

NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

Kirkland, Washington

The Glass Ceiling at Home: How parental leave policies perpetuate a culture of sexism

An undergraduate thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for completing the Northwest University Honors Program

by

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April, 2023

Dedication

This thesis would not be possible without several instrumental people. To the ones named, and those not named, I will forever be grateful for the support offered through the research and writing process.

Dr. Cherri Seese, whose open door and mentoring guidance was not limited to this thesis, but extended to my life as a student. Thank you for all that you have taught me by, word and example, about what it means to be a Christian, an academic, and a powerful woman.

Dr. Clint Bryan, who allowed me to dream big about this work and provided uplifting encouragement throughout. Your kind heart and belief in students' potential are staples at Northwest and staples in my experience of the Honors Program.

My Honors Cohort – the eight of you contributed more than you may realize to the last four years of my life. Thank you for the gentle urging to complete this project, and for pushing me to do my greatest in everything I do. You are all very important to me.

Abstract

The United States is one of few countries that does not offer any paid parental leave to its citizens, yet nearly half of the families in the country are ones in which both parents work. Societally speaking, the expectations placed upon mothers and fathers regarding responsibilities in the home are often unequal – and they have been this way for decades. Despite major shifts in the labor force gender breakdown, little has been done to better accommodate dual-worker families or encourage changes in how mothers and fathers care for their families. The expectations regarding home responsibilities fall into the category of gender roles, and are often an expression of sexism. The lack of paid parental leave policies cause unnecessary difficulties for working parents that perpetuate sexism in the workplace as well as at home. To combat the issue of sexism in the greater American culture, changes must be made in workplaces and government across the country regarding the accessibility of paid maternity and paternity leave.

Keywords: maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, gender roles, sexism, labor force, family

I. Intro

Young women's career goals are often littered with "ifs," "ands," or "buts" regarding the possibility of someday having a family. One girl may dream of being a lawyer but wonders about how she could balance such a demanding job with the needs of the family she wants to have. Another hopes to be a doctor but fears that the years of required schooling would prevent her from having children and being a present mother. While not all women want to be mothers, those that do often face this dilemma when pursuing a future. As a woman myself, I've witnessed this occur since childhood and often wondered why only I was asked "but what if you want to have children?" but not my brother or male friends. Contrary to their female peers, young men do not often hesitate when charting their career plans. They are free to dream and remain unencumbered by the thought of having children. There is an obvious difference in how young men and women think about their futures. Young women worry about balancing work and family before either has begun while this thought rarely crosses the minds of men. Remembering the parents and mentors that asked me about career and family plans hinted to me that this phenomenon is a cultural norm that is passed down through generations – not something that is ingrained in us from the beginning. These norms are not new to American culture, but the way they are expressed has changed over time. Today, they are most amplified in the American workplace.

One of the major underlying causes of cultural sexism in the United States is the insufficient maternity and paternity leave policies for the average worker. This lack of adequate policy perpetuates sexism both within and outside of the workplace and could send women the message that it is solely their responsibility to achieve a work-life balance. This work aims to explore how the insufficient policies for maternity and paternity leave in the U.S. drive gender

roles and sexist expectations of both men and women. The primary focus of this writing is two-parent households in the United States and those who work in the corporate space.

II. Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, the words or phrases listed below will be used according to their given definitions.

Family – A group of one or more parents and their children living together as a unit (Oxford, 2023).

Dual-worker family – Married-couple families in which both spouses are in the labor force (Hayghe, 1990).

Sexism – Prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex (Oxford, 2023).

Gender role – the role or behavior considered to be appropriate to a particular gender as determined by prevailing culture norms (Oxford, 2023).

III. Literature Review

The old-fashioned nuclear family – a two-child household with a breadwinner father and a homemaker mother – is rare in modern America. The changing times bring with them changing gender roles that are dissolving this notion of family. However, America's workforce has done little to adapt to new family structures and gender roles. Outdated work systems and structures are posing greater problems to both female and male employees who are trying in vain to balance a career and family. Most often, the burden of this stress falls to working women who face sexism in the workplace that is motivated by cultural expectations regarding a woman's role in the family. A result of a long history of domesticity, this role is typically to care for children,

husband, and home with little outside help. Joan Acker (1990) was an early proponent in recognizing this problem, writing about the concept of gendered organizing thirty years ago. Gendered organizing refers to the methodical organization of the typical American workplace in a way that is most beneficial to a male employee, making it difficult for women to advance even under management that is consciously feminist (Acker, 1990). Acker called out corporate America's preference for male workers, using as evidence the common qualities of the "ideal worker." These qualities excluded many common feminine traits such as being emotional and kind, while focusing on more masculine characteristics. These characteristics include being tough-minded and the ability to detach from personal or emotional considerations when problem-solving. Also included in the description of this ideal masculine worker was the concept of being completely committed to work rather than family life.

Aside from these ideal employee traits, the very structures in place for corporate America pose obstacles for women trying to advance. Leave time is hard to acquire and promotions go to those who put work above all else; however, society overwhelmingly places the responsibility of childcare on women and often shames "workaholic" moms who put work above their family. A woman is then left with conflicting expectations from work and culture, making it exponentially more difficult for her to advance than her male coworker. Just seven years after Acker published her work, Leslie Perlow (1997) debunked the theory that the overly committed worker is a better one when she consulted with a company to restructure their work force. By creating a more efficient work model and allowing employees to have more quality time in their personal lives, Perlow increased the worker's productivity. Not only was this efficiency good for company output, but it gave them more flexibility to adapt to their employees' diverse family lifestyles. In light of this research conducted in the past thirty years, it is clear that not enough has changed.

Two years after Perlow published her pivotal book, Karen Ashcraft (1999) studied maternity leave—an ongoing problem that comes between career and family. Rather than viewing it as its own policy or issue, Ashcraft introduced maternity leave as a form of succession. While succession typically refers to an employee rising up to fill the vacancy of someone who has left a company, in this context it is slightly different; “succession” here refers to an employee’s filling in for a worker who is on maternity leave (Ashcraft, 1999). Companies often fail to reinstate that worker in the full capacity of her former role, pushing her back in her success and making it difficult for her to further advance within the company (Ashcraft, 1999). This form of succession has become a tool for employers to limit opportunities and push back against employees who are expecting children. Ashcraft was one of few people to study maternity leave through this lens, and there is scant research on how to restructure workplaces to better accommodate expectant mothers’ career and leave needs.

Buzzanell and Liu’s 2005 study assumed a more personal approach to the same field as they interviewed fifteen working women who took maternity leave from their employers. These women’s experiences were relatively similar to one another, and they painted a grim picture of a woman’s work/life balance in the 21st Century. Outside of policy alone, many women shared that they perceived more apprehension than celebration at the news of their pregnancies. These reactions, which came from both management and coworkers, reflect the deep-rooted issue of conflict between work and family ideals.

In the same year as this work, Diane Halpern (2005) addressed this issue at an APA convention. Her choice to cite the ongoing issues with America’s outdated work structure in juxtaposition with current family models shows the importance of focusing attention toward finding a solution. Halpern spoke about her own experience with balancing work and family, and

how it led her to begin an APA task force dedicated to researching the social science in this area and develop recommendations for schools and businesses to better handle this issue. She highlighted the rapid changes that are occurring in the structure of both the work force and the family institution in the U.S. and emphasized that changes must be made to meet new family needs.

While few in America have pursued solutions like Halpern, Fursman's (2009) collection of case studies explored alternate working options in New Zealand and explained how they benefited the families and employers who utilized them. Testimonies from various families, both those who have and those who do not have access to flexible working options, show the deep value in shared family time that results from flexible working options. Fursman extended beyond the generic family structure that lives at the center of the US work model and observed families with single parents, various ages of children, and even those who are caring for parents or individuals with disabilities. These testimonies showed how flexible work options can help a variety of working caretakers (both men and women) become closer with their families and experience lower stress and greater job enjoyment. Family closeness was most demonstrated through a measure titled "quality family time" (Fursman, 2009). A survey of families in this study indicated agreement among 98% of respondents that spending time with their family was the best thing they could do as it allowed them to be more involved in their family's life and deepen their relationships (Fursman, 2009). This, in turn, lowered employees' levels of stress while at work and allowed them to further focus and enjoy their jobs (Fursman, 2009).

Despite this groundbreaking research, several things remain unchanged. The definition of "family" has evolved enormously, yet the role of caring for the home and children still falls primarily to women. More women than ever are entering the work force and pursuing careers of

their own, yet they are expected to prioritize their family over work while men are not. Today, over 72% of women with children under the age of 18 participate in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Yet, 59% of dual-worker families report that the majority of child-related responsibilities, particularly those of managing schedules, activities, and caring for illnesses, belong to the mother (Pew Research Center, 2015). Much work has been done to explore the seemingly unachievable work-life balance expected of women, but this work all points to the workplace being the expression of preexisting sexism. A broader look at the existing research seems to indicate that the workplace is actually one of the greatest perpetuators of this sexism that permeates throughout the rest of American culture. This is particularly expressed in the lack of adequate maternity and paternity leave policies, which make it extremely difficult for parents to equally balance the responsibilities associated with the family.

IV. Study

a) Corporate structure

Employee age, pay, and hours were largely unmonitored in the United States until the signing of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in June of 1938. Before this act, there were only a few attempts to regulate the American workforce and they were mostly unsuccessful. Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor from 1933-1945, made efforts to rid the country of child labor and establish a cap on the hours in a working day and week but had difficulty making any changes that lasted (Terrell, 2021). It wasn't until the adoption of the FLSA in 1938 that both of these changes were firmly established. The FLSA had an amazingly long-lasting impact, as it set the standard for the 40-hour work week that many companies still use today (Terrell, 2021). This structure especially thrived in a time when most families had two parents and the culture was committed to specific gender roles – the men worked a full-time job while the women

maintained the home and cared for the children. With the occurrence of the global Covid pandemic beginning in 2020, employers and employees alike began to recognize that the 40-hour week may not be as necessary as once believed. Remote work brought with it more flexible working times, and many employees in a post-pandemic world are more likely to advocate for flexibility from their jobs (Zucker, 2021). While this trend promotes a positive outlook on the elimination of sexism in the workplace, many workplaces still hold fast to outdated structures and leave little room for women to thrive. These structures include inflexible work schedules and organizational discrimination towards women and expectant mothers (Acker, 1990). These things must change on a grand scale if society hopes to see a change in the presence of gender discrimination in the United States.

b) Women in the labor force

Over the past seventy years, the numbers of women in the US labor force have steadily grown. The percentage of women in the workforce began to see notable growth at the onset of the 20th century, growing by over 3 million in just 20 years (Hayghe, 1990). By the 1940's, 26% of all women in the U.S. were in the labor force. This number has since grown to just over 57% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021) and nearly half of the working adults in the United States are women (U.S. Department of Labor). As more and more women launch into the working world, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that they are treated fairly through the adjustment of cultural expectations along with these trends. Working women are no longer a significant minority, and the failure to abolish sexism means that nearly half of the American workforce is likely to experience this form of negative prejudice while trying to do their job. These women deserve a system that allows them to thrive, not one that puts them at a constant

disadvantage. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case. Sexism is still prevalent in the workplace and directly or indirectly affects large numbers of working women.

Despite the growing number of working women, statistics show that the professional world still holds some biases towards these employees. About 42% of working women report personal experiences of gender discrimination at work, while only 22% of men have experienced the same (Parker & Funk, 2017). These experiences of sexism include pay inconsistencies, receiving less support than a male counterpart, being denied a promotion, or being treated as incompetent. Workplace sexism appears in many more forms, such as employers' dissatisfaction regarding employee pregnancies (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). This is where the intersection of sexism and maternity leave policies begins to become apparent.

c) Family structure

Before addressing the individual issues that working mothers and fathers face, it is first important to evaluate how the family structure has changed over time and acknowledge its current state. Despite the lack of change in America's corporate model over the past decade, the family model has shifted significantly from what was once considered "typical." The typical family of the early 20th century referred to a two-parent household in which the father worked full-time and the mother's primary role was homemaker (Hayghe, 1990). Since the 1940s, this style of family has become increasingly rare in the US as dual-worker families – those in which both parents work part or full-time – have become more common (Hayghe, 1990). According to Pew Research (2017), nearly half (46%) of modern two-parent households in the U.S. are dual-worker families compared to just 26% that fit the "traditional" description of the early 1900s. Despite the majority of two-parent families now being dual-worker models, 59% of these families report that the majority of the child-related tasks in the home are primarily the mother's

responsibility (Pew Research Center, 2015). This shows a remaining discrepancy between realistic changes in family structure and cultural expectations of shared responsibility in the home. Understanding this shift in the American family model, it is now important to individually examine the responsibilities and challenges associated with modern-day motherhood and fatherhood.

d) Motherhood & Maternity Leave

Motherhood, once considered by most to be a joyous period of life, is now a topic wrought with stress for many working mothers. Inadequate maternity leave policies, negative attitudes toward pregnancy, and organizational discrimination towards mothers have made the workplace an undesirable place for any mother. This discourages many women from pursuing their careers, or causes unnecessary stress while they do so. These stressors detract from the importance of the role mothers play at home. A study performed to evaluate the importance of secure infant attachment to caregivers found that infants without a secure attachment to their mother had higher levels of cortisol, which can result in chronic stress (Kuo et al., 2019). The study also recognized a negative correlation between the security of the infant-mother attachment and the hours worked by a mother. Mothers working more hours had a less secure attachment with their infant than those that worked less (Kuo et al., 2019). This study highlights the significance of a mother in her child's life, yet the importance of this role is not reflected in the values of most American workplaces. Buzzanell & Liu's (2005) study of expectant mothers and their workplaces revealed the commonality of negative attitudes surrounding employee pregnancies. Many of the women featured in this study had to advocate for their own maternity leaves, and struggled to receive adequate information from uncooperative HR departments.

Buzzanell & Liu pointed out that the message conveyed in these – and many other – scenarios is that maternity leave is a reward rather than a right.

Because maternity leave is commonly viewed as a benefit rather than a necessity, mothers' time with a new baby is often cut short by insufficient leave allowances. In the United States, there is no federal law guaranteeing paid parental leave for public or private sector employees (Williamson, 2023). The Family and Medical Leave Act does ensure up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn child, but the lack of pay most often means that one parent must continue working (U.S. Department of Labor). As of 2023, only 11 states have passed laws granting paid family and medical leave (Williamson, 2023). The International Network on Leave Policies and Research's most recent annual review of parental leave policies by country showed a staggering difference between the United States and the other 48 countries in the review. The U.S. is lagging far behind other nations in providing parental leave that is paid and that provides sufficient time for recovery and bonding (Koslowski et al., 2022). The necessity of longer leave is supported by Wiese and Ritter's examination of the impact of leave length on mothers as they reentered the workplace. This study of 149 mothers found that those who were granted a longer leave period were more likely to be satisfied with their job once they returned. Contrarily, those who returned sooner attributed more of their life stress to work and were highly likely to leave their job or the workforce altogether (Wiese & Ritter, 2012). It is important to note that both groups of women had equal mean levels of stress – the difference was their perceived cause of stress. This study points to longer leave being a benefit for both the mother and the employer. Longer leave allows a mother to better handle and appropriately attribute her stress after reentering the workforce, making it more likely that she will remain at her existing job.

Bolstering the protocol for maternity leave in the U.S. elicits fear in many corporate employers, yet the evidence shows that it would be a benefit to everyone involved.

e) Fatherhood & Paternity Leave

The mother-infant bond has long been understood as a crucial one for both parties, but the importance of the paternal relationship requires more intentional study. Many works that have studied the paternal relationship were done in conjunction with the maternal relationship. Kuo et al. (2019) tested infant cortisol levels with regards to the security of their parental attachment. While this study found that being securely attached to the father alone caused stress for infants, secure attachment with both parents was correlated with the lowest recorded levels of cortisol. The paternal bond is a beautifully necessary complement to the infant-mother relationship. In a study that followed stress in parents rather than infants found that a weak parental bond, whether maternal or paternal, was a predictor of high levels of parenting stress. This stress can indirectly increase the risk of poorer executive functioning in a developing child (de Cock et al., 2017). Indicated by the recency of these studies, high levels of paternal involvement is something of a recent concept in American culture.

Just over a century ago, a father's role was well-defined within the family network: breadwinner, moral compass, and disciplinarian (American Psychological Association, 2009). With the rapid industrial and socioeconomic changes in the 20th century, fathers found themselves growing more and more distant from their families. In more recent years, however, culture has begun to expect involved parenting from fathers. This shifting role of the father is largely correlated with the increase of working mothers, which requires the traditional "mother-father" roles of 1920 to be dismantled (American Psychological Association, 2009). This shift originated in the 1960s, but the results are only becoming widely apparent in more recent

decades. With 46% of two-parent American families being dual-worker, it is easy to understand why more involvement from fathers is necessary. Research shows that the ratio of childcare responsibility between fathers and mothers is closely related to the wife's working pattern. Fathers especially tend to do more solo childcare when the mother is employed (Raley et al., 2015).

In light of these developing paternal roles, it seems that work flexibility should allow fathers to spend more time with their families. But with a rigid work model, American fathers are not allowed adequate flexibility to assist in child rearing. Working mothers, who are still culturally expected to take on the majority of the child-related responsibilities, spend an increased amount of time away from the work force with every child they have. In contrast, fathers spend less time away from the work force for each child they have (Goldin, 2006). This highlights inconsistencies with the changing cultural expectations of fathers and the expected commitment of male employees to the workforce. While the greater culture is asking more of modern-day fathers, the culture of the American workplace continues to push traditional "breadwinner" expectations upon men and does little to encourage them to be present fathers.

While the Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, fathers typically don't take this opportunity or only take a week of time off work (Petts et al., 2020). Most families cannot afford both parents to take time off work with no pay for an extended amount of time, leaving the father to be the sole earner for the duration of the mother's unpaid leave. While paid maternity leave is more widespread than paid paternity leave, 44% of countries have some form of paid leave for fathers. In the United States, there are some states or employers who offer paid leave but it is not a guarantee (U.S. Department of Labor). Yet even if leave is offered, fathers can be hesitant to take advantage of it due to social pressures regarding

fatherhood and providing for a family (Petts et al., 2020). These attitudes are lessening over time, but it is difficult to combat them when there is no paid leave option for fathers.

f) Global Approaches to Parental Leave

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency established in 1919 to set labor standards and policies for employees in 187 countries. One of the many missions of the ILO is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of working mothers and their children, and they have begun to investigate paternity leave in the last decade. The ILO has set a standard of maternity leave in the 2000 Maternity Protection Convention (no. 183). This is the third convention of its kind, the prior being established in 1952 and the first in 1919. Convention no. 183 includes measures of both time and money. The ILO requires a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, but recommends 18. In a 2014 study of global maternity leave policies, 98 participating countries met the 14-week standard, and 42 met or exceeded the 18-week suggestion. 60 countries provide only 12-13 weeks – the United States being one of them (International Labor Organization, 2014). This convention also determined that women should be compensated while on maternity leave, and the amount must be enough to “maintain themselves and their child in proper conditions of health and with a suitable standard of living”. The ILO has a somewhat fluid definition of this amount, stating that it must be equivalent to two-thirds of the woman’s previous earnings or a “comparable amount” (International Labor Organization, 2023). The same 2014 study previously mentioned found that 74 countries meet these standards of compensation for at least 14 weeks of maternity leave. Of those countries, 61 provide 100 percent of the mother’s previous earnings for that same length of time. However, 93 countries did not meet this standard either because they compensated too little, compensated none, or provided compensation for less than 14 weeks (International Labor Organization, 2014).

With the Family and Medical Leave Act only guaranteeing 12 weeks of unpaid leave to new parents, the United States falls sadly short of these standards that so many other countries have deemed worthwhile for their employees.

Although the ILO has not set a standard for paternity leave, they have recently begun to recognize its impact in promoting gender equality and predicting more involvement from fathers. Despite the lack of a standard set by this organization, 70 countries offer paid paternity leave (International Labor Organization, 2014). While most of these leaves are fairly short, this is still a step of progress. The ILO recognizes and encourages this progress, stating that “enshrining a statutory right to paid paternity leave in national legislation would signal the value that society puts on the care work of women and men and would help advance gender equality” (International Labor Organization, 2014). Although the ILO encourages countries to create legislation regarding paternity leave, their own lack of example in this area indicates just how unequal the child-rearing expectations are for many people. Paternity leave policies are lagging far behind those for maternity, though both need to improve drastically in the United States.

V. Conclusions

Sexism is an issue that is lessening over time in the United States, yet the family is an area where this progress appears to be slower. Growing numbers of women are working, pursuing education, and achieving positions of leadership along with their male peers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Despite this growth outside the home, they are still depended on for the majority of housework and childcare (Pew Research Center, 2015). It is undeniable that a mother’s bond with her child is unique and crucial for healthy development – yet the importance of this bond should not place all responsibility on the mother (de Cock et al., 2017). Because women are typically expected to carry the load of the home, it has been more difficult

for them to advance in the workplace. Employers who worry about employee commitment and the success of their business are hesitant to offer adequate maternity leave, and are likely to subconsciously discriminate against a woman for fear of her prioritizing her family over work (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). To an extent, this problem is out of the employers' hands – the U.S. government has not provided the resources or issued the requirements necessary to offer paid or long maternity leave (International Labor Organization, 2014). This causes women to unfairly carry the majority of work within the home while denying them an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the job.

On the contrary, fathers carry little of the work in the home yet are not given the opportunity to take on more because of the workplace expectations that they be committed to the job above all else (Acker, 1990). Just as the maternal-infant bond is critical, the paternal-infant bond is vital to a child's development (de Cock et al., 2017). The greater American culture, recognizing the need for more present fathers and shared responsibilities, now calls upon men to be active in their children's lives (American Psychological Association, 2009). Yet, this is difficult when they have little flexibility at work.

While there are many factors outside the workplace that reinforce gender roles, the lack of appropriate parental leave policies is one of the biggest drivers of these attitudes. Work is a central pillar of American values – unemployment rates are of great interest in politics, and stories of building a business from the ground up are treasured tales. Not only does society value work, but work is necessary for most people. Dual-worker families have dramatically increased because one income can't support the costs of a home, food, bills, and children's expenses (Hayghe, 1990). Work is a thread that ties our society together, which gives it a tremendous

amount of influence. If sexism is demonstrated at work, then surely it will permeate the rest of society.

More specifically than work, it is parental leave policies that play a key role in the slowing of gender equality. The U.S., which does not guarantee paid parental leave to any employee, sends several messages through this decision (International Labor Organization, 2014). The lack of leave communicates that parenthood is not valued, that family must take a back seat to work, and that parents are expected to take massive cuts in pay during one of the most expensive times in their lives. These messages, received by parents at the beginning of their family journey, set the tone for every mother and father in the workplace. Small changes can be made in the home, but no change can happen on a grand scale until the government paves the way for adequate leave policies.

VI. Implications for Future Research

A change as great as implementing paid parental leave requires time and more extensive research but is largely necessary. Americans have witnessed magnificent strides with regards to gender equality, yet often seem to accept the unfortunate reality of the workplace. Before employers are likely to support this cause, further research must be done into how paid parental leave impacts job satisfaction and performance outcomes. This information is crucial to show employers how offering paid parental leave benefits their company by improving their relationships with employees. To emphasize the importance of making this change, research must also be devoted to further studying paternal attachment and how it alone impacts children's development. Many studies have been done to show the effects of maternal attachment or the relationship of an infant with both parents, but the paternal bond is not often studied on its own. This is important in demonstrating why adequate leave policies are important for both parents,

not just mothers. Studies of marital satisfaction and happiness in relationships that benefit from paid leave would also serve as vital to this argument. To further support the call for these changes, research must be done into the practicality of offering paid leave. This includes topics such as the economic and political impacts of offering paid parental leave. Methods to support single mothers and fathers should also be explored. This research focuses on two-parent households in the U.S., yet those are becoming rarer. Therefore, it is important to observe what barriers there are to working single parents and seek solutions to remedy them. Parents who do not have a partner to share responsibility with are in a uniquely difficult situation and should have equal opportunities and access to paid leave. This research is also limited in that it refers entirely to heterosexual biological parents. With increases in LGBTQ couples who are adopting children or having them through other methods, considerations must be made about how they are to take parental leave.

The impacts of Covid on parental involvement in child-rearing and on flexibility of work patterns are not studied in this research but are an important piece of this argument. To dive deeper into how the Covid pandemic has impacted the roles of both fathers and mothers is an important topic of future research. Covid has greatly contributed to the way in which parents interact with their children and divide responsibilities in the home, and has shaped parental roles compared to what they were before. Further research into how this interacts with the need for parental leave would greatly contribute to the argument for more adequate leave policies.

The importance of this work lies in the recognition of the workplace as a central structure for American families. If adequate policies are not offered for both mothers and fathers, the journey toward gender equality is halted. Families must work, and cannot escape the sexism demonstrated through limited paternal leave. The impact of this issue extends beyond parents

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themselves – whether or not a woman is a mother, she is impacted by the possibility that she could become one. Her career progress is closely tied to the progress of her female peers, whether or not she chooses to have children. Similarly, attitudes toward fatherhood often become attitudes toward masculinity overall. Men who are taught that they should not and cannot take leave for their children are also taught that being a man means being a worker. Men who become “workaholics” may not be at fault, but are the result of a culture that has taught them that work is their purpose. These attitudes are inexplicably difficult to escape, yet it is possible through the establishment of fair and adequate parental leave policies.

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