

The Gendered Impact of Employer-Provided Work-Family Policies

By

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I explore how employer-provided work-family policies like paid parental leave, flexible scheduling, and remote work, help to challenge and reinforce gender inequality in the workplace and the home. Using in-depth interviews and survey data, I examine how the absence and presence of paid parental leave policies impact gendered leave decisions and whether work-family policies can effectively disrupt outcomes that lead to the reproduction of gender inequality.

The first empirical chapter, “Time to Care: Socioeconomic, Family, and Workplace Factors in Men and Women’s Parental Leave Use” (co-authored with Jungmyung Kim and Leann Tigges), uses original survey data to examine how individual, family, and workplace factors are associated with the length of parental leaves taken by workers in diverse jobs and work contexts, but with the same municipal employer, focusing on gender differences in the factors associated with longer parental leaves. We find significant gender differences in the factors associated with leave duration. For women, socioeconomic status seemed to matter most, while for men, family and workplace context influenced leave length. The results indicate the centrality of financial considerations in parents’ leave decisions, reinforcing the importance of having a dedicated paid parental leave policy.

The second empirical chapter, “Blueprints for Fatherhood: The Impact of Paid Parental Leave Policies on Fathers’ Leave,” draws on interviews with 59 fathers and mothers at the same municipal employer about their parental leave decisions. Comparing leaves taken before and after the implementation of a six week paid parental leave policy, I find that paid parental leave encourages fathers to take substantially longer leaves. While financial considerations are an important component, I argue that the success of paid parental leave is also predicated on the

creation of a new blueprint for fathers' leaves that offers them clarity on how to enact involved fatherhood surrounding the birth of a child. These findings suggest that employer-provided paid parental leave policies can be highly effective at influencing fathers to take longer parental leaves.

In the final empirical chapter, "Paying for Work-Family Balance: Assessing the Role of Family-Friendly Job Amenities in Occupational Segregation and the Wage Gap," I examine whether workers in female-dominated occupations are indeed more likely to have access to family-friendly job amenities and whether access to these job amenities explains a portion of the wage gap between male- and female-dominated occupations. I focus on workers' access to three contemporary family-friendly job amenities: paid leave, remote work, and flexible scheduling. I find that workers in female-dominated jobs are no more likely to have access to family-friendly job amenities than workers in male-dominated jobs, but that access to job amenities does explain a portion of the wage gap between male- and female-dominated occupations. Taken together, these findings suggest that both compensating differentials and devaluation are at work in ways that compound the inequality associated with gendered occupational segregation.



## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

Despite dramatic increases in women's labor force participation and men's involvement in childcare, gender inequalities persist at work and at home. Mothers continue to spend significantly more time caring for children than fathers (Parker and Wang 2013; Sayer et al. 2009, 2004). While these patterns of gender inequality are found across the world, some countries have successfully used work-family policies to mitigate these patterns. Scandinavian countries have designed policies specifically to encourage men's participation at home and women's participation in the labor market; these policies have translated to moderate improvements in men's engagement at home and women's engagement in the labor market (Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Thévenon and Luci 2012). However, in other instances, work-family policies may actually help to reinscribe gendered work and family divides. For instance, when maternity leaves are too long they can have a negative effect on women's labor force participation, career advancement, and the gender wage gap (Datta Gupta, Smith, and Verner 2008; Mandel and Semyonov 2006).

The United States is unique among high-income countries for its lack of work-family policies. The U.S. one of only three countries in the world without paid maternity leave and one of few high-income countries without paid paternity leave (Kauffman 2020). While in many European countries, workers have the right to request flexibility in working arrangements and there are limits on work hours (Adams and Janta 2018), no similar policies exist in the U.S. In the absence of federal policies, the cost of childbearing in the U.S. falls on parents. While government paid parental leave policies represent a socializing of the costs of childbearing, employer-provided paid parental leave policies are an alternative where these costs pseudo-socialized by employers. While a relatively small proportion of workers have had access to

employer-provided work-family, availability of these policies is increasing. The adoption of these policies by employers may represent a shift in understanding of how the cost of child bearing should be distributed.

In this dissertation, which comprises three standalone chapters, I explore how employer-provided work-family policies interrupt and reproduce gender inequality in the workplace and the home in the U.S. In the first two empirical chapters, I focus on parental leaves at a single employer to explore how mothers and fathers navigate work and family responsibilities in the period surrounding the birth of a child. In the final empirical chapter, I zoom out to explore employer-provided work-family policies at a national level, examining the relationship between family-friendly job amenities, occupational gender segregation, and the gender wage gap. By highlighting the processes through which these policies can challenge and reinforce gender differentiation and inequality, my findings contribute to discussions about policy design and implementation as well as understandings of contemporary enactments of fatherhood and motherhood.

### **Employer-Provided Work-Family Policies: Reducing or Reproducing Gender Inequality**

The first two chapters of this dissertation focus on parental leave. How parents navigate balancing work and family after the birth of a child can have a lasting impact on their gender division of labor. There is growing evidence that when fathers take longer parental leaves, they are more involved in childcare as their children grow up (Huerta et al. 2014; Knoester, Petts, and Pragg 2019; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Petts and Knoester 2018; Pragg and Knoester 2017). However, as it stands, the majority of fathers return to work within two weeks of the birth (Harrington et al. 2014; Ogbuanu et al. 2011) while most mothers spend at least two months at

home with their newborns (Klerman, Daley, and Pozniak 2012; Ogbuanu et al. 2011). Mothers' extended time at home with their infants gives them a greater opportunity to learn child-specific cues, routines, and parenting skills. As a result, a manager-helper dynamic often emerges, where fathers rely on mothers for instruction and knowledge about routine infant care (Miller 2007). Because of the gender differentiation in paid and unpaid work that emerges during the transition to parenthood, scholars highlight the need for finding ways to encourage fathers to take longer parental leaves to achieve greater gender equality at the nexus of work and family (Barnes 2015).

One reason for fathers' short leaves may be the lack of paid parental leave in the United States. Only 19 percent of workers in the U.S. have paid parental leave (Pizzella and Beach 2019). Without paid parental leave, workers must use their accrued paid time off or rely on unpaid leave for time taken off of work after the birth of a child. Less than half (47%) of workers who took time off work for parental, family, or medical reasons report receiving their regular pay while on leave, with another 16 percent saying they received a portion of their pay (Horowitz et al. 2017). That leaves 36 percent of workers who took leave with no pay during their leave. However, access to paid parental leave in the U.S. is increasing. Workers in six states and the District of Columbia now have guaranteed paid leave and three other states have passed paid leave laws that will go into effect in the next few years (National Partnership for Women and Families 2021). Additionally, more employers than ever, around 30 percent, now offer their employees paid parental leave (Society for Human Resource Management 2020). In addition to private-sector employers (Kaufman and Petts 2020), federal employees now have 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave (Yoder 2020). Because of the long overdue expansion of paid parental leave policies, it is more important than ever to understand how these policies impact workers' leave decisions and what role they play in facilitating change or reproducing gender

differentiation in the division of work and family responsibilities during the transition to parenthood.

In addition to paid parental leave, workplace policies that provide workers with the ability to work from home and have flexibility in their scheduling also have the potential to support work-family balance and gender equality in the labor market. Over half of workers in the U.S. have a flexible schedule, with just over a third able to change their schedule frequently and, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, one quarter worked from home at least occasionally (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019b). However, in the wake of the massive shift to remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic, employers are expected to increase the availability of work from home policies (Bartik et al. 2020). These policies may help moderate work-family conflict and provide opportunities for fathers to be more involved in daily childcare (Brumley 2018).

The impact that employer-provided work-family policies have on gender inequality depends on whether the policies are utilized, and access to employer-provided work-family policies does not always translate to use. Research on flexible work arrangements (FWAs), like flexible scheduling and remote work, show that more workers have access to these policies than actually use them (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). One of the reasons workers avoid using FWAs may be cultural expectations for workers. The ideal worker norm assumes that ideal workers have limited responsibilities outside of work (Williams 2010). There is ample evidence that breaking with the ideal worker norm can result in negative consequences for workers and a flexibility stigma may come with using some employer-provided work-family policies. Workers who use FWAs or take family leaves have slower wage growth and lower performance reviews, and are perceived as less committed to work (Berdahl and Moon 2013; Coltrane, et. al 2013; Glass 2005; Rogier and Padgett 2004, Vandello, et al. 2013).

The flexibility stigma plays a role in the ongoing motherhood wage penalty (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). While some studies find that the flexibility stigma is greater for men than women (Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al. 2013), others have found no significant difference in the flexibility stigma for men and women (Coltrane, et al. 2013). Either way, for men, who still face pressure to be financial providers (Townsend 2002), using work-family policies may not be worth the risk. Indeed, prior work has found that women tend to be more receptive to new policies and more likely to use them (Danziger and Boots 2008; Kelly, et al. 2010). One result of this may be that while these policies help alleviate work-family conflict for women, the policies may not represent a real threat to the gender order and instead simply work to reinscribe women's role as primary caregivers, even when they are employed.

Studying employer-provided work-family policies offers insights into how work and family intersect in informing the division of labor and the economic inequality that flows from it. It highlights the potential for small-scale employer-provided policies to transform these entrenched patterns. Finally, it provides the opportunity to gain contextualized understandings of how mothers and fathers construct their roles as working parents in a wide range of occupations.

### **Overview of the Empirical Chapters**

This dissertation consists of three papers that explore the relationship between employer-provided work-family policies and gender differentiation and inequality in the workplace and the home. Chapter 2, which was co-authored with Leann Tigges and Jungmyung Kim and published in a special issue of *Community, Work, and Family* focused on translational research, examines how individual, family, and workplace context are related to the duration of men and women's parental leaves in the absence of a formal paid parental leave policy. We pay particular attention to how the relationship between context and leave duration differs for men and women. We draw

on a survey of City of Madison (Wisconsin) employees that includes data on employees' parental leaves as well as a host of individual, family, and workplace variables. It is important to note that the only parents captured by this data are those who returned to work at the City after their leave. Parents who either exited the labor market or chose to find a different job are not represented. Among mothers, those who exit the labor force after the birth of a child have lower levels of educational attainment and are more likely to be Black and Hispanic, on average, compared to those who return to work (Cohany and Sok 2007). This means that the data may overrepresent employees who had more resources prior to the birth of their children.

By examining the leaves of mothers and fathers who work in a wide range of white-collar and blue-collar jobs at a single employer, we have a unique opportunity to identify how men and women respond similarly or differently to factors related to leave-taking while controlling for the employer-policy context. We find that when workers must use their accrued paid time off or take unpaid leave for their parental leaves, women's leave durations are related to their socioeconomic status. While women's leaves were dependent on individual-level markers of privilege and disadvantage, men's leaves were not related to socioeconomic status. Instead, men's leaves were dependent on family and workplace context. These findings offer insights into how gender operates in and through parental leave in the absence of a formal paid parental leave policy.

In Chapter 3, I examine how the implementation of a paid parental leave policy at the City of Madison impacts fathers' leaves. Based on interviews with 30 fathers and 29 mothers in different-sex marriages who have young children, I explore how fathers make decisions about their parental leave arrangements in the absence and presence of paid parental leave. I show how fathers rely on conceptual blueprints to guide their leave decisions. Despite purporting to hold

ideologies of new fatherhood, without a clear alternative blueprint to translate those beliefs into actions, fathers tended to fall back on traditional provider norms and take short leaves. They justified these short leaves by highlighting financial considerations even when they had substantial amounts of accrued paid sick time left that could have been used to cover their pay while they took longer leaves. However, I find that paid parental leave can be highly effective at encouraging fathers to take longer leaves—all of the fathers in my sample who had a child after its implementation took the entire six weeks of paid parental leave available to them. I argue that paid parental leave gave fathers a new blueprint for their leaves that offered a clear pathway to enacting new fatherhood ideals without challenging their role as financial provider. The findings presented in this chapter speak to the ways that workplace culture and policy can impact how men navigate work and family responsibilities after the birth of a child.

The scope of this chapter is limited to married fathers in different-gender relationships. Although the sampling frame did not limit the sample to married fathers, no single fathers are represented in the sample. While the focus on different-sex couples does limit the reach of this work, men in same-gender relationships face a different set of considerations when making decisions about parental leave than men who are in different-gender relationships. As a result, studying these decisions for men in same-gender would require a separate framework and set of questions. Nonetheless, examining how parents in same-gender relationships balance work and family during the transition to parenthood is an important topic for future research.

The final paper, Chapter 4, zooms out to explore how employer-provided policies impact patterns of gender inequality in the U.S. labor market. In this paper, I test two competing theories, compensating differentials and the devaluation perspective, to better understand how family-friendly job amenities are related to occupational segregation and wages. Using the 2017-

2018 American Time Use Survey Leave Module, I examine whether workers in female-dominated occupations are more likely to have access to flexible scheduling, paid family leave, and remote work and whether access to these family-friendly job amenities explains a portion of the wage gap between male- and female-dominated occupations. Further, I consider whether the relationship between wages and job amenities varies by occupational gender composition. I find that, in contrast to the compensating differentials hypothesis, workers in female-dominated jobs are less likely to have family-friendly job amenities and job amenities are associated with higher, not lower wages. Further, the ability to work remotely is not associated with the same wage bonus for workers in female-dominated jobs as it is for workers in male-dominated jobs. Taken together, these findings suggest that both compensating differentials and devaluation are at work in ways that compound the inequality associated with gendered occupational segregation.



## **CHAPTER 2. TIME TO CARE: SOCIOECONOMIC, FAMILY, AND WORKPLACE FACTORS IN MEN AND WOMEN’S PARENTAL LEAVE USE<sup>1</sup>**

In recent years, parental leave has garnered increased attention from policymakers, the media, and the general public. In particular, there has been a growing emphasis on paternity leave because men’s parental leave use, especially leaves of two or more weeks, appears to advance gender equality at home and at work, in part by encouraging greater involvement in childcare (Huerta et al. 2013; Nepomnayschy and Waldfogel 2007; Pragg and Koester 2017). Additional benefits of parental leave for women, men, children, and even employers include improved mental health for mothers, extended breastfeeding, increased parent-infant bonding, and increased worker productivity (Chatterji, Markowitz, and Brooks-Gunn 2013; Dagher, McGovern, and Dowd 2013; Matos and Galinsky 2014; Milkman and Appelbaum 2011). Yet the United States is the only developed nation without guaranteed paid maternity leave and one of only two without paid paternity leave (Raub et al. 2018). In the absence of such policies, American parents take short leaves compared to their European counterparts. The majority of fathers take less than two weeks after the arrival of a new child, and almost half of mothers have returned to work within two months (Harrington et al. 2014; Horowitz, et al. 2017; Klerman et al. 2012; Laughlin 2011).

While a rich literature exists on the factors associated with leave use and duration for women and men in Europe (Duvander 2014; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Ray, Gornick and Schmitt 2010), the lack of consistent parental leave benefits for American workers has made

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<sup>1</sup> Citation: Barcus, Miriam, Leann Tigges, and Jungmyung Kim. 2019. “Time to Care: Socioeconomic, Family, and Workplace Factors in Men and Women’s Parental Leave Use.” *Community, Work and Family* 22(4):443–64.

such research more difficult in the U.S. context. The research that does exist has been limited in a few key ways. Men and women are mostly studied separately, which makes it difficult to assess whether men and women react similarly or differently to the same factors. In addition, few studies have included working-class parents, who may face different constraints in leave-taking than their middle-class counterparts.

The current study attempts to fill these gaps by drawing on data that provides a unique opportunity to explore how different factors are related to leave-taking for middle- and working-class men and women under the same workplace policy. Studying workers under the same workplace policy eliminates variation in employer-provided benefits that are difficult to measure systematically and may facilitate or constrain leave-taking. We examine how individual characteristics, family context, and organizational context are related to the duration of parental leaves, with particular attention to how these differ for men and women. To gain a more nuanced understanding of how gender operates on and through parental leave, we draw on a conceptualization of gender as a multilevel structure (Risman 1998 2004) that intersects with resource-linked socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (Sullivan 2013).

The current study utilizes a survey of municipal employees to identify the factors that are associated with longer parental leave-taking, which is essential for developing policies that maximize the benefits of parental leave for parents and children. The data were collected as part of a collaborative research project with the City of Madison, Wisconsin, to inform development of a paid leave program for municipal employees that is responsive to their needs *and* promotes equal leave-taking by men and women. The research partnership not only produced high quality

data about family and medical leave-taking, but laid the groundwork for the October 2018 passage of a dedicated paid parental leave program for municipal employees.<sup>2</sup>

The paper is organized as follows. First, we lay out our conceptual framework and review the findings from previous research on parental leave use in the United States, followed by details on the leave policies for City of Madison employees. The results section is divided into two parts. We first describe patterns in leave-taking based on different individual, family, and workplace characteristics, and then provide a regression analysis to explore how these factors are independently related to men's and women's leave durations. We conclude by discussing the results and offering some thoughts on how research done in partnership with an employer can help advance initiatives related to work-family balance.

### **Parental Leave in the United States**

The United States is the only developed country that does not provide new mothers with paid leave. The majority of developed nations provide paid leave to fathers as well, either in the form of gender-neutral parental leave or as leave reserved for fathers (Heymann and McNeill 2013). The only national leave policy in the U.S. is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows eligible workers to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave for family or medical reasons, including the birth of a child. However, as a result of the eligibility requirements, a little over 40 percent of private sector workers are ineligible for FMLA leave (Klerman et al. 2012). In the absence of a federal policy, a number of states and employers have adopted paid parental

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<sup>2</sup>. Details of the new policy can be found here: <https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/apm/hr/APM2-49PaidParentalLeavePolicy.pdf>

leave policies of their own.<sup>3</sup> However, only 13 percent of private sector workers and 25 percent of local and state government employees have paid parental leave (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). As a result, the vast majority of parents must use vacation or sick days, if available, to cover as much of their leave as possible, or take unpaid leave.

Almost all employed parents in the U.S. take at least some time off work after the birth of a child. However, most leaves are quite short. About 90 percent of resident fathers take some time off work for the birth or adoption of a child, however their leaves tend to be much shorter than mothers' parental leave, with the vast majority of fathers taking less than two weeks of leave (Harrington et al. 2014; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). But even women's leaves are relatively short. Almost a quarter of new mothers have returned by work after two weeks and around half return within two months (Klerman et al., 2012; Laughlin 2011; Ogbuanu et al. 2011). These statistics also suggest that the majority of working American parents do not take the full 12 weeks of leave protected by FMLA.

Unsurprisingly, one of the more important determinants of longer parental leaves is having access to paid parental leave. Mothers with access to paid parental leave, either through their workplace or through a statewide provision, take longer leaves than those without paid parental leave. In California, statewide paid family leave has doubled the average length of maternity leave, with particularly large effects for disadvantaged women (Guendelman, et al. 2013; Rossin-Slater et al. 2013). For men, the policy is especially effective at increasing parental leave use during the first two weeks after birth (Baum and Ruhm 2016). The California policy

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<sup>3</sup>. States with paid family leave laws in effect include California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, Washington, and Massachusetts. The District of Columbia's law will go into effect in 2020.

also encourages fathers to take leave alone, increasing father-only leave-taking by 50 percent (Bartel et al. 2018).

### **Understanding Differences in Parental Leave**

Because the majority of workers in the United States do not have access to paid family leave policies (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018), parents must either use their paid sick or vacation time or take unpaid leave. As a result, parents' ability to take longer parental leaves is dependent, in part, on individual, family, and workplace resources that either provide them with the opportunity to take paid time off or make it feasible to take unpaid leave. That parental leave-taking may be related to social and economic capital suggests that leave-taking may mirror larger patterns of family inequality: parents with more capital are further advantaged by their ability to take longer leaves and parents with less capital are further disadvantaged by their inability to take long leaves (McLanahan 2004).

In addition to resource constraints, fear of repercussions at work may also limit parental leave durations. Taking a long parental leave may signal a break from the ideal worker norm, which requires prioritizing work over family (Williams 2000). There is agreement among scholars that breaking from the ideal worker norm has negative repercussions for mothers, who face discrimination and a wage penalty (Budig and England 2001; Correll, et al. 2007). Similarly, fathers fear being seen as less committed to their job if they take long parental leaves (McKay and Doucet 2010). Thus, working in a more family-friendly environment may mitigate concerns about repercussions and encourage longer leaves (McKay and Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014).

While individual, family, and workplace factors are important on their own, they do not operate in isolation and their effects on parental leave cannot be understood outside of the

context of gender (Singley and Hynes 2005). Notably, women take much longer leaves than men (Horowitz, et al. 2017) and there are significant differences in leave durations within genders as well (Petts 2018; Petts, Knoester and Li 2018). To understand differences in parental leave use between and among men and women, we draw on the gender perspective (Ferree 2010) and Risman's (1998; 2004) conceptualization of gender as a multilevel structure. The gender perspective places individual gendering activities, like parental leave-taking, in a larger social context and emphasizes how the individual, interactional, and institutional levels are systematically linked (Ferree 2010; Risman 2004). In line with this approach, we do not give primary explanatory power to only the individual or family or workplace, but instead see gender as operating "in, on, with, and through" (Ferree 2010, p. 425) each to inform, constrain, and facilitate parental leave decisions. In the sections below, we discuss specific individual characteristics, family contexts, and workplace factors that prior research from the United States and Canada points to as being critical for understanding differences in leave duration.

### ***Individual characteristics***

Prior research suggests that socioeconomic resources are important for enabling mothers and fathers to take longer leaves (Guendelman et al. 2014; Petts 2018; Petts, Knoester and Li 2018), indicating that leave-taking may follow broader patterns of family inequality (McLanahan 2004). Financial considerations create disparities in the duration of parental leaves. Lower incomes and the experience of financial strain during pregnancy are both associated with shorter leaves for mothers (Guendelman et al. 2014; Petts 2018). Fathers with lower incomes also take shorter leaves than their higher earning counterparts (Petts, Knoester and Li 2018). Educational attainment, which may be indicative of financial and cultural resources, is also related to leave lengths. Mothers with a college degree take longer leaves than those who did not complete

college (Han et al. 2009). Men with higher levels of education and higher prestige jobs are more likely to take any parental leave, and are more likely to take two or more weeks of leave (Nepmnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). Race may also play a role. Black fathers take shorter leaves than white fathers (Pragg and Knoester 2017) and they face more workplace penalties for their leave-taking than White fathers who request leave (Rudman and Mescher 2013).

The relationship between higher levels of economic and cultural capital and longer leaves may indicate a greater likelihood of having paid leave or the ability to afford unpaid leave, both of which are likely to enable longer leaves. This relationship may also suggest that resource-linked socioeconomic and demographic characteristics buffer potential penalties associated with leave-taking, which may facilitate longer leaves.

*Hypothesis 1:* Employees with socioeconomic and demographic characteristics commonly associated with greater financial and cultural resources, such as higher income and educational attainment, and race will take longer parental leaves than employees with less financial and cultural privilege.

### ***Family context***

The decisions parents make about parental leave use are informed by their work-family strategy, which in turn is influenced by financial resources and caregiving demands and often plays out in gendered ways (Singley and Hynes 2005). When explaining their parental leave decisions, interview studies have found that parents often say they did what “made the most sense” financially while still trying to maximize the amount of time one parent (usually the mother) spent at home with the infant (Rehel 2014; Singley and Hynes 2005). As a result, for two-parent families, how employment is shared within the couple may influence parental leave lengths. There is evidence that this is the case. Fathers with non-employed female co-parents are less

likely to take leaves longer than two weeks than fathers with employed co-parents (Nepomynaschy and Waldfogel 2007). Having only one employed parent may mean that there is no perceived need for that parent to spend extended time at home. Men who took short parental leaves reported that they did not stay home longer because they were not needed since their wife was able to remain at home (Rehel 2014). Financial considerations may also play a role. Single-earner households may not have the financial resources to support unpaid leave after accrued paid time off has run out. The inability to financially support a family when the sole earner is on leave may also explain why single mothers take less time off work than their married counterparts (Petts 2018).

*Hypothesis 2:* Being the sole earner in the family, whether due to having a partner who is not employed or due to being a single parent, will be associated with shorter parental leaves.

### ***Workplace factors***

Previous research has shown that workplace context beyond policy availability affects the use of work-family policies, including family-care leaves (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002, 2004; McKay and Doucet 2010). In particular, studies have found that signifiers of family-friendliness are associated with use of work-family policies (McKay and Doucet 2010; Sprung, Toumbeva and Matthews 2014). Women tend to be more supportive of work-family policies than men (Horowitz, et al. 2017). Women's support for such policies may help create a workplace environment that is more family-friendly and that facilitates workers taking longer parental leaves. Indeed, workers whose work-groups were a higher proportion female reported feeling more able to utilize work-family policies (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2004), which suggests that the gender composition of a department may be associated with departmental support for work-



family policy use. Similarly, employees' use of work-family policies has been found to be influenced by their perceptions of supervisor support (McKay and Doucet 2010). Prior research has found that female supervisors are more supportive and accommodating of family demands than male supervisors (Sprung, Toumbeva and Matthews 2014). Taken together, these findings suggest that having a female supervisor may enable parents to feel more comfortable taking longer parental leaves.

*Hypothesis 3:* Employees who work in more family-friendly environments, such as being in a department with a greater ratio of women or having a female supervisor, will take longer parental leaves.

### ***Gender differences in factors associated with parental leave***

As noted above, on average, women take longer parental leaves than men (Horowitz, et al. 2017). Additionally, significant differences in parental leave durations exist among men and among women (Petts 2018; Petts, Knoester and Li 2018). While we could find no U.S. studies that directly compare the drivers of men and women's parental leave durations, prior research provides insights into how different forces may influence leave-taking for men and women to produce gender differences and differences within genders.

Because of the physical realities of child birth and breastfeeding as well as cultural ideals of intensive motherhood that suggest women are uniquely aware of and able to meet their child's needs (Barnes 2015; Blair-Loy 2003; Damaske 2013; Doucet 2006; Hays 1996), we expect mothers to maximize the amount of time they spend at home after the birth or adoption of a child during the three months of FMLA job-protected leave. But because taking long leaves often requires taking unpaid time off, we expect that mothers' ability to take longer parental leaves will be tied to their socioeconomic status. Indeed, prior work has found that mothers who lack

economic and cultural advantages take shorter parental leaves than their more privileged counterparts (Petts 2018).

While images of fatherhood have expanded beyond their economic contribution to the family, fathers' breadwinning role remains highly salient and is often prioritized over involvement in routine care (Townsend 2002). Prior research has found that even fathers who do not hold traditional gendered views of parenting themselves fear repercussions if they break from these cultural expectations by taking long leaves (McKay and Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014; Singley and Hynes 2005). While we do not measure gender ideologies in the current study, the findings from prior research that highlight the importance of cultural expectations for fathers offer insight into which factors may be associated with fathers' leave durations. In particular, previous research points to the importance of a number of family and workplace considerations for men's leaves. As discussed in the family context section above, fathers with a non-employed co-parent take shorter leaves than men whose co-parent is employed (Nepomynaschy and Waldfogel 2007). In qualitative studies, men reported that concern about suffering penalties at work if they took longer parental leaves, fearing that extended leaves would be interpreted as a lack of commitment to the job (McKay and Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014). On the other hand, fathers who saw their workplace as family-friendly and supportive of family leave-taking felt empowered to take longer leaves (McKay and Doucet 2010). Taken together, these findings suggest that fathers' parental leave use is responsive to their family context and sensitive to their workplace environment.

*Hypothesis 4:* Men's leave duration will be more strongly associated with external factors such as family and workplace context, while women's leave duration will be more strongly associated with resource-linked socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

## Data and Methods

### *Context: City of Madison leave policies*

A large and diverse organization, the City of Madison has approximately 2,800 permanent employees across 26 departments that range from transit, water utility, streets and parks divisions, to police and fire departments, human resources, assessors, and attorneys. Employees receive a relatively generous package of paid sick leave and paid vacation and personal time. A full-time worker in his or her first year employed by the City would have a total of 26.5 days of paid time off (not including national holidays), roughly 13 of which are sick leave. Unused sick leave is allowed to carry over from year to year, and accumulated sick leave can be converted to a wage equivalent to pay employer-provided health insurance premiums in retirement. During the years covered in this study (2007-2017), parents could take up to 12 weeks of job-protected FMLA leave within the first year following the child's arrival. Birth mothers qualified for temporary disability insurance, which could be used to cover 65 percent of their salary for the six weeks immediately following the birth. However, wage insurance can only be used after all of the mother's sick leave has been exhausted. Birth mothers who wish to take more than six weeks of parental leave can draw on vacation and personal days or take unpaid leave. Fathers and adoptive parents draw on their paid time off and take unpaid leave once their paid time off has been exhausted. The number of sick days available for parental leave varies based on employees' tenure, their need to use sick time, and their ability to flexibly schedule their work without needing to use sick time. At the time of our study, about fifty percent of employees had at least 6 weeks of accumulated sick time, one-third had less than 2 weeks, and 10 percent had none accrued (meaning they used their sick time almost as soon as they earned it).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. As reported to researchers by City of Madison Human Resources in November, 2017.

### ***Data Collection and Sample***

In collaboration with the City government, we conducted a survey of 2,825 City of Madison employees from June to September 2017. Employees with a work email address received a link to the web survey and those without a work email address received a hardcopy of the survey at their home address. Using standard practices for multiple follow-ups, we were able to achieve a 63% response rate (1,773 completed surveys). The respondents were representative of all employees on key characteristics with the exception of gender and race—women and whites are slightly over represented in the sample (see Appendix A-1). We combined survey responses with administrative personnel data, which allowed us to construct a variety of variables, including the gender composition of departments. In the current study, the sample is restricted to respondents whose youngest child was born or adopted in 2007 or later and who were employed by the City at the time of birth or adoption. Three hundred thirty respondents met these criteria. We excluded an additional 25 respondents due to missing values on one or more variables in the model. Our final sample size is 305.

### ***Parental leave length***

The dependent variable of the study is the number of work days of parental leave taken for the respondent's youngest child. Values range from 0 to 61. Twelve respondents reported taking more than 60 days (12 work weeks) of parental leave, which is beyond FMLA protection. To avoid problems of outliers but ensure we left those taking more than 12 weeks distinct, we coded all leaves longer than 60 as 61.

### ***Predictor variables***

The models include a number of relevant predictor variables, the means of which are shown in Table 1.

### ***Individual Characteristics***

A number of variables capturing socioeconomic status are included in the regression models. *Gender* is a dichotomous variable (female = 1) based on the gender category recorded in the administrative data. Because City of Madison employees are overwhelmingly white and our sample is relatively small, *race* is dichotomous variable where the categories are white and person of color (non-white = 1). We use educational level and annual wage to measure socioeconomic status. *Educational level* is a categorical variable with 1 = less than a Bachelor's degree, 2 = a Bachelor's degree, and 3 = more than Bachelor's degree. The *annual earnings* in the year of birth or adoption of the respondent's youngest child was estimated by the average of the biweekly wages in that year. We used the wage in 2013 for those who gave the birth to their youngest children before 2013, because we only had access to the last five years of wage data. We do not believe this poses a serious problem in the estimation of the regression model as the salaries of public employees tend to increase in a fairly stable and even manner, which was confirmed by our observation of the data at hand. We did not log the wage variable as its distribution was not skewed to the right but normally distributed, which reflects typical wage structures of public organizations.

### ***Family context***

We measure whether there was an *employed co-parent* present right after the birth or adoption with a categorical variable where 1 = nonemployed co-parent and 2 = no co-parent present (the reference category is employed co-parent). Co-parents were defined in the survey as a spouse or partner helping to care for the youngest child at the time of birth.

### ***Workplace factors***

Finally, we have measures of workplace context. *Ratio female* is the ratio of female employees in the respondent's department in the year in which parental leave was used and includes the respondent in the calculation of the ratio. We measure the *supervisor's gender* at the time of parental leave use, as reported by the respondent, with a dichotomous variable (1 = female supervisor).

### ***Controls***

*Age* at time of birth or adoption is coded in years. A dichotomous variable is used to measure whether the leave was taken for the birth or adoption of the respondent's *first child* (1 = yes). A dichotomous variable for *same-gender partnership* (1 = yes) is also included. *Tenure* is a continuous variable and is calculated based on the number of years from the employee's start date to the year of the parental leave. We also control for employment in the *fire department* (1 = yes).<sup>5</sup>

### ***Analytic strategy***

We begin by analyzing the descriptive statistics to get a better understanding of patterns of parental leave use among City employees. In addition to presenting the mean number of days of parental leave for the group as a whole, we also separately analyze the descriptive statistics for men and women. This will provide insight into variations in leave-taking among men and among

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<sup>5</sup> The fire department is a unique organizational context in two important ways. First, full-time firefighters are scheduled for two 24-hour shifts per week. Thus, they can continue to work full-time and still be home five days of the week. Additionally, they have an informal system for trading work days. This system allows firefighters to swap days with their coworkers, with the expectation that they will cover for their coworker in the future. As a result, many firefighters may not have the same need to take official leave as other employees, since they are able to string together many days off without having to take leave

women as well as between men and women. We then use multivariate OLS regression models to predict parental leave duration. The first model does so for the full sample and the second and third models do so for men and for women, respectively. Through these models, we seek to identify which individual, family, and workplace factors are related to parental leave duration and whether and how they differ for men and women. The OLS regression models use clustered-robust standard errors to account for the fact that municipal employees may share similar organizational characteristics, especially when they work in the same department. An advantage of this method is that it allows for not having a strict multi-level data set with the same higher-level characteristics that are shared by lower-level entities (see Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo 2007). We expect that this decision will lead to more robust estimation results to test our research hypotheses, especially regarding the relationship between parental leave length and organizational context.

## **Results**

### *Average lengths of parental leave*

On average, respondents took off 27 work days, or about 5.5 work weeks, after the birth or adoption of a child, but there were significant differences across various characteristics (see Table 2). In this case, the average does not tell the whole story. A majority of parents used less than 20 days of leave, but a substantial number of parents, especially mothers, used more than 60 days of leave (see Figure 1).

Importantly, mothers took almost three times as much time off as fathers, 48.6 work days (about 10 weeks) compared to 18.1 work days (just under 4 weeks). The descriptive data also provide preliminary evidence of race and educational advantages. Whites took one more work week off than people of color, and employees with an advanced degree took nine more work

days than those with a Bachelor's degree and 12 more work days those without a Bachelor's degree. Higher earnings were associated with shorter average leaves, a trend which may be caused by the lower average wages of women, who took longer leaves than men. The regression results will shed more light on this. Family context also appears to matter. Those with an employed co-parent and those taking parental leave for a first child took longer leaves.

Workplace context is associated with leave length in expected ways: fire department members, newer employees, those in overwhelmingly male departments, and those with male supervisors all had shorter parental leaves than their counterparts.

Some of these trends vary by gender. While men of color took two more days off than white men, women of color took 16 fewer days leave than white women (6.5 weeks versus 10 weeks). Similarly, educational attainment did not make much of a difference for men's leaves. However, women with an advanced degree took the longest leaves of any group, 54 work days, compared to 43 days for those without an advanced degree. But some characteristics, especially family context, matter more for men than women. Having an employed co-parent and being a first-time parent were associated with longer leaves for fathers, but not mothers. Different workplace contexts were also associated with notable differences in the average length of leave for men. While the average length of parental leave for women was not linearly related to the ratio of women in the department, men who worked in departments with smaller ratios of female employees took much less time off than those who worked in departments with higher ratios of female employees. Finally, men with a female supervisor took an average of one more week parental leave than men with a male supervisor (for women the difference was less than 3 days). These bivariate relationships are interesting and suggestive. However, correlations among these variables, especially between social status and organizational context, could be responsible for



some of the strong differences we see, especially for men. To better identify which factors drive these trends, the following section discusses the results of the regression analysis predicting length of parental leave.

### ***Regression results***

Regression analysis of the full sample (Table 3) allows us to see to which characteristics explain the differences in leave duration discussed above. After controlling for a host of socioeconomic, family, and workplace characteristics, women were still predicted to take significantly longer parental leaves than men, an average of 28 more work days (over 5 more work weeks). Note that the bivariate difference in men and women's parental leave was 30 work days, suggesting that gender is a major driver of the variation in time off. However, as gender was the only individual characteristic that was significant for the full sample, we do not find support for hypothesis 1, that socioeconomic and demographic characteristics commonly associated with greater financial and cultural resources would result in longer leaves.

We find partial support for hypothesis 2, as those without an employed co-parent took about a week less leave than those whose co-parent was employed. Being a single parent was not significantly related to parental leave duration. Control variables related to family context were also significant. First-time parents took about one week more leave than those who already had children. And parents in same-sex relationships, who we know from the descriptive statistics were all women, took much shorter leaves than those in heterosexual relationships. While some of the control variables measuring workplace characteristics were related to leave lengths, we did not find support for hypothesis 3 since the gender mix of co-workers and the gender of the supervisor did not significantly influence the length of parental leave. Employees in the fire department took shorter leaves compared to respondents in other departments. Workers with

longer tenure took longer leaves, likely because these employees had more opportunities to accumulate paid time off, but they may also have felt more secure about their jobs and worried less about perceptions of co-workers or supervisors.

Although the results from the full sample show that the gender differences in leave lengths cannot be explained by other factors, important gender differences may occur in the influences on leave-taking. In order to understand whether the factors associated with taking longer leaves are similar or different for men and women, we conducted separate regression analyses by gender.

### ***Differences in factors related to men and women's parental leave use***

#### *Individual characteristics*

The findings regarding gender differences in the association between resource-linked socioeconomic and demographic characteristics offer support for the first part of hypothesis 4, that these individual-level factors will be more important for women than for men in terms of parental leave duration. For men, socioeconomic status variables did not significantly affect the length of parental leaves. However, some indicators of social status, especially race and education, have particularly large effects for women. Even after controlling for other individual, family, and workplace factors, women of color still took 12 fewer parental leave days than white women and women with an advanced degree took parental leaves nearly 3 weeks longer than women without a Bachelor's degree.

#### *Family context*

Our models show additional support for hypothesis 4 in the importance of family context for fathers compared with mothers. For men, family context was an important determinant of parental leave duration. Fathers in dual-earner households took leaves 6 days longer than fathers

who were the sole earners. (Being a single parent was also associated with shorter leaves for men, however given that there were only three men in the same who did not have a co-parent helping to raise their child, we urge caution in interpreting this result.) In contrast, women's parental leave length was not dependent on the employment status of their co-parent (although there was much less variation among women than among men in co-parent's employment status).

Looking at the influence of first-time parenting, we see first-time fathers taking nearly 8 days more leave time than "experienced" fathers, while first-time motherhood made no difference for women's leaves. The only family context variable relevant to women's leave-taking was the sex of their partner. Women who were in same-sex relationships took significantly shorter leaves, 20 days less, than women in heterosexual relationships. Because our sample did not contain fathers in same-sex relationships, we could not determine whether this would be the case for gay fathers.

#### *Workplace factors*

Workplace factors had a greater impact on men's parental leave than on women's. For men, longer tenure was associated with longer leaves. For each additional year working for the City, fathers took an extra day of leave. Working in a department with more women also increased the length of paternity but not maternity leaves. A one percent increase in the ratio of female employees was associated with 0.36 days more of men's parental leave. This means that, all else being equal, a man working in a department where 40% of employees were women took about 7 more days parental leave than a man working in a 20% female department. In contrast, no workplace factor significantly influenced the length of maternal leaves. The importance for

workplace factors for men but not for women supports the final part of hypothesis 4, that workplace factors will be more strongly associated with leave duration for men than women.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to identify specific factors that affect the amount of time parents take for parental leave, with particular attention to differences between men and women. Because there is no federal paid parental leave policy in the United States, parents' ability to take paid leave is dependent on the benefits offered by their employer, which vary drastically. This study has the advantage of looking at parental leave for a diverse group of employees of a single employer with supportive leave policies, yet lacking an employer-paid parental leave program. Using data drawn from a single employer allows us to examine what factors are related to leave-taking while controlling for employer-policy context. We identify individual, family, and workplace factors associated with leave-taking, and consider how these factors differ for men and women.

We found large differences in the lengths of men's and women's parental leaves that were largely unexplained by socioeconomic, family, and workplace factors; women's parental leaves remained five weeks longer than men's, after controls. A number of sociological explanations for this gap, including gendered work and family expectations (Ferree 2010; Risman 1998 2004) are implicated in our analysis. Additionally, we are also mindful that the physical reality of childbirth and breastfeeding likely plays a role in women's longer leaves, especially in the context of relatively short leaves that do not extend past three months.

Net of gender, a few family and organizational factors were important. Annual earnings did not increase leave length in any of our models, despite the fact that financial considerations

were common reasons for ending parental leave.<sup>6</sup> However, the aspects of family context that were related to leave duration have important financial implications. Members of dual-earner couples took longer leaves, perhaps because of greater financial resources allowing for unpaid leave once paid time off is exhausted or because a co-parent who is not employed offers the possibility of infant care that reduces the need for longer leaves by the employed parent. In addition, first-time parents took longer leaves, which could be because their sick leave accounts had not been depleted by the care of other children, allowing them to take more paid time off during parental leave. It could also be that first-time parents felt less prepared to balance caring for an infant with employment. Job tenure, a financial resource in the sense of accumulated paid time off, was associated with longer leaves. Additionally, longer tenures may be associated with greater organizational security and power, or with working in closer proximity to people in more powerful positions, which may serve as a buffer from negative career consequences associated with taking leave (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002).

Given the differences in the lengths of their leaves, we expected the predictors of leave length to differ for women and men. Understanding how factors affect men and women differently is important for building policies that encourage gender equality in leave-taking. Furthermore, identifying variations in parental leave lengths among women and among men uncovers significant inequalities within each group. The separate analyses of paternal and maternal leave-taking reveal that individual-level, resource-linked socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are more strongly associated with leave lengths for women, while for men, family and workplace context seem to matter the most.

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<sup>6</sup>In analysis of the survey data not shown here, 6 in 10 parents said financial considerations figured in their decision about when to return to work. Results available upon request.

Both educational attainment and race were associated with the duration of women's leaves. Women with an advanced degree took longer leaves than those without a college degree and white women took longer leaves than women of color. Educational attainment and race are indicative of some women's access to resources that support longer leaves. Because women have to use unpaid leave once their sick and vacation time is exhausted, the fact that women with an advanced degree take longer leaves may have to do with financial advantages associated with being part of a highly educated couple (Han, et al. 2009). In addition, less educated women and women of color may be less likely to work close to organizationally powerful employees, which would make them more vulnerable to the repercussions of leave-taking (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). Women of color also suffer larger motherhood wage penalties than white women (Glauber 2007); thus, the career consequences of longer parental leaves may indeed be greater for women of color than white women. Overall, this provides important insights into the way mothers' ability to take longer parental leaves functions to maintain patterns of family inequality (McLanahan 2004) since longer leaves, and the associated benefits for mothers and children (Chatterji, Markowitz, and Brooks-Gunn 2013; Dagher, McGovern, and Dowd 2013; Matos and Galinsky 2014; Appelbaum and Milkman 2011), are largely unavailable to disadvantaged women.

We also find that women in same-gender partnerships took significantly shorter parental leaves than women in heterosexual partnerships. This may reflect a more egalitarian division of childcare in same-gender couples (Biblarz and Savci 2010; Umberson, Thorneer, and Lodge 2015). If lesbian couples share leave more equally in order to more equally divide childcare responsibilities, then the leave taken by lesbian mothers may be shorter than the leave of heterosexual mothers who carry the greater share of childcare responsibilities. Alternatively, it is

possible that the lesbian mothers in the sample were less likely to be birth mothers than the heterosexual women, removing the need to take longer leaves for physical recovery and to manage breastfeeding. Our understanding of how same-gender couples manage work-family demands would benefit from research on this topic.

In our analysis of men's parental leaves, we found that individual-level factors like socioeconomic status were not related to leave duration. Instead, family and workplace context factors emerged as important. Men whose co-parent who was not employed took shorter leaves than men in dual-earner relationships. Being the sole source of income for the family may reflect financial constraints or more traditional gender ideologies related to parental roles (Rehel 2014). Because our data on leave-taking were retrospective, we could not assess the finances of the family or gender ideologies of these fathers at the time of leave. Tenure and first-time parenthood also were associated with longer leaves for men. As discussed above, for both of these factors, the amount of accumulated paid time off likely enables longer leaves.

Another aspect of workplace context that positively influenced men's leave-taking was the share of departmental coworkers who were women. Previous research found that fathers reported hearing negative comments from coworkers and supervisors about men who take long parental leaves (Rehel 2014). It may be that men perceived women as being more understanding of longer parental leaves (or perhaps female coworkers actively encourage longer leaves) and as a result did not fear repercussions of breaking with the ideal worker norm and taking longer leaves (McKay and Doucet 2010). It is also possible that working with more women means that longer leaves were seen as more of a norm. In either case, the effect of the gender ratio variable suggests that workplace culture is important for encouraging longer paternity leaves.

This study is evidence of the power of work-family research done in partnership with an end-user. Collaborating with the City of Madison to conduct this research had benefits for the research process, the quality of the data, and the real-world impact of the study. Most available secondary data capture either individual variables or workplace variables. However, to understand how people make work-family decisions, it is crucial to have information about the individual and about the workplace context. The City provided us with historical administrative data, which allowed us to accurately measure various aspects of workplace context over time. For example, we were able to calculate the exact proportion of female employees in each department from 2007 to 2017, a variable that was significant in understanding paternal leaves. The quality of the survey data was also improved by this collaboration. As we designed the research instruments, we had multiple meetings with people in key organizational positions and with The Women's Initiative, an employee committee whose members came from a range of occupations, from human resources professionals to bus drivers. Their feedback and input improved the quality and applicability of our survey questions. When the survey was administered, it was accompanied by a letter from the Mayor of Madison endorsing the survey, which gave it legitimacy and likely increased the response rate. Finally, the results of the larger study, which were presented to the city council, helped bring about a change to the City's parental leave policy. In October, 2018, the City of Madison adopted a new policy that provides six weeks of paid leave after birth or adoption to all regular employees.

While our study benefits from the integration of data on the individual and workplace, it is not without its limits. One limitation is the retrospective nature of the data. We asked parents about parental leaves within the last ten years. While parents likely have strong memories of this important period in their lives, it is possible that they may not remember the exact number of



days or weeks of parental leave. Future work would benefit from collecting information on more recent events. Additionally, we are not able to measure gender or parenting ideology at the time of birth. This means that we lack direct insights into how respondents' views of their role as a parent inform their parental leave-taking. While we believe female ratio in the department and having a female supervisor are good proxies for a family-friendly workplace culture, we are not able to measure the respondents' perceptions of family-friendliness at the time of their leave-taking. Another limitation is that we knew only the respondent's earnings at the time of birth. Having household income at the time would have allowed a better understanding of how a couple's financial situation is related to leave use. For women, it would be helpful to have information on whether they were the birth mothers, as this could help shed light onto the shorter leaves taken by lesbian parents as well as the extent to which gender differences have to do with the physical aspects of childbirth. Finally, while drawing from a single employer has its benefits, it also has drawbacks. Specifically, we are not able to see how different parental leave policies may affect leave-taking.

Despite these limitations, this study has important policy implications. Although the specific factors associated with longer leaves differ for men and women, the significant factors for both groups imply that financial considerations are central to parental leave duration. This suggests that providing paid parental leave may help facilitate more equal parental leave-taking among women, as well as between men and women. Having to rely on accumulated paid sick and vacation time to cover pay for time off to care for a new child is restrictive. If parents exhaust their sick and vacation balances, they must take unpaid leave, which means that employees with access to more financial resources are more able to take longer leaves. For women, this reflects the importance of resource-linked socioeconomic and demographic

characteristics in our analysis. Given the benefits of longer parental leave for women's physical and mental health, the shorter leaves of less privileged mothers could have real consequences. For men, paid parental leave may promote gender equality in leave durations by removing the financial barriers to longer leaves. If men receive pay for their parental leaves, then families will not have to worry about whether they can afford to have the higher-earning parent take extended time off.

The policy adopted by the City of Madison is certainly an important first step. Our research suggests that paid leave is crucial for encouraging men to take longer parental leaves and will likely reduce the gap between men and women's leaves. However, while the provision of paid leave may increase the length of paternity leaves, without changes to workplace culture, a gap between men and women is likely to remain. To change workplace culture, trainings for employees and supervisors about the importance of supporting men's use of family-friendly workplace policies could be beneficial, as could increasing the presence of women in men's work environments. As more employers adopt parental leave policies, it will be important for future research to explore how to effectively encourage paternity leave-taking.

## Tables and Figures

Figure 1. The Distribution of Total Parental Leave Days

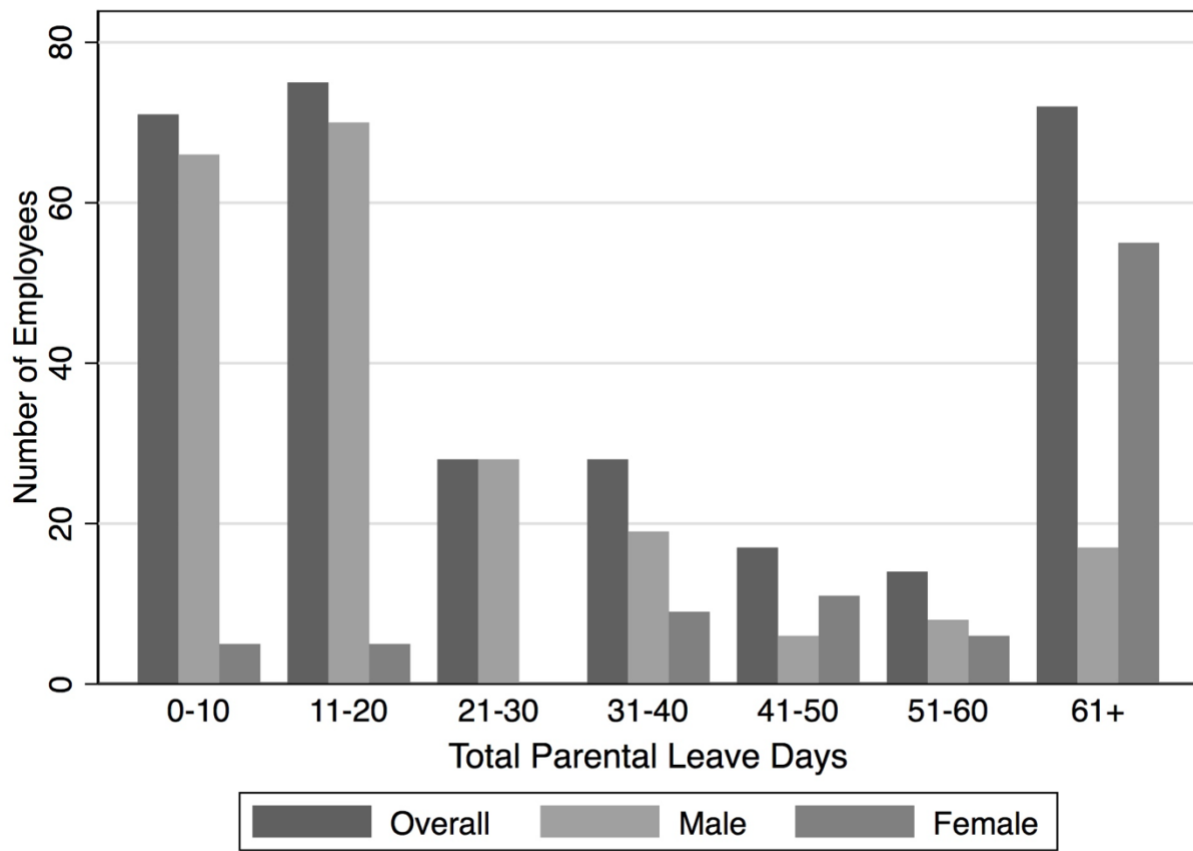


Table 1. Mean, minimum, and maximum values for all variables

Variables	Total (N=305)			Men (N=214)	Women (N=91)
	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Gender (Female=1)	29.8%	0	1		
Leave Days	27.2(22.5)	0	61	18.1(17.4)	48.6(18.0)
<i>Individual Characteristics</i>					
Race (Person of color=1)	12.5%	0	1	14.0%	8.8%
<i>Education</i>					
Less than Bachelor's	29.8%	0	1	34.6%	18.7%
Bachelor's degree	48.0%	0	1	48.1%	47.3%
More than Bachelor's	22.3%	0	1	17.3%	34.1%
Annual wage (Unit: \$1,000)	61.4(16.8)	13.7	108.6	64.0 (15.1)	55.1 (18.8)
<i>Family Context</i>					
<i>Co-parent employment</i>					
Employed co-parent	83.6%	0	1	81.8%	87.9%
Nonemployed co-parent	13.1%	0	1	16.8%	4.4%
No co-parent	3.3%	0	1	1.4%	7.7%
<i>Workplace Factors</i>					
Female share in the dept	29.6%(17.3%)	30.5%	80.0%	25.7%(14.3%)	41.8%(18.3%)
Female supervisor	28.9%	0	1	21.5%	46.2%
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	35.4(5.5)	20	65	35.1 (5.2)	36.0(6.3)
First-born child	27.2%	0	1	25.7%	30.8%
Same-sex couple	4.6%	0	1	0.0%	15.4%
Fire department	0.180	0	1	22.9%	6.6%
Tenure (Unit: Year)	8.0(4.9)	0.9	31.2	7.7 (4.9)	8.7 (5.1)

Table 2. Average leave lengths (in days) by employee characteristics

	Full Sample Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	Women Mean (SD)
<i>Overall</i>	27.2 (22.5)	18.1 (17.4)	48.6 (18.0)
<i>Individual Characteristics</i>			
Race:			
White	27.8 (22.7)	17.8 (17.3)	50.1 (16.7)
Person of color	22.7 (20.3)	19.9 (18.4)	33.5 (24.8)
Education:			
Less than Bachelor	22.6 (20.8)	17.9 (18.3)	43.2 (18.8)
Bachelor	26.3 (22.0)	18.0 (17.6)	46.4 (18.5)
More than Bachelor	35.0 (23.8)	18.6 (15.6)	54.4 (15.7)
Annual wage*:			
1st Quartile (\$49,000 & below)	36.8 (24.0)	23.1 (22.1)	49.2 (18.5)
2nd Quartile (\$49,000-62,000)	22.2 (20.3)	15.5 (14.4)	45.8 (20.5)
3rd Quartile (\$62,000-72,000)	25.6 (21.4)	18.4 (17.4)	50.3 (14.3)
4th Quartile (\$72,000+ )	24.0 (21.6)	17.2 (16.8)	48.4 (18.9)
<i>Family Contexts</i>			
Co-parent employment:			
Employed co-parent	28.7 (22.7)	19.4 (18.2)	48.9 (17.9)
Nonemployed co-parent	15.8 (16.5)	12.0 (11.9)	50.0 (11.5)
No co-parent	34.0 (24.8)	11.3 (6.4)	43.7 (23.3)
<i>Workplace Factors</i>			
Female share*:			
1st Quartile (0-13%)	13.9 (16.9)	11.3 (14.1)	39.3 (21.3)
2nd Quartile (13-34%)	24.7 (21.8)	17.6 (17.0)	55.9 (9.5)
3rd Quartile (34-35%)	30.0 (21.1)	24.0 (19.0)	43.2 (19.9)
4th Quartile (35% +)	39.4 (21.2)	23.1 (17.3)	50.5 (17.7)
Gender of the supervisor:			
Male supervisor	23.8 (21.9)	17.0 (17.4)	47.3 (19.4)
Female supervisor	35.4 (22.0)	21.8 (17.2)	50.1 (16.4)
<i>Controls</i>			
Age:			
18 to 35	25.2 (21.2)	16.7 (16.2)	48.6 (14.7)
36 or older	29.5 (23.8)	19.9 (18.9)	48.6 (21.0)
Birth order:			
First-born	32.5 (21.6)	22.9 (17.3)	51.4 (15.9)
Second-born+	25.2 (22.5)	16.4 (17.2)	47.2 (18.8)
Same-gender couple:			
Same-gender couple	30.9 (25.1)	(no sample)	30.9 (25.1)
Heterosexual couple	27.0 (22.4)	18.1 (17.4)	51.7 (14.4)
Department:			
Fire Department	12.8 (17.4)	9.3 (13.2)	40.8 (22.9)
Not-Fire Department	30.0 (22.3)	20.6 (17.7)	49.2 (17.7)
Tenure*:			
1st Quartile (0-4 years)	19.4 (19.5)	11.8 (11.5)	42.2 (21.1)
2nd Quartile (4-7 years)	28.4 (21.6)	19.2 (16.6)	52.5 (12.3)
3rd Quartile (7-11 years)	31.0 (22.8)	20.6 (18.2)	50.1 (17.5)
4th Quartile (11+ years)	29.7 (24.3)	21.3 (21.2)	48.5 (19.8)

Note: An asterisk(\*) indicates the variable is categorized into quartiles. The 1st quartile has the lowest values of the variable whereas the 4th quartile has the highest values.

Table 3. Regression Results Predicting Total Days of Parental Leave

	Full sample B (SE)	Men B (SE)	Women B (SE)
Female	27.631*** (3.241)		
<i>Individual Characteristics</i>			
Person of color	-1.055 (2.278)	1.282 (1.977)	-12.335** (3.384)
Education			
Bachelor's	-0.112 (1.698)	-1.409 (2.017)	5.217 (4.171)
More than Bachelor's	1.696 (2.947)	-5.632 (4.535)	13.901** (4.019)
Annual wage	-0.078 (0.097)	-0.164 (0.102)	0.046 (0.072)
<i>Family Context</i>			
Employed co-parent			
Nonemployed co-parent	-5.042** (1.787)	-5.941* (2.355)	-3.413 (4.357)
No co-parent	-9.899 (8.416)	-11.068*** (2.299)	-4.530 (10.065)
<i>Workplace Factors</i>			
Female ratio	0.184 (0.104)	0.363** (0.119)	0.040 (0.099)
Female supervisor	1.446 (1.556)	2.084 (1.750)	1.725 (2.845)
<i>Controls</i>			
Age	-0.061 (0.215)	0.252 (0.228)	-0.420 (0.375)
First-born child	5.670* (2.077)	7.784** (2.525)	4.494 (2.442)
Same-sex couple	-20.696*** (4.299)	(Omitted)	-20.402*** (3.872)
Fire department	-4.608* (1.933)	-2.174 (2.233)	-2.231 (3.792)
Tenure	0.825*** (0.212)	0.961** (0.305)	0.438 (0.380)
Intercept	14.286* (6.880)	3.632 (8.206)	51.210*** (10.652)
N	305	214	91
R <sup>2</sup>	0.517	0.253	0.356

Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

## Appendix

### *Appendix A. Survey Respondent Characteristics*

TABLE A-1. Survey Respondent Characteristics

Variables	Survey Respondents	Overall City Employees
Female employee	38.0%	30.1%
Age at the time of survey	44.7	45.5
Employee of color	13.5%	17.5%
Annual wage at the time of survey (Unit: \$1,000)	73.882	71.485
Tenure at the time of survey (Unit: Year)	13.0	12.7
Fire Department	11.7%	13.8%

*Appendix B. Questions Associated with Each Variable*

TABLE B-1. Questions Associated with Each Variable

Variables	Data Source (Survey Question)
Gender	HR data
Age at time of leave	Calculated—The difference between the current age (HR data) and the birth year of youngest child (survey)
Race	HR data
Education	“What is the highest level of education you have completed?”
Annual wage	HR data
Co-parent’s existence	“Was there a co-parent helping you with your youngest child?”
Co-parent’s employment status	“Was this co-parent employed at the time of this child’s birth or adoption?”
First-born child	Inferred from the question “How many children do you have (...)?”
Same-sex couple	“What is your current spouse or partner’s gender?”
Fire Department	HR data
Tenure	HR data
Female Ratio	HR data
Female Supervisor	“Was that supervisor male or female?”



### **CHAPTER 3. BLUEPRINTS FOR FATHERHOOD: THE IMPACT OF PAID PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES ON FATHERS' LEAVES**

Over the past several decades, understandings of fatherhood have undergone dramatic change in the United States (Coltrane 1996; Eggebeen 2002; Milkie and Denny 2014; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). New fatherhood ideals have expanded beyond traditional breadwinning to include fathers' active involvement in their children's daily lives and fathers are expected to develop nurturing relationships with their children and be more equal co-parents with their partners (Gerson 2010; Marsiglio and Roy 2012). In accordance with these new fatherhood ideals, fathers now spend more time actively involved in childcare than ever before (Parker and Wang 2013; Sayer et al. 2009, 2004). However, gender inequality in parental involvement has proved persistent as mothers continue to spend twice as much time as fathers do providing childcare (Parker and Wang 2013). To explain the persistence of the gender division of labor in the face of contemporary ideologies of involved fatherhood, scholars have turned their attention to the transition to parenthood as a significant period for establishing gender differentiation in paid and unpaid work ( Barnes 2015; Gjerdingen and Center 2005; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, and Kamp Dush 2013; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015). Following the birth of a child, most mothers take at least two months off of work (Klerman et al. 2012; Ogbuanu et al. 2011), while the majority of fathers return to work within two weeks (Harrington et al. 2014; Ogbuanu et al. 2011). Mothers' longer leaves provide them with an opportunity to learn their infant's cues and routines (Miller 2007), solidifying their role as primary caregivers while fathers slide into a secondary caregiver role (Allen and Hawkins 1999; Coltrane 1996; Rehel 2014; Wall and Arnold 2007). When fathers do take longer parental leaves, they are more likely to have higher levels of involvement in daily childcare as their

children get older (Huerta et al. 2014; Knoester, Petts, and Pragg 2019; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Petts and Knoester 2018; Pragg and Knoester 2017).

Because of the association between fathers' longer parental leaves and father involvement, paid parental leave has gained the attention of scholars as an important policy intervention. In the United States, where there is no federally mandated paid leave, working parents who lack employer-provided paid leave must use any accumulated paid time off to cover their pay while on leave or they must take unpaid leave. These financial constraints are an important reason for the differences in mothers' and fathers' leave durations. When a couple is only able to forgo one parent's wages after the birth of a child, they tend to opt for the mother to take the longer leave based on the physical needs of the mother and infant (Singley and Hynes 2005). Further, the fact that women earn less, on average, than men means that it often makes financial sense to forgo the mother's lower wages (Kaufman 2020). In the absence of a federal paid parental leave policy, employer-provided paid parental leave policies may help encourage fathers to take longer leaves by removing financial constraints.

The good news is that more employers than ever (around 30 percent) now (provide paid parental leave policies (Society for Human Resource Management 2020). However, the effect of these leave policies on fathers' leave decisions is unknown. Research on the effect of government provided paid parental leave policies on fathers' leaves outside of the United States has found that men's uptake of parental leave is highly dependent on the cultural context and policy design (Geisler and Kreyenfeld 2011; Kaufman and Almqvist 2017; Maume 2015; Miller 2010, 2011; Valarino et al. 2018). In the United States, research has found that men are often hesitant to use work-family policies (Danziger 2010; Kelly et al. 2010). However, this research has largely examined flexible work arrangements, which may be different from parental leave in

that flexibility is often implemented inconsistently and informally (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Borgkvist et al. 2018; Hayman 2009; Kelly and Kalev 2006; Mcnamara et al. 2012).

Additionally, as is the case with the vast majority of work-family research, prior research has focused on workers in white-collar jobs, who may have more power to utilize these policies and face stronger pressure to conform to ideal worker norms than workers in blue-collar jobs.

In this paper, I explore how paid parental leave influences fathers' leaves across a diverse set of occupations. I draw on interviews from fathers employed by the City of Madison in different-gender marriages who had children before and after the implementation of a six-week paid parental leave policy. I compare fathers across three occupational groups: white-collar, blue-collar, and law enforcement. This research design provides a unique opportunity to explore the impact of the policy for fathers in different occupations while holding the employer context constant. I find that paid parental leave policies are highly effective at encouraging fathers to take longer leaves. The leave decisions of the fathers in my sample were informed by a convergence of gender family schemas (Ridgeway 2011) and institutional opportunities and constraints. I argue that paid parental leave (PPL) policies encourage men to take longer parental leaves by laying out blueprints that guide their parental leaves. Without a clear alternative blueprint to guide their leave decisions in accordance with the new fatherhood ideal, fathers fall back on the cultural schemas that emphasize fathers' role as financial provider. PPL policies offer fathers a clear blueprint for enacting new fatherhood ideals without challenging their role as financial provider.

### **Gendered Parenthood**

Gender and parenthood are deeply intertwined. Enactments of fatherhood are informed and constrained by hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005; Doucet 2018; Wall and Arnold 2007).

Considering the role of gender beliefs, or cultural schemas, can help clarify why gender has such a strong hold over the organization of social relations in the family despite new, more egalitarian ideologies. Family gender schemas create a blueprint for organizing family members' behaviors and responses to institutional structures in ways that align with hegemonic gender beliefs (Ridgeway 2011). In other words, the convergence of cultural schemas and institutional structures encourages mothers and fathers to slide into traditional gendered divisions of paid and unpaid labor, even when the individuals themselves do not hold traditional gender beliefs (Raley et al. 2012; Ridgeway 2009). The gender frame is particularly salient in family relations because the traits and abilities associated with each gender are intertwined with the activities central to caregiving and breadwinning (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). As a result, the gender frame can be particularly powerful in organizing behavior within the family. Additionally, family gender schemas likely have a strong influence over the way mothers and fathers navigate the birth of a child. This perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how culture and institutional structures shape the gendered work and family decisions of new parents in light of changing gender ideologies and workplace policies.

### **Contemporary Schemas and Enactments of Fatherhood**

“New fatherhood” ideals have expanded expectations for fathers beyond breadwinning. Good fathers are not only characterized as those who are not only financial providers, but are also actively involved in their children's everyday lives and share childcare responsibilities with their co-parents (Gerson 2010; Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Townsend 2002). These cultural ideals are widely embraced by young men, the majority of whom indicate a desire for egalitarian relationships in which paid and unpaid labor is shared equally between parents (Gerson 2010; Pedulla and Thebaud 2015). Fathers themselves express beliefs that being a “good” father entails

the hands-on care of their children and building emotional bonds and providing nurturance (Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Taylor et al. 2013; Townsend 2002). Further, many fathers hold egalitarian attitudes towards sharing caregiving responsibilities and seek to be equal co-parents with their wives and partners (Kaufman 2013).

While the new fatherhood ideal has redefined fatherhood to include hands-on childcare and active co-parenting, it has not replaced expectations for fathers to be financial providers. Breadwinning remains central to understandings of fatherhood (Killewald 2016; Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Townsend 2002). In practice, fathers have increased their involvement in their children's daily lives, but these new fatherhood ideals have not led to a complete transformation in the way that heterosexual couples share responsibility for childcare. Mothers continue to be the primary caregivers and spend significantly more time than fathers providing childcare (Parker and Wang 2013; Raley, et al. 2012). Fathers' time with their children also looks different from mothers' time in terms of the types of childcare activities they engage in. Fathers spend a disproportionate amount of their total time with their children in non-routine play and educational activities (Raley, et al. 2012). The gendered landscape of parents' time with their children indicates an ongoing arrangement where mothers are primary caregivers, responsible for daily care and routine childcare tasks, and fathers remain secondary caregivers.

The gender division of labor gets exacerbated for heterosexual couples during the transition to parenthood. Prior to parenthood, men and women share paid and unpaid labor relatively equally (Yavorsky et al. 2015). However, after the transition to parenthood, women tend to decrease their paid work hours and increase their unpaid work (even excluding childcare), while men increase their hours of paid work and decrease their contribution to housework (Bianchi et al. 2000; Gerson and Jacobs 2004; Gjerdingen and Center 2005; Kotila, et

al. 2013; Yavorsky, et al. 2015). To explain this shift in the division of labor, some scholars point to the way the transition to parenthood is structured differently for mothers compared to fathers. While neither men nor women are guaranteed access to paid parental leave in the U.S., women take more time off work upon the birth of a child than men (Klerman, et al. 2012; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). As new parents navigate balancing work and family, a manager-helper dynamic often emerges. Scholars see the time parents spend with their newborns to be crucial for developing child-specific skills by learning infants' cues and routines (Miller 2007). Mothers' longer parental leave may position them to take primary responsibility for child care while fathers act as helpers who assist when asked and need instruction from mothers (Allen and Hawkins 1999; Coltrane 1996; Rehel 2014).

There is a growing body of evidence that taking longer parental leaves is associated with high levels of father involvement even after the first year (Haas and Hwang 2008; Huerta, et al. 2014; Knoester, et al. 2019; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Pragg and Knoester 2017). If fathers are able to spend more time at home with their babies in the first year and are more involved in daily caregiving, they may develop more child-specific parenting skills, as well as have greater confidence in their own caregiving. Additionally, this knowledge and confidence may help fathers develop a sense of responsibility, a key aspect of parental involvement and one where a particularly large gender gap remains (Pleck 2010). Fathers' access to parental leave may bring a more equal division of labor by facilitating the development of parental responsibility and parenting skills. As a result, when the months after a child is born are structured similarly for mothers and fathers, a more equal gender division of labor may naturalize over time (Rehel 2014).

### **Institutional Opportunities and Constraints for Involved Fatherhood**

One reason for the gap between new father ideals and levels of father involvement may be the ways institutional opportunities and constraints interact with new and old fatherhood norms. Perhaps the most important institutional constraint regarding parental leave in the U.S. is the policy context. The vast majority of new parents do not have access to paid parental leave in the U.S., which is the only developed nation without guaranteed paid maternity leave and one of two without paid paternity leave. The Family and Medical Leave Act provides 12 weeks of job protection to parents who take time off after the birth or adoption of a child. But the lack of pay means that doing so usually comes at a literal cost. As a result, when deciding how to share parental leave, parents may feel constrained financially. When the number of weeks a couple can afford to forgo their full household income is limited, the mother often takes a significantly longer leave than the father (Singley and Hynes 2005). One reason for this may be physical considerations. Mothers who give birth to their children have a physical recovery of their own after childbirth. Additionally, if the mother wishes to breastfeed, being home with the newborn instead of returning to work immediately is important for establishing the breastfeeding relationship and keeping supply high (Grandahl, Stern, and Funkquist 2020). Additionally, when explaining their parental leave decisions, parents often say they did what “made the most sense” financially while still trying to maximize the amount of time one parent (usually the mother) spent at home with the infant (Rehel 2014; Singley and Hynes 2005). In the absence of paid leave, parents may face constraints that lead them to fall back on cultural schemas that position fathers as the financial providers and mothers as primary caregivers.

Workplaces also have their own set of institutionalized gender practices and meanings (Martin 2003) that influence the way parents navigate leave. Workplace policies and practices are often built around the ideal worker norm, which assumes the ideal worker has limited

responsibilities outside of work (Williams 2010). Taking an extended parental leave may indicate a break from this norm, which may in turn result in lost promotions (Brumley 2018). Mothers suffer from discrimination and wage penalties regardless of their leave-taking (Budig and England 2001; Correll et al. 2007) and fear of workplace repercussions may also deter otherwise eager fathers from taking longer leaves. Indeed, in qualitative studies, men reported concern that extended leaves would be interpreted as a lack of commitment to the job and result in penalties (McKay and Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014). While workplace practices can act as a deterrent for men's leave-taking, they can also facilitate it. Fathers who see their workplace as family-friendly and supportive of family leave-taking felt more empowered to take longer leaves (McKay and Doucet 2010). However, responses to work-family policies are still gendered. Women tend to be more receptive than men to new policies that challenge ideal worker norms and are more likely to use work-family policies than are men (Danziger and Boots 2008; Kelly, et al. 2010). Further, fathers who work in departments with a higher proportion of women take longer leaves on average than fathers who work with more men (Barcus, Tigges, and Kim 2019).

Even when workplaces implement policies to help parents reduce work-family conflict, having a formal policy in place does not necessarily mean that the policy will be used by employees. Studies on work-family policy use have shown that more workers have access to work-family policies than actually use these policies (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). One of the most important reasons for low usage rates is employees' fears of career consequences (Eaton 2003; Galinsky, Bond, and Hill 2004; Hayman 2009). These fears are not unfounded. Workers who utilize leaves or flexible work arrangements for family-oriented reasons often face a flexibility stigma (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013). The flexibility stigma paints workers who use work-family policies as being less deserving of workplace rewards, such as wages and



promotions (Coltrane et al. 2013). The cost of breaking from the ideal worker norm is well-documented for mothers (see for example Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Christopher 2012; Dodson 2013). While fathers are typically assumed to be highly committed to work and even receive wage premiums over men who are not fathers (Budig 2010), when men use work-family policies, they too suffer face the consequences associated with the flexibility stigma (Coltrane, et al. 2013).

Understandings of when and how to use work-family policies are locally constructed (Munsch 2016) and use of work-family policies is dependent on social context within the workplace (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Eaton 2003; Kelly et al. 2010; McNamara et al. 2012; Minnotte, Cook, and Minnotte 2010). Supervisor and coworker attitudes towards policies impact employees' perceptions of appropriate policy use and can serve as barriers to employees using available policies even when they have an individual need to do so (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Eaton 2003; Hammer et al. 2011; Kelly et al. 2010; McNamara et al. 2012; Ryan and Kossek 2006). In addition to a fear of repercussions, one reason work-family policy use may be particularly suspectable to the local workgroup culture is that these policies are often ambiguous in their application. For example, flexible workplace arrangements are often implemented inconsistently or left to supervisor discretion (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2004). As a result, even when there is a formal policy on the books, social context and local workgroup culture shape policy use.

When workers do not have access to dedicated paid parental leave policies, if they want to take time off after the birth of a child, they must navigate sets of policies and procedures that are often unclear. While FMLA provides 12 weeks of job protected leaves, how employees use their accrued paid time off, like vacation and sick days, is often left for them to strategize.

Gender frames and cultural schemas are more likely to guide individual's behavior in ambiguous situations, such as taking leave in the absence of formal paid parental leave policies (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). As a result, we might expect fathers to fall back on gender beliefs in the absence of a formal paid parental leave policy, even if they are able to receive pay for the duration of their leave by using other forms of paid time off. Conversely, the implementation of a paid parental leave policy may provide an alternative blueprint for fathers that is guided by clear leave availability and procedures, minimizing the impact of conventional family gender schemas.

While most of the research on work-family policy usage focuses on workers in white-collar occupations, studies that have looked at fathers across occupations indicates that the intersection of gender, class, and occupational context plays an important role in how fathers navigate work and family responsibilities (Williams et al. 2013). Some research suggests that working-class men are more involved in routine childcare and housework than middle-class men (Gerstel and Clawson 2014; Shows and Gerstel 2009; Usdansky 2011). For example, in their comparison of male physicians and EMTs, Shows and Gerstel (2009) find that physicians' high levels of work devotion pull them away from daily childcare, while EMTs use their nonstandard schedules to their advantage and consciously arrange their work schedules to meet the needs of their family. However, other studies have found that working-class men are less likely to share domestic work with their partners than are middle class men (Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Miller and Carlson 2016; Miller and Sassler 2012).

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature on fatherhood and paid parental leave. While previous research has established a connection between fathers taking longer leaves and father involvement, the question of *why* most American fathers continue to take short leaves remains. By focusing on fathers' leave decisions before and after the implementation of

employer-provided paid parental leave, I highlight how gender schemas and institutional opportunities and constraints inform fathering behaviors. Through the comparison of fathers in white-collar, blue-collar, and law enforcement occupations, this study also sheds light on how gender, class, and occupational context intersect as fathers navigate work and family surrounding the birth of a child.

### **Data and Methods**

The data used in this paper come from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 31 fathers and 26 mothers employed by the City of Madison. The focus of this chapter is fathers and thus the fathers' interviews are primary. However, interviews with mothers are used as additional context. All of the parents in my sample had at least one child who was five years old or younger and was born while the parent was employed by the City.

The City of Madison, which will interchangeably be referred to as “the City,” is a useful case for examining parental leaves for a few reasons. The City of Madison adopted six weeks of paid parental leave in 2019, providing me a unique opportunity to compare the leave decisions of parents who took leaves before and after the implementation of a paid parental leave policy. The City employs around 2,800 permanent employees across 26 departments, with a diverse workforce in terms of class and occupation. In this study, I examine parents across three occupational groups: white-collar, blue-collar, and police. White-collar workers include engineers, urban planners, lawyers, and accountants, among others, and the majority have graduate degrees. The blue-collar workers in my sample include maintenance workers and mechanics in departments including parks, streets, and transportation. These workers largely do not have Bachelor's degrees, but all either attended some college or earned associate's degrees or trade certifications. Finally, those in my sample who work in the police department are primarily

patrol officers, but a few are detectives or community outreach officers and one is a sergeant. The police force is highly educated, with the majority of workers in the police department holding Bachelor's degrees.

Prior to 2019, parents employed by the City of Madison did not have access to a paid parental leave policy. FMLA offers job protection for up to 12 weeks of leave following the birth or adoption of a child, but in order to continue receiving pay while on leave, fathers had to draw from their bank of accrued paid time off (PTO). There are four types of accrued PTO available to City employees: personal, vacation, sick, and compensatory time. All City employees get three and a half personal days a year. For vacation time, employees begin with ten vacation days in their first year and get an additional two and a half days for every four years of employment with the City. Sick time is accrued throughout the year and employees earn a total of 13 days of sick leave every year. Importantly for this study, saving sick time has some financial benefits for employees. Employees are allowed to roll over up to 150 days of sick time to the next year. At the end of the year, any sick time in excess of 150 days is paid out to the employee at their regular salary. These payouts are a significant amount of money. For example, an employee earning \$80,000 a year would receive approximately an additional \$4,000 a year after 12 years of not using any sick time. A smaller, but still notable, incentive for employees to avoid using sick time is that the City pays a portion, up to one hundred percent, of the premium for disability insurance based on how little sick time an employee used in the previous year. The final form of PTO City employees can earn is compensatory time, hereafter referred to as comp time. When City employees work overtime hours, they have the option of earning additional wages or additional paid time off (comp time). Employees in all departments can earn compensatory time, but it is especially relevant to police officers, for whom earning comp time is structured into their

jobs. Police officers must report 15 minutes before their shift begins, which is automatically logged as comp time. Additionally, police officers can earn comp time for time spent responding to a call that continues after their shift ends. As a result, the police officers in my sample frequently had large amounts of comp time available to them. If parents do not have enough PTO available, they can take unpaid leave as provided by FMLA.

In October of 2018, the City announced that starting January 1, 2019, employees would have access to paid parental leave. The PPL was also available retroactively for parents who had a child between September 1 and December 31 of 2018. The paid parental leave policy provides new parents with six weeks of paid leave after the birth or adoption of a child. To receive pay for any leave taken beyond six weeks, parents have to use their accrued PTO. PPL can be taken continuously, intermittently, or to work a reduced schedule during the first year after a child is born.

The current study is a continuation of prior research done in partnership with the City of Madison to examine the need for paid family and medical leave conducted between 2016 and 2018. As part of the initial project, a survey was distributed to all City employees. At the end of the survey, employees were asked whether they would be willing to be contacted for follow-up. Those who agreed provided their names and contact information. I used this information as the starting point for recruitment during the summer of 2019 by emailing those who had provided their contact information and inviting them to participate in the study. Additionally, the City of Madison Human Resource Department asked all department supervisors to post flyers and send an email to all of their employees with information about the study. The flyers and emails included instructions for interested employees to reach out to me directly. To reach saturation across white-collar, blue-collar, and law enforcement occupations, I also employed a snowball

sampling strategy. Although my sampling frame did not exclude fathers in same-gender relationships, the final sample does not include any fathers in same-gender relationships. This is reflective of the results of the original City of Madison survey, in which none of the male respondents with children were in same-sex relationships. The lack of fathers in same-gender relationships in the data likely indicates that the number of fathers at the City in same-gender partnerships is likely small. However, it should be noted that I did not make any targeted attempts to recruit fathers in same-gender relationships, which prior research on members of the LGBTQ community has found is often necessary for recruitment (Moore 2008; Umberson and Lodge 2015).

Interviews took place at a location of the interviewee's choosing. Employees were given permission by Human Resources to interview during work hours, so most interviews occurred in interviewee's offices or in conferences rooms in City buildings around Madison. Some interviewees preferred to meet outside of their workplaces. In those instances, we met in a coffee shop or a private room at the public library. Three interviews were conducted over the phone after the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Interviews lasted between one and two hours, with the average interview lasting one and a half hours. Interviews were semi-structured, containing a set of core questions, but interviewees were also further probed on topics that came up naturally. The interview guide included questions on the interviewee's work history, tenure at the City, their partner's jobs, and their leave decisions as well as questions about their experiences while on leave and transitioning back to work. For this paper on leave decisions, I focus on the interviewees narratives about how they made their leave arrangements prior to the birth of their child. Additionally, while my sample included mothers, here I draw predominantly on the interviews with fathers. All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews were coded using Nvivo, following Deterding and Waters (2018) flexible coding approach. I began by applying a set of index codes based on the broad topics captured in the interview guide and generating analytic memos throughout this first step. I then used the analytic memos and extant literature to guide the development and application of a set of analytic codes.

Table 1 shows the average leave duration for the parents in my sample, broken down by occupational group, as well as the individual characteristics of interviewees and their families. Fathers' leaves in white-collar and blue-collar occupations were almost identical, averaging around two and a half weeks of leave prior to the implementation of PPL and eight weeks after the implementation of PPL. However, fathers in the police department took significantly longer leaves, taking an average of nine weeks of leave without PPL and 11 when PPL became available. All of the fathers in my sample were married to the mothers of their children at the time of their leaves (only one father had an older child from a previous marriage). Their wives' leaves were much longer than their own, averaging 14 weeks, not including three wives who transitioned to being stay-at-home moms after the birth. As with fathers in same-gender relationships, single fathers were not excluded from the sample frame. However, the data from the original City of Madison survey included only one unmarried father, suggesting that again, the lack of fathers in different family-types is likely reflective of the makeup of fathers employed by the City of Madison.

Fathers' educational attainment varies by occupational group. Fathers in white-collar occupations are highly educated, with the majority holding a graduate degree. Fathers in the police department are also highly educated, all possessing at least a bachelor's degree. A much smaller portion (13 percent) of fathers in blue-collar occupations have bachelor's degrees. The majority of blue-collar fathers either attended some college but did not graduate or received an

associate's degree or certification from a trade school. The fathers in my sample are overwhelmingly white (84 percent). While I do not have access to the exact demographics of City employees, the percent of white fathers in this sample is similar to the percent of white fathers in the survey of City employees presented in Chapter 2 (86 percent) (Barcus, Tigges, and Kim 2019). This paper primarily uses the interviews with fathers, however, it does draw on some interviews with mothers to corroborate and provide additional context. As a result, mothers characteristics are also included in Table 1 for reference. Mothers who lacked PPL took an average of 12 weeks of leave, which is equal to the full amount provided by FMLA. Only four mothers in my sample took leave after PPL and their leaves were an average of 14.5 weeks.<sup>7</sup> No mothers in my sample worked in blue-collar jobs.

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<sup>7</sup> Mothers' average leave after PPL is greater than the 12 weeks of FMLA because two of those mothers had children after the start date for PPL eligibility but before PPL became available to use. Specifically, they gave birth after September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, when births began to qualify for PPL retroactively, but completed 12 weeks of leave prior to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, when PPL became available for use. As a result, the City permitted mothers in this unique situation to use the six weeks of PPL when it became available for a total of 18 weeks of leave.



**Table 1. Average Leave Durations and Characteristics of Fathers, Mothers, and their Families by Occupational Group**

	Fathers				Mothers <sup>1</sup>		
	White-collar	Blue-collar	Police	Total	White-collar	Police	Total
<b><i>Parental Leaves</i></b>							
<b><i>Prior to PPL<sup>2</sup></i></b>							
Avg. length of leave (weeks)	2.5	2.6	9.2	4.5	12.3	11.7	12
Total leaves taken	17	9	11	37	25	9	44
<b><i>After PPL</i></b>							
Avg. leave length (weeks)	7.9	8	11	8.9	14	15	14.5
Total leaves taken	7	4	5	16	2	2	4
Partner's avg. leave length (weeks)	13	14	16	14	4	7.8	5.5
<b><i>Sample Characteristics</i></b>							
Avg. number of children	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	2	1.8
Avg. age of children (yrs)	3	4	3	3	4.5	3.5	4.5
Educational attainment (%) <sup>3</sup>							
High school	0	0	0	0	6	0	4
Some college, trade school, or associate's	8	88	10	29	0	0	0
Bachelor's degree	31	13	80	45	45	88	58
Graduate degree	54	0	10	26	50	13	38
Race (%)							
White	92	88	70	84	89	88	88
Black	0	13	0	3	6	13	8
Hispanic	8	0	10	6	6	0	4
Asian American	0	0	20	6	0	0	0
N=	13	8	10	31	18	8	26

<sup>1</sup>None of the mothers interviewed held blue-collar jobs

<sup>2</sup>PPL was implemented on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. However, employees who had a child between September 1<sup>st</sup> and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 were given six weeks of paid parental retroactively.

<sup>3</sup>Percentages are rounded and as a result may not equal 100

### ***Setting the Stage: Maximizing Mothers' Leaves at All Costs***

To understand the context of fathers' leaves, it is important to look at how parents view mothers' leaves. Parents positioned mothers' long leaves as automatic. Almost all mothers in my sample took the full 12 weeks available to them under FMLA and a few mothers received permission from their supervisors to extend their leaves beyond FMLA. When asked why mothers took the

amount of time off of work that they did, parents' responses were simple and consistent: mothers and fathers assumed that mothers wanted to spend as much time as possible at home with their baby and that they would take as much time off of work after the birth of a child as possible, regardless of how much of that leave would be paid.

The decision for mothers to maximize their leaves was presented as a given. As Allison, who held a temporary position as a typist when her son was born, said of her 12 weeks of leave, "Oh, I know I was going to [take 12 weeks] right away...I knew as soon as I found out I was pregnant that I wanted to take as long as I could and be with him." While pay was a central concern for fathers, as discussed in detail below, the amount of paid time off did not change mothers' leave arrangements. Leah, an engineer at the City who took 12 weeks of leave for both her children, explained:

I think it was always assumed that I would take 12 weeks as a block, I would take the maximum amount of leave possible. At the time, the City didn't offer paid leave at all, so we did have to do some budgeting and figure out that some of it would be unpaid but we always assumed I'd take it and we'd find the money.

Leah's response is indicative of the approach many parents took. When it came to mothers' leaves, if money was a problem, the solution was to budget rather than have the mother return to work sooner. Indeed, most of the mothers represented in my sample, both the mothers I interviewed and the wives of the fathers I interviewed, had to take some unpaid leave.

Fathers accepted these decisions without question. In explaining why their wives maximized their leaves, fathers frequently stated simply that was what their wives wanted. When I asked Randy, who works in water systems maintenance, how he and his wife decided she would take 12 weeks of leave, he said, "She just told me she was going to, that she was gonna take the time off straight until she was out of time." Sam, a patrol officer, similarly explained that his wife said "'I want the whole three months right away.' And I said 'yeah, absolutely.' She

wanted all that really important early bonding time and whatnot. So yeah, I never questioned that at all. She said ‘I wanna do it,’ and I said ‘Great, good.’”

Mothers’ long leaves were not only assumed, they were the starting point for fathers’ own leave decisions. Kyle’s wife took six months of leave for each of their children while Kyle took less than a week. When explaining how he and his wife came to this decision, Kyle said, “Well, the first thing was trying to figure out for her what she wanted to do...It was more about making sure she could get the time that she wanted and needed.” To understand why fathers like Kyle decided that they should take significantly shorter leaves than their wives, we have to look at fathers’ narratives about their leave-taking decisions.

### **Fathers’ Leaves Before PPL: Falling Back on Provider Norms**

#### *Following Norms and Expectations for Leaves*

Fathers relied heavily on the blueprints laid out by cultural schemas and institutional opportunities and constraints to make their parental leave decisions. Norms and expectations surrounding leave-taking played a central role in narratives about fathers’ parental leave arrangements. While mothers taking the maximum amount of leave available to them was consistently the norm, norms for fathers differed somewhat by occupational group. Specifically, for fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations, the norm seemed to be taking between one and four weeks of leave, while fathers in the police department consistently took longer leaves. Only two of 26 leaves taken by fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations prior to PPL were longer than four weeks (the average was two and a half weeks). This is not just a pattern that emerges in the data, it is a norm that parents are aware of. In explaining why she took a longer leave than her husband, Nicole, a patrol officer, said, “I think it’s just because...I don’t want say that was the

expectation but I think that that's the expectation that we had. That was the norm...what people in our culture do. The mom stays home for 8-12 weeks and the dad stays home for one to two."

Norms and expectations came up frequently and explicitly when fathers reflected on why they had decided to take the amount of leave they did. While prior research has suggested that fathers may take short leaves because they feel pressured by the expectation to return to work quickly after the birth of a child (McKay and Doucet 2010), when fathers in my sample mentioned norms, it was not typically in the context of feeling pressure from the ideal worker norm. Instead, unspoken norms derived from family gender schemas laid out a pathway that fathers were content to follow when making their leave decisions. When asked why he took two weeks of leave for his first child, Ben, who works in finance, said, "That's a good question. I don't really know. I just kind of feel like it's...I just think that two weeks off seemed like a good amount. I don't really have a great answer. It just seemed like an amount that was acceptable and [an amount] that I should take." Similarly, Dennis, an engineer, attributed his decision to take one week of leave to following what he had seen coworkers do at the engineering firm where he worked when his first child was born. He said, "I decided based on...I don't know, I guess what other people had been doing. I knew a couple of people, I saw dads who had taken two weeks, but I thought 'oh, a week and then a week working from home will be enough.'" Like Ben and Dennis, many fathers who took short leaves did not articulate clear reasons for doing so. Instead, they were guided by gender frames and did what they thought they "should" do.

Most of the fathers in the sample evoked the new fatherhood ideal. However, when making their leave-decisions for their first children, fathers fell back on conventional schemas of fathers as primary providers and secondary caregivers. In retrospect, fathers recalled not knowing how much they would be missing in terms of learning about their infants by returning

to work so quickly. Taken together, these findings show that fathers *wanted* to be involved fathers and co-parents but did not connect that desire to their actual behaviors surrounding parental leaves. This exposes how the blueprints fathers followed failed to set them up to achieve the new fatherhood ideals that fathers purported to strive for.

While fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations were influenced by diffuse family gender schemas that led them to default to shorter leaves, the local organizational culture within the police department had a different set of norms and expectations that encouraged fathers to take leaves that were twice as long, on average, as their counterparts in other departments. While only two of 26 leaves taken by fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations were longer than four weeks prior to PPL, only two of 16 leaves taken by fathers in the police department were less than eight weeks and none were less than four weeks. Like white- and blue-collar fathers, fathers in the police department recalled being influenced by their coworkers' leaves, except in this case, their coworkers' leaves were long. Brian, a detective and father of two, took two weeks off immediately after both of his children were born and then took another six to eight weeks of leave when his wife returned to work after her 14 weeks of leave. When I asked Brian how he and his wife decided to arrange their leaves that way, he explained that he had followed what he had seen many of his coworkers do:

I think we probably talked to other people that had done the same thing. I know that a lot of people around here do that, that their wife would stay home for that 12 to 14 weeks and then the dad takes off the month and a half or whatever after that. I definitely talked to people in the department that had kids before I did that said that seemed to work out well.

Like fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations who modeled their short leaves off of what they saw others do, Brian's decision to take up to ten weeks of leave was also influenced by what he saw his coworkers doing. However, unlike fathers in other departments, Brian and the other

fathers in the police department took leaves that were much longer than the American norm of two or fewer weeks.

Using leave intermittently, rather than continuously, was very common in the police department. Of the 16 leaves taken by fathers in the police department, 12 included some intermittent leaves. Intermittent leaves were much more common in the police department than any other department. Although fathers in white-collar and blue-collar occupations could have taken leaves intermittently, and doing so may have been a way to extend the total amount of time they took off without drastically reducing their paychecks, only four of 13 leaves taken by fathers in blue-collar jobs and 5 of 24 leaves taken by fathers in white-collar jobs included any intermittent leave. The consistency of leave patterns within the police department and the divergence from the leaves of other fathers at the City illustrates how norms and expectations surrounding fathers parental leaves can be locally constructed.

Because of police officers' standard schedule of six days on, three days off, intermittent leaves often required complex calculations and strategies to maximize time at home. Fathers in the police department who took intermittent leaves benefited from the guidance of their coworkers. Sean, a patrol officer, took a total of ten weeks of leave after both of his children were born. After taking off two and a half weeks immediately following the births, he spread out the rest of his leave over the six months that his wife was on leave. Because he worked six days on, three days off, Sean often took a few days off at the beginning or end of his rotation so that he would be home for five or six days straight and then only have to work three or four days in a row before having another five or six days off. He explained that he got the idea to do this from other people in department who "were teaching me kind of little tricks." In turn, Sean shared how he strategized his leave with Sam, another patrol officer in my sample. During the

interview, Sam said of his own leave arrangement, “We actually tried to model a little bit after what Sean did, instead of taking it the whole thing all at once, to kinda break it up as needed.”

The norms in the police department are different from those in other departments not only in terms of leave-taking behavior, but also in terms of the culture surrounding talking explicitly about parental leaves. Indeed, Sean recalled that his coworkers had actively encouraged him to use as much leave as he could, telling him, “‘Use all of your time, you’re not gonna regret using all your time.’ And ‘It’s time that you’re never gonna get back.’ The majority of the people were telling me that.” While fathers in white- and blue-collar jobs expressed that they had based their short leaves on what they had observed other fathers doing, fathers in the police department had explicit conversations with each other about parental leaves where they not only shared how they had arranged their own leaves, but also actively encouraged other expecting fathers to take long leaves.

One factor that may contribute to these clear norms around leave-taking in the police department is the department size and makeup. The police department has a relatively high concentration of fathers of young children and men in their 20s and 30s. For example, Amir, a community officer, noted that there had been six or seven men in his district alone who had a child the year his daughter was born. As a result, expectant fathers have access to many different coworkers to turn to for advice and examples of leave-taking. In contrast, most of the fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations worked with few, if any, other men who had recently taken parental leave. As a result, the alternative blueprints found in the police department had a greater opportunity to become clear through repeated use.

### *Justifying Short Leaves with the Provider Schema*

While most of the mothers in my sample took some unpaid leave, it was rare for fathers to take any time off that was unpaid. Of the of the 53 leaves taken by fathers in my sample, 49 leaves did not include any unpaid time off. Of the four fathers in my sample who took any unpaid time off, only one took unpaid time off to extend his leave beyond four weeks. The other three took relatively short leaves, but had little to no paid time off available at the time, either because they worked for a prior employer with no benefits or had not yet worked at the City for long enough to accrue paid time off. Even in these exceptions, when unpaid leave was used by the fathers, it was used minimally, just enough to meet fathers' pre-PPL averages.

Although no men expressed explicit gender beliefs about the role of fathers as financial providers, they nonetheless drew heavily on implicitly gendered logics supported by the provider schema when explaining their leave decisions. Fathers often framed their financial considerations in the gendered social relational context of the family. For instance, some fathers explained that they limited their leave duration to avoid taking unpaid time off in order to ensure that their wives could maximize their own leaves and use as much unpaid leave as needed to do so. Ryan, who works in finance, framed his decision to limit both of his parental leaves to less than two weeks as a direct response to his wife's unpaid leave:

The decision-making process really went like this: 'Emily, how much time do you want to take off? You can take off as much as you want, I will do whatever I need to do in order to ensure that we still can meet all of the other [financial] obligations that we have.' She ended up taking time off unpaid, so I went back early that she could do that.

Ryan's decision-making process is a common one. Fathers begin with the understanding that their wife will take as much time as she can, some of which will likely be unpaid, and adjust their leaves based on what they think they can afford. Rick, an urban planner, followed this pattern as well when he explained his decision to take four weeks of leave:



[My wife] Angela was going to take three months off, and I wished I could have taken that much time off, or at least six weeks or so, but then I think I definitely trimmed it back based on how much I could get paid for through sick leave and vacation time and so on. I didn't wanna take too much unpaid time off since Angela wasn't getting paid.

Although Rick said he would have liked taking a longer leave, he felt like he had to limit his leave in order to minimize the financial impact of his wife's unpaid leave, which was itself not up for question.

In addition to wanting to avoid unpaid leaves, many fathers ended their leaves before using up all, or in some cases even half, of their accrued paid time off. While some fathers did so to ensure they could take time off to meet any future caregiving needs, others did so for financial reasons. Fathers who attributed their abbreviated leaves to financial considerations framed their decisions as the responsible thing to do. The logic these fathers employed to explain their decision to leave substantial amounts of PTO untouched relied on cultural schemas of fathers as providers as well as the opportunities and constraints of the institutional context at the City. Some fathers explained that they wanted to avoid using any of their accrued sick time in particular because of two City policies that result in financial incentives. The first policy is a waiver of disability insurance premiums for employees who use three or fewer sick days in a year. Dennis, an engineer, is one of the fathers who explained that he did not use paid sick days to add to the four weeks he took off after his first child was born because he wanted to avoid paying fifty dollars a month for disability insurance the following year.

In addition to avoiding the monthly premium for disability insurance, there is an even greater financial incentive for City employees to not use their sick leave so that they can receive the sick days payout at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> year at the City. It was common for fathers to avoid using their sick time. Even fathers like Amir and Mateo, police department employees who took over two months of leave, still tried to use their vacation and comp time rather than drawing on

sick leave. This shows how cultural schemas interact with institutional policies and constraints to impact fathers' understandings of how and when different types of paid time off should be used. The meaning of sick time as something that should not be used is constructed through the gendered lens of the provider schema and within the context of the City's policies.

The decision to take short leaves in favor of saving for the sick time payout illustrates how gender frames influence the way fathers respond to the birth of a child within institutional contexts. The choice Blake, an accountant whose wife transitioned to be a stay-at-home mom after their son was born, made to not use any sick time to extend his leave shows the power of the provider schema. Blake's son was born prematurely and had to spend 11 weeks in the NICU. Blake took about eight weeks off work in all: two weeks immediately following his son's birth, two weeks when his son came home from the NICU, and a total of four weeks in between that allowed him to work reduced hours so that he could spend time at the hospital daily. Blake wished he could have spent more time at home with his wife and son because the transition out of the NICU was really difficult. Despite having over seventy days of sick time, more than enough to cover the remaining 4 weeks of leave covered by FMLA, Blake felt he had to prioritize financial considerations:

I obviously wish I could have taken more time 'cause when that two weeks was up I'm like, "Alright, I'm not sure I'm ready to go back to work, but I kinda don't have a choice." I was even contemplating dipping into my sick time just biting the bullet and saying, "Well, I'll have to pay the [disability insurance] premiums, and I'll lose as much bank time but..." 'Cause I'm like, "This is gonna be a rough transition." 'Cause those two weeks went by really fast. And I wasn't quite ready, feeling ready to go back to work. I definitely wanted to spend more time with my wife and my son. But I had to make a difficult choice, as far as the financial side versus the family side.

Although Blake said he "kinda [didn't] have a choice," he did have a choice. Blake's choice was not even between returning to work or taking unpaid leave, it was between returning to work or delaying the sick days payout and paying a small insurance premium. He rationalized this thinking by saying he thought, "I'm going to have one income with my wife staying home,

you're gonna need that extra money eventually, probably in another five years when I have more time banked, so it will probably come in handy.” While Blake’s experience of having an infant in the NICU for 11 weeks is an extreme one, it shows how dominant provider schemas are for fathers. In Blake’s case, he wanted to spend more time at home with his wife and infant, but ultimately felt restricted by his desire to avoid using paid sick days because the prospect of additional income from the paid sick days’ payout five years in the future.

Another common reason why fathers did not use more of their accrued paid time off to extend their parental leaves was a perceived need to save their paid time off so that they would not have to take unpaid leave in case of an emergency. Fathers described unlikely scenarios to justify these decisions. Sam, a patrol officer who took eight weeks of leave, said he wanted to make sure he had paid time off in case he suffered a serious injury, referencing a coworker who had torn his ACL while chasing a suspect. It should be noted, however, that if Sam had been injured on the job he would have qualified for disability insurance and would have been given desk work while he was healing. Kyle, a traffic manager who bragged about how much paid time off he had in his bank, said one of the reasons he took less than a week of leave for both of his children was because he wanted to save his PTO just in case something “catastrophic” happened. Peter, an engineer, only took one and a half weeks of leave after his son was born. He explained that despite a full year’s worth of sick time being available for use immediately, if he had quit his job prior to earning all of those sick days, he would have had to pay the City back for any time he used prematurely. “It’s not like I was thinking of leaving, but if something was to come up, I didn’t want to have to have to dish out money I guess. That was a big part of it.” Despite having no intention of leaving his job within the next few months, Peter felt like he had to prioritize playing it safe with his paid time off rather than taking more time off work after his son was

born. These fathers explained their hesitancy to use more of their paid time off to extend their leaves by positioning the decision as a responsible and risk-adverse one, despite the fact that the scenarios they constructed were unlikely to occur before they had the opportunity to accrue more paid time off.

Overall, fathers almost always prioritized avoiding the potential of any financial consequences over spending more at home time with their wife and infant. While fathers acknowledged new fatherhood ideals, saying they wished they could have spent more time at home, their decisions and rationales ultimately were guided by the provider schema and informed by the specific institutional context of the structure of the City's paid time off policies. Justifying their leave decisions required family gender schemas that emphasize providing over caregiving for fathers.

### **The Creation of New Blueprints for Longer Leaves After the Implementation of PPL**

When PPL was available, its use by fathers became almost automatic. All the fathers in my sample who had a child after PPL was implemented used all six weeks of PPL. The average leave duration for fathers in white- and blue-collar occupations increased from two and a half to eight weeks and from nine to 11 weeks for fathers in the police department. Fathers framed their use of PPL as the result of a combination of the alleviation of financial concerns and the creation of new norms and expectations. In effect, PPL provided fathers with a new blueprint for their leaves that allowed them to enact new fatherhood ideals without challenging fathers' provider roles.

The implementation of PPL seemed to create a new default for fathers' leaves. When explaining why they chose to use PPL, fathers presented the decision as a simple one: the time was there for them to take, so they should take it. Ben, who only took two weeks of leave after

the birth of his first child, explained his decision to take nine weeks of leave after the birth of his second child, “I thought, well it’s there for my taking. I’m getting paid for the whole thing, it’s not as though I have a reduced salary. It was fully paid. So I thought, use it or lose it.” Dennis, an engineer who only took one week after the birth of his first child, explained why he took six weeks of leave for his second child, “I mean, I think just the fact that it was six weeks paid and it was use it or lose it, so I definitely wanted to use it.” Randy, a water systems maintenance worker, took 3 weeks when his eldest was born and 6 weeks when his second child was born, after the implementation of PPL. Randy explained that he decided to take more time off after the birth of his son than he had for his daughter simply because, “I had more time off available specifically for a birth.”

The implementation of paid parental leave not only changed fathers’ own understandings of what their leaves should look like, it also changed the expectations for fathers’ leaves within the workplace. This is best illustrated in the cases of the only two fathers in my sample who were somewhat reluctant to use all of their paid parental leave. Shane, a librarian, took six weeks of parental leave when his fourth child was born in September of 2018, before PPL was available. When he returned to work, he learned that PPL had passed and would be available to him retroactively. He was not sure whether he should use it. The six weeks he had already taken was more than twice as long as he had taken for his first three children and he was not sure if he wanted to leave work for another six weeks. In addition to his wife insisting he take the PPL, he said his coworkers insisted he use it. He said, “every person I did talk to, including my team, was like ‘yes, you’re using it.’” The response from Shane’s team shows how the implementation of PPL created new expectations among City employees about fathers’ parental leaves. Shane’s

coworkers had not commented on his first three leaves, but they vocalized the assumption that Shane would use the leave when PPL was present.

Jeremy's supervisor had a similar reaction when Jeremy told him his wife was pregnant soon after the implementation of PPL. Jeremy's explained that he learned about PPL when supervisor approached him and said, "Hey, guess what, Jeremy? You're gonna be the guinea pig on this." Jeremy, a father of four, had not taken more than two weeks off after the birth of his first three children and said that when his supervisor told him about the PPL he thought to himself, "how could anybody take six weeks?" Despite his ambivalence, Jeremy ended up using all six weeks of PPL. Both Jeremy and Shane's stories show how the presence of PPL changes the expectations around fathers' leaves among supervisors and coworkers as well as opens the door to conversations about leave-taking in departments where that had previously been rare.

Evidence that PPL created a new blueprint for fathers to follow can also be found in the way it served to limit leaves. While PPL changed the expectations to emphasize longer leaves for fathers, some fathers interpreted the expectations associated with PPL as setting upper-limits for leave-taking as well. For instance, Rick used PPL to take six weeks of parental leave after the birth of his second child leaving the rest of his PTO untouched. When I mentioned to Rick that it sounded like he could have taken more paid time off using other accrued PTO if he wanted to, he realized, "Now that you mention it, I'm sure I could have used [sick time]. And I did, I think use some sick time when Jack [my older child] was born." However, Rick said he had not thought to use any of his accrued PTO to extend his leave beyond the six weeks of PPL. In reflecting upon why he did not take more time off, he explained, "I guess you're thinking to yourself about what the norms are and what the unwritten expectations are, and just going on your gut about that." To

Rick, the presence of six weeks of paid parental leave implied that the accepted amount of leave was six weeks and would have felt like “looking a gift horse in the mouth.”

### **Bridging the Gap between Provider Norms and New Fatherhood Ideals with Long Paid Leaves**

While fathers who took short leaves based their decisions on the provider schema, when fathers had blueprints for longer leaves, they evoked new fatherhood ideals in explaining their decision to take a long leave. Even though fathers still avoided unpaid leaves, they rationalized long leaves by highlighting how being home for longer gave them time to bond with their infants and better support their wives. Scott, a patrol officer, took 14 weeks for his first child and 10 weeks for his second. He explained:

I was more, I guess, I don't wanna say coined the phrase, but it came and now it's kind of stuck and I've used it for other people is "I will never regret spending 12 weeks with my new born child, would regret working and missing out on not seeing my kid's first time crawling or first time smiling or..." So if I have the ability to be able to financially stable and obviously marriage spousal stable, all those things happen, why not take the time off. I'm never gonna regret that time with the children.

Tou, another patrol officer, also said that spending time with his infants was a priority for him:

In [taking 10 weeks of leave], I ended up burning through a lot of my sick time that I have accrued, and for different reasons we like to try to acquire that sick time because that pays out once you max out, but at that point I just thought, you know what, it's way more important for me to spend this time with my kid.

Fathers who took long leaves expressed that they not only wanted to spend time with their infants, but wanted to be hands-on, with some even explicitly stating that they were not the kind of fathers who “don’t change diapers.”

In addition to bonding, fathers justified their longer leaves by explaining how they arranged them based on what was best for their wives and babies. A handful of fathers had PPL for their second child but not their first, giving them the opportunity to draw on their past experience. In many of these cases, fathers explained that the immediate period after the baby

was born was harder than they expected, especially the physical and emotional recovery of their wives, after their first child was born. As a result, fathers used their wife's difficult recoveries as a reason to use the PPL they had available to them. For example, Randy, who works in water systems maintenance, only took one week of leave immediately following the birth of his four-year-old daughter followed by three weeks when his wife returned to work. When his ten-month-old son Leon was born, he decided to use all six weeks of PPL and to use three of them right away. He explained that his decision to do so was influenced by his wife's struggles after their daughter's birth, "I wanna say it was like she went through postpartum [depression]. And she didn't want to go through that again with the second, with Leon. So she needed me there longer in case she did go through it again." Similarly, Mark, an engineer, extended the first portion of his leave to support his wife after her C-section. He took three weeks off immediately following the birth of their second child, explaining, "Last time, she felt really bad for a solid two weeks. Not good at all. So I was like, let's get [her] past the two week mark and then do another week just in case things are not going as well as last time." Brent, a detective, said of his four weeks of leave he took immediately following the birth of both of his children, "I feel like it was one of those mental health requirements for my wife." These fathers rationalized their leaves by emphasizing how their leaves allowed them to better support their wives' postpartum recovery.

In addition to framing extended leaves immediately following the birth of their children as being about the mothers' recovery, fathers also explained their use of intermittent leaves as having to do with what was best for mothers. Fathers took intermittent leaves in two different ways. Some fathers took intermittent leaves in a routine, scheduled manner, effectively using intermittent leave to reduce their schedule to a part-time schedule for a period of time. Other fathers used intermittent leaves as needed. Fathers who took regularly scheduled intermittent



leaves tended to frame how they arranged their leaves around what was best for the mother. A few fathers took one or two days off a week consistently while their wives were still on leave, to help with stuff around the house, while others took mornings off the days their wives worked the second shift so the wives could sleep in. Other fathers took their leaves intermittently without a consistent schedule. These fathers all explained that the days they took off were largely determined by their wives. Sometimes it was in response to an explicit request from their wives. For example, Brent, the detective who took four weeks off immediately after the birth of his children, took about 20-30 additional days off intermittently. He said the decision of which days to take off he “just kinda delegated that to her of, ‘whenever you get stressed, tell me and I’ll take off and take over and give you a chance to rest and take girl-time or get out and just be away from the house or whatever it is.’ So it was more at her discretion I’d say.”

Lastly, fathers explained their decision to take longer leaves by saying that doing so was what was best for their baby. In particular, when fathers took their leaves after their wives returned to work, fathers explained that they were able to delay putting their infant in daycare. While two fathers mentioned it helped defer the cost of daycare, most of the fathers who gave this reason did so in the context of thinking it was better for the infant and an easier transition for the mother to go back to work knowing the baby was in good hands. Instead of using leave intermittently like many in the police department did, Brian, a detective, took two weeks off immediately following the birth of both of his children and then took an additional 6-8 weeks of leave when his wife returned to work. He explained that this arrangement enabled them to delay daycare. He said that he did it that way, “Just so they are a little older when they went to daycare, and so I could have time with them alone, independent of my wife being around too. And again,

it helped ease my wife's transition back to work too knowing that she wasn't bringing the kids straight to day care, that I was gonna be home as well.”

### **With and Without Paid Parental Leave: The Case of Second Births**

Looking at fathers who took their first leaves without having access to PPL and their second leaves after PPL was implemented offers a useful opportunity to look at how all of the different threads presented thus far come together. These fathers’ narratives illustrate how paid parental leave creates a new blueprint that allows them to activate new fatherhood ideals emphasizing bonding and supporting their family through hands on care. In this section, I focus on Ben, a financial specialist who exemplifies the themes discussed in this paper. Ben took two weeks of leave after the birth of his first child because two weeks seemed like the amount of time he “should” take off work. Like many of the fathers in my sample who took short leaves for their first child, Ben recalled not knowing how important spending time at home with the infant would be. Ben said that when he made that decision he did not understand “the bonding and the parenting that happens during the first three to six months, during the first year. And I don't even know if I really understood that until after Lucy was born. I knew you had to be there but I didn't quite know... I knew why but I didn't quite know like the emotional attachment that is there as well.” Ben, like many of the fathers who took short leaves after their first child was born, did not know how important the first few weeks and months would be for establishing a relationship with their baby nor did they realize how many opportunities they miss to enact new fatherhood ideals after returning to work so quickly.

For their younger children, fathers drew on their prior experiences to explain why they wanted to take more time off work. Being able to support their wives was a key part of this. Ben took a total of nine weeks of parental leave after his son Charlie was born. In explaining why he

decided to take three weeks of leave immediately following Charlie's birth, compared to the two he took when his daughter was born, Ben noted that his wife had an unplanned C-section when Lucy was born and was set to have a planned C-section, he wanted to make sure he was home longer to provide support. Ben recalled, "I thought, 'Alright, I know we're gonna be in the hospital for at least three nights. I know we're gonna have a toddler running around at home.' So I thought if I have the time, which I do, let me take three full weeks off to help out." Even though three weeks was already longer than he had taken off work after their Lucy was born, Ben took another six weeks of leave when his wife returned to work. His decision to arrange his leave this way was in part to delay daycare. However, as mentioned above, after his daughter was born, he realized how important it was to have time to bond with a new baby and he wanted to take the opportunity to spend more time with his son to do so. When deciding to take the six weeks of leave alone, Ben explained that he thought it would be "good for me to get some time with him alone, to really bond with him and to get a feel for how he was and to try to get to know him better as a baby, as a person. Which you can absolutely do as a family, but something's different when you're the only caregiver." For Ben, taking this longer leave was an opportunity to enact new fatherhood ideals by providing hands-on support for his wife and developing a father-child bond with his son.

Having access to PPL enabled fathers to make different decisions about their leaves for their younger children than they had for earlier births. Ten fathers in the sample had PPL available to them when their youngest child was born but did not have PPL for earlier births and all of these fathers took longer leaves for their youngest child than they did for their eldest. In contrast, of the seven fathers who have multiple children but never had PPL, only one (14%) took a longer leave for their youngest child. Additionally, among the husbands of the women I

interviewed, none of whom had PPL, 12 had multiple children and only three took longer leaves for later births. In sum, fathers at the City who had PPL for later births universally increased their leaves while fathers without PPL, both at the City and elsewhere, rarely took longer leaves for second births. These patterns illustrate how PPL works as a blueprint to help fathers translate their prior experiences into longer leaves.

Even when fathers emphasized wanting to bond with their infants and support their wives, PPL still played a central role in their leave decisions. When asked how he decided to take the additional six weeks of leave when his wife returned to work, Ben's first response was, "I thought, well, it's there for my taking. I'm getting paid for the whole thing, it's not as though I have a reduced salary. It was fully paid. So I thought, use it or lose it." Like most of the fathers in this category, Ben's longer leave was predicated on it being fully paid. But again, most of these fathers could have taken more time off without sacrificing their paychecks by drawing on their sick time. As a policy, PPL sends an explicit message to fathers that they can take longer leaves after the birth of a child. In doing so, it creates a blueprint for leaves that allows fathers to act on new fatherhood ideals without challenging their role as financial provider.

## **Conclusion**

This study sheds light on the disconnect between new fatherhood ideals and father involvement in practice. While men express a desire to be actively involved equal co-parents, primary responsibility for daily childcare continues to fall on mothers (Raley, et al. 2012). Given the importance of the transition to parenthood in establishing this gendered pattern of childcare responsibilities, I look at how fathers make parental leave decisions and the impact of paid parental leave policies. I argue that fathers rely on blueprints that result from cultural schemas and institutional contexts to guide their parental leave decisions. I find that new fatherhood ideals

alone did not provide fathers with a clear understanding of how to translate those ideals into practice when making their parental leave decisions. Instead, in the absence of a clear alternative blueprint, the provider schemas interact with institutional opportunities and constraints to create the default blueprint for fathers' parental leaves. The implementation of PPL created a new blueprint for fathers' leaves that helped fathers align their parental leaves with new fatherhood ideals.

Prior to the implementation of PPL, fathers in white- and blue-collar jobs at the City consistently took relatively short leaves, averaging 2.5 weeks. Contrary to prior research (Eaton 2003; Galinsky, Bond, and Hill 2004; Hayman 2009; McKay and Doucet 2010; Rehel 2014), the fathers in my study did not feel pressure from work to take short leaves. Instead, fathers recalled feeling content with their leaves when they made the decision. Fathers' contentment with leaves that aligned more with traditional fatherhood roles than contemporary ideals highlights how fathers lacked a clear understanding of what enacting new fatherhood could look like with an infant. As is often the case in ambiguous situations, fathers fell back onto family gender schemas to guide their leave-taking decisions (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Rather than being driven by a desire to be involved in infant care, fathers followed what they perceived to be the norm and invoked the provider schema to explain their leave decisions. Not only did fathers avoid unpaid leave, but in many cases, fathers ended their leaves before they even came close to exhausting their banks of accrued paid time off. To rationalize this decision, father implicitly invoked the provider schema, describing the delayed financial incentives to save their sick time and framing the choice as a responsible one. These patterns show how traditional family gender schemas frame how fathers respond to the institutional context and shape leave decisions when there is not clear alternative.

The implementation of PPL transformed fathers' leave-taking decisions by providing a new blueprint for parental leave. While prior research has found that the implementation of work-family policies does not always translate to utilization, especially for men (Danizinger and Boots 2008; Kelly, et al. 2010), paid parental leave had a one hundred percent uptake rate for the fathers in my sample. For most of the fathers I interviewed, the availability of PPL was enough to trigger the decision to take at least six weeks of leaves, a decision which they portrayed as being straightforward because of the presence of the policy. The expectation that they should use PPL was not just held by fathers themselves, coworkers and supervisors were quick to adopt the expectation as well and, in some cases, actively encouraged fathers to use PPL. In line with studies that show the importance of supervisor and coworker support for work-family policy use (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Eaton 2003; Hammer et al. 2011; Kelly et al. 2010; McNamara et al. 2012; Ryan and Kossek 2006), the shared expectation that fathers would use PPL in its entirety facilitated fathers' use of the policy.

The blueprints for longer leaves provided by PPL allowed fathers to activate new fatherhood ideals. To explain their decision to take longer leaves, fathers drew on logics of emotional attachment and equal co-parenting supported by new fatherhood ideal (Gerson 2010; Kaufman 2013; Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Townsend 2002), which were largely absent in the explanations provided for short leaves. They spoke about wanting to bond with their infants, develop parenting as an equal co-parent, support their wife's recovery after child birth, and offer solo care to delay sending the baby to daycare. The contrast between the primacy of provider norms in narratives surrounding short leaves and new fatherhood ideals for longer leaves was especially apparent for fathers who had children both before and after the implementation of PPL. These fathers expressed a desire to take longer leaves in order to bond with their infants

and be more involved in daily care. Yet fathers who had multiple children prior to PPL did not invoke the same narrative and few took longer leaves for later births. This shows how PPL was key for facilitating the activation of new fatherhood ideals. Still, fathers underscored that their ability to fulfill new fatherhood ideals was predicated on the ability to continue providing financially. That fathers underscored the importance of the fully paid leaves indicates that successful initiatives to encourage father involvement may have to bridge contemporary and conventional understandings of fatherhood.

Comparing workers in white-collar, blue-collar, and law enforcement departments helps illustrate the importance of a clear blueprint for involved fatherhood when it comes to arranging work and family responsibilities. In contrast to prior research, which has found that fathers in blue-collar jobs position themselves to be more involved in routine childcare than fathers in white-collar jobs (Shows and Gerstel 2009), I find that the leaves of fathers in both white-collar and blue-collar jobs looked very similar while fathers in law enforcement took significantly longer leaves. There are a few structural and cultural differences between the police department and the other departments at the City that may have contributed to the creation of alternative blueprints that led to longer leaves even in the absence of PPL. Patrol officers earn a lot of comp time, both through the additional 15 minutes earned at the start of each shift and for overtime, which is a frequent occurrence. This means that fathers in the police department may have more accrued paid time off to draw on, especially non-sick leave paid time off, than fathers in other white- and blue-collar departments. As a result, compared to fathers in other departments, fathers in the police department may have been able to take longer leaves without having to dip into their paid sick days. However, because most fathers across departments ended their leaves with a substantial amount of paid time off left, some even with substantial amounts of comp time, this is

likely not the only reason for the difference. The high concentration of fathers in their 20s and 30s means that men in the police department had the opportunity to see numerous coworkers navigate parental leave. The result was the creation of an alternative blueprint for longer leaves within the police department that made long leaves the norm.

The success of PPL in facilitating longer leaves for fathers is encouraging given the increases in access to PPL at employers across the country (Kaufman and Petts 2020; Society for Human Resource Management 2020), however, the specific context of the City of Madison as an employer needs to be taken into account. A number of fathers who previously worked at high-pressure firms noted that the requirement to meet billable hours, competitive work environments, and work cultures that did not recognize men's caregiving responsibility meant that they were not sure if they would have felt comfortable taking PPL had it been available in that context. This suggests that PPL policies may have a stronger impact at employers, like the City, that have demonstrated family-friendliness and where workers do not rely on billable hours or commission. The specific design of the PPL policy may have also played a role in the way it was received by fathers. Prior research has found that fathers are more likely to use parental leave when it is fully paid and use-it-or-lose-it (Kaufman 2020). PPL at the City had both of these features. Additionally, six weeks is a moderate duration. If the leave were longer, fathers might not use all of it. As it is, even with PPL, fathers still take shorter leaves than mothers and more often than not end their leaves before using the full 12 weeks provided by FMLA. While mothers had to use their paid sick time, fathers remained reticent to do so. The lack of parity suggests that while paid parental leave provides an important opportunity for fathers to enact new fatherhood ideals, those ideals still encompass a gender imbalance.



There are some limitations present in this study. Selection may play a role in two different ways. As mentioned above, the City is known for being family-friendly and providing generous benefits. As a result, fathers may have chosen to work for the City for these reasons, which would also indicate an orientation to using those benefits. Additionally, the fathers who volunteered to participate in my study may have been those who are more invested in work-family policies, again making them more eager as a group to use the policy when it became available. My sample was also overwhelmingly white and the vast majority had at least some education beyond high school. Men with more privilege may be more comfortable using work-family policies because they may be better situated to endure career consequences or may face smaller consequences than men who have less privilege. Finally, my sample of fathers only includes those in different-gender relationships. While they were not excluded from the sampling frame, effective recruiting of members of the LGBTQ community often requires targeted sampling strategies that were not employed in the current study (Umberson and Lodge 2015). There is a strong need for research on LGBTQ parents and families and how parents in same-gender relationships balance work and family during the transition to parenthood is no exception. The way fathers in same-gender relationships navigate parental leave likely differs considerably from those in different-gender relationships who have gender norms and physical realities to fall back on as blueprints. Future research designed to capture the unique diverse experiences of the transition to parenthood and navigation of parental leave for parents in same-gender relationships would provide important insights into how this period and these workplace policies translate to other family forms.

This study provides insights into ways that workplaces can support fathers in the transition to parenthood. The findings show that fathers were more likely to take longer leaves

when it was clear to them that they could and should do so. While employer-provided paid parental leave policies can be effective in doing this, so can workplace culture as long as it is backed up with clear guidance on how fathers can do so, as demonstrated by the police department. As a result, human resource departments and direct supervisors should be explicit with fathers about how they can use their PTO creatively while using FMLA leaves. Another implication has to do with PPL policy design. The fact that the leave could be used at any point during the first year and that it could be used continuously, intermittently, or to reduce work schedules proved to be highly valuable for fathers. Few fathers used all six weeks immediately following the birth. Offering PPL policies that provide fathers with the flexibility to use their leave in the way that best benefits their family may make leave policies more successful at translating into fathers' leave use. These findings highlight the importance of supportive work-family policies and the potential of these policies to challenge traditional family gender schemas. PPL policies have the potential to transform the way fathers structure the transition to parenthood by providing them with clear blueprints that allow them to enact new fatherhood ideals without jeopardizing their role as financial providers.

**CHAPTER 4. PAYING FOR WORK-FAMILY BALANCE: ASSESSING THE  
ROLE OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY JOB AMENITIES IN OCCUPATIONAL  
SEGREGATION AND THE GENDER WAGE GAP**

Despite significant progress in reducing gender inequality in the workforce, men and women still cluster in different jobs. Occupational segregation is so prevalent that only six percent of women work in male-dominated occupations (Hegewisch and Hartmann 2014). The high level of gendered occupational segregation is a leading factor in the persistent gender wage gap. Female-dominated occupations pay less, on average, than comparable male-dominated occupations (Cotter et al. 1997; England 2005; Hegewisch and Hartmann 2014). In fact, occupational segregation may explain as much as 49 percent of the gender pay gap (Blau and Kahn 2007). As a result, understanding the forces driving occupational sex segregation and the gender wage gap that flows from it is central for identifying strategies to reduce gender inequality.

While the lower relative pay of female-dominated occupations is well-documented, the cause of gendered occupational wage disparities remains contested. On the one hand, compensating differentials theory assumes that women have preference for jobs that allow them to better balance their work and family responsibilities and are willing to give up higher pay for jobs that offer family-friendly job amenities (Daw and Hardie 2012; Filer 1989; Killingsworth 1985). Women's assumed preferences are thought to result in women clustering in occupations that pay lower wages in exchange family-friendly job amenities. On the other hand, the devaluation perspective argues the lower relative pay of female-dominated occupations cannot be boiled down to women's preferences (England 2005). Instead, the devaluation perspective argues that female-dominated occupations pay less because cultural biases lead to the devaluation of women's work. A final possibility, informed by both compensating differentials and the devaluation perspective, is that family-friendly job amenities compensate for lower

wages only in female-dominated occupations, whereas job amenities in male-dominated jobs are perks offered in addition to higher pay. Through the lens of compensating differentials theory, this could be understood as the result of women's preferences while the devaluation perspective would interpret this as an additional way that women's work is undercompensated.

To examine whether it is indeed the case that the lower pay of female-dominated occupations can be explained by access to family-friendly job amenities, prior work has largely focused on the relationship between occupational segregation and flexible scheduling. The results of these studies have been mixed, with some finding that female representation in an occupation is positively associated with flexibility (Davis and Kalleberg 2006; Goodstein 1994; Lowen and Sicilian 2009; Osterman 1995), while others have found no relationship between occupational gender composition and flexibility (Glass 1990; Glass and Camarigg 1992; Glauber 2011). Because of a lack of nationally representative data on employer-provided benefits, this work has generally relied on a few data sources that capture benefit availability in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Since then, access to flexible scheduling has increased greatly, from 27 to 58 percent (Beers 2000; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). Additionally, flexibility is not the only family-friendly job amenity that could be relevant. In particular, paid family leave and the ability to work remotely have gained attention as important job amenities to help workers balance the demands of work and family. As demand for and access to these job amenities increase, it is important to understand the relationship between family-friendly job amenities, occupational segregation, and the gender wage gap. Further, understanding the relationship between working from home and the wage gap is especially pertinent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as many employers are expected to add permanent opportunities to work from home.

This study contributes to the discussion about the lower pay of female-dominated occupations in three ways: 1) by considering whether the relationship between wages and access to family-friendly job-amenities varies by occupational gender composition, 2) by expanding the types of job amenities considered, and 3) by drawing on recent data. Using data from the 2017-2018 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) Leave Module, I examine the relationship between job amenities, earnings, and occupational gender composition. I extend previous work by analyzing access to paid family leave and remote work, using new data on flextime, and considering how the relationship between access to job amenities and wages varies across male- and female-dominated occupations. First, I examine whether workers in female-dominated occupations are more likely to have access to these job amenities than workers in integrated or male-dominated occupations. Second, I examine whether access to family-friendly job amenities accounts for a portion of the wage penalty associated with working in female-dominated occupations and whether the relationship between wages and job amenities varies by occupational gender composition.

### **Competing Theories on Job Amenities, the Gender Wage, and Occupational Segregation**

The microeconomic theory of compensating differentials is used to explain both the clustering of men and women in different occupations as well as the gender wage gap. Compensating differentials theory asserts that using wages alone to measure labor market inequality does not adequately account for tradeoffs workers make between wages and other job amenities (Daw and Hardie 2012). Instead, the full pay of a job is thought to be made up of both monetary and nonmonetary forms of compensation. In explaining the gender wage gap, compensating differentials theory operates under the assumption that women prefer jobs that allow them to

balance their family demands with paid work and posits that women will opt to take a larger portion of their total compensation in the form of family-friendly job amenities.

Compensating differentials theory has also been used to explain gendered occupational segregation. This perspective posits that men and women are concentrated in different occupations based on their preferences. These different preferences, particularly women's preference for desirable working conditions and family-friendly job amenities, are assumed to come from women's domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. Accordingly, men and women cluster in occupations that meet their preferences. Compensating differentials theory also posits that the lower average wages of female-dominated jobs are the result of these different preferences, with women clustering in occupations that offer a greater portion of the total compensation in nonpecuniary benefits while men cluster in occupations with higher wages (Filer 1989; Killingsworth 1985).

While supply-side theories such as compensating differentials favor explanations of the gender wage gap and occupational segregation that focus on the choices and preferences of women, devaluation theory shifts the focus from women's choices to gendered beliefs about the value of women's work. Devaluation theory suggests that cultural biases lead to the devaluation of activities associated with women. As a result, occupations with a high concentration of women pay less *because* the work is done by women. Scholars who draw on devaluation theory point to a large body of research that finds that as the proportion of female workers in an occupation increases, wages decrease, even after controlling for human capital and occupational factors (England 2005; England, Allison, and Wu 2007; Perales 2013). Additional research has found that pay declines after the proportion of women workers in an occupation increases (Levanon, England, and Allison 2009).

The devaluation perspective highlights that without national standards for employer-provided benefits and amenities, family-friendly job amenities are distributed unevenly across the workforce. The devaluation of women's work may mean that workers in occupations with a high concentration of women are less likely to have family-friendly job amenities in addition to being paid lower wages. If this is the case, then the lack of family-friendly job amenities is an additional disadvantage incurred by workers in female-dominated occupations.

### **Contemporary Family-Friendly Job Amenities**

A number of past studies have tested the idea the gender wage gap and the clustering of women in lower paying occupations can be explained in part by women's preferences for jobs that allow them to more easily balance work and family. These studies examine the relationship between family-friendly job amenities and wages and/or occupational segregation. Prior work on has largely focused on flextime as a family-friendly job amenity (Gariety and Shaffer 2001; Glauber 2011; Lowen and Sicilian 2009; McCrate 2005). In this study, I focus on three contemporary family-friendly job amenities: flexible scheduling, remote work, and paid family leave.

The findings of prior research examining whether women cluster in occupations that offer more flexible scheduling have been mixed. Some studies have found that the likelihood a worker will have flexibility increases with the proportion of women in the occupation (Davis and Kalleberg 2006; Goodstein 1994; Lowen and Sicilian 2009; Osterman 1995). However, others have found no evidence of such a relationship. In fact, some studies have found that female concentration is actually negatively associated with schedule flexibility (Glass 1990; Glass and Camarigg 1992; Glauber 2011). Finally, regardless of the occupation, McCrate (2005) found that female workers do not have more access to flexible schedules than male workers.

There is weak empirical support for the idea that gender wage gap is in part the result of the priority women place on flexibility. Studies have consistently found that flexibility is actually associated with higher wages, for both women and men (Gariety and Shaffer 2001; Glauber 2011; Lowen and Sicilian 2009; McCrate 2005). Further, at the firm-level, firms that offer flexibility do not pay less, suggesting individual firms do not use such policies to make up for lower wages (Glass 2004). Other studies have focused on the motherhood wage penalty, comparing non-mothers to mothers, who ostensibly have stronger desires to have access to flexibility. However, flexibility has not been found to account for any portion of the motherhood wage penalty and even for mothers, flexibility is associated with higher, not lower, wages (Fuller and Hirsh 2018; Glauber 2012; Yu and Kuo 2017).

Rather than operating as a compensating differential, these findings suggest labor market segmentation and indicate that flexibility is more likely to be available to workers in “good jobs,” which offer both higher wages and better benefits (Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000). However, while prior work has focused on the direct effect of flexibility on wages, it is possible that the relationship between wages and flexibility varies by occupational gender composition. If employers assume that women are more likely to be willing to trade wages for family-friendly job amenities, job amenities like flexibility may suppress wages for workers in female-dominated occupations more than for workers in male-dominated occupations. As such, flexibility, along with working from home and paid family leave, may act like a compensating differential for workers in female-dominated occupations only. In that case, rather than justifying the wage gap, as compensating differentials are often interpreted as doing, it would suggest that workers in female-dominated occupations face additional barriers to higher pay.



While flexibility has received the most attention in prior research, paid family leave is another important family-friendly job amenity. Having access to paid family leave allows workers to take time off of work to care their family members without losing pay or having to arrange for another caretaker to fill in while they are at work. Paid leave has increasingly gained the attention of legislators, the media, and the public as a necessary policy for work and family balance. In the absence of a federal paid family and medical leave policy, for workers who do not live in one of the seven states with paid family leave, it is up to individual employers to provide this family-friendly job amenity. The inconsistency of the provision of paid leave makes it a particularly useful family-friendly job amenity to look at because it increases the likelihood that employers and employees view it as a special amenity rather than a right.

Paid leave may function differently than flexibility in terms of the relationship between wages and occupational segregation due to a number of pertinent differences between the two family-friendly job amenities. Employers who offer flexibility in work schedule do not incur any direct costs or lost productivity. Presumably, the same amount of work is getting done for the same price, just at a different time or location. Paid leave, however, involves paying employees for time they are not working, which may mean it operates as a compensating differential.

Finally, the ability to work from home is an especially pertinent family-friendly job amenity. Remote work can be understood as family-friendly when it is done as a replacement for in-person work, not as an extension of the work day leading to long hours. As a replacement for in-person work, whether permanent or periodic, remote work may allow workers to more effectively balance work and family demands by eliminating commute times, offering some flexibility in hours, and giving workers the ability to complete domestic tasks and caregiving throughout the day. Like flexible schedules, allowing employees to work from home has

minimal, if any, cost for employers. Prior work on the relationship between remote work and wages finds that working from home instead of the office is associated with higher earnings, with no penalty for women or men who work from home (Glass and Noonan 2016). Understanding the effect of remote work on wages and occupational segregation is especially important in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic as remote work is expected to be much more common long term, even after it is safe to return to in-person work (Bartik, et al. 2020).

## **Hypotheses**

Compensating differentials and devaluation theory lead to competing hypotheses regarding the relationship between family-friendly job amenities, the gender wage gap, and occupational segregation. In this paper, I examine three interrelated research questions and test the hypotheses associated with compensating differentials and devaluation theory.

First, I examine whether workers in female-dominated occupations are more or less likely to have access to family-friendly job amenities than workers in male-dominated occupations. Compensating differentials theory hypothesizes that workers in female-dominated occupations will be more likely to have family-friendly job amenities because women choose occupations that offer these job amenities to make it easier for them to balance work and family responsibilities. On the other hand, devaluation theory hypothesizes that workers in female-dominated occupations will be less likely to have family-friendly job amenities because the societal devaluation of women's work results in lower compensation in both monetary and non-monetary forms.

Second, I examine the relationship between family-friendly job amenities and wages. Compensating differentials theory posits that greater access to job amenities in female-dominated jobs attenuates the gender wage gap because women cluster in jobs that provide

family-friendly job amenities in exchange for lower pay. Accordingly, compensating differentials hypothesizes that job amenities will be negatively associated with earnings and controlling for job amenities will attenuate the negative effect of working in a female-dominated occupation on earnings. Conversely, the devaluation perspective posits that women's lower pay is the result of cultural biases that see women's work as being less valuable, not based on women's preferences for job amenities. Accordingly, the devaluation perspective hypothesizes that job amenities will be positively associated with earnings and controlling for job amenities will not account for the negative effect on wages of working in female-dominated occupation.

Finally, I examine whether the relationship between wages and access to family-friendly job amenities varies based on occupational gender composition. While compensating differentials theory emphasizes the supply-side factors at play and devaluation theory emphasizes the demand-side, both perspectives lead to the hypothesis that having access to family-friendly job amenities for workers in female-dominated occupations will be associated with lower wages than for workers in male-dominated occupations.

## **Data and Methods**

### ***Sample***

I use the 2017-18 Leave Module of the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to analyze the relationship between the gender wage gap and family-friendly job amenities. The ATUS is conducted by the U.S. Census and sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The nationally representative sample is randomly selected from members of households that have completed their final Current Population Survey (CPS) interview. One household member over 15 years of age is randomly selected to complete the ATUS time-diary interview. The 2017-18 Leave Module was administered to a subset of ATUS respondents, asking them about their access to

and use of paid and unpaid leave. To be eligible for the Leave Module, ATUS respondents had to be in the labor force and could not be self-employed. There are 10,121 Leave Module respondents. Following prior research, I restrict the sample to adults who are working age (18 to 64 year old) and currently employed, leaving 8,601 respondents. To ensure that each model draws on the same respondents, I dropped respondents with missing data for any of the five different models. The results were not sensitive to this change. The remaining sample consists of 8,096 respondents.

### ***Dependent Variables***

*Family-friendly job amenities.* I examine the three different family-friendly job amenities: paid family leave, flextime, and remote work. *Flextime* represents workers ability to vary or make changes to the times they begin and end work. Respondents who indicated that they could vary their start and stop time were coded as 1 while those who could not were coded as 0. I also examine respondents' use of *work from home* policies. Specifically, I examine the ability to work from home as a replacement for in-person work rather than the ability to bring work home in addition to regular in-person work hours, because the latter is more an indicator of intense work demands than family-friendliness (Glass and Noonan 2016). As a result, unlike the other *flextime* and *paid family leave*, which measure access, this variable measures actual use of remote work. Respondents who indicated that there are days when they only work at home were coded 1. In sensitivity tests, the results did not change when the specification was limited to those who worked from home at least once a week. As a result, all respondents who indicated they ever worked from home for a full day were included. Those who indicated there were not days when they only work at home were coded 0. *Paid family leave* captures workers who have access to paid leave to care for a family member, including the birth or adoption of a child, childcare,

eldercare, and caring for an ill family member. Respondents who indicated that they could receive paid leave for any of those reasons are coded as 1; those who could not receive paid leave for any of those reasons are coded as 0.

*Earnings.* The natural log of weekly earnings is used to measure earnings due to the skewed distribution of earnings. Using logged earnings allows me to discuss regression coefficients as percent changes in earnings for a one-unit change in the independent variable. For instance, multiplied by 100 to reflect percent change, the coefficient on “female-dominated” indicates how much more or less workers in female-dominated occupations earn in terms of percentage, compared to workers in male-dominated occupations and allows for a comparison of the gap between these occupational groups. Usual weekly earnings in dollars were recorded at the time of the ATUS interview for respondents who changed jobs or employers since the final CPS interview. For the respondents whose employment had not changed, the ATUS documents the earnings information reported in the final CPS interview. I use weekly rather than hourly earnings to minimize estimation errors for salaried workers (Glass and Noonan 2016; Morgan and Arthur 2005). In addition, using hourly earnings reduces the impact of the real gap in pay between men and women due to the longer hours offered in predominately male occupations (Lips 2013). As a result, I believe that weekly pay is the best indicator of wage compensation for this study.

### ***Independent Variables***

*Occupational gender composition.* The first dependent variable analyzed is the percentage of female workers in three-digit Census occupation codes using data from the 2017 and 2018 Current Population Survey (CPS). This is a three-category variable where 1 equals female-dominated occupations (more than 75% female), 2 equals integrated occupations (between 25%

and 75% female) and 3 equals male-dominated occupations (more than 75% male). The percent female for each occupation from the CPS was then merged with the ATUS data.

Table 1 shows the five most common occupations by gender. The most common female-dominated occupations include elementary and middle school teachers, nurses, and secretaries. Within integrated occupations, managers and supervisors as well as customer service representatives are among the most common. The most common male-dominated occupations include software developers, engineers, and carpenters.

*Individual characteristics.* Individual-level controls include sex, race, citizenship status, marital status, and the presence of children under 18 years old in the household. To isolate the effects of gender, I use a *female* dummy variable coded as 1 for female, 0 for male. I measure *race* with a categorical variable representing identification as white, Black, American Indian/Native Alaskan Asian American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or multiple races. The reference category is identification as White. *Hispanic ethnicity* is measured through a dummy variable where 1 equals Hispanic and 0 equals not Hispanic. To ensure that the effects of race and ethnicity are not actually the result of *citizenship*, I include a dummy variable indicating the effect of being a U.S. citizen. *Marital status* is measured by a dummy variable, coded 1 for married and 0 for unmarried. Because family responsibilities, especially those related to child care, are thought to be the main reason why women opt to take larger portions of their total wages in the form of job amenities, I include a dummy variable for *parental status*. Respondents who have at least one of their own children under 18 years of age in the household are coded 1 for “Parent” and those who do not have a child of their own in the household are 0. *Age* is measured continuously from 18 to 64 years old.

*Human capital.* To isolate the relationship between family-friendly job amenities, occupational segregation, and wages, human capital factors that might influence occupation and wages need to be controlled. I measure *educational attainment* categorically with dummy variables for a high school degree or less, some college, and bachelor's degree or higher. In the multivariate analysis, having a some college is the reference category. I include a measure for *full-time* to account for differences in benefit availability between full- and part-time workers. Working 35 hours or more a week is coded 1 for full-time, while working fewer than 35 hours a week is coded 0. In cases in which respondents answered that their hours vary weekly (N=201), I use the number of hours they reported working in the previous week. Including these respondents using the previous week's hours worked instead of excluding them from the analysis does not change the results.

*Occupational characteristics.* Following previous research (Glass 1990; Glass and Camarigg 1992; Glauber 2011), I include broad occupational categories to account for labor market forces that may be associated with wages and access to benefits. As Glass (1990:789) points out, "Broad occupational categories in the economy employ different labor processes that affect job characteristics irrespective of the gender stereotyping that may accompany these major divisions in the economy." For example, many professional occupations are highly male as are blue collar occupations. Similarly, many administrative occupations are highly female as are many service occupations. Because of this potential heterogeneity at the extreme ends of the occupational sex composition spectrum, controlling for broad occupational categories ensures that the effect of percent female is not suppressed. Further, any apparent effects of job amenities may be confined to certain occupational sectors rather being universal. Thus, I include categorical variables for broad occupational sectors. *Broad Occupational Group*

*(BroadOccGroup)* is a categorical variable that includes management, professional, service, sales, administrative and blue collar occupational categories. Professional occupations serve as the reference category.

### ***Analytic Plan***

To examine the relationship between family-friendly job amenities and occupational gender composition, I begin by comparing the percent of workers with each family-friendly job amenity in male-dominated, gender-integrated, and female-dominated occupations. I then estimate three separate logistic regressions to predict the probability that an individual has access to paid family leave, remote work, and flextime.

To examine whether family-friendly job amenities explain the portion of the wage gap flowing from occupational segregation, I estimate OLS regressions predicting logged weekly earnings. Models are nested to assess whether access to family-friendly job amenities explained the observed associations between occupational gender composition and wages. Finally, I include interaction terms between the gender composition of occupations and each of the family-friendly job amenities and calculate the predicted logged weekly earnings for male- and female-dominated occupations to examine whether the relationship between earnings and job amenities differs by occupational gender composition.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive Differences***

Table 2 presents the weighted means for the variables used in the analysis for the full sample, by gender, and by occupational gender composition. Occupational gender segregation is evident in the sample. Just under half of workers work in highly gender segregated occupations (23 percent



in female-dominated and 23 percent in male-dominated occupations). Thirty nine percent of women and 40 percent of men work in occupations where at least 75 percent of the workers in the occupation are of their same gender, while only 6 percent of women and 7 percent of men work occupations dominated by the other gender.

Differences in earnings are also present by gender and by occupational gender composition. On average, women earn about \$200 less a week than men, with weekly earnings of \$925 compared to men's \$1,200. Workers in male-dominated occupations have the highest earnings at \$1,171 per week, followed by an average of \$1,120 in weekly earnings for workers in gender integrated occupations. Workers in female-dominated occupations earn an average of \$343 a week less than those in male-dominated occupations, with average weekly earnings of \$828.

The availability of family-friendly job amenities varies by amenity and individual and occupational characteristics. Fifty-six percent of the sample reported having some flexibility in when they start and stop work, with little difference by workers' gender. However, in line with the expectations of the devaluation hypothesis and contrary to compensating differentials theory, workers in female-dominated occupations were the least likely to have flextime (46 percent). Workers in gender-integrated jobs were the most likely to have flextime (63 percent), followed by those in male-dominated occupations (54 percent). Working from home for a full day is the least common family-friendly job amenity. Only 17 percent of the sample reported ever working from home for a full work day, with a slightly smaller percent of women (15 percent) reporting remote work than men (18 percent). Like flextime, working from home was most common in gender-integrated occupations (21 percent), followed by male-dominated occupations (14 percent). Again, workers in female-dominated occupations were the least likely to have this

family-friendly job amenity, with only 9 percent of workers in these occupations reporting ever working from home for an entire work day. Only one third of the sample has access to paid family leave, with a higher percentage of men having paid family leave (36 percent) than women (30 percent). Access to paid family leave is spread relatively evenly across different occupational gender compositions. Thirty-four percent of workers in gender-integrated occupations had access to paid family leave, while 32 percent in male-dominated occupations and 31 percent in female-dominated occupations reported having access to paid family leave.

### ***Occupational Segregation and Family-Friendly Job Amenities***

Table 3 shows the results from three logistic regression models predicting access to flexible scheduling, remote work, and paid family leave. Overall, the results of these models provide support for devaluation theory, which suggests that workers in occupations with a larger proportion of female workers will be less likely to have access to family-friendly job amenities. Model 1 shows that the likelihood of having flexible scheduling decreases as the female representation in an occupation increases. Table 3 presents the results as odds ratios. The odds that workers in female-dominated occupations have flexible scheduling are 0.399 of the odds that workers in male-dominated occupations have flexible scheduling—in other words, the odds are 61 percent  $[(1-0.404)/1]$  lower that workers in female-dominated occupations have flexible scheduling than those in male-dominated occupations. Regarding remote work, the odds that workers in female-dominated occupations work a full day from home are 0.321 of (or 68 percent lower than) the odds for workers in male-dominated occupations, while the odds that workers in gender-integrated occupations work a full day from home are 0.718 of (23 percent lower than) the odds for workers in male-dominated occupations. There is no significant difference between those in gender-integrated and male-dominated occupations for flexible scheduling or remote

work. Access to paid family leave is not associated with occupational gender composition, with no significant difference in the likelihood of having paid family leave across all categories. Net of controls, an individual's gender is not associated with flextime or remote work. However, the odds that female workers have paid family leave are 27 percent lower than the odds for male workers.

A number of control variables, both individual and occupational, are associated with the various family-friendly job amenities. American Indian/Alaskan Native workers are less likely to be able to work remotely and have paid family leave than White workers. The odds of Hispanic workers having paid family leave or the ability to work remotely are significantly less than for non-Hispanic workers. Citizenship is also associated with access to family-friendly job amenities. Citizens are more likely to have the ability to flex their schedules and to have paid family leave. Workers with markers of labor market power are more likely to have access to job amenities as well. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with a higher likelihood of having flextime and working remotely and higher earnings are associated with greater access to all three family-friendly job amenities. While the odds of a full-time workers having access to paid family leave are 2.617 times the odds of a part-time worker, full-time workers are less likely to have schedule flexibility and to be able to work from home. Access to family-friendly job amenities also varies by broad occupational group, with workers in management and administrative occupations being more likely to have job amenities and workers in service and blue-collar occupations being less likely.

### ***Wages and Family-Friendly Job Amenities***

Next, I examine the relationship between wages and occupational gender composition. Table 4 presents the OLS regression models predicting log hourly wages. Model 1 predicts log wages

based on individual, human capital, and occupational characteristics. The coefficient for female-dominated occupation in this model represents the baseline penalty associated with working in a female-dominated occupation before controlling for possible effects of family-friendly job amenities. As expected, workers in female-dominated and integrated occupations earn less than workers in male-dominated occupations, with those in female-dominated occupations earning the least, net of controls. Using the natural log of wages allows for a discussion of wage differentials in terms of percent change. Working in a female-dominated occupation is associated with wages that are 18.6 percent lower relative to working in a male-dominated occupation.

Model 2 adds flextime, remote work, and paid family leave, examining the effect of family-friendly job amenities on wages and the wage gap. Including the family-friendly job amenities in the model reduces the wage penalty associated with working in female-dominated occupations to 15.2 percent lower relative to working in male-dominated occupations. Taken alone, this might indicate support for compensating differentials theory. However, flextime, remote work, and paid family leave are all associated with higher weekly earnings. Having the ability to work remotely is associated with the highest increase in wages of the family-friendly job amenities. The ability to work from home is associated with a wage increase of 15.7 percent compared to workers who cannot work from home, while paid family leave is associated with a 10.6 percent wage premium and flextime is associated with a 5.4 percent increase. Because these job amenities are associated with higher earnings and workers in male-dominated occupations are more likely to have flextime and work from home, these findings cannot be interpreted as evidence that these family-friendly job amenities are compensating differentials. Instead of explaining the lower earnings of workers in female-dominated occupations, the observed relationship between job amenities, occupational segregation, and earnings suggests that job

amenities are endogenous and explain a portion of the higher earnings in male-dominated occupations.

To examine whether having family-friendly job amenities has the same association with wages for workers in male-dominated and female-dominated occupations, I estimate an additional model (Model 3) that includes interactions between job amenities and occupational gender composition. The interaction coefficient for working in a female-dominated occupation and having the ability to work remotely is significant, while the interaction coefficients between occupational gender composition and paid family leave and flextime are not significant. Figure 1 shows the predicted logged weekly earnings of workers in male- and female-dominated occupations with and without remote work. Following the patterns from the prior model, workers in male-dominated occupations have higher logged weekly earnings than workers in female-dominated and gender integrated occupations. As the figure shows, the effect of remote work on wages varies by category of occupational gender composition. For workers in male-dominated and gender integrated occupations, the ability to work remotely is associated with a significantly higher wage premium than it is for workers in female-dominated occupations.

## **Discussion**

Ongoing occupational segregation plays a large role in the gender wage gap, with female-dominated occupations paying less, on average, than male-dominated occupations (Blau and Kahn 2007; Hegewisch and Hartmann 2014). While the relationship between wages and occupational gender composition is well established, there are competing theories about why this is the case. On the one hand, compensating differentials theory suggests that women's preference for job amenities that allow them to better balance work and family leads to women clustering in occupations that pay less in exchange for family-friendly job amenities. On the other hand,

devaluation theory argues that the lower relative pay of female-dominated occupations cannot be explained by women's preferences. Instead, devaluation theory posits that female-dominated occupations pay less because cultural biases lead to the devaluation of women's work. In the current study, I test these theories by examining the relationship between occupational segregation, wages, and three contemporary family-friendly job amenities— flextime, remote work, and paid family leave.

Rather than providing clear support for either the devaluation hypothesis or compensating differentials theory, the findings of this study indicate that both are at work in ways that compound the inequality associated with occupational segregation. I find that workers in female-dominated jobs are no more likely to have access to paid family leave, flextime, or to have worked from home than workers in male-dominated jobs, which shows that women do not cluster in occupations with family-friendly job amenities. Instead, workers in female-dominated jobs are significantly less likely to have flexibility in scheduling and to work from home. As a result, the clustering of women into certain occupations cannot be explained by a preference for occupations with family-friendly job amenities. Rather, in line with the devaluation hypothesis, female-dominated occupations are less family-friendly by these measures than male-dominated occupations, suggesting an additional disadvantage of working in female-dominated occupations.

Examining how the relationship between wages and job amenities varies by occupational gender composition shows that the wage gap is larger between workers in male- and female-dominated occupations who work from home than it is between those who do not have this family-friendly job amenity. While workers in male-dominated occupations who have family-friendly job amenities are the highest earning group, there is no statistically significant difference between the wages of workers in female-dominated occupations who have job amenities and

those in either male- or female-dominated occupations who do *not* have paid family leave or work from home. This suggests that workers in female-dominated occupations who have job amenities are paid less in exchange for these job amenities compared to their counterparts in male-dominated occupations and that the additive benefits of working in a “good job” are greater for workers in male-dominated occupations. Taken together, the findings indicate that workers in female-dominated jobs are less likely to receive family-friendly job amenities than workers in male-dominated jobs. When workers in female-dominated jobs are able to work from home, this amenity does not come with higher wages that accompany it in male-dominated jobs.

There are a few important implications of this study. First, it suggests a reframing of compensating differentials. Compensating differentials are often used to justify the wage gap between male- and female-dominated occupations. However, the lower wages of female-dominated occupations cannot be explained by women clustering in occupations that allow them to trade wages for family-friendly job amenities because female-dominated occupations are less likely to have these amenities. While this cannot explain the lower pay of female-dominated occupations, there is some evidence that wages are traded for job-amenities in female-dominated occupations. However, rather than justifying the wage gap, I argue that this actually suggests that workers in female-dominated occupations are doubly disadvantaged. They are less likely to have family-friendly job amenities and when they do have them, their wages are suppressed.

A second implication is related to the long-term effects of a growing remote workforce. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that more workers will have the opportunity to work from home. If working from home is associated with a greater wage gap between male- and female-occupations, we may expect that this will impact the overall gender wage gap as working from home becomes more common. This points to the need for ongoing research into

the effects that working from home has on the wages of workers in female-dominated occupations as the shift to working from home becomes permanent for more workers over the next few years.

There are limitations to the present study. Because the data are cross-sectional, employment history is not measured, which is an important aspect of human capital in predicting wages. Another potential limitation is that workers' reported access to paid family leave might differ from their actual access to paid leave. Workers may think they have access to paid leave when they do not actually, and vice versa. In particular, workers who have not used family or parental leave may be least likely to have an accurate understanding of their benefits, which may influence the finding that more women report having access to family leave. Additionally, we have no measure of use of paid leave. It may be that wages are affected by use of paid family leave, rather than access to it. Workers who take advantage of family-friendly benefits may suffer career penalties from the very employers who provide those benefits. However, this alternative would not be consistent with compensating differentials theory. Instead, it would provide evidence of a discriminatory demand-side effect. Finally, measures of occupational sex composition are based on national level data using three-digit occupational categories. It is possible that the relationship between sex composition and access to paid family leave exists at the local or firm-level but not the national or occupational level, which prior research has found is case for monetary compensation (Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002). For instance, women might not initially choose their occupations based on their expected family responsibilities, but later may choose to work for employers that offer family-friendly job amenities once they are closer to having children.



## Tables and Figures

**Table 1. Most Common Occupations by Occupational Gender Composition**

Female-dominated	Elementary and middle school teachers Registered nurses Secretaries and administrative assistants Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides Social workers
Gender-integrated	Managers, all other First-line supervisors of retail sales workers Customer service representatives Accountants and auditors First-line supervisors of office and administrative support workers
Male-dominated	Software developers, applications and systems software First-line supervisors of production and operating workers Carpenters Computer occupations, all other Engineers, all other

**Table 2. Means of Variables for the Full Sample, by Sex, and by Percent Female in Occupation**

	Full Sample	Women	Men	Female-Dominated	Gender Integrated	Male-Dominated
Individual Characteristics						
Female	0.49	—	—	0.84	0.50	0.12
Weekly earnings	\$1,065	\$925	\$1,200	\$828	\$1,120	\$1,171
Race						
White	0.80	0.79	0.81	0.78	0.80	0.83
Black	0.12	0.13	0.10	0.16	0.12	0.08
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Asian	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.06	0.06
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Multiple races	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
Hispanic	0.16	0.14	0.18	0.13	0.16	0.21
Citizen	0.92	0.94	0.89	0.95	0.93	0.85
Married	0.53	0.51	0.55	0.53	0.52	0.56
Parent	0.41	0.41	0.40	0.43	0.39	0.44
Educational Attainment						
High school or less	0.30	0.26	0.35	0.25	0.27	0.45
Some college	0.26	0.28	0.23	0.32	0.23	0.24
College and above	0.44	0.46	0.42	0.43	0.50	0.31
Age	40	41	40	40	40	40
Occupational Characteristics						
Sex Composition						
Female-dominated	0.23	0.39	0.07	—	—	—
Gender-integrated	0.54	0.55	0.53	—	—	—
Male-dominated	0.23	0.06	0.40	—	—	—

**Table 2. Means of Variables for the Full Sample, by Sex, and by Percent Female in Occupation, Cont'd**

	Full Sample	Women	Men	Female-dominated	Gender integrated	Male-dominated
Occupational Category						
Management	0.18	0.17	0.18	0.02	0.30	0.06
Professional	0.30	0.33	0.26	0.46	0.23	0.27
Service	0.15	0.17	0.15	0.20	0.13	0.16
Sales	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.01	0.14	0.01
Administrative	0.14	0.20	0.08	0.30	0.12	0.02
Blue Collar	0.16	0.05	0.26	0.01	0.08	0.48
Family-Friendly Job Amenities						
Flexibility	0.57	0.56	0.57	0.46	0.63	0.54
Work from home	0.17	0.15	0.18	0.09	0.21	0.14
Paid family leave	0.33	0.30	0.36	0.31	0.34	0.32
<i>N</i>	8,096	4,174	3,902	1,906	4,391	1,799

Source: American Time Use Survey Leave Module, 2017-18

**Table 3. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Predicting Access to Flexibility, Work from Home, and Paid Leave**

	<u>Model 1</u> Paid Family Leave	<u>Model 2</u> Flexible Scheduling	<u>Model 3</u> Remote Work
Occupational Gender Composition			
Female Dominated	1.093 (0.148)	0.399*** (0.054)	0.321*** (0.056)
Gender Neutral	0.972 (0.108)	0.718** (0.079)	0.784 (0.10)
Male Dominated	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Female	0.775** (0.0686)	0.956 (0.0811)	1.029 (0.103)
Race			
White	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Black	0.939 (0.107)	1.163 (0.121)	0.800 (0.117)
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0.394 (0.187)	1.843 (0.837)	0.282 (0.193)
Asian	0.864 (0.149)	0.704* (0.125)	0.686* (0.108)
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.893 (1.311)	1.931 (1.120)	1.364 (0.846)
Multiple races	1.926 (0.736)	1.481 (0.487)	0.827 (0.339)
Hispanic	0.624*** (0.074)	0.950 (0.105)	0.546*** (0.089)
Citizenship Status	1.749*** (0.285)	1.356* (0.191)	1.057 (0.189)
Married	1.189* (0.096)	1.020 (0.077)	1.167 (0.128)
Parent	1.011 (0.0827)	1.048 (0.0808)	0.899 (0.0926)

**Table 3. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Predicting Access to Flexibility, Work from Home, and Paid Leave, Cont'd**

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>
	Paid Family Leave	Flexible Scheduling	Remote Work
Educational attainment			
HS or less	0.821 (0.092)	0.879 (0.0902)	0.577** (0.106)
Some college	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
BA+	1.055 (0.101)	1.236* (0.114)	2.098*** (0.253)
Age	1.053* (0.0272)	0.958 (0.0223)	1.140*** (0.0388)
age2	0.999** (0.0003)	1.000 (0.0003)	0.998*** (0.0004)
Logged weekly earnings			
	1.808*** (0.139)	1.425*** (0.0946)	2.047*** (0.219)
Full-time	2.617*** (0.445)	0.515*** (0.0684)	0.569** (0.099)
BroadOccGroup			
Management	1.235* (0.132)	1.710*** (0.187)	1.116 (0.128)
Professional	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Service	0.831 (0.117)	1.041 (0.129)	0.307*** (0.089)
Sales	0.805 (0.126)	1.513** (0.239)	1.024 (0.169)
Administrative	1.440** (0.182)	1.374** (0.167)	0.890 (0.137)
Blue collar	0.702* (0.109)	0.389*** (0.052)	0.148*** (0.037)
N	8,096	8,096	8,096

*Source:* American Time Use Survey Leave Module, 2017-18

*Notes:* Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Table 4. OLS Regression Models Predicting Logged Weekly Earnings**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Occupational Gender Composition</b>			
Female Dominated	-0.186*** (0.0262)	-0.152*** (0.0261)	-0.144*** (0.0377)
Gender Neutral	-0.152*** (0.0215)	-0.140*** (0.0212)	-0.158*** (0.0299)
Male Dominated	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Female	-0.143*** (0.0175)	-0.132*** (0.0169)	-0.132*** (0.0169)
<b>Race</b>			
White	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Black	-0.0912*** (0.0224)	-0.0852*** (0.0219)	-0.0857*** (0.0219)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	-0.0505 (0.0656)	-0.0314 (0.0624)	-0.0315 (0.0615)
Asian	0.102* (0.0432)	0.114** (0.0410)	0.113** (0.0408)
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0327 (0.122)	0.00708 (0.114)	0.00891 (0.114)
Multiple races	0.0933 (0.0476)	0.0748 (0.0463)	0.0756 (0.0462)
Hispanic	-0.0840*** (0.0226)	-0.0648** (0.0227)	-0.0641** (0.0227)
Citizenship Status	0.0600 (0.0310)	0.0480 (0.0307)	0.0496 (0.0309)
Married	0.0490** (0.0157)	0.0413** (0.0156)	0.0408** (0.0156)
Parent	0.0583*** (0.0158)	0.0540*** (0.0156)	0.0542*** (0.0156)

**Table 4. OLS Regression Models Predicting Logged Weekly Earnings, Cont'd**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Educational attainment			
HS or less	-0.0809*** (0.0196)	-0.0698*** (0.0190)	-0.0697*** (0.0189)
Some college	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
BA+	0.295*** (0.0197)	0.264*** (0.0195)	0.262*** (0.0196)
Age	0.0404*** (0.00487)	0.0370*** (0.00481)	0.0372*** (0.00481)
age2	-0.000368*** (0.0000578)	-0.000327*** (0.0000571)	-0.000329*** (0.0000570)
Full-time	0.225*** (0.0241)	0.208*** (0.0239)	0.206*** (0.0239)
Broad Occupation Group			
Management	0.0930*** (0.0240)	0.0723** (0.0234)	0.0673** (0.0238)
Professional	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Service	-0.408*** (0.0279)	-0.383*** (0.0282)	-0.385*** (0.0284)
Sales	-0.195*** (0.0322)	-0.190*** (0.0308)	-0.189*** (0.0307)
Administrative	-0.181*** (0.0253)	-0.182*** (0.0244)	-0.179*** (0.0245)
Blue collar	-0.265*** (0.0260)	-0.215*** (0.0266)	-0.216*** (0.0269)
Flextime		0.0543*** (0.0157)	0.0460 (0.0290)
Works remotely		0.157*** (0.0221)	0.162*** (0.0398)
Paid family leave		0.106*** (0.0159)	0.0945** (0.0289)

**Table 4. OLS Regression Models Predicting Logged Weekly Earnings, Cont'd**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female dominated*flextime			0.0252 (0.0407)
Gender neutral*flextime			0.00626 (0.0361)
Female Dominated*works remotely			-0.141* (0.0700)
Gender neutral*works remotely			0.0204 (0.0478)
Female dominated*paid family leave			-0.0325 (0.0412)
Gender neutral*paid family leave			0.0329 (0.0359)
Constant	2.033*** (0.105)	2.013*** (0.104)	2.018*** (0.104)
N		8,096	8,096

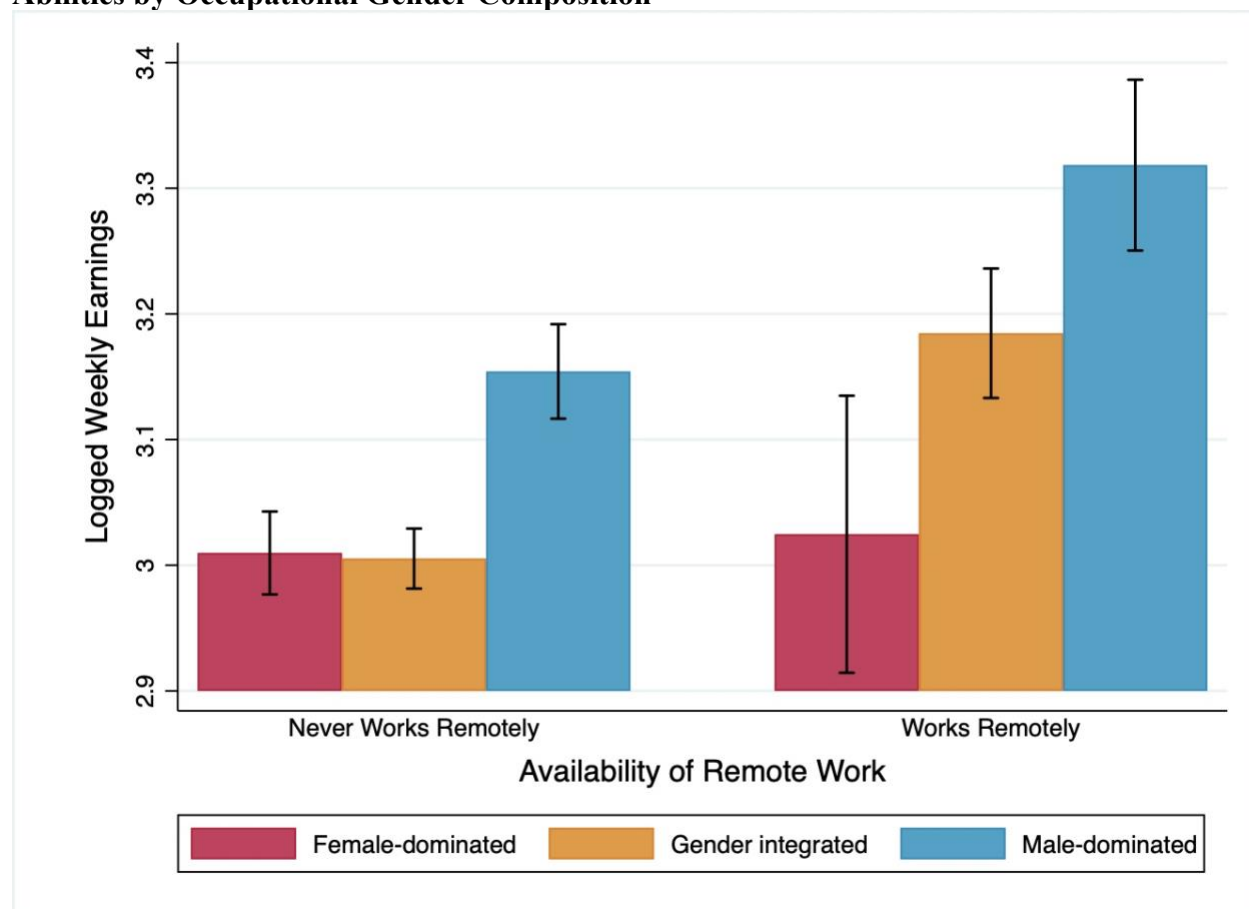
*Source:* American Time Use Survey Leave Module, 2017-18

*Notes:* Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001



**Figure 1. Predicted Logged Weekly Earnings for Workers with and Without Remote Work Abilities by Occupational Gender Composition**



## **CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION**

In this dissertation, I explored how employer-provided work-family policies impact gender inequality in the workplace and at home. By examining parental leaves at the City of Madison before and after the implementation of a paid parental leave policy, I identified how gender schemas and leave-taking blueprints lead men and women make different decisions about their parental leaves and how paid leave policies can create new blueprints for men to follow that facilitate longer leaves. Additionally, in considering how family-friendly job amenities are related to occupational segregation and the wage gap that flows from it, I explore how supply- and demand-side forces results in the reproduction of gender inequality in the labor market.

The first paper shows what happens when workers with relatively generous amounts of paid time off, but no specific bank of paid parental leave, take parental leaves. The patterns identified are highly gendered, both in the factors associated with leave duration and leave duration itself. The average length of mothers' leaves is close to the maximum 12 weeks provided by FMLA. For mothers, family and workplace context is not associated with leave length. Instead, factors related to socioeconomic status are the only factors that are associated with leave durations, suggesting that mothers default to taking the longest leaves they can and only take shorter leaves when they lack the privilege the do so. Fathers' leaves, on the other hand, are much shorter than mothers' on average and their leave durations are associated with factors related to their family and work. This suggests fathers' leaves are sensitive to their specific contexts and provides the groundwork for the potential of paid parental leave policies to change the workplace context for fathers and encourage longer leaves.

The second paper examines what how the implementation of an employer-provided paid parental leave policy impacts fathers' parental leaves. I find that without paid parental leave,

fathers tend to rely on the leave-taking blueprints laid out by the provider schema, taking short leaves and explaining these leaves by emphasizing the need to save their paid time off even when they purport to believe in new fatherhood ideals. However, the findings that fathers in the police department had an alternative blueprint for longer leaves even before paid parental leave was available suggests that longer leaves are possible even in unexpected places, like the highly masculine, male-dominated police department. Once paid parental leave became available, fathers in field and professional departments used it almost automatically. My findings indicate that fathers are primed and ready to be active co-parents but lack clarity on how navigate work and family responsibilities in a way that positions them to do so. I argue that paid parental leave policies have the potential to create new blueprints for fathers that allow them to enact new fatherhood ideals without jeopardizing the provider role.

While the second paper highlights the positive potential of paid parental leave, research on the effects of work-family policies in countries with more generous policies warns of the potential for these policies to reinscribe gender inequality when they encourage women to reduce their commitment to the labor market (Kaufman 2020). Without government policies in the U.S., employer-provided work-family policies could operate through demand- or supply-side forces to reinforce gender inequality. In the final paper, I examine how access to family-friendly job amenities like remote work, paid family leave, and flexibility are associated with occupational segregation and the wage gap. Rather than women clustering in occupations that provide these job amenities, as compensating differentials theory posits, I find that workers in female-dominated occupations are less likely to have flexible schedules or the ability to work from home than workers in male-dominated occupations. Additionally, while job amenities are associated with higher earnings across occupational groups, they are associated with a higher wage

premium for workers in male-dominated occupations. Rather than pointing to a need to scale back or alter employer-provided work-family policies, this paper reinforces the need for more consistent access to these policies. Taken together, these findings suggest that both compensating differentials and devaluation are at work in ways that compound the inequality associated with gendered occupational segregation.

Stepping back, the research presented in this dissertation highlights the role of employer-provided work-family policies in reducing and reproducing gender inequality and offers insights into contemporary parenthood, especially fatherhood. By examining parental leave use in this context, this dissertation builds on feminist theories that situate the process of doing and undoing gender at the nexus of work and family (Coltrane 2013; Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 2004; 2009; Williams 2010; Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013). It provides an image of contemporary fatherhood that is stuck between traditional provider norms and new fatherhood ideals. Fathers do not want to be detached from the daily lives of their children like the male breadwinners of the 1950s. They see themselves as loving, involved fathers who enjoy spending time with their children. However, surrounding the birth of a child, fathers lack clarity on how to navigate work and family responsibilities to position themselves to be equal co-parents, leaving them sensitive to their work and family context and cultural norms. Formal work-family policies have the potential to shift the norms for fathers by creating clear expectations for balancing work and family. These findings point to several avenues for further research. My research highlights the importance of understanding the context in which fathers are making decisions about work and family and points to the need for additional research on how different workplace cultures and policy formations impact fathers parental leave decisions. While the study at the City of Madison highlights fathers' leave decisions in a supportive

workplace, more work is needed to understand the impact of leave policies in high-pressure, competitive workplaces where the ideal worker norm may be more salient. For instance, some of the engineers I interviewed indicated that the culture at prior jobs in the private sector had been much less accommodating of men's caregiving. Examining the impact of work-family policies in other contexts would help identify the extent to which a family-friendly workplace culture is needed for policies to be effective and offer additional insights into how men experience different opportunities and constraint for enacting new fatherhood ideals.

Another important question that remains is how the details of the policy impact leave use. At the City, fathers had the freedom to use their leaves at any time for a full year after their child was born. Many fathers chose to use a substantial portion of their leaves after their wife returned to work. However, some paid parental leave policies dictate that the leave must be used immediately. In future research, I hope to interview fathers employed by the City of Dayton, which offers one month of leave immediately after the birth of a child. Comparing leave use at two different municipal employers with different policy arrangements will add to understandings of how policies impact fathers' leave decisions.

Finally, while my research highlights how paid leave can lead fathers to take longer parental leaves, what fathers do while on leave remains unclear. In my own future work, I plan on drawing on the interviews with parents from the City of Madison to explore how gender differentiation in childcare unfolds during the first few months after the birth of a child. In addition to analyzing fathers' roles in caregiving during their leaves, I will also examine the role of parental leave in facilitating fathers' roles. As Ben, one of the fathers highlighted in Chapter 2, explained about the impact of the six weeks he spent alone with his second child, "It's understanding those nuances that I feel like is really important, and having that six weeks helped

me learn them. My wife knew them for both kids, but I didn't really know them for Lucy as well as I do... I feel like I know them for Charlie.”

My interest in studying parental leave and work-family policies started when I was an undergraduate at Grinnell College. In the spring of my sophomore year, I learned about ethics of care in Feminist Theory with Astrid Henry and about how so much of gender inequality can be traced back to motherhood in Sociology of the Family with Susan Ferguson. An eager, but pragmatic, young feminist, I began to focus my attention on identifying tangible ways to increase the value of care work and started learning more about paid parental leave. Paid parental leave would not only allow mothers to avoid taking unpaid leaves, but it might help encourage fathers to take more time off work as well and perhaps if men got more involved in caregiving, there could be ripple out effects into the many realms that the systematic devaluation of care work impacts. While my understanding of the mechanisms and processes involved has gotten more sophisticated over the past decade, at its core, this is still what drives my interest in this area. And this dissertation illustrates that there is reason to be hopeful that work-family policies can help disrupt deeply entrenched patterns of the gender division of labor.

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