Working Mothers:

Navigating maternity leave and career transition.

By Laura Mills

Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I authorize OCAD University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

I further authorize OCAD University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Laura Mills

Abstract

According to the World Economic Forum, countries with the strongest economies are those that have found ways to advance the careers of women, especially working mothers. Fortune 500 companies with a high ratio of women as senior executives or on the board of directors measure highest in every form of profitability. At a time where gender opportunity is making strides and the percentage of female participation in the workforce almost at parity to men, we seem to know more about parental leave from the employer's side, surrounding predictors of retention and engagement metrics, than we do about the personal experiences of mothers in the workforce. To truly support and advance this cohort, it is important to complete the full picture of this transition by understanding the experience of taking time off work to have a child and returning to work from the women's point of view. Through speaking with women individually and engaging in a full spectrum conversation about aspects of both work and family in this transition, this project aims to address this gap in academic literature, in order to achieve a healthier distribution of knowledge and understanding of women returning to work after maternity leave. The output of this project uses secondary and primary research to generate insights and recommendations that invested stakeholders can use to create positive impact and enhanced experiences for these women.

Keywords: Employment, Diversity and Inclusion, Canada, Maternity Leave, Maternity Benefits, Gender Studies, Service Design

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to all the mothers who agreed to participate in this research. I am so grateful for your honesty and sincerity about this period in your lives – may your personal and professional lives continue to flourish.

Thank you to my advisors Greg Van Alstyne and Vanessa Docherty for sprinting to the finish line with me and for your valued insight and contribution to this project.

Thank you to my MERP working crew, Pansy Lee, Steve Truong, Aurelia Dalinda and Frank Sedghipour for all the laughs and words of encouragement. I am so glad to have met you in this program.

To my family – Mom, Dad, Jess, Spence, Trev, Sam and Bryn. Family matters most and I couldn't have done this without you.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1 The rise of working mothers

> "The economic empowerment of women across the rich world is one of the most remarkable revolutions of the past 50 years. It is remarkable because of the extent of the change: millions of people who were once dependent on men have taken control of their own economic fates."
> – The Economist (2009)

Women account for 47% of the labour force in Canada and the US and have driven an estimated 80% of employment growth since 1985 (Statistics Canada, 2015; United States Department of Labour, 2011). In the last fifty years, political, societal and cultural efforts have been in place to harness and activate the true potential and economic value of women in the workforce. From Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, encouraging women around the world to "Lean In" to their careers, to Hillary Clinton defining the "biggest crack in the glass ceiling yet" as the first women as a major party nominee for the U.S. Presidential election; female employment has not only increased significantly in the last fifty years but it is diversifying into roles previously held exclusively by men.
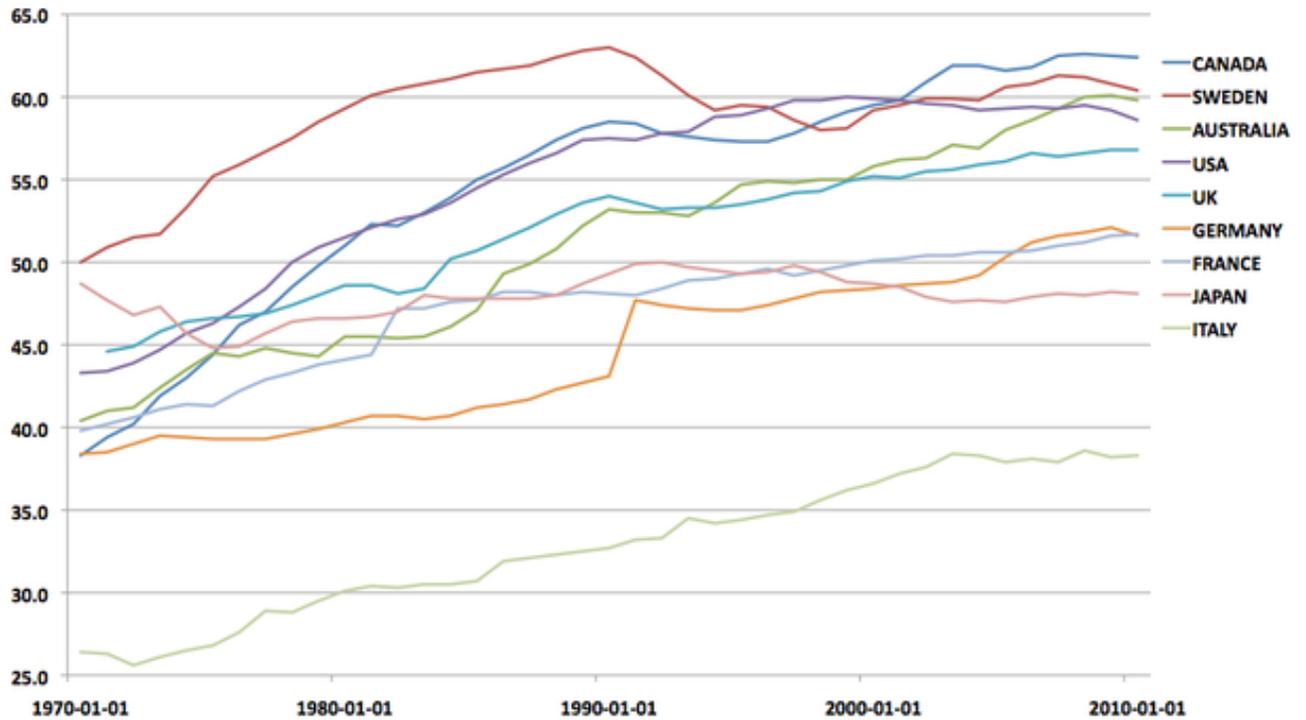
Figure 1. Female Labour Pariciparion by Country: 1970 – 2010. Retrevied from

https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?id=AUSLFPWNA

As the number of women participating in the workforce increases, so does the

number of working mothers with more and more women choosing to return to

work after having children. In Canada alone, the number of women returning to

work within one year after childbirth has doubled since 1983 (Statistics Canada,

2015). Dual income families are on the rise and family-focused policies and

maternity leave benefits offered by employers for working parents have been

adjusting in scale and scope to encourage mothers to remain in the workforce

after having children.

Even with these encouraging statistics and the increase of working mothers with access to family-focused benefits and policies, the reality is that many women still struggle to transition back into the workforce after motherhood. The first and second year after childbirth is described as the most trying for mothers' mental health (Brough, O'Driscoll, Bigg, 2009), and coping with new responsibilities of family and to generate income in addition to working is a challenge for many.

Despite having almost equal participation in the workforce, the representation of women at the senior executive level is severely disproportionate to the presence of men at this level (Waller, 2016). In Canada, men are two to three times more likely to be in a senior management position than women, and women hold only 20% of board seats at Canadian Stock Index companies (Catalyst, 2015). Anne Marie Slaughter's "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" article published in *The Atlantic* broke new ground, gaining one million views within four days of publication (2012). In it she took a provocative stance in calling out the 'partial truths' to the beliefs that had dominated the narratives surrounding working mothers and the 'can do' attitude that drove them. Slaughter argued that until society values *care* as much as it values *competition*, a working mother will always be undervalued because of her role as a caregiver.

1.2 The opportunity

Pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood are profoundly transformative experiences for women. While we must recognize that not all working women want to have

children and not all mothers are career-driven, still it may be said that there are many women who want to achieve both. Prior research indicates there are strong social and economic benefits in helping this segment of the population meet their respective goals for career and family in harmony.

Gender diversity in the workforce, particularly in leadership positions, delivers positive economic impact to the companies that foster it. Per the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap report (2014), countries with the strongest economies are those that prioritize helping career advancement for women and working mothers. Fortune 500 companies with a higher ratio of women on the board or in senior positions measured highest in all indexes of profitability (World Economic Forum, 2014).

There are also interpersonal benefits that come with motherhood. Many professional women report feeling more confident after children and feel comfortable taking bigger risks at work (Miller, 2015). Being a child of a working mom can also have its benefits; sons tend to help more with housework chores as adults and daughters are likely to complete more years of education than children of stay-at-home mothers (McGinn, Castro and Lingo, 2015). Increasingly, women have greater choice and agency over when they have children, and often try to time childbirth for the best career and financially-beneficial times in their lives. The rise of birth control in the 1960s and in fertility treatments options over the last 20 years have provided more flexible options for

working women and in many cases, result in the delay of motherhood, and a larger population of older first time mothers (Mathews and Hamilton 2014).

At present, most research on maternity leave and working mothers has focused on corporate impact as it pertains to retention, workflow and engagement, aimed at understanding the likelihood of a woman returning to work after a child. A disproportionately small amount of research exists about the personal experience from the woman's point of view. This presents an opportunity to address this gap in literature and to provide primary research about what women experience spanning the period from conception until returning to work after maternity leave. By focusing on the woman's point of view it seeks to support a more balanced, and thereby healthier, distribution of knowledge and opportunity to generate insights to aid in understanding this group, as well as pathways for innovation.

1.3 Purpose, scope and limitations

> "What we discovered in our research is that while the empowerment part of the equation has been loudly celebrated, there has been very little honest discussion among women of our age about the real barriers and flaws that still exist in the system despite the opportunities we inherited."
> – Kerry Rubin and Lia Macko, authors of 'Midlife Crisis at 30' (2004)

This project is inspired by the positive impact diversity can have on a thriving workforce and the promising career outlook for family-centered women. It also considers the many transitions one will experience in life and the personal

development achieved when one finds a way to navigate milestones successfully.

The research presented in this study looks at internal and external drivers behind the increase of working mothers while looking to understand the experience from the point of view of those women. The aim is to understand the personal, social and systemic forces that construct a woman's experience during a very specific part of her journey: her return to work after maternity leave. It also aims to illuminate challenges and barriers specific to this circumstance to expose opportunities for more understanding and subsequently crafting solutions to support a successful transition.

The output of this investigation is intended to be both practical and conceptual. It is intended that the insights generated from the research will help complete the unbalanced picture that exists in research today of how to support working women as they transition to motherhood. The findings from both primary and secondary research will be woven together to highlight the backstory of these working mothers and used to generate examples of human-centered solutions that invested stakeholders, such as government, employers and families can leverage and implement to address this opportunity cost. Lastly, while the core focus of this project is investigating working mothers, the hope is that some insights generated serve not only other parental segments but many others experiencing a massive life transition while trying to balance their economic and social or personal responsibilities. The intentions noted above serve to drive the underlying research question:

Many working women in Canada take up to a year off work to welcome a child. Recognizing the importance women play in the diversity of the workforce, in an increasingly precarious work economy, how are women handling returning to work after maternity leave and what solutions might we develop to help them during this transition?

The sequence of this paper mirrors the research journey from a broad exploration to a narrow and focused lens. The journey begins in Chapter 2 with a literature review referencing academic papers as well as online articles and discussion forums aimed at understand the contemporary view of what working mothers experience. The purpose of including online articles and discussion forums serves to provide additional understanding and context from other influencers that might not otherwise be captured in academic writing. They also deliver faster cycles of publication and therefore can be a source of recent updates in a fast-changing media landscape. The literature review informed the basis of what shaped the exploration in the primary research, as well as additional outputs for possible solutions.

Chapter 3 describes the methods and approach taken to complete the primary research as well as more detail on the target audience. From here observations and insights from the various research groups are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

The distillation and organization of insights is summarized in Chapters 5 in addition to introducing a new framework for design requirements that also serves

to define the problem space. This framework is used to inform design inputs for presented solutions in Chapter 6. The study concludes at Chapter 7, with suggestions for future areas of research.

While the core focus of this research is to produce benefits for all working mothers a potential limitation in this research is that the insights generated from women in more traditional 'white collar' professions may not be generalizable for women in higher or lower socio-economic strata. Furthermore, due to the small sample size, exploration into factors such as the role of ethnic background or more unconventional gender roles (such as the husband staying home as primary caregiver) were only lightly explored. Given the size of the cohort of working mothers, it is likely there are many nuanced segments, as well as intersecting segments of populations that would greatly benefit from more focused research. These groups may also include adoptive parents, or parents in same-sex relationships, or other non-traditional family groups. It should also be noted that this research was conducted in Canada, where maternity leave terms are federally defined and enforced, and tend to be longer and more generous than those in the United States where the more robust maternity leave options are at the discretion of the employer. The insights derived from this research will help to positively influence and inform future efforts to support successful transitions for the professional mother and her personal and professional community

.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Problem and context

To fully understand the experiences shared by women returning to work after

having children and to review the forces that drive their increased participation in

work and maternity leave, an extensive academic literature review is presented

including material drawn from social sciences, economics and gender studies.

Given the personal and community aspect of motherhood, many online materials

such as blogs, forums and discussion sites are effective outlets for women in this

life stage and has been included in discussions.

In doing so, this secondary research covers the following spectrum of inquiry:

- *Driving forces behind mothers increased participation in the workforce*
- *Needs that are unmet during this transition*
- *Structures and relationships already in place to help women*

2.2 Drivers behind employed mothers

To begin, it is important to understand the drivers behind the increased

participation of working mothers in the workforce. In the last 50 years, the

proportion of women working outside the home has risen from 43% in 1970s to

57% in 2014, and the number of working mothers has doubled during this time with 63% of mothers working today, compared to 31% in 1970 (Statistics Canada, 2015). The drivers behind this movement vary from economic necessity to changes in policy (passage of governmental equal rights acts), increased access to higher education and shift in cultural attitudes toward working women and mothers. Interestingly, while women's economic empowerment and roles in the labour force have grown in the past few decades, their maternal responsibilities and role of primary care giver to children remain relatively unchanged. This is discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

According to Wang, Parker and Taylor (2013), U.S. Census Bureau data indicates a record of 40% of American households with children under the age of 18 include mothers who are either the primary or only source of income for the household. Compare this to the 11% share in 1960 and this shift is staggering across a multitude of economic and social factors. From the rising cost of real estate to increased tuition fees, the cost of living continues to grow, giving a strong incentive for women to work thereby creating a dual income household.

For single mothers, bearing the burden of generating income to manage expenses, it is hardly an incentive but an absolute necessity.

% based on households with children under age 18
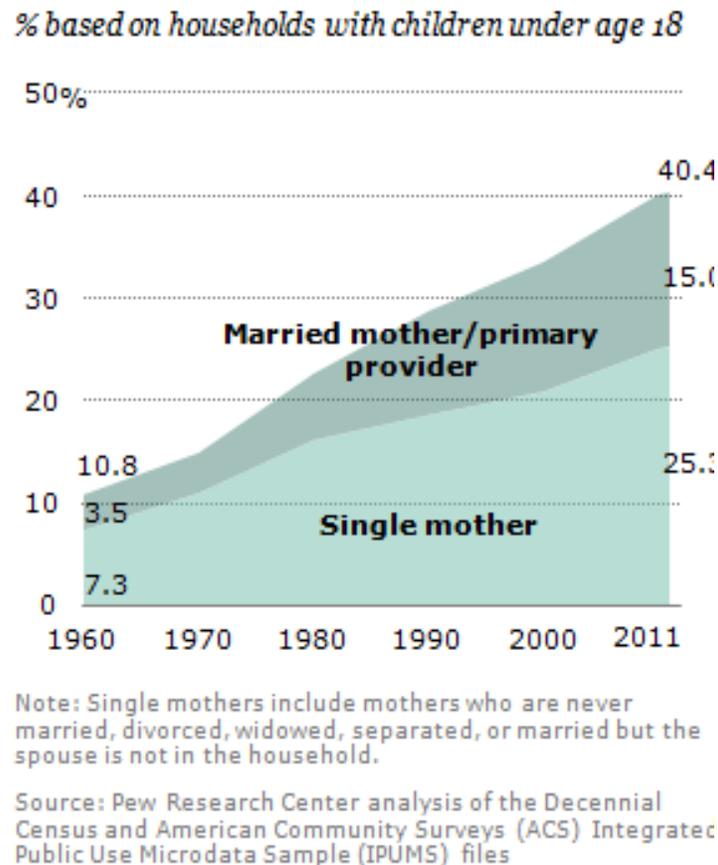
Figure 2: Mother as the Sole or Primary Provider: 1960 - 2011. Retrieved from

http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/breadwinner-moms/

As indicated by the chart above, a growing proportion of female primary household earners are single mothers and these patterns align with broader demographic trends of an increase in non-marital births and divorce in general (Wang *et al.* 2013). It is important to note that women in dual income households are not immune to the financial demands of a household either. In her book "The

Two-Income Trap", Elizabeth Warren (2007) outlines some of the rising economic stressors family households are facing and the demand for dual income earners in raising a family. Primary culprits include cost of living and inflation. Even when adjusting for inflation the cost of everyday living expenses has sky rocketed in recent decades. On average in the U.S, a new home today costs 10 times the annual income of the buyer. Contrast this with 1938, when the average home was purchased for merely double the buyer's annual income (Warren, 2007).

Increased access to higher education and civil rights policies have also directly influenced the expansion of opportunities for women in the work force. Women's rights movements during the 1960s, often referred to as second wave feminism, included many campaigns in support of female civil rights issues. Access to education and equal employment opportunities were two prominent demand drivers that helped reform the national education curriculum and implementation of government policies surrounding equal pay (Strong-Boag, 2001). An outcome of these movements meant broader access to education via an inclusive educational policy, such as changes in academic and athletic and elective curricula, but also a change in perceptions and attitudes towards working women and working mothers to accompany a move toward female empowerment (Strong-Boag, 2001). Women could increase their employable skills resulting from their ability to access more education and training, and ultimately better work experience. This in turn allowed them to move into professions previously unavailable to women altogether, entirely dominated by

men. Today, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), 59% of bachelor degrees are earned by women, compared to 35% in 1960. The impact on the workforce is not immaterial as labour force participation for women ages 25 – 54 is nearly triple what it was in 1960 (from 30% to 80%) (Ferrao, 2010).

In response to the surge of working mothers in the workforce, we've also seen the rise of family-focused policies on both the organizational and national policy level. For context, family-focused policies or benefits refer to a set of employee benefits or arrangements that help strengthen the family unit. Examples include flexible working hours, telecommuting policies and parental leave ("Family-Friendly, n.d.). Two critically important policies that an organization can offer are access to paid leave and flexibility. Level of accessibility for these two policies has increased substantially in the US (Council of Economic Advisors, 2015). In 1994, only 38% of countries surveyed by the International Labour Union provided at least 14 weeks of maternity leave; the minimum timeframe recommended by the Maternity Protection Convention to safeguard health of mother and child. Among this same set of countries, when assessed in 2009, 48% were reported to legally entitle maternity leave, indicating that the scope of family-focused policies is expanding in these countries (Oun, 2010). Per this same research within the International Labour Union, 95% of developed countries offer paid maternity leave for at least 14 weeks. While the U.S certainly lags in terms of their paid maternity leave offering, their

implementation of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993, which guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave, has started to open more opportunities for American working mothers.

In additional government change in policies, savvy organizations are catching on to the benefits of family-focused policies at work. Susan Wojcicki (2016), CEO of YouTube, has spoken publicly about the business benefit to offering paid maternity leave saying that "It may sound counterintuitive, but the research—and Google's own experience—shows paid maternity leave actually increases retention". Other tech giants such as Netflix, Sales Force and Etsy are following suit with their own set of generous, by U.S. standards, maternity and paternity benefits (Lam, 2016). The rise of maternity leave benefits is a play for competitive talent as much as it is a 'civil' rights' move and the strategy is an effective one. Almost half of working parents, when polled by a Nielsen survey, reported to have turned down a job offer because it would have conflicted with family obligations which indicates the values of the labour force are certainly family centric (The Harris Poll, 2014).

Despite their increased shift to participation and earning power in the workforce, women still retain majority share of housework and household duties. On average, working mothers dedicate more than 12 hours a week in child care related tasks, working fathers by comparison spend fewer than seven hours (Parker and Wang, 2013). It is important to note that men's household hours have increased threefold since the 1960s reflecting an increasing trend of

paternal responsibility. Most of society, however, is of two minds about mothers'

gain in the workplace and the toll it could be taking on children and families.

When surveyed, about half (51%) of Americans feel children are better off with a

stay-at-home mother, while only 8% say the same of fathers (Wang *et al* 2013).

Interestingly, a large majority of Americans (79%) do not agree with the notion

that women should return to traditional roles inside the home. It seems women

are caught in a tangle of conflicting expectations; a career woman with maternal

responsibilities is admired and revered but a mom who works outside the home

is seen to be adversely affecting her child's development.

Summary of stressors and helpers

The following is a thematic clustering of academic and online sources defining

the experiences women face when returning from maternity leave organized in a

two by two matrix. The axes consist of work and family and are polarized by

helpers and stressors, research insights gleaned from the academic and online

sources were categorized within these quadrants.

These insights explicitly cover the timeframe of a mother preparing for

maternity leave as well as their return to work. It is important to note that some of

these insights may overlap in multiple quadrants. For example, feeling guilty for

being at work and not with the child can be both a family and a work stressor. In

this case, it would be categorized under family stressor because the source of

the stress is derived from family relations.

Figure 3: Secondary research - Summary of Stressors and Helpers for Women Returning to Work After Maternity Leave.

2.3 Work stressors

Feeling replaceable

A reoccurring theme across academic papers, news articles and online discussions is the pressure of a returning mother to prove one's value in the organization again. When returning from maternity leave, many women are in a

position where someone has been 'filling in' for their role and showing that their

skills are interchangeable with other talent.

> "In her job, she described task boundaries as 'fuzzier' and they had to be explicitly renegotiated with her to manager to make it clear what was expected during her 3 days in the office. Kate and Naima both felt torn between wanting their old job back with the same level of responsibility, and needing, nonetheless, to reconcile this with the reality of the changed job circumstances. Both had responsibilities shifted from them in their absence and in their return, found themselves in positions that made them feel a bit deskilled." (Millward, 2006)

This feeling of being replaceable causes many women to feel uncertain about

their role in the future of the organization. In 'Managing Your Emotions After

Maternity Leave' business author Hillary Pearl (2014) chronicles a story of a

senior consultant returning to work after having a child to find the maternity leave

backfill employee had overtaken her role; rather than deal with the confrontation

of regaining her territory, the new mother left the organization as soon as a

competitive offer came through. In a British study of employed women and their

return to work after maternity leave, 21% of them reported a decline in job status

upon return to work. A large portion of women report feeling undervalued, and

felt they had fewer opportunities for advancement (Houston and Marks, 2003).

The consequences of a reduced status at work can have a negative impact on an

employee's sense of well-being and can therefore can contribute to the greater

stress for a mother's return to the workforce (Campione, Morgan and Jerrell

2004).

Time constraints and dual workload

Learning to cope and adjust to the dual workload from career and childcare was another source of stress for this cohort. Many women found they had to structure their day with more rigor to be able to spend more time with their children. This meant less time for idle work time and informal socializing with their work group and less flexibility around their work schedule (Alstveit, Severinsson, and Karlsen 2011). Losing a flexible schedule can be particularly challenging for someone trying to reintegrate back into the workforce. Per Campione *et al.* (2004), being flexible is considered an important individual skill in modern employees and in turn, feeling inflexible in context of keeping up with the demands of work can adversely affect new mother's wellbeing at work. Johnston and Swanson (2007) argue that for a mother, professional responsibility is often easier to negotiate than maternal responsibility since this comes at the 'core' of motherhood and is an existential part of being a mother. The implication here is that when professional and maternal responsibilities conflict, the work duties will take a backseat causing the mother duress about her work situation. Another term for this, derived from Marks' (1977) scarcity theory, is family-interference-with-work (FIW) conflict, which assumes that individuals have a fixed limit of time and energy available and that occupying multiple roles create inter-role conflict and overload.

Tension of new and old identity

Many new mothers returning to the workforce are grappling with a new 'working mom' identity and the transition is not straightforward. Among multiple sources of research, the level of self-consciousness and concern over how they are perceived in the work force was strongly prevalent. Many women worried about being perceived as weak or incapable while others felt they were not living up to the expectations of what a working mom should be. It seems that women often keep these struggles private to avoid subjecting themselves to judgment or exposing weakness about their insecurities (Pearl, 2014). Reva Seth (2014) argues that the media bias towards showcasing only the top 1% executive level working moms is creating an unattainable image of working moms and causing inter-role conflict for many working mothers.

> "The problem is, many of us benchmark our successes against this group …. [we need to] provide role models from beyond the C-suite. There is still a tendency to showcase female success stories — particularly women at the top — in this shiny, packaged way. The research clearly shows these are not the stories or means of sharing experiences that are relevant to most working moms. I heard repeatedly that you learn more from the person immediately ahead of you in your career than from someone 'at the top', because it's more attainable. Women want to hear about the tricky, gritty parts to learn how other women overcame difficulties"
> – Seth (2014)

The unattainable working mom image has dangerous implications for mothers as it denotes a social expectation that, when not feeling fulfilled, can contribute to depersonalization and burn-out (Glasberg, Eriksson and Norberg, 2006). Struggling to manage identities can lead to distress and can impact a mother's

perception and relation to her identity. For example, in the phenomeno-logical

analysis of women's return to the work force, women who found it difficult to cope

in their new situation changed how they identified themselves from 'workers with

maternal responsibilities' to 'mothers who work' (Millward, 2006).

2.4 Home stressors

Maternal expectations

Women are faced with another competing archetype; that of the 'happy

housewife'. Many women look to the 'happy housewife' archetype as the

benchmark of what a good mom should be and when women fall short of that

their distress manifests in forms of guilt and feeling below standard. Descriptions

of guilt for not being home and not feeling like a good enough mother were

common among several secondary sources.

> "Just expect that the first few weeks are going to be terrible. It took all of
> my willpower when I went back to work to not spend half the day crying. I
> seriously contemplated quitting because I was so stressed and felt like a
> terrible mother, but unfortunately not being able to pay bills would make
> me an even more terrible mother, ha"
> – "Tips/advice for returning to work after maternity leave," n.d.

Concerns of childcare facilities or options, stopping breastfeeding earlier than

deemed ideal for the baby and not spending enough time with the child were

common threads of guilt directly resulting from internalizing cultural prescriptions

of what a good mother is (Johnson and Cassell 2001).

As indicated in earlier research, women are more commonly tasked with being

the primary caregiver of their children and therefore anything that could affect

their ability to provide care for their child is seen as a source of conflict. This

includes feeling the need to save energy and having enough time at home with

the child as well as getting enough rest at night. As Noor (2004) summarizes:

> "Because most people see the work role as the woman's extra role, it is
> acceptable for family demands to intrude into the work role. However, one
> doesn't allow work to interfere with family activities if one considers herself
> as a family-oriented person. Therefore, WIF [work interfering with family]
> conflict is more likely to be experienced than FIW [family interfering with
> work] conflict and will have a bigger impact on women's well-being."

Finding childcare options were a significant source of emotional and economic

stress. In Canada, almost half of parents pay for childcare, whether through

private in home service (nannies) or through daycare providers. The cost of

childcare has substantial impact on household costs, especially in cities like

Toronto and Vancouver where the average cost of daycare is over $1,600 a

month for infants (Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 2016). This is

assuming a family gains access to a daycare as most cities reported at least 70%

of centers maintain a waitlist, with many of these charging a fee to be waitlisted.

Furthermore, daycare adds rigidity to an already compressed schedule – there

are morning drop off windows and hard deadlines for pick up. There is also a

period of adjustment for the child getting used to separation and the added stress

it causes for parents (Bigras, Lemay and Brunson, 2012).

2.5 Work helpers

Connected through technology

Technology has enabled assistance for working women to transition to

motherhood in the modern era. Many new moms cited flexible hours as a key

advantage in helping balance work and family life. Thanks to mobile devices and

portable computers, parents can now account for the unpredictable nature of

childcare and adjust work hours accordingly. In an online discussion forum

centered around seeking advice for women returning to work after maternity

leave, many women stated that digital devices helped them with a very strong

emotional need to connect with their children when they were apart. Receiving

photo updates on their smart phones, video monitoring cameras and phone calls

to check on their children were all helpful ways for women to stay connected

while at work ("Tips/advice for returning to work after maternity leave," n.d.):

> "Definitely cried every day the first week on the way to and from work but
> by the second week I had snapped back into my routine. I know what I
> have set up probably isn't doable for what you are planning (unless your
> daycare is the kind that has video cameras?) but I have a nanny and we
> use nanny cams (which our nanny knows about and is fine with). The
> reason I have nanny cams is not because I don't trust my nanny (I would
> not have hired her if I didn't trust her!) it's because I like to watch my baby.
> I like to see her when she naps and when she plays. She's not home all
> day (they go to story times and play dates etc.) but when she is if she's
> doing something cute or funny my nanny will say "Look at the camera in
> the living room/nursery/etc." and I can look and see what she's doing. So,
> it feels sort of like working from home without actually being close enough
> to elicit the clinginess." ("Tips for returning to work after maternity leave.
> Separation Anxiety?" n.d.).

Informal organizational support, such as a very understanding managerial

philosophy and work culture, were immense drivers in a woman's satisfaction in

her return to work. In many cases, existing family-focused policies alone were not

enough to predict an employee's outcome, it was the presence of informal

support through someone like a manager that was the best predictor for

increased job satisfaction, reduced stresses and lower intention to leave (Alstveit

et al., 2011). In other words, having both managers and organizations viewed as

understanding was a much stronger predictor than the existence of family-

focused policies alone. In many cases, it seems the 'supportive supervisor' role

can help act as a gate keeper in accessing family-focused policies (Millward,

2006).

Strength in career identity and role models

Many women stated that having role models and maintaining their career identity

greatly helped them through their transition back to work. Many women felt they

were still in their career despite taking time off, and through informal work

networks they manage to keep updated during their absence. These social

relationships helped the women stay engaged with the on-goings of the

organization which was beneficial in their return to work as they felt more

centered in their work (Brough *et al.,* 2009). Having successful precedents to

follow for social comparison were also shown to be helpful in having a woman

maintain their career identity. Seeing someone navigate the journey ahead of one provides reassurance and encouragement in one's own personal experience.

Work and parental roles are both psychologically important to many women by providing independence and fulfillment. When managing both well, many mothers find they are flourishing in their return to work and many women reported feeling more confident at making decisions and taking bigger risks after their return from maternity leave (Millward, 2006). Other positive changes reported include an increased capacity to understand the situation of others and invoke empathy. As a result of better understanding of others, women reported feeling more self-assured as both a professional and as a woman. This lead to women daring to express their wishes more at the office as well as having a greater peace of mind as they no longer felt lonely or isolated (Alstveit *et al.*, 2011).

2.6 Home helpers

In the home, most often mothers credited a support network, such as a partner or family and friends, as well as trusted childcare options as strong supporters during this transition (Millward, 2006). Having other peers or mentors, such as other parents or role models, to speak to and ask questions of during this time

was a way for women to seek support and advice. Many women, especially first time mothers, found having a frame of reference or feedback and encouragement as they navigate through this unprecedented transition to be very valuable (Boettcher, 2014).

The additional support of childcare options provided flexibility in an often unpredictable and tumultuous period of their lives. Knowing their child is well cared for allowed women to feel more confident in their identity as a mother which not only reduced anxiety and distress from coping with this new role but also allowed them focus on other areas of their identity as a working professional, a friend and in many cases, a partner (Brough *et al.*, 2009). It also provided women with the flexibility to plan for personal and professional commitments. Should a mother need to work late, for example, having a reliable childcare option enabled her to do so in a way that didn't compromise her priorities as a parent.

3. Project Design

3.1 Primary Research

While insights derived from secondary research were used to identify key areas of challenges for this cohort, there are limitations in the personal insights it can provide. As referenced earlier, a large body of academic literature exists through the lens of employers with themes spanning corporate retention and engagement and less on the personal experiences of these women. Furthermore, given the global nature of this cohort with the population of working mothers spanning many economic regions and the varied family-focused policies within them, the findings are fragmented.

Recognizing the importance of understanding and evaluating the points of view from all stakeholders in the design of a solution, the aim of the primary research is to address gaps remaining from secondary literature. In doing so, this will provide a more complete picture of the transition working women undergo when they journey into parenthood.

3.2 Defining the target audience

There is a large cohort of working women having children and the transition to parenthood is profound for all of them, some segments of mothers will respond to certain challenges in different ways. For example, the experience of a medical professional returning to shift work after having children will be different than that of a school teacher due to the different context of their schedules and career

requirements. While many broader themes and challenges are consistent for all mothers, the design interventions and solutions will likely need to be adapted to cater to the nuances of these segments effectively. For this reason, further focus was applied to the primary research to yield a more tailored solution.

While there are many compelling working mother segments to consider for this project, a focus was applied to both their professional and family life. First time mothers undergo an arguably starker transition given that they have a lack of firsthand experience in planning a family. In Canada, the average age of a first-time mother is 28.5 years old with more than half (52%) of Canadian births coming from women ages 35–39 (Cohn, 2013). The age of first time mothers has been rising and mirrors delays in similar stages of adulthood such as age of marriage and completing post-secondary education. Bordering the cusp of Gen X and Millennials at the time of this research, in general this group was born between 1976–1990. As mostly digital natives they are technology forward and highly connected through social media and other digital tools (Prensky, 2001). As a cohort, they are generally several years out of school and have already begun to make a considerable investment in their career; they are also more likely to have grown up in a household with a working mother than previous generations (Patten, Fry, and Posts, 2015).

Forming a group of professional working mothers for further research was done with the intention of collecting diverse experiences amongst a defined group of professional working women. *Knowledge workers* are defined as anyone whose main professional capital is knowledge (Wikipedia, 2017);

27

essentially, they are the holders of 'white collar' jobs and can be found at work across industries such as finance, technology and marketing. Davenport (2013) estimates that knowledge workers make up a sizable portion of our workforce (40%) and that due to the global expansion of information technology and mobile interactions this segment is rapidly expanding. Given the increase of higher education for women, focusing on the experience of first time mothers who are knowledge workers will bring a sizeable and relevant distribution of knowledge to a growing group of professionals.

3.2 Methods and approach

Figure 4 Twins from First Time Mother and Research Participant

In order to address the underlying research question, in addition to a comprehensive literature review the research was complemented by one to one semi-structured interviews with working mothers. Expert interviews were also conducted with Human Resource professionals (key influencers) from small, medium and large size organizations.

To better understand the experiences of working mothers from the individual's perspective, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted. It is important to note that both first time and experienced mothers were interviewed, this was done intentionally to gain understanding of similarities and differences between both family types. Experienced mothers may also be seen as 'extreme users' in this practice and be able to provide additional inputs not

considered by first time mothers. Recruitment was facilitated by a call for candidates and recruitment letter (see Appendix A). Requirements for participation were women with a minimum five years' work experience drawn from business and nonprofit sectors who have taken maternity leave at least once in their career. Professional networks in the Greater Toronto Area and Vancouver were leveraged to attract participants beyond the researcher's primary network. To consider the employer as a stakeholder in shaping this experience for working mothers, interviews were also conducted with Human Resource professionals. This helps gather insight into how companies develop and implement employee policies, in particular family-focused policies, as well as development programs for employees.

The recruitment process netted 30 working mother candidates and 10 HR candidates. A total of 15 working mothers and 7 HR experts were subsequently interviewed (see appendix B Table 1). For the working mothers group, half of the interviews took place in the home of the women or at a neutral setting and the other half were done over the phone. Participants were given gift cards to recognize their time and contribution to this research. The interview was structured into two phases; the first half of the interview intended to understand the individual's career journey and expectations as well as family goals and expectations, following that the questions shifted to the timeline and experiences of planning a family continuing to the start of maternity leave and, where applicable, the return to work. The interviews ran for approximately 45 minutes

in length and were recorded, transcribed and thematically coded before applying the KJ Method of affinity clustering to find connections in participant responses.

The expert interviews were conducted over the phone and in person, the objective was to understand what trends they were seeing with respect to working parents and industry standard family-focused policies, how their organization evaluates the needs of working mothers and address their departure and return from maternity leave as well as how their organization measures success and perceived benefits of family-focused policies.

Insights gathered from the primary research were combined with the findings from the secondary research to set up criteria for a design intervention that addresses this project's primary research question. Following the analysis and synthesis of research, development of solutions and potential impacts for this cohort are discussed in future sections of this paper.

4. Observations and insights from primary research

4.1 Interviews with mothers

Observations from the one to one interviews were grouped by topic and discussion points and the KJ method of affinity clustering was applied to visually organize and identify smaller themes which were grouped into overarching thematic areas. The observations are discussed below and grouped into personal, professional, and maternal areas. The experiences and their core observations below will be discussed in chronological order.

Personal		
Planning ahead	Enjoyment of work	Time of change

Professional	Maternal
Judgement + Uncertainty	Diversifying value sources
Optics + lack of empathy	Planned vs reality
Newfound productivity	Childcare solutions
Lack of career outlook	Time for moments that matter
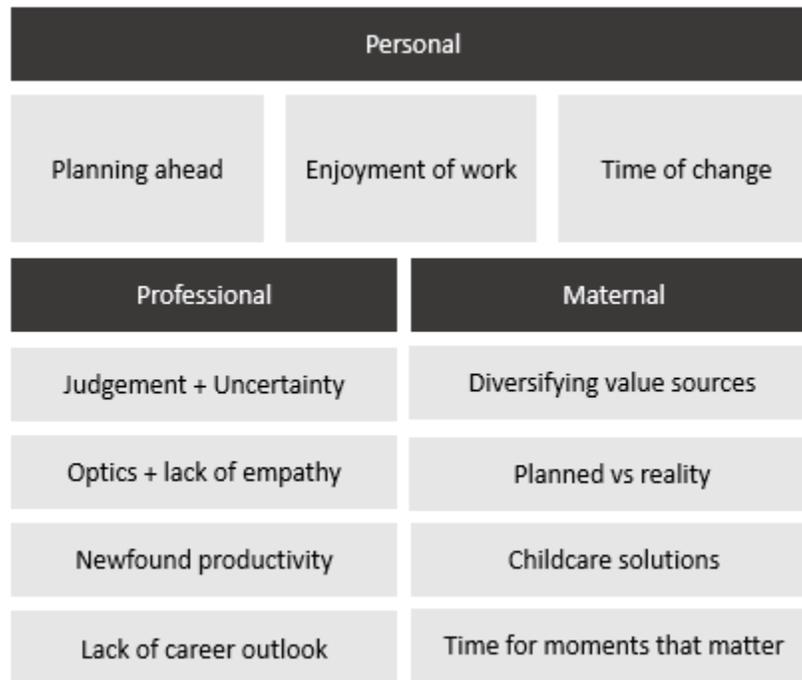
Figure 5 Summary of observations for knowledge worker mothers taking maternity leave

4.1.1 Personal observations

Several commonalities emerged from the interviews around the women's attitudes and beliefs towards family and work. Of the 15 women interviewed, nearly all, save for one, were trying for a child by either actively seeking fertility treatments or by abstaining from birth control methods and 'seeing what happens'. Though this result is not surprising considering the increase in the age of first time mothers in Canada (Cohn, 2013), we can likely infer that these women are taking consideration of personal and professional readiness in their plans to have a child. All women across the board reported they had always imagined themselves as working mothers. They attributed this to the example set by their own working mother or because they associated work with a sense of satisfaction and self-value despite what unconscious biases might exist within the work sphere. When asked if she always imagined being a working mother, P10 went on to say

> "Yes, I really do love my job. Which I think is a really hard thing for some moms to admit. Not to themselves but it's really taboo like when you come back early you notice a lot of different personal judgements. Especially with some of the male [senior executives], they'd ask things like 'did you not like being a mom?' to which I would say 'did you not like being a dad?'"

Two women did state that they wished they could take time off work for a few years and return when their children were of school age. The reasons behind not doing so were financially driven as well as fear of having a large gap on their resume and any implications that may present for career opportunities and

33

advancement. When probed further about what they imagined themselves doing during this time out of the workforce, in addition to child care, they listed freelancing or working on projects with an element of novelty outside of their current career choice, for example a woman with a consulting and banking background expressed she'd like to do creative focused projects. In other words, this suggests that these women still enjoyed the idea of work but preferred perhaps a smaller scope and control over the selection of projects. These observations suggest that while working brings financial benefits, there are clearly strong intrinsic motivators for women to pursue a career. Furthermore, expectations of working parenthood and the enjoyment of work present an interesting generational lens on this cohort, likely attributed to a generation who grew up with an unprecedented number of working mothers and exposure to female role models.

It seemed that becoming a parent was not only a time of personal change but professional change as well. Nearly half of the women (40%) changed employers after maternity leave or within six months of returning. The reasons for this vary from lack of satisfaction with current employer's support and perceived development opportunities to being offered a more attractive role that satisfied both career and family needs. When asked about what the next five years looked like, this is also where many responses were split. Some expressed a wish for stability over the next few years for more time with their children as well as a desire for more children, while other women stated they wanted to get back to focusing on their career and accelerating it. This was true for both first time and

second time mothers. A strong signal for employers here is to recognize this time of transition can lead to greater consideration set in other roles and therefore a potential risk of losing an employee during this time.

4.1.2 Observations about professional experience

When it came down to telling their employer about their pregnancy, several women expressed anxiousness and nervousness in anticipation of the conversation. When probed for what drove these feelings P15 expressed:

> "Well one of the things I really struggled with, and I struggle with it now, is that even though [telling my boss about my pregnancy] was so well received I still feel like there's judgment around the fact that I'm choosing to take time off work. I even tell my husband, it's so much harder than you can comprehend, until you're in that position you won't know how it feels. I'm also in a role where I'm in a very male dominated team. The men are very supportive but I feel like, and even if it's not true, I feel like if I leave and go off work again I feel like I'm letting them down and they will be disappointed. Almost that feeling that you get when you have to tell your boss you're leaving for another job, that's the feeling I had. And I do not look forward to the next time I have that problem."

On an optimistic note, despite the fear in anticipation of the telling their employer many women said the announcement of their pregnancy was generally well received and a positive conversation. For the period leading up to maternity leave, the future of their career was not top of mind for most women and the general theme that emerged during this time was a commitment to making a smooth transition and leaving their team in a good place. For some women, this desire came at a cost to their own health and best interest. P9, despite having a

35

medical condition that complicated her pregnancy, admitted to working longer

than advised by her doctor:

> "I should've wrapped up work earlier [due to my complication]. At that point it was only a matter of wrapping up with the team and onboarding my back fill I probably should've take work off a week or two before. I felt that I wanted to ensure I left the team in the best place I possibly could and I felt in my mind that that took priority. I would make that decision differently next time. There was definitely a sense of devotion to stay and wrap it up."

Several other mothers expressed an over commitment to wrapping things up with

work, P1 had said she was still approving marketing collateral while in labour and

P10 was answering emails, she estimates around 20 hours a week, only a few

days after delivering her child.

When it came to planning the return to work, uncertainty around role upon

return played into many women's concerns. These were driven either from a lack

of clarity around expectations before departure in terms of what role they would

come back to as well as how back filling for their role was managed. One

participant's employer, for example, out-sourced her backfill to the US head

office which lead to uneasiness and ambiguity about what lay ahead for her

return. This participant ultimately ended up accepting another job offer during her

maternity leave and returned to work at a different employer. For participants in

professional services such as consulting and finance, it was important to them

that their client lists were well managed but also that they had they access to

their client list upon their return. They felt their organization did little to ensure

they could regain access to managing clients they had spent several years

building relationships with. "It seemed like [the employer] preferred to avoid

conflict than to open up a discussion about me getting my book back" said one mother in professional services. For some, these feelings of uncertainty in their career future led to vulnerability in their career identity. "I really feel like I didn't fight hard enough for myself' said P8 when negotiating for a new role, "I just wasn't in a great career state [of mind] because I had been spending all my time with a child, I didn't feel great about my body, I was tired. In hindsight, I wish I had fought harder". This could be a potential pitfall for employers if not managed well as it renders the barrier to changing employers much lower if women feel there is uncertainty in their returning role. This is also presents an opportunity for mentors and coaches to ensure they can identify and help address these feelings of career vulnerability.

In returning to work, participants stated the first three months were most difficult; this rang true among the HR experts' experience with mothers as well. This presented a time of internal conflict as well as struggles to reintegrate into the work environment after being away and adjusting to the demands of being a working parent. Many women felt a sense of ambivalence when retuning to work; while they were looking forward to working again and the satisfaction that work brings they did not want to be separated from their child and worried about missing out on special moments. "I didn't want to give her to someone else and have them see her reach these milestones every day when I'm not there", said one participant P2, "but I felt conflicted because I didn't want to be a stay at home mom either. It was really hard." This theme did not come through as strongly when speaking to second and third time mothers (3 out of 15), while they

missed their children it seemed they had the benefit of experience and found the detachment less stressful.

For many women, the challenge of reintegrating back to work was driven by feeling out of touch as well as adapting to a new routine and establishing new norms.

> "From a work perspective, even though I have been doing this so long, I felt like a bit of an outsider. We had a new president of our company, someone on my team had been let go and no longer worked there. The workload had increased, there was my colleague who had done an incredible job of doing my job. It was a weird feeling. I was excited but there was a lot of anxiety as well." – P12

Conflicts surrounding time management and managing a new routine were prominent in many of the discussions with women. While they felt, they managed their time efficiently, they could not cater to their work schedules the same way they did before. Mothers with their children in daycare experienced an onslaught of sick days as their child built up immunity to the new germ exposure. This lead to concern around the optics of this time out of office and expectations from their employer.

These concerns were mitigated when the woman's manager or immediate work group were also parents, and in the best of cases, mothers themselves. Having been through the experience before these work groups and managers could provide advice and help the new mothers understand what to expect from both a work and parental perspective, there was also less concern over judgment. This observation was consistent with the secondary research as well.

Conversely, many women reported that having managers or a work group who didn't understand parenthood, mainly because they weren't working parents themselves, which made the transition harder. For P10, lack of diversity in leadership meant her organization had less practice in supporting mothers and therefore weren't well equipped in addressing their needs, she went on to say:

> "I had a couple of really fantastic files, I struggled to get more resources. I asked a couple of times but it's one of those things where you don't want to be seen as a special need. And again, it's with hindsight that you realize it's really not a special need. I was working 85 hours a week until my second was born. It's a combination of factors, some people don't want to take over your files because it's seen as a temporary thing, and everyone's too busy. I was constantly asking for help and I wasn't getting it." – P10

For other women, the challenges were categorized as unspoken biases, feeling judged or held back in their career because of parental responsibilities that their organization failed to empathize with. This was not exclusive to gender in the management level, P1 for example worked at a firm with two female owners who were not parents themselves. When asked if there was something she could change she stated:

> "I wish I could make everyone understand how hard it actually is to be a working parent. Even at this [new] work place and even though they say they are understanding, people still look at you differently if you have a child. People say 'hmm of course they have to leave now they have a child' and they say they understand but they just don't."

In discussions of ideal work environment, common themes of schedule, flexibility, variable hours and the ability to work remotely bubbled to the top. Autonomy over their work and career development were a close second followed by working with likeminded people in a supportive culture. Some women from bigger

39

organizations found support in forming informal work groups at their organization with other mothers who had children of similar age. The groups served as safe forums where mothers could seek advice and air their grievances if they were not getting the support they needed from management. Family inclusive events like holiday staff parties were excellent conduits in facilitating connections for these groups.

A strong theme emerged around discovering a new-found productivity among these women. When asked how their output at work has changed since being a mother, nearly all the women reported their quality and output of work was equal if not greater to what it was previously and that they were much more efficient with their time. Knowing that a recent research study has uncovered that women often undervalue their contribution in performance reviews, we can likely infer these women's output at work were in fact much stronger (Glasberg, Eriksson and Norberg, 2006). This was attributed to more confidence and perspective gained from being a parent as well as finding new and better ways of doing things and saving time. "I am way more confident now since being back, things roll off my back more easily and I don't let problems hang over my head like I used to" P7 stated when asked about how working has changed since being a parent. P10 explained "my profitability has gone through the roof since being a parent. It makes me laugh because we do all these process enhancements and lean reviews, and really, they should just follow the parents around. Go look at how our files are run; our files have one meeting a week instead of seven. We've taken the client report down to one page from six."

Unfortunately for many women, this new-found productivity failed to correlate

with career development. When asked about their level of satisfaction with their

role, several women, particularly in the younger quartile, expressed

dissatisfaction with where they were in their career and were disappointed at the

impact parenting had on their ability to progress. A common theme that emerged

was a feeling that since work was no longer competing as their number one

priority, as this had shifted to their child, they could no longer progress in their

careers. This was especially true for first time mothers despite the fact they felt

their reported output was still the same. P8 continued to say about her career

development:

> "As much as I wish it was all performance-based [to get a promotion], I've
> learned that it's just not. It's performance, mixed with longevity, mixed with
> optics of availability, mixed with politics. I often feel that no matter how
> good I am at my job, and how productive I am, I am still seen as the mom
> who needs to be home for dinner, the mom who refuses to work
> weekends, unless it's during nap time, or the mom who's bound to get
> knocked up in the next 6 months again."

A key insight to highlight here is the mismatch between the perceived value

being delivered by the mother in her working environment and the organization's

expectations. Knowing that women place higher expectations on themselves in

general, let alone as a working parent, it seems there is a gap that needs to be

addressed between mothers' actual performance, her career goals and the steps

required to get there. Otherwise any negative self-perception may hold her back

from current and future opportunities.

4.1.3 Observations about the maternal experience

In the early stages of motherhood, while ecstatic with their new addition to the family many women found the early stages of maternity leave difficult and isolating. One participant described it as "it's weird how alone you can feel when you're not physically alone, I wasn't prepared for how much of a shock it would be". Another mother said she found herself envious of her husband who could go to work during the day while she was left alone all day to care for the child while suffering from sleep deprivation. Having a strong support network such as family members or close friends who could contribute to childcare were sources of relief and assistance. Additionally, mothers with social networks of parents with similar aged children also helped the mother manage navigate her way through this steep learning curve.

Anecdotally, applying for EI (Unemployment Insurance) felt like an unnecessary stress for many women. They found the process complicated and onerous, something they didn't want to be bothering with, this was especially true for the three participants who went into early labour unexpectedly. While this may seem like a smaller step in the grand scheme of the experience, this administrative step could be a quick win for government stakeholders to make it a more streamlined and intuitive process.

Interesting patterns emerged around how women spent their time during maternity leave and how they experienced transitioning back to work. Many women saw this not only as a time to care for their child but also a time to pursue

other side projects as sources of enjoyment. Some women did freelance work, which filled time in between the baby's nap schedule, while others pursued side hobbies such as photography. Two women were even completing the last year of an MBA program during maternity leave. Maintaining contact with their professional network was also a key priority for some, as well as maintaining contact with their employer, some even doing 'under the table' work during maternity leave. A hypothesis from these observations is that these activities serve to diversify the mother's sources of value. Since parenting is a new and unscripted experience, there are bound to be ups and downs no matter how hard one might try to get it right the first time. For the women who had alternative projects, these served as alternative value sources that help maintain connections outside of the home that could help weather the storm from some of the 'downs' and sense of isolation that comes from parenting in these early stages. An added beneficial outcome from participating in these activities meant testing out different childcare solutions and separation from their child. Ultimately this laddered up to creating a better experience when it came time to return to work; the mother had practice at leaving her child in different childcare solutions and she also maintained her career mindset and practice.

Another source of stress for many women was the conflict between perceived control and the realities of parenthood. Many women expressed their efforts to 'plan everything down to a T' (P7) and expressed that they felt distressed when things didn't go according to plan. Examples included trying to reach certain milestones during sleep training or breast feeding. A failure to

reach a planned outcome meant personal projections of inadequacy as a parent. This observation is consistent with some of the secondary research in reference of women trying to achieve the 'happy housewife' archetype. The difference that bubbled through in the primary research wasn't so much the comparison to what a good mom should be, it was conflict derived from the lack of perceived control these women had over achieving desired outcomes. When probed to what could have been done differently, P7 expressed "I'd tell myself I can't control everything. I had everything planned and it all went differently. You may want your child to do 'X' and 'Y' by a certain time and they don't but that's fine and you have to accept that. I would get upset when things didn't go according to plan. If I could build a time machine, I would back and shake myself for thinking I could control everything."

Sourcing a trusted and affordable childcare solution for their return to work was also point of stress for many mothers. Several pursued daycare, the more affordable paid option, but were faced with wait lists and unfavorable alternatives, P3 went on to say "when I left [the facility] I burst into tears as soon as I entered the parking lot, I just could not imagine leaving our son there. So we made arrangements for my mom to come live with us and care for him. That wasn't our first choice but it seemed like the only option we had left." For mothers who had used daycare as a childcare option (approx. 30%), the unanimous challenge faced were the constant sick days as their child built up their immune system. Since sick children can't be in daycare, this typically resulted in a parent needing to time off work as well as catching sickness themselves. When one mother's

44

husband chose to stay at home be the primary care provider, she was relieved

as she was very concerned about finding a dependable childcare solution, "[I

wish I could] find a perfect nanny that I could trust. I'm scared to have one right

now because I've heard so many horror stories so I trust my husband more with

our child right now."

When asked the magic wand question, asking participants to imagine they

could invent anything they would like to help them through their experience, the

strongest unmet need that emerged was time. This came in various forms such

as having more help around the house to reduce time spent on upkeep:

> "I'd invent some sort of government fund to help outsource things like
> cleaning and food, not the same as a tax break because I just put that to
> his education, but something that help me outsource some of this so I can
> have more time at home" – P4

For other women, it meant more control over their schedule to be present for

important moments:

> "When I was a child my father had a very flexible work schedule which
> allowed him to be very involved in things like class outings and school
> plays, and I will forever remember that time with him, I have no problem
> getting my work done [remotely] I would just like to have the time to be
> there for him' P12.

A couple of women in the research group could address this by returning to work

part time. The HR experts cited this as a common adjustment they make for

many employees as well as work sharing, where two employees could share one

role.

4.2 HR stakeholder interviews

The group of Human Resource (HR) experts ranged from small (startup) companies to medium and large size organizations across a range of industries (see appendix B Table 1). The intention was to uncover nuances and similarities between how organizations of varying sizes and backgrounds address the needs of working mothers. Insights are grouped under discussion points below.

A commitment to diversity and inclusion

All HR experts noted a shift in HR practice toward family-focused policies and benefits in recent years. This is attributed in large part to the increasing composition of millennials in the workforce. "To millennials the experience is more important than the money," said one HR expert, "and they view their work and life as a holistic experience, so a lot of companies have recognized that and are promoting their family friendly policies as a way to draw and retain talent." The mid to large size organizations had formal diversity and inclusion policies in place with representation of working women and mothers as major proponents. Ensuring females are included on shortlists for interviewing positions, in particular for senior management, are examples of tactics used to enforce this. Adding paternity benefits was identified as a new emerging trend in the family friendly benefits space which included both financial aids, such as salary tops during leave, as well as internal discussion and encouragement of senior men to take leave to set an example.

While for the most part the experts have observed progress in the space of supporting working mothers, they did recognize that negative bias does rear its ugly head from time to time. Concern over hiring a woman of child-bearing years who may be at a stage in her life where she is ready for children, based on estimated age derived from years of experience, does get raised by hiring managers from time to time. This is particularly hard on smaller companies who generally operate on skeletal staff and are affected by absent head count with more impact than that of a bigger organization. It is important to note that not hiring a woman in relation to pregnancy or family status is a form of sex discrimination per the Canadian Human Rights Act (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2017). Ultimately, company culture is a large predictor of how well a company addresses maternity leave and crafting that experience for women.

Building and evaluating family-focused policies

Design of benefits and policies is driven mostly by way of listening to employee needs through feedback mechanism such as employee surveys. Smaller organizations with limited budgets are forced to be more selective in the benefits they fund and prioritizing paid benefits comes down largely to the composition of the employee base and what their needs are. As a result, it is rarer that a small organization would fund a benefit like maternity leave top up or emergency

47

childcare relief as these would be superseded by more basic and standard benefits for medical or dental coverage. For these companies, whenever possible support would come in the form of time making flexible work arrangements or providing extra personal days.

Employee engagement surveys were the leading source of evaluation for changes in HR policies. Some of the larger global organizations, with the benefit of more robust HR teams, created online forums similar to social media sites where employees could search for advice or post inquiries and needs. These platforms were monitored regularly by HR and findings around specific themes were reported up the chain to senior management. The smaller to medium size organizations, in addition to reviewing surveys, used the self-professed 'old school' method of asking the question more directly and likely in a face to face conversation: if a mother returns to work after leave, does she stay? If the answer is no, consistently over time, it is evidence that a gap needs to be addressed.

Addressing a women's departure and return

Typical protocol in preparing for an employee's maternity leave absence was to hold a meeting between the employee and manager to discuss timing, logistics and a package listing available benefits during maternity leave (such as amount of time off, vacation entitlement and if applicable the amount of top up to their salary).

In tandem, HR and management work together on how resources will be covered for the role, whether they pull internal resources or contract out externally. The HR experts stated that recruiting for maternity leave contracts are often much more difficult as top tier candidates are generally looking for permanent positions. It is estimated that recruiting for a maternity leave contract takes twice as long as it does for regular position openings.

All HR respondents agreed that the first few months back to work for a mother were often most difficult, as cited by discussion with the mothers. The primary support offered is centered around flexibility, either by reducing the number days a week worked, facilitating remote working technology or even job sharing (more common in larger organizations). It is important to note that working remotely is easier for 'white collar' roles than for service based industries.

When asked how aware employees were of benefits offered to them and how many people take advantage of them, one HR respondent shared an interesting perspective in that employees do not often consider their employer as someone who could help them with a personal problem. As such, fringe benefits that fall outside the standard maternity leave offerings, such as EAP (Employee Assistance Programs) and emergency day care, have relatively low adoptions despite being designed to support employees' personal needs.

5. Synthesis

5.1 Summary of gaps to address in the maternity leave experience

Using inputs from primary and secondary research, six major gaps are identified

in the maternity leave experience for women and are discussed in more detail

below.

Having children feels like a career detractor (not enhancer)

This is the largest gap and reflects a wider systematic issue of female disadvantage in the workforce since women are less likely to have access to the same opportunities as men. A man is 30% more likely to be promoted than a woman which impacts the pipeline of senior executive talent and means by the time we reach the SVP level women only hold 20% of the share (McKinsey & Company, 2016). In Canada, women have access to a yearlong job protected and paid maternity leave which is generous in relation to their US counterparts of 12 weeks' unpaid leave (Government of Canada, 2016). While this allows for adequate time with their child (most women in the research group agreed they had enough time off with their maternity leave) many women feared it would negatively impact their career development. Similarly, a McKinsey (2016) survey of over 4.6 million employees revealed that 42% of employees believe taking an absence or sabbatical at work will hurt their career. Correll, Benard and Pail (2007) put this thought to paper in a study that tested the discrimination hypothesis of mothers in the workforce. The results revealed that mothers were not only offered a starting salary $11,000 lower than that of a childless counterpart of the same gender, race and qualifications, they were also rated as less competent and less suitable for promotion and management training. Men, however, did not appear to be penalized for being a parent and in some cases

benefited from it by receiving higher evaluations than childless candidates of equal qualifications.

This is all in despite of the fact that there is evidence to support the incremental value a mother can bring to her employer. All the participants in the primary research agreed their work output was equal if not better than before children. In a Microsoft study of over 500 employers, 57% agreed that mothers make better team players and 35% feel their multitasking skills were superior (Microsoft, 2014). A growing portion of organizations clearly see the value in elevating working mothers in the workforce and have claimed this as an area of focus. Nearly eighty percent of companies (78%) in a McKinsey study (2016) report that gender diversity is a top concern for their CEO (up from 56% in 2012) however only a third of these employers claim their senior leaders are held accountable to making headway. The disconnect between employer's mission for diversity and inclusion and the lack of action plan are materially felt in the one to one interviews with mothers. Many women reported that despite their increased productivity and performance at work, motherhood appears to negatively impact their career, especially compared to their male partners, and they reported a lack of optimistic career outlook.

Maternity leave is treated like an on/off switch

To be entitled to EI (Employment Insurance) maternity and parental benefits a mother must accumulate at least 600 hours of insurable employment within the

52-week period before the start of the first date of the EI benefit period. During the period of EI coverage, any income earned from the women will be deducted from the EI benefits (Government of Canada, 2016). In other words, when a mother is on maternity leave she is discouraged from working or making any income for risk of deducting from government benefits. As a result, maternity leave is generally treated like an off switch between the employee and employer. Once the employee is on maternity leave, aside from some informal contact with colleagues and managers, the engagement model with the employer is almost nonexistent. For many women in the interviews, this came through in the challenges they faced in the first few months of being a parent as well as the return to work. In both cases, the change was described as a 'shock' and a complete readjustment. The women who engaged in side projects such as freelance work or coursework throughout their maternity leave found the transition back to work less jarring. This demonstrates a gap in the current maternity leave structure for most organizations and provides an opportunity for employers to rethink the engagement model with the employee during maternity leave and returning to work to be a smoother transition rather than a stark change.

Some forward-thinking organizations have caught on to this insight and have made arrangements for a graduated return to work; building up the number of days worked a week over the span of a couple of months while the mother works her way back up to full time. Vodafone (2015), a global Telecommunications company, made headlines in 2015 when they announced a

paid four-month maternity leave as well as six months of full pay at 30 hours a week to new mothers in all regions globally. Great Places to Work in Canada (2017) lists initiatives leading organizations do to support a mother's return to work which include compressed work weeks, reduced hours and graduated return to work programs.

Out of touch and out of sight

Visibility in the workplace can do a lot to boost one's career and profile. Being physically present in the workplace facilitates exposure and face time with senior level executives, which allows for informal knowledge sharing with colleagues, and increases an employee's image and likelihood of receiving development opportunities (Coleman, 2010). Many women in the interviews stated that while on maternity leave they felt out of touch with the organization and which led to feeling uncertain about their value to their employer and what lay ahead of them for their return. They seemed to question if they weren't physically present at work, how strongly were their employers considering their future and development at the organization. It also contributed to steeper learning curve when returning to work as they had to catch up on items missed during their absence such as organizational changes, new software upgrades or changes in regulation in their industry.

Upon being back to work, women worried about the optics of their new schedule. With their new role as a parent, working late or on weekends is not

feasible the way it was before children. There is also less time for socializing or participating in extracurricular activities at work. For first time mothers, this was a particularly bigger concern since several of them wanted more children and felt that the optics of their current schedule combined with the possibility of another year long absence would severely limit their career prospects. This presents an opportunity for employers to consider how heavily optics of visibility and presence in the office are tied to development opportunities for employees. It is possible to assume that this gap exists for other groups experiencing personal change as well, such as caretakers of sick family members as well as personal illness or injury.

Employees don't consider their employer as someone who can help them with personal issues

When asked how aware employees were of all benefits offered by their organization, as well as how often they use them, the HR experts admitted that general knowledge and use of benefits by employees were lower than hoped. It seems that when faced with personal issues, a company is on the lower end of an employee's consideration set when thinking of who can support them.
This also came through in conversations with participants. When asked who they turned to for support when challenges arose during their experience, it was usually friends, loved ones and/or their partner. When asked if they would tell their employer or manager, many women responded that doing so would feel like

admitting weakness or exposing a gap in their ability as an employee. For other

women, this belief came out of direct experience because of failed attempts in

the past to ask for support from their employer. In today's employment economy,

employers are faced with a tighter labour market which drives competition for

recruitment and retention of talent (Miller, 2017). The average job tenure in North

America is 4.6 years and on average employees will have 7 or more jobs over

the course of their career (Bailik, 2010). A point of differentiation employers can

use to attract prospective employees is to provide meaningful experiences

beyond pay. This presents an opportunity for employers to change the perception

of their employees to consider work as a place of professional and personal

development.

**A need for building empathy and understanding for mothers in the
workplace**

Empathy is said to be one of the most effective qualities in a leader (Humphrey

and Adams, 2016). It is also an integral ingredient to teamwork and building

effective teams as it contributes to mutual understanding and trust (Duhigg,

2016). What came through in the discussion with the mothers was a lack of

empathy in their organization for what mother's experience. This manifested in

several ways from colleagues making comments in passing to leadership not

having the right mechanism in place to support working mothers. For some

organizations, this can be attributed to lack of practice, the smaller representation

of female senior executives could mean this issue does not get prioritized as often at senior leadership level. Unfortunately, even in cases where leadership does declare diversity and inclusion a priority the execution can often fall short. In a survey of over 4.6 million employees, only 28% of entry-level employees and 51% of managers admitted to knowing how to improve gender diversity in their organization (McKinsey, 2016). In this same survey, it declared that almost 100% of organizations offer anti-harassment/discrimination training but much fewer bias training for hiring (67%) and performance reviews (56%). Without being able to understand and identify bias, it less likely that employees will be able challenge it or make fair decisions.

Some progressive companies who have declared elevating women in the workforce as a priority have already taken note. Facebook launched its *Managing Unconscious Bias* training in 2015 to help educate employees on how bias can affect them and give them tools to interrupt and address it in the workplace. A segment of this training program includes *Maternal Bias* aimed at helping employees identify and challenge the biases imposed on mothers in the workplace. Google launched SYLT (Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute) in 2012 aimed at teaching mindfulness and resilience. A component of this training is meant to coach empathy through emotional intelligence (Gang, 2015).

Time and control over schedule

Building off the findings in the primary research, one of the top things the women listed that could help them in their journey was more time. This came through in many ways from more flexibility around their work schedule to help with cooking and cleaning at home. When probed for what this extra time would be used for the answers centered around family time and being present for important moments with their child. As Parker and Wang (2013) research from earlier indicates, women still maintain majority share of house hold duties despite their increase in workforce participation in recent decades. Research around female career mobility showed that women who do majority of housework are less likely to aspire to be a top executive compared to women who split household duties evenly at home (McKinsey, 2016). This suggests a strong opportunity for invested stakeholders to consider benefits that can create more time at home when evaluating family-focused policies as well as initiatives aimed at elevating women.

5.2 Experience mapping maternity leave

An experience map was created to visualize the various stages of the transition for working women to parenthood. The goal of this framework is to help invested stakeholders identify key points of challenge that would be suited for a design intervention. In line with the maternal and career observations unearthed in the research, the experience map reflects both the career focused and maternally

focused sides of the experience. From this framework, three areas of intervention are outlined and discussed below. They are the announcement, the departure and the return. Problem statements in reference to the gaps identified above are included under the opportunities section.
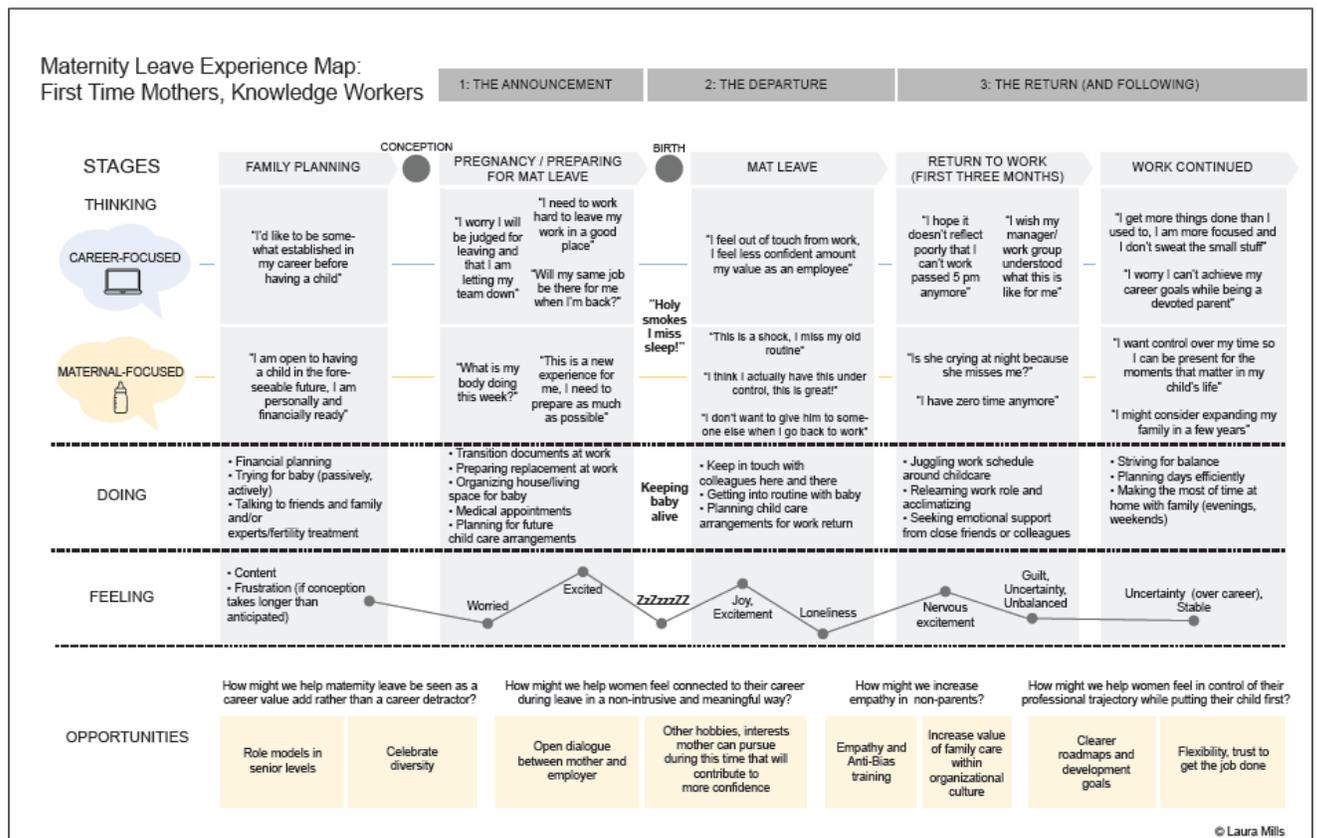
Figure 6 Maternity Leave Experience Map: First Time Mothers (larger version in Appendix E)

5.2.1. The announcement

This is the very beginning of the mother's journey and can set the tone for the rest of her experience. While this is generally an exciting time for the first-time mother it can also be met with work related stressors. The stage of announcing pregnancy to employer, typically following the three month 'danger zone' (this is

in reference to the first trimester of pregnancy in which women typically do not share their pregnancy status), can often be a source of stress for the employee. This stems from concerns about judgement from work team or manager due to taking maternity leave as well as concern over the negative impact it may have on her career, such as not being considered for a promotion or payroll increases as well as the future of her job role when she returns. Closer to the end of the pregnancy the mother to be is focused on 'finishing strong' and tying up loose ends at work is focus for the employee during this time as well as preparation for her new addition such as buying car seats, setting up a crib and other accessories to prepare for the newborn. Her body is also undergoing immense changes and medical appointments will pick up in frequency often requiring some schedule impact at work.

At an organizational level this is an opportunity for the workplace to honor their commitment to diversity and inclusion by showcasing mother role models in their organization to demonstrate that pregnancy is celebrated and that new mothers are supported. At an individual level this is an opportunity for managers to have a meaningful conversation with their employee about their value in the future of the organization as well as an opportunity to showcase understanding and support for what is to come throughout this journey.

5.2.2. The (temporary) departure

At this stage the mother has detached from work and is now immersed in her new stage of full time mom. This is time of joy and excitement but also nerves

and exhaustion. For career focused women this is a tenuous period of adjustment, going from a routine built around a full-time work schedule to unpredictable hours and a steep learning curve in the new position of 'mom'. Mothers will discover a new-found meaning and perspective in life; a new sense of value, purpose and unprecedented selflessness.

Key stressors around this time include ensuring the safety and well-being of their child but there are also risks of loneliness and isolation stemmed from deprivation of the stimulus of their old routine. There may also be fears of an 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality about her employer – fear of being forgotten in the work group and organization, losing the reputation and visibility she has spent so long building.

From an employer's perspective, the opportunities in this stage are to find ways for dialogue between the mother and employer, as well as ways to enable a level of participation from the maternal employee in a non-intrusive way. It would be best for this to take place several months into the maternity leave to allow for a period of adjustment to her new role as mother.

This is also a great time for the mother's support network to pitch in to free up time for the mother to pursue other interests and activities. The primary research indicates that mothers who pursue activities outside of childcare have an easier transition back to work.

5.2.3. The return, and following...

The return to work is described as one of the most challenging stages. While there is nervous excitement about returning to a familiar routine and rejoining (or joining a new) work group, this is also a time of internal conflict. It is the first time since becoming a mother that the woman is faced with separating from her child routinely. Feelings of guilt for leaving the child with another person and worry over missing out on special moments are common feelings during this time.

Having been away for an extended period of time the mother is almost starting anew as she readjusts to norms formed by the work group while she was away, company changes and often a new role or new scope to adjust to. All of this while catering to her child's schedule with pickups and drop offs for childcare as well as making arrangements on the fly for her child's sick days and any other parental responsibilities that may arise.

Many stressors during this time stem from concern over the child's wellbeing. A child's tears at daycare drop off, difficulty sleeping through the night, flus and fevers are all examples of stressors that weigh on a mother in tandem with juggling the demands of office life.

On returning to work after extended time off, there is certainly pressure from the mother to ramp up quickly. This pressure most often stems internally, from either wanting to avoid judgement for letting parental responsibilities get in the way of work or for wanting to prove she is still the high functioning employee she was before a child. Concerns around optics, visibility and hampered career opportunities are common worries for women during this time.

For employers, it is important to understand that some women might find it difficult asking for help during this time. In a competitive work world, admitting you need help might make you feel vulnerable about your place in the organization, there is also an adversity to drawing attention to one's self or feeling like a 'special needs' case.

Looking ahead, many women want to understand how to develop their careers while still being a devoted parent. For many first time mothers this feels like a bigger challenge based on the desire to grow their family and have another child which may impact their employer's consideration for other opportunities. For employers, this is an opportunity to spend extra time co-planning and creating a goal with your employee to understand her goals and help give her control to get there. Be aware of politics and predispositions around optics and flexibility that might contribute to biases against working mothers and assessing their professional potential. Instead consider ways to develop stronger goal setting or development roadmaps to help the employee achieve her goals with helpful prompts and nudges in the right directions. Where possible, showcase other working mothers in the organization to show precedence and role models. The cost to not doing this means the barrier to switching companies is lowered and ultimately less mothers will make their way to senior leadership levels within the organization.

6. Design Proposals

Using the information and insights provided in previous chapters, and leveraging the experience map as a framework for human-centric design and innovation, a number of design ideas are put forward to address gaps in a first-time mother's experience returning to work following maternity leave. It is important to note that the factors that contribute to these experiences can be symptoms of a wider systematic issue and that the ideas presented are not comprehensive solutions. The recommendations put forward are intended to address key insights and gaps identified throughout this extensive research, and they would be best implemented as pilot programs at interested organizations to test, refine and iterate their approach.

6.1 The Inclusive Departure

For many places of work, maternity leaves are treated as a complete, yet temporary, departure from the organization. Preparation for departure is met with off-boarding meetings centered around paper work for benefits entitlement, if any are provided, as well as timing for due date, last day of work and estimated return of work. Work property such as laptop and cell phone are given back to

the company, and contact between employer and employee is often reduced to email check ins or phone calls every so often, mostly for quick requests around paperwork such as statement of work for EI application or updates on date of return. What was heard from the women that were interviewed is this detachment can often lead to more difficulty when returning to work. Having missed out on key company changes or team updates while being away, coming back to work can feel like starting again new which seems counterproductive especially for employees who have been with the organization for several years already. This is also an opportunity cost for the women's wellbeing, many of the women linked enjoyment of maternity leave to other interests and activities in personal and professional development and that these lead to an easier transition back to 'work life'.

The idea:

The *Inclusive Departure* is a holistic approach to addressing time off for maternity leave. As the title indicates, the approach to this method is inclusivity, with the goal of having the employee feel included in the organization during time off. Rather than focusing off-boarding for leave around dates and logistics for departure the *Inclusive Departure* starts with a conversation with the employee about her goals over the next few years, personal and professional. From there, the employee and employer can build out an engagement model for the direction of her leave that both sides are comfortable with. Allowing the employee to choose to attend events such as team off sites, training workshops, quarterly

business reviews, monthly check ins with team or manager, or the occasional team brainstorm are ways to enable inclusion to the organization without feeling intrusive. This engagement model would also allow the employee to keep her laptop and/or mobile device (if applicable) so that companywide emails and key updates and even dialogue between work groups and colleagues are accessible.

Pros and cons:

The benefit to this approach is that allowing the employee to tailor her level of engagement with company over her time on maternity leaves gives her control over contributions and relationships to serve her career goals. This also makes returning to work less daunting or uncertain, as she has already broken the ice by engaging with her employer over leave. This approach also increases visibility of the employee during this time which helps combat the challenge of career setbacks from maternity leave due to being out of sight and therefore out of a consideration set for future career developments.

The company culture will be a large factor on successful adoption. Many companies have the mindset that maternity leave is a complete detachment, if an employee is not on payroll there is no need for a level of engagement or there may be a fear of disturbing the mother while she is on leave. There could also be a risk of implied pressure on the employee to engage with the organization on a level she is not comfortable with during maternity leave and the employer should take care to ensure it is very clear that any level of engagement is purely optional during maternity leave.

Many companies have strict privacy policies surrounding access to data and company devices, therefore offering devices to employees during extended leave could pose challenges for some companies, especially professional service based companies who are also protecting client's data. An alternative approach to this would be to offer cloud based access to email.

This model plays in a legal grey zone since women are only entitled to parental EI benefits when they are not working. While technically with this approach the employee would not be receiving supplemental income, employers should be thoughtful in their approach to avoid concerns around ethics.

The final risk begs the question of childcare and who would be looking after the child while the mother attends an occasional meeting with her employer. Many companies have EAP programs that include a limited number of emergency day care relief. Alternatively, some companies could include cost for a fixed number of daycare days to their maternity packages to facilitate the *Inclusive Departure* model.

6.2 In House – Working Mother Career Coach

Many women in the research expressed that they were not satisfied with their career and felt that since becoming a mother their career outlook has been dimmed. This is especially true for first time mothers who are still considering

expanding their family and are uncertain of how to nurture their career while still

pursuing family developments.
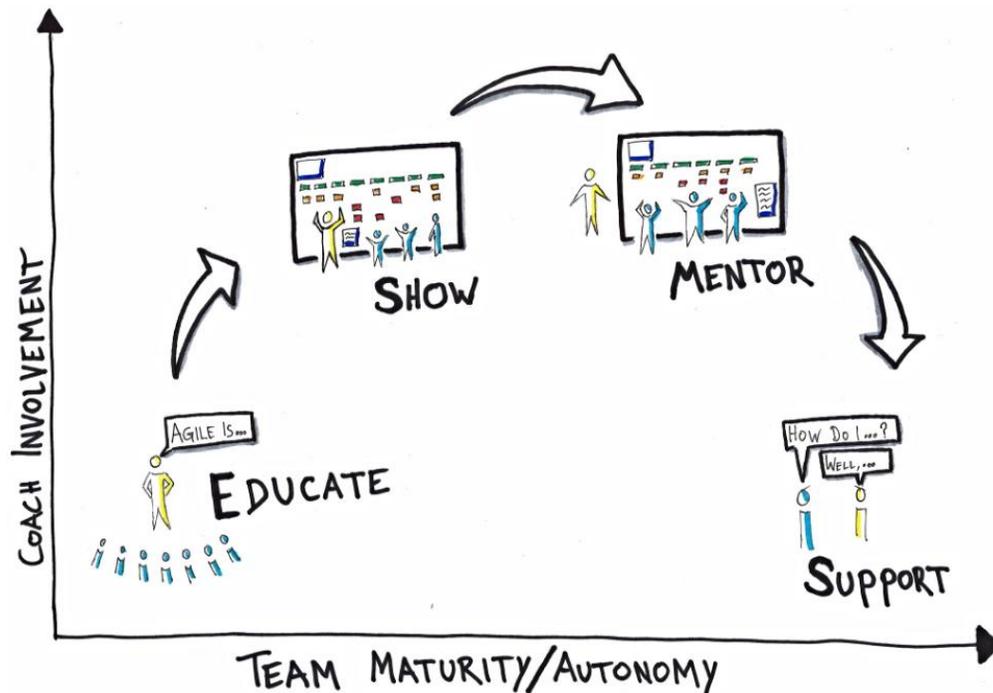
Figure 7 Example of Agile Coaching Model, retrieved from: https://pragma.team/blog-

list/2015/8/21/an-agile-coach-is-not-only-about-coaching-part-1-1

The idea:

Building off the of 'agile' and 'lean' coaches that organizations will often employ

when undergoing change management, organizations invested in advancing

working mothers can employ *Working Mother Career Coaches* who can help

women plan their personal and professional development goals over the next few

years, helping them make informed decisions about their career development

and trajectory in a way that is manageable with their family structure. This could

be considered as an enhanced version of career coaching because it is specialized and tailored to working mothers, helping set them up for success in both professional and personal life.

Pros and cons:

The benefit to this approach is that it helps the mother/employee manage expectations about her own career to feel empowered and in control of where she wants to get to, rather than being disappointed or feeling short of her personal expectations. The coach could also work with the management and working team that the mother is returning to work with. This helps sets a level of understanding and empathy for that team in a way that universally helps the team perform as a newly reformed unit. This approach helps to pivot the current perception that a professional environment and resources cannot help support personal and familial needs

As with any added resources, employing a *Working Mother Career Coach* is an added investment of time and cost. Cost could be managed by bringing in a mother career coach only at key planning cycles throughout the year such as quarterly and bi-annually reviews to help women plan their next development cycle. Alternatively, this could be considered an integrated insurance benefit offered by the insurance providers under Employee & Family Assistance Programs (EAFP), a set of benefits that provide employees and their families with support for issues relating to health and wellness as well as greater personal

and workplace well-being (University of Toronto Human Resources and Equity, 2017).

6.3 Work and Life Integration - Performance Evaluations
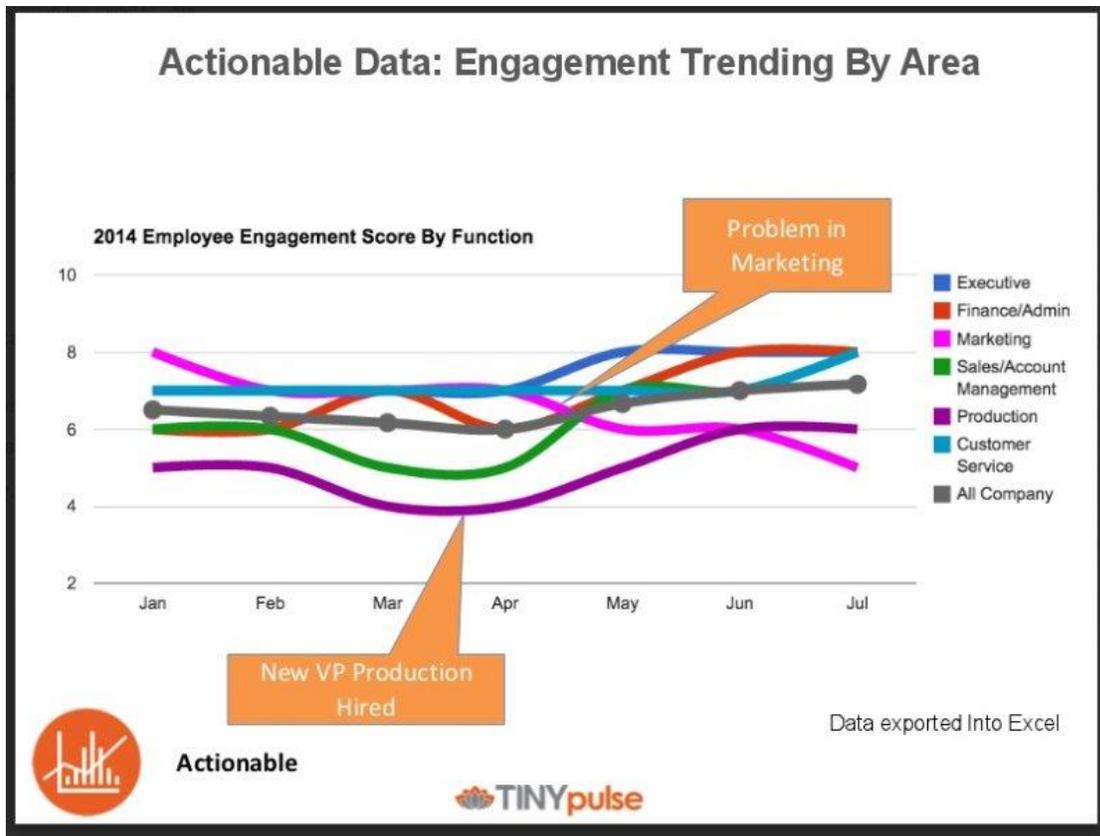
Figure 8 Example of employee survey. Retrieved from: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hr-dirty-word-tinypulse-breaks-through-paul-wallis

What came through in the interviews with the mothers is a lack of understanding from colleagues or managers who did not have children, or who weren't the primary caregiver to children, that created challenges for the women. In some cases, despite the organization declaring elevating women in the workplace a

priority, some of the tactics employed internally felt more like lip service than something that would hold the organization accountable. Colleagues and managers who were empathetic and understanding, and these are not always parents themselves, made the transition and continued work much more manageable. This opens an opportunity for employers to evaluate themselves and their leadership more closely against declared priorities. This also set ups an incentive and reward for those who are already making strides in this space.

The idea:

It is common for organization to deploy employee satisfaction surveys and often these are drilled down to leadership and department levels asking questions around engagement, development opportunities and work life balance. In some cases, leadership performance and compensation can be based off these surveys, for having a certain percentage of employee engagement for example. Factoring in a 'Work-Life Integration' score into these surveys would be a way to hold accountability to the organization as well as at a senior executive or department level. The score is comprised of a set of questions designed to assess how supportive or understanding an executive or department is of employees in care-giving roles of various kinds – elder care, child care and any other dependents. For organizations with a firm commitment to valuing family care, and therefore advancing women, the results of these surveys could be linked to compensation for senior leaders.

Pros and cons:

The benefit in this approach is that it provides an incentive for management and leadership to nurture an understanding culture and environment for employees in care giving roles. It also delivers another platform or forum to provide feedback, however, effectiveness of this approach will depend on how closely an organization follows through and actions feedback. Some employers and employees may find that this approach to be an invasion of privacy or will be suspicious of its intentions, fearing judgmental views or exposing their vulnerability as a caregiver.

6.4 "Congratulations! Your perspective has grown" campaign

The research in this paper argues that diversity in the workforce brings enormous value and benefit to the organization. It is what enables different perspectives which in turn makes the output of work stronger and more resilient. The journey of becoming a mother increases one's perspective but unfortunately this has been shown to slow down one's career advancement rather than propel it forward.

The idea:

Rather than trying to remove the barriers that slow down a women's career during this time, the 'congratulations!' campaign focuses on highlighting the value that being a mother adds. This is an internal campaign or initiative within the organization aimed at celebrating diversity and different perspectives by rewarding mothers, and other parents, for their increased perspective and honoring examples of working mother achievements. This would involve showcasing examples and stories of working mothers in the organization who have made improvements at work or added value because of their gained perspective at occasions such as leadership or management training.

Pros and cons:

This approach culturally reinforces the value of working mothers and increases visibility of working mothers and the contributions they are making. By doing so it aims to change unhealthy biases toward new parents, in particular mothers, whose contributions may go unnoticed. The challenge with this approach is calling attention to an attribute that has previously worked against women. This might be met with apprehension and fear over judgement. When implementing this approach, one must be careful to curate examples of strong value drivers, such as instances of the new-found productivity mentioned in the primary research, to change perception to a positive light.

6.5 Household Time Savers

Considering that mothers are more likely to be primary care giver of their child and they maintain the majority of the share of housework, it is no surprise that creating more time is rated so highly on their list of priorities. This can be particularly challenging in the first three months back after maternity leave when work and family priorities converge for the first time.
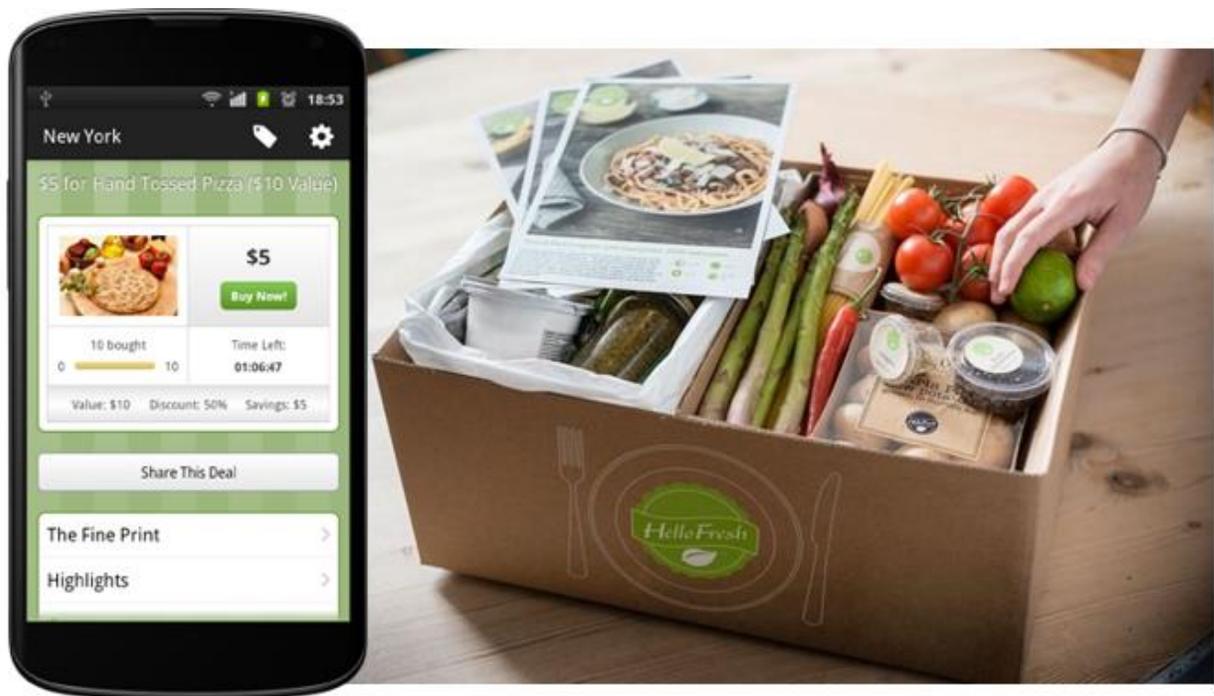
Figure 9 Group Buying Apps and Meal Delivery. Groupon Image retrieved from: https://uniprogy.com/couponic/demos/mobile, Box delivery image retrieved from: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/48/11/0c/48110c65baa29d7ce274e9e409cd4b72.jpg

The idea:

Building off the increase of ecommerce based click and collect grocery shopping, food delivery businesses as well as group buying models – employers and merchants have a unique position to leverage buying power within their employee base to address the unmet need of time for mothers.

With the *Household Time Savers* initiative, employers could create a platform to facilitate and subsidize products or services that would help mothers create more time for their family. Examples of this could include covering or subsidizing meal deliveries to the office that mothers could then take home for their families. This service could be available to all employees but those with children at home would have access to a discount or have a free grace period of three months. By leveraging the power of numbers within their employee base and being strategic about vendor selection, employers could render an economically viable arrangement that benefits mothers without too much incremental cost. This idea could also extend to other household services such as house cleaning or yard work.

Pros and cons:

This approach is aimed at extending the help employers can provide to mothers beyond the parameters of the office. Creating more time at home for meaningful experiences will mean a happier and well-adjusted employee. A limitation to this

approach is the challenge it puts on smaller organizations without the

incremental budget to fund extra benefits or the large staff size to benefit from

economies of scale. This would require more careful selection of vendors for the

Household Time Savers and gauging the interest in the employee base to asses

potential audience size. Alternatively, this could be a viable business opportunity

for food delivery merchants and to compete strategically in an increasingly

crowded market.

7. Opportunities for change

7.1 Implementation and dissemination

Several avenues may be explored toward initiating change on this topic and implementing the ideas discussed earlier. The first step includes outreach and partnering with progressive organizations who have established networks of HR professionals and leaders. This would provide direct access to an audience who can affect change within the workplace. Examples of such organizations include:

- **Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC - http://ceric.ca/)** – This non-profit institute funds projects to develop innovative resources that build the knowledge and skills of diverse career professionals. The Globe and Mail recently published an overview[1] of a guide the CERIC created for employers to help mothers in navigating maternity leave and career transitions; research from this project could contribute to this guide.

- **HR Professionals Association (https://www.hrpa.ca/)** – A regulatory association, with more than 23,000 member registrants,

---

[1] Article from Globe and Mail: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/career-advice/life-at-work/employers-can-ease-path-for-moms-returning-to-work/article31800333/

aimed at advancing the professionalization of HR and acknowledgement of the profession as a key driver of organization success.

- **Partnering with EFAP (Employee and Family Assistance Program) vendors** – Many companies have an EFAP as part of their Group Benefits offerings. As EFAPs are built-in to benefits offered by employers, a program that is created in partnership with these vendors would have impact on the services offered to better tailor benefit solutions.

- **Disrupt HR (includes local chapters such as http://disrupthr.co/toronto/**) – A forward thinking series of events across Canada and US designed to inform and empower executives, business leaders and professionals in the HR field. Events include information exchange via five minute presentations from various speakers designed to move talent thinking forward. This could serve as a platform to disseminate this research.

- **Best Start (http://beststart.org/)** – The Best Start Resource Centre is a key program of Health Nexus, a bilingual health promotion organization that works with diverse partners to build healthy, equitable and thriving communities. The Best Start Resource Centre supports service providers who work in preconception health, prenatal health and early child development. They also deliver training and professional development workshops

across Ontario. Every February at their annual conference they

welcome hundreds of service providers featuring leaders in the

fields of preconception, prenatal and child health. A potential

partnering idea could be to provide a workshop designed for

mothers returning to the workforce and how to best support them.

In addition to partnering with thought leaders and research associations,

another actionable step would be to align with entities that reward and enable the

support of work-life integration in the workplace. Canada's Top 100 Employers™

is an organization that assesses and identifies employers who lead their

industries in offering exceptional workplaces for their employees. An easily

executable initiative would be to create a Best Practice guide with a compilation

of winning elements that Family Friendly and Most Diverse Employer award

recipients are implementing at their organizations, spanning multiple industries.

This could serve as a guide for employers who are looking to make

improvements in their workplace as well as set an industry standard of best in

class family-focused employers.

7.2 Recommendations for future areas of research

Looking ahead, additional research on this topic would provide a great benefit to

employers, caregivers and government stakeholders alike. There would be value

in expanding the research's focus to include other parental segments and

caregivers such as fathers, same sex couples and individuals with family

dependents such as elderly care. Further broadening to other industries and exploring contract and temporary work would also provide meaningful value to understand if there are design or implementation differences to consider based on different socioeconomic strata.

Recently, two important movements in regards to government policy are deserving of monitoring and further exploration. In March 2017, the Government of Canada announced an increase of $7 billion over the next 10 years for early learning and childcare programs as well as the extension of the parental leave benefit from 12 to 18 months (Government of Canada, 2017). Near the end of 2016 marked the launch of the 'Working While on Claim' pilot project, a government initiative that allows recipients of EI benefits (fishing, parental, compassionate leave) to earn income while receiving a percentage of their EI benefits (Canada Employment Social Development Programs, 2016). Both initiatives will have impact on the gaps identified earlier and would benefit from future research.

8. Conclusion

Today we are seeing closer gender parity in the workplace but we are still far from reaching equal opportunity. As presented throughout this paper, the struggles working women face when they become mothers are complex, inciting conflict among social, cultural, and economic factors.

It is hoped that gaps in the maternity leave experience identified in chapter 5 and the design ideas presented in chapter 6 will offer a new perspective to employers, families and other stakeholders in society who have a vested interest in advancing working mothers as well as other caregivers. By understanding the gaps that drive these challenges and the key points of intervention to address them, we can incite progress within even the smallest increments of targeted change.

As a final note, it is worth remarking that to succeed in advancing mothers in the workforce, we cannot rely solely on employer organizations to cater to their working employees; it takes a wider shift in society to reevaluate our values around family care and the role women play. It is hoped that this project with its focus specifically on first time mother's return to work and their experiences navigating these new waters, in addition to the large body of research out there, can show the benefits of prioritizing family care and adding diversity to the workforce to create a more inclusive, resilient and successful workplace.

Bibliography

Alstveit, M., Severinsso n, E., & Karlsen, B. (2011). Readjusting one's life in the tension inherent in work and motherhood. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *67*(10), 2151-2160.

Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2017). *Policy on Pregnancy & Human Rights in the Workplace*. Retrieved April 15 from, http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/policy-and-best-practices-page-1

Canada Employment Social Development Porgrams. (2017). *Working while on claim pilot project.* Retrieved May 10, 2017 from https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei-list/ei/working-while-claim.html

Boettcher, S. (2014, February 8). Author of the Mom Shift Reva Seth compiles stories of happy and successful working mothers. *Calgary Herald*. Retrieved, February 5, 20017, from http://www.calgaryherald.com/life/Author+MomShift+Reva+Seth+compiles+stories+happy+successful+working+mothers/9483116/story.html?__lsa=ac4d-b1c0

Bailik, C.(2010). A Lifetime of Career Changes. *The Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved March 30, 2017 from http://blogs.wsj.com/numbersguy/a-lifetime-of-career-changes-988

Bigras, N., Lemay, L.,& Brunson, L. (2012). Parental Stress and Daycare Attendance. Does Daycare Quality and Parental Satisfaction with Daycare Moderate the Relation Between Family Income and Stress Level among Parents of Four Years Old Children? *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 55(1), 894-901

Brough, P., O'Driscoll, M. P., & Biggs, A. (2009). Parental leave and work-family balance among employed parents following childbirth: An exploratory investigation in Australia and New Zealand. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, *4*(1), 71-87.

Campione, W., Morgan, J., & Jerrell, M. (2004). Employed women's well-being: The global and daily impact of work: Working paper series--04-05.

Catalyst Women Heads of TSX60 (2015.) Retrieved February 19, 2017, from http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/statistical-overview-women-workforce#footnote18_y6ghkg4

Coleman, H. J. (2010). *Empowering yourself: the organizational game revealed*. AuthorHouse.

Council of Economic Advisors. (February 2015). Economic Report of the President. *The economics of family-friendly work policies,* (4), 157-202.

Cohn, D. (2013, July 10). In Canada, most babies now born to women 30 and older. Retrieved February 19, 2017, from Pew Research Center, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/10/in-canada-most-babies-now-born-to-women-30-and-older/

Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? 1. *American journal of sociology*, *112*(5), 1297-1338.

Davenport, T. H. (2013). *Thinking for a living: how to get better performances and results from knowledge workers.* Harvard Business Press.

Duhigg, C.(February 26, 2016). What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team. *The New York Times.* Retrieved April 1 2016, from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html?_r=0

Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP). (2017). *University of Toronto Benefits Human Resources & Equity*. Retrieved from: http://benefits.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/efap/

Family-Friendly. (n.d.). *In Wikipedia*. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family-friendly

Female Power (2009, December 30). *The Economist*. Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/node/15174418

Ferrao, V. (2010). Paid work. *Women in Canada: a gender-based statistical report*, *6*.

Giang, V.(2015). Inside Google's Insanely Popular Emotional Intelligence Course. *Fast Company.* Retrieved April 1, 2017 from https://www.fastcompany.com/3044157/the-future-of-work/inside-googles-insanely-popular-emotional-intelligence-course

Glasberg A.L., Eriksson S. & Norberg A. (2006) Burnout and 'stress of conscience' among healthcare personnel. Journal of Advanced Nursing 57(4), 392–403.

Government of Canada. (2016). *EI Maternity and Parental Benefits - How much could you receive*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Government of Canada. (2017). *Building a Strong Middle Class: Budget 2017.* Retrieved May 10, 2017 from http://www.budget.gc.ca/2017/docs/plan/toc-tdm-en.html

Great Places to Work Canada. (2017). Supporting Working Moms – Before, During and After Maternity Leave. Retrieved from: http://www.greatplacetowork.ca/insights-and-events/articles/hottopic/1013-supporting-working-moms-before-during-and-after-maternity-leave

Houston, D. M., & Marks, G. (2003). The role of planning and workplace support in returning to work after maternity leave. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *41*(2), 197-214.

Haynes, M. C., & Heilman, M. E. (2013). It had to be you (not me)! Women's attributional rationalization of their contribution to successful joint work outcomes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*(7), 956-969.

Humphrey, R. T., & Adams, L. (2016). Empathy and Leadership.

Johnson, P., & Cassell, C. (2001). Epistemology and work psychology: New agendas. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *74*(2), 125-143.

Johnston, D. D., & Swanson, D. H. (2007). Cognitive acrobatics in the construction of worker–mother identity. *Sex Roles*, *57*(5-6), 447-459.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). Organizational stress.

Knowledge worker (2017). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_worker

Lam, B. (2016, March 16). Why tech is the leading industry on parental leave. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/03/tech-paid-paternity-leave/473922/

Macko, L., & Rubin, K. (2004). Midlife crisis at 30.

Marks, S. R. (1977). Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time and commitment. American Sociological Review, 921-936.

Mathews, T. J., & Hamilton, B. E. (2014). First births to older women continue to rise. *NCHS data brief*, *152*, 1-8.

McGinn, K. L., Castro, M. R., & Lingo, E. L. (2015). *Mums the Word! Cross-national Relationship between Maternal Employment and Gender Inequalities at Work and at Home* (No. 15-094). Harvard Business School Working Paper.

McKinsey and Company. (2016). Women in the Workplace. *McKinsey & Company: Lean in.* Retrieved on April 1 2017, from https://womenintheworkplace.com/#about

Microsoft Research. (2014). *Single Parent and Employment 2014: Who Works Harder, Women with Kids, or those Without?* Microsoft Press.

Millward, L. J. (2006). The transition to motherhood in an organizational context: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *79*(3), 315-333.

Miller, C. C. (2015, June 9). Mounting evidence of advantages for children of working mothers. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/upshot/mounting-evidence-of-some-advantages-for-children-of-working-mothers.html?_r=0

Miller, S. (2017). Retention is the Top Benefits Objective. *SHRM*. Retrieved April 1, 2017 from https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/retention-top-benefits-objective.aspx

Noor, N. M. (2004). Work-family conflict, work-and family-role salience, and women's well-being. *The Journal of social psychology*, *144*(4), 389-406.

Oun, I. (2010). Maternity at Work: A Review of National Legislation: Findings from the ILO Database of Conditions of Work and Employment Laws. *International Labour Office, Geneva*.

Parker, K., & Wang, W. (2013, March 14). Modern parenthood. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from Pew Research Center, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/

Patten, E., Fry, R., & Posts. (2015, March 19). How Millennials today compare with their grandparents 50 years ago. Retrieved February 19, 2017, from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/19/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/

Pearl, H. (2014, August 19). Managing your emotions after maternity leave. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from Harvard Business Review, https://hbr.org/2014/08/managing-your-emotions-after-maternity-leave

Pregnancy and maternity discrimination at work. (2004). Retrieved February 5, 2017, from Equal Opportunities Commission, http://www.eoc.org.uk/pregnancy-maternity-discrimination/

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, *9*(5), 1-6.

Sandberg, S. (2015). Managing Unconscious Bias. *Facebook Newsroom*. Retrieved April 1, from https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2015/07/managing-unconscious-bias/

Seth, R. (2014). *The Mom Shift*. Canada: Random House Canada.

Slaughter, A. (2012). Why women still can't have it all. *Atlantic Monthly*. Retrieved February 19, 2017 from: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/

Statistics Canada. (2015, December 17). The surge of women in the workforce. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from Government of Canada, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015009-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2015, June 24). *Employment patterns of families with children.* Retrieved from Government of Canada, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2015001/article/14202-eng.htm

Study Reveals The Most And Least Expensive Cities For Child Care In 2016. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved February 19, 2017, from Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/newsroom/news-releases/study-reveals-most-and-least-expensive-cities-child-care-2016

Strong-Boag, V. (2001, January 31). Women's movements in Canada: 1960–85. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from The Canadian Encyclopedia, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/womens-movements-in-canada-196085/

Tips/advice for returning back to work after maternity leave. (n.d.). *In Reddit.* Retrieved February 5, 2017, from https://www.reddit.com/r/beyondthebump/comments/4de7q6/tipsadvice_for_returning_back_to_work_after/

Tips for returning back to work after maternity leave. Separation Anxiety? (n.d.). *In Reddit.* Retrieved February 5, 2017, from https://www.reddit.com/r/beyondthebump/comments/4de7q6/tipsadvice_for_returning_back_to_work_after/

The Harris Poll. (2014, June). Vast Majority of Americans Favor Flexible Workplace Policies. Retrieved from http://www.theharrispoll.com/business/Vast_Majority_of_Americans_Favor_Flexible_Workplace_Policies.html

United States Department of Labour. (2011, January). Women in the Labor Force in 2010. Retrieved February 5, from https://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-laborforce-10.htm

Vodafone. (2015). Vodafone pioneers global maternity policy across 30 countries [Press release]. Retrieved from: http://www.vodafone.com/content/index/media/vodafone-group-releases/2015/global-maternity-policy.html

Waller, N. (2016, September 27). How Men & Women See the Workplace Differently. *The Wallstreet Journal.* http://graphics.wsj.com/how-men-and-women-see-the-workplace-differently/

Wang, W., Parker, K., & Taylor, P. (2013, May 29). Breadwinner Moms. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from Pew Research Center, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/breadwinner-moms/

Warren, Elizabeth, and Amelia Warren Tyagi. *The two-income trap: Why middle-class parents are going broke.* Basic Books, 2007.

Wojcicki, S. (2016, January 27). Closing the tech industry gender gap. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved February 5, 2017, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-wojcicki/tech-industry-gender-gap_b_9089472.html?1453912334

APPENDICES
Appendix A - Recruitment Letter

Section 1. RECRUITMENT INVITATION FOR EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Dear [name of candidate],

You have been invited to participate in an interview for a research project on mothers' experiences returning to work after maternity leave. This interview is part of a major research project at OCAD University's Masters of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation program.

We are looking for **Human Resource professionals** who are interested in sharing their experience working in talent management and/or executive recruitment.

The request:
A 45-minute meeting with you where I can ask you opened ended questions regarding:
- Your professional experience with working mothers
- Availability of, and access to, family-friendly benefits in your organization (note: family friendly benefits are a set of benefits offered by an employer that make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work obligations)

Benefits of participating:
Your participation in this research will lead to a better understanding of what mothers experience returning to employment after maternity leave and how we might better enhance this experience for them.

Considerations:
Note that all identifiers will be anonymized in the final report, and, at the end of the project, all raw interview and intermediate analysis data will be destroyed. Up until a specified date, you may contact me to withdraw parts of or all of your interview data from the project.

If you are interested in speaking with me further and feel you meet the description above, please respond to this message so that I may coordinate a time for the interview.

Sincerely,
Laura Mills
Principal Investigator
Email: ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉   Phone: ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉
MDes candidate – OCADU – Strategic Foresight and Innovation

Section 2. RECRUITMENT INVITATION FOR WORKING MOTHERS

Dear [name of candidate],

You have been invited to participate in an interview for a research project on mothers' experiences returning to work after maternity leave. This interview is part of a major research project at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU) Masters of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation program.

We are looking for **employed mothers** who are interested in sharing their experience in taking maternity leave to welcome a child.

The request:
A 45-minute meeting with you where I can ask you opened ended questions regarding:
- Your experience transitioning into maternity leave
- Your experience returning to work after maternity leave

Benefits of participating:
Your participation in this research will lead to a better understanding of what mothers experience returning to employment after maternity leave and how we might better enhance this experience for them.

Considerations:
Note that all identifiers will be anonymized in the final report, and, at the end of the project, all raw interview and intermediate analysis data will be destroyed. Up until a specified date, you may contact me to withdraw parts of or all of your interview data from the project.

 If you are interested in speaking with me further and feel you meet the criteria above, please respond to this message so that I may coordinate a time for the interview.

Sincerely,
Laura Mills
Principal Investigator
Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮   Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
MDes candidate – OCADU – Strategic Foresight and Innovation

Appendix B – List of Interviewees

Table 1 - Interviewees with assigned anonymous coding

Mothers	Industry
P1	Advertising
P2	Marketing
P3	Consulting
P4	Government
P5	Business Development
P6	Marketing
P7	Law
P8	Marketing
P9	Marketing
P10	Consulting
P11	Sales
P12	Marketing
P13	Business Development
P14	Financial Services
P15	Business Development

Table 2. List of HR experts with anonymous coding

HR Experts	Industry	Company size
HR 1	University (Union)	Large
HR 2	University (Union)	Large
HR 3	Food and Beverage	Medium
HR 4	Startup	Small
HR 5	Banking	Large
HR 6	Advertising	Medium
HR 7	Consulting	Medium

Appendix C – Interview Guide – Working Mothers
Discussion guide for working mothers.

Introductions – 5 mins

The objective of the introduction is to set respondents at ease and to encourage them to feel comfortable in expressing their opinions openly and honestly. In this opening, respondents will also be briefly familiarized with the objectives of the discussion and the agenda and have an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the research.

Discussion Topic
Hello, my name is Laura and today I would like to talk about your career and your experiences as a parent. Specifically, I am interested in what this experience has meant to you, what parts you find encouraging and what parts you find challenging. I would encourage you to speak candidly and be open and honest. There are no right or wrong answers, I am interested in understanding this experience through your eyes.

Protocol:
- Reiterate informed consent and that their privacy will be protected and their names will not be used without permission
- If you agree, this session will be audio taped so that I can review our conversation later and ensure I capture your thoughts accurately
- You have the right to opt out or decline to answer questions at any time, just let me know
- If you decide after this interview you'd like to withdraw participation you can do so by emailing me by the date on the consent form and I will remove and delete your data
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions – 45 min

Purpose	Question	Probes
1. Background. - Establish some rapport and find out more about the participant. Get an understanding of context – family and work - Look for how they identify themselves (are they a mom who works, a career woman with children)	**So, tell me about YOU..**	• What do you do for work? How long have you been in that role? • Tell me about your family, your friends • How do you like to spend your free time?

2. Career Patterns To understand her definition of career, career identity and what impact working has had on her.	**What comes to mind when I say career?**	• What does word mean to you/what is your definition in your own words? • What comes to mind when I say 'your career'? • How would you describe it today?
3. **Family Planning** To understand thought process behind planning for a family. Their definition of parent and what it means to them.	**Tell me about the experience of planning for a family, what was that like for you?**	• How did it come to be? • Did you always imagine you'd have children? • Describe what 'parent' means in your own words • Describe 'working parent'
4. **Environment** To understand how she interprets their work environment and what impact that has on her experience.	**What is your ideal work environment like? Think about the setting, the culture, etc.**	• What might you need to be successful as a worker? What about as a parent, what would the ideal work environment be like? • Does this differ than your current work environment? Tell me why you think so.
5. **Relationships** To build an understand of social networks and support networks of the participant and how they contribute to their career.	**Describe your social systems at work (can be formal or informal)**	• Describe your immediate work group. • How are they supportive, or not? What influences have they had on your experience so far? • How do you connect with them? (face to face, via technology etc..)
6. **Transition to parenthood** To understand how she felt and how she navigated through the experience from pre-maternity leave to returning.	**I'd like to hear more about your transition to parenthood.**	• <u>Prepping for mat leave</u> – what was this experience like for you? How did you feel? Was there any particular aspect that it made it easier/harder for you? • <u>During mat leave</u> – what was this like for you? What did you like, dislike about it? How did your social systems change? Did you keep in contact with anyone from work? • <u>Returning to work (if applicable) first year</u> – describe this experience felt like to you. Who did you turn to for support during that time? Did you return to the same team, different team? How was that experience for you? What it a positive experience?

7. **Advice** Another probe to understand challenges or helpful experiences during this time.	**What kind of advice would you give to someone else going through an experience like this for the first time (expecting a child and taking time off work)?**	• What would be things to take advantage of, or the pitfalls to watch out for? • How do you feel your output has changed since being back?
8.**Future** Additional context for values and motivations of participant. To understand criteria that would need to be satisfied long term.	**What do the next five years look like for you? For family, for career?**	• What is most important for you over the next 5 years as it pertains to your career? • To your personal life?
9. **Magic Wand** Gives the participant a clear opportunity to reflect and consider context of discussion.	**I'd like you to think about our discussion and imagine you have a magic wand that would enable you to invent anything you'd like. What would you invent to create the ideal experience returning to work after maternity leave?**	• Why do you feel this would help to the experience? • What is getting in the way of making this happen?

Appendix D – Interview Guide – HR Experts

Discussion guide for expert interviews.

<u>Introductions – 5 mins</u>

The objective of the introduction is to set respondents at ease and to encourage them to feel comfortable in expressing their opinions openly and honestly. In this opening, respondents will also be briefly familiarized with the objectives of the discussion and the agenda and have an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the research.

Discussion Topic

Hello, my name is Laura and today I would like to talk about your professional expertise with working mothers. Specifically, I am interested in any policies or programs your organization might offer to women who have children and the impact this may have on employee satisfaction and development.

Protocol:

- Reiterate informed consent and that their privacy will be protected and their names will not be used without permission
- If you agree, this session will be audio taped so that I can review our conversation later and ensure I capture your thoughts accurately
- You have the right to opt out or decline to answer questions at any time, just let me know
- If you decide after this interview you'd like to withdraw participation you can do so by emailing me by the date on the consent form and I will remove and delete your data
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

<u>Questions – 45 min</u>

Question	Clarification
1. Tell me about the family friendly policies are offered by your organization.	- What kind are offered? - How are these policies developed? How often are they amended? - How do you measure success? - How hard is it to make changes?

2. What changes are you noticing in benefits offered by organizations these days?	• Does it look different than 10-20 years ago? If so, why or why not? • Would you describe your organization as ahead of government policy? Why or why not?
3. How does your organization address preparing for an employee's upcoming maternity leave?	• Are there particular trends that stand out? • What you noticed as things that are hard/things that go well? • How does this change affect the organization?
4. How does your organization address when an employee returns from maternity leave?	• Same probes as above.
5. Describe how policies are developed or updated at your organization?	• What factors influence the change? • Is it an easy process? What parts are most challenging? • Are some policies harder than others to implement? • How do you evaluate the cost/benefit?

Appendix E – Motherhood Experience Map

Maternity Leave Experience Map:
First Time Mothers, Knowledge Workers

STAGES	1: THE ANNOUNCEMENT		2: THE DEPARTURE	3: THE RETURN (AND FOLLOWING)	
	FAMILY PLANNING	PREGNANCY / PREPARING FOR MAT LEAVE	MAT LEAVE	RETURN TO WORK (FIRST THREE MONTHS)	WORK CONTINUED
	CONCEPTION ●		BIRTH ●		
THINKING — CAREER-FOCUSED	"I'd like to be somewhat established in my career before having a child"	"I need to work hard to leave my work in a good place"; "I worry I will be judged for leaving and that I am letting my team down"; "Will my same job be there for me when I'm back?"	"I feel out of touch from work, I feel less confident about my value as an employee"	"I hope it doesn't reflect poorly that I passed 5 pm anymore"; "I wish my manager/work group understood what this is like for me"	"I get more things done than I used to, I am more focused and I don't sweat the small stuff"; "I worry I can't achieve my career goals while being a devoted parent"
THINKING — MATERNAL-FOCUSED	"I am open to having a child in the foreseeable future, I am personally and financially ready"	"What is my body doing this week?"; "This is a new experience for me, I need to prepare as much as possible"	*"Holy smokes I miss sleep!"* — "This is a shock, I miss my old routine"; "I think I actually have this under control, this is great!"; "I don't want to give him to someone else when I go back to work"	"Is she crying at night because she misses me?"; "I have zero time anymore"	"I want control over my time so I can be present for the moments that matter in my child's life"; "I might consider expanding my family in a few years"
DOING	• Financial planning • Trying for baby (passively, actively) • Talking to friends and family and/or experts/fertility treatment	• Transition documents at work • Preparing replacement at work • Organizing house/living space for baby • Medical appointments • Planning for future child care arrangements	**Keeping baby alive** — • Keep in touch with colleagues here and there • Getting into routine with baby • Planning child care arrangements for work return	• Juggling work schedule around childcare • Relearning work role and acclimatizing • Seeking emotional support from close friends or colleagues	• Striving for balance • Planning days efficiently • Making the most of time at home with family (evenings, weekends)
FEELING	Content; Frustration (if conception takes longer than anticipated)	Worried → Excited	*zzzzzz* → Joy, Excitement → Loneliness	Nervous excitement → Guilt, Uncertainty, Unbalanced	Uncertainty (over career), Stable
OPPORTUNITIES	How might maternity leave be seen as a career value add rather than a career detractor? Role models in senior levels / Celebrate diversity	How might we help women feel connected to their career during leave in a non-intrusive and meaningful way? Open dialogue between mother and employer / Other hobbies, interests mother can pursue during this time that will contribute to more confidence	How might we increase empathy in non-parents? Empathy and Anti-Bias training / Increase value of family care within organizational culture	How might we help women feel in control of their professional trajectory while putting their child first? Clearer roadmaps and development goals / Flexibility, trust to get the job done	

Appendix F – Research Ethics Board Approval

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board.
File number: 100889
REB number: 2017-12
Associated documentation is on file in the Office of Research at OCAD University.