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Parental Leave: Policy and Practice

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Parental Leave: Policy and Practice

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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Dedication

For all the support given to me throughout the years spent working toward this degree, I give heartfelt thanks to my family and friends. Your encouragement and inspiration strengthened my resolve time and again.

I dedicate this paper to my beloved daughter, Katharine, who has given me more to be grateful for than I ever could have imagined.

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In conducting this research, I had the good fortune of working with an obstetric group practice that supported my study and that generously allowed me access to their facilities in an effort to recruit participants; I am grateful for their kindness and assistance. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the moms and dads who shared their time and their stories.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
A Note on the Term “Family”	5
Structure of the Thesis	6
Potential Contributions of This Research	8
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature on Parental Leave	9
Parental Leave Throughout the World.....	9
Benefits of Parental Leave	13
Effects on Parents	13
Child Health and Development.....	15
Breastfeeding	17
Parental Leave and the Workplace	19
Does Parental Leave Have an Impact on the Workplace?	20
Fathers and Parental Leave	21
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework	26
Anthropology of Policy	26
Advocacy Anthropology	29
Anthropologic View of Parental Leave.....	33
The Intersection of Gender Roles, Worker Roles, & Reproduction	34
Political Economy – Availability and Accessibility of Parental Leave.....	37
Embodiment	39
Chapter Four: Parental Leave in the Current U.S. Societal and Cultural Context.....	42
The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.....	43
FMLA Definition and History	43
Eligibility Requirements for Workers	44
Implications of the FMLA for Workers.....	46
Use of Parental Leave	47
State-Level Policies	48
Other Efforts to Improve Parental Leave	50
Motherhood, Fatherhood, and the Work-Home Dynamic	52
Chapter Five: Methods	57
Recruitment	59
Site Description.....	60
Data Collection	60
Data Analysis.....	62
Methods Limitations	63

Chapter Six: Results.....	65
Respondent Demographics.....	65
Finances.....	67
“What is best for our family” – Individuality in Making Choices.....	69
Bonding.....	72
Breastfeeding.....	74
Societal Expectations.....	76
“It’s great, but...” – Reflections on the FMLA.....	77
Chapter Seven: Discussion and Recommendations.....	80
The Anthropological Perspective.....	82
Study Limitations and Ethical Concerns.....	85
Potential Applications.....	86
Applying Parental Leave Research in a Broader Context.....	87
Conclusion.....	90
References.....	93
Appendix: IRB Approval.....	105

List of Tables

Table 1: Calculating full-rate equivalent of paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave, 2007/2008.....	11
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Abstract

Parental leave is a broad term that encompasses maternity and/or paternity leave to care for an infant. Parental leave provides job protection for workers and may be paid or unpaid, with provisions varying throughout the world. Every industrialized nation offers some form of paid parental leave, with the exception of the United States, whose only federal policy regarding parental leave is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a law that allows eligible workers to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job protected leave for the birth or adoption of a child.

This research project explored how parents understand and navigate the process of parental leave in the United States, and, using an anthropological perspective, situated these narratives into the overall framework of parental leave policy and use in this country. Data were collected through surveys (N=32) and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with expectant parents, most of whom were expecting their first child (N=20).

The results of this study found that parental leave is valued, especially for the purposes of bonding and establishing breastfeeding. Parents were grateful for the length of leave they were able to take, but many would have liked to have a longer leave. Their decisions on whether to use parental leave were shaped by cultural norms relating to gender and worker roles within society, and also the ways in which parents embodied their role as mother or father. Parents also faced a complex situation regarding the availability and accessibility of parental leave within their workplace. While some parents had the option of taking job-protected leave under the FMLA, they did not feel that the leave was accessible, either because they could not afford unpaid leave, or

because they feared that taking more leave than what was considered to be the norm in their workplace would have a detrimental impact on their career.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In households where juggling the needs of one's family contends with meeting the demands of a job, maintaining balance can be difficult. When a child is born to a parent (or a set of parents) who are working, the parents must figure out a way to both care for their child and meet other obligations (work-related, financial, etc.). Some parents are able to take advantage of parental leave for a time following the birth of their child to help facilitate the transition between home life and work life. Parental leave is a broad term that encompasses maternity and/or paternity leave to care for an infant, as well as leave taken to care for a child who has been placed through adoption or foster care (Tanaka 2005). Parental leave provides job protection for workers and can be fully paid, partially paid, or unpaid. Provisions of parental leave vary throughout the world with regard to time granted and level of pay, and levels can differ for mothers and fathers. Every industrialized nation offers some form of paid parental leave, with the exception of the United States (OECD 2010). The only federal policy in the United States that covers parental leave is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which, briefly stated, allows eligible workers to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job protected leave during a twelve month period for their own serious illness, to care for a seriously ill family member, or for the birth or adoption of a child.

The lack of a national paid parental leave programs impacts a majority of families in the United States. According to U.S. Census data, in 2010, 86% of families with young children (under 6 years old) had at least one parent working (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). For mothers with children under the age of 1 year, 56.5% were in the civilian labor force in 2010 (data were not provided for mothers in the armed services).

Among women in the labor force, 88.3% were employed and 11.7% were unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). It is interesting to note that although data are collected about mothers' work status in relation to the age of a very young child (the categories are: under 3 years old, 2 years old, 1 year old, or under 1 year old), such data are not collected for fathers. With regard to fathers' work status, data are categorized for fathers of young children (under 6 years old), but subcategories for very young children are not provided (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

Given the economic reality of no national paid parental leave program in the United States, and the fact that not all parents may be financially able to take unpaid leave from their job, it is important to try and understand how parents negotiate the choices surrounding parental leave. Parents' decisions regarding the amount of time they take off from work may be influenced by a wide variety of factors, including personal preferences and circumstances (e.g., family finances, caring for other children), cultural considerations (e.g., expectations regarding gender roles, workplace norms, family traditions, or religion), or structural constraints (federal- or state-level policy, institutional policies and programs). To date, there has been little research that examines the factors that motivate parents as they make decisions related to parental leave use, especially in the United States. There have been a few studies published recently that look at fathers' use of parental leave in Canada (McKay and Doucet 2010) and in the Nordic countries (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas and Rostgaard 2011). The impetus for these studies was to discover why fathers in these regions were not using all of the parental leave available to them, or why in systems of shared parental leave the fathers were using very little of the shared time.

I was drawn to the topic of parental leave initially because of the disparity between the United States and the rest of the industrialized world with respect to paid parental leave policies. Studies of parental leave globally have documented benefits to

both babies and parents (e.g., Chatterji and Markowitz 2005; Tanaka 2005; Appelbaum and Milkman 2011), and further, some in the United States are advocating the positive impact on business that paid parental leave policies would produce (Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009). This business-centered approach stems in part from the fact that in creating the FMLA, the U.S. Congress gave a high priority to the concerns of businesses in addition to the concerns of families (Congress 1993).

Anthropology, I believe, can be a part of improving the parental leave policy in the United States through making clear the realities and limitations of the FMLA along with highlighting the benefits of paid parental leave policies throughout the world. As I continued studying parental leave policy I began to talk with parents – I was very interested in the stories of mothers and fathers who had encountered the issue of returning to work following the birth of a child. Some had taken parental leave, and others had not – either because they had no access to leave of any sort or because they had no access to paid leave and could not afford to take unpaid time off from work. During this time, I had my own experience with parental leave, which only increased my curiosity as to how, prior to the birth of a child, parents made the decisions of whether or not to take parental leave, and how much time they decided to take. I also wanted to hear their experiences with parental leave and their return to the workplace following parental leave. In addition, I wanted to know how parents perceive parental leave policy in general and in the context of their workplace. As a whole, these questions formed the basis for my research project. Coming from an anthropological perspective, I recognize that decisions on whether to use parental leave following the birth of a child are shaped not only by the availability and accessibility of leave, but also by cultural norms relating to gender and worker roles within society. Parental leave choices are also shaped by the ways in which parents embody their role as mother or father, a process that may evolve as the parent experiences their new reality.

Thus, the main goal of this research project is to explore how parents understand and navigate the process of parental leave in the United States, and to situate these narratives into the overall framework of parental leave policy and use in this country. The project involved the collection of data through surveys (N=32) and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with expectant parents (most parents in this group were expecting their first child) as well as with parents whose child, or children, have already been born (N=20). In an effort to have the broadest sample possible, the only criteria for participation included status as a legal adult (over 18 years of age) and as a parent (whether expectant or established). The expectant parents were drawn from a sample of patients at a local obstetric practice. The physician practice had two offices where I distributed surveys, one in Hillsborough county near USF, and one in the southern portion of central Pasco county. Patients and their partners had the option, at their discretion, to complete a detached contact information form if they wished to be interviewed.

The surveys allowed me to gain a better understanding of expectant parents' knowledge regarding parental leave and their plans for using or not using the leave, as they were preparing for the birth of their child. Interviews with expectant parents gave a more nuanced understanding of how they were making these choices, and what factors were most influential. Using a snowball sample, I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with parents who have been through the parental leave process. Many, though not all, of these respondents also worked or lived in Hillsborough or Pasco counties. Interviewing parents who have already had experience with parental leave – or who were currently experiencing parental leave – allowed me to understand these parents' influential factors in making decisions related to parental leave, as well as their reflections on the process and how it met or differed from their expectations.

To briefly preview the results, most parents in both groups did not have access to paid parental leave (i.e., leave for which their employer compensated them and they did not have to use their accrued personal days) and in this context a majority of parents discussed the impact of finances as important in deciding the length of parental leave. About half of the mothers said that they had taken the full amount of leave they were allowed, either through coverage provided by the Family and Medical Leave Act or workplace policy if ineligible for FMLA coverage. None of the fathers interviewed said they took as much time as they were allowed under FMLA or workplace policy, instead indicating that the length of their leave was driven primarily through the amount of accrued leave they had available.

Other prevalent themes were individuality (parents expressed the importance of making choices based on their personal circumstances as opposed to feeling pressure from family, the workplace, or cultural norms), the importance of bonding during parental leave, and among women, the establishment of breastfeeding. Most parents also indicated that they thought society expects parents to return to work as quickly as possible following the birth of a child and further, that they should return to work as though nothing had changed in their lives. Interestingly, throughout the interviews many parents also stated some variation of the phrase “everyone’s situation is different,” as they made the point that they would not judge the parental leave practices of others.

A note on the Term “Family”

Throughout this paper, the term *family* will appear in various contexts. Throughout my research project, the term parents refers to mothers or fathers of children, and while not designed to be exclusively used in the biological sense, all of the study participants were the biological parents to their children. Under the Family & Medical Leave Act, family is defined to mean child, parent, or spouse. As cultural norms

in the United States evolve, however, eligible persons covered under the rubric of child and parent are expanding. Recently, the U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division released a booklet that provides a comprehensive section to help employees determine FMLA eligibility for parents and children. The following excerpt from the booklet (Wage and Hour Division 2012:5) details the eligibility requirements for children and parents:

Parent

Parent means a biological, adoptive, step or foster father or mother, or any other individual who stood in loco parentis to the employee when the employee was a son or daughter. This term does not include parents “in law”.

Son or daughter

Son or daughter means a biological, adopted, or foster child, a stepchild, a legal ward, or a child of a person standing in loco parentis, who is either under age 18, or age 18 or older and “incapable of self-care because of a mental or physical disability” at the time that FMLA leave is to commence.

In Loco Parentis

A child under the FMLA includes not only a biological or adopted child, but also a foster child, a stepchild, a legal ward, or a child of a person standing in loco parentis. The FMLA regulations define in loco parentis as including those with day-to-day responsibilities to care for and financially support a child. Employees who have no biological or legal relationship with a child may nonetheless stand in loco parentis to the child and be entitled to FMLA leave. For example, an uncle who is caring for his young niece and nephew when their single parent has been called to active military duty or an employee who is co-parenting a child with his or her same sex partner may exercise their right to FMLA leave. Also, an eligible employee is entitled to take FMLA leave to care for a person who stood in loco parentis to the employee when the employee was a child. (See Administrator’s Interpretation No. 2010-3 and Fact Sheets 28B and C.)

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 of this paper examines the existent literature surrounding parental leave. Parental leave policy globally is reviewed and compared to the FMLA in the United States (the only federal level policy in the United States that addresses parental leave). This chapter also considers the academic literature that addresses parental leave, its benefits, its impact on the workplace, and the expanding research into fathers and parental leave.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of anthropological theory as it relates to parental leave. The broad nature of parental leave lends itself to analysis through a variety of theoretical perspectives. This chapter considers how anthropology of policy and advocacy anthropology contribute to the understanding of parental leave policy. Additionally, an argument is presented that through the use of anthropological theory, the decisions parents make surrounding parental leave and how they make those decisions can be viewed as occupying a space at the intersection of gender, work, reproduction, political economy, and embodiment.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ways in which parental leave is situated in the current societal and cultural context of the United States. The FMLA is discussed in detail, and actions by individual states to address parental leave are also explored. Contemporary views of motherhood and fatherhood are examined as they relate to parental leave, and the influence of new media is also explored.

Chapter 5 describes the research project, outlining the goals, methods, and strategies for participant recruitment, as well as for data collection and analysis. Chapter 6 details the results of the research project, and discusses the themes that emerged from the interviews. Participants indicated that the importance of parental leave had much to do with bonding and breastfeeding. For many parents, decisions surrounding parental leave are made in the context of financial considerations. Many parents discussed societal expectations about length of parental leave in regard to the workplace, although most said they made their decisions about parental leave use outside of those expectations, with regard only to what was best for their family. In addition, every parent interviewed talked about the FMLA as being a good in some capacity (job protection, for example), but not good enough as a national parental leave policy. Chapter 7 provides discussion of the results, study limitations, potential applications of the results, and the conclusion.

Potential Contributions of This Research

This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how parents make decisions regarding parental leave, specifically parents who live in the United States. Results will also be shared with the obstetric practice where the surveys were distributed. This research project also has the potential for being a starting point for future research into how parents negotiate parental leave in the United States, and how parental leave policies can be adapted to better fit the needs of families.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature on Parental Leave

This chapter will review the literature on parental leave. It begins by providing a brief overview of parental leave throughout the world. Following this, the academic literature about parental leave, its benefits, and how it interfaces with the workplace is reviewed. An important focus of this review is the growing amount of research that is beginning to focus on fathers' use and perception of parental leave globally.

Parental Leave throughout the World

In many countries, paid maternity leave is the norm. Countries such as France, Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Spain, grant maternity leave with 100% pay for a certain period of time following the birth of a child (for these countries, the paid leave ranges from 14 to 18 weeks). Other countries, including Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, offer partially paid maternity leave (OECD 2010). Australia's recently enacted legislation of partially paid maternity leave results in the United States being the only country among the 34 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that does not offer any paid maternity leave (Australian Nursing Journal 2011, OECD 2010). As a result of the widespread acceptance and use of paid maternity leave globally, only about five per cent of women return to work within three months of giving birth in the UK, Germany, and Sweden, compared to about one-third of women in the United States (Berger, Hill et al. 2005).

Paternity leave is not offered quite as much as maternity leave, and when offered it is for a shorter duration, although countries that do offer paternity tend to offer it as

fully or partially paid leave (OECD 2010). In addition to providing maternity and paternity leave, many countries provide additional parental leave, designed to be shared between parents. The duration, wage replacement rates, and eligibility rules vary among the countries that offer additional parental leave, as do the proportions taken by mothers and fathers, though generally mothers do take more of the parental leave than fathers. Table 1 (below) shows the length of maternity leave, paternity leave, and other parental or prolonged leave available to parents in 37 countries around the world, as well as the FRE (full-time rate equivalent of wage replacement) for parents who take leave. It is worth noting that the data in this table are for 2007/2008; in 2011 Australia enacted a paid maternity leave program, thus the United States is the only country not to provide any paid maternity leave.

Globally parental leave is viewed primarily as a social issue, and so businesses do not bear the burden of providing parental leave benefits to their employees. Rather, there is an accepted and widely followed national-level policy within which parents and businesses operate (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011). In countries with the most generous and comprehensive parental leave policies, studies focus on how these policies and programs might be further enhanced to address societal concerns or discrepancies. For example, Swedish researchers are focusing on why fathers do not take their full allotment of parental leave in a country where dual-earning households are common (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Mansdotter, Fredlund et al. 2010; Almqvist, Sandberg et al. 2011; Eydal 2011; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Johansson 2011; Wells and Sarkadi 2012). Similarly, in Germany, there is interest in research on the effectiveness of recent policy adjustments made with “the dual objective to increase fertility and to enhance incentives for women to return to the labour force after childbirth” (Bergemann and Riphahn 2011:17) in a country where fathers are still often the economic breadwinners in a family (see also Blum 2010; Thyrian, Fendrich et al. 2010).

Table 1: Calculating full-rate equivalent of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, 2007/2008¹

	Maternity Leave	% rate of allowance ²	FRE paid maternity leave	Paternity leave ³	% rate of allowance ²	FRE paid paternity leave	Parental and prolonged period of leave ⁴	Maximum length of parental and prolonged period of leave for women ⁵	% rate of allowance ²	FRE paid parental leave	Parental leave (unpaid)	Maternity and parental leave (full-rate equivalent)	Maximum length of leave for women
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(3)+(10)	(1)+(8) or (7)
Australia	6.0	0.0	0.0	x(10)	..	..	52.0	46.0	0.0	0.0	52.0	0.0	52.0
Austria	16.0	100.0	16.0	0.4	100.0	0.4	104.0	96.0	18.5	19.3	84.7	35.3	112.0
Belgium	15.0	76.9	11.5	1.4	87.4	1.2	13.0		21.8	2.8	10.2	14.4	15.0
Bulgaria	63.0	90.0	56.7	..	..	..			..	..	..	56.7	63.0
Canada	17.0	48.5	8.3	..	..	..	35.0		55.0	19.3	15.8	27.5	35.0
Czech Republic	28.0	59.8	16.7	..	..	..	134.0	136.0	34.8	46.6	87.4	63.4	164.0
Denmark	18.0	50.4	9.1	2.0	50.4	1.0	46.0		50.4	23.2	22.8	32.3	46.0
Estonia	19.9	100.3	20.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	136.0	152.0	48.1	65.4	70.6	85.4	171.9
Finland	18.0	65.9	11.9	7.0	70.0	4.9	143.5	138.5	16.6	23.8	119.7	35.7	156.5
France	16.0	100.0	16.0	2.0	100.0	2.0	146.0	143.0	19.0	27.8	118.2	43.8	159.0
Germany	14.0	100.0	14.0	17.3	67.0	11.6	148.0	148.0	27.5	40.6	107.4	54.6	162.0
Greece	43.0	59.0	25.4	0.3	100.0	0.3	30.3		0.0	0.0	30.3	25.4	43.0
Hungary	24.0	70.0	16.8	0.7	100.0	0.7	136.0	84.0	43.6	59.3	76.7	76.1	136.0
Iceland	13.0	80.0	10.4	13.0	80.0	10.4	26.0	13.0	40.0	10.4	15.6	20.8	26.0
Ireland	42.0	15.7	6.6	14.0	0.0	0.0	14.0		0.0	0.0	14.0	6.6	42.0
Israel (7)	26.0	53.8	14.0										
Italy	20.0	80.0	16.0	..	..	..	26.0		30.0	7.8	18.2	23.8	26.0
Japan	14.0	60.0	8.4	..	..	..	44.0	44.0	70.9	31.2	12.8	39.6	58.0
Korea	12.8	100.0	12.8	0.4	100.0	0.4	45.6		21.2	9.7	35.9	22.5	45.6
Latvia	19.0	100.0	19.0	2.0	80.0	1.6	52.0		70.0	36.4	15.6	55.4	52.0
Lithuania	21.0	100.0	21.0	4.0	100.0	4.0	104.0		84.9	88.3	15.7	109.3	104.0
Luxembourg	16.0	100.0	16.0	1.4	100.0	1.4	26.0		46.5	12.1	13.9	28.1	26.0
Malta	13.0	45.7	5.9	..	..	..			..	..	..	5.9	13.0
Mexico	12.0	100.0	12.0	..	..	..			..	..	..	12.0	12.0
Netherlands	16.0	100.0	16.0	0.3	100.0	0.3	26.0		20.6	5.3	20.7	21.3	26.0
New Zealand	14.0	71.4	10.0	..	..	..	38.0	24.0	0.0	0.0	38.0	10.0	38.0
Norway	9.0	80.0	7.2	10.0	80.0	8.0	91.0		34.7	31.6	59.4	38.8	91.0
Poland	18.0	100.0	18.0	4.0	100.0	4.0	156.0		13.5	21.1	134.9	39.1	156.0
Portugal	17.0	100.0	17.0	2.9	98.3	2.8	13.0		0.0	0.0	13.0	17.0	17.0
Romania	21.0	75.0	15.8	..	..	..			..	..	..	15.8	21.0

Table 1: Calculating full-rate equivalent of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, 2007/2008¹

	Maternity Leave	% rate of allowance ²	FRE paid maternity leave	Paternity leave ³	% rate of allowance ²	FRE paid paternity leave	Parental and prolonged period of leave ⁴	Maximum length of parental and prolonged period of leave for women ⁵	% rate of allowance ²	FRE paid parental leave	Parental leave (unpaid)	Maternity and parental paid leave (full-rate equivalent)	Maximum length of leave for women
Slovak Republic	28.0	55.0	15.4	..	..	..	136.0	128.0	22.6	30.7	105.3	46.1	156.0
Slovenia	15.0	100.0	15.0	13.0	21.4	2.8	37.0		100.0	37.0	0.0	52.0	37.0
Spain	16.0	100.0	16.0	2.1	100.0	2.1	144.0	146.0	0.0	0.0	144.0	16.0	162.0
Sweden	8.5	80.0	6.8	10.0	80.0	8.0	51.4		60.0	30.9	20.6	37.7	51.4
Switzerland	14.0	80.0	11.2	..	..	..	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0	11.2	14.0
Turkey	16.0	70.0	11.2	..	..	..	26.0		0.0	0.0	26.0	11.2	26.0
United Kingdom	52.0	24.6	12.8	2.0	4.7	0.1	13.0		0.0	0.0	13.0	12.8	52.0
United States	12.0	0.0	0.0	..	..	..			..	..	..	0.0	12.0

1 See Tables PF2.1.B, PF2.1.C, PF2.1.D and PF2.1.E for details on payment rules

2 The "rate of allowance" is defined as the ratio between the full-time equivalent payment and the corresponding entitlement in number of weeks. In column 9, the rate is calculated on the basis of the total of weeks available for women when specified.

3 Information refers to the entitlement for paternity leave in a strict sense and the father quota included in some parental leave regulations (for example, Finland and Iceland). In Finland, the 7 weeks include 3 weeks of standard paternity leave, plus 2 weeks of parental leave that give rights to additional 2 weeks of paternity leave.

4 Information refers to parental leave and subsequent prolonged periods of paid leave to care for young children (sometimes under a different name as for example, "childcare leave" or "Home care leave", or the *Complément de Libre Choix d'Activité* in France). In all, prolonged periods of leave can be taken in Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Norway, Poland and Spain.,

5 The maximum length for the mother refers to the maximum duration of the parental leave entitlement not for exclusive use by the father minus the period of maternity leave taken *after* the birth of a child"

6 The individual is assumed to take 26 weeks of parental leave and a remaining period of 130 weeks of childcare leave over which home care allowance can be received.

7 The data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Sources: see Table PF2.1.E

Source: OECD (www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database)

Benefits of Parental Leave

Parental leave, often because it results in increased parent-child interaction, is associated with a variety of positive health and development factors for parents and children. In a review of studies on the effects of parental leave, Miller and colleagues (2009) note that research suggests a number of benefits associated with longer periods parental leave worldwide, including reduced rates of infant mortality, longer duration of breastfeeding, better physical and mental health for new mothers, as well as improved outcomes in child health and development. Conversely, a study by Berger and colleagues (2005) focusing on developmental outcomes of children in the United States whose mothers returned to work within 12 weeks of giving birth found evidence using longitudinal data that suggested causal relationships between an early return to work for mothers following childbirth and negative outcomes for their children. These included a reduction in the duration of breastfeeding, reduction in immunizations, and an increase in externalized behavior problems at age four.

As these two examples demonstrate, researchers have found that parental leave can impact families in a variety of areas. Some of the broader themes are discussed in the following sections.

Effects on Parents

Chatterji and Markowitz (2005) examined data from the 1988 National Maternal and Infant Health Survey and found a reduction in the frequency of depressive symptoms among new mothers who took longer maternity leaves. In their article, Chatterji and Markowitz (2005) reviewed the sparse research that had been done to date on the effects of maternity leave on maternal health. They identify research by Gjerdingen and colleagues in the 1990s on the physical and mental health of a sample of 436 first time mothers in Minnesota (Gjerdingen and Froberg 1991; Gjerdingen,

Froberg et al. 1993; Gjerdingen and Chaloner 1994; Gjerdingen, McGovern et al. 1995). These studies suggest that there are higher rates of physical complications including respiratory infections, gynecologic problems, and breast symptoms (infection, breast discomfort, or nipple irritation) among mothers who were employed within the first few months following the birth of their child compared to mothers who had not returned as early (Gjerdingen, Froberg et al. 1993; Gjerdingen, McGovern et al. 1995). Especially for symptoms associated with respiratory infection, Gjerdingen and colleagues (1993) note that “these symptoms were found to be more frequent for women who returned to the work force than for those who remained at home. From 3 to 12 months post partum, 46% to 50% of women who had returned to the work force and 27% to 39% of women who stayed at home noted respiratory symptoms”(Gjerdingen, Froberg et al. 1993:280). Drawing on data from the same sample of new mothers, Gjerdingen and colleagues (1994) state that

Length of maternity leave and number of work hours were both significantly related to new mothers' postpartum mental health. Approximately 80% to 83% of women in this sample returned to the workplace after delivery, and the average amount of time devoted to the job between the third and twelfth months was 35 hours per week, with a range of 2 to 81 hours. Women who had taken more than 24 weeks' maternity leave had better mental health outcomes at 9 and 12 months postpartum. Mental outlook was also brighter for women who spent fewer hours at their jobs. This relationship was significant at each point in time except at 1 month postpartum, when only 5.7% of women had returned to work. (Gjerdingen and Chaloner 1994:471)

In each of these articles, Gjerdingen and colleagues (1991; 1993; 1994; 1995) conclude that the perception that most women make a full recovery (physically and mentally) from childbirth within six weeks post partum may not coincide with the reality women encounter in their everyday lives. Further, the authors argue that if additional studies find this similar results with larger samples that are more representative of the general population, then policies relating to maternity leave, along with the social support that is

provided to mothers (i.e., from family members and the community at large) should be reexamined from this perspective.

Child Health and Development

A number of studies have tried to determine whether there is any association between maternal employment (or conversely, the lack of maternal employment while a woman is using maternity leave) and developmental outcomes for children (Berger, Hill et al. 2005; Gregg, Washbrook et al. 2005; Tanaka 2005; Waldfogel 2007; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011). However, it can be difficult to identify a definitive link between maternal employment and specific child development outcomes, especially when the outcomes measured are for older children, when a number of other factors also come into play. Additionally, care must be taken when reviewing studies that may have been conducted in different countries, noting that not only do employment patterns differ, but so do parental leave policies, attitudes surrounding leave and employment, childcare options, and so on. No research that I have come across claims to have accounted for all of these variables, but despite these potential confounders, the studies offer similar suggestions for improvement: better leave policies and better options for affordable, accessible childcare (Berger, Hill et al. 2005; Gregg, Washbrook et al. 2005; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011).

Berger and colleagues' work mentioned above (2005), analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that among children in the United States, reductions in recommended immunizations and negative behavioral outcomes at age four were associated with mothers returning to work within 12 weeks of giving birth (especially when the return was to full time employment). Based on their findings, the authors conclude that "longer periods of maternity leave could enhance children's health and development" (F30).

In contrast, a study by Gregg and colleagues (2005), which was conducted using longitudinal data from the United Kingdom, found that maternal employment only really impacts child cognitive development when the mother returns to work full time during the first 18 months of the child's life, and the quality of childcare is less than the quality of care that the mother would provide. These authors found that paid childcare (as opposed to free childcare provided by a friend, neighbor, or relative) protects children from these "adverse effects" in cognitive development. However, they also note that situations wherein the mother works full time and uses little or no paid childcare are relatively rare in their study, accounting for only about 6 per cent of the cases. Comparing these data to available data from the United States, the authors note that "the size and scale of the adverse effects are noticeably smaller, which reflects the far wider use of part-time working on return and perhaps the lower incidence of return in the first 3 months through maternity leave rights" (Gregg, Washbrook et al. 2005:F75). (For comparison purposes, the study conducted by Berger and colleagues did not utilize data on childcare in conjunction with developmental outcomes.) The authors conclude by stating that "Our finding that it is only early full-time work that may be problematic suggests that policies that encourage the adoption of flexible and part time working practices, and also that enable mothers to remain at home for longer after a birth, will minimise any negative effects of maternal employment. Further, our results suggest the importance of access to affordable childcare, particularly for very young children" (2005:F75).

In a review of factors associated with school readiness, Lally (2010) advocates for a minimum of six months paid parental leave, noting that such leave can help parents to facilitate early brain development in their babies through the formation of stronger positive attachment relationships.

Tanaka (2005) examined data on parental leave and child health (specifically, low birth weight, infant mortality, and immunization coverage) from 18 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) from 1969-2000. Findings included an association between longer paid parental leave and fewer low birth weight babies, as well as a significant decrease in infant mortality (post-neonatal mortality in particular). The author concluded that “This suggests that if leave is provided without adequate payment and job protection, parental leave-taking behavior may not be very responsive and may result in mothers’ early return to work. As a result, other leave does not have a significant effect on improving infant health” (Tanaka 2005:F26).

Breastfeeding

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2012) recommends “exclusive breastfeeding for about 6 months, followed by continued breastfeeding as complementary foods are introduced, with continuation of breastfeeding for 1 year or longer as mutually desired by mother and infant” (Eidelman and Schlaner 2012:600), noting that the Institute of Medicine and the World Health Organization provide the same guidelines. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services notes that these guidelines are also supported by a host of other organizations including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Nurse-Midwives, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Public Health Association and American Dietetic Association (Office of Women's Health 2011). Breastfeeding has also been shown to have continued benefits to a child through two years of age. The majority of babies in the United States are not breastfeed according to these recommendations, however. According to Healthy People 2020, recent data show that only 14.1 percent of

babies born in 2006 were breastfed exclusively for six months, and just 22.7 percent of babies born in 2006 were breastfed through one year (Healthy People 2020 2012).

Barriers to breastfeeding can include physical problems (pain with breastfeeding, latching issues, low milk supply, breast infections), social concerns (lack of support from family or not having a private space to nurse at home, feeling uncomfortable with breastfeeding in public), and structural constraints upon returning to work (the cost of a breast pump, a work schedule that is inflexible or demanding, not having a private space at work to pump, and not having support from one's employer) (Kukla 2006; Guendelman, Lang Kosa et al. 2009). However, studies show a positive association between parental leave and breastfeeding in both uptake rates and duration of breastfeeding (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011; Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011).

Assessing the impact of California's Paid Family Leave (PFL) program, Appelbaum and Milkman (2011) state

Most new mothers in our sample (85.2 percent) reported that they had breastfed their new baby. In this regard, use of PFL made an important difference for new mothers in low-quality jobs: 92.5 percent of those that used PFL initiated breastfeeding, compared with 83.3 percent of those that did not use PFL. The use of PFL affected the duration of breastfeeding, roughly doubling the median weeks for which infants were breastfed: from five to eleven weeks for mothers in high quality jobs and from five to nine weeks for mothers in low quality jobs. (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011:25)

In a report synthesizing the current state of parental leave in the United States, Sundbye and Hegewisch (2011), note that while "Paid maternity leave makes it more likely that children are breastfed...lack of paid maternity leave ... decreases breastfeeding by four-and-a-half weeks on average, as a result of early returns to work" (Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011:6). Additionally, in a qualitative study examining fathers' use of parental leave in Canada, McKay and Doucet found that giving mothers the opportunity to breastfeed was a primary consideration for fathers in determining how much parental leave to take and when to take the leave (McKay and Doucet 2010).

Parental Leave and the Workplace

Prior to the passage of the FMLA in the United States, many business interests argued against the creation of a law that would provide parental leave benefits to workers. Business stakeholders worried that they would be locked into holding a position, and perhaps providing benefits, for a woman while she had multiple children without any guarantee that the woman would in fact return to the workplace. Such arguments were never postulated in terms of 'parents' only 'mothers,' and there were even concerns that a law mandating job-protected parental leave would encourage higher fertility rates – concern about fertility rates is an ongoing issue as proponents of paid parental leave attempt to pass such legislation in the United States (Averett and Whittington 2001). This context helps to explain why most of the academic literature in the U.S. about parental leave in the first years following the passage of the FMLA addresses concerns such as mothers' return to employment, and the effect of the FMLA on businesses (Ruhm 1998; Waldfogel 2001; Han and Waldfogel 2003). As time progressed, and businesses reported no significant detrimental impact, research began to transition from the impact of the FMLA on business to the impact of the FMLA on families. By 2000, the trend of American mothers working (and further, working while their children were young) had been growing for quite some time, and there was an increasing amount of attention being given to mothers and motherhood both in the academic and popular literature. Some of this literature focused on how women negotiated their various roles in society (worker, mother, wife, caregiver) (Hochschild 2007; Guendelman, Lang Kosa et al. 2009; De Henau, Meulders et al. 2010), while other works focused on the impacts of working on motherhood, or of motherhood on working (Kukla 2008; Crittenden 2010). Currently, there is a growing focus on fatherhood in the literature, again from both an academic and popular standpoint. This incorporates how

men view and act upon their roles as fathers, husbands, and workers, and also is beginning to include how fathers use parental leave (Reed 2005; Broughton 2006; Bygren and Duvander 2006; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007; Kaufman, Lyonette et al. 2010; Mansdotter, Fredlund et al. 2010; McKay and Doucet 2010; Jesmin and Seward 2011; Johansson 2011; Wells and Sarkadi 2012).

Depending on one's point of view, parental leave can in some ways be seen as a strategy for mothers to ameliorate the effects of working on their family, or as a smart business strategy to increase worker retention, productivity, and loyalty. Certainly the literature which focuses on topics such as the effects of maternal employment on children fall into the former category, but there is an increasing body of work that showcases the latter as well, particularly authors who conclude that workers in the United States would benefit from a national paid parental leave policy (Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009; Houser and Vartanian 2012).

Does Parental Leave Have an Impact on the Workplace?

There have also been studies that examine women's employment in relation to parental leave policies and programs. This research has looked at employment patterns for women in a single nation, as Ruhm (1998) and Laughlin (2011) did in the United States, Hanratty & Trzcinski did in Canada (2009) or across a number of countries, as Hegewisch & Gornick (2011) did for OECD countries and De Henau & colleagues(2010) did for the EU-Fifteen.

Research has shown that the enactment of the FMLA in the United States and parents' leave use under the law has not resulted in widespread adverse consequences as businesses had initially feared (Waldfogel 2001). Indeed, an increasing number of large corporations in the U.S. have begun to offer maternity and paternity leave benefits that go far beyond the protections guaranteed by the FMLA. Such businesses have

reported that these benefits (among others that may include designated lactation spaces, access to flexible schedules, and even on-site childcare options) result in improved work atmospheres for their employees and benefits to the business including an increase in worker retention, productivity, and company loyalty (Health Resources and Services Administration 2008; Houser and Vartanian 2012). However, it is important to note that even though some U.S. workers are gaining access to improved parental leave benefits, this by no means applies to the majority of workers – only about 10 per cent of private sector employees have access to paid parental leave (Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009; Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011). Further, as Young (2009) recently demonstrated, when private businesses do offer maternity and paternity leaves that go beyond the FMLA, they often do not offer the same benefits to men and women (the maternity leaves are longer than the paternity leaves offered by law firms, for example), which may have the unintended effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes that women are more suited to raising children and men are expected to prioritize work above family while simultaneously leaving the company's policies more vulnerable to legal challenges by men who are not afforded the same benefits as women (Young 2009).

Fathers and Parental Leave

Whereas much of the overall research on parental leave has focused on its benefits to mothers and children, its effect on business (or economic impact in general), studies that look at parental leave and fathers take a different approach. The general themes of this research include how taking leave impacts fathers' activities with their child, why fathers use only a small proportion of shared leave, and the evolving meaning of fatherhood and masculinity as it relates to and is shaped by factors such as taking parental leave.

Large-scale quantitative studies have examined relationships between fathers taking leave following the birth of a child and patterns of involvement with regard to care-taking of the child (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007; Wells and Sarkadi 2012), finding that fathers' involvement with care-taking activities is positively associated with fathers taking parental leave (even for a short duration) or working reduced hours, and that this association is evident for months beyond the time of the leave. Quantitative studies have also sought to identify possible factors in the workplace that might influence how much parental leave time fathers use (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Kaufman, Lyonette et al. 2010).

In an effort to understand why fathers are not taking a greater amount of parental leave in the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway), and to increase the share of leave taken by fathers, policy makers have been adjusting national policies to include features such as the "father's quota," essentially a portion of the overall parental leave time marked just for fathers – men can either "use it or lose it" (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Eydal and Rostgaard 2011; Haas and Rostgaard 2011). Researchers in these countries are also examining the issue of fathers and parental leave from a variety of angles.

Haas & Rostgaard (2011) focused on the adjustment to parental leave policies and their impact on the fathers' parental leave use patterns across the region, finding that the implementation of the fathers' quota had resulted in a significant increase in fathers using their own leave, although the quota did not lead to an increased amount of shared parental leave time. Mansdotter and colleagues (2010) looked at the social and health characteristics of fathers in Stockholm, Sweden, who use paternity leave and discovered that men who are "privileged in terms of social and health characteristics are more likely to take paternity leave," leading the researchers suggest that future programs

should aim to increase leave taking among “first-time and older fathers, immigrants, and those employed in the private sector, and those self-employed” (2010:338). Bygren & Duvander conducted a study specifically focusing on the workplace in Sweden and found that fathers who work in the private sector for small, male-dominated companies use less parental leave than fathers whose workplaces are larger, in the public sector, or are not male-dominated. Additionally, they note that “men who work at workplaces where other fathers have not previously used a great deal of parental leave are also less likely to use it” (2006:370).

In addition, qualitative research on fathers’ use and experience of parental leave is increasing, both in the Nordic countries and elsewhere. In 2010, McKay and Doucet published a study wherein they conducted in-depth interviews with 26 couples in Canada to examine how couples made decisions about fathers’ use of paid parental leave. They found that among most heterosexual couples, both the men and women viewed the shared parental leave time as belonging to the mother (rather than to both parents), and so the decision of how to divide this time up between the parents was granted to the mothers, in what the authors termed ‘mother-led’ decision-making. Many parents also cited the influence of breastfeeding as an influential factor in determining how shared parental leave time would be divided. In deciding when fathers would use their designated paternity leave (as opposed to shared parental leave), a predominant factor was the couples’ desire to parent “as a team” in the first few weeks after childbirth, and many of the fathers used their designated paternity leave concurrently with their partner’s maternity leave during this time. Other influential factors included “the displayed or expected responses of bosses and work colleagues, as well as extended family and community peers”(2010:311) as well as the affordability of taking leave and being entitled to leave (the province of Quebec, where some of the interviews took

place, has a “use-it-or-lose-it” paternity leave policy). In their discussion, the authors also noted that “most men did not see taking leave from work to care for a newborn as an obligation of fatherhood. Rather, being a good father meant earning money and not taking leave time away from mothers. These views were reinforced by workplace and community norms” (McKay and Doucet 2010:316).

In a 2011 study, Almqvist and colleagues found that among 16 Swedish couples who were interviewed about their experiences with parental leave, fathers had a more child-oriented outlook and took on an increased share of child care as a result of taking parental leave. In a parallel to the findings of McKay and Doucet, the authors related that when it came to taking parental leave longer than average, “No father who had taken long leave had done it without the mother’s support” and that for most of the couples in their study “the mothers had the last say about the division of parental leave” (Almqvist, Sandberg et al. 2011:203).

Johansson (2011) conducted interviews with 20 Swedish fathers who had taken at least six months of paternity leave, and similarly found them to have a child-oriented focus. He notes, however, that in analyzing such changes in the role of the father, one must not be too quick to conflate an evolution of the meaning of fatherhood as being the same as gender equality, even though it may be a step in such a direction. The author states “Men’s child-care orientation is more a question of their “picking out the good bits” than of a radical transformation of masculinity” (Johansson 2011:166).

In a study comparing the experience of taking leave between American and British fathers, Kaufman and colleagues (2010) interviewed 37 fathers in the United Kingdom and 46 fathers in the United States. Unlike previous studies, this study focused not on the fathers’ experiences as they related to their child or partner, but rather in their experiences and opinions of the parental leave policies and systems. The authors found that although men in both countries took about the same length of leave,

their perceptions of the leave were not always similar (in the United Kingdom, fathers are granted up to two weeks of paternity leave with a low level of wage replacement, whereas in the United States, fathers are granted up to 12 weeks of leave with no wage replacement – what the authors termed a “particularly American phenomenon of unpaid leave” (2010:322)). In general, they discovered that among the men “perceptions differ in what is standard, and allow British fathers to take leave for granted. Because of a lack of paid leave, American fathers are more likely to use vacation days to take leave or depend on supervisors who allow informal or unrecorded leave” (Kaufman, Lyonette et al. 2010:322) In addition, many fathers in both countries had experienced some difficulty in dealing with their employers regarding leave, and most fathers wished they had access to paid parental leave.

Overall, the literature shows that taking parental leave has a number of benefits for families and the workplace. Taking parental leave, and paid leave in particular, can improve the initiation and duration of breastfeeding, and it is also associated with a number of health and developmental benefits for children and health benefits for mothers. Fathers who take parental leave are more involved in caring for their children, even after they return to work. Workplaces also benefit from providing parental leave, especially paid parental leave, through increased employee morale, higher worker productivity, less use of sick leave, and higher rates of retention among employees who use parental leave. The next chapter will consider parental leave and parental leave policy from an anthropological perspective.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Parental leave is a topic that has not yet been explored from an anthropological perspective. However, there are many anthropological perspectives from which parental leave can be viewed and analyzed. Anthropology of policy offers a useful framework for the analysis of policies that relate to parental leave in the United States. Parental leave can also be viewed through the rubric of advocacy anthropology, which seeks to understand how parental leave is used, contested, and changed over time. Finally, it is postulated that parental leave, and the decisions parents make surrounding it, can be thought of as occupying an anthropological space at the intersection of gender, work, reproduction, political economy, and embodiment. Together, these ideas provide an anthropological view of parental leave in the contemporary United States.

Anthropology of Policy

It is useful to consider parental leave through the lens of anthropology of policy. According to Wedel and colleagues (2005), “an anthropological approach to the study of policy incorporates the full realm of processes and relations involved in the production of policy: from the policy makers and their strategic initiatives to the locals who invariably shape and mediate policy while translating and implementing it into action” (Wedel, Shore et al. 2005:34). Wedel and colleagues (2005) also contend that although anthropology of policy as a particular niche of anthropology has emerged fairly recently, anthropologists have been interacting with policy on varying levels for decades, citing the work of Boas on race which was requested by the United States Immigration

Commission. During the 1970s and 1980s anthropologists such as Nader (1974) and Wolf (1974) called for research into powerful institutions and the processes by which elites maintained and used power. In the introductory chapter to their edited volume, Shore and Wright (1997) state

Our argument is that policy has become a major institution of Western and international governance, on a par with other key organizing concepts such as 'family' and 'society'. However, whereas social scientists have treated the latter as ideological and politicized concepts and explored their operation in depth, 'policy' is still frequently treated as if it were politically and ideologically neutral, and has scarcely been analysed or theorized by anthropologists. By problematizing 'policy', we aim to chart a new territory for social, and particularly political, anthropology. (Shore and Wright 1997:6)

Current policy research by anthropologists is occurring in diverse areas. Apthorpe's (1997) study of language as it relates to policy and power is one example. Apthorpe argues that "Policy language, then, is itself a form and source of policy power. Policy discourse tries more to persuade than describe; genre and style are integral to policy paradigms, not adornments to be dispensed with if they do not please" (Apthorpe 1997:54-55). Hansen's (1997) research into policy and discourses of power in the hospital setting is another interesting example of research in the policy arena. Hansen uses Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and Foucault's work on the discourses of power to analyze the relationships between policy, doctors and nurses in a hospital setting, and how these actors use various policies (i.e., hospital policy, nurses' policy, and general medical policy) to gain symbolic capital (Hansen 1997).

In designing this research project, anthropology of policy was useful in considering the role of the FMLA and workplace parental leave policy as potential forces that might play a role in shaping parents' decisions regarding how much leave to take following the birth of a child. The study seeks to discover what parents know and think about the FMLA, and whether knowledge of the provisions of the FMLA constitute part of a strategy that parents might use in understanding the parental leave policies or

practices in their workplaces. In addition, anthropology of policy considers the implementation and contestation of policy, a perspective that is useful when thinking of federal parental leave policy in the United States. This viewpoint has been used by anthropologists in other areas, such as in the analysis and critique of health policy, as Singer and Castro (2004) demonstrate.

In applying the theory of critical medical anthropology to the study of health policies, Singer and Castro argue that health policies “are seen as reflecting a compromise between, and at the same time, the relative balance of power among conflicted forces (i.e., social groups with different and often opposed interests) at a particular time and in a particular place” (2004:xiv). I think this assessment is also true of the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) as it pertains to workers and employers in the U.S. Leave from one’s job, whether it is for medical purposes or for bonding with a new child, is not considered by the federal government to be a social issue, but rather a labor issue, and as such the regulations surrounding this type of leave were crafted by the Congress with the intent of providing simultaneously for the interests of both employers and workers (Congress 1993). The history of the crafting of FMLA is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, including how proponents of the law were attempting, through passage of the FMLA, to simultaneously correct for unintended consequences of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 and create a law that protected working women as caregivers without being a law intended just for women.

However, research on the application of the FMLA for American workers has demonstrated that the law is heavily slanted toward the interest of businesses rather than workers. Eligibility requirements for coverage under the FMLA pertaining to the length of time and amount of hours worked for the current employer, and total number of workers employed at a place of business result in fewer than half of workers in the private sector (46%) being eligible to take job-protected leave (Han and Waldfogel

2003). It appears that advocates of parental leave have taken note of such research. Attempts at the federal and state levels to enact more comprehensive parental leave policies that are worker- and family-friendly have made use of arguments that tout the benefits to employers and businesses of family-friendly policies, including greater productivity, higher retention rates, and lower incidences of absenteeism (Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009; Appelbaum 2011; Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011).

Anthropology of policy also considers issues such as: who created the policy, and for whom was it created? How is the policy viewed, implemented, followed, and contested? (Wedel and Feldman 2005; Shore, Wright et al. 2011). All of these questions help to understand current parental leave policy, its intentions, its applications, and ultimately, its effectiveness. Additionally, this framework serves to provide a context for the variety of ways in which parents negotiate the existing structure of parental leave. Finally, an anthropology of policy perspective enables researchers to make suggestions for a more comprehensive form of parental leave in the U.S. that takes into account the multitude of factors that have bearing on the issue, including areas of concern for parents, employers, and the government.

Advocacy Anthropology

As evidenced by research that demonstrates the limitations inherent in parental leave policies in the U.S. (Han and Waldfogel 2003; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009; Young 2009; Kelly 2010; Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011), it is clear that parental leave is as an issue that needs considerable improvement. Anthropology can provide a unique perspective from which to both analyze the current situation and to offer suggestions for improvement. Advocacy Anthropology appears to be especially well-suited for this endeavor.

Singer (1990) postulates that “advocacy, in the broad sense of putting knowledge to use for the purpose of social change, is the explicit aim of the anthropological endeavor” (1990:548). In a thorough review of engaged anthropology in the United States, Low and Merry (2010) argue that engaged anthropology has a variety of forms that emerged from debates over the role of anthropologists in relation to their study populations: “Some are forms of support, teaching, and communication; others are social critique – the scholarly pursuit of uncovering the bases of injustice and inequality; and some concern the collaborative approach to research by working with research subjects through collaborative and equal relationships. Some are more radical forms of engagement centered on advocacy and activism” (2010:S207). Not all anthropologists are comfortable with advocacy as a part of scholarship, however, as Halstrup and Elsass (1990) maintain. As a discipline, they argue, “Anthropology is concerned with context rather than interest, while advocacy means making a choice among interests within the context” (Hastrup and Elsass 1990:307). Among applied anthropologists though, the opinion of Hastrup and Elsass appears to be in the minority. Kirsch (1996), for example, notes that “activism is a responsible extension of the anthropological commitment to maintain reciprocal relations with the people with whom we work” (1996:15), while Antrosio (2012) argues that anthropology “challenges assumptions in order to effect change” (Antrosio 2012). Another strong voice for advocacy within anthropology is Farmer (1999; 2003; Farmer and Castro 2004), who works as a physician-anthropologist with vulnerable populations in Haiti that are at high risk for contracting HIV and tuberculosis. Farmer worked with his colleague, Jim Yong Kim, to establish two organizations in an attempt to understand and address, from a simultaneously anthropological and medical approach, the spread of HIV in Haiti. These are described by Farmer as “Zanmi Lasante, a community-based organization in Haiti led by the priest and his co-workers; and Partners in Health, a Massachusetts-based, nongovernmental

organization with a mission to remediate inequalities of access to health care” (Farmer 1999:25). Farmer has helped to establish healthcare clinics in rural Haiti to provide treatment for those afflicted with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and he also advocates for a greater awareness of the health realities and inequalities faced by the poor (Farmer 1999; Farmer 2003). Addressing the idea of cost-effectiveness when helping the poor in third-world countries such as Haiti, Farmer argues

We keep hearing that we live in “a time of limited resources.” But how often do anthropologists, physicians, or public health specialists challenge this slogan? The wealth of the world has not dried up; it has simply become unavailable to those who need it most. By questioning these unfounded economic assumptions, medical anthropologists can contribute to rethinking the long-standing public health paradigms that curtail access to health care for the poor. (Farmer and Castro 2004:18-19)

As a student of anthropology, I am aware of the debate within the discipline about whether or not to be advocates or simply “outside” researchers. While some have considered advocacy to be at odds with theory and research, there has been an increasing momentum towards engaged anthropology that incorporates theory and application, and recognition that application often involves advocacy (Johnston 2010; Low and Merry 2010). Johnston frames the argument well: “At issue here is the question of the substantive “work” of anthropology: is it simply and solely an intellectual pursuit, with the primary purpose of fieldwork to collect data in a rigorous and objective manner? If so, then the social meaning of doing anthropology is, simply, to conduct work *in* communities, not *with* communities.” (2010:S235). In the area of educational anthropology, Gonzalez (2010) argues that the distinction of advocacy and scholarship is a “false binary” (2010:S250), and that “the discipline of anthropology has often failed to recognize how anthropologists of education have blurred theoretical insights with engaged and advocacy scholarship (2010:S250).

Such debate has caused a bit of ambivalence among anthropology graduate students while entering into interdisciplinary projects as the anthropological voice. In an

article in which three graduate students collectively reflected upon their internships as part of a federal government initiative to address health disparities (MacPhee, Heurtin-Roberts et al. 2005), the authors observed that “Anthropology is most comfortable on the margins of both community and debate... Although the position of informed outsider has its advantages in the contexts of anthropological research, it has proven to interfere with our work in the community of the federal government” (MacPhee, Heurtin-Roberts et al. 2005:25).

Reading about the experiences of MacPhee and her colleagues led me to assess whether I wanted to conduct my own research from the standpoint of what Hale (2006) terms cultural critique or activist research. According to Hale,

Activist research and cultural critique can be distinguished principally on methodological grounds. Scholars who practice activist research have dual loyalties—to academia and to a political struggle that often encompasses, but always reaches beyond, the university setting; proponents of cultural critique, by contrast, collapse these dual loyalties into one. Cultural critique strives for intellectual production uncompromised by the inevitable negotiations and contradictions that these broader political struggles entail. Activist research is compromised—but also enriched—by opting to position itself squarely amid the tension between utopian ideals and practical politics. (Hale 2006:100)

Reflecting on this dichotomy, I found that the most compelling arguments in favor of enhancing scholarly research through the addition of advocacy came from the theories of critical medical anthropology. At the core of this theory is the idea that there are networks, relationships, and interactions at all levels in terms of healthcare and health policy. As discussed above, the basic assumptions of critical medical anthropology as it relates to health policy can be applied to other policies as well, including parental leave policy. Further, the tenets of critical medical anthropology include an assertion that “its mission is emancipatory” as well as that “commitment to change [is] fundamental to the discipline” (Singer 1995:81). I believe that these tenets of critical medical anthropology

are relevant to my idea of what advocacy anthropology would look like as it relates to parental leave: committed to changing a system that supports the interests of business over the interests of workers, thus freeing parents to focus more on the well-being of their families in the first months following the birth of a child.

In the context of advocating for workers, Durrenberger (2007) utilizes the work of Weinbaum (2001), Kasmir (1991, 2005), Stephen (2003), and Singer (1995) to formulate the argument that anthropological collaboration with unions can be effective if the collaboration “(a) places the local situations in the global context, (b) recognizes the role of culture, (c) acknowledges that people contest cultures, (d) and uncovers relevant causal relationships and attends to relationships of power” (2007:74). A similar argument can be made for parental leave policy. A comparison of the FMLA to the policies of other nations illuminates the uniquely American cultural view of parental leave, and how the FMLA attends to business interests more so than the interests of families (workers). Anthropological research has the potential to discover how parents are negotiating parental leave within the workplace, in terms of using the policies (federal and/or employer-based) that are available to them and contesting policies that are not as functional. One of the goals of this research project is to explore how parents perceive, use, and reflect upon parental leave in light of their own experiences.

Anthropologic View of Parental Leave

In addition to approaching parental leave through the lenses of policy and advocacy, it can be argued that parental leave also occupies an anthropological space at the intersection of gender, work, reproduction, political economy, and embodiment. It is important to be aware of societal (structural) constraints and cultural expectations in the United States regarding parental leave in the context of gender roles and worker roles, and how parental leave fits into capitalist notions of reproducing labor.

Embodiment theory could be a useful tool when considering how parents make decisions regarding parental leave. The areas of gender, work, and reproduction contain a great deal of overlap and so are addressed in one section to present a continuous idea. Political economy and embodiment, while also important, are less tightly woven in regard to parental leave and are presented separately.

The Intersection of Gender Roles, Worker Roles, & Reproduction

I believe gender norms and expectations play an important role in decisions regarding parental leave use and length of leave. Gender role norms for fathers are undergoing change, with a greater acceptance of the idea of fathers spending time with their newborns (and children in general); an increase in literature over the past five to ten years addressing fathers, including fathers taking parental leave, attests to this growing emphasis on fatherhood (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Jesmin and Seward 2011; Johansson 2011; Wells and Sarkadi 2012). Because gender roles set a frame of expectation regarding the role of men as fathers and the role of women as mothers (Reed 2005), it is no surprise that gender roles also frame societal and cultural expectations about what is normative postnatal behavior in terms of time away from work. While the recent literature on parental leave shows that increasing attention is being given to fathers and to their decisions to use leave or the length of their leave (Kaufman, Lyonette et al. 2010; Mansdotter, Fredlund et al. 2010; McKay 2010; Johansson 2011), there is a no such emphasis on these topics for mothers. Such a gap in research might be the result of gender role norms in Western society and the U.S. which presume that mothers will want to spend time with their newborn as well as that they will need time for physical recovery after delivery. These assumptions may be due to a perception that women will a) always *want* to use parental leave, b) always *need* at least some parental leave for childbirth recovery, c) always *want to use as much time as*

they possibly can (bearing in mind that there may be boundaries established by outside uncontrollable forces such as workplace regulations, finances, etc.).

Increasingly there seems to be a tension between the role of mother and the role of woman as worker (Lamphere, Zavella et al. 1993; Hochschild 2003; Williams June 2010; Appelbaum and Milkman 2011). In the former, mothers are traditionally expected to *want* to spend time with their baby, away from the working world, and this is partially expressed in modern times as full use of parental leave. In the latter, women are expected to return to work full-heartedly after their leave time, as though the time taken to care for a newborn were a vacation. As with a vacation, once the leave is finished, the worker's focus is expected to return completely to their work, not taking into account the enormous lifestyle changes that have taken place in the home. Interestingly, these contradictory views have become more sharply contrasted as parental leave use has become more common since the passage of the FMLA in 1993. In many cases (currently and historically in American culture), mothers who work outside the home are still viewed as mothers first and workers second (Crittenden 2010) (see further discussion in Chapter 4). However, within the workplace, as women strive to not be perceived in this manner, they are subsequently expected to return to work without regard to their new circumstances at home. Perhaps men as workers have always faced these expectations, but they have traditionally had their female partners (the mothers of their children) to facilitate this transition: mothers were usually the ones handling nighttime feedings and sleep disruptions. When both parents return to work relatively soon following the birth of their child, parents must not only arrange for child care during the hours they work, but also negotiate who gets up with the baby in the middle of the night (Lamphere 1993; Hochschild 2003).

Applied to parental leave, this paper maintains that new parents, consciously or unconsciously, make parental leave decisions within the framework of gender role and

worker norms in the United States. This study seeks to understand if men and women base their choices in part on these gender role and/or worker norms. For women in particular, there may be a built-in conflict regarding others' (colleagues, managers, those whom they manage, etc.) perception of them in the workplace once they become mothers. This study asks whether this possible conflict or changing perception factors into their decision-making.

It could also be argued that when a child is born in the U.S., families are not just reproducing themselves, but also reproducing labor in the context of a capitalist society. As such, it is logical that society wants these children to be raised effectively, so that the future workers will be prepared for the labor force (Engels 1978[1884]; Lamphere, Zavella et al. 1993). This is one economic argument for family-friendly work policies enacted both through legislation and through individual corporations. It also provides an interesting point of comparison between the labor-based policy of the United States and the socially based parental leave policies of other capitalist countries. Whereas arguments in the United States for improved parental leave policies are ensconced equally in terms of the benefits to employers (and the overall economy) and benefits to babies, in countries that have socially-based parental leave policies, the focus of the policy is on providing support for the family in the months (or year) after the birth of a child. In Sweden for example, mothers are entitled to eight and a half weeks of maternity leave and fathers are entitled to eight weeks of non-transferable paternity leave. Both parents have access to an additional 360 days of shared parental leave (to be split up between the mother and father at their discretion). These leave periods are paid at an 80 percent wage replacement rate for the first 390 days, with a ceiling of just over \$54,000 per year (OECD 2010; Haas and Rostgaard 2011).

Political Economy – Availability and Accessibility of Parental Leave

Wolf (1997[1982]) defines political economy as originally being “the field of inquiry concerned with “the wealth of nations,” the production and distribution of wealth within and between political entities and the classes composing them” (Wolf 1997(1982):7-8). As anthropologists during the latter half of the twentieth century worked to integrate political economy into their theoretical perspectives for research in areas such as health and healthcare (Scheper-Hughes 1990; Singer 1995; Farmer 1999) as well as into ethnographies of working women (Lamphere, Zavella et al. 1993; Yelvington 1995), Roseberry (1988) offered this assessment:

Many anthropologists identify what they do as political economy; but the label is also, at least in part, ascribed, and the ascription is offered as part of a critique. With the move toward “political economy,” authors imposed uniformity or boundedness upon a heterogeneous set of scholarly and political concerns. Part of the problem here concerns the place of “political economy” within the history of economic thought, its identification with classical political economy with Ferguson and the physiocrats through Smith, Ricardo, Mill, and – by the way of a critique that started with classical assumptions (e.g. the labor theory of value) and took them to radical conclusions – Marx. Political economy could in this sense be distinguished from neoclassical economics, which represented a shift in concerns from the “wealth of nations” to the price of beans, from value as determined by labor time to price as determined in markets. Most anthropologists who appropriated political economy, however, did not thereby appropriate all of classical political economy. They appropriated Marx. (1988:162)

Later, Erickson and Murphy (2006) made a similar observation, stating that “the political economic perspective within anthropology has roots in eighteenth-century analysis of capitalism and in the historically grounded Marxist critique of capitalism and the “economies” of class-based power within and between nation-states” (2006:235-236).

One of the most well-known applications of political economy in anthropology occurred when Singer (1989) argued for a greater inclusion of political economy (among other things) in the creation of critical medical anthropology. In doing so, he drew upon the earlier critiques of anthropology as a discipline that urged a greater awareness of

political economy, noting that “for Wolf and others, this [meant] a critical turn toward political-economy and to Marx. These offer theories and methods for understanding the present world holistically in terms of the growth of the world-system, the penetrating effects of capitalism, and the determinant role of class, sex, and race on social behavior” (Singer 1989:1193). Since the time of this argument, political economy has become widely recognized and valued in medical anthropology and cultural anthropology in general.

Applied directly to the focus of this research project, political economy of parental leave in large part can be seen as the political economy of the availability and accessibility of leave. It is important to note that for some groups within the U.S., the reality of both parents working is nothing new. For decades, financial situations have required many mothers to be employed, long before parental leave was enacted or before pregnancy discrimination was made illegal (Lamphere, Zavella et al. 1993). For the most part, the voices and stories of these mothers have been overlooked in the current discussions of parental leave (Lamphere 1993). Some of these include the mothers who do not have access to paid parental leave, or those who work yet do not qualify for job-protected parental leave under the FMLA, either because they work for less than 12 months with the same employer, they work part time at multiple jobs rather than full time at one job, or they work for a company that employs fewer than 50 workers. In such situations, it is likely such workers do not have parental leave benefits beyond possibly being able to use a few days of accrued sick time or vacation time (Waldfoegel 2001; Han and Waldfoegel 2003).

The accessibility of leave is another avenue for the application of political economy. Because the FMLA provides only for unpaid parental leave, parents who may be eligible for coverage may take only a short amount of leave, or no leave at all, due to a lack of wages during the leave period, especially if these workers have no accrued

paid leave available to use. Accessibility of leave may also be understood as a worker's perception of how much leave is acceptable to use in the workplace without a detrimental effect on their career.

Embodiment

The theory of embodiment is interesting to explore in the context of parental leave. Scheper-Hughes and Lock(1987), in proposing embodiment as a theory, argue that it is crucial to deconstruct received notions of the body (e.g., Cartesian duality) and view the body from three distinct yet overlapping perspectives: the individual body, the social body, and the body politic. The individual body is the ways in which a person experiences their reality, what Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) term as "the phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body-self" (1987:7). The social body, which can be analyzed using the theoretical lenses of symbolism and structuralism, refers to the body as a symbol wherein "the body in health offers a model of organic wholeness; the body in sickness offers a model of social disharmony, conflict, and disintegration. Reciprocally, society in "sickness" and in "health" offers a model for understanding the body" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:7). The body politic, which draws on work of Foucault (1975), refers to the "regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and in leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:7-8).

Further, Scheper-Hughes and Lock make the argument that the analysis of emotions is essential because of the effect emotions have on experiences to the body (such as pain or illness) and the ways in which these experiences are projected and understood in the social body and body politic. They write that "Insofar as emotions entail both feelings and cognitive orientations, public morality and cultural ideology, we

suggest that they provide an important “missing link” capable of bridging mind and body, individual, society, and body politic”(Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:28-29).

In an attempt to understand the breast cancer screening or non-screening behavior of African American women, Lende and Lachiondo (2009) use embodiment theory in the following manner: exploring subjective experience, activity (screening in this case) as an embodied act, and understanding the body as “meaningful and relational, not simply an object to be manipulated (e.g., screened or treated)” (2009:218). By using embodiment as a framework to understand an activity, these authors postulate that contrary to the idea that people make decisions purely using their mind, with their body acting only as a passive responder, the body is active in shaping thoughts and perceptions. In this approach, they also maintain that cognitively distancing oneself from one’s body (or from a part of the body, as is often the case in a biomedical setting) is a learned, rather than a natural process.

The act of taking parental leave can be viewed as an embodiment of motherhood and fatherhood through the physical experience of bonding with the baby, and for moms, the experience of breastfeeding. From such a viewpoint, deciding to take parental leave becomes one way in which the body reacts to, and seeks to define, motherhood or fatherhood. The emotions parents experience throughout pregnancy and during the first few days, weeks, and months postnatally, shape the ways in which parents relate to each other, their child, and the rest of their world. Mothers and fathers experience becoming – and being – a parent as individuals, as cultural and social symbols of parenthood (e.g., sleep-deprivation, breastfeeding), and as people regulated by their external world (i.e., restrictions on how much leave to take, or how much is socially acceptable in their workplace). As parents undergo this process, their conceptions of what would happen are reconciled with their lived experiences, and ultimately their

knowledge of what parenthood entails transforms into an understanding of what parenthood means for them.

As a whole, ideas from the areas of policy, advocacy, gender, work, reproduction, political economy, and embodiment form a uniquely anthropological perspective on parental leave. This perspective allows me to examine existing parental leave policy, explore how parents make decisions regarding parental leave and their experiences with parental leave, and analyze this data using a holistic approach that recognizes that parents make choices within the framework of existing cultural norms as well as their own lived realities.

Chapter 4: Parental Leave in the Current U.S. Societal and Cultural Context

This chapter will explore parental leave in the United States through a review and analysis of policy (the FMLA as well as state-level parental leave policies), and will place parental leave in the current cultural context of the United States (addressing topics such as modern labor/workplace realities, family dynamics, the focus on work-family balance, the larger popular and academic movements focusing on motherhood and fatherhood, and the ways in which new media is shaping/reshaping these issues). While the primary focus is on the academic literature, the chapter will also include some of the popular literature that has contributed to the increased interest in motherhood, and later fatherhood, in contemporary American culture over the past 10 to 15 years. In addition, I will examine what the literature suggests is happening in the push for more comprehensive parental leave in the U.S., both in terms of research and popular efforts.

Unlike the rest of the industrialized world, the United States has no national paid maternity leave program: the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) is the only federal policy that addresses parental leave, although a few states have created and passed parental leave legislation that goes beyond the FMLA, providing partial pay to workers who take parental leave (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011). In addition, some employers within the private sector have incorporated paid parental leave into their benefit packages, this is entirely voluntary on the part of employers, with varied levels of pay and length of leave (Lovell, O'Neill et al. 2007), except in cases where unions have bargained to include parental leave coverage (whether paid or unpaid) in their contracts with employers. The next section will detail the FMLA and its impact on workers.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993

FMLA Definition and History

In 1993, the federal government passed into law the FMLA, the purpose of which is to provide up to 12 weeks per year of unpaid, job-protected leave for workers who need or choose to take time off for certain qualifying events (including birth or adoption of a child, the care of a newly born or adopted child, one's own serious illness, or caring for a seriously ill child, parent, or spouse). The FMLA was crafted in part because previous legislation pertaining to pregnancy and childbirth, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (PDA), while seeking to prevent employer and workplace discrimination against women who were pregnant or had just given birth, was not comprehensive in either the prevention of discrimination based on gender or in other workplace practices, such as hiring (Ginsburg 2012). For example, the PDA prohibited employers from firing or not promoting a woman because she was pregnant or had given birth, but it did not prevent business from refusing to hire a women on the basis that she was pregnant. As a result of this, the PDA effectively discouraged businesses from hiring pregnant women. In a 1989 House of Representatives hearing on the FMLA (as proponents worked for passage of the measure), the American Bar Association noted that "Historically, denial or curtailment of women's employment opportunities has been traceable directly to the pervasive presumption that women are mothers first, and workers second. This prevailing ideology about women's roles has in turn justified discrimination against women when they are mothers or mothers-to-be" (as cited by Ginsburg (2012:9)).

Congress sought to remedy this discrepancy by creating legislation that not only gave women job protection during pregnancy, childbirth, and recovery, but also during the course of caring for sick children (recognizing that women take on the majority of childcare roles). At the same time, Congress wanted to make the law gender-neutral so

that employers would not view the law as a disincentive to hire women in their workplace. As a means to ensure gender-neutrality in the law and its application (and to avoid the scenario of employers discriminating against women in their hiring practices), Congress included a provision for employees to take leave for self-care. Research at the time suggested that men and women missed approximately the same number of days at work annually because of illness or injury (Ginsburg 2012). Proponents of the FMLA understood that for the law to be viewed as providing protection to all workers (rather than for the primary protection of women), it had to include a provision for job-protected medical leave for oneself, not simply for one's family and care for a new child. Thus the law that sought to address parental leave and family leave in the United States became the Family and Medical Leave Act (Ginsburg 2012). So even though Congress passed the FMLA with the understanding that "it is important for the development of children and the family unit that fathers and mothers be able to participate in early childrearing ... [and] the lack of employment policies to accommodate working parents can force individuals to choose between job security and parenting" (FMLA Findings and Purposes, 1993, Section 1.b.2), they also did so with the acknowledgment that a job-protection measure seen to benefit primarily women would have a negative effect on the hiring and employment of women. As Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has noted, when it comes to the FMLA, "Self-care leave...is a key part of Congress' endeavor to make it feasible for women to work and have families" (Ginsburg 2012:20).

Eligibility Requirements for Workers

In the creation of the bill, Congress also stressed that this piece of legislation was intended to provide leave protection for individuals "in a manner that accommodates the legitimate interests of employers" (FMLA Findings and Purposes, 1993, Section 1.b.2). To accomplish this, the FMLA places restrictions on which workers are eligible for the

unpaid, job-protected leave. Workers are eligible if they have been employed for at least 12 months by their employer, and have worked at least 1,250 hours during the previous 12 months for their employer (roughly equivalent to 25 hours per week). Employees who meet these conditions are not eligible, however, if their employer has fewer than 50 employees (either at that work site or within a 75 mile radius of that site). In addition, if a husband and wife have the same employer, “the aggregate number of workweeks of leave to which both may be entitled may be limited to 12 workweeks,” if the employer so chooses (FMLA Sec. 102, 1993, Section 102.f.1).

A final stipulation of eligibility deals with “highly compensated employees” who are defined as “a salaried eligible employee who is among the highest paid 10 percent of the employees employed by the employer within 75 miles of the facility at which the employee is employed” (FMLA Sec. 104, 1993). These highly paid individuals are eligible for the leave, but their employers are not required to restore them to their original position (or an equivalent position with equivalent pay and benefits, as is guaranteed to other employees) if the employer determines that denying the employee their position is “necessary to prevent substantial and grievous economic injury to the operations of the employer” (1993:Sec.104) and the employer provides the worker with notice of this decision, though no time frame for providing this notice is established (FMLA 1993).

If, after meeting all of the above requirements, an employee is determined to be eligible and takes the job-protected leave, it is in an unpaid status unless the employer either elects to provide paid compensation for the leave, or if the employee elects to use their annual and/or sick leave for this time. However, the legislation also grants the employer the discretion of requiring that employees use their accrued paid leave while taking leave under the FMLA, rather than simply taking unpaid leave in order to save their accrued leave (FMLA 1993). In cases where contracts between unions and

employers regulate the application of parental leave in the workplace, the rules for how to handle accrued leave may be set forth in the contract.

Implications of the FMLA for Workers

The FMLA is an important piece of legislation in the area of parental leave, but it is clear that it was written with employers in mind just as much, if not more so, than the workers whose jobs it seeks to protect. In their analysis of the impact of the FMLA, Han and Waldfogel (2003), note that “only about 60% of private sector workers are covered” (2003:191) due to the clause stipulating a minimum number of employees, and once the clause stipulating a minimum number of hours worked is added, only 46% of private sector workers are eligible for leave under the FMLA (Han and Waldfogel 2003). This legislation clearly excludes a large number of part time workers, who are likely to be hourly employees in blue-collar, service sector, or retail sector jobs, and who often are not represented by unions or other collective worker groups. A number of full time workers who are employed by small companies are also affected, as are those who are employed by individually franchised operations of larger companies.

There are few workers who can afford to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave, and so it is good that the law requires employers to permit workers to use their annual or sick leave. Sick leave usage during parental leave, however, is often constrained by company rules which govern other sick leave (for example, women who have given birth may be limited to the ability to use sick leave for six or eight weeks postpartum, which is the accepted medical recovery time for childbirth), but workers who wish to use their annual leave for any or all of the time are often able to do so.

In addition to the FMLA allowing employees to elect to use their accrued leave, the act also enables employers, at their discretion, to implement a policy that would

require employees to use their accrued annual leave. This seems to be a move designed to restrict workers from taking additional time off, either for vacation or illness, due to the fact that they may have used all of their accrued time under their FMLA leave. The Institute for Women's Policy Research recently published a report by Miller and colleagues (2009) in which they found, among other things, that women working for the federal government would need approximately 4.2 years to accrue enough leave to cover 12 weeks, assuming they use only 3 days of sick leave per year and 10 days of annual leave each year (and barring the use of leave for other, unforeseen circumstances). This would require such a worker, if they wanted to have paid leave for the birth of every child, to space the births of their children about four years apart, which may or may not align with the worker's personal values or desired timeframe for child spacing.

Use of Parental Leave

Many, though not all, workers in the United States are covered under the FMLA, and are thus eligible to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave upon the birth or adoption of a child. However, parents often do not utilize this eligible time to its fullest extent, and as result, some studies show that the FMLA has had a limited impact on the leave-taking behavior of new parents (Han and Waldfogel 2003). Though specific amounts can vary, having a child (including the cost of high-quality childcare) costs families approximately \$11,000 in the first year (Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009). These financial issues may contribute to new mothers in the United States returning to work much more quickly than new mothers in European countries – approximately one-third of women in the United States return to work within three months of giving birth, compared to approximately five

per cent in the UK, Germany, and Sweden (Berger, Hill et al. 2005) and just over half of mothers in the United States with a child under the age of one work (Johnson 2007).

Fathers tend to use less parental leave than mothers in the United States as well as in countries where paid leave is available (Han and Waldfogel 2003; Bygren and Duvander 2006), and this difference may have factors other than the financial constraints which impact both parents. Bygren and Duvander (2006), looking at the use of parental leave by fathers in Sweden, concluded that fathers' workplace characteristics (including the size of the workplace, whether there were more men or women in the workplace, and whether the workplace was part of the private or public sector) influenced the length of parental leave for fathers, as did the presence of other men who had taken parental leave at an earlier point in time. In this context, some states have passed legislation that provides parents with some replacement income during parental leave. Two states have systems modeled on statewide temporary disability programs, and a third state has passed a law to provide a flat rate of replacement income for parents. These examples will be further discussed in the next section.

State-Level Policies

Over the past decade, some states have begun to consider legislation pertaining to parental leave, often as a part of more generalized family leave. To date, only two states, California and New Jersey, have enacted and implemented family leave laws, although new mothers may be able to qualify for partially paid leave after the birth of a child through state temporary disability insurance programs in a handful of other states (Fass 2009; Appelbaum and Milkman 2011).

In 2002, California became the first state to enact a partially paid parental leave system, the Paid Family Leave program. This system applies to all private sector workers (public sector employers can opt in) and provides up to six weeks of pay at 55%

of a worker's normal wages, up to \$987 per week currently (the maximum dollar amount is indexed based on the state's average weekly wage). This program builds upon and is modeled after the State Disability Insurance system in California, which provides some income support for women during and after pregnancy. The wage replacement benefits for both programs are entirely employee-funded through a 1.2 percent employee payroll tax, thus neither the state nor businesses incur a direct cost for these income benefits (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011).

In 2009, New Jersey enacted Family Leave Insurance, a system modeled after California's Paid Family Leave program. As in California, the Family Leave Insurance in New Jersey builds upon that state's existing Temporary Disability Insurance program and provides a wage replacement indexed on the state's weekly average wage. Workers in New Jersey are eligible to receive two-thirds of their weekly wages for six weeks, up to \$561 per week (in 2010) (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011).

Washington state passed the Family and Medical Leave Insurance program in 2007, which would provide a flat rate of \$250 per week of wage replacement (for up to five weeks) following the birth or adoption of a child. Unlike California and New Jersey, Washington does not have a state-level temporary disability program on which its family leave law is structured, nor do the funds for the program come from a payroll tax. Rather, funding for the program is to be provided by the state, and due to budgetary constraints the law has not yet been implemented – most recently, implementation has been postponed until October 2015 (EOI 2012).

New York, Rhode Island, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico also have temporary disability programs for their workers, including benefits for pregnancy and childbirth (providing temporary incomes for usually no more than four weeks of pregnancy-related disability

leave and six weeks of childbirth recovery leave); however none of these have enacted any further paid family leave legislation (Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011). New York is one of a handful of states that have been considering establishing some sort of paid family leave program, including states that do not have statewide temporary disability programs, such as Illinois, Missouri, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Arizona (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011; Sundbye and Hegewisch 2011). The benefit of state-wide temporary disability programs for women is that the programs provide at least some level of wage replacement during parental leave; the downside is that such programs are based on pregnancy-as-a-disability status, not parent status, thus excluding fathers from coverage.

Other states have sought to expand coverage of the FMLA adjusting eligibility requirements. For example, a few states have lowered the threshold for number of workers in an organization from 50, the level set in the FMLA, to anywhere from 15 (in Maine) to 25 (in Oregon), and others have extended the duration of parental leave (Lovell, O'Neill et al. 2007). It is not clear however, if such measures have a great impact on parents if there is no provision for income replacement, as making more employees eligible for leave does not necessarily coincide with making leave more affordable for parents.

Other Efforts to Improve Parental Leave

The question for advocates then becomes, what is the best way to encourage a state- or national-level paid parental leave policy? Advocates for such leave are currently employing a multifaceted approach, using research showing the advantages to businesses of offering expanded parental leave benefits combined with data showing that most American workers do not have access to such benefits. While paid parental

leave proponents are cognizant of, and to some extent make use of, research showing benefits of paid parental leave for families (children and mothers in particular), the atmosphere in the United States is such that the concerns of businesses and institutions must be addressed first and foremost if the argument for paid leave is to be seriously considered (e.g., Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009; Appelbaum and Milkman 2011; Houser and Vartanian 2012).

In some respects, these arguments appear to be gaining momentum, as issues of family, motherhood, and fatherhood have been increasing in popular awareness over the past decade. On the federal level, the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act is a proposed measure that would provide many federal employees who are eligible for FMLA with four weeks of paid leave upon the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child (Miller, Helmuth et al. 2009). While this piece of legislation has support, it has not been successful, even though it has been introduced in each Congressional session since 2000, and was even approved in the House of Representatives in 2009, although it did not win approval in the Senate (Maloney 2011).

At the business level, there has been increased momentum among companies to be seen as family-friendly, and often this includes offering parental leave benefits to their employees. For more than 20 years, *Working Mother* magazine, which has a readership of more than two million people, publishes an annual list of the “Best 100 Companies for Working Mothers” based on factors including (but not limited to) maternity and paternity leave offered, availability of flexible work schedules, advancement and mentoring programs. In 2011, the magazine reported that of their 100 Best Companies, 100% offered paid maternity leave and 76% offered paid paternity leave, compared to 16% of companies nationwide. The company has also recently teamed up with the National

Partnership for Women & Families to campaign for a national paid family leave insurance program (Finnigan 2011; National Partnership for Women & Families 2012).

Motherhood, Fatherhood, and the Work-Home Dynamic

Intertwined in parental leave is the issue of working parents, working mothers in particular. Mothers' work-home dynamic is the basis of a growing body academic and popular media – books including academic works such as *Sunbelt Working Mothers: Reconciling Family and Factory* by anthropologist Louise Lamphere (1993) to popular literature such as the novel *I Don't Know How She Does It: The Life of Kate Reddy, Working Mother* by Allison Pearson (2002). In addition, there are a number of nonfiction books that are at once academic and written for a popular audience, including *The Second Shift* by Arlie Hochschild (2003), *The Price of Motherhood* by Ann Crittenden (2010), and *Equally Shared Parenting* by Marc and Amy Vachon (2010). Books, however, are simply one media outlet in which motherhood and the work-home dynamic are focal points. New media is another set of platforms on which motherhood, fatherhood, and the work-home dynamic operate. New media platforms include social networking sites (e.g., Facebook; Pinterest), blogs (e.g., PhD in Parenting; The Busy Dad Blog), podcasts (e.g., Manic Mommies), and video content (e.g., GeekDad).

One area that is pertinent to motherhood and also leads into consideration of the work-home dynamic is breastfeeding, which has become an oft-discussed topic. A campaign including PSAs produced by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that sought to encourage more mothers in the United States to breastfeed their babies became controversial when one PSA compared not breastfeeding a baby to riding a bull while pregnant (Kukla 2006; Rabin 2006). This comparison angered a lot of

people, regardless of whether they had children, and a number of groups including the National Organization for Women spoke out against the PSA. In an open letter to the Secretary of the DHHS, a more holistic view of the realities of breastfeeding was taken by Kim Gandy, the president of the National Organization for Women. She wrote

“The harsh commercials ignore the real barriers for women who want to breastfeed. Equating a woman's decision not to breastfeed with log-rolling or mechanical bull riding while pregnant insults the millions of women who are physically unable to breastfeed, are advised not to breastfeed due to illness medical treatment, or are unable to breastfeed for six months because of inadequate workplace accommodations. ... I hope you will endeavor to increase the number of women who are able to breastfeed by making it more possible for them to do so, rather than guilt-tripping women who are doing their best.”(Gandy 2006)

In general, this ad campaign focused on the potential risks of not breastfeeding, a contrast to previous campaigns that had focused on the benefits of breastfeeding (Kukla 2006; Morales 2007). While Amy Spangler (2007), a nurse who was at the time the head of the U.S. Breastfeeding Committee, asserted that the ad campaign “is really sharing information and there are no studies to show that sharing information and helping people make informed choices in any way contributes to them feeling guilty about that choice, whatever it might be... This campaign is for all of the individuals in this society who are in a position to support a mother’s choice to breastfeed her child” (Morales 2007:np), this claim was rejected by others, including the president of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Morales 2007). Kukla (2006), noting that the woman riding the mechanical bull was the only minority woman to appear in the ad campaign, argued

It seems likely that this shift in emphasis from giving benefits to avoiding harms will intensify the vilification of mothers who do not breastfeed and accordingly intensify mothers’ own sense of indecency and inadequacy when breastfeeding proves difficult. This emphasis on harm takes another layer of significance when we remember, once again, that most of the women who are not breastfeeding, and at whom the campaign is

primarily aimed, are low income and minority women... Perhaps most important, for my purposes, is how the entire campaign strategy is built upon the implicit presumption that women *have* the real choice to breastfeed but are too selfish to do so without manipulation. Accordingly, all of the materials are aimed directly at mothers rather than, for instance, fathers, grandmothers, and employers, all of who[m] often contribute to making breastfeeding difficult and who have the potential to contribute substantially to its support. (Kukla 2006:173-174)

Another reason this PSA was so inflammatory might be because it occurred in the context of the so-called “mommy wars” that were habitually in the media through newspaper and magazine articles, on television, and online: a rift – and some hostility – between some mothers who worked outside the home and those who did not. After journalist Lisa Belkin wrote an article in 2003 about a cohort of highly educated women she knew who were ‘opting out’, at least temporarily, from the workforce (Belkin 2003), the phrase caught on and for a few years there was a pointed backlash against women who were well educated and were opting out of the workplace in favor of staying home with their children. However, as time went on it appeared that the controversy was more of an issue of attention-grabbing headlines than an issue about which mothers were upset. In 2009, journalist David Leonhardt argued

“My theory is that many academics and pundits want to be arguing about whether women *should* stay at home. But telling people what they should or should not do is tricky business. You can come off as a scold or sexist or something else unpleasant. So the experts instead end up arguing about whether women *are* staying home. Saying they are staying home becomes a proxy for supporting the choice to stay home. Saying they’re not becomes a proxy for supporting the choice to work.” (Leonhardt 2009)

Many people, including Leonhardt, urged the focus to turn to providing supportive policies to families so they can manage work and home life, through better parental leave policy, workplace flexibility, and better childcare options (Kukla 2008; Crittenden 2010).

The work-home dynamic has also been a recent focus in the area of fatherhood, a topic which has gained momentum in the public eye over the past decade. Many fathers are incorporating more family time into their lives, and doing so in an open way. The public attention being given to fatherhood coincides with an increase in academic research on the subject from a variety of angles, including masculinity (Broughton and Walton 2006), work and fatherhood (Reed 2005; Johansson 2011), engagement with one's children (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Wells and Sarkadi 2012), and parental leave (Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007; McKay and Doucet 2010). Academically, the journal *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers* premiered in 2003. As with motherhood, the new media industry has evolved to encompass fatherhood, although the quantity of father-dedicated material is not quite as large. In blogs, podcasts, and online communities fathers have outlets to share their experiences and make their voices heard. These are the products of fathers who discuss topics relating to raising children, interacting with spouses, and for some, being a stay at home dad (blogs include GeekDad; The Busy Dad Blog; A Man Among Mommies; Single Parent Dad; A Family Runs Through It; and Luke, I am Your Father). One of the larger communities is GeekDad, an online community that features blog posts, discussion forums, project ideas, and a podcast (GeekDad.com 2012).

Although the FMLA provides important job-protection guarantees to parents who use it to take parental leave, the law covers fewer than half of private sector workers within the United States. To ameliorate this situation, advocates for parental leave are encouraging a paid federal parental leave program and/or state-level paid parental leave programs. They are also engaging with the public to raise awareness about the lack of adequate parental leave in the U.S., especially as issues of motherhood, fatherhood, and parents' work-home dynamic become news topics of interest in the mainstream

media. This context provides the backdrop for the research project discussed in this thesis, which is outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Methods

The research project in which this thesis is based focuses on parents' knowledge and decisions surrounding parental leave. Time restrictions prevented a longitudinal study with a cohort of parents (which could have explored how their decisions may have changed over time and following the birth of their child, and how they experienced the process of parental leave), or a very large study that would include both expectant parents and parents who have already been through (or were currently going through) the parental leave process. I chose instead to collect data through the use of surveys with expectant parents and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with both expectant parents and parents who already had at least one child.

The primary purpose of the surveys was to gather information from a large number of respondents in order to assess their prior knowledge of parental leave law and company regulations and to assess factors important to expectant parents as they make decisions about their intent to use parental leave. The survey was self-administered and consisted of 51 items: a mixture of open- and close-ended questions as well as a Likert scale. The open- and close-ended questions addressed the respondent's plans for using parental leave, factors and values that might impact their decision, their knowledge of their employer's policies and the FMLA regarding parental leave, whether or not they planned to breastfeed their baby, plans for childcare for the baby, and general demographic data including age, employment status and type of work, household income, marital status, whether or not they were a student, and number of other children. The Likert scale addressed the participant's view on the importance of

taking time off from work following the birth of their child on a personal level, in the context of society, their family, their culture, and their religion. Completion time was approximately 20 minutes. The survey also served as a method for recruiting interview participants. Along with the survey, respondents had an option to fill out a contact form if they wished to participate in a separate interview. While the original goal was to collect about 100 surveys from expectant parents through childbirth education classes and physician offices, there were bureaucratic barriers (which are discussed in more detail below) that restricted the distribution of surveys to just one of four proposed data collection sites, resulting in the completion of only 32 surveys.

The primary purpose of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews was to explore further expectant parents' knowledge and decision-making processes surrounding parental leave, and to place their knowledge and actions within a broader context of their values, beliefs, and the realities of their lived experiences. The goal was to interview between 20 and 30 expectant parents, however with only 32 surveys completed, this goal could not be reached. Ultimately, only two expectant parents were interviewed (although four expectant parents completed the contact form and agreed to an arranged interview, only two of these completed the interview; the other two did not return multiple phone calls). As a result, the research project needed to expand in order to interview established parents (parents who already had at least one child) as well. The recruitment process for these parents is discussed in the section below. The interviews were designed to be conducted in person and last approximately 45 minutes, although actual interview times varied and not all interviews were conducted in person, due to geographical distance, participant's time constraints, or participant's preference. In total, 20 interviews were conducted: 12 in person, seven over the phone, and one via email. During the interviews, participants discussed how they made choices about parental leave, the factors that influenced their decisions, policy relating to parental leave, the

impact of the participant's job on parental leave options, the way in which participants felt parental leave was perceived in society, and expectations for parental leave. Established parents also talked about their experiences with parental leave. No incentives were provided for completing the survey or the interview.

Recruitment

In an effort to expand the demographic attributes of my sample (i.e., to talk with expectant parents who did not necessarily live in one particular geographic location), I had planned to attend and distribute surveys at childbirth classes offered at two hospitals: one located in Hillsborough county, near the university, and another in eastern Pasco county, which is a more rural area. Additionally, I wanted to distribute surveys in the offices of two group obstetric physician practices: one that serves Hillsborough and Pasco counties, and another that serves only Pasco county (primarily the eastern portion of the county). Both sets of childbirth education classes and one of the group physician practices were affiliated with local hospitals that also had to sign off on the study as a part of a chain-of-command approval process; one of these hospitals declined my request to conduct the study, and the other did not return my calls after repeated attempts. As a result, I was unable to attain approval from three of my proposed sites.

Rethinking the strategy of my research, I opted to work with one group obstetric practice that serves both Hillsborough and Pasco counties (and that has an office in each county) to distribute surveys and interview survey respondents who offered their time. In addition, I now had the opportunity to expand my respondent pool to include parents who have already been through the experience of parental leave (or who were currently going through this process). Initially I used a convenience sample of parents I knew that had expressed interest in my research topic and a willingness to be interviewed (or who had asked to be interviewed), followed by a snowball sampling

method to expand the number of respondents. In this manner, I was able to interview a number of established parents. In total the research included 32 surveys and 20 interviews (two with expectant parents, and 18 with established ones).

Site description

Survey distribution occurred in two physician offices of a group obstetric and gynecologic practice. This practice is staffed wholly by women, from the front desk to the nurses to the physicians. For some in-office procedures, such as minor outpatient surgeries, the office does contract with other professionals – such as anesthesiologists – who may be male or female, but the in-house staff is entirely female. In each physician office, my main point of contact was the nurse supervisor, with whom I had weekly informal check-ins to collect returned surveys and discuss any issues that may have arisen with data collection. As part of the office practice, the nurse supervisors also served as my liaison with the head physician in each office, who also had to grant permission for me to place the surveys in the office. Additionally, I briefly met the front office staff in each office, as these women are in charge of managing the lobby and they also were the ones to inform the nurse supervisor of my arrival each week for our check-in.

Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval for the study, including the use of the self-administered questionnaire and interview protocol, I was able to begin data collection. I placed surveys and contact information forms on tables in the lobbies (waiting rooms) of the physician offices as part of a display that included a flyer (providing a brief overview of the research and my contact information) and an informed consent. (Due to the non-obtrusive nature of the research, and the fact that it is not always feasible to obtain

signed consent for self-administered surveys, I received a waiver of the signed consent process.) A separate basket for completed surveys and contact forms was also provided in the lobbies. The nurse supervisors also asked their staff to mention the surveys to patients, facilitating data collection while at the same time assuring the patients that the surveys were part of a research project being conducted by a USF graduate student, completely voluntary, and in no way affiliated with the physician's practice or patient care. The nurse supervisors and I discussed the importance of this disclaimer so that patients did not feel as though they were under any pressure to complete the survey. Some surveys were kept near the nurses' work areas so that if a patient did decide to complete the survey, the nurse would have one at hand to give the patient.

If a survey respondent completed the contact information form (providing name and phone number), I followed up with a phone call to introduce myself, tell the respondent about my research, answer any questions the respondent might have and inquire if they were still interested in participating in an interview. If the respondent agreed, we set a time for the interview. The respondents who volunteered for an interview in this manner all requested phone interviews rather than in-person interviews, citing the convenience factor of phone interaction, or an inability to meet in person due to hectic work schedules. As a result, phone interviews were conducted with these respondents. For established parents, I conducted interviews in-person, over the phone (again some respondents requested to be interviewed via phone, for much of the same reasons mentioned above), and in one case, via email – this was the request of one respondent who had a very busy schedule. Before each interview began I reviewed my research, confirmed the respondent still wished to be interviewed, and asked if there were any questions (I also offered to answer questions again at the conclusion of each interview). I also let the respondents know that they were not obligated to answer a

question if they felt uncomfortable addressing a particular topic, though in none of the interviews did respondents express discomfort with any of the topics or questions.

In-person interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, and for phone interviews I took extensive notes during the interview. Interviews conducted in person ranged from 20 to 80 minutes, and interviews conducted over the phone ranged from 30 to 75 minutes. For all interviews, I also wrote additional follow-up notes as necessary, as some respondents indicated after the conclusion of the interview that they wished they had mentioned an additional point or perspective. In these scenarios, I would write down the additional information so it could be included in the data.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using SPSS. Through surveys I had hoped to gather data from a large number of respondents, but the reduction in site locations resulted in far fewer surveys collected than initially proposed, with only 32 surveys returned. Consequentially, I was able to perform some rudimentary descriptive analysis, but the small amount of data entered means that in no way are these results generalizable to a broader population.

Time and other resource constraints prevented me from fully transcribing each interview, but I did extensively review and partially transcribe each interview to extract salient themes along with relevant quotes and perspectives. This study is in exploratory in nature, and so in coding the interviews thematically, I looked for themes that came about as a result of the interview questions as well as themes that emerged spontaneously from the respondents. I entered the data gathered in this manner in Microsoft Excel so that I could more easily organize and analyze the recurrent themes.

Methods limitations

This study is a snapshot of expectant and experienced parents, designed to explore how parents make decisions relating to parental leave, and to understand the experiences of parents who have been through the parental leave process. The participant recruitment method utilized in this study was not intended to find a representative sample of the general population, and so while results generated are informative, they cannot be generalized to the entire population.

Surveys, while a good method of collecting concrete data, are unable to generate in-depth responses and although respondents had an opportunity to volunteer for an interview, most did not. Interviews are a good way to collect in-depth data, however, analysis is best done when all interviews are able to be fully transcribed and coded in detail.

If I had the opportunity to design an ideal study, it would be a longitudinal study consisting primarily of interviews with parents beginning during pregnancy and following up at post-birth intervals (e.g., at 6 weeks, 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months postpartum). I would also like to interview parents together if possible (some parents might be single parents without a partner, and so it would not always be feasible to conduct partnered interviews), and even perhaps in small group settings in order to document an atmosphere of interaction between participants as they share their experiences with parental leave and returning to the workplace (this could even be done at events such as play dates, baby showers, birthday parties, etc.). Such a study would also delve more deeply into the experience of returning to work after having a child, and how parents work to negotiate that transition. Another approach would be to conduct ethnographies of parents in the workplace. If I ever have the opportunity and funding to conduct this type of study, it would be ideal to examine the types of parental leave

available and accessible to workers within a large company, whose benefit packages are often stratified according to level of work.

Though this study was carried out with limited time and no funding, it does seek to demonstrate the importance of parents' understanding of parental leave, and their lived experiences with the process. The results of the study are presented in the next chapter according to the themes that emerged from participant responses.

Chapter 6: Results

This chapter will discuss the results of the research project, focusing on the themes that were found in the data. In an effort to maintain continuity, the quantitative results, though limited, are presented with the ethnographic data where appropriate.

As the ethnographic data were entered into Microsoft Excel and reviewed, a number of themes emerged. Parents noted that in making decisions about using parental leave, finances played a large role, as did the importance of making decisions in a way that was best for their family, although some parents noted that societal expectations influenced their choices of how much parental leave to take or whether they still worked some while taking parental leave. The importance of parental leave for bonding and breastfeeding were also prevalent themes. Finally, respondents' thoughts on the FMLA tended to follow a similar pattern, with most indicating that the current law is better than having no policy, though there is substantial room for improvement.

Respondent Demographics

Seventeen interview participants in this study were female and three were male. Three of the female respondents were expecting, two of these were expecting their first child, and the third was expecting her second child. With the exception of one woman, who had three children, respondents whose children were already born had one (N=9) or two (N=7) children. Seventeen of the respondents were married, and the other three, all of whom were women, indicated they were living with their boyfriend. Data on age were not collected beyond the inclusion criteria of being a legal adult (18 years of age or older).

The respondents also tended to be well educated (eight have degrees beyond a bachelor's degree, six more have an associate's or bachelor's degree) and have professional jobs; only a four had hourly wage jobs prior to the birth of their child(ren). Of those, two decided to leave their job in order to stay home with their child; one parent had planned to transition to a reduced schedule, but her position was eliminated and so she decided to remain out of the work force for a few years; and one had arranged to leave her job, but when her boss called to ask if she wanted to return to work on a reduced schedule, she agreed to do so. Out of the 16 participants who had professional jobs, only one took an extended leave of absence beyond four months; most professional female workers returned to work (or plan to return to work) within 12 weeks of childbirth, and all the male workers returned to work within a few weeks of the birth of their child.

Of the 32 survey respondents, 30 were expectant mothers, and two were expectant fathers. Just over half of the respondents were expecting their first child (N=17). The age range for respondents was 22-37, with five respondents declining to give their age. As with the interview participants, most of the survey respondents tended to have professional jobs; five women were unemployed. Of those who were employed (N=27), most indicated they would be taking parental leave following the birth of their child (N=26). The anticipated length of leave for the expectant mothers ranged from four weeks to more than a year, though the most common response was about 12 weeks (N=11). Three expectant mothers were not sure how long they would be taking, and one expectant mother indicated she would not be taking any parental leave; she did not elaborate on the issue further. One father planned to take one to two days of parental leave, the other planned to take two to three weeks.

Finances

Of the 20 parents interviewed, only three had had access to paid parental leave: two mothers who were able to have fully paid maternity leaves of four months' duration, and one mother whose employer offered four weeks of paid maternity leave. Among parents who did not have access to paid parental leave, financial considerations were greatly influential in their choices regarding parental leave, and there was a broad range of ways in which they sought to use their accrued personal time to financially cover the leave or to work within their existing budget to financially cover the lack of income.

A few women worked for employers that offered short-term disability benefits, but not all of them were able to take advantage of these benefits, either because they lacked knowledge of their presence or how the benefits are paid out. Julia, a full time nurse, was eligible for up to six weeks of short term disability coverage, but she did not realize that there was a stipulation that employees must use all of their accrued personal time before the coverage began. Julia had been saving her personal days, and had about five and a half weeks accrued. As a result, she only received a couple of days' pay under her short-term disability insurance.

To compensate for the lack of paid parental leave, most of the parents used their accrued personal time (which was referred to as sick leave, vacation leave, or paid time off). Among the fathers, only one of the three said that he used "as much time as I had available" for parental leave; the other two used some of their accrued leave time, but not all of it. Among working mothers, all of those who had accrued leave used (or intended to use) the entirety of it for their parental leave. None of these mothers, however, had enough accrued leave to fully cover the length of leave they were eligible to take.

Some were able to save money in advance to cover the loss of income.

Michelle, a manager who has one child, explained that she and her husband worked to

pre-pay whatever bills they could in advance of her eight week maternity leave, only two weeks of which would be paid with her vacation time. Michelle related that, "I was two months ahead in my mortgage" by the time her daughter was born. In addition, the timing of her daughter's birth worked out to be around the time they would be expecting a tax refund, so they planned to use the refund to help offset the lack of income. Ellen, a freelance graphic designer and part time natural childbirth instructor, also worked to save money in advance of the births of her two children. She did not have access to any paid leave, but she and her husband thought it was "financially feasible" to save about three months' worth of income during her pregnancies so that Ellen could take three months off with each baby. Saving money in anticipation of a reduced income while on maternity leave is something Nicole did as well. As the director of a day care, Nicole, who has two children, planned to use her accrued time and then "I just budgeted myself, so that I knew that I would have money to cover the time that I wouldn't get paid for."

Five mothers said they stretched their accrued leave to cover the length of time they wanted to use, either by taking a reduced payment each week during the leave, or by taking the full payments and then setting money aside to cover the weeks they were not paid. For three other mothers and one father, this meant that mothers had to take less time than they were permitted because they could not stretch the income far enough. Kimberly, who is expecting her first child, would like to take the 12 weeks for which she is eligible, but she knows her financial situation prevents her from doing so. She feels lucky that her employer provides four weeks of paid maternity leave, and that she has short term disability to use for a time after that, but she cannot make that income stretch to cover 12 weeks. "Eight weeks" of maternity leave "works better financially" for Kimberly and her boyfriend. She hopes that after eight weeks, the baby will be on a schedule to make transitioning back to work a little easier, although she does say that "If it was financially possible, I wouldn't go back to work." I also heard this

sentiment from Maria, who told me that ideally, she would like to stay home with her baby (who is due four months from now), but that financially that is not possible.

“Otherwise three or six months would be nice” Maria says, but financial restrictions mean even that is not an option. Realistically, Maria thinks that by using her accrued leave she will be able to cover the time that is medically necessary for recovery, six to eight weeks. She and her husband need her full pay each week from her full time job as a probation officer, so taking a reduced paycheck as a trade for a longer maternity leave will not work.

Among employed survey respondents (N=27), 70 percent indicated that their workplace did not provide paid parental leave (N=19), 22 percent (N=6) said their workplace provided at least partial pay for a few weeks, one respondent said she had the ability to use short-term disability pay, and one was not sure whether parental leave was paid or unpaid at her workplace.

“What is best for our family” – Individuality in making choices

In each interview, parents talked about how they made the choices they did concerning parental leave. While many parents identified expectations and norms of culture, family, society, or religion, very few said these outside factors influenced their decision-making process. Generally, norms and expectations were phrased to indicate that American society and American culture expects parents to return to work soon after the birth of a child: 1 to 2 weeks for men and 6 to 12 weeks for women. For the women that identified religious norms/expectations, they indicated that their particular religion may think it is preferable for mothers to stay at home with the children, but went on to say that they do not feel pressured or influenced by these. Leah, who described herself and her husband as religious, said “There are expectations but not extreme, they [her church] take a more liberal view of ‘do what is best for your family,’ understanding that

'you have to pay bills and keep things running.'" Most parents said that their extended families were non-influential in the decision-making process, even if the family members had expressed a wish that the parents could have taken more time, they understood the necessity for the parents' return to work; only four parents indicated they had substantial help from extended family members in caring for their children. All of the parents said they made decision on their own or had discussed it with their partner. Katelyn, a school social worker with three children, believes that the financial constraints many parents face "removes the choices from people's options, and makes the decisions for them. ...'What is best for our family?' – the decision should be made that way." Karen, a mother of two children, said that of her ultimate decision to transition out of her full time job after her oldest child was born, and then to work part time from home through the birth of her second child, "For me it was a very personal decision." Stephen, a retail specialist with one child, was more blunt: "Society as a whole really doesn't matter to me. What only matters to me is the small world I live and work in."

An interesting facet of the individual decision-making process is how removed it can be from the experiences of parents' family members. A number of parents (six mothers and one father) expressed the idea that they really did not know what to expect regarding parental leave: the process, their coverage under the FMLA or through their employer, or a more general sense of the whole situation being new and uncharted territory. Given this, it might not be surprising that of the 18 established parents, 10 clearly expressed a substantial difference between what they thought their parental leave would be like and their actual experience. Ellen, who has two children, stated that after her first child was born "I didn't really know what to expect, but it was definitely different from what I expected... I didn't really realize the levels of emotions that came with the roller coaster of hormones." After the second child was born, Ellen said that "I expected the emotional part of it, I was more aware of what to expect. But I was more

tired with the second.” Julia, reflecting on her parental leave experience, shared that she “anticipated it would be a cocoon time – spending time with him [her son], recovering, and being a mom. But, it is difficult to have blissful cocoon time when you can’t pay the bills.”

Samantha, who has one child, worked at a call center during her pregnancy and had planned to take the six weeks of unpaid maternity leave her company offered, but when her doctor did not clear her to return to work until seven weeks postpartum, she had to forfeit her position at the company. After her baby was born she began to view maternity leave differently though, and while on leave she realized she did not want to return to work after six weeks anyway. When I asked her what she thinks of maternity leave now, she replied, “I think it’s different in different parts of the world. I could take six weeks after birth, and I thought ‘Well, that’s just crazy’ and I ended up at home for a year and a half. Moms should be able to stay home for at least a year. It’s not long enough here.” She told me of conversations she had with her mom, who had taken four weeks of leave with her firstborn, realized that four weeks was not enough, and took four years away from work with her second. Samantha told me, “I was thinking from a different place before I had him. I didn’t know what to expect.” She says she may not have really heard or taken her mom’s advice prior to her son’s birth. She was thinking, “yeah, that was good for you Mom, but I’ll be fine.” Only after she had gone through the experience was she able to really understand her mother’s thoughts on working and having a baby.

Evelyn, a postal worker with two children, also made that point. During the interview, she reflected on her experience with maternity leave: “I think talking about it [now, in the interview] just kind of makes you more aware. ...I don’t think I really planned it out as I thought I would have.” But, she said, it is hard to know what parental leave will be like when “you’re going through the pregnancy, and beforehand, it’s just not

something that's on your plate when you're not pregnant." She had planned to take the 12 weeks of leave guaranteed by the FMLA after her twins were born, but as the time drew closer for her return to work, she knew she wanted to have more time with them. "I was kind of figuring [that I could take more time], but no one else knew my plans!" She and her husband talked about it, and he had told her "as long as things were getting paid, take whatever time you want." So she requested an extended leave of absence, but her request was denied and she had to return to work after 12 weeks of leave. Of that decision, Evelyn noted, "the individual basis thing, I wish that was looked at more, it's like we're allowed our 12 weeks and that's it." Evelyn said near the end of the interview that she thought she might try to talk to her sister (who is pregnant with her first child) about parental leave planning and options, but she is not sure how effective the conversation will be as her sister might not yet be in a place to hear and understand what Evelyn is saying.

Parallel to the idea of making parental leave decision individually or as a nuclear family was the idea of not being judgmental about the parental leave choices of others. Karen summed up this point nicely: "it is important for people, especially moms, to not be judgmental of others in regards to issues of taking parental leave, staying home, returning to work, or any combination because these are personal (and familial) issues wherein what works for one person or family may not work for another." Katelyn, too, made the point that circumstances are not the same for all families making decisions about parental leave, saying "What is best for our family? The decision should be made that way."

Bonding

Bonding can be described as "the close emotional tie that develops between

parents and baby at birth” (Ask Dr. Sears 2011). In a review of 30 years of research on bonding, Winberg (2005) notes that

Through a close body contact immediately after birth the mother seems to regulate the newborn’s temperature, energy conservation, and acid-base balance, adjustment of respiration, crying, and nursing behaviors. Similarly, the baby may regulate – i.e., increase – the mother’s attention to the needs of her baby, initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding, and efficiency of her energy economy. (Winberg 2005:225)

Most of the research on infant bonding has been on the maternal-child bond, however, Reed (2005) states that “Although our culture does little to train males to be fathers, even scientists are finding that nurturing comes naturally to most men, possibly even driven by biology. The process has a variety of labels: bonding or attachment, if one is focused on the child; or engrossment, if one is thinking about the father” (Reed 2005:239).

All of the employed expectant parents who completed the survey as part of this study identified bonding as a factor in making decisions regarding parental leave. Likewise, every interviewee mentioned the importance of bonding during parental leave, and that getting to know one’s child was an important reason to take parental leave. Julia told me the parental leave story of her husband, who is part of a group of men actively choosing to take parental leave so they can bond with their babies:

My husband took about a month through his saved PTO [Paid Time Off]. He is a firefighter. They have unions and a better voice with their management. There’s something about their culture there; that all these big macho firefighters have been taking about a month off [for paternity leave]. My husband saw a coworker do it, and decided he wanted to do it too so he saved up his leave. Since then, something like six more firefighters have done this with their babies. There’s something about big macho firefighters wanting to take time off to snuggle with their babies. Once the culture is created, once someone else does it, more people want to do it.

David, a software engineer and father of two, felt that spending time with each of his children after they were born was important, despite having pressure from the workplace to take a minimal amount of parental leave. He noted that,

It takes having the child to truly understand what is needed, and therefore you must be there to attend to things post-birth. In addition, the child has immediate needs that can only be satisfied by the parents (or guardians). There is also the emotional needs of the child and the raw emotion of the experience. ... People become necessary at their jobs, the experience and knowledge of a person does not easily transfer to a substitute employee. Therefore any time someone must leave work there will be a gap where they had expert knowledge. However, who really cares? It's just work. No one reaches the end of their life and says 'I wish I had worked more.' People do say 'I wish I'd spend more time with my kids.' There is a reason for that.

Madelyn, a medical resident who has one child and is expecting a second, reflected on the importance of bonding and the challenge she felt after returning to work as a medical resident six weeks after the birth of her daughter. She stated that having parental leave was important in the following way:

Just the family bonding time as a whole, and learning how to be a mom, bonding with your child, getting to know your child. I remember it was hard even going back after six weeks, and being like, I still don't feel like I know – I felt like my mom knew her better than I did. You know, because I was gone most of the day ... I'd have to call her when I was home at nights or on the weekends and say, how often do you feed her or how much have you been feeding her?

Claire also emphasized the importance of bonding, stating that the benefits of parental leave “are that you get to bond with your child and you get time to recover yourself. ... I know it [parental leave] is a luxury, but I think it's a borderline human right...to be able to have that time.”

Breastfeeding

It is recommended by a host of organizations (e.g., the American Academy of

Pediatrics, La Leche League, the World Health Organization) that mothers breastfeed their children exclusively for the first six months, and then concurrently while introducing other foods until the child is 12 months old, and then for as long as is mutually desired by mother and child (Office of Women's Health 2011; Eidelman and Schlaner 2012). These recommendations are based on the numerous benefits of breastfeeding for the infant, including nutritional benefits, and health benefits, including a reduction in the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), and immunological benefits (Office of Women's Health 2011). Breastfeeding facilitates bonding between the mother and baby, and also benefits the mother in the short term by encouraging uterine contractions post-delivery, and in the long term by lowering a woman's risk for postpartum depression, ovarian cancer and breast cancer (Labbok 2001; Women'sHealth.gov 2011). In addition, breastfeeding is less expensive than formula feeding (Office of Women's Health 2011).

Nearly all of the mothers interviewed spoke of parental leave as time to establish breastfeeding, even if they knew they would not be pumping upon their return to work. Similarly, most employed women who responded to the surveys indicated that breastfeeding influenced their decision-making process surrounding parental leave (84 percent, N=21), though four employed women (16 percent) said that they did not plan to breastfeed. Leah, a school psychologist who has one child, was especially grateful for her nine weeks of maternity leave in this regard. Leah said that when began nursing her daughter she realized there was a lot more involved in breastfeeding and establishing flow, than she had thought and she was glad that she had time to work with a lactation consultant during her maternity leave and get into a routine.

Katelyn, a school social worker and mother of three, had initially "planned on breastfeeding [my first child] for six weeks but since I was home, I ended up breastfeeding for 20 months." Further, she discovered while being home with her firstborn, that "if I had to return to work, I would not have kept breastfeeding because I

was not able to pump enough milk.” Alissa, who has a daughter, stated about breastfeeding that

I knew that was what I would prefer to do, and that was something I was committed to throughout [my parental leave]. She really breastfed very exclusively until I came back to work full time – she was about 10 months old, and then I ended up, just because of the demands, which I know is very common with women who want to pump and keep breastfeeding going, she ended up having to supplement a little bit with formula when she was at the day care ... like one bottle a day or something like that. But for the most part, she breastfed until she decided that she was all done with it, so she got a good 14 months in.

Ellen, a graphic designer and natural childbirth educator who has two children, was adamant about breastfeeding her children. She stated that part of making breastfeeding work for her was the ability to work from home, saying “I always wanted a baby and always wanted to work from home – I was *determined* to work from home – to just make it happen, working from home and breastfeeding.”

Societal Expectations

Most parents also indicated that they thought society expects parents to return to work as quickly as possible following the birth of a child and further, that they should return to work as though nothing had changed in their lives. Alissa, who has one child and whose employer provided paid parental leave, had this to say:

Whatever my situation had been, I probably would have chosen the longest time that I could, going in ... ahead of time, I was just really excited about the ability to take the leave... I probably should have anticipated a little bit more about, sort of what happens when you come back, and what the expectations are going to be about the productivity while you are gone.

Even though Alissa found her employer to be very supportive and believes that there is “a growing acceptance of parental leave than there has been in the past, say 10 years ago,” she still found herself working 10 to 15 hours per week during her leave, “just to keep things afloat” and that expectations surrounding productivity during the leave time were unclear, and still seem to be unclear from a policy perspective. Due to

the fact that a paid parental leave policy had been in place for only a couple of years, Alissa noted that “I think some of the policies are kind of in evolution, because it is very new ... with parental leave it's just sort of, who knows, because nobody had had it before... One of the things that has been a point of conflict...is how much you're expected to produce ...while on leave. Because technically, the leave is supposed to be used to be a parent.”

Karen noted that “Socially, I think people expect the mother to take off some time. I think there's also a lot of expectation that it is a recovery period, and not a bonding period with your child, but the bonding period is very important.” For her husband, Karen said that he felt that he couldn't really take off more time than he had accrued, “because he was a dad and therefore didn't ‘need’ the time for recovery like a mom does.” David, a software engineer who has two children, took this approach:

Society expects work. We live in a work society. I think we are torn between being good parents (which society wants) and working harder than almost any other society on earth (which society also wants). No matter what, someone is going to be unhappy with the eventual arrangement. ... [This made] me think that only spending a week off when my child was born was OK. It really isn't. Everyone should take more time when their child is first born.

“It's great, but...” – Reflections on the FMLA

All the parents who participated in the study expressed gratitude that there is some system in place to help parents through the provision of job-protected time for parental leave. However, no one thought the FMLA was good enough in its current form. Some respondents, such as Kimberly, were glad that at least parents who use FMLA do not have the burden of worrying whether their job would be secure, even if there is room for improvement, stating “It's great that it provides that sense of [job]

security, one less thing to worry about while you're out. It would be great if it paid you that whole time, but you know..."

David, too, focused on the benefit parents are afforded in the sense of job protection under the law, declaring that "I think it is *very* important... codifying into law some basic rights for new parents is incredibly important at workplaces where they would otherwise not hesitate to disallow parental leave (extended or not) or punish people for it."

Other parents were adamant that the law simply does not provide enough support for parents. For example, Stephen stated that

It's one of those things where it's a good idea in theory, but it's poor execution... it's not strong enough, it's very weak, it's very minimalist. It's better than nothing, but it can definitely be a lot stronger. ... You would think that the leader of the free world would have some sort of paid parental leave, even half pay or something rather than just saying that the onus is on the individual employee to pay for themselves. My opinion is that FMLA just says, 'you don't get in trouble for taking 12 weeks off, but everything else is up to you.'

Leah and Julia made similar statements, although each had a slightly different perspective, with Leah focusing on the fact that the FMLA covers both parents and is beneficial for bonding, noting "It's good to have a law to secure your job. Paid leave would be better, as short term disability does [provide pay]. I don't think it is enough – you need more money, more time. It is good that it covers dads too. Good for bonding. Should cover more time and be paid though."

Julia, meanwhile, took a broader approach, arguing that

It's great in the sense that it offers some coverage, but it should be more far-reaching. It would be nice if they would mandate, they should mandate that your employer should give you time off and they (they government) should give some sort of stipend. Paid parental leave would benefit parents, babies, and societies.

Claire and Alissa adopted an even wider view, drawing comparisons with the state of parental leave globally. Claire maintained that parental leave policy ultimately has to recognize the human and familial aspects of workers, stating

If you look at polices across the world, the United States is so far out of the picture when it comes to other developed countries when providing leave. Policy, whether it comes from the employer or from the government, needs to recognize that people are whole, and that people have families and that's something to be lifted up, even by an employer, as opposed to marginalized and made more difficult.

Alissa, meanwhile, felt that in order for parental leave policy in the United States to be on par with other parental leave policies globally, then

It needs to be much longer. If you compare the US to any country around the world, any country, it's such a different approach to parental leave. That's what I would like to see, just moving our country towards the average around the world. I think it should be paid leave, I think it should be at least six months, eight months, a year, something like that.

This chapter has focused on the themes that emerged in the qualitative interviews and to a lesser extent, the surveys with parents: finances, the importance of individuality in making choices (as a person or as a nuclear family unit), bonding, breastfeeding, societal expectations, and reflections on the FMLA. While each of the themes presented in this chapter are interesting in their own right, in order to provide a more holistic view of how parents make decisions regarding parental leave, the connections between the themes need to be explored. The final chapter will examine the ways in which these themes are related and place these results within the broader contexts of parental leave, motherhood, fatherhood, and the work-home dynamic in the United States. It will also discuss the study's limitations, its potential applications, and possible directions for future research.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Recommendations

As is commonly reported in the academic literature, most parents in this study did not have access to paid parental leave, and as a result many parents had to strategize ways deal with the prospect of unpaid leave following the birth of their child. Some parents were able to save money in advance of the leave, while others stretched the income from accrued leave to encompass their unpaid leave time, and still others opted to reduce the duration of their parental leave because they did not have any flexibility in their financial situations. Overall, about half of the mothers interviewed had taken or planned to take as much parental leave as they were permitted, yet none of the fathers did so, instead basing their leave duration primarily on financial or workplace factors. Parents of both sexes overwhelmingly indicated that their decisions about parental leave were their own or the result of discussions with their partner, and not due to outside influences or expectations, though there seemed to be a general consensus that American society expects parents to return to work fully and wholeheartedly relatively quickly following the birth of a child. This is contrast to attitudes regarding parental leave in other countries, where maternity leave is paid, and it is the norm for both parents to use parental leave. Indeed, in some countries policymakers are concerned that fathers are not using parental leave to the fullest extent. This concern has inspired research into how fathers make decisions regarding parental leave use (Bygren and Duvander 2006; McKay and Doucet 2010) and, in the Nordic countries, has even resulted in the adjusting of parental leave policies to encourage fathers to use more leave (Haas and Rostgaard 2011).

Parents also emphasized that they are not judgmental of other parents and their decisions. The impetus for these statements was not explored, but considering the current emphasis on motherhood and fatherhood prevalent in the U.S., such sentiments very well may be a response to the media's portrayal of the so-called 'mommy wars.' Finally, women noted that establishing breastfeeding was an important aspect and benefit of parental leave, and both men and women thought bonding was an essential part of, and reason for, parental leave. In this manner, participants in this study embodied parenthood through the experiences of breastfeeding and bonding, and used parental leave as a tool to enable and enhance these experiences.

On a policy level, many respondents pointed out limitations of the FMLA, and that they knew, or had heard, that parental leave policies in other nations surpassed the policy in the United States. Accessibility to paid parental leave is severely restricted in the U.S., as it was in this study. Although 22 percent of employed survey respondents said their employer provided at least partially paid parental leave, these results may be an anomaly due to the fact that the sample is not representative of the general population, or even the result of a misunderstanding on the part of expectant parents about the provisions of their workplace in regard to parental leave. One of the interview participants, Leah (a school psychologist), experienced such a misunderstanding. Leah discussed her confusion at learning, very near her due date, that in her school district the parental leave policy was not universal among different worker roles (i.e., teachers, support staff, etc.). Leah had even previously attended district-wide information sessions, not realizing at the time that the information presented was geared towards teachers, not all workers, leaving Leah rather confused at a late date about the policies that were applicable to her.

Study respondents faced structural constraints such as the lack of a national (or even statewide) paid parental leave policy combined with employer-based constraints to

limit the amount of parental leave most parents could reasonably take. Evelyn, for example, was willing to take extended unpaid leave from her job to stay home with her twins for more than the FMLA-granted 12 weeks, but her employer would not grant her an extended leave of absence, and she reluctantly returned to work. These restrictions have a clear effect on both mothers and fathers; however, the American notion of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as nurturers adds another layer of difficulty for fathers who wish to take parental leave in excess of the standard one to two weeks. An expectant father who completed a survey commented that when it comes to his workplace, the FMLA, and parental leave “My employer will not hold my position for that amount of time. They will replace me. Maybe this will work for women, but not men. I’m lucky if I can take two weeks.” This expectant father, who is an architect, noted that his company viewed men taking parental leave for up to two weeks as “part of the process” but that leave in excess of two weeks would negatively impact his career.

The Anthropological Perspective

Although parents said that work-centered societal/cultural norms did not influence their choices, their responses made clear that the necessity of income drove their choices in many cases. Stephen’s quote, “Society as a whole really doesn’t matter to me. What only matters to me is the small world I live and work in” illustrates the perceived autonomy that parents have when making choices related to parental leave. The ‘small world’ of which he speaks is a world in which, for many parents in this study, the American societal and cultural norms regarding worker and gender roles come into direct conflict after the birth of a child.

Many parents also recognize that their ideal (more time off from work) matches the ideal norms of their extended families, and possibly their religion (if they are

religious), but that these, too, are in conflict with the work-centered norms and expectations of society and culture. Because the majority of these parents face the reality of needing the income from work, the work-based norms take precedence over other norms, which are seen as ideal, but not practical.

These conflicting expectations faced by parents are then made more complex by the availability and accessibility of parental leave within their workplace. Mothers and fathers who would like to be more present for their baby are confronted with the option of having parental leave available for use, granted by the FMLA, but not finding that leave accessible to them, often because they cannot afford unpaid leave, or because they fear that taking more leave than what is considered to be the norm in their workplace will be detrimental to their career. While workplace cultures can evolve to be more accepting of longer parental leave, as Julia's story of her firefighter husband demonstrated, parents' hesitations in taking longer parental leave is justified in many cases. Exemplifying this is the following excerpt about a new mother and her workplace experience (this appeared as part of a larger article about maternity leave in the February 2012 issue of *Parents* magazine):

A cost analyst working for the federal government, she was entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). She saved her 58 vacation days so she could continue getting a paycheck during her time off (if she hadn't, she would have received no pay). When she learned that her department was in a bind because a colleague had resigned, the new mom volunteered to return to work part-time three weeks early.

The reward for her loyalty? A drop in rating on her annual review, which meant a smaller salary increase. She says her agency had a policy of not awarding the highest rating to anyone who took extended time off – which, practically speaking, ended up applying only to moms on maternity leave. “Nobody mentioned this to me until I sat down for my review,” she says. “Had I known, I wouldn't have given up part of my leave. I was kicking myself for that.” She considered filing a complaint, but felt it was too risky. “It would have helped other mothers in the long run, but it would have killed my career.” (Holecko 2012:75)

On a conscious level, parents made choices according to the needs of their families, including wanting as much time as they could to bond with their baby while providing for their family financially. Parents also felt the expectations of operating within the norms of a work-centered society, and the conflict that created with their own views of how much parental leave they wanted to take as a mother or father (gender roles). However, parents did not believe that they were making their own decisions within that broader context, but rather that they were autonomous agents in this regard. In addition, most parents thought that structural changes in society (specifically, improvements to the FMLA including providing for at least some paid leave) would help families have the ability to take more parental leave, and would make parental leave more accessible through normalizing the practice.

The results of this study also suggest that bonding was a primary way in which parents embodied the experience of being mothers and fathers, which in turn led parents to emphasize the value of parental leave. As Madelyn reflected on her six-week parental leave with her first child she stated, "I think you need to figure out what you're doing as a mom, you need to figure out how to be a mom. You need time to bond with your baby and have that time." Regarding the upcoming birth of her second child, Madelyn plans to work part time after her medical residency is finished, around the time her second child will be a couple of months old, but in the interim, her postpartum parental leave time will be just a few weeks for recovery purposes. She continues:

I'm nervous. My husband's like 'Oh I'm ready' and I'm like "I'm not" because I just, I know what's coming and it's hard to be able to do that and then to try to rush and get back to work. Plus now we also have another baby at home. So I am nervous about how it's going to work. I'm glad to know it's only a couple months that I'll have to do it until I'll be able to be home and then I don't plan on working full time once I'm done. I know I just have to get through it. ... I'm excited now but I just know all the work that comes along with it... and even the fact that I know it's

temporary. If this was going to be the rest of my life, it would have been a lot harder.

Using an anthropological perspective, this study shows that parents' use of parental leave incorporates gender role and worker norms, the ways in which people embody the experience of become parents, and the manner in which this is influenced by the regulations of the FMLA. While this study is small and limited in scope (discussed further in the following section), it nevertheless provides insight into how parents understand and experience parental leave in the United States.

Study Limitations and Ethical Concerns

This is an exploratory study into the ways in which parents understand, experience, and make decisions regarding parental leave. There are important ethical concerns when conducting a study with a small sample size, including protecting the privacy of respondents. I chose to use pseudonyms for the respondents, and where I thought that a job title might be an identifying feature, I replaced it with a more general job description. Obtaining USF IRB approval for my study was also important, especially because I would be interacting with pregnant women, who are considered to be a protected population. Although answering questions about parental leave in the form of a survey or interview posed no risk to the women involved, or, if they were pregnant, to the fetus, going through the IRB approval channel caused me to be more mindful of the ethical concerns regarding pregnant women.

There are also limitations to my study. The study did not elicit as many survey responses as I had hoped; therefore I was unable to present an analysis of the understandings and parental leave plans of expectant parents. As Schensul and LeCompte point out, self-administered surveys also require a literate population

(Schensul 1999). While I was not dealing with an explicitly illiterate population, I cannot rule out the possibility that some of the expectant women or their partners were not literate. In addition, the sample size was small (20 participants were interviewed) and by using a convenience sample followed by a snowball sample to recruit established parents, my sample is not representative of the population of parents as a whole in the United States, either in terms of sex (17 women and 3 men were interviewed) or worker type (there were many professional-level workers, and few hourly wage workers), and so the results cannot be generalized to the entire population. It can also present difficulties to conduct interviews over the phone or by email rather than in person, as phone interviews are harder to record and transcribe, while face to face interviews allow the researcher and the respondent greater ability to delve deeper into discussion on topics of interest to either party. One interview was done via email, which also presented a challenge in that email presents greater difficulty in asking follow up questions and having in-depth discussions. Also, while conducting interviews, I did not directly collect information regarding participants' age or financial situation, information that could have helped to better understand the context of the participants' decisions regarding parental leave.

Potential Applications

Here I offer a couple of potential applications of my study specifically, followed by some general suggestions of applications about raising awareness of parental leave in the United States. First, as part of my ongoing communication with the physician practice, I can assist them if they are interested in designing an appropriate outreach to raise awareness of parental leave among expectant mothers. During my conversations with the nurse supervisors, I asked if the nurses or doctors ever talk to the patients about parental leave. I was told that generally they do not; there is no policy against it,

however it is basically beyond the scope of the practice. Given that the offices in this practice do have multiple brochures or fact sheets about a variety of topics relevant to women (from breast cancer to obesity to cord blood banks), I could create a fact sheet template or a brochure that contains basic information about the FMLA and references to relevant organizations (websites, addresses, phone numbers) in order to provide parents with an introduction to the idea of parental leave. This may not be comprehensive in terms of answering all their questions specific to their workplace, but it is a starting point, and potentially within the scope of the physician's practice in that it is present yet unobtrusive and would require no additional responsibilities or duties for the staff.

Second, the experiences of parents suggest why parental leave is so important to them. My research could be used as data to show policymakers and organizations that advocate for better parental leave policies why parental leave is so important to families. The argument has been made, that when employees are supported as families, they are better workers (higher productivity, less absenteeism, etc.). These organizations could be ones that work on the national or state level, for example The National Partnership for Women and Families, the Institute for Women's Policy Research, or MomsRising, or even unions seeking to bargain for comprehensive, paid parental leave policies for workers in their next contract.

Applying Parental Leave Research in a Broader Context

Anthropologists bring a holistic approach to research and analysis, and this places us in a unique position to work within the context of parental leave. One way in which this could be done is through policy analysis and recommendation at a state or federal level. Anthropologists could also serve as advocates by lobbying for parental leave, and helping to shape and create policy for state-level support of new parents,

perhaps based on the California model of family leave. This could be done through the synthesizing the knowledge about how California's program is structured, what its impact has been (for families, workplaces, etc.), and then presenting it as an option to state-level governments. This would probably be done in conjunction with activist organizations or other grassroots movements, but it could be done through interested corporate or policy-making entities.

Another option for anthropologists would be to approach the parental leave issue from the workplace perspective. By conducting ethnographies of companies that are considered to be leaders in the area of parental leave, anthropologists could understand, from the employer point of view, why these policies were created, how they were implemented, how they are used by workers, and how they affect the overall workplace. Using this knowledge, anthropologists could serve as consultants to other companies interested in providing effective parental leave benefits, making recommendations and adapting best practices to the needs of a specific corporation. Coming at the workplace perspective from another angle, anthropologists could work with unions that have successfully negotiated comprehensive parental leave policies into their collective bargaining agreements, in order to understand the ways in which these unions managed to incorporate that language and what the impact of parental leave benefits have been on workers and the business as a whole. In this scenario, anthropologists could conduct a workplace ethnography of not just the impact of parental leave benefits, but also of the impact of the union in securing such benefits. The results of such a study could then be shared with other unions throughout the country, and perhaps used as a model for future bargaining agreements.

In light of some of the interviews wherein respondents reflected that they probably were not in a place (mentally) to truly understand parental leave while they were pregnant, I began to wonder what resources would be of use to expectant parents.

The parents in my sample whose leave experiences most closely matched their expectations were Karen (who grew up with much younger siblings, remembers watching her mother nurse and helped to care for her siblings), Michelle (whose only expectations were not getting much sleep and wanting to read to her daughter), and Katelyn (who “specifically” chose her field of work and “very intentionally” chose her employer to match her goals in life: “My number one goal is to be a mom. My number two goal is to do something purposeful with my time.”). These women entered the process from lived experience, minimal expectations, and extensive life planning, respectively. Combining this knowledge with Evelyn’s observation that just talking about parental leave brings awareness, I think that, generally speaking, awareness can be raised on multiple levels so that all parents can be better informed about parental leave.

One level is policy awareness, in which an increased attention to the efforts of advocates who are trying to pass a version of national parental leave policy might spark community-wide or even national discussions on the current state of parental leave and how it impacts parents, as well as how it might be improved. Examples of relevant public policy flexible work schedules, paid sick days, and continuing to breastfeed after returning to work (e.g., space and time for lactation must be provided in workplaces under the new Affordable Care Act). Another level of raising awareness is to engage parents and expectant parents at the community level. This could be a geographic community, perhaps through outreach (discussions in childbirth education classes would be a good place to start), or an online community, through the use of social networking sites or blogs. All of these are areas in which anthropologists could make a contribution.

Using online tools to communicate ideas and research to a broader community is an emerging area of engagement for anthropologists. Blogs, contributions to online journals, the creation of anthropology websites, and calls for open access to academic journals are among the ways that current anthropologists within academia are making a

digital impression. One of the larger goals of these activities is to make anthropology more accessible for a broader audience, including for anthropologists who do not work in academia (Jackson 2012; Kelty 2012) and “as a means to an end – as a way of making a difference” (Trombley 2011). Jackson sums up this sentiment nicely in a recent essay for the site anthropologies (<http://www.anthropologiesproject.org/>): “In a world filled with lifelong learners seeking knowledge, desperate social problems needing regress, rapid cultural change to be negotiated, and nearly boundless deprivation and suffering, we have unprecedented need for an anthropological scholarship that is widely and freely available” (Jackson 2012). Anthropologists could contribute to the discussion of parental leave by sharing an anthropological perspective on established blogs, including blogs for parents such as Manic Mommies (a blog for working moms who are “trying to do it all”), GeekDad (“Building a community for the geek parents out there”), or parenthology (“Field notes on parenting, work, and anthropology”) or creating a blog of their own to address the issue of parental leave (to the best of my knowledge, there is currently no such blog or website).

Conclusion

Policy can encourage or restrict parents’ use of parental leave. In much of the world, parental leave policies are designed to assist parents with incorporating a new child into their family, but in the United States, the FMLA attempts to protect parents who choose to take parental leave while still catering to the interests of businesses. The result is that American parents take significantly less leave than their global counterparts, and often do so under the strain of financial pressure. There has been a growing interest in motherhood and fatherhood over the past 10 to 15 years in the U.S., and with this interest has emerged a focus on the discrepancy between parental leave policy in the United States compared to the rest of the world. Increasingly, popular

organizations such as *Working Mother* magazine have been supporting the effort to establish a national paid parental leave policy.

Currently, parents who decide to take unpaid leave, or who are fortunate enough to have access to paid leave, often do so despite societal expectations that work obligations take precedence over family matters. However, these parents also find the experience rewarding in terms of bonding with their child, and for mothers, establishing breastfeeding. As Leah said of her nine week parental leave, “I would never give up that time.” This study contributes to the literature that seeks to gain a better understanding how parents conceptualize and make decisions about parental leave, and to situate this knowledge within the overall framework of parental leave policy and practice in the United States.

Because parental leave in the United States has not been extensively studied, future research on parental leave has so many potential avenues. A few possible suggestions are presented here. Given that so few Americans in the private sector have access to paid parental leave, an in-depth analysis of the corporations that offer paid parental leave could be done. Of particular interest might be the stratified levels of parental leave benefits provided by very large organization to workers whose salaries range from relatively low hourly wages in the storefronts to much larger salaries in corporate offices. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has published an “Employer Spotlights” brochure featuring organizations that have created breastfeeding friendly worksites (Health Resources and Services Administration 2008). One of these organizations is The Home Depot, which, according to the DHHS, “established a comprehensive lactation support program at their headquarters in Atlanta and provides new mothers with incentives to continue breastfeeding... Because of the program’s success at the Atlanta home office, company officials are now piloting the program at two divisional offices and in select retail stores” (Health Resources and

Services Administration 2008:6). It would be interesting to study such a company's parental leave policy as it relates to workers at differing levels within the organization.

Other areas of research could include studies on the efforts to enact state-level paid parental leave programs, and the continuation of studies to assess these programs' effects on parents, businesses, and even children (the study by Appelbaum and Milkman (2011) focused on how California's Paid Family Leave Program impacts parents and businesses, but not children). Finally, it would be important to conduct longitudinal mixed-method research on how parents use parental leave in the U.S., how this leave is negotiated, and the impact of the leave on families in order to develop a better understanding of their leave practices and how policies, whether corporate, state-level, or federal, can be shaped to meet the needs of parents at this time of great change in their lives.

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Appendix: IRB Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
 Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
 (813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

December 15, 2011

Amanda Parr, B.A.
 Anthropology
 37150 Grassy Hill Ln.
 Dade City, FL 33525

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review
 IRB#: Pro00005604
 Title: Parental Leave Policy and Choices: Exploring the Decision-Making Process of Expectant Parents

Dear Ms. Parr:

On 12/14/2011 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 12/14/2012.

Approved Items:

Protocol Document:

[Research Proposal](#)

Consent/Assent Document:

Waiver of informed consent documentation granted.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117 (c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) that the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or (2) that the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR

56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board