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# Parental Leave Usage By Fathers And Mothers At An American University

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## PARENTAL LEAVE USAGE BY FATHERS AND MOTHERS AT AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

*While many U.S. research universities now offer gender neutral family friendly policies, very few are what might be considered “father friendly.” Campus cultures rarely encourage men to access these policies, or do so reluctantly because some campus actors believe men will use parental leave time for their research instead of for childcare. We employ quantitative and qualitative data to compare the parental leave experiences of men and women faculty at a large research university. In doing so, we assess whether the allegation that men take unfair advantage parental leave is true at a large research university. We find that it is not. In our sample, relatively few men take paid leave. Those who do take it, however, have partners who work full-time. Importantly, we find that among those taking parental leave, both fathers and mothers report engaging in care as well as some degree of ongoing research activity. Men and women faculty alike report that the cessation from teaching and service obligations provided by parental leave allows them to maintain a modicum of their research agenda despite caring for an infant. We also analyze what the other primary predictors of leave-taking are for faculty, and find that women and men engaged in science and math disciplines are among the least likely to use their paid leave benefits upon having a child. We conclude with a discussion of the merits of paternity and maternity leave and discuss how parental leave policy might be best formulated.*

**Keywords:** caregiving, faculty, family policy, gender, parental leave

Men's engagement in caregiving reflects a contradictory and complex terrain, in which men's economic provisioning remains essential for being perceived as good fathers, even as there are greater calls for men's integration into caregiving (Latshaw, 2011; Miller, 2010; Schreffler et al., 2011; Townsend, 2002; Winslow, 2005). As Miller

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(2010, p. 276) argues, new fathers engage more in caring practices than previous generations of men, although these are “juggled, balanced, and fitted in around work demands.” At the same time, men’s caregiving reflects both the preferences of their partners, and how much (or more usually, little) support employers give to men who wish to provide care (McKay & Doucet, 2010).

We consider how men reconcile employment with parenthood, comparing faculty fathers and mothers, and particularly focusing on whether and when fathers take advantage of paid parental leave. Previous research suggests that men are less likely to take gender-neutral parental leave (Drago & Colbeck, 2003; Kaufman et al., 2010), although this may be conditioned by their family context, in part because these leaves might disadvantage them at work. Yet leave-taking may have somewhat different connotations for academics than for other workers: parental leaves may be considered to be akin to “sabbatical”—leaves that allow faculty to focus on research.

Indeed, there are both anecdotal accounts of faculty men’s misuse of parental leave to work on their research, and some research that suggests this may be true (Rhoads, 2004; Rhoads & Rhoads, 2012). In nationally-representative research, Rhoads and Rhoads (2012, p. 28) argue that “we should seriously consider restricting paid post-birth leaves in academia to women,” further noting:

During the course of our research on institutional policies, we heard stories of male academics who took paid post-birth leave in order to advance their publishing agendas. One top university had to change its rules in an effort to minimize this behavior. Some assistant professors were taking leave even though their wives didn’t have jobs. Another had taken leave while his child was in full-time day care. (p. 12)

We use multiple methods to explore the usage of paid parental leave by men and women at one large, public, research-intensive university. We evaluate which men and women faculty use leave benefits, how they use their leave time and what the correlates of parental leave use are. Ours is one of the only studies to analyze the correlates of leave-taking while taking into account the faculty member’s domestic partner’s work/caregiving arrangements at the time of leave. Our results speak to the growing literature on fathering and the division of childcare between men and women as well as parental leave benefits in the workplace, specifically in the university setting.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Parental Leave Policy and Men’s Use of Leave**

Feminist scholarship in organizations has questioned the characterization of modern American workplaces as gender-neutral institutions (Acker, 1990). Historically dominated by men, the schedule and work demands expected of today’s worker still implicitly assume a workforce that lacks family constraints and is supported by stay-at-home spouses (Currie, Thiele, & Harris, 2002; Gatta & Roos, 2004; Williams, 2000; Haas and Hwang, 2009; Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010). Yet, most mothers have entered the labor force and fathers are increasing their child-rearing participation (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2007), causing that assumption to become in-

creasingly out of step with reality. Some countries and some employers have enacted work-family policies aimed at helping parents balance between caregiving and paid employment, allowing them to venture outside the restrictive bounds of the “ideal worker” (Kelly, 1999; Kelly & Dobbin, 1999; Kelly et al., 2010; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Morgan, 2009).

Among wealthy countries, the U.S. ranks last, along with Australia, with zero weeks of federally legislated paid parental leave (Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Kaufman et al., 2010; Thévenon, 2011). Most leave policies are gender-neutral; however, owing to persisting gender norms about parenting and gender pay differences, mothers are the predominant users, although the higher the income replacement, the more likely that men take leave (O’Brien, 2009). Studies have suggested that fathers taking longer parental leaves are later more likely to be involved in childcare (Pleck, 1993; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007). In order to foster greater father involvement in families, some countries have amended parental leave policies so as to reserve some time for fathers only, and fathers are far more likely to take leave under these conditions (Armenia & Gerstel, 2006; Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Haas & Hwang, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Moss & Kamerman, 2009). For example, Swedish fathers receive two non-transferable months of leave (Haas & Hwang, 2009), which has resulted in a dramatically increased father leave-taking rate (Klinth, 2009). In Canada, only Quebec offers non-transferable paid paternity leave while the rest of the provinces offer gender-neutral leave. As a result, 82 percent of Québécois fathers use leave compared to only 12 percent of fathers in the rest of the provinces (McKay & Doucet, 2010).

Within the United States, the 1993 federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) legislated employee eligibility for up to twelve weeks a year of unpaid leave for care. In practice, few American men take more than a week of leave upon a birth or adoption, and those most likely to utilize FMLA are disproportionately middle-class, married women who can afford to take unpaid leave (Gerstel & Armenia, 2009; Han & Waldfogel, 2003; Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Kaufman et al. (2010) document that many American men use vacation days for parental leave, and relatively few recognize that they are eligible for FMLA. Han and Waldfogel (2003) note that American men’s unpaid leave taking did not change after FMLA. However, many workplaces have introduced family-friendly benefits such as parental leave to their salaried, professional employees; half of private sector medium and large American firms offer partially-paid family leave (Bond, Galinsky, Kim, & Brownfield, 2005).

### **Parental Leave in the Academy**

Faculty face challenges based on the unique structure of academic work. Although the flexible nature of academic work has the potential to foster work-family balance, academia may fit best within Coser’s (1974) formulation of the “greedy institution,” making excessive demands of its members, with a particular tendency to override the boundary between work and personal arenas. The timing of academic careers pits the greedy institution of academia against the similarly greedy institution of the family. Most faculty do not complete their doctoral and post-doctoral educations until their early to mid-thirties, a life stage during which many are also forming families (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004a, 2004b; Mason & Goulden, 2004a, 2004b; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009).

Faculty therefore confront a double work-family bind—at the same time that many face intensive caregiving needs in the home, they may also be facing high productivity expectations in the workplace to earn tenure within the first six years of employment. Childbearing is a major factor behind why women faculty are more likely than men to leave the academy, shift to contingent positions, and take longer to be promoted (Goulden, Frasch, & Mason, 2009; Jacobs, 2004; Mason & Goulden, 2004a; Wolfinger et al., 2009). Research suggests that faculty fathers are privileged in the academia, able to advance professionally while facing few obstacles to family formation aspirations (Drago & Colbeck, 2003; Mason & Goulden, 2004a, 2004b; Wolfinger et al., 2009). Yet it is worth noting that faculty men report similar or even higher levels of work-family conflict than women do (American Council for Education, 2005; Philipsen & Bostic, 2010; Williams, 2010).

Across American universities, leave policies have also been increasingly adopted; paid maternity leave is granted by a majority of universities, although often on a six-week basis during pregnancy (Center for the Education of Women, 2007). Almost 30% offer a full semester of paid leave to mothers (CEW, 2007). Faculty men are less likely to have access to paid leave, or receive only very short leaves; paternity leave appears to be most available at public universities (Raabe, 1997).

We might expect that men faculty will be more inclined to take paid leave because it is not transferable to their partners, in effect making it the kind of use-it-or-lose-it policy that has been so successful at the country level. Yet, studies have shown that few academic mothers and even fewer academic fathers take advantage of paid leave (Drago & Colbeck, 2003; Drago, Crouter, Wardell, & Willits, 2001). Faculty underutilization of family benefits is driven in large part by bias avoidance and fear of discrimination (Armenti, 2004; Drago et al., 2001; Fothergill & Feltey, 2003; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011). This is more pronounced among men, who are expected to fit the “ideal worker” prototype even more rigidly than women. As Raabe (1997, p. 213) argues “even when such opportunities are technically available, there frequently are cultural constraints on their use by men.” Research finds that a lack of role models, discouraging chairs and colleagues, and inflexible institutional expectations for productivity limit faculty’s sense of agency in taking parental leave (O'Meara & Campbell). Such constraints are likely to be worse for male faculty who have fewer father role models for work-life balance and policy use (Sallee, 2011). Benefits may be underutilized due to faculty concerns over how usage might impact their tenure and promotion,<sup>1</sup> as well as institutional inertia in the communication of such policies (Mason, Stacy, Goulden, Hoffman, & Frasch, 2005). Low usage may reflect lack of need, at least among some populations. Although many academic men are increasingly involved in parenting and childcare, many more men than women in the academy have partners who take a large role in childcare. Given this and the relatively recent introduction of parental leave at many universities, it may be some time before faculty begin to see parental caregiving leave as their right rather than a privilege.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Such concerns are not unfounded, given a recent ruling by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission finding the University of California-Santa Barbara at fault for denying a faculty member tenure after taking parental leave (Jaschik, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Over time since leave-taking policies were implemented, fathering has taken a prominent po-

## Controversies Around Paternity Leave

Political opposition to men's leave-taking focuses primarily on how it could negatively impact work performance and productivity (Haas & Hwang, 2010; Pajumets, 2010), as well as how it might disadvantage fathers in their careers (Fried, 1998; Haas & Hwang, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2010; Pajumets, 2010; McKay & Doucet, 2010).<sup>3</sup> Haas and Hwang (2009) note that while Swedish workplaces have become more supportive of men's caregiving, the majority of private-sector workplaces still report that co-workers and managers do not react positively to fathers taking leave.

Yet, another controversy focuses on concerns that men may abuse leave. For example, a small Swedish study of long-term paternity leave-takers found that while most men do the primary childcare, about 20% of them did not (Chronholm, 2002). An OECD (2005) report notes that men concentrate their parental leaves around summer and holidays, leading one author to conclude that "Swedish fathers tend to use parental leave more for leisure time than for being involved in childcare" (Buckler, 2007, p. 14).

Similar suspicions have also been raised regarding faculty men's use of leave. Ironically, however, men's opting out of childcare on their parental leave is looked upon as a strategy to get *more* work done rather than to enjoy more leisure time. Rumors and anecdotes about men "childcare shirkers," who use leave to conduct research rather than provide care, are common in the academy (for example, see Center for WorkLife Law, 2011; Truitt, 2011; and Williams, 2010). While research has shown that some faculty fathers are deeply invested in care (Marotte et al., 2011), fathers taking leave are likely to face greater suspicion than mothers.

Based on studies showing childcare gaps between men and women faculty working fulltime (Astin & Milem, 1997; Mason & Goulden, 2004a; Sutor, Mecom, & Feld, 2001; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Misra, Templer, & Lundquist, 2012), some argue that allowing men equal leave time may reinforce, rather than reduce, gender inequality in the university by allowing men additional time to devote to research (Rhoads & Rhoads, 2012).

Only one project has included a measure of parental leave-taking when analyzing men and women faculty's caregiving behaviors relative to their spouse's caregiving hours (Rhoads, 2004; Rhoads & Rhoads, 2012). Yet this study measures caregiving hours at time of survey rather than at time of leave-taking. The research shows that faculty men who took leave are later more involved in care than men who did not; but that they remain less involved in care than faculty women (Rhoads, 2004). The researchers also find an insignificant interaction between gender and leave-taking in predicting current childcare hours. This indicates that *there is no statistically significant difference* between men and women leave takers in childcare hours, though the authors

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sition in Swedish definitions of manhood, including a newfound belief that father leave is a universal right (Holter, 2007; Rostgaard, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in Sweden prior to the 1995 passage of the men's quota leave, a study showed that 69% of Swedish companies believed that men taking parental leave would cause lower profits and difficulty finding replacement workers for men's highly specialized positions (Haas & Hwang, 1995).

conclude just the opposite (Rhoads & Rhoads, 2012). As a result of their interpretation, they conclude that paternity leave unfairly advantages men and suggest that biological and evolutionary explanations should be considered when studying gender roles caregiving.

### **Theoretical Expectations**

Based on our review of the literature, we have a number of theoretical expectations. First, we expect men to be less likely than women to take paid parental leave, in part due to bias avoidance behaviors (Drago et al., 2001). Secondly, we also expect that men will be more likely to take leave if their partners are working full-time (Lammi-Taskula, 2008; McKay & Doucet, 2010). Finally, we explore assertions of *how* men and women faculty use their care leave, to determine whether, in fact, “childcare shirkers” are evident.

Our study improves on previous research in a number of ways. Broadly speaking, most of the existing literature documenting men’s use of leave has focused on countries where paid parental leave for men is universally available. This paper provides a different perspective, offering a national backdrop where paid parental leave is workplace specific and where very few men take leave even when it is available. Specifically, our unique contribution within that setting is that we analyze the work-care arrangements of the partner *at the time when* the faculty member took (or did not take) paid leave. We also use a variety of methods, including surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews to assess the activities men and women reported engaging in *at the time* they were on parental leave in order to assess how the leave-taking experiences of men and women compare. Our goal is to understand whether men and women faculty approach leave differently from one another.

### **SAMPLE AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

For the past decade, the university under study has granted a full semester of paid parental leave upon a birth or adoption of a child to both men and women faculty.<sup>4</sup> University policy describes parental leave as intended to “be for the purpose of caring for, or preparing for the arrival of, the child.” While it stipulates that “members who are on such a leave may not engage in additional salaried employment,” it does not make other requirements, except that faculty members who take a paid leave must return to the university for at least one year of employment following the leave.

Data were collected as part of a larger study focused on understanding work-life balance on campus. Our study uses a mixed methods approach, with surveys, focus group interviews, and qualitative one-on-one interviews. The one-on-one interviews were conducted in 2006-2007. Survey data were collected in December 2008 and February 2009, through a web-based survey, as well as a paper survey sent through campus mail.

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<sup>4</sup> Faculty who must care for a sick or elderly family member are also granted the same access to paid leave, though we do not study those leaves here, as they tend to last for shorter periods. Those qualifying for parental leave are tenure stream and senior lecturer faculty who had a child since the policy was put in place.



It was stressed that faculty participate in the survey only once. Three hundred and forty-nine faculty completed surveys.<sup>5</sup> Sixty-five faculty members also participated in focus group luncheons in April of 2009, which included non-tenure line faculty, assistants and associates, as well as parents and nonparents alike, who were invited to participate through an email sent out to all university faculty. In the focus groups, faculty discussed their challenges regarding work-life balance and the types of programs, services, and/or other support that would help most in terms of navigating work-life balance. We did not collect demographic statistics from each of the focus group participants but we did collect such information from our qualitative sample and our survey population. Tables 1 and 2 describe the two samples.

Table 1  
*Qualitative Interview Sample Descriptive Statistics (N = 22)*

Demographic Characteristics	Percentages
Women	77
STEM	23
2+ children	73
<i>Rank at interview</i>	
Lecturer	14
Assistant	36
Associate	36
Full	14

Our qualitative interview sample is comprised of 22 faculty parents, 17 women and 5 men. Five interviewees work in the STEM disciplines and most have two or more children. The majority of the faculty we interviewed were either assistant or associate professors, although we also interviewed three full professors and three lecturers.

Our survey analyses focus on the 71 births to faculty members that qualified for paid parental leave in the survey sample (since paid leave for caregiving). Table 2 shows summary statistics for the independent variables we use in the quantitative analyses: gender, age, discipline, race, rank, number of children, and spousal care arrangements. Since the paid leave policy had only been in place for seven years when this survey was collected, the number of births occurring during the parental leave period is small, with only 71 births (out of a sample of 349 respondents). Table 2 shows that this subgroup of recent parents consists of half men and half women, and that the average age at last birth was 37 years old. The gender variable is dichotomous (0 = men, 1 = women) and we measure age both continuously in years as an age-squared term to capture nonlin-

<sup>5</sup> This was a 30 percent response rate (out of 1,163 faculty), which is average for a web-based survey (Shih & Fan, 2008). Although seven hundred and twenty faculty started the survey only three hundred and forty-nine completed it. There was no incentive provided for faculty to take the (lengthy) survey beyond their desire to contribute to the study.

Table 2

*Survey Sample Descriptive Statistics: Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations*  
(N = 71)

Independent Variables	Percentages/Mean (Standard deviations)
Women	51% (.50)
Age at birth	37.2 (3.9)
Age-squared	1398.9 (307.1)
STEM	44% (.50)
White	85% (.36)
First child	48% (.50)
<i>Rank as of birth</i>	
Lecturer	6% (.23)
Assistant (comparison category)	53% (.50)
Associate	35% (.48)
Full	6% (.23)
<i>Partner arrangements after birth</i>	
Partner worked full-time (comparison category)	48% (.50)
Partner had a temporary leave	27% (.45)
Partner was homemaker/worked part-time	25% (.44)

earity. We use a dichotomous variable to measure faculty discipline (STEM = 1 indicates Engineering, Math, Life Sciences, and Physical Sciences clusters, whereas STEM = 0 indicates all remaining discipline) to account for the fact that the STEM disciplines tend to be composed primarily of men. For race we use a dichotomous measure for whether the faculty member is white or non-white (0 = non-white, 1 = white). Most of the sample (85%) is white. We do not break non-white faculty into specific ethnic groups due to small sample size. About half of the births among the respondents in the sample are first births (0 = 2nd or higher birth, 1 = 1st birth). We see that 53% of recent births occur among assistant professors and 35% occur among associates. Very few full professors or senior lecturers had children during this period. Each of these variables are measured dichotomously, and in the regression that follows assistant faculty parents are the reference category for comparison to the other ranks.

Given our theoretical expectations, we are most interested in how gender and the partner's work/care arrangements at the time of birth and adoption shape leave-taking behavior, controlling for other factors, such as age and rank. Our quantitative analysis uses logistic regression, a generalized linear model used to predict the probability of an occurrence when the outcome variable is dichotomous rather than continuous, to predict the probability that the faculty member took a parental leave.

## RESULTS

We organize our presentation of results by theme rather than by method. Thus, we integrate our quantitative survey data results with qualitative data from the interviews,

focus groups and open-ended sections of the survey data in order to explicate and deepen our findings as a whole.

### Opting to Take a Parental Leave: What Are the Predictors?

Table 3 divides the survey's independent variables by whether or not the faculty member took a paid parental leave. We note where differences between the two groups are statistically different from one another in the leave-taker column.

To begin with, a small majority (61%) of eligible faculty in our sample utilized the paid leave benefit. This appears to be a higher percentage than what other studies have documented (Drago & Colbeck, 2003; Drago et al., 2001; Mason et al., 2005), perhaps because awareness & support of the policy on campus is high. Indeed, a recurring theme in our interviews, particularly among women faculty, was that their departments openly encouraged their decisions to take parental leave, although there were some notable exceptions. Many described a family friendly climate, a "culture of welcoming parents with children." The role of the department chair figured strongly in these accounts. One faculty woman recounted the day she went to her chair's office to inform her of her pregnancy:

Table 3

*Survey Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables by Dependent Variable Categories: Percentages, Means and Standard Deviations (N = 71)*

Independent Variables	Leave-taker (61%) N = 43	Non-Leave-taker (39%) N = 28
Women	72% (.45)***	18% (.39)
Age at birth	37.5 (4.4)	37% (3.7)
Age-squared	1422.1 (337)	1383.8 (289.1)
STEM	26% (.45)***	71% (.46)
White	84% (.36)	86% (.41)
First child	56% (.50)***	36% (.48)
<i>Rank as of birth</i>		
Lecturer	5% (.21)	7% (.26)
Assistant (comparison category)	56% (.50)	50% (.51)
Associate	37% (.49)	32% (.48)
Full	2% (.15)	11% (.32)
<i>Partner arrangements after birth</i>		
Partner worked full-time (comparison category)	63% (.17)**	25% (.25)
Partner had a temporary leave	30% (.20)	21% (.42)
Partner was homemaker or worked part-time	7% (.24)***	54% (.51)

*Note:* If marked in the leave-taker column, the difference between leave-takers and non-leave-takers is statistically significant \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

She gave me this big hug, and said, "Oh we're so happy. It will be our baby." It was just wonderful. "Let me know what you need, and here's how to file the papers, and make sure you ask for delayed tenure position here."

While most accounts described supportive departmental colleagues, like the interviewee who said her colleagues were "coming out of the woodwork saying 'I'll teach your class to help you finish the semester,'" or the woman who described her colleagues sitting her down saying "you must take leave, you will never have this time with your baby again," not all were. In the open ended section of the survey, a woman commented on the contrast between family-friendly policies and on-the-ground cultural acceptance for such practices:

I am grateful for all that the university has done to help with balancing family and work responsibilities. At the same time, I remain frustrated over the lack of encouragement I received to take family leave.

Another female faculty member echoed this sentiment during an interview, describing a gap between stated acceptance and behavioural acceptance:

At the same time, I also feel like there's this — you know, sort of the way they act and what they say is really supportive and I really appreciate that but I also feel like when the time comes, I hand in my annual faculty report and say I was on maternity leave, I will be evaluated more negatively, or less favourably because I was not productive this year and I don't know what to make of that.

Describing how her male departmental chair encouraged her to take the parental leave despite perceived resistance from her colleagues, a faculty woman said her chair told her that her colleagues would "forget how annoyed they were" with her by the time she got back.

This sentiment may have particular ramifications for men faculty, who are not traditionally associated with caregiving in the immediate aftermath of a birth. As such, they may be more harshly judged for taking leave than women. Perhaps that is why our data show that many more women than men take parental leave. In our survey, 72 percent of all leave-takers are women while 82% of all *non*-leave-takers are men. In our interviews, all of the women took parental leaves while half of the men did not. The interviews provide some rich insight into the factors predicting whether men take parental leave.

The men who did not take parental leave each expressed concern about negative consequences of doing so. One worried what his colleagues might think and how it could have impacted his career as a non-tenured assistant professor at the time. Noting that there was no one in his department who had gone through the process of having a baby, he said:

Politically, I don't know how the other people in this department feel.... So I personally was afraid of being away from my work too much, and ... there is always more work I could be doing.

In retrospect, he wished he had taken leave for his family's sake and expressed regret over the decision. Another male faculty member said that he felt pressure to remain at work since his program had been operating at a faculty deficit for some time, adding also that, as a man, he didn't "want to be perceived as milking the system." Another man, concerned about colleague's perceptions if he took the leave, described cobbling together a shift-work arrangement with his wife.

Yet, the two faculty men in our interview who took leave were quite comfortable doing so. One said, "I just assumed I would take it. I had a conversation with my chair about when to take it. But I didn't think of it as—I just thought it was fine." Married to a partner who works full time, he said the leave had "saved his life," describing it:

I mean, just having a new baby is so hard in so many different ways and um...That semester everything would have been so much harder.... Maybe it's taken for granted but I really appreciate that it's the fathers, too. Because society sends a lot of sometimes subtle, sometimes not subtle messages that moms are the real parents, and the dads, too, are really important.

Table 3 shows that another factor associated with not taking leave is STEM affiliation, which is dominated by male faculty. Only 26 percent of STEM faculty took leave, compared to 61 percent of all faculty. In a focus group discussion of parental leave, one female STEM faculty noted that "gaps in research are looked at negatively by my peers" while another STEM female interviewee said she was the first woman hired in many years and the first in her department to have a baby. STEM interviewees were more likely to describe a "child-free" environment in their cultures. One scientist described how none of her colleagues knew anything about the university's parental leave policy, noting that her department emits a definite message of bias against caregiving.

Returning to the survey results in Table 3, neither race nor rank of faculty members is associated with taking paid leave. However, more than half of leave-takers are on their first birth, while non-leave-takers are more often on their second (or higher) birth. Faculty may feel more comfortable taking a paid leave for their first child than for subsequent children; the qualitative data suggests that taking a second parental leave may be seen as less acceptable. One focus group participant, for example, described how a male colleague was pressured not to take a parental leave for his second child (as he had for his first). Another interviewee noted that while she had taken a leave for her first child, she did not feel comfortable taking it for her second. She wondered aloud how much worse the pressure she felt from her department would have been if she had taken it.

At the bottom of Table 3 we also examine significant differences between leave-takers and non-leave-takers in our survey data with respect to the partner support they have in the home.<sup>6</sup> The survey question for this variable was worded "For each child

<sup>6</sup> All sample members in this analysis were partnered at birth except for two women faculty. Rather than dropping them from the analysis, we coded their partner arrangements as working full-time. Since we are primarily interested in how partner support correlates to whether one takes a paid parental leave, we believe this recoding is a proxy for lack of support they receive with care arrangements.

you have raised, please indicate partner's arrangements made to adjust workload," and respondents were asked to write in the details of these arrangements. We coded the responses into three mutually exclusive categories: partner continued working full-time; partner received a temporary (paid or unpaid) leave from their work; or partner was a homemaker or worked part-time.<sup>7</sup> We defined temporary leave as stints lasting longer than three weeks. (Faculty who are partnered with another faculty member at the same institution are eligible for paid leave during the same semester or in back-to-back semesters.) Some faculty spouses made subtle adjustments to their work schedules even though they are still coded as full-time in our measures (for example, two reported that their spouses, though still working full-time, were able to reduce some of their workload). A few other faculty members discussed how their partners juggled their full-time schedules by working some days at home or working weekends and nights in order to help provide care. Table 3 shows that a majority (63%) of leave-takers have partners who were working full-time in the aftermath of the birth, whereas only a quarter of non-leave-taker partners were working full-time. About equal numbers of both groups had partners with a temporary work leave. And while almost no leave-takers had partners at home full-time or part-time, over half of non-leave-takers did. Most faculty take leave according to their partner's work situation; very few faculty ( $N = 3$ ) take leave when they have a spouse who is a homemaker or part-time worker. And, some faculty ( $N = 7$ ) opt out of taking a paid leave even without full-time or part-time support in the home.

Is a faculty member who takes parental leave despite having a partner at home evidence of the male childcare shirker? In our focus groups, concern was sometimes expressed about this unintended consequence of gender-neutral parental leave. When asked to identify work-family challenges at the university in the focus groups, one group of faculty wrote, "Parental leave policies can be used by the non-primary caregiver as time to research." In another focus group a faculty member declared, "Male faculty should get to take paternity leave only if they are going to be the primary care giver. They should have to sign a statement verifying that." Later, the following exchange occurred between a man and two women regarding family leave:

Woman 1: [There] should be some way to make sure only primary caregivers can take parental leave. I don't want to gender it but ... normally women are the primary caregivers.

Man: In my case I took parental leave as the primary caregiver. My wife is an engineer and only had two weeks off after our child was born.

Woman 2: You are an exception. I am in [X department]. The men I see taking parental leave sit in their office and do research...

Leave-taking mothers in our sample were not immune from suspicions of shirking. A faculty member described her interaction with a childless colleague who insinuated

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<sup>7</sup> We combine part-time working partners with full-time homemaker partners because there were only two part-time working partners.

that parental leave gave her an unfair advantage. The colleague told her that she wished she could have a maternity leave too so that she could “get all sorts of stuff done.” Another woman described how her chair advised her against stopping her tenure clock on top of taking a parental leave, under the premise that it was unfair to the other untenured professors. According to her chair, parental leaves were synonymous with research sabbaticals. But, generally, men bear the brunt of suspicions around parental leave, largely because it is assumed that they are likely to have a stay at home wife. One interviewee raised the potential of abuse of the policy by men, noting that: “Some people could take it and use it to have more time on their research and not actually do anything, you know, if they had stay at home spouses doing all the childcare.”

To get at this frequently-raised concern, we separate the statistics shown as the bottom of Table 3 by gender. Figure 1 shows a bar chart comparing the spousal arrangements across leave-taker women, leave-taker men, non-leave-taker women, and non-leave-taker men. When breaking these groups into gendered subgroups, the *N*s become quite small, particularly for leave-taker men (*N* = 12) and non-leave-taker women (*N* = 5).

With these caveats in mind, the top two bars of leave-takers show that the three faculty “childcare shirkers” who enjoy the support of homemaker/part-time spouses *are all women*, not men. Thus, at least within our survey sample, there appears to be no instance of men taking leave when they already have a partner who is primarily at home.

For these three women, it is also important to remember that, despite the potential for gender neutrality in childcare provision, pregnancy, labor, and lactation still fall exclusively within the biological realm of women (none of these women were adoptive mothers). Some of the women interviewees described physical challenges during their pregnancies, with one faculty member bedridden for most of her pregnancy; others described the intensive demands of breastfeeding and lengthy mental and physical post-partum recoveries. These scenarios raise the potential for a further nuancing of current gender-neutral parental leave policies in order to take biological contingencies into account.

One way that men faculty leave-takers do appear to be more advantaged than women leave-takers in Figure 1 is that 50 percent of them have a partner whose respective workplace also granted them temporary leave, compared to only 23 percent of female faculty leave-takers. In terms of lowest post-birth partner support, which we measure as full-time partner employment, 50 percent of leave-taker fathers and 68% of leave-taker mothers have a partner in the full-time labor force. Moving to the bottom two bars showing partner support for non-leave-taking faculty, we see that most of these men (61%) have support at home, with a part-time or full-time homemaker partner. Yet, four out of the five non-leave-taking women have partners who were also employed full-time. Among non-leave-taking men, only 13 percent (*N* = 3) of non-leave-taking men have a spouse who was also employed full-time. One of our interviewees who opted out of parental leave despite having a wife who was unable to take a parental leave noted that they each shared childcare shifts in order to avoid putting their newborn in fulltime day care:

So we felt, if it [daycare] was 40 hours a week, I think I might have looked into the leave a little bit more. I wouldn't want a child in daycare that much and kind of, 24

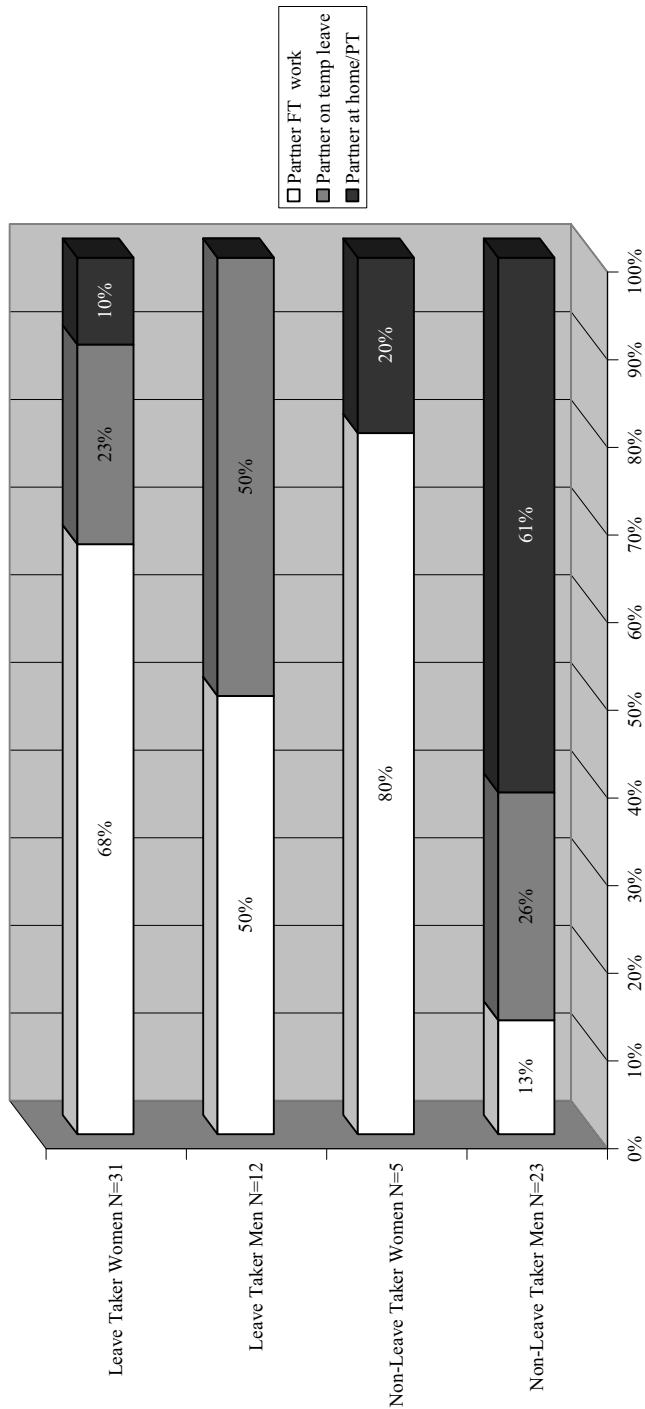


Figure 1. Partner Arrangements upon Birth among Faculty Eligible for Parental Leave.



hours a week really isn't, a little over half of 40, so this is okay, we are okay with this.

Although he describes being satisfied with this arrangement here, he later reflects on his decision not to take the parental leave with some regret:

I think it is unfortunate, too, because I think it would be best, honestly, I think it would be best for our family, for you know raising our daughter that we are spending the majority of our time with her as opposed to a daycare provider.

Another faculty described how he rearranged his schedule after being unable to take paternity leave due to limitations on when it can be taken:

Well, we moved all my teaching into the night.... We had kids going in every which direction.... So between my wife and I, we bounced kids around to neighbors.... And then going home with a baby, still, my wife never breastfed, in fact with all the kids I did the night feedings just to give her a break, she was home during the day.... I was sleeping for two to three hours at a time.

The figure also shows that 26 percent of non-leave-taking men have a partner who received a temporary parental leave, compared to none of the comparison women faculty who opted out of leave. In sum, Figure 1 indicates that most men do not take leave largely because their partner provides childcare. Most women take a leave regardless of their partner arrangements. Among those few men who do take a leave, evidence shows that none had a homemaker or even part-time partner at the time.

In order to see how parental leave-taking is impacted by the simultaneous presence of the control variables shown in the tables, we next model a logistic regression predicting whether the faculty member took a paid or opted out upon the birth of their child. Table 4 shows the results of the regression. For each covariate we list the unstandardized coefficient ( $b$ ), the standard error ( $SE$ ), the unstandardized coefficient transformed into an odds ratio ( $e^b$ ), and the standardized coefficient ( $std\ b$ ) for comparability.

Many of the significant relationships from Table 4 hold even in the presence of the controls. Compared to faculty fathers, mothers are eight times more likely to take a leave. There is also a marginally significant negative effect showing that faculty in STEM are 75 percent less likely than other faculty to take paid leave upon a birth. Age and race have no association with whether or not a faculty member takes parental leave. Although first births were more common among leave-takers in the descriptive tabulations, the statistical significance of that effect disappears with other controls. We also find a marginal negative effect of being a full professor on the likelihood of taking a parental leave; compared to assistant professors, full professors are far less likely to take a paid leave when they have a child (a 96% reduced odds). The coefficient signs for lecturers and associates are also negative, but their difference from assistant professors is not statistically significant. As previously, there were no gender interactions for any of these rank covariates.

Finally, we evaluate the coefficients for partner support in the home: whether the partner a) was a full-time or part-time homemaker or b) received a temporary leave, rel-

Table 4

*Logistic Regression Predicting If Faculty Member Took Paid Parental Leave (N = 71)*

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Std b</i>
Women	2.13**	0.86	8.39**	1.07**
Age at birth	0.44	1.42	1.56	1.75
Age-squared	0.00	0.02	1.00	-1.05
STEM	-1.41+	0.81	0.25+	-0.70+
White	1.10	1.18	3.02	0.40
First child	0.82	0.77	2.27	0.41
<i>Rank</i>				
Lecturer	-2.48	1.72	0.08	-0.58
Assistant (comparison)				
Associate	-0.51	0.97	0.60	0.25
Full	-3.22+	1.75	0.04+	-0.75+
<i>Partner arrangements after birth</i>				
Partner worked full-time (comparison)				
Partner was homemaker or worked part-time	-2.91**	1.04	0.05**	-1.28**
Partner had a temporary leave	0.29	0.92	1.34	0.13

*Note:* If marked in the leave-taker column, the difference between leave-takers and non-leave-takers is statistically significant +  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

ative to whether the partner worked full-time after the birth/adoption of the child. The results show that having a partner temporarily at home has no bearing on whether the faculty member decided to take a parental leave. However, having a full-time or part-time homemaker for a partner (as opposed to one employed full-time) is highly associated with *not* taking a paid leave. In fact, the standardized coefficients (far right-hand column) indicate that this coefficient has the largest magnitude of any other significant coefficient in the model. Thus, even though the gender effect alone is very strong, we conclude that the most important single predictor of taking a paid leave is the lack of a homemaking partner. The obvious next step would be to examine the effect of an interaction between gender and partner support on the likelihood of taking a paid leave. However, we already know from Figure 1 that not a single man in our sample took a leave with a partner at home part-time or full-time (and only three women did). Thus, the interaction is impossible to calculate because the likelihood of a man in our sample taking a leave while having a stay-at-home or part-time working partner is 0 percent.

We tested gender interactions with each of the other variables in the model. There were no major significant interaction effects, except for a slight gender difference between men and women in birth parity, showing that men faculty are less likely than women to take a parental leave upon a higher order birth.<sup>8</sup> We were also interested to

<sup>8</sup> Our sample is too small to get a large enough number of faculty who have had more than one

see, based on the absence of a gender and STEM interaction effect, that STEM women are as unlikely to take a leave as STEM men. This suggests that there is something about informal work cultures and/or structure in the math and science disciplines that discourages family leave.

### Working During Parental Leaves

Although our results suggest that faculty men in our sample are not abusing parental leave by taking it when they have a part-time or homemaker spouse, we further analyse our qualitative data to explore what a “legitimate” parental leave constitutes in the faculty popular imagination. Our quantitative survey data is unable to get at this question but the narrative nature of our qualitative data provides a compelling lens into this question.

Every interviewee—men and women alike—reported that they engaged in substantial caregiving, but that they also stayed connected to work in some meaningful way. This is an important complexity of parental leave in need of address in the larger literature. The anger directed toward the alleged male faculty “childcare shirker” phenomenon is rooted in the belief that parental leave should be solely for childcare during a complete moratorium on any academic work life. But our interviews reveal that this is an unrealistic expectation in most cases and could ultimately defeat what makes parental leave so effective as a policy.

In the interviews, most faculty expressed concern about abandoning their mentorship of students. A cessation from teaching and service allowed them to continue mentoring their students in a way that would have otherwise fallen by the wayside. “You have this group of students that needs you,” said one faculty member upon describing how she spent time on her leave communicating with students via email. She went on to explain the absurdity of separating parental leave from student mentorship: “And students are on a long enough clock that you can’t possibly time it so that they’ve all graduated and then you have a baby and then you get them again.” “You can’t tell your students...,” a faculty man said echoing this sentiment, “to go away for a semester.” One faculty member recounts coming into campus when her son was ten days old to help her undergraduate student finish an honor’s thesis.

A repeat theme emerging from the interviews is that parental leave enables parents to take extra time with their newborn while neutralizing any associated penalties by allowing them to retain some connection to their work. In being released from teaching, this mother described how it saved her from falling too far behind in her career by working part-time about halfway through her leave:

I was able to continue mentoring my grad students and I think I had honors students during those times too, so continuing helping them with their honors theses and con-

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birth after paid leave benefits came into effect. It is therefore unclear whether this interaction effect reflects a stronger stigma for men than women of taking a second leave (as our focus group findings might suggest), or something else related to the timing of first births occurring before the policy was implemented.

tinuing the data collection and plans and whatever things were in the works. I was able to keep things going.... I don't think I started anything new, but I was able to keep things going during that time.

Like students, research projects and grants have lifespans that do not halt during a parental leave. Most of our interviewees discussed how a semester release enabled them to sustain a modicum of their research and grant activity without sacrificing time with their child or vice versa. One of the men who took a leave said it gave him enough flexibility to take time with his family and not have his career "get blasted out of the water because of it." He described it this way:

Instead of taking three months where I just did nothing but childcare it was more like I had six months of working twenty hours per week which had an incredible flexibility, which was so important that I can't even begin to describe it. But it wasn't in the form of, I'm just going to not come on campus for three months. It's the type of work that I do, I just can't leave my research unattended for that long, I wouldn't want to anyway. So there was quite a bit that kept going, but it didn't mean that the leave didn't make a world of difference to our family. And my career, both.

This staying connected theme also emerged in focus group discussions. Women faculty discussed how, despite a pause in teaching and service expectations, some degree of research must continue even on maternity leave. For example, one woman said, "Family leave is a sabbatical from teaching and service, but you can't just tell graduate students, 'OK, I'm off then.' I had a colleague who put her baby in a drawer; she was back in the first week. She put bedding in a desk drawer!" As another faculty woman wrote in an open-ended response to the survey, "Even though I was on leave, I did not stop working, but worked only when the baby was asleep."

STEM faculty in our focus groups were especially attuned to the difficulty of taking leave given the funding constraints of external grant requirements. One remarked, "I can't tell NSF I'm going to take leave to go read *Good Night Moon* for four months." Another scientist said he had not taken a parental leave even though he was eligible because "What happens to grants and graduate students?" Indeed, grant requirements explain why one faculty member worked twenty hours a week during part of her parental leave:

Now I did work a little, I worked part time with both kids when I was on my leave...It was a loan repayment grant through NIH—so I had to be working 20 hours per week and I could only postpone it a certain amount of time.

We find it compelling how many of the interviewees noted that taking leave is what allowed their careers to stay afloat while being able to spend invaluable time with their child. Interestingly, from the university's perspective, faculty staying connected to their research while on leave may be a worthy investment since it keeps their productivity from falling too far behind. Two of the interviewees articulated this point especially well.

...It's one way in which I think it was a great investment on [the institution's] part cause if I had had to be in the classroom that semester then my research would have just stopped and made me much less likely to get grants... [the institution] would get its money back in indirect costs, I'm sure.

Release[ing] you from the course of teaching is a really wise investment in junior faculty ... because I don't think that a semester's release from teaching has any long term negative impact on your career where having your research take a hit ... does potentially have a negative impact on your career, which of course, then impacts your department and your university.

Competing messages about how faculty are expected to use the parental leave periods were also shared in the interviews. On the one hand, many faculty feel judgment when they admit that they do any research at all on their leaves. One of the fathers we interviewed said that the reason he did not take the parental leave was precisely because of this judgement.

So, let's say, I take the leave and then.... I still come into the office you know, a couple days a week ... then is it viewed by the other faculty as, "oh, he's just using this time so that he can get out of teaching; he can still do his research."

Yet, in practice, most faculty also received the contradictory message that they are expected to continue working during their leave. Faculty members shared stories of how their colleagues sent students and other work their way throughout the leave. One woman recalls receiving an email from a senior colleague four weeks after giving birth asking her when she would be coming back to work. Others shared stories about being asked to attend seminars, sit on committees, and go to faculty meetings during their leave. One woman was asked to teach:

One professor asked me if I could teach...a limited course, which would have been maybe four weeks. So it wouldn't have been a lot, but nevertheless it was sort of this kinda of thinking, "oh you're not teaching anything right now, could you teach this?"

Another faculty member was told:

I don't see why you can't come in 2 days a week—leave means you don't have to teach 2 courses; you still have to do other parts of your job.

A female professor, who completed a textbook while on leave, said:

But you know, there's sort of this expectation, particularly among people who had never had kids before, that "oh, well the child sleeps a large portion of the day, you can just work then" type of thing, you know? And I went into it thinking that it would be about that also. I had no idea about the whole sleeplessness and everything else that happens.

Another faculty member was pressured by her department to continue her research while on leave because it was concerned that she would not get tenure.

Here I was trying to negotiate having a new child and sleep and all that and then I was still trying to deal with getting more manuscripts out and trying to publish more and keep up with students and it was very, very stressful.... I did get several additional publications during that time, which helped, and I got tenure. But it was still not the easiest time of my life.

These comments reveal an important dimension of parental leave that has benefited both women and men faculty. The fixation on the “male care shirker” spectre may, in effect, silence a more important dialogue on how we should more realistically think about the purpose of parental leave in academia.

### DISCUSSION

Just as feminist scholarship has questioned the characterization of modern American workplaces as gender-neutral institutions, this paper extends that question to parental leave, asking whether such policies are truly gender-neutral. Before discussing the implications of our primary expectations and findings on leave-taking with regards to gender, partner arrangements in the home, and types of activities faculty report engaging in during leave, we first address the two other significant correlates of leave-taking: STEM affiliation and rank.

National studies find that the reason faculty often do not ask for leave or reduced course loads is fear of adverse career consequences (Drago & Colbeck, 2003). This perception is likely to be more acute in departmental contexts where leave-taking has not been culturally accepted. In a majority male climate, both men and women faculty may feel more intense pressure to meet the expectations of the (male) ideal worker. Workplaces composed primarily of men are more likely to foster informal cultures that discourage parental leave-taking (Haas & Hwang, 2007). Even in non-STEM departments where family friendliness was a defining characteristic in many interviewee descriptions, some faculty still expressed discomfort around their decisions to take parental leave. The interviews also showed that STEM faculty often have lab-based or other staffed projects research that operate on continuous grant funding and are therefore logistically difficult to pause for a semester.

We also found that, even controlling for other factors like age and gender, full professors are far less likely to take a parental leave than assistant professors. Although the number of faculty who had children as full professors is small to begin with, the magnitude of the effect in Table 2 is large even if its significance is marginal. It is possible that this is a cohort effect, since many full professors had their first children prior to the availability of parental leave and may feel less comfortable using the benefit. Assistant professors, on the other hand, more often come from dual career households and were hired after the policy was already in effect and thus more likely to know others who have used the policy.

We view our two most important contributions to be, first, furthering our understanding of how partner arrangements influence leave-taking among faculty parents

and, second, shedding light on what actually happens on an academic parental leave. In the first vein, we base our analysis of parental leave “need” on the work status of the faculty member’s partner *at the time of the birth/adoption*. In doing so, we find no evidence for the “male childcare shirker” stereotype. Fitting with our theoretical expectations, we find that men are far less likely to take leave than women; however, the number one predictor of men’s leave is if one’s partner is working full-time, and thus unavailable as a primary caregiver in the immediate aftermath of the birth. This echoes past findings showing that fathers are most likely to take leave when mothers do not qualify (McKay & Doucet 2010). Admittedly our sample is small, but the effects of our model attain surprisingly high significance levels for its size. Furthermore, both our qualitative and quantitative data suggest that just the opposite is likely to happen—some faculty men who need the parental leave opt out for fear of being stigmatized.

In the second vein, our analysis of men’s and women’s qualitative accounts of their activities during leave suggest that both childcare and work occurs during the leave period. Although the discourse around the male childcare shirker may force a blanket condemnation of any non-childcare work occurring during parental leave, the stories told by our interviewees reveal that this is an unrealistic and perhaps misguided expectation. In addition to being a potential investment on the part of the institution, working some (by choice, when convenient) allowed faculty to avoid abandoning work that was very important to them while at the same time pursuing family goals that were very important as well. In other work, O’Meara and Campbell (2011) found that many faculty experienced an adjustment period wherein they transitioned from their pre-children expectations for their work and productivity to their post-children expectations. Given that faculty in research universities regularly report working between 55 and 60 hours a week (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004a), this transition in expectations relates to productivity and how to balance work with new priorities takes time. Our qualitative data suggests that the parental leave period allowed faculty to ease into their new work persona and figure out how to be both the worker and parent they wanted to be before returning to work 100 percent.

## CONCLUSION

At the root of discomfiture around male leave-taking in academia is a concern for how gender neutrality may undermine advances in gender equality. Certainly if men are more likely than women to advance their scholarship during parental leave with the help of a stay-at-home partner, this is a legitimate concern. Yet, we see two important trends in our analysis. Many men who opt out of parental leave do so because they lack major caregiving responsibilities due to the support of a part-time or stay-at-home spouse. The fact that these men are not taking leave may be a good sign, indicating that the alleged “male caregiver shirker” may be more hype than reality. On the other hand, the uniform application of the “ideal worker” archetype to men generally means that the minority of men who lack caregiving supports in the home still tend to opt out of the policy. For men this is a double bind. They fear being seen as less dedicated to their work than their families; yet they simultaneously fear being accused of being childcare shirkers who are “milking the system.”

Although we find no evidence for childcare shirking in our research, it does not mean that childcare shirking never occurs. Some universities have adopted policies that spec-

ify use for primary caregiving. Harvard Law school defines the minimum qualifications of such a role: “‘Primary caregiver’ means a faculty member who is the sole caretaker of his or her newborn or newly adopted child at least 20 hours per week, from Monday through Friday, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.” (Harvard University, 2001, p. 4; Williams, 2005). Stipulating a minimum of 20 hours a week recognizes the possibility that primary parenting can be done by more than just one parent in the household. Such a policy is similar to agreements acknowledging that faculty engage in research-related activities while on sabbatical. Adopting such a policy may encourage fathers (and mothers) who need the leave to feel more comfortable taking it by reducing any associated “shirker” stigma with parental leave use.

In addition, our findings reveal an important nuance of parental leave that deserves further exploration and discussion in the academy. Regardless of gender, leave takers in our sample needed the leave to take care of their kids in the absence of a part-time/homemaker spouse as well as to stay above water in their careers while engaging in such care. All of the faculty accounts in our interviews demonstrated that doing research on leave did not give parents an unfair advantage over other faculty, but allowed them to avoid falling as far behind in their research and mentoring responsibilities as they inevitably would have if they had attempted to juggle newborn care along with teaching and committee work. The fact that so many faculty reported parental leave as being a career saver at the same time that it enabled them to be home with their baby is a clear indication that academia is, as many professional workplaces are, a “greedy institution” (Coser, 1974).

The other concern about gender neutrality and parental leave policy is the fact that childbearing differs from caregiving. Even excluding the possibility of complications stemming from pregnancy and birth or the decision to breastfeed, the normal post-partum physical and mental recovery time required of childbearing presents a different set of constraints for biological mothers than for fathers. Further policy nuancing could remedy this gender imbalance, by providing additional time to faculty who are biological mothers. Thus, men and women faculty still have the option to devote significant care time to their children, but women’s childbearing role could be recognized as an additional responsibility that only women face.

Shutting down men’s opportunities for paternity leave undermines their equal ability to nurture children. Indeed, one argument for paternity leave is that it will help to change such cultural gender norms around appropriate caregiving roles. Some research has indicated that longer leaves are associated with greater father-child involvement (Neponmyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007), and this also appears to be the case among faculty (Rhoads & Rhoads, 2012). In our qualitative data, one faculty member remarked on how the opportunity of paternity leave for her husband (also a faculty member) changed his relationship with the child:

[Paternity leave was] a really good thing, good for their relationship and good for him. He had been away so much when the other two were babies ... but he and our third child still have this, you know— she loves her daddy and they’re really close and I think that was a good thing.

Perhaps more important, extending leave to men as well as women has the potential to destigmatize leave-taking as women’s work and to reduce the possibility of an aca-



demically “mommy track.” One of the faculty men we interviewed put it this way: “... society is going to keep treating moms like they’re supposed to do it all if the policy is [only for mothers]. It’s a vicious cycle in a way; they’re [fathers] not going to do it if everybody acts like they’re not supposed to.”

As this academic father points out—it will take more than having a gender neutral policy to get fathers to take leave and to make its use equitable. Father friendly organizations will be ones where there is also informal support from co-workers and supervisors, flexibility in use of policies, and assumptions that both genders should take leave and that neither gender is more likely to be cheating the system (Haas & Hwang, 1995; Sallee, 2011). Our findings suggest that accommodations for different pressures for lab time in STEM fields, the work status of one’s partner, the physical aspects of child-birth, and the desire some faculty may have to work part-time during leave complicate the picture. Regardless, campuses that err on the side of flexibility are likely to put both men and women on track for more successful navigation and balance of both family and work priorities.

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