administrative paperwork.

Andrea began working when her son, Shawn, was five months old and is still regularly doing (eleven months into her leave). She intends to only work for two hours at a time but never observes that limit because there is always more work than can ever be completed. She only places a firm end to her work time if there is a conflicting family obligation.

It is important to Andrea that she continue to work during leave because she does not plan to ever be a stay-at-home mother, long-term. She continues to work for free because her office closed down and she feels "bad because the service doesn't exist anymore...so I'm just trying to help out and...also keep in contact with the workplace, with a workplace. Just... so I won't be just a mum."

Informal Work

Informal work includes occasional in-person meetings with leave replacements or colleagues, either at work or at mothers' homes, and professional development. Avery, a government department manager has arranged a few informal meetings with both her leave replacement and valued team members. She feels the ability to, at least, touch base keeps mothers "motivated and excited to return" and "helps foster success for when they return." She recounts "feeling inspired" after these informal chats.

Professional development activities includes preparing for, attending, and presenting work at conferences, preparing and delivering an Internet seminar, mentoring junior professionals in the community, and sitting on volunteer committees. These activities do not reflect mothers' routine daily tasks, nor are they "official" job requirements, but they all serve to enhance mothers' resumes.

Emerging Tensions

The tension between these mothers' caregiving and professional roles on leave is evident in the reasons that they seek out continued career engagement. Not fully satisfied with a completely baby-focused leave, the integrated mothers want to be "in the loop," and crave additional intellectual stimulation.

Moderately attached mothers are still very interested in what is happening at work (e.g., staff or protocol changes). While minimally attached mothers on intensive leaves were also interested in being in the loop, they did not tend to seek out attachment opportunities for this specific purpose. In contrast, the work information they obtained was usually a by-product of a rare social visit. Moreover, the moderately attached mothers in management positions are more likely to stress the importance of being fully up to speed for their upcoming return to employment. They feel it is important to be aware of developments to best manage their staff and departments.

Avery, the public sector department manager who planned a handful of meetings with her leave replacement, did so to "get an outside perspective" on her staff. She simply "can't imagine not staying in touch." For her, "that would just be weird." She posits, "maybe if you had a different kind of job but with my job, like I really do need to know what's going on otherwise

you come back and you're gonna be blindsided by... issues or questions or whatever things that have come up.”

However, those moderately attached mothers without management duties also express a desire to be on top of developments for their own information and to know what to expect when they returned. This demonstrates that seniority is not solely driving the association between wanting to know what is happening and seeking out career connections. Most mothers on leave are still very invested in their professional lives, are thinking about work, and are looking ahead to their return, which drives them to maintain at least minimal attachment.

Work attachment can also provide intellectual stimulation or, as Nora put it, a chance to “[use] my brain.” Most of the mothers describe typical weeks on leave to be full of monotonous, routine child care that leaves them feeling a “little mindless” and “bored,” at times. Seeking out professional opportunities on leave enables them to get their “fix of brain time.” It also offers a more obvious, external sense of validation and accomplishment than they are able to obtain from domestic labour at home. Nora laments that, despite working “6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., always “double shifts” providing child care and managing the home, she struggles to quantify what she has accomplished on any given day. This is in contrast to her job as an academic medical researcher where accomplishments can be measured more clearly in publications, grants, and experiments.

However, mothers did not integrate their career with leave purely for these benign reasons. Several integrated leave mothers, including Jeanette, Margo, and Grace were all anticipating promotions once they returned to their jobs. On leave, these mothers remained concerned about the punitive effect that being completely detached might have on their career trajectory including, wages, skills, and advancement (e.g., Cooke 2011; Gangl and Ziefle 2015;

Mandel 2012; Mandel and Shalev 2009). Consequently, moderate work attachment also functions a way to remain professionally visible.

Margo, health researcher and clinician, explains, “I think when you take a step back from your job, even though it’s like maternity leave or whatever, to a certain extent people forget about you a little bit. So I wanted to kind of keep that presence so that... things wouldn’t just get passed to somebody else just because they were there.” To that end, Margo attends monthly team meetings, presented at a conference, and gave a guest lecture during her leave. Despite enjoying this continued work activity, the threat that absolute detachment posed indicates that mothers like Margo are straddling the line between working because they want to and because they have to (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007).

The Thin Line between Desire and Duress

Even though leave is legally job-protected, mothers are aware that being “M.I.A.” for a full year can still hurt their chances for advancement by communicating weaker professional commitment relative to their male counterparts without comparable caregiving responsibilities (e.g., Cahusac and Kanji 2014; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Stone 2007). As such, the integration behaviour of the moderately attached professional mothers anticipating promotions indicates the influence of ideal worker norms that challenge the feasibility of separating of work and leave.

Maintaining informal involvement on leave, in Jeanette’s words, ensures that her “career momentum” is not “completely stall[ed].” In terms of seniority and responsibility, Jeanette holds one of the most demanding positions of all, at times managing upwards of seventy-five people. Her government job is so hectic that she often cannot find time to read or respond to emails in between all of her daily meetings but says that she thrives on this kind of challenging schedule.

On her third leave, Jeanette feels very strongly about spending a full year with her new son, James, and older daughters. Relaxing at home on her sofa, with James bouncing on her lap surrounded by a sea of colourful (and, might I add, loud) toys, she speaks with confidence regarding the benefits of a more balanced work and family life. She believes that having balance makes her a better manager and that part of her job is to model this balance by taking leave and vacation. She does not “expect too much” from herself or her employees to safeguard against burn-out.

However, Jeanette is next in line to be department director and this is never far from her thoughts. She worries that she may have jeopardized this promotion because “if I’m gone for a year then who knows?” Jeanette wonders, “I don’t know how much I risk that by taking a full one year mat leave. At this point in my career, if they find they can do it without me quite well...or if another manager’s completely outshining me for the one year that I’m away, it might be someone else that becomes the next director, for example.”

To be able to both have her leave and also defend her career, she seeks out professional development activities, such as mentoring and conference presentations. “It’s really hard to feel like you’re losing the momentum on your career. It really feels strange.” Jeanette is not willing and cannot fully separate from her job for an entire year if she wants to protect her upward mobility.

Similarly, prior to leave, Grace’s superiors communicated that they were expecting her to return early to manage her team. Her strong desire to keep reading scientific research publications to avoid “getting dumb,” is directly related to her anticipated promotion to an even more demanding position. She recounts an acquaintance’s experience in a job interview. After leave, her friend was told to “brush up” on her industry knowledge:

[Job interviewer speaking to Grace's friend] "You just can't talk the talk anymore so you either need to wait to interview again until you get back to work and get back into it or you need to start working with... a trainer or consultant to get you able to... answer interview questions and answer technical questions." So that's like my [Grace's] biggest fear, is I'm gonna get dumb [chuckles] over [leave]...so I think that the small sustained amount of academic work will help me sort of maintain...scientific literacy, basically... that I need for my job.

Determined to avoid this same fate, Grace is intent on continued intellectual maintenance, if not development. Being committed to multiple on-going research projects provides ample opportunity for her to engage in manageable pieces of work during leave (in theory):

There's still research that'll be going on while I'm gone. And...I'm [principal investigator] on [one project] and the other two, I'm co-investigator on so I will have to be quite involved...Most of us are working with lots of colleagues. We're never sort of taking on projects all on our own. We usually have two or three co-investigators...to help work on things so...the time commitment will – it's not that significant.

She did her best to continue to engage with work to demonstrate her dedication amid significant post-partum health issues. However, approximately four months into leave, and with a slightly disappointed sigh, she (under)estimates that she is only minimally attached to work. She has been unable to read any scientific literature as planned and is concerned about her "loss of productivity." For someone in her position, used to long work hours and looking towards advancement, "it's weird to tap out for a year" because then you have "a year's worth of catch up to do."

As these mothers' experiences show, the nature of the work attachment on integrated leaves is complex. On the one hand, the mothers not considering advancement in the near future are able to selectively participate in limited work activities when they want to "use their brain" or reconnect. For them, moderate attachment scratches their professional itch and is best described as a nice complement to their "time off." On the other hand, the mothers experiencing stronger

ideal worker pressures to minimize their employment and productivity hiatus are conscious of the negative impact such an employment gap can have on their advancement opportunities.

Even though the mothers anticipating promotions were under more duress to keep working on leave, their experience combining career and leave was positive. What accounts for the widespread beneficial effect of moderate attachment, even under ideal worker pressure?

Controlled Integration

Regardless of their degree of attachment to work over leave, all of the mothers emphasize the fundamental importance of being in control of the integration process. This is a crucial issue because mothers are legally entitled to job-protected leave and, as many comment, they cannot be “expected” or “required” to work at this time. In contrast to Brianne and Celeste (the mothers experiencing ideal worker leaves), virtually all of the moderately attached mothers felt positively about their level of attachment because they exercised control over how much and when they engaged with their jobs.

Overall, work engagement on integrated leaves is mostly, if not always, initiated by the mothers, themselves. Senior manager, Avery insists that all of her continued involvement is “very much directed by me. Like they [staff] would never contact me at home....it’s always initiated by me.” The only moderately attached mother who ran into trouble managing on-going work demands and had a negative experience was senior research manager, Grace.

Prior to leave, Grace’s co-workers were already asking when they could call and email her again. She was willing to assist her staff but found she was overwhelmed by the level of work-to-Mom blurring that occurred. The number and nature of the work requests was “above and beyond what’s reasonable,” given that Grace was on leave. She was immediately inundated

with work emails which quickly became a source of anxiety for her. She eventually stopped responding, needing to completely eliminate this stressor as she managed the feeding and sleeping difficulties that come with being a first-time parent to a newborn. This initial work anxiety had a ripple effect and she has subsequently limited her work engagement in favour of protecting her own well-being, knowing the risk she runs, otherwise.

In addition to increased control, the nature of the work activities undertaken during integrated leaves protected mothers' leave time. They required little effort, did not take up much time, and were sporadic in mothers' estimation. More often than not, they were discrete tasks that could be started and finished quickly. Margo describes the amount of work required to present at a conference:

They were talks that I had done before...so they didn't require too much preparation...I had to make some new slides and cut some things down 'cause I had less time to talk...If they were brand new talks that I had to do, that would have been really intense but...it wasn't too bad. It was more like networking and going to talks and listening. I just had to do a couple presentations. It wasn't too bad.

Overall, professional activities tended to last only a few hours at a time over a handful of days and were not regular, on-going events. Integrated mothers either fit their career tasks around the baby's schedule, combine it with care (e.g., answering emails while feeding or bringing the baby along to the workplace), or arrange for child care to be provided by their partner or family and friends.⁶ As a result, the majority of the moderately attached mothers feel that they have "left" their jobs and enjoyed sufficient bonding time, while also demonstrating an impressive level of career involvement.

⁶ Mothers did not regularly arrange for child care for the purposes of working on leave, as previously discussed in chapter five.

The evidence indicates that the integrated approach satisfactorily combines work and career but does it allow mothers to do intensive mothering and live up to ideal worker standards?

Consequences of Moderate Attachment

The integrated approach to leave includes elements of both intensive mothering and ideal worker norms. These mothers spend a considerable amount of time with their babies, as intensive mothering requires, but also assert their professional value through continued career attachment. Mothers taking integrated leaves do not perfectly embody either the intensive mother or the ideal worker. Instead, they represent a hybrid leave that includes a less extreme version of both, largely to mothers' personal and professional benefit.

Integrated leaves do not fully satisfy the tenets of intensive mothering because these mothers do sacrifice some of their limited leave time with their babies for additional "selfish" professional interests (Hays 1996). However, compared to mothers experiencing ideal worker leaves, moderately attached mothers only spend a fraction of their leave time professionally engaged. Moreover, many delay additional career activity until after an initial period of leave where they do not engage with their jobs beyond occasional bridge work and social interaction. The first several months of leave are generally spent bonding and caregiving at home.

Even after they start work, family remains these mothers' first priority and the majority of their leave efforts are still devoted to their babies. They spend smaller amounts of time and fewer days working than the significantly attached mothers. When they do work, they make sure to flexibly schedule it around mom and baby yoga or story time at the library, for example. These mothers do still privilege their caregiving activity and protect quality time with their

children. They still “make the most” of their leave but also address their own career interests and concerns.

At the same time, integrated leaves are not wholly consistent with ideal worker norms. Most of the moderately attached mothers took an entire twelve months of leave, which is a significant employment interruption. Contrast this to Brianne and Celeste, who were both officially back to work only six months after giving birth. However, none of the moderately attached mothers were under the “official” obligation to do any work while on leave. In many cases, these mothers are voluntarily seeking out small pieces of work for themselves, which strongly communicates their level of professional commitment. Even if they are only taking part in informal and unpaid activities, these mothers are still keeping their skills sharp and mitigating the career impact of a fully detached leave by continuing to professionally produce.

The question remains as to how “acceptable” an integrated leave is within a gender culture that puts great pressure on new mothers to engage in full-time caregiving. However, in this research, it emerges as the most promising approach to addressing the cultural contradictions between career and caregiving pressures that emerge during leave (Hays 1996). Relatively speaking, an integrated leave is a much closer approximation of intensive mothering than an ideal worker leave. It is also a much closer approximation of the ideal worker than the complete career detachment characteristic of intensive leaves. To the extent that integrated leaves allow mothers to enjoy their leaves and also participate in (and protect) their professional interests, they may positively impact the problems that plague mothers in the labour force after childbirth, without demanding they sacrifice their desire for significant parenting time.

This chapter detailed three approaches to maternity and parental leave, each more or less in line with either the ideology of intensive mothering or ideal worker norms. The next chapter

describes mothers' experiences as they transition from leave back to paid employment. Again, while intensive mothering tends to dominate mothers' return-to-work behaviour, a spectrum of return approaches still exists. Like the continuum of leave-work attachment, mothers' returns can be categorized as conforming more closely to intensive mothering (reduced returns), ideal worker norms (early intense returns), or somewhere in between (full-time and early gradual returns). The manner in which mothers' return is crucial because each approach affects the nature of their labour force participation and the gendered division of labour at home.

Chapter 6: The Continuum of Return Transitions

The vast majority of mothers returned to paid employment. This indicates significant labour force attachment following leave that is consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Baker and Milligan 2008; Berger and Waldfogel 2004; Hofferth and Curtin 2006). At the same time, however, temporary and indefinite reductions in work hours were common (e.g., Houston and Marks 2003). Obtaining child care impacts mothers' particular return-to-work decisions and many mothers' child care plans were still uncertain when they re-joined paid labour.

Every mother singled out a lack of affordable, quality child care options as the most stressful and important issue they faced once leave ended. Lengthy wait lists and high costs forced mothers to use a variety of services to meet their needs in order to go back to work. Family daycares, daycare centres, private nannies, informal arrangements with family and friends, and a mix of more than one of these kinds of care were used. Parents working in jobs incompatible with standard 9:00-5:00 daycare hours hired nannies to be able to accommodate their work schedules (see also Presser 2003).

Mothers unable to secure full-time daycare spots often fell back on grandparents, if their family lived in the city or reasonably close by. Having local family is a significant advantage in dealing with child care difficulties. Paula's parents watched her daughter nearly five days per week once she returned to work full-time. It was a long commute to drop-off and pick up the baby each day but the financial savings were worth it until Paula became fed up with the fact that her mother spent more time raising her child than she did. Paula ultimately quit her job to pursue self-employment so that she could be her daughter's primary caregiver. For those without local family, initial child care needs during the transition back to work were sometimes solved through

extended vacations. Both Esther and Leigh's parents live in different countries but came to visit for several months to temporarily provide child care so these mothers could regain their career footing while they sort out longer term arrangements.

Similarly, mothers temporarily reducing their work hours sometimes do so to bridge the gap until care arrangements are finalized. However, decisions to limit work hours either temporarily or indefinitely are associated with reduced gender equality at home. Consistent with existing research, mothers' employment reductions in this study are linked to an increased (and unequal) child care and housework load after leave (e.g., Coltrane 2000; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Sanchez and Thomson 1997).

That being said, mothers' domestic workload (housework, in particular) is not as significant to variation in their return approaches as it is to their degree of continued work attachment on leave. At least, most mothers do not cite their unequal share of this labour as a reason for their particular return approach.⁷ The weak connection is partly related to the higher socioeconomic standing of the study families, as many hire cleaners to come in a few times a month to assist with the housework. Outsourcing some of this work lessens mothers' total domestic burden and those working full-time hours also admit to reducing their standards of cleanliness, somewhat.

From mothers' perspectives, financial need and job restrictions play the biggest role in their decisions to return to paid employment, further indicating the pivotal role that job context plays in the overall leave experience. For instance, Roberta had no option other than to return at

⁷ One notable exception is Jordan, whose experience is discussed in-depth in the reduced return section of this chapter.

full-time hours. The fact that she is the main breadwinner compounds her need to re-engage in this particular way.

Nevertheless, the consequence of setting a more traditional tone during leave is the persistence of a skewed division of child care after leave. Fathers doing little caregiving on leave, compared to their partners (i.e., most fathers), do not change this behaviour once mothers are back to work. In fact, the increased child care efforts fathers put forth on the weekends when mothers were on leave largely disappear once mothers are back at work. Many mothers, like Jordan, still assert that their partners deserve time for themselves on the weekends because of how much effort they put in at work during the week:

I really encourage [my husband]...if he wants to... go do something fun with his buddy...like go and watch a game... you know, I'll watch [my daughter] during that time and then I'll get to go out for dinner with a girlfriend and so we really do trade off. I know he... goes out more than I do but... that more has to do with the fact that I just don't set things up. I find I get so... focused on everything else that needs to be done.

Jordan's response is, again, consistent with mothers' continued drive to live up to intensive mothering standards after leave, spending as much time with the baby as possible. Not all mothers are as easy-going as Jordan, however. Nora is dissatisfied with her continued role as the "default parent" because she is the mother:

I'm the default parent and so, you know, when someone says to me "Hey, do you want to... go get a coffee?" my first thought is "Okay well I have to figure out someone to watch [my daughter]. I have to figure that out, okay, once that's done, yes, then I go out for coffee" whereas it feels like with my husband, he says yes and then asks and says "Oh, now we need to find someone to watch [my daughter]." So I find that's a little frustrating.

So, after leave, mothers add work demands to their (continued) majority share of the child care. In addition, most are adamant that their jobs are more flexible, compared to their partners' jobs.

As a result, reductions to part-time and the need to take a day “off” to care for a sick child unable to go to daycare become mothers’ responsibility.

Consequently, to properly understand mothers’ daily post-leave experience, it is essential to acknowledge that they are all now managing a new, heavier total work-family load that includes both paid and unpaid labour. Regardless of their specific return approach, most mothers’ daily routine reflects their continued participation in intensive mothering: privileging caregiving, as much as possible (Hays 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987).

The Daily Persistence of Intensive Mothering Ideology

All mothers are pressured to engage in intensive mothering. Their only “choice” is whether or not to also take part in paid employment (Hays 1996). Consistent with this assertion, the scheduling and organizational strategies mothers use once they return to work are intended to maximize their limited caregiving time now that their children are spending most of the week in daycare, with nannies, or grandparents. They all still try to be the “good” mothers they were on leave, even though many are now spending a fraction of the time with their children, one-on-one.

The transition back to paid employment results in a more hectic daily pace. Managing work and family demands requires regimented scheduling compared to the flexible weekly schedule mothers had on leave. Nora insists that the day “has to be scheduled. It can’t just be one of those things that just happens. You really have to think about it.” Similarly, the only analogy that Eve found appropriate to convey her experience as an employed mother of two was that of a student working full-time, while taking classes, where “every waking moment is jam-packed with something.”

Mothers describe their endless list of daily tasks after returning to work. Consistent with intensive mothering, the majority of these tasks are about taking care of the baby and housework comes a close second. They generally sum up all they do at their jobs in one brief phrase, something like, “then I go to work and I come home,” before listing more than a dozen other domestic tasks they then perform.

Once home, their attention is mostly focused on family (labour). Dinner needs to be made, babies need to be fed, bathed, read stories, sometimes nursed, and put to sleep. Dishes have to be washed, the living room needs to be tidied, laundry has to be folded and put away, and parents prepare themselves for work the next day. The list goes on and on and they have to do it all again tomorrow and the next day. Gwen, a senior insurance manager, describes it as “chaos.”

As a consequence of the heavy workload, mothers attempt to make the borders between the work and family domains more rigid, limiting work-to-family border blurring as much as possible. In turn, the firm limit placed on time spent at work and on work activities is a major contributor to the faster and busier daily pace: mothers need to be more “efficient” at work to be able to get home for their “second shift” (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Fortified Borders to Maximize Mothering

Work efficiency supports mothers’ attempts to fortify the borders between the work and family domains after leave and, by extension, increases the odds of being considered both “good” mothers and good employees. After leave, Sue calculates that she spends just ten percent of her time with her two young sons. Rather than sadness, her tone conveys frustration at having to return to her nursing job for financial reasons. As a result, Sue does her best to get as much done as physically possible during her workday to be able to leave on time and be with her children,

which often means skipping lunch and breaks. She notices a big change in how her days at work feel after her second leave. It has become “much crazier” and far “less chill.”

The additional work she does during her designated breaks cannot be banked to be used later as flex-time (as is common practice when nurses work over-time). As a result, all of it is unpaid. Overall, Sue’s work days are “super structured” because she cannot make any appointments after 4:00 p.m. in order to pick up the kids from daycare. Similarly, Grace goes so far as to limit who she interacts with during the day. She describes avoiding a particularly long-winded co-worker, as the irrelevant conversation interrupts her work flow and productivity.

After leave, there is generally less tolerance for work creeping into family time, even for those used to border blurring (e.g., Celeste and Brianne). However, the enforcement of strong work-family borders is greatly associated with their job context (Schieman et al. 2006, 2009). For mothers with relatively less demanding jobs, or those that do not lend themselves to blurring, abiding by a firm end to the work day is more realistic and achievable (e.g., Stella, Jordan, Sarah, and Audrey). That being said, the price of leaving work “at work” might be working through lunch and breaks.

Likewise, many of the mothers whose jobs regularly blurred into non-work time prior to leave separate the two domains more clearly upon their initial returns. Prior to leave, blurring the borders was usually something that Nora and Margo “did not mind.” Working a little in the evenings and on weekends was accepted as “just part of the job.” However, mothers like Nora and Margo anticipate that the more distinct separation they are presently enjoying will not last, especially as work demands intensify.

Jeanette’s weeknight meetings have already reclaimed their position in her schedule, less than three months after returning to her department manager position. Three months after

returning to her research manager job, Grace is routinely working one or two hours in the evening, a few times a week. She, somewhat reluctantly, admits to the occasional night where she works five hours from home. She insists that she takes weekends “off”... but that includes working Sunday nights. It is not a question of if but *when* the heightened blurring returns for these mothers due to their job demands (Schieman et al. 2006; 2009).

Appreciating the influence of mothers’ jobs is important because the resurgence of work-family blurring diminishes opportunities for intensive mothering after leave. For first-time mothers, work-life blurring prior to leave was rarely a problem for them. If anything, working after hours and on weekends made them “ideal workers.” However, now that they are mothers, having to attend to work matters at the expense of family time may seriously challenge their claims of being a “good” mother.

The variable demands of mothers’ particular jobs played a significant role in their return approaches. Senior accountant, Brianne, deliberately took a short leave so she would not have to return during the busiest work quarter. In contrast, Jordan and Audrey (health and school counsellors) have easily reduced to part-time positions. As with the three approaches to leave, mothers’ returns reflect their attempts to resolve the growing tension between caregiving and career pressures. However, the type of leave that mothers’ experience does not necessarily determine their type of return. Table 1 (next page) summarizes the variation amongst leave and return types. The absence of a clear relationship emphasizes the role of other factors, including job-specific restrictions and the availability of child care, in shaping return trajectories.

Because the Canadian leave policy provides up to one year of leave, returning to full-time employment after twelve months of leave is not unusual (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007). In fact, many Canadians might assume that this is the standard operating procedure for new mothers who

had been working full-time prior to childbirth. However, less than half of the mothers interviewed experienced this type of return, suggesting that it is not really “standard” at all. As one might expect, mothers immediately returning full-time in this sample were in senior management positions or had little choice in the matter.

	Standard full-time return	Reduced return		Early intense return	Early gradual return	Total
Intensive leaves	3	Temporary reduction 3	Indefinite reduction 6	0	2 (both fathers took leave)	14
Integrated leaves	3	Temporary reduction 2	Indefinite reduction 4	0	2 (1 father took leave)	11
Ideal worker leaves	0	0		2 (both fathers took leave)	0	2
Total	6	15		2	4	N=27

Table 1. Mothers’ leave and return type

“Standard” Full-Time Returns

Immediately returning to full-time hours was not typically mothers’ first choice when it came to re-engaging with paid work. Mothers have mixed feelings about this approach but most conclude that it does not give them enough time with their babies. They perceive less work-family balance immediately after leave and, as a result, do not feel able to be “the kind of mother” that they want to be. This dissonance is understandable when one considers that these mothers were full-time, stay-at-home mothers for a full year and are now full-time employees. The switch literally happens overnight.

Increasing Tensions

Mothers experiencing an immediate full-time return (especially those who had intensive leaves) objected to the abrupt nature of their transition back to paid employment. Ideally, Stella wanted to return four days per week, having an additional day for “fun stuff.” She had a difficult leave and really only began to enjoy it once her daughter, Rose, was about ten months old and more interactive. Returning to work full-time at one year when quality time with children can include so much more than “survival” tasks, like feeding and diapering, is bittersweet. At our last interview, Stella beamed from ear-to-ear, thrilled to be back at work. However, she also wistfully looked off in the distance with her chin resting on her hand, imagining how great it would have been to have a sixteen month leave where she could have spent the summer hiking with Rose.

Gwen, a senior insurance manager, found leave to be a “transformative” experience. She was not expecting to enjoy it or being a mother, for that matter, as much as she did. She says that the shift from spending all day with her son, Kayden, to forty-five hours a week in the office is like flipping a light switch. As a result, Gwen estimates she is only operating at sixty percent as a mom. “How could...I be doing an excellent job of parenting when I only spend on a...weekday, say three to four waking hours with [my son]?”

She feels left out because she is not doing the bulk of the parenting and is amazed and exasperated that she now has no idea what her son actually eats each day. She was surprised when Kayden learned “where his nose was” and had to call the sitter to ask if she had taught him that. Being in the office five days per week now means that she does not get to see those kinds of developments, first-hand. Given the more than full-time demands of her job, Gwen does not seem optimistic that things will greatly change. “I don’t think it’s – I don’t think I can get to one hundred percent on both of them [as a mom and manager] just because time.”

Roberta, a lab technician, had no choice but to return full-time, which weighed heavily on her. She quickly realized that, perhaps, she would rather be a stay-at-home parent:

I think I had a lot of things I wanted to do as a child but...I feel like I was discouraged from anything other than academics and so I had to let a lot of that go and now I feel like I've lost anything. Like if you were to ask me, "what is my passion?" I don't know. But after having [daughter, Maggie], I'm almost wondering if I'm discovering being a mom is like my passion. But at this time, because my husband is [not currently employed] and realistically living in [Marine], I probably can't afford to not go to work. So that makes me sad.

It is clear that many of these mothers still want a lot of time with their babies once leave ends but the tension between full-time mothers' roles is also evident from their assertions that returning full-time is necessary to protect their professional standing after a full year of leave.

After a year of leave, Jeanette struggles to negotiate work and family. Despite not wanting full career detachment on leave, she did not want to immediately return full-time to her department manager role. Her senior status and pending promotion demanded it:

I mean ideally I would have been able to start back at work...part-time and I did look into that...It wasn't easily achievable. I would have had to give up my full-time status and it would have been...something very obvious to the organization...It was kind of recommended to me that it would be a career...limiting maneuver...Even if it was for a temporary amount of time, like six months or twelve months, to change from full-time status to part-time status, would suggest to [superiors] that I wasn't...willing or able to step up to the plate [in a more senior role].

Since officially reducing to part-time is out of the question, Jeanette is using some of her flex-time to have a bit more time at home with her children during the week. Seeing as this time is easily made up by her regular evening meetings, she is not enjoying much of a reprieve from work. Jeanette and the other full-time "standard" mothers return to most of their usual job duties the instant that leave ends. What does this mean for motherhood and career expectations?

Consequences of Full-Time Returns

Immediate full-time returns may have a neutral effect on judgments of being good mother and worker, at best. According to several of the “standard” full-time return mothers, this approach does not give them enough caregiving time after leave. Insofar as they exhaust their entire leave entitlement to spend as much time with their babies as possible, they are in line with the ideology of intensive mothering, not returning to paid employment until it is absolutely required.

To the extent that these mothers return to work without requesting any flexibility adjustments or hour reductions, they may be abiding by the minimal standard of what it means to be an ideal worker, if you are a new mother: immediately resuming full-time paid work. Violet was eager to return to work as a construction project manager because she knew that an extended absence (beyond one year) was detrimental. She was “emotionally ready” to return at the twelve month mark and was “worried about staying on leave any longer.” Violet was concerned that she would run the risk of her “skills becoming stale” if she took additional time and says it would have been harder to “get back in” because mothers’ professional network “forgets” about them while they are on leave. For her particular job, the longer she is away, the longer it has been since her last projects were completed and this stalls her forward professional momentum.

According to Violet, one year of leave seems to be the limit to what is acceptable, especially if mothers have management responsibilities (not to mention working in a male-dominated industry, like construction). The scales may be quickly tipped back towards “family devotion” as soon as full-time mothers make any adjustments at work to increase their caregiving time, communicating lower professional commitment (Blair-Loy 2003; Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

Consistent with the widespread persistence of the dominant mothering ideology, some full-time mothers scale back at work in order to preserve caregiving time, given the constraints of their jobs (Crompton and Harris 1998). When they cannot not reduce hours, they reduce the time and effort they expend on activities such as travel and after-hour socializing. Now that they are mothers, these “extras” are not worth the sacrifice, for the time being.

In addition to cutting back to forty-five hours a week from her usual sixty, senior insurance manager, Gwen, is determined to both limit her business travel and evening client social events. She describes herself as more “discerning” in choosing evening events, only attending the most relevant and worthwhile. However, this plan is not without its risks in a masculine ideal worker environment: Gwen has many clients outside of the city and evening events support networking and future business (Cahusac and Kanji 2014). While she does not think it has “hindered” her career yet, she does wonder if it might become a problem later on:

I think with work, if I wanted to do – get to one hundred percent, I would be out travelling a lot more. I would be visiting our out of town customers and I would be [travelling] for training and, I don’t know, just doing all these other things. There’s tons of things I could be doing but I just kind of “Meh, whatever, **I can get by right now.**” And these things aren’t required but I think they are things that...I should be proactive to – to do on my own and set them up on my own and I’m not doing that right now.... You could get by and still do a really good job but sometimes it’s “Okay, you know what, I’m gonna just fly to [Winnipeg] and spend a couple days there and...go visit these people instead of calling them....” It’s just little things like that. **It might take you from doing a pretty good job to a really good job....**I’m probably [not] doing that enough just because I feel like, “Ugh, I don’t really want to go away... ‘cause it’s a hassle.”

To gain more time with her son, Gwen has pulled back on important aspects of her job. While they are not essential on a daily basis, she acknowledges they could be relevant to her career performance down the line.

Similarly, department manager, Jeanette, retains her official full-time status but has transferred some of her duties to lighten her total professional workload. Even though she had

been intent on staying attached over leave to protect her promotion, she is not eager for it to happen any time soon and has delayed her own advancement. She thinks she might be ready to take on more responsibility in another year but is, at the same time, concerned that she has reached her limit for work-family balance. She is worried that any more work will upset the acceptable level of chaos she has reached with the demands of three children. Returning full-time supports Jeanette and Gwen's status as ideal workers but their subsequent work adjustments may erase any benefits they may have gained. Instead, the reductions are more indicative of what full-time employed "good" mothers must do (Hays 1996).

Findlay and Kohen (2012) find that the average length of leave for non-Québec Canadian mothers employed prior to giving birth is forty-four weeks (about ten months) (see also Marshall 2003). However, my results show that the "one year of leave" generalization overlooks important variation in mothers' experience of work-family reconciliation around this mean. Temporary employment reductions over a period of just one or two months, before or after leave, can make a big difference in the transition back to paid employment. In this study, less than half of the mothers interviewed immediately returned to full-time hours after a full year of leave. Several mothers who had been employed full-time before leave cut down on their hours when it was time to return to paid work. Most consistent with the tenets of intensive mothering, the reduced return approach is the focus of the next section.

Reduced Returns

Approximately one-third of the mothers interviewed both during and after leave reduced their time in paid employment but reductions took many forms. As a result, some reductions may have more serious implications for mothers' labour force attachment and earnings than others. Exiting the labour force altogether (at least temporarily) and indefinitely reducing to part-time hours from full-time are likely to have the most negative consequences. Smaller reductions are discussed first, followed by more substantial and consequential reductions.

Several mothers took a minimum of one full year of leave and then temporarily reduced their work hours when they first started back to work. However, these mothers always intended on returning to full-time hours, eventually.

Margo, Esther, and Sue, among others, increased to full-time hours over the course of a few weeks or months. Initially coming back at slightly reduced hours is a way to soften the transition from leave: to both enjoy the benefits of paid work but also get to spend more time with children. Senior research manager, Grace, describes her plan to transition back around ten months:

Starting at two [days per week], going up to three and slowly going back, um, partly to help...the baby get used to daycare...and help me get used to being back. And just gradually getting – instead of being thrown right into it 'cause I've heard from a lot of people that it's...quite hard...to get back into things. Just going from every day...not having a schedule to all of a sudden having to be at work at 8:30 a.m. and looking presentable and getting out of the house and all that.

While she ultimately took a full year of leave, Grace did return gradually over three weeks. She worked three days her first week back, four days the second week, and was back up to five full days by her third week.

Those who briefly reduce their hours before increasing to full-time are able to do so for one of two reasons: they either take advantage of their inherent job characteristics (e.g., the option to telecommute), or use their accrued vacation days to return four days per week, rather than five. Esther, a telecommunications engineer, returned to work at the one year mark, largely for financial reasons. She would have liked another six months of leave but, fortunately, her job has always encouraged employees to telecommute. Esther exercised this option for the first few weeks after leave. While she concedes that there are more interruption and it can be harder to focus when you work from home, the benefit of getting to spend more time with her daughter, Elise, far outweighs those drawbacks.

In contrast, Margo gradually increased her number of work days over approximately six weeks, working two days the first week, three days the second week, followed by a few four-day weeks. Not wanting to be immediately back full-time but also having no desire to be a stay-at-home mother, this was an acceptable compromise. Similarly, Sue opted to use her vacation time to work four days per week. Even these one day per week employment reductions are an expression of mothers' drive to focus on their children as much as possible.

Those indefinitely cutting their hours from full-time to part-time demonstrate a more significant reduction in their employment participation, especially compared to those returning to full-time hours within one or two months' time. Not all of the mothers who took the intensive approach to leave reduced their paid employment after leave. However, *every* mother who officially reduced to part-time hours did so with the intent to spend more time caregiving, and took the intensive, baby-focused leave approach.

“Something’s Got to Give”...to Keep Doing Intensive Mothering

Most of the reduced return mothers’ actions are motivated by the desire to preserve a little more time with their babies, but the mothers reducing to part-time are the best illustration of how the pressure to intensively mother can significantly diminish women’s labour force participation after childbirth.

Jordan, Eve, Sarah, and Audrey all had intensive leaves and part-time reductions support their continued engagement in intensive motherhood while still renewing their connection to paid work. Both Sarah and Audrey previously held two concurrent part-time positions and simply have not returned to one. Jordan is working a one year part-time position as a maternity leave replacement and Eve has arranged with her supervisor to work part-time for six months. These mothers are all employed between two to three days per week. Though Jordan and Eve’s positions are not permanent, both are hoping for a long-term extension.

Consistent with their leave approach, these mothers remain very vocal about how babies’ early years are precious and limited, and this general caregiving orientation is reflected in their post-leave employment trajectory. Audrey works part-time as part of her goal to ensure her son, Barney, is “emotionally okay,” feeling that fourteen months is too young for him to be in full-time daycare. Similarly, Jordan’s strong desire to remain her daughter’s primary caregiver is the reason she has reduced her hours:

I...made the choice and [it] was more me basically telling my spouse that this was what I *needed* [original emphasis]...I didn’t want her to go from straight from being with me full time to being in care full time...I felt that would be too difficult for her and I also felt like that would be too difficult for me as I would feel like...I really wanted to be a mother. I really – uh, I’m gonna cry [chuckles]. I’m still hormonal! It’s terrible! I really wanted to be a mom.

Both Audrey and Jordan adamantly frame their decisions as personal choices, yet both explanations reflect the pressure they feel to take the lead on child care, at the expense of paid labour, because they are assumed to be the “best person for the job” (Hays 1996, 8).

Jordan also reasons that reducing to part-time is the best course of action because it gives her more time to keep managing the chores. While her husband helps, like on leave, this work is primarily Jordan’s domain. When asked her if she could handle all of these responsibilities while working full-time hours and she does not need any time to consider her reply:

No, no. I really couldn’t. I just... I think I’d be burning myself out...I know financially it would be better for my family but in terms of my own mental health...I remember as a kid they talk about...women in the workforce and how you could do it all and – and now that I’m actually a mother and – and in this role, it’s like yeah, **I can do it all but something’s got to give to do it all**. So... you have to sacrifice something...you can’t have all these roles and be juggling all of these balls and be perfect at everything because all of these roles take energy and they take effort and they take time and – and there’s so much time and energy that you have. So... inevitably, something’s got to give.

There has been no discussion as to whether her husband might reduce his hours to part-time so the “something” that has to give is Jordan’s paid work. Jordan’s explanation indicates the on-going conflict between the requirements of being a mother and an employee.

Finally, exiting paid labour is the most extreme form of an employment reduction. Three mothers did not return to any paid work at the end of a one year leave but, of these, only Eileen left her teaching job to focus on her baby. Danica and Andrea, who had taken the integrated leave approach, are undergoing substantial life changes. One is pursuing additional education to secure a (higher paying) “dream” position in the near future. However, both are intent on rejoining the paid labour force full-time and as soon as possible. If their leave behaviour is any indication, their employment interruptions are likely to be temporary, though not without financial consequences, at the very least.

The specific nature of mothers' employment reductions varies. Yet, overall, they indicate mothers taking action to relieve the increased conflict they are experiencing between their desired level of caregiving and paid labour after leave. Reductions suggest that caregiving duties decisively "win" out over career but is that the case?

Increasing Tensions

Officially reducing to part-time suggests that the pressure of intensive mothering overrides employment pressures, resolving the conflict that Jordan fears. Similarly, many of the mothers temporarily reducing from five to four days per week openly shun the idea that they need to buy into ideal worker norms that, at a minimum, require full-time hours. Sue sees no real advantage to being a part of the "rat race" at this point in her children's lives. These mothers are satisfied that working less allows them to be "the kind of mother" they want to be. However, the inherent conflict between caregiving and career remains and this conflict is greater for the part-time mothers, who continue to feel pressure to maintain consistent full-time employment despite their official reduction in hours.

While mothers like Jordan and Eve are employed in more "feminine" jobs (health counsellor and community services, respectively), not typically associated with ideal worker norms, they still recognize that a lengthy employment withdrawal or reduction puts every woman at risk within the competitive labour market. Jordan discusses the dilemma she faces, wanting to stay-at-home but realizing that may not be possible:

After the year's up [I will be] looking at working more...[In] an ideal situation, I would have probably had stayed home, had my children, took five years off...and then return to work...once the kids are back at school but, the reality of the workforce right now, you can't do that...To take even three years off, all of sudden you lose your seniority, you – you lose so much of what you've worked so hard to get...Like, your qualifications, a

reputation....There's so many people who are fighting for jobs that you can't be guaranteed...to just step back in. If you leave, you're out of the game and so...I don't feel like that option is available to women anymore.

The price of long-term intensive mothering is lost seniority, the need to renew qualifications, and a diminished professional reputation (on top of lost income, I would add). Clearly, one does not have to be a hedge fund manager to experience serious career penalties if they reduce paid work for family. The different reductions involve varying degrees of maternal work attachment. This variation, in turn, impacts the practical “doing” of intensive motherhood and living up to ideal worker norms, the additional employment penalties they risk, and whether or not mothers recover any measure of gender equality at home.

Consequences of Reduced Returns

Full-time employment does not necessarily preclude women from the practice of intensive mothering (and they will be judged against this standard, regardless). However, time is a central component of this ideology, as “good” mothers devote most of theirs to their children’s growth and development (Hays 1996). Therefore, new mothers’ “success” on this metric is relative and the greater their employment reduction, the better. Accordingly, those who exit the labour force or reduce to part-time hours in order to be their children’s primary caregiver are, at the very least, better positioned for intensive mothering.

The part-time mothers do not mother as intensively as they did on leave, when they spent virtually no time on their careers. However, they still devote more time to their children on a daily basis after leave than those who returning to near full-time hours. In contrast, those that are only temporarily reducing their hours by telecommuting or applying vacation days spend even less time in child care. They might be *perfect* intensive mothers during the one or two days per

week they are at home but they are still spending at least half of their week away from their children and will be back to full-time hours in very short order.

Insofar as the reduced return mothers are able to spend more time parenting, like they want, they are achieving their goal. However, the negative ramifications of this approach seriously diminish any sense of victory. Several motherhood penalties identified in the existing literature are apparent, or can be inferred, from increased work detachment on leave and subsequent employment reductions.

Reduced income from fewer hours is a clear penalty mothers experience but employment losses are not simply the result of voluntarily cutting down time in paid employment (e.g., Budig and Hodges 2010; Waldfogel 1998). They also include the structural inability to advance. Employed mothers are penalized through perceptions of diminished work commitment and suitability for positions of authority simply because they are mothers (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). That being said, these more implicit disadvantages often go hand-in-hand with official part-time hour reductions. Part-time mothers, perceived as less committed or knowledgeable, may be unofficially demoted to the “mommy track,” be passed over for important assignments, and have difficulty securing mentors to support their professional advancement (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007; Webber and Williams 2008; Williams et al. 2013).

The mothers temporarily reducing their employment to eighty percent, experience a much smaller reduction in their total number of work hours. Moreover, using their paid vacation protects them from the income penalty that necessarily results from working fewer hours. However, using up all of their vacation means that mothers lose much of the safety net of paid time that may have provided flexibility in addressing family demands over the next year. When children later fall ill and cannot go to daycare, mothers will have to call in sick, themselves, and

miss out on work (see also Perry-Jenkins 2003; Dodson 2013). Furthermore, this behaviour is still at odds with ideal worker norms.

Mothers temporarily reducing also make additional career concessions that, in some ways, negates their nearly full-time return to paid employment. Because many have jobs where part-time hours are impossible they, instead, engage in “satisficing” behaviour (i.e., scaling back on work and/or family demands) according to their own particular employment constraints (Crompton and Harris 1998).

Esther is pledging not to work any over-time and has delayed pursuing an additional certification because it has to be completed outside of work hours, further diminishing time with her family. She is not comfortable putting this off but needs to be “pragmatic” about it. Grace is “saying no” more often to new projects. Finally, Constance remains determined to “only [do her] hours,” which might be easier said than done, given that she is an academic researcher. It is beyond the scope of this research to be able to definitively assess the career impact of delaying additional certification but, at best, it will have a neutral effect on achievement. The consequences of scaling back in academia are more predictable because of the nature of this work.

Grace’s refusal to take on too many new projects is a practical decision. Anticipating another leave in the not too distant future, she does not want to have several pending research commitments coinciding with leave, especially considering her most recent experience with difficult post-partum health issues. She is content with relying on her most recent research projects, noting her academic role is “not stalled.” Nevertheless, her research success requires continual momentum so her pre-emptive slow down does stunt her academic achievements, potentially until after her next leave. One cannot publish from non-existent work. Likewise, for

Constance, only working the minimum number of hours is risky because research and publications require a considerable long-term time investment that often demands long hour work weeks.

Accessing flexibility options or scaling back at work after having just returned from an entire year of leave may support perceptions of lower work commitment and, by extension, suitability for increased responsibility (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Following this to its logical conclusion, even temporary employment reductions may be compounded and result in wage gaps associated with less senior positions and a lack of advancement opportunity (Budig and Hodges 2010; Williams et al. 2013). Even occasional telecommuting has been linked to wage deficits for American mothers (Glass 2004).

Officially reducing to part-time hours has an even bigger negative wage consequence. It also sends a clearer message to co-workers and superiors that mothers are less dedicated to work relative to family, perhaps better suited to the “mommy track” (Stone 2007; Webber and Williams 2008). Indeed, part-time mothers are finding themselves on the sidelines at work. Eve always needs to be filled in because she is only there a few days a week. “Just being out of an office two days...things go on when you’re not there so... you tend to miss out on whether it’s meetings or...different functions or just conversations that happen, for sure.”

These career risks are not to be taken lightly but neither is the gender division of labour observed amongst the reduced return mothers. Employment hours are a significant predictor of women’s reduced domestic workload and these results support this association (Coltrane 2000; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Even temporary hour reductions are linked to an increase in mothers’ child care and housework. As a result, the more traditional division of labour established on leave persists until these mothers finally increase to full-time hours. For example,

Constance returned to a new position and is currently working four days per week. She estimates the child care division is still skewed towards her (sixty percent), and her housework share is seventy percent because she can run errands and tidy up on her “day off.” However, mothers working part-time continue to shoulder the most unequal post-leave domestic workload, gaining the least from their return to paid employment.

Due to the increased amount of time the part-time mothers spend at home (at least two full weekdays in addition to the weekend), they perform far more child care and housework than their counterparts. Sarah works three days per week and estimates that she is responsible for ninety percent of the child care on her “days off,” doing all of the grocery shopping and routine spot cleaning around the house. Like Sarah, Audrey and Jordan are experiencing the same division of labour after returning part-time.

Working just two days per week, Audrey is the “CEO of the household.” She performs three-quarters of the child care and about sixty percent of the housework, which is probably a conservative estimate. Audrey feels that she should still be doing most of the housework because she is home and continues to “see it more.” Her assertion is almost identical to Jordan’s, who reasons that “because I’m only eighteen hours a week at work...I still do the majority of the cleaning and the laundry and things like that. It just makes more sense...for me to continue to do then because I’m here more.”

The career concessions and hour cut-backs leave the temporarily reducing mothers in limbo between intensive motherhood and ideal worker after leave, not satisfying the demands of either. Compared to the part-time mothers and those exiting paid work, these mothers do less caregiving. At the same time, work cut-backs challenge their performance as ideal workers, at least until they were back full-time. The question is whether or not their decisions to scale back

temporarily will have any long-lasting impact on their career achievement and advancement. Their seemingly minor career concessions to balance work and family may have bigger consequences if mothers maintain these reductions long-term, until their children are in school. Add to that the fact that many are considering having another child in the near future, and even minor scaling back (and the resultant penalties) may be compounded by another lengthy leave period.

The actions of those exiting paid work or reducing to part-time are, unquestionably, consistent with intensive mothering ideology. However, the risks associated with these career concession are greater than those run by the mothers making temporary reductions. The now stay-at-home and part-time mothers are not “ideal” workers. Moreover, spending fewer weekly hours in paid employment after leave has clearly set the tone that they are the ones responsible for the child care and housework going forward.

These results strongly suggest that mothers’ particular decisions about how, exactly, they will transition back to paid employment can contribute to their future career experience and domestic inequality at home. If reduced returns, designed to increase caregiving time, pose a threat to mothers’ career standing, is it better to return *early* to full-time hours? Early intense returns, most consistent with ideal worker norms, are examined in the next section.

Early Intense Returns

Given the overall dominance of intensive mothering on leave, it likely comes as no surprise that only two mothers had already returned to full-time hours by the time their babies were six months old. It should also come as no surprise that those two mothers had ideal worker leaves

(Celeste and Brianne). While both mothers hoped to work significantly less than usual when they first started back, the nature of their job demands and senior responsibilities has made that nearly impossible.

Celeste planned to work only part-time, at first, but ended up immediately returning at full-time hours. Likewise, Brianne had initially planned to credit the time she worked (unpaid) on leave and use her accrued vacation time to temporarily reduce to four days per week. In theory, this should have worked because she deliberately scheduled her return for a less busy quarter. Brianne should only have returned at thirty-two hours per week but was, instead, working more than forty hours right from the start. Back at work for two months, she is currently averaging between forty to forty-three hours in just four days. She takes one day “off” each week but sometimes taking phone calls and answering emails on that day off.

If this is what life looks like less than ten months after becoming mothers, it is not hard to understand why both Brianne and Celeste feel like they never “left” their jobs. They had less than three consecutive months after childbirth when they were not also engaged in some sort of on-going career activity, even if it was minor. On leave, the conflict between motherhood and career was quite obvious and this conflict has only intensified after leave.

Increasing Tensions

For these mothers, the increasing tension is reflected in their experience of time strain which demands flexible and permeable work-family borders like never before (Clark 2000). Brianne and Celeste’s ideal worker employment contexts routinely require that they work into the evening and on weekends. However, these hours conflict with their new family demands, and their job, as mothers, to resume caregiving once the clock strikes 5:00 p.m. Consistent with the

general trend already discussed, both mothers have the clear goal to be as efficient as possible during the day to leave the office at a reasonable hour.

Celeste is adamant (and successful) about leaving by 4:30 p.m. to relieve the nanny. At first, she was unapologetic about this practice, saying that “they can suck it up.” However, she now admits feeling guilty that she is not regularly at work until 6:00 p.m. The only reason she does not make care arrangements to stay later is because it feels worse to not see her baby than it does to not be working a little bit more. Likewise, Brianne technically leaves work by 5:00 p.m. but this does little to resolve the dilemma between being both a “good” mother and ideal worker at the same time.

The borders they put in place are weak, at best. Both Brianne and Celeste continue to work from home in the evenings after their babies are in bed: Celeste until 7:00 p.m. and Brianne from 7:00-9:30 p.m. The only reason Celeste does not work later is because she is just “too tired” by that point, having been working either as a mom or lawyer “non-stop” since 6:00 a.m. She compensates, in part, by working some weekends while her son, Charlie, sleeps in his stroller parked in the corner of her downtown office.

The negative effect of continued border blurring is apparent from Brianne’s frustrated tone when she describes how immensely displeased she is with her current workload, and the impossibility of cutting back in a meaningful way. The negative effects are also reflected by the circumstances of our final interview: we met in her home office (less than ten feet from her bed), perfectly symbolizing the annihilation of any separation between her home and family lives. Our interview took place on her one “day off,” coinciding with her hosting several friends for a get-together, since it is one of the only days she has both the time and energy for socializing. She had

forgotten we had an appointment and split her time between her friends downstairs and myself, frantically running back and forth to manage the double-booking. She is time strain, personified.

Consequences of Early Intense Returns

The early intense approach is very much in line with ideal worker norms. Both Brianne and Celeste minimized their full-time employment interruption as much as possible, which communicates to their superiors and team members that they are highly committed to their organizations, even during one of the most demanding family transitions. This message bodes well for their career and wage achievement.

Quickly returning to full-time hours limits the financial penalty of taking leave. Brianne benefitted less than Celeste, in this respect, having received a top-up in addition to her EI payments. Not receiving basic leave benefits and living off of savings means that Celeste is thrilled to be earning her full-time income again. It has been suggested to Brianne by her superiors that she should consider putting herself up for partner this year. It can safely be assumed that Brianne's consistent attachment to work on leave and her lightning fast return to full-time hours only helped her in this regard.

As much as early intense returns enable mothers to more closely approximate the ideal (male) worker after childbirth, they greatly diminish the time mothers have to spend with their babies, which reduces their caregiving participation. While all employed mothers spend less time caregiving once back at work, early returns accelerate this time loss. Six months into leave, mothers taking the intensive approach were still spending entire days with their babies, having "tummy time" on the living room floor "in yoga pants." Brianne and Celeste are already back in their offices just six months after childbirth. It is a clear contrast that emphasizes the power of

both intensive mothering and ideal worker norms. To paraphrase the intensive leave mothers, returning early to full-time hours when babies are only this young once and mothers are only entitled to a year off is not how “good” mothers make the most of the “gift” of leave.

Brianne and Celeste are, in many ways, caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to returning to work early. True, they both love their careers and did not ever envision a lengthy, full-time caregiving leave but both are even more in love with their babies. They have returned quickly to demanding professional work because, in their view, they both have to and want to. However, the increasing work-family conflict evident in Brianne’s experience, just two months after returning, suggested that these devotions are in severe competition, to the point that her career might soon take a serious hit (Blair-Loy 2003).

As Stone (2007) finds, mothers in demanding high status professional positions often have no option but to make a significant career change when the inflexible nature of their jobs prevents them from spending enough time with their children. Though Brianne is not contemplating quitting her job, she is reconsidering whether or not to put herself up for partner. Adding parenting demands on top of her massive workload is already too much and a promotion will only make things worse.

It is apparent that Brianne feels stuck and the only way that she can manage is to let some lower priority job tasks slide, for the time being. This only serves to maintain her stress level because she knows that these additional obligations are still waiting and she has to get to them eventually. Brianne was a nearly perfect ideal worker on leave but her method of problem solving is indicative of the overarching dominance of intensive mothering: spending less time with her child and partner is out of the question and so the only solution is to now cut-back on

her career efforts. Such tension is reminiscent of the American professional mothers who eventually “opt” for a career change amid unresolvable work-family conflict (Stone 2007).

Brianne and Celeste’s early intense returns to work, again, provide great insight into how mothers’ jobs can influence both their leave and post-leave labour force attachment and achievement, maintaining gender gaps in seniority and wages. Fully committing to the ideal worker approach may diminish mothers’ well-being and actually threaten their advancement by fast-tracking their experience of work-family conflict after a short leave. In a gender culture dominated by intensive mothering, the “something” that has “got to give” is mothers’ jobs, even for high status professionals.

Thus far, the evidence has detailed the effects of the two most extreme approaches to returning to employment, highly consistent with either intensive mothering ideology or ideal worker norms. There is a more moderate approach to the return transition that, again, falls somewhere in-between, describing those who return to work early but at temporarily reduced hours.

Early Gradual Returns

The early gradual approach describes those mothers returning to work prior to one year of leave but at reduced hours, which results in a lighter workload. The most common practice is for mothers to return part-time at ten months. Voluntarily returning to work early indicates that this strategy leans more towards the ideal worker approach. At the same time, the workload is considerably less intense and mothers still spend a lot of time with their babies, which justifies a more moderate classification. Early gradual mothers essentially engage in part-time caregiving

and part-time employment for approximately six or eight weeks before increasing to full-time hours once more. For comparison, most of the early gradual return mothers will already be working full-time by the time the mothers temporarily cutting back to four days per week are just starting their reduced hour transition.

Likewise, the standard full-time return after a year of leave and early gradual return approach are only separated by a few weeks of part-time employment. However, this seemingly small difference has a big impact. Returning to part-time hours after ten months of leave greatly increases mothers' satisfaction with their transition from leave to employment, and they perceive more work-family balance, relative to immediate full-time returns at twelve months.

Increasing Tensions

According to mothers, a more gradual reintroduction helps ease some of the tension between the pressures of being both a parent and a full-time employee, at the same time. Jeanette, the government department manager who had no choice but to return full-time, sees this type of return as ideal:

Escalating but over a longer period of time so that you're not back to full-time until the kid's a year and a half old or something. Maybe every two months you up it by one day....That'd be so much better for the women and so much better for the kids....I think mentally, developmentally, it'd be easier to organize [e.g., child care], it wouldn't feel so insurmountable to have to go from zero to five days a week in a short amount of time.

While Jeanette's vision does not include starting a gradual reintroduction before the end of one year, she does not rule that out. She reflected for a few minutes before agreeing that yes, coming back one or two days per week around the seventh or eighth month could also be beneficial. The experiences of the early gradual return mothers suggest that Jeanette is correct.

The early gradual return mothers experience far less conflict between their work and family demands during the return transition. The overwhelming consensus is that this approach greatly benefits both mothers and their children, allowing them time to ease back into their work roles and emotionally adjust to being away from their children for longer periods of time. Child care supervisor, Paula is grateful to have the option. “I’ll be part time...which I think emotionally leaving [my daughter] is really scary. Going back to work is really scary. So at least...it’s gonna be half-half. I’ll be able to spend still some time with her but also kind of get my feet slowly back in the water at work. So just it worked out perfectly to go back in the summer part-time.”

Stephanie, a therapist, can ease herself back into work early (four days a week starting at ten months) because she holds two positions. Her self-employed clinical position allows her to set her own hours and appointments, seeing as many or as few clients as she likes. In addition, her employed position also allows her to work from home one day per week, providing a great deal of flexibility and supporting more time with her son, Timothy, as she gradually increases back to full-time hours.

In fact, the only disadvantage these mothers offer is not having enough time to really dig into complex projects or certain work tasks because they are only working a few days per week. Cara, a veterinarian, returned to work part-time at ten months by opting to only perform the administrative aspect of her job. Her clinical duties and hours are far more unpredictable, which makes them incompatible with wanting to start back early with a reduced workload. She goes into the office three days a week for eight hours a day and only regrets having to put off some pending work projects until she is back at full-time hours.

Relative to full-time returns, starting back early but part-time helps preserve a considerable amount of maternal caregiving time, while also allowing mothers to access the social, intellectual, and professional benefits of their workplaces. But, what are the implications of this approach for the work and family expectations placed on mothers?

Consequences of Early Gradual Returns

Early gradual returns generally have a neutral effect on mothering and employment expectations. But, if anything, this approach assists mothers' reputations as ideal workers.

At first blush, returning to part-time work two months before leave ends does not seem consistent with intensive mothering. Mothers like Stephanie, Paula, and Cara are all resuming working before they technically *have* to. Even though their part-time arrangement is short, it is enough to make a significant difference in mothers' perception of work-family balance. The early gradual return mothers feel like they are getting a lot more one-on-one time with their babies during the transition back to employment, compared to mothers having to immediately return at full-time hours.

Working part-time after just ten months of leave clearly reduces the absolute number of hours they actually spend with their children during the one year leave period, threatening claims to being a "good" new mother. Nevertheless, the perceived benefits of a more gradual nature of a temporary part-time transition back to work are an acceptable trade-off for returning early. These mothers all took the intensive approach to leave for a full eight months and, at that point, were ready to start engaging in some career activity again. Even if they did not fully "max out" their leave time, they had already enjoyed a lengthy period of primary caregiving, not taking their

leaves “for granted,” in any sense. As a result, it is difficult to argue these mothers were not engaged in intensive motherhood on leave.

The fact that these mothers return to work before they have to does make them more “successful” in living up to ideal worker standards, even if they are returning at reduced hours. Coming back sooner, rather than later, may increase perceptions of mothers’ career and organizational dedication. Rejoining paid employment part-time has a neutral effect on their personal earned income, as they had been receiving leave benefits at fifty-five percent of their full-time salary, anyway. However, early returns, in most cases, support mothers’ attachment to their previous employers, which has been shown to have a positive long-term effect on mothers’ wages (Waldfogel 1998).

For example, Daphne suggests that an early gradual return benefits employers because mothers might be inclined to return to work sooner if they had the option to start back slowly and increase their hours over time. After just over a year of leave, Daphne has started back at her interior design job. She worked approximately two or three days per week for approximately two-and-a-half months before increasing to full-time hours. In hindsight, she says that the option of working two days per week at eight months would have been the ideal transition. She would be getting enough sleep by that point to be able to handle more complex mental tasks, have greater physical and emotional capacity, and would still get to have enough time with her son.

From a career achievement perspective, early gradual returns to paid employment may provide an advantage over full-time returns. Moreover, they give mothers much more one-on-one time with their babies upon first returning to work, increasing their overall sense of work-family balance and satisfaction during the return transition. As with leave attachment, a more

moderate approach that incorporates some intensive mothering and ideal worker behaviours is associated with better return-to-work outcomes, from mothers' perspectives.

Longitudinal Insights

Interviewing mothers both during and after leave has provided important insight into the connections between mothers' jobs, leave, and the emergence of wage and achievement penalties at work. The results strongly suggest that mothers' jobs are pivotal in shaping both their leave and return-to-work experience. Mothers' job context dictates the degree to which they can detach from work over leave, mediating the work-family plans they may have in mind. Mothers' jobs are also important because the resultant degree of career attachment experienced during leave impacts mothers' return-to-work transition.

The experiences of the minimally attached mothers on intensive leaves indicates that near complete detachment may increase the likelihood that mothers will experience increased anxiety around their return, diminished professional confidence, and skill stagnation (which is especially significant for those just beginning their careers).

The experiences of the significantly attached mothers on ideal worker leaves indicates that excessive career attachment during leave prevents mothers from spending enough time with their babies. In hindsight, the mothers with the most demanding senior management positions felt "backed into a corner" when it came to working and would have liked a greater separation between career and leave. In addition, returning early to very demanding jobs at full-time hours accelerates these mothers' experience of work-family conflict. While this approach protects their career standing, demonstrating their commitment and allowing them to earn income again

quickly, they ultimately still sacrifice some work hours and duties because their normal weekly work demands do not give them sufficient family time. Moreover, one of these mothers is reconsidering a promotion, keenly aware that will only increase her, already too heavy, workload.

In contrast, a moderate degree of work-leave integration yields the most benefits, allowing mothers to enjoy both their leave time and exercise their professional interests. For those under more pressure to stay productive on leave, engaging in some limited instances of career activity helps protect their pending promotions but does not negatively encroach upon leave time.

The manner in which mothers return to work (i.e., whether at full-time hours or reduced) is also largely determined by mothers' jobs, which means that the benefits associated with the early gradual return approach are only available to those whose jobs support this type of transition. Returning to part-time hours after a leave of ten months gives mothers the greatest sense of work-family balance after leave, increases their profile as committed "ideal" workers, and secures their attachment to pre-leave employers, which has been shown to benefit wages, long-term (Waldfogel 1998). Supporting mothers' perception of work-family balance is crucial as the mothers returning full-time after a year of leave are more prone to duty concessions because their rigid weekly schedules do not provide enough caregiving time upon their initial return.

Even though there is significant variation in mothers' leave and return experiences, with many distancing themselves from full-time intensive mothering, the general dominance of this ideology remains (Hays 1996). Why does this highly unequal, gendered cultural standard

continue to at least rival, if not completely override, career pressures? The next chapter explores the persistence of intensive mothering during leave and upon mother's transition back to work.

Chapter 7: Reproducing and Challenging Intensive Mothering

Maternity and parental leave unfold underneath the spectre of intensive mothering (Hays 1996). This gender “appropriate” method of motherhood pervades the daily leave experience, regardless of whether mothers take an intensive, ideal worker, or integrated approach, remaining more or less attached to their careers. Likewise, mothers either experience a standard, reduced, early intense, or early gradual return to paid employment. Yet, again, intensive mothering endures and manifests in job-specific hour and duty cut-backs. According to this ideology, “good” mothers focus more on their babies during leave and less on their careers. When there is work-family conflict after leave, they privilege their motherhood responsibilities and make sacrifices at work to achieve balance.

However, the fact that new mothers find, at least, some room to maneuver within this larger cultural ideology, indicates that they construct their leaves in response to *both* the pressures of intensive mothering and ideal worker norms (see also Dow 2016). Resolving the tension they experience between these pressures ultimately produces these varied approaches to leave. Therefore, mothers’ leave experiences all still reflect intensive mothering but to different degrees.

Despite some evidence to the contrary, I find that new mothers are not free to choose their ideal type of leave or their degree of continued work involvement (Hakim 2000). This research supports and builds upon existing evidence that finds mothers’ labour force participation is constrained by their institutional context, financial circumstances, and couples’ attitudes regarding proper gender behaviour (Crompton 2006; Kangas and Rostgaard 2007; McRae 2003).

This chapter begins by delineating the way in which intensive mothering produces mothers' leave behaviour. Chapter one demonstrates, at the surface level, how mothers' daily actions are consistent with intensive mothering (e.g., becoming the primary caregiver and privileging the baby's needs and schedule). I now identify and describe the background forces that lead to those behaviours, pressuring mothers to act accordingly and sanctioning "deviant" conduct (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The remaining sections of this chapter turn to the additional structural forces that reaffirm the practice of intensive mothering, impeding new mothers from doing leave any other way. Intensive mothering is strongly reinforced by the existing Canadian leave policy, most workplace practices, and the migration to a more traditional division of labour after childbirth. These forces make it more likely, than not, that Canadian mothers will experience a more intensive leave. However, there are conditions at each of these levels that can enable mothers to gain some distance from this approach. As a result, only some new mothers ultimately have the opportunity to challenge intensive mothering ideology on leave.

New Mothers Must be Intensive Mothers

On leave, mothers engage in intensive mothering by becoming the primary caregivers to their infants, privileging their needs and schedules, and seeking (often paid) activities and interactions that support optimal growth and development (e.g., music and movement classes). Two common threads linking all of these behaviours are mothers physically being with their babies and spending time together. As a result, mothers and their babies become "a unit," which greatly

restricts mothers' odds of being anything other than an intensive mother throughout that period of time. But, why are they a unit? Why must they, almost literally, be attached to one another?

The ideology of intensive mothering pushes new mothers to achieve and sustain this extreme connection through the socially constructed notion that mothers have a unique or innate ability to better care for babies (Hays 1996). For mothers of infants, this includes the pressure they may feel to breastfeed. In addition, mothers feel pressure to take full advantage of their limited leave time, which intensifies the desire to be together for the duration of that time.

The fact that infant care revolves around feeding means that most new mothers start off as intensive mothers, no matter what. However, feeding eventually becomes more predictable, less frequent, and can be supplemented by bottles (and fathers). When this occurs, according to intensive mothering, the *really* "good" mothers do not separate to pursue their own interests because babies "are only this young once" and need their mothers.

Mothers' Unique Influence and Ability

Most of the mothers in this research express the belief that babies need their mothers, above all else. This belief advances and sustains the idea that the first year of infant care and development is best handled by women (Hays 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987). As a result, near constant attachment becomes an integral part of properly "doing gender" and, by extension, intensive motherhood on leave.

"Right now, this is my job," Jordan explains as she lovingly tends to her daughter, April. Jordan is obviously distracted for the length of our entire interview. She constantly turns away to speak to and check on the baby, jingling a set of colorful plastic toy keys to grab her attention after a snack of pureed fruit fails to interest. At times, she even answers my questions while looking

only at her daughter, raising and exaggerating the tone of her voice in an effort to elicit a smile or laugh (or stifle a simmering wail).

Jordan unequivocally asserts that she wants “to be the one to raise our kids.” Eve describes wanting to have the “influence come from us,” as opposed to other caregivers. Similarly, for Gwen, the purpose of leave is to “build up the family unit.” For all of these intensive leave mothers, leave is the time to set “the foundation you want” for your children.

Even though they use the words “we” and “us,” including their male partners, mothers are the ones at home full-time, providing nearly all of the care. On leave, *mothers* are the ones responsible for “building up the family unit” and “setting the foundation” for their children, not fathers. As a result, leave becomes a lot more than basic baby care and “time off” from work. Leave is their chance to start raising the happiest and healthiest child possible.

Because of the gravity of what leave represents for children’s futures, there is a tremendous amount of emotion attached. Mothers take it hard when they feel like they are not living up to the standards of “good” mothering. Consistent with “doing gender,” mothers on leave are held accountable by others (and themselves) for seemingly failing to give their children the best start (West and Zimmerman 1987). This process is most evident in the “failure” to breastfeed properly.

Feeding babies is, perhaps, the quintessential example of gendered labour. Regardless of the fact that fathers are capable of feeding infants through other means, breastfeeding is the easiest way for new mothers to do their gender, which reinforces the idea that they are “naturally” better suited to the task (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gwen, a senior insurance manager, explains that the bond between mother and child starts off as biological through breastfeeding. It then “becomes engrained” through mothers “always answering” the baby’s

needs (see also Fox 2001). Strongly linking biology to bonding and breastfeeding encourages consistent physical attachment and makes breastfeeding a fundamental part of “good” mothering, as opposed to a choice.

Stella concludes that there is significant societal pressure on mothers to breastfeed because everyone knows that “breast is best.” This pressure comes from other mothers and even health professionals, citing the benefits of antibodies for the baby’s development. Sue, a nurse herself, experienced the sting of this stigma when she switched to a bottle mid-way into her youngest child’s first year:

It feels like someone’s judging you and saying you’re a bad mom. They have no idea where you’ve been or how hard it was or what you’ve gone through or that you want to or that you know all the information. You were an educated person. You understand that it’s better. I feel like they’re...assuming that you don’t know what’s best for your baby and that you...didn’t try hard enough.

The judgment “deviant” mothers incur serves to undermine their sense of competence and efficacy, leading to feelings of “failure.” Many mothers like Stella and Sue do not breastfeed as much as others, either by choice or because they physically cannot, and they pay the price for not fully complying with this amplified standard of good mothering.

Mothers who exclusively breastfeed spend far more time with their babies, responding to their emergent needs and cementing mother and baby as a “unit.” This necessarily restricts their ability to engage in other activities on leave. Audrey, a school counsellor, is determined to constantly make sure that her son, Barney, is “emotionally okay” during this crucial time in his development. The fact that Barney cries when separated from her causes Audrey to greatly limit any other pursuits, other than full-time caregiving.

If he gets hungry and I’m out at the time and isn’t really taking the bottle, then he [partner] ends up having this crying baby for – for a time and then I feel really bad about having [chuckles] left him with this crying baby and I feel bad that [Barney’s] had to be

really unhappy for that time. So then I feel like **I just don't do some of that stuff anymore**...I couldn't be fully present in the space that I was in because I kept thinking about [Barney].

Audrey is constantly “thinking about” her son, as new mothers are supposed to do (Walzer 1998). On one rare occasion, she attended a morning yoga class and grabbed coffee with a friend. She was “battling guilt the whole time” (four or five hours), feeling like she “should” be home. She recognizes now that this was “ridiculous,” seeing as her child was perfectly safe being cared for by his father, but she could not help but feel guilty for being away and shirking her feeding responsibilities.

In contrast, Jeanette, had an integrated leave where she took part in informal professional development activities. However, she did not engage with work as much as she would have liked and this was partly due to her decision to breastfeed “on demand.” Jeanette prioritizes her son, breastfeeding whenever and wherever he wants. She explains that “[first-time moms] don't realize the extent to which your own needs are completely subsumed by another human being...who is the most wonderful person in the world but is also a parasite in the sense that they need you. They're completely vulnerable and you... you do not have any independence of person, especially if you're nursing.”

Likewise, Cara was only minimally attached to her veterinary career for eight months on leave, related to her “need” to breastfeed. She admits that she “would like to go to a work meeting or...there's a free clinic that I used to volunteer at every month that I wanted to volunteer at but I can't 'cause I can't leave him for more than like three hours....That's the one thing that I sometimes am like slightly... not resentful but just slightly wish could be different.”

Cara's “slight wish” that she could be a bit more involved with her career is, again, immediately and repeatedly qualified by her assertion that she would only rarely want to be away

from her baby. For both Jeanette and Cara, feeding is the mother's job. It is improper to "resent" their babies' need, to separate from them, and even more inappropriate to sacrifice breastfeeding for work on leave. It is important to note that these mothers did not intentionally undermine their male partners' child care abilities but, nevertheless, assuming all of the feeding responsibility increases the odds that they become the "experts" on all child care, simply because they, spend more time with the baby.

Celeste, the busy law firm partner who consistently worked throughout leave, deliberately rebels against this gender standard, recognizing its restrictive effect. She breastfed her son when she could but sees "no reason why, because I'm the woman, that I should take on a larger burden of child care. There's obviously the biological necessity of breastfeeding at the beginning but when I go into the office, I pump and he drinks breast milk from a bottle, which I think is fine."

Despite the fact that Celeste is an outlier on this matter, she does not totally eschew the idea that mothers are "biologically" better suited to feeding. She still responds to the pressures of intensive mothering but to a lesser degree than some of the other new moms. Relatively speaking, Celeste created more physical space from her baby on leave through bottle feeding, which allowed her to increase her career attachment and stay on top of her management duties. In addition to breastfeeding, mothers are pressured into taking an intensive approach to leave by the fact that leave is a limited time offer.

Leave is Short and Precious

There is no time to waste. Leave will be over in the blink of an eye. The threat of time scarcity serves to further cement mothers and babies as a physical unit on leave. As a result, not taking full advantage of this time or, worse, using this time for their own interests becomes a marker of maternal deviance (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Constance and Daphne signed up for several weekly mother-baby enrichment activities to aid optimal development (e.g., sign language and swimming classes). Because their babies are only this young once they had better enjoy the time while they can. Constance says that she “should be appreciating it. I know that it’s a special time; that it doesn’t last forever and...I guess that’s why I try and fill our week with things to make sure that [Caleb] is getting the most out of it and I am as well.”

Mothers may never again have this much time to be with their children without competing work demands, which can be a source of hesitation for diverting their time and attention towards work. During leave, Cara was asked to give a talk in another province and initially planned on regular volunteer work:

I could just go there, do the talk and then come back the same day. [Because of breastfeeding] I want to try to not do overnight travel until [after one year] ‘cause I know he’s only going to be little for such a short time....I wanted to keep volunteering [at a clinic] even after he was born...but...I wasn’t able to. And there were times when I was upset about [that] but – but ultimately...this is temporary, he’s only gonna be small once....I should just enjoy him being so little.

It follows that taking full advantage of leave means being together as much as possible but it is useful to examine why mothers are able to be so attached to their babies, in the first place.

Mothers’ “gift” of considerable time off from work is enabled by financial support. The

Canadian leave policy encourages and rewards new mothers for being at home, making it even harder to challenge intensive mothering in a significant way.

Reinforced by Policy

The message embedded within the Canadian policy is that of maternal employment detachment: mothers are to have little to no involvement with paid work during leave. The existing federal policy successfully discourages mothers from official, continued career attachment through a lack of paternity leave, moderate income replacement, restrictions on paid work, and associated legal and financial penalties.

Leave is for Mothers

Outside of Québec, there is no paternity leave provision for fathers. Fathers' only option is to share thirty-five weeks of parental leave. As a result, any parental leave time that fathers take automatically reduces the amount of parental leave available to mothers. Canadian women with partners claiming parental leave are almost five times more likely to return to work within eight months, compared to women whose partners did not take leave (Marshall 2003). On the surface, this should limit intensive mothering because if there is less parental leave available to them, mothers will spend less time at home, out of full-time paid labour. However, sharing parental leave may actually support intensive mothering on leave because parental leave is generally presumed to also be "for" mothers.

While fathers are taking more leave, overall, their participation rates are nowhere near as high as mothers, especially where no formal paternity leave option exists (Beaupré and Cloutier

2007; Beaujot et al. 2013). Prior to leave, it is likely that many Canadian women have already assumed sole ownership of all thirty-five weeks of parental leave. In this sense, parental leave is just more maternity leave and having one bank of weeks to draw from encourages mothers to “make the most” of *all* of that “short” time, only focusing on the baby. Though mothers want their partners to spend more time caregiving, Gwen and Stella both balked at the idea of fathers taking even a month of “my leave.” Eileen adds that paternity leave is a much more desirable policy option “so you’re not having to share it.”

Again, the existing gender wage gap further discourages fathers outside of Québec from taking much, if any, parental leave since higher earning men may only receive fifty-five percent of their usual income through leave benefits while mothers return to (likely) lower paying jobs. Federal financial benefits are an important way in which the existing policy keeps mothers at home on leave.

Leave Means no (Paid) Work

The Canadian policy positions leave and employment as exclusive, sequential activities (see also Gilbert 2008). The sequence is as follows: transition from employment to leave, enjoy a year of leave, and then return to paid work a year later. It is no surprise, then, that the financial benefits parents receive come from the Employment Insurance (EI) program, designed to provide temporary support in a period of unemployment.

The basic federal benefits are not overly generous but are enough for a dual income family to withstand a period where one earner (the mother) is not working for pay. Mothers on leave are not being rewarded for their caregiving labour and many know it. After leave, Stella remains frustrated because “when you look at how much EI is, it’s kind of insulting...you’re

supposedly doing this important job where you're looking after children but you don't get paid very much....obviously doing that job is not as highly respected as doing this [paid] job.”

As per eligibility regulations, the only reason that mothers receive EI benefits during leave is because they were once employed and regularly paid to insure their earned income (Service Canada 2016). Once the maximum leave period has ended, mothers are no longer eligible to receive EI benefits. The assumption is that they will have returned to employment by that time, given that mothers' jobs are legally protected. Providing modest financial payments is a subtle way to discourage maternal employment but the policy also explicitly reinforces unemployment by deducting earned income on leave, and the threat of serious financial and legal penalties for fraudulent activity.

There are no provisions for mothers to be able to earn any income while receiving federal maternity leave payments. Every single dollar earned and reported during maternity leave is deducted, consistent with the assertion that mothers are already receiving unemployment benefits and cannot be unjustly enriched. The message could not be any clearer: mothers on maternity leave are not to be working for pay.

In fairness, the EI program does permit parents to work a little during parental leave without reducing their benefits. While receiving payments, mothers can earn up to \$50 per week or up to twenty-five percent of their weekly benefit amount, whichever is higher (Service Canada 2016). If mothers are receiving the maximum weekly leave benefit of \$537, they could earn a maximum of \$134.25 per week. Considering that the majority of mothers in this study hold graduate degrees and are employed in professional positions with good salaries, they would not be able to work very many hours before hitting this cap. Estimating low, at \$15 an hour, a mother could work just under nine hours per week before maxing out her allowed earnings.

The effect of the work hour restriction is not lost on Paula, who explains the bind new mothers may find themselves in, due to modest EI payments and the cost of child care, should they want to re-engage with their jobs sooner:

I'm getting...less than \$800 a month. My portion of rent is more than that....It's ridiculous but, at the same time, it makes no sense for me to go back to work sooner because where am I gonna put [my daughter]? You know? So you're kind of like okay, well I'll just take this pay cut because there's no point in going back early only then to, what, find a daycare that's gonna charge me double than that to put her in. **Might as well be with my kid myself then, right?....**I think you're only allowed like fifteen hours or twenty hours [of paid work during leave]....If you could only work like fifteen hours and you're working like eight hour days, who's gonna hire me to...work twice a month for them?

Even though finances are tight, it still does not make any sense for Paula to do anything but stay home with her child under the current policy. However, there are some early signs of future reform. A 2016 pilot project, "Working While on Claim," was put in place to assess the effect of increasing the parental leave earned income allotment. Under the pilot, parents working while on parental leave could keep \$0.50 of their benefits for every dollar earned, up to ninety percent of the weekly insurable earnings amount used to calculate their leave benefit (Service Canada 2016). The pilot project does not explore the idea of allowing mothers to earn while receiving maternity leave benefits, meaning that every dollar mothers earn on maternity leave will still be deducted from their benefits.

Entertaining potential leave earning reforms are an important step, particularly given the decline in standard employment, the associated rise in non-standard temporary jobs, and employment and wage insecurity across the socioeconomic spectrum in Canada (Vosko et al. 2003; Kapsalis and Tourigny 2004; Galarneau 2005; Saloniemi and Zeytinoglu 2007; Fuller and Vosko 2008).

Not all parents can cease their particular kind of work for an extended period of time, either for financial reasons or because their latest job may not exist after leave. Marshall (2003) finds that job permanence is negatively associated with early maternal returns to paid work. Only seventy-five percent of mothers returning at four months hold a permanent job, compared to ninety-eight percent of those on leave for a full year. Non-permanent workers in temporary, term, contract, and casual positions are almost five times more likely to return to work in less than nine months (Marshall 2003; see also Findlay and Kohen 2012).

If mothers need to work hours that exceed the leave policy allowance, the only other option is to underreport their leave earnings. This is fraud and penalties include both financial and legal sanctions. The penalties for knowingly misrepresenting information or failing to declare essential information include: paying interest on overpayments, punitive financial penalties for each instance of misrepresentation, and prosecution. Deliberately misusing the EI program, in this manner, can result in a violation that may increase the minimum earnings or number of hours required to be eligible for future benefits (Service Canada 2016).

The current policy limits on earnings provide little incentive for mothers to significantly engage with paid employment while receiving EI. During a financially tight time, the price of working for pay is reduced benefits, which does little to boost the family finances. Alternatively, mothers can work unpaid. Work for free, work for little to no additional pay, or get paid to just spend all of their time with their new baby – which sounds more attractive?

The Normative Power of Policy

Policies can support gender inequality in unpaid labour, reinforcing a particular model of caregiving that places a heavier burden on either the state or family (mother) (Gangl and Ziefle 2015; Cooke 2011; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1996). The content of the overarching federal leave policy is relevant to challenging intensive mothering ideology because welfare state policy has been shown to influence attitudes, belief systems, individual preferences, and their subsequent behaviour (e.g., Gangl and Ziefle 2015; Marshall 2003; but see also Budig et al. 2012).

In Canada, the substantial 2001 policy increase extending parental leave to thirty-five weeks resulted in longer maternal leaves. Among benefit recipients, the median length of leave for Canadian mothers was six months in 2000. This increased to ten months in 2001, following the policy reform, establishing the “normalcy” of a year-long leave (Marshall 2003). However, job variation under the policy means that not all mothers can take longer leaves. The exclusion of self-employed workers from the benefit program (unless they pay into EI) may lead to shorter leaves in such instances (e.g., ideal worker, Celeste). In both 2000 and 2001, the median leave length for self-employed mothers was only one month (Marshall 2003). Similarly, Findlay and Kohen (2012) find that self-employed, non-Québec Canadian mothers take less total leave time (twenty nine weeks) compared to mothers who are not self-employed (forty-eight weeks). They conclude that self-employed mothers take less paid leave, overall, and longer unpaid leave (Findlay and Kohen 2012).

Moreover, Gangl and Ziefle (2015) demonstrate that mothers' work-family preferences can follow policy reforms. They find that the progressive lengthening of German leave policy, prior to 2007, is associated with a significant decline in mothers' subjective commitment to work and long-term absence from full-time employment over time. Family policies, in part, operate as

a “normative anchor,” diffusely communicating cultural care ideals that impact mothers’ subjective work orientation, regardless of their pre-birth employment status (Gangl and Ziefle 2015).

Likewise, Zhang (2007) observes a non-linear association between leave protections and the post childbirth employment rate of new Canadian mothers between the 1980s and early 2000s. The employment rate positively increases when protections increase to a moderate level but decrease when entitlements increase substantially (i.e., the 2001 policy reform). Significant job-protected leave means that mothers can take a full year without fear of losing their position, so many do (Zhang 2007).

Similarly, within this research, the generosity of the Canadian leave policy (compared to the United States) appears to reinforce intensive mothering and taking one full year of leave. Most of those interviewed accept the normative gender cues embedded within the Canadian policy: leave is the time when mothers do not work for pay and, instead, spend as much time with their baby as possible.

The Canadian Grass is Greener...

Mothers on leave express how “grateful” and “lucky” they feel to have access to the generous Canadian leave entitlement. Positive comments about the Canadian policy are almost always buttressed through a comparison to less fortunate mothers in the United States, where job-protected maternity leave is a mere twelve weeks and is unpaid (United States Department of Labor 2013).

The mothers interviewed “couldn’t imagine” returning to work so soon after childbirth and many say they “wouldn’t be able to do it.” These feelings are more pronounced amongst the

mothers taking the most intensive approach to leave. Constance feels she has to “maximize” the Canadian system and “not waste it ‘cause a lot of people...south of the border would be killing themselves to get a year of paid maternity, not just six weeks or whatever they get.” Cara wholeheartedly agrees and feels “so grateful....even if it’s only...\$900.00 every two weeks, it’s like someone’s paying me to stay home and take care of my baby. And I have...this great job that I can just go back to....I can’t even believe how lucky I am.”

Audrey describes the Canadian policy as a sort of societal permission for mothers to “take a year off” from work. To her, there is no judgment for those who take an entire year because she feels that caring for a new baby is institutionally recognized as an “important job” in this country. Cara states that the impression she gets from other Canadians is that it is her “job to take care of the baby during leave.” According to her, parents in Canada are not made to feel like they are “less of a professional for doing that.” Constance agrees and asserts that “people expect that you’re not working while on leave.” They know you are not “just wasting time.”

The generosity mothers perceive is intensified by supplementary financial benefits. Eve took a year of leave and felt “lucky” to receive a top-up from her employer. She compares her situation to that of her mother, who was only entitled to six weeks of leave, and other Canadian mothers who cannot afford to take a full year of leave at a reduced salary. Eve describes leave as a “privilege” and would not want to “appear unappreciative because not everyone gets it.” Likewise, Constance’s receipt of a six month top-up appears to have influenced her decision to extend her leave past one year, rather than sharing any time with her husband. She “wanted it all...’cause I get paid more than he does so [it] made more sense.”

The design of the Canadian policy thoroughly promotes the separation of leave and work for new mothers, offering little incentive to challenge the pressures of intensive mothering. In the

Canadian policy environment, unless self-employed, it usually makes the most “sense” for mothers to completely detach from their jobs, in favour of full-time child care for the duration of leave. However, it is also apparent that maternal job variation plays an important role in how long different mothers can realistically be on leave (or do intensive mothering full-time), and the nature of their continued attachment to work within the same policy context. On the one hand, it is easier to fully commit to an intensive leave when mothers’ jobs support maternal employment detachment or, alternatively, rule out any possibility of continued involvement. On the other hand, excessive job demands and work that can be done part-time from home may make mothers more susceptible to pre-existing ideal worker pressures, making for a less intensive leave.

Not So Fast: Jobs as Mediators

Much of the existing literature emphasizing cultural ideologies understates the impact of jobs in the reproduction of traditional gender divisions (e.g., Hays 1996; Fox 2009). One notable exception is the work of Pedulla and Thébaud (2015), who find that institutional constraints (namely, a lack of workplace family reconciliation policies) are pivotal in young couples’ plans for their future domestic arrangements. Specifically, women’s preferences for egalitarianism are increased when supportive family policies are perceived to be available (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Similarly, my research finds that mothers’ jobs are central to their engagement in or challenges to the practice of intensive mothering immediately following childbirth (see also Dow 2016; Johnston and Swanson 2006). Job contexts determine whether or not mothers have the opportunity to integrate professional activities into leave, in the first place, and their subsequent decisions to reduce hours or cut-back on their duties to increase their caregiving time once leave

ends. Intensive mothering and ideal worker behaviour during these two facets of the leave experience are each encouraged by distinct job characteristics.

Intensive Mothering During and After Leave

At work, intensive mothering during leave is facilitated by the hiring of temporary leave replacements, restrictive union and HR rules, and the absence of senior management responsibilities. These factors effectively reduce the need and opportunity for border blurring and, therefore, mothers' opportunity to take part in career activities on leave.

The common practice of hiring a temporary maternity leave replacement means that mothers have no job to engage with, even if they are so inclined, supporting intensive mothering. The replacement takes over their job duties so mothers rarely have the opportunity to maintain formal paid involvement. Working in health care, medical testing, and public sector community services, Sue, Roberta, and Eve (among others) all had leave replacements. This was one reason for their complete career detachment.

Replacements are not occupation-specific but there are particular jobs where they are necessary and, as a result, leave-work integration becomes nearly non-negotiable. Eileen and Paula, working in the teaching and child care fields, could not stay attached beyond casual social ties for this reason. On leave, their only option was to return to work early and that is less than ideal in teaching or child-centered professions on a yearly schedule. These contexts thrive on consistency, as the children become accustomed to a particular teacher or caregiver, and making changes is disruptive.

Union and HR rules are intended to protect new mothers from on-going work requests so that they are able to enjoy their "time off." Cara explains that the heart of these policies is the

rule that “when people are on leave, do not contact them.” Moreover, when mothers are on leave, they may not be covered by employers’ insurance, creating an unnecessary risk from the organization’s perspective. As a result, these policies are significant obstacles for those wanting to remain formally involved.

Workplace policies support the practical separation of leave by rescinding company equipment/technology which prevents access to the organization’s information. For example, mothers may no longer be able to read official emails. Cara had to turn in her laptop, as per HR rules. Likewise, for security reasons, Gwen was unable to keep her remote web access. Luckily, Gwen had no plans to be attached to work. In contrast, Jeanette did want to stay in the loop and it was a chore to find out if and how she could keep her phone because mothers remaining attached over leave was not a common practice in her government organization. To work around union/HR regulations and protect their career momentum (and future promotions), both Jeanette and Margo subsequently pursued a variety of informal “work-esque” activities.

Professional ethical standards also pose a barrier to on-going job attachment. Audrey, a school counsellor, was unable to do any work on leave unless she accepted a formal part-time position. The successful treatment of her clients requires an on-going rapport and the establishment of trust. To see clients casually or intermittently throughout leave is unacceptable. Similarly, Jordan, a health counsellor, could not remove client files from her office in accordance with privacy guidelines or see clients on occasion while officially “on leave.”

Finally, an absence of on-going job demands helps facilitate intensive mothering. To be clear, I am not arguing that the mothers taking an intensive approach to leave have “easy” jobs. In fact, many are employed in very challenging, busy fields (e.g., health care). However, these mothers do not hold demanding management or supervisory positions, with continued

responsibilities and the associated headaches. Moreover, few engaged in routine border blurring, prior to leave, because there was either no need or they could not work outside of the office.

Only two intensive leave mothers manage other staff: Gwen (insurance) and Paula (child care supervisor). Table 2 (below) summarizes the relationship between management duties and work attachment during leave.

	Intensive leaves	Integrated leaves	Ideal worker leaves	Total
Management duties	2	5	2	9
No management duties	12	6	0	18
Total	14	11	2	N=27

Table 2. Management duties and leave-work attachment

Many of the intensive mothers have reduced to part-time hours. Their intensive mothering behaviour is facilitated by working in “feminine” fields, like health care and education, or in organizations that offer part-time positions to help negotiate mothers’ caregiving responsibilities (Williams 2000). Audrey, Sarah, Eve, and Jordan easily secured an open part-time option or made specific arrangements with supportive (often female) supervisors to cut down on their hours (see also Daverth et al. 2016; Desai and Waite 1991; Houston and Marks 2003).

In contrast, Sue (a nurse) has been unable to find a part-time position despite having mostly female co-workers/superiors and working in a field where maternity leave is very common:

Oh, I’m so lucky in that sense, like, working at [health organization] and that because everybody’s so used to it. They’re like “Oh yeah, congratulations!” you know so, um, whereas I feel like in a lot of other jobs and things like that, you probably wouldn’t have

that same sort of [support]...I was lucky... 'cause so many people go off on leave. Like they expect it. They know it's gonna happen.

Sue would give anything to work part-time but is now resigned to the fact that, if a position does become available, it will be quickly snapped up by someone with more seniority.

Seniority can also be a useful tool to perpetuate intensive mothering after leave because it gives mothers a measure of power and control over their work schedule and tasks. Gwen is delegating less important business trips to her junior staff. Though her job is still demanding, this limits her total weekly work hours and allows her to spend more time with her son now that she is back at work full-time.

Ideal Worker During and After Leave

At work, integrated and ideal worker behaviours are encouraged by high status job characteristics and demands and the nature of the work, itself. Where, how, and when mothers' work is performed means that certain jobs are more easily incorporated into leave than others. Specifically, senior management positions, self-employment, and jobs that are characterized by autonomy, schedule control, and flexibility provide the opportunity for and can increase pressure to blur the borders between work and family during and after leave (Schieman et al. 2006, 2009).

With or without management duties, the mothers engaging in more career activities on leave have higher demand jobs that make evening and weekend work a regular occurrence. Brianne, Celeste, Grace, and Jeanette are in charge of a number of staff members and managing their respective departments includes a number of daily administrative tasks, in addition to their substantive work, increasing their total number of job demands. On leave, these mothers remain

in contact with their teams and employees, at the very least. They need to know what is happening to support their return and, if there are problems, deal with them as soon as they arise.

Self-employment also lends itself to pressing demands that can disrupt intensive mothering on leave. Stephanie is self-employed part-time. This means total responsibility for acquiring, treating, and managing both her clients and enterprise. All of this is on top of her management duties with another health organization. Her leave was integrated, largely because she needed to continue to manage her own clients.

At the start of leave when her son, Timothy, was receiving medical care, Stephanie brought her laptop and cell phone to the hospital and dealt with client issues between feedings. She recounts multiple trips down to her car where she would make private calls before returning to the neo-natal unit. Likewise, she intended to return to work prior to one year of leave and, at ten months, notified her clients that she would be working once more. Before officially starting work, she fielded client calls to schedule new appointments, creating additional work towards the end of her leave.

Similarly, Leigh started her own home-based business during the course of her leave. This represents a significant shift in her employment trajectory, switching from temporary work within a bio-medical research setting to handcrafting, marketing, and selling her own products. For ten months, Leigh experienced an intensive leave: completely focused on her baby with almost no continued professional activity, including social contact. However, at ten months, Leigh began working on her business part-time, starting with research and planning. She continues to do a considerable amount from home but also brings the baby along to meetings with suppliers.

Nora, an academic scientist, details the flexibility, autonomy, and demands characteristic of these kinds of high demand jobs that promote regular border blurring:

As long as the jobs get done, it doesn't really matter when you do them [work tasks] or what order they get done it...I mean, [I'm] supposed to work 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m....but...some days I would just work from home and that was fine. Really as long as the work got done... it's not as if there was a punch card or anything like that...I definitely would do heavier work at times [in the evening at home]. I mean if I'm trying to get a paper submitted or, you know, ethics approvals are due next week and "Oh, bio safety is up for renewal" then you've just – you got to do it. It's got to get done.

For Nora, managing projects, applying for grants, and mentoring students contribute to her increased number of weekly hours. Moreover, the timing of career activities may leave mothers no choice but to integrate work and leave. As academic professionals, Nora and Margo must still make satisfactory progress and continue to build their resumes (e.g., conferences or guest lectures and seminars already scheduled during leave).

In addition, mothers' typical daily work tasks contribute to increased border blurring on leave and ideal worker behaviour. Tasks that can be performed from home greatly increase mothers' opportunity to stay involved both formally and informally (e.g., writing, reading papers, and answering emails). Grace did a bit of side contract work during leave (reading and writing tasks) that was not a mandated obligation but was still part of her official job activities, as manager. It can be particularly difficult to draw a clear line between what is and what is not formal work in autonomous and flexible research-based professions, which helps distance these new mothers from intensive mothering during leave. Grace's experience sits in clear contrast to mothers like Cara, a veterinarian, who could not just decide to treat animals whenever she had the urge.

After leave, the ideal worker pressure on mothers with higher demand professional jobs is further compounded by an absence of reduced hour options, characteristic of more "masculine"

business contexts (Cahusac and Kanji 2014; Stone 2007). Ideal worker mothers, Brianne and Celeste, do not have the option to formally reduce their hours. Likewise, most of the integrated mothers have no option for formal, reduced hour positions. Even if part-time positions were available, management duties rule that out as a return approach because there is too much work to be done. Moreover, the official reduction could be fatal to future advancement aspirations (Webber and Williams 2008; Williams et al. 2013). Table 3 (below) summarizes the relationship between management duties and return type, highlighting the decreased likelihood of reduced return trajectories for these particular mothers (see also Damaske and Frech 2016).

	Standard full-time return	Reduced return		Early intense return	Early gradual return	Total
Management duties	4	Temporary reduction 1	Indefinite reduction 0	2	2	9
No management duties	2	Temporary reduction 4	Indefinite reduction 10	0	2	18
Total	6	15		2	4	N=27

Table 3. Management duties and return type

By investigating mothers’ employment contexts, it becomes apparent that jobs can either facilitate or impede intensive mothering or ideal worker behaviour. Some wanting a completely baby-centered leave have jobs that ensure this will be the case — Audrey and Jordan (counsellors), and Sue (nurse), for instance. However, others wanting to focus more on their babies may not be able to because of on-going work issues they cannot ignore — Violet (construction project manager), Celeste (law firm partner), and Brianne (senior accountant). In contrast, mothers *wanting* to remain involved with work may not get the chance or have to

compromise by taking part in unpaid, informal activities — Eve (community services advisor), and Jeanette (government manager). Whereas others have jobs that can be incorporated into leave, giving mothers a satisfactory balance of both career and family — Danica (municipal government employee), and Andrea (social worker).

These findings support the “Stress of Higher Status Hypothesis,” demonstrating how high demand job resources may exacerbate work-family conflict (Schieman et al. 2006; 2009). On the one hand, job seniority, autonomy, and schedule control are valuable resources that enable new mothers to continue to engage with their careers to positively enhance their leave by increasing border flexibility and permeability. They can also empower mothers to strike a better balance between work and family after leave. On the other hand, these same “resources” and weak borders can maintain ideal worker behaviours on leave to such a degree that mothers lose a significant amount of time with their growing families.

Consequently, these results also support the scholarly work of both Stone (2007) and Blair-Loy (2003), examining the unique work-family problems facing highly educated, professional middle and upper class mothers employed in demanding industries. Every mother in this study experienced some tension between intensive mothering and ideal worker norms on leave, but the conflict was particularly strong for professional/managerial mothers.

The focus of the analysis, thus far, has been on mothers and their jobs. However, as Walzer (1998) and Fox (2009) argue, the (re)production of gender after childbirth is an interactional experience: mothers “do” motherhood at the same time that their male partners are “doing” fatherhood. The next section examines the role that fathers play in the maintenance and disruption of intensive motherhood.

Fathers' Leave (or Lack, Thereof)

Consistent with the existing literature, I find that fathers' are integral to the reproduction of intensive mothering. Fox (2001, 380) asserts that the ability to do intensive mothering requires that husbands consent to their wives shifting the majority of their physical and emotional energy to the baby. While some fathers have a similar attitude towards parenting, others prefer to be less involved and are somewhat irritated at their wives' extreme approach. In fact, intensive mothering, at times, even interferes with fathers' ability to share in caregiving more equally. Mothers engaging in intensive mothering "in spite" of their partners earn more income, using this superior material bargaining position to their advantage (Fox 2001, 380). However, Fox (2001) generally concludes that middle class mothers are better positioned to take part intensive mothering relative to their working class counterparts because of the resources it requires (e.g., withdrawing from paid employment) (see also Dodson 2013; Perry-Jenkins 2003, 2012).

All of the mothers in this study are (at least) middle class and most are in dual-earner relationships so it is not surprising that all participated in (at least) some intensive mothering (see also Fox 2009). Intensive leaves are supported by fathers' minimal leave time. After childbirth, fathers are now the main, if not sole, breadwinners and leave is still presumed to be "for mothers."

When Fathers Take “Time Off”

Sue’s husband took less than five days off from work after their son was born, despite a legal entitlement to substantial parental leave and Sue’s willingness to share (a little):

So in his contract in his union, he’s [utility trade]...you’re allowed to but... yeah, **it’s an unwritten rule that you just don’t**. So...especially when you’re [in a management position]. So yeah, so he can’t. I mean that’s what I’d originally wanted to, is you [moms] get...almost like a month of vacation when you accrue over that year and I was hoping to...take one month less of maternity, take my [accrued] vacation and give my husband that one month so we’d both be home with kids for one month before going back to work, which would be amazing, but he didn’t have an option so...well I guess like theoretically you do, but we don’t.

Sue accepts that her husband “didn’t have the option,” when he actually did. Likewise, he accepts the “unwritten” gender rules of his masculine work context that continue to deter Canadian men from sharing in leave time (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007; Marshall 2008). By not taking any significant time off, Sue’s husband facilitated an intensive leave, and Sue is not alone: the majority of fathers only used accrued vacation days to take between one and three weeks off from work. In fact, some only took advantage of the one or two *days* provided by their employers.

When Fathers Take Leave

Approximately half of the sample of mothers moved away from intensive mothering with integrated or ideal worker leaves. Extending Fox’s (2001) findings, new mothers need their partners’ consent to *challenge* intensive mothering, and those with considerable economic bargaining power are able to translate this into a more equal division of leave labour. In this study, mothers with partners taking more parental leave engage in fewer intensive mothering

behaviours. They remain more involved with their jobs during leave, generally return to work faster, and model a more equal division of domestic labour.

Brianne and Celeste, the ideal worker mothers, earn roughly as much or more than their partners. Their ability to take short leaves, work during these short leaves, and return to full-time paid employment by six months required their partners to take their own substantial period of parental leave (approximately four months), assuming primary responsibility for both child care and the housework.

Prior to leave, Brianne was concerned with “setting the right precedent,” fully aware that her strategic plan to return to work quickly and achieve some semblance of work-family balance, hinged on her partner’s contribution:

Because I know how demanding my job is, [it’s important] that [James] is doing at least fifty percent...I just felt if I was home for the entire year, that [child care and chores] would probably transition more to me...[T]hings change really quick with this job and...then you’re trying to come back, you’re doing a learning curve, you’re trying to figure out how to be at work and how to fill in at home whereas...when I come back [by six months], I know [my partner] is at home and he’s got that part under [control]. I think it will be less stressful to try to get into things and transition and smaller learning curve.

Like Brianne, Celeste and her partner, Marshall, always planned to share leave. They feel it is important that they both have the full leave experience. Marshall provided regular, weekly child care before he took leave, when Celeste only worked part-time. He then assumed the primary care and household responsibilities once his own leave started. Since her son’s birth, Celeste has been determined to reject “gatekeeping” behaviour, suggesting that she possesses superior expertise because of her gender⁸ (Allen and Hawkins 1999; but see also Fox 2009):

⁸ Fox (2009) questions the extent to which mothers actually engage in the practice of gatekeeping based on the existence of only modest empirical evidence.

[My husband] is really competent... and that was one of the things that I was quite intentional about, that I did not want to be... always double checking on [Marshall] when he's doing child care or making him feel like he isn't as capable at changing a diaper or feeding him [baby, Charlie] or entertaining him than I am. I mean, a bit at the beginning, it was hard for me to step back and just let him change the diaper and not correct him but I feel like it pays dividends now that I don't think – I don't feel like... I am the parent and then he kind of... you know, steps in when necessary...and so at the beginning it was an intentional decision to... let go because otherwise... I think my life would be harder.

Both James and Marshall see immense value in being the primary caregiver to their young children (see also Kershaw 2005). As a result, their wives remained involved with their demanding careers on leave and have fully re-engaged with work sooner (for better or worse). The fact that both sets of parents took part in *limited time* intensive parenting supported a more equal division of the domestic labour, overall.

Prior to leave, both Marshall and James had already shared more equally in the household chores. In fact, Brianne's partner did the majority of the housework prior to leave and she outsourced her small remaining share to a cleaning service, consistent with higher earning mothers' ability to "buy out" of routine housework, decreasing the gender gap in unpaid labour (Coltrane 2000; Oropesa 1993). So, the question is: to what extent does caregiving and domestic leave equality depend upon fathers' pre-existing egalitarian attitudes and behaviour? Do you already have to have this type of gender "precedent" to be able to reap the benefits?

My results indicate that having such a pre-established understanding is important but not necessarily essential. However, if gender equality in the household division of labour does not already exist between partners, it must be consciously planned *before* leave. Several mothers retaining the majority of the domestic duties on leave (and whose partners took little "time off") confided that they had hoped their partners would have taken more time off, or taken some leave of their own. During leave, whether or not this was going to happen was still "up in the air" or

needed “to be worked out.” During the follow-up interviews, I returned to this question and rarely did any of these undefined plans materialize. The mothers in these relationships took all of the leave.

Aim Higher but Even Twenty Percent Helps

While it definitely helps to have a partner who already wants and is willing to take several months of leave, half of that amount still makes a big difference to mothers’ labour force attachment after childbirth.

Fathers taking just two months of leave facilitates the early gradual return approach, reducing the length of mothers’ total employment interruption. Cara, Stephanie, and Paula have all returned part-time at ten months because their partners are taking short leaves. Both Stephanie and Cara are earning part-time income (that does not have to be used to pay for daycare), and their partners are receiving top-ups, in addition to leave payments, making the arrangement a viable financial decision.

Having their partners at home is likely part of the reason why the early gradual return mothers do not complain about their continued disproportionate share of the housework and child care after leave (associated with their part-time employment). Because they are taking parental leave, fathers assume these duties on the few days per week that these mothers are working. Being able to take some leave from work and taking primary responsibility for the child care and housework at this time, is essential. The enduring stigma around father’s taking leave is particularly problematic, in this regard, because simply taking more time off while mothers are also home is not enough to reduce intensive mothering and mothers’ domestic workload.

Gwen's husband was nervous about asking to take one month off from his job at the end of "her" leave. He had strongly considered telling his boss and co-workers that it was Gwen's idea to save face. His one month of "family time" amounted to little more than an extended vacation (with some additional child care). Gwen did not return to work while her husband was off and, instead, retained the primary responsibility for the baby and household. Her husband made repairs around the house and they did things together as a family.

In sum, intensive mothering is embedded at multiple levels, which successfully maintains and reproduces this ideology during the leave period. Intensive mothering is encouraged at the cultural level through the pressure exerted on mothers to become a "unit" with their babies, to physically spend as much time together as possible, to maximize every second of leave and give their children the best possible foundation in life. Intensive mothering is supported at the policy level through modest financial benefits, and limits and sanctions on earned income that make maternal employment detachment the most logical course of action for most mothers. At the workplace level, intensive mothering is formally encouraged by practices and policies that separate mothers from on-going professional activity or eliminate any need for their involvement. Such practices include the hiring of replacements, taking back laptops and phones, and restrictive union, HR, and ethical regulations that deter mothers' continued participation. Finally, at the family level, intensive mothering is reproduced when fathers take minimal time off and refrain from exercising their right to substantial parental leave.

While some new mothers are supported in challenge intensive mothering, the existing Canadian institutional policy context and the migration within couples toward traditional gender roles after childbirth greatly reduces the likelihood that most new mothers will gain much distance from this ideology. However, increased participation of fathers in parental leave, where

they assume primary responsibility for the child care and housework, and job-specific resources (e.g., duties that can be performed flexibly from home and autonomy over work tasks) are central in helping mothers devote some time, attention, and effort to professional pursuits on leave. Consequently, only a fraction of mothers presently have the opportunity to “do” leave differently.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The leave period and the impact of mothers' jobs, therein, has been overshadowed in the sociological work-family literature thus far. Existing research has placed a stronger emphasis on understanding cultural influences on the social construction of gender upon the transition to parenthood (Fox 2009; Hays 1996; Walzer 1998), and the concrete negative effects of motherhood on women's labour force attachment and career achievement (Boeckmann et al. 2015; Budig and Hodges 2010; Waldfogel 1998). Where employment is central to the argument, the leave period is not distinctly identified (usually), which obscures its relevance to mothers' work-family trajectories (Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1997; Stone 2007). My contribution to this already rich body of scholarship is to bring together the concepts of intensive mothering and ideal worker norms in the context of leave.

The goal of this study is to shed light on how jobs structure mothers' leave and return-to-work experiences, alongside of gendered cultural norms: how the presence (or relative absence) of ideal worker pressures impacts intensive mothering during leave, a period of time when this ideology should be largely unchallenged (Hays 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987).

The leave period provides important insight into the emergence of inequality in labour force attachment, achievement, and domestic labour for mothers following childbirth. The results of this research demonstrate that work and family cannot be cleanly separated even on leave. New mothers begin to experience the conflict between their professional and caregiving obligations during their leave period, long before they officially return to paid employment. Accordingly, mothers construct their leaves in response to these dual and inherently oppositional work-family pressures (Hays 1996). Mothers' responses to these pressures after childbirth (i.e.,

privileging caregiving or career attachment) impact their overall leave experience and return-to-work transition, including whether or not they reduce their participation in paid labour and shoulder much of the child care and housework.

Overall, intensive mothering dominates the leave experience. However, negotiating the already emerging tension between their career and caregiving responsibilities results in a variety of approaches to leave because some women experience greater pressure to remain involved with their jobs. Ultimately, the particular leave approach mothers take reflects their engagement in either intensive motherhood or ideal worker behaviour. Significant employment detachment throughout leave and reduced employment hours or duties after leave are highly consistent with intensive mothering. In contrast, remaining significantly attached to work throughout leave and returning to work before the one year leave entitlement is exhausted strongly reflects masculine ideal worker norms (e.g., Stone 2007).

Mothers are not simply free to choose the type of leave that they want but they will, nevertheless, experience the consequences of their approach. Intensive mothering and ideal worker leaves are both associated with negative labour force and domestic outcomes. Extreme detachment from work allows work anxieties to grow, reduces mothers' professional confidence, and can stall skill development during leave. Moreover, any subsequent reduction in employment hours to increase caregiving time after leave are associated with an increase in mothers' domestic workload, maintaining the traditional gender division of labour and gender inequality at home.

Extreme attachment to work on leave, followed by early returns to employment greatly diminishes mothers' ability to sufficiently engage in caregiving. It hastens their experience of work-family conflict which encourages career cut-backs to manage the excessive total workload.

In contrast, the controlled integration of leave with manageable professional activities; and gradually returning to work early at part-time hours are promising compromises to easing the tension between career and caregiving after childbirth. Mothers taking these approaches strike a balance between both intensive mothering and ideal worker behaviour. As a result, the integrated approach is generally associated with both personal and professional benefits and, most importantly, viewed positively by mothers. These mothers enjoy sufficient caregiving time but also receive intellectual stimulation, stay in the loop with workplace developments, and protect their career advancement by remaining professionally visible, committed, and productive. The early gradual return mothers are less likely to make additional career concessions to increase their caregiving time, especially compared to those mothers who immediately return to full-time hours after a completely detached leave.

The integrated approach emphasizes the fundamental importance of job variation for mothers' need to remain attached to work throughout leave. The tension between caregiving and career appears strongest for senior management professionals whose employment context is more clearly governed by ideal worker norms, compared to other forms of paid work. This increased pressure contributes to excessive leave-work integration and early intense returns for mothers in the most demanding professional fields, like law and finance. Higher demand professional employment can leave mothers with little choice but to continue working on leave to protect their career standing and future advancement prospects. As a result, the line between working out of desire or under duress in these contexts is blurry, at best.

Demanding and senior management professional jobs facilitate distance from intensive mothering because work-family border blurring is encouraged by high status job demands and resources that characterize this type of work, for better and worse (Schieman et al. 2006; 2009).

Professional jobs characterized by task and schedule autonomy, and work that can be done from home on a part-time or casual basis (e.g., research and writing) are more easily integrated into leave. Furthermore, professional mothers' work attachment is greatly enabled by more egalitarian partnerships, often related to their greater economic bargaining power (Fox 2009).

The variation in mothers' work attachment on leave strongly highlights the importance of fathers' caregiving participation for reducing gender inequality in paid and unpaid work around childbirth. The more time that mothers spend providing child care and performing housework diminishes the time and energy they can devote to other activities on leave. Fathers taking minimal time off is not likely to translate into a lighter domestic burden for mothers. Mothers with a more unequal domestic division at home pursuing additional career interests on leave generally experience a heavier total unpaid workload. In contrast, fathers taking at least two consecutive months of their own parental leave helps sufficiently reduce mothers' domestic responsibilities, supporting them to engage in more career activity on leave and return to paid work in less than a year's time.

In sum, even though intensive mothering is deeply embedded, reinforced by federal and workplace policies/practices and the dominant gender culture, there are still many ways to "do" leave. The variation observed in this research underscores the importance of looking to mothers' job contexts for new theoretical development regarding the concepts of intensive mothering and ideal worker norms, the conflict between cultural notions of "proper" motherhood and professional behaviour, and understanding the emergence of negative labour force outcomes and increased work-family conflict for employed mothers.

Theoretical Significance of the Research

My results demonstrate that job context is an important theoretical component. The cultural conflict between career and caregiving is present during leave but to a much greater extent for mothers' going on leave from particular jobs. Mothers' jobs influence the structure of leave and the return-to-work transition. Accordingly, specific jobs impact how mothers practically "do" intensive mothering (e.g., Garey 1999).

The manner in which many senior professional mothers "do" intensive motherhood is very different from the way in which mothers without management responsibilities engage with intensive mothering. Senior professionals, Brianne and Celeste, participated in limited time intensive mothering (about three months) before incorporating part-time career activities. Hays (1996) does not thoroughly incorporate jobs into her initial analysis of the concept, but it is clear that understanding exactly what intensive motherhood can and does look like is not the same for every mother, and is greatly dependent upon her particular work demands (or lack, thereof) (see also Dow 2016; Johnston and Swanson 2006).

The pivotal role of jobs also suggests the need to expand the ideal worker concept beyond highly paid, demanding senior professional employment contexts (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). Regardless of the job, all of the mothers in this research remained cognizant of their employment identities, obligations, and constraints on leave. Moreover, they actively worked to reconcile these with their simultaneous family goals and demands. Every job has unique expectations for their workers and what it means to be an ideal worker may vary considerably by job. Nevertheless, these job-specific expectations will impact work-family integration and conflict for all employees with caregiving responsibilities. Fully detaching from work over leave can be an

appropriate and, in some cases, the only acceptable approach for teachers and counsellors given the practical design and ethical guidelines of this work. It is important to consider what it means to be an “ideal” worker in different types of employment and how such variable job expectations and constraints are connected to the reproduction (or deconstruction) of dominant gendered cultural parenting expectations.

Furthermore, the positive outcomes associated with the integrated leave and early gradual return approaches reminds us that work and family do not always conflict and diminish psychological and physical well-being, but that exercising *control* is crucial to perceived work-family balance. To move forward theoretically and from a practical policy standpoint, it is important for work-family scholars to continue to work to better understand the circumstances under which intensive motherhood and career co-exist to parents’ benefit. Clearly, maternity and parental leave is an exceptional time when mothers’ employment demands may be significantly reduced, if not eliminated altogether. As such, recommendations for integrating paid employment and leave during this particular time cannot simply be applied to the post-leave period when mothers must manage their usual job demands.

That being said, these results do have very clear policy implications that may be translated into a number of practical applications designed to improve the leave experience for Canadian mothers.

Applied Significance of the Research

The results of this research indicate that mothers' jobs influence their degree of career detachment during leave. Maintaining a moderate degree of attachment has personal (i.e., intellectual) benefits that can enhance mothers' leave experience. Perhaps more importantly, maintaining attachment may protect mothers' advancement prospects by helping them remain professionally visible and productive. Accordingly, these results suggest that efforts designed to enhance mothers' well-being and employment outcomes must occur *before* mothers go on leave. This requires support at both the federal and workplace level which, in turn, demands future research.

My results suggest that there is an important disconnection between existing policies and Canadian mothers' needs. Current policies generally reinforce complete maternal employment detachment for the year immediately following childbirth and, as such, best support full-time maternal caregiving. Yet, many mothers neither want, nor can afford, to sever their career ties to this degree. Under current policies, mothers seeking continued career involvement must either officially return to employment after a brief period of leave, potentially accelerating their experience of work-family conflict, or continue to perform whatever "side" work they can on leave. The latter option increases mothers' total amount of unpaid labour, sustaining this existing gender gap (see also Cooke 2011; Mandel 2011; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1996).

Job variation can either facilitate or impede leave-work integration, and influence whether or not mothers can return to paid employment early or gradually. Workplace policies are, therefore, fundamental to increasing access to leave-work integration. To that end, my results have the immediate potential to inform human resource policy development. Because

employment contexts and the nature of mothers' work varies so significantly, opportunities for on-going integration have to be unique to mothers' organizations and positions. Understanding that mothers may want to remain involved with their jobs during leave, and devising a realistic plan prior to leave, may provide the opportunity for a reasonable degree of leave-work integration to mutually benefit both mothers and employers.

In addition to workplace policies, the evidence also indicates that the overarching federal policy have a role in facilitating alternative leave approaches and increasing gender equality after childbirth. If integrated leaves and early gradual returns are associated with positive outcomes but require fathers' taking leave, what does federal policy have to look like to increase both mothers' job involvement and fathers' caregiving participation?

Future Federal Leave Policy

To support leave-work integration, maternity and parental leave policy has to provide all families with more options for structuring leave. Providing all Canadian fathers with their own non-transferable paid paternity leave may increase the number of fathers becoming primary caregivers during their infants' first year. Cross-national research demonstrates that leave entitlements designed specifically for fathers increases the proportion of fathers taking leave (e.g., Beaujot et al. 2013; Duvander et al. 2010). The lesson to be learned is that the length of the paternity leave period must be longer to increase the amount of time fathers spend on leave, since they may only take the limited amount of paternity leave being offered.

At the same time, federal leave entitlements could provide parents with employment options with variable rates of remuneration (in addition to the usual bank of maternity and parental leave weeks). In line with the special plans offered by the province of Québec, parents

could choose a part-time leave/work option designed to allow both parents to engage in periods of both paid work and caregiving.

The mothers in this research did not generally begin any career activity until three months into leave. Hypothetically, mothers might take the first three months of leave while her partner remains employed full-time. She could receive the standard leave remuneration of fifty-five percent for this period of time (plus an employer top-up, if entitled). Both parents could take leave for the next three months, receiving at least seventy-five percent income replacement to account for both parents being out of paid labour. Alternatively, mothers may be allowed to work part-time for pay during this second stage, while fathers are on full-time leave (or vice versa). The working partner could receive reduced leave benefits because they are earning part-time income.

During a third, three month phase, parents could again choose whether or not both want to remain on leave (with benefits), or if one or both wish to work part-time for pay while receiving reduced leave benefits. The financial feasibility of these options needs to be assessed, but allowing parents to earn income while receiving lower benefits may help offset a higher income replacement rate, should parents choose a period of joint leave. However, this option assumes that fathers will take leave and mothers will not need child care.

Indeed, child care is essential to both existing leave policy and its development. Difficulty securing a highly competitive and expensive child care spot is the most common and frustrating problem mothers voice during the transition back to paid employment. Returning to full-time work, for some mothers, may require first finding a private nanny to accommodate lengthy or unpredictable work hours. For those unable to afford this kind of private care, uncertainty as to whether a spot will open up in time causes great anxiety about whether or not

they can return to full-time hours right away. Similarly, child care is crucial to facilitating an integrated leave when fathers remain employed full-time. Government department manager, Jeanette, could take part in professional development activities because she employed a full-time nanny. Accordingly, progressive leave policy must also include child care provisions in the event that fathers are unwilling or unable to act as the primary caregiver.

One option may be to offer mothers reduced leave benefits with an additional cash benefit that may be used for child care services. A flexible cash benefit that could be used for any preferred caregiver would be beneficial if mothers are unable to find an elusive daycare spot for children under twelve months, or if they would simply be more comfortable using their own family-provided care (e.g., grandparents). Again, the reduction in leave benefits may be used to offset the cost of the child care benefit.

These kinds of theoretical policy possibilities raise a number of important questions, including what other institutional and community supports are necessary? And, what are the consequences of doing leave so differently for families, employers, and welfare states? As such, there is a pressing need for future research examining the implications of national part-time leave/work options.

Future Research

This research suggests that the existing Canadian leave policy does act as a diffuse normative anchor, communicating “proper” gender norms that influence mothers to become the primary caregivers (Gangle and Ziefle 2015). If the current policy contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of intensive mothering through employment detachment, it follows that federal

policy reforms may also be able to advance a more integrated leave approach, or at least provide the option to more mothers.

Professional mothers with on-going senior job demands, concerns, and interests appear more likely remain attached to their jobs over leave. The integrated approach to leave and early gradual returns enables these mothers to simultaneously engage in more equal amounts of career and caregiving. However, caregiving is still mothers' dominant activity on leave. Therefore, the question remains as to the extent to which a formalized integrated leave approach is acceptable within a gender culture that continues to pressure couples to assume more traditional gender roles once becoming parents (Fox 2009).

Moreover, the advantages associated with integrated leaves depends upon mothers' ability to control and limit the kinds of career activities they take part in on leave. I find that the senior management professional mothers lacking control experience far more negative effects, related to their inability to adequately detach from their increased job demands. Given these results, the German policy context provides an excellent opportunity to investigate the effects of a part-time leave option for professional mothers in high demand employment contexts, in particular.

For many years, the German welfare state was, perhaps, best known for extensive three year job-protected leave entitlements that diminished women's labour force attachment and encouraged traditional gender roles following childbirth (Mandel and Semyonov 2006). This approach was decidedly in-egalitarian, especially in contrast to Nordic countries, like Sweden.

Sweden is considered one of the most forward thinking countries on the issue of gender egalitarianism, deliberately engineered through generous family policies (Duvander et al. 2010; Olsen 2007; Sundström and Duvander 2002). Swedish parents have long had access to sixteen

months of job-protected and highly paid leave.⁹ A large proportion of Swedish fathers take, at least, some leave and policies have been successful in increasing their caregiving participation. Since 2002, fathers in Sweden have been entitled to two months of non-transferable paid leave and two weeks of paid “daddy days” to be used immediately after the birth of their child (each with eighty percent income replacement). These benefits are in addition to their full fifty percent “quota” of the sixteen month parental leave (mothers and fathers are, by default, each assigned fifty percent of the time) (Duvander et al. 2010; Sundström and Duvander 2002).

However, the long-term consequences of Sweden’s policies serve as a lesson to other countries looking to “legislate” gender equality in both work and family. Swedish mothers still take considerably more leave time than fathers, impeding efforts toward truly gender-neutral caregiving. Despite very generous benefits designed explicitly for men, Swedish fathers can still “sign over” their portion of the parental leave and, as a result, the majority of mothers take more than half of the leave available (Duvander et al. 2010; Sundström and Duvander 2002).

Subsequent research has also linked such generous welfare state policies, including lengthy paid leaves, to gender segregation in the labour market (Mandel and Semyonov 2006). While these policies have been successful in supporting women’s employment they can also concentrate women in less senior, female-type jobs (Mandel and Semyonov 2006).

Nevertheless, inspired by the gender conscious “Swedish model,” Germany has made several policy adjustments (starting in 2007) to encourage both parents to participate in both leave and employment. Under the new German policy provisions, parents’ jobs are still protected

⁹ Swedish income replacement is eighty percent for the vast majority of leave and three months are remunerated at a lower flat-rate. Those unemployed before birth receive the lower flat-rate benefit amount for the duration of leave. Parents are also entitled to an additional three months of unpaid leave (Olsen 2007).

for a total of three years but they can only receive leave payments for twelve months, and additional contingencies were incorporated in 2015 in an attempt to increase flexibility around the timing of leave. Parents have the option to receive reduced benefits over a period of two years, rather than full benefits for one year, and also work up to thirty hours per week for pay. German parents can receive an additional two months of leave, as long as they are taken by the “other” partner (i.e., “daddy months”). Finally, leave can be taken up until the child’s eighth birthday, with employer permission¹⁰ (Blum and Erler 2015; Gangl and Ziefle 2015). These policies raise the question as to whether concurrent leave-employment options are a better approach to legislating gender quality after childbirth than generous, non-transferable individual entitlements alone.

Like Canada, traditional gender roles after childbirth are still common in Germany, reflected by long-term maternal employment detachment during and after the leave period (Gangl and Ziefle 2015; Grunow et al. 2006, 2012; Ziefle and Gangl 2014). Yet, German mothers with more education and those in high occupational status jobs before birth return to paid labour more quickly after leave (Grunow and Aisenbrey 2015). Lengthy work interruptions are associated with career disruption, including the potential for downward mobility (Aisenbrey et al. 2009). These patterns suggests that options to more thoroughly integrate employment into leave might be attractive, especially to professional German mothers in more senior positions.

Germany also has national policies designed to integrate employment and leave, and protect employees from excessive work demands. The 2015 Elterngeld Plus provision allows

¹⁰ This provision mirrors the Swedish policy, enabling either parent to exercise many of their leave entitlements at any time before children’s eighth birthday (Duvander et al. 2010; Olsen 2007).

parents to officially work for pay for up to thirty hours a week while receiving reduced benefits over two years (Blum and Erler 2015). In addition, The Ministry of Labour has established protections to curb the extent to which work can encroach into non-work time, as a means to protect workers' mental health. As of 2013, managers are prevented from contacting employees by phone or email after hours, unless it is an emergency (Vasagar 2013).

The combination of these two policies suggests that the German context might address some of the work-leave integration problems identified in this Canadian sample. Because the German policy developments are very recent, their effect on gender equality in employment and caregiving is unclear, making new research in this context imperative. German mothers are entitled to continued employment, receive pay for this work, and are also protected from excessive demands. At the same time, the tension between notions of the "good" mother and professional career demands suggests a certain level of ambiguity about the attractiveness and utility of this kind of leave option for German mothers. Even though many may see the value in a two year part-time leave, the gendered cultural pressure to commit to full-time caregiving may render this leave approach unacceptable.

Investigating the experiences of German professional mothers can help to understand the conflict between progressive policies and formidable gendered cultural norms. This knowledge is necessary to inform the development of future Canadian policy to better meet the needs of a wider range of families. In turn, responsive federal policies support mothers' achievement both at work and at home. Nevertheless, this suggested research is, again, concerned with the experiences of professional and managerial mothers. Clearly, this group of mothers has a particular leave experience that cannot be generalized to those in less privileged socioeconomic positions (Dodson 2013; Perry-Jenkins 2012; Swanberg 2005).

The mothers in this Canadian sample are all highly educated and either middle or upper-middle class. They are also in dual-earner relationships, typically with equally high earning (or higher earning) partners. As such, their leave experience reflects the advantages of their class position (Fox 2009). Most took part in paid mother-baby activity classes, obtained paid child care for older children, and many travelled abroad for several weeks during leave. By virtue of having secure or full-time employment, all were at least eligible for (and most received) both basic and supplementary leave benefits which supported intensive mothering. However, outside of Québec, approximately forty percent of employed Canadian mothers do not receive such benefits, largely because they have difficulty satisfying the employment hour threshold of 600 hours (McKay et al. 2016).

To better understand Canadian mothers' leave experiences it is essential that future research also examine what leave is like for lower income and more precariously employed mothers, who are either ineligible for or not receiving benefits. The necessity of financial resources for intensive mothering suggests that leave-work integration may look entirely different, or be far more prevalent, amongst new mothers of lower socioeconomic status. This group may have a unique way of "doing" motherhood on leave, related to their position in the occupational hierarchy, in particular (e.g., service jobs that cannot be done from home). To that end, the socioeconomic homogeneity of my sample is one limitation of my research but this is, at the same time, counterbalanced by the study's methodological strengths.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The longitudinal design of the research is, perhaps, its greatest strength. Interviewing mothers at least two times, during and after leave, allowed me to observe and contextualize the different opportunities and barriers mothers faced under pressure to live up to both the standards of intensive mothering and their career contexts. It also gave me the chance to observe the initial ramifications of mothers' work-family decisions: how near complete detachment *and* excessive attachment to work during leave could reinforce deeply entrenched notions of proper motherhood through employment reductions. Capturing these changes then allowed me to make measured inferences, linking individual mothers' "choices" to larger existing patterns of both labour force and domestic gender inequality.

Despite the advantages of the longitudinal design, one limitation of the study is that I was only able to make observations until mothers' second or third month after leave. My analysis is based upon their initial work-family decisions and cannot capture any subsequent increases or reductions in either employment or caregiving participation. I do not know whether or not mothers reducing to part-time hours will eventually return to a full-time position, or if the ideal worker mothers eventually "opt" out (Stone 2007). Likewise, I cannot ascertain whether or not the duty concessions mothers make after leave end up having a negative impact on their wages or long-term career achievement.

The second fundamental strength of this study is the vast amount of richly detailed data provided by semi-structured interviews, and the level of validity achieved by taking a grounded analytical approach. The primary intent of this study is to understand and communicate the leave experience from mothers' perspectives. A grounded approach allows mothers' accounts of this

incredible life course transition to take centre stage. Mothers' own concepts drive the analysis (though enhanced by existing theoretical frameworks), and their insights stress both the joys and challenges of leave for a more complete picture, overall.

Nevertheless, because gendered parenthood is an interactional experience, many would assert that the decision not to interview fathers is a significant weakness (e.g., Fox 2009; Walzer 1998). Insofar as the goal is to ascertain mothers' experiences, the absence of fathers, I would argue, is not a weakness. However, my results do demonstrate that the extent to which mothers conform to or challenge gendered cultural expectations around leave is strongly related to fathers' leave-taking behaviour. As such, future progress in understanding the manner in which leave is socially constructed requires the incorporation of partners' perspectives.

However valid, my results cannot be generalized beyond the sample of mothers in question. Those interviewed are not a representative cross-section of the larger Canadian population, relatively similar in terms of class, job type, and ethnicity. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status is particularly relevant to my results, given the proportions of immigrant and minority women employed in lower wage and skill jobs. Such compounding experiences of inequality, again, emphasize the importance of future research designed to adequately appreciate the heterogeneity of women's experiences as employed mothers (see also Damaske and Frech 2016).

There is also some sample attrition. While the overall retention rate for follow-up interviews is satisfactory, I was still unable to interview six mothers after leave. As a result, I do not know what kind of leaves these mothers had, whether or not they remained attached to work, and the forces that helped structure their leaves. Likewise, I do not know if they returned to employment early, or made any reduction in weekly work hours or normal duties in favour of

more caregiving time. I am confident that I achieved saturation of the core codes, concepts, and associations, but it is still possible that these mothers' unique experiences may have introduced different avenues of inquiry that would have further developed aspects of my final analysis. Specifically, I was unable to interview the only single mother in the study after her leave, which would have provided important insights into lone mothers' experience of the conflict between work and new motherhood. It also would have expanded my understanding of fathers' roles in supporting work-leave attachment.

The final, big-picture strength of this study is its relevance to both the sociological literature and the practical development of policy to address mothers' pressing needs. I am happy to have had the opportunity to continue building work-family scholarship and theory, hopefully adding a useful new piece that helps to fill an existing gap. But, above all else, I consider myself privileged to have gained mothers' trust. I am grateful to these mothers for permitting me to share in one of their most personal experiences. To me, sociology is at its best when approached with the goal to help enhance social life on the ground, even if in a very limited way. I am proud to have generated results that can inform a viable, long-term scholarly research agenda; one with the potential to address specific obstacles faced by mothers seeking to realize their full potential as both devoted caregivers and highly invested professionals.

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Appendices

Appendix A includes the questions for the interviews conducted while mothers were on leave.

Appendix B includes the questions used in the second (or third) interview after mothers' leaves or upon their return to paid employment.

Appendix A: During Leave Questionnaire

1. Introduction:

How are you finding being a mom so far?

- What are you enjoying the most?
- What has been the hardest part for you?

Are you currently breastfeeding?

- How has that been going?

How has your spouse/partner been doing as a new Dad/Mom?

- Was he/she able to take any time off after the baby was born?

2. Typical Leave Day/Week:

Can you walk me through a typical day or week in your life, right now?

- How much of the baby care do you do?
- Would you like to do less/more?
- How much of the household chores do you do?
- Is this any different than before you had the baby?
- Do you see/talk to your friends much these days?
- Does anyone besides yourself/your partner ever take care of the baby?

Do you take part in any mother-baby activities?

- What do you like most about these activities?
- Any drawbacks or challenges? (e.g., cost, need for transportation, etc.)

- Do you have a preference for these kinds of activities or more flexible outings like going to the park, for a walk, or just playing at home?

Does the baby's schedule/needs structure the day or do you prefer the baby to adapt to what needs to get done?

Do you spend time with or talk to any other new moms? (old friends or new ones)

- Where did you meet?
- What kinds of things do you do together/talk about?

Is there anything specific you feel like you "should" be doing right now?

- Why is this something you "should" do?
- Best/hardest part of being on leave?

Did you have any special plans/projects for leave or ideas about how you would spend your time?

- Any "before baby" activities/interests you want to get back to?

How is your stress level these days?

Have you been able to take any time just for yourself, without the baby?

- What do you like to do?
- How often do you get some alone time?

3. Mothers' Jobs and Leave:

Can you give me an idea of what your job is like? Duties/hours – a normal day?

How do you feel about your job/work right now? (Do you think about it? Do you miss it? Are you at all eager to go back?)

Have you been in contact with work at all? Social visits, phone calls/emails?

- Any involvement with colleagues/your replacement; issues that need your input?

Transition to leave from work – how fast/slow; work to go on leave; more/less workload; more/less stress than usual?

Are you planning on returning to the same job?

- Will you be making any changes when you go back?

Are you doing any paid or unpaid work right now?

- How/when are you able to work?

4. Leave Benefits:

Are you currently receiving paid leave benefits from EI?

- How have you found the process?
- Would you change anything about your EI benefits?

Are you currently receiving any benefits through your job or employer (paid “top-up” or otherwise)?

- How do you feel about the benefits offered through your workplace?
- Is there anything else you think your employer should be doing for moms on leave?

Is your spouse/partner receiving any benefits?

Open: Anything you would like to add?

Appendix B: Post-Leave Questionnaire

1. Introduction:

How is [baby] doing? What's new with him/her?

How are you finding being a mom these days?

- How is it different for you now compared to when you were on leave?
- What are you enjoying most?
- Any difficult or challenging parts?

How has your partner been doing now that you're back to work?

- Has he made any work-family adjustments since we last spoke? Does he plan to?

2. Typical Day/Week:

What is a typical/day week like, these days?

- How has your share of the child care changed?
- How do all of the chores get done?
- How much of a change is it compared to when you were on leave?

3. Leave Reflections:

Did you enjoy being on maternity leave?

- Was there anything you didn't like?

*A few moms I spoke to described maternity leave as their "job right now"; did you find your leave to be a lot of "work"?

- In what ways?

- Is that a good description or would you describe leave in a different way?

Some moms said that they felt pressure to only talk about the good aspects of leave. Did you notice anything like that?

- Why do you think that is?
- Can you be more honest with other moms/people you are close to?

4. Being Back at Work (or not):

How is it being back at work?

- Have there been any adjustments to your job in terms of hours, schedule, or duties, etc.?
- Any particular reason you returned to work when you did?
- Would you have liked to have been on leave longer?

How were you feeling about going back to work at the end of your leave?

- Excited or looking forward to anything in particular?
- Anything you weren't looking forward to?

Tell me about your first few weeks back – what was it like to get back up to speed again?

- Did you immediately start back full-time?

*How involved/tied to your pre-baby job did you feel over leave? (scale of totally detached to totally attached)

- Was that your choice?
- What do you think of the idea of moms “keeping a toe” in the water with work over leave (e.g., attending a monthly meeting)?

- Would you have liked to have been more involved with work during leave than you were?
- Would keeping more work ties have helped your return to work at all?

Has there been a clear separation between your work and family life since you've returned?

- Has there ever been a time when the lines between work and home have "blurred"? (e.g., phone calls or emails outside of work hours)

Have you experienced any conflict between work and family since you've been back –Times when one got in the way or interfered with the other?

- Can you give me an example?
- How did you deal with that?
- How comfortable would you be cutting back on some work duties/hours for family reasons?

Would you describe your life as more "work-family conflict" or "work-family balance" right now (or neither)?

Is there anything you feel like you "should" be doing either at work or at home?

Does your current work-family arrangement allow you to be both the kind of mom and professional that you want to be?

- What would help?

***If not back in paid employment:

Why didn't you return to your job?

How do you feel about the idea of paid employment right now?

Would you like to return to work at some point?

5. Federal and Employer Policy:

Based on your experience, is there anything your employer could do to better help moms going on/returning from leave?

How are things, financially, these days?

Based on your experience, do you have any suggestions for benefits from the federal government?

Open: Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't covered?