

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG FACULTY MOTHERS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty
of Tift College of Education
at Mercer University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Atlanta, GA

2021

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DEDICATION

In dedication to my mother, my husband, and my children:

My mother modeled for me, while pushing me to carry the baton a little further.

My husband encouraged me, seeing my potential even through my doubts and disbelief.

My children inspired me, expecting me to be just as good a student, as I expect of them.

This body of work is our collective sacrifice, for which I am forever grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My decision to return to school was not made lightly. I began my doctoral journey as a wife, mother of four children, and a full-time employee. I am grateful to every person who provided much needed support throughout the years to assist me in achieving such a lofty goal.

Thanks to my participants. I truly appreciate each of you sharing your faculty mother stories with me. I learned and laughed so much. Thank you for trusting me to share your journeys with the world.

Thanks to my dissertation committee. Dr. Larde and Dr. Morgan, I appreciate your encouragement and insight throughout this process. Dr. Carr, you were the God-appointed dissertation chair for me. When I felt challenged and my faith was low, you not only reminded me of God's truth (John 16:33), but you held my hand, so I would not let go. I am forever grateful for your patience, encouragement, thoroughness, and matured faith.

Thanks to Cohort X. I learned so much from you all. Being a part of our cohort is a point of pride for me. To laugh, learn, argue, cry, and most importantly be held accountable by some of the most brilliant minds I've encountered was an honor. I look forward to a lifetime of friendship.

Thanks to the Dream Team. Not only did we enjoy a great working relationship, but when I decided to return to school, you both proved to be more than colleagues, but rather family. Meghan, I appreciate every task/event you managed on my behalf, so I could complete schoolwork. Delia, I am grateful for all the flexibility you supported, so I could complete schoolwork. More importantly, you both believed in me through my own doubt, and for that I am truly grateful.

Thanks to my girlfriends. I am surrounded by women in constant pursuit of greatness, and it remains a motivating factor for me. Eboni, Johvanna, Shantell, Alaina, Ericka, Lauren, Sherida, Topez, Tish and Josalin—thank you for working to be the best versions of yourselves and inspiring me to do the same.

Thanks to my family. Daddy, you never doubted for a second that I could accomplish this goal or any other, and I appreciated always having your vote of confidence. Mama, you earned both of your degrees while raising children and working full-time, so I knew I could, too. The support you both provided to me, my husband and my children will always be appreciated. I am also grateful to my sisters, Renelle, Toya, CC, Raven, Mia, and Maegan for keeping me grounded throughout this process. They made sure I kept laughing, dancing, and smiling while never taking myself too seriously.

Thanks to my husband and children. Maurice, I am so grateful for our partnership throughout this process. You never kept score of all I didn't do at home while working to accomplish this goal, but rather you stood in the gap for me. You even supported me quitting my job to focus on completing my dissertation. Thank you, dear. Charis, Maurice, Jr., Caleb, and Daniel, thank you for all that you sacrificed so I could reach this goal. Especially, thanks for believing in mama and encouraging me not to quit. We did it!

Thanks to my God. I started this journey with hopes of advancing my career, but You wanted to advance my character, so You did just that. Your unfailing love comforted me through the valleys and empowered me to climb the mountains. I did not accomplish this by power nor might, but by Your spirit. Thanks for doing what only You could.

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ABSTRACT

LOZARIE HODGES RILEY

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG FACULTY MOTHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Under the direction of SHERAH B. CARR, Ph.D.

Despite women outnumbering men as doctoral degree recipients, women remain underrepresented in higher education leadership roles. Specifically, women at the childbearing age serving as faculty often face challenges such as inadequate maternity leave and family policies that impede pathways for tenure, promotion, and elevation to senior administration. As such, the aim of this study was to explore the work-life balance experiences related to maternity leave and/or family policies of female employees on the path to higher education leadership.

To address the research questions of this study, the researcher utilized narrative inquiry to capture the stories of four faculty mothers who gave birth and took a maternity leave period while working to earn tenure. Women's Ways of Knowing theory served as a framework to understand how participants made sense of their experience. Through core story creation, developed by Polkinghorne (1988) and further extended by Emden (1998), narrative analysis of the stories resulted in a narrative specific to each participant, as well as a narrative of the faculty mother work-life balance culture. Four themes emerged that offer recommendations to advance the faculty mother work-life balance experience: *Mentorship*, *Support to Return to Work After Leave*, *Advancing Leave Policies*, and *Work-Life Balance*. The findings of this study implied that faculty mothers are disadvantaged by the Family Medical Leave Act, while desiring the creation of university level leave policies specific to pregnancy and motherhood. Recommendations for future studies include qualitative and quantitative study designs.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The role of faculty is incredibly unique to the field of education and more specifically, higher education. Through Carnegie classifications, which serve as the leading framework to describe and classify U.S. institutions of higher education, research one (R1) institutions are indicative of the highest level of research. Some competing priorities for faculty employed within R1 institutions include teaching, mentoring, conducting research, and being of service to the university and community (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). According to the Council of Graduate Schools, 2017 marked the ninth year in a row that women outnumbered men as doctoral degree recipients (53%), awarded by U.S. universities (Okahana & Zhou, 2018). Despite the closing education gap between women and men, men continue to dominate university leadership. A 2013 report released by Colorado's Women's College conveyed that women hold an average of 24.53% leadership positions in higher education: 8% as full professors and 32% as chief academic officers at R1 institutions (Lennon, 2013). A more recent study conducted in 2017 by the American Council on Education revealed that only 30% of U.S. college and university presidents are female. Furthermore, females serving on institutional governing boards have remained at 30% for nearly 20 years (Bartel, 2018). Female faculty remain underrepresented in higher education leadership roles at research one universities.

Background of the Problem

The initial introduction of women into the U.S. workforce occurred in the period following the Civil War, as a means of survival for newly freed slaves. The workforce gained even more women during World War II when the drafting of men to fight the war resulted in the

vacancy of their workplace positions. While there was a need for women to work when men were away, the return of the soldiers made the presence of women in the workforce unwelcomed. Although inequitable work conditions and pay remained, nonprofit organizations, labor unions, and the feminist movement assisted in solidifying a more permanent place for women in the workforce (Shah, 2015). In the 21st century, women make up nearly half of the U.S. workforce, which has remained steady after dramatic increases during the second half of the 20th century (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

In 2013, Forbes magazine ranked Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of the social media giant, Facebook, as the sixth most powerful woman in the world—a ranking even higher than the sitting first lady received on the listing of 100 women. That same year, Sheryl Sandberg released a book entitled *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, which garnered great attention as a possible instruction manual for women who envision themselves as leaders within their respective fields. Chapter 7 of Sandberg’s book, “Don’t Leave Before You Leave,” is devoted to advising women who desire leadership roles on how to manage maternity leave and early childhood rearing, without postponing or abandoning one’s career trajectory. Sandberg (2013) wrote,

The time to scale back is when a break is needed or when a child arrives—not before, and certainly not years in advance. The months and years leading up to having children are not the time to lean back, but the critical time to lean in. (p. 95)

In other words, Sandberg advised women to not give serious consideration to plans of motherhood when making decisions regarding their career until they give birth to a child; instead, they should pursue their career even more before children. Sandberg’s bold suggestion

does not account for women who have been “leaning in” for the majority of their career. yet still struggle to reach the top tiers of leadership. The women of academia, or the female faculty and administrators within the realms of higher education, by nature of the position have most often earned doctorate degrees, prepared several publications as a result of their research, taught and mentored dynamic student bodies across disciplines, and served the university community well before “leaning out” to have children, yet they are disproportionately absent from senior leadership within higher education (Bartel, 2018).

Consider the female assistant professor who resigned from a Texas university in 2019, citing that her employer drafted a policy to limit the presence of children on campus while failing to recognize that women accounted for more than half the teaching faculty and that the new policy would disproportionately impact women. Before the introduction of the policy, the faculty member’s 10-year-old daughter walked 100 yards to the campus after school and waited in her mother’s office for 30 minutes until her father arrived to pick her up after his local hospital shift. This arrangement saved the family money, fostered independence in the child, and most importantly, allowed the female professor to continue her workday with little disruption. As an assistant professor already working 60-80 hours a week, the former university employer stated that the worry of her daughter being caught on campus after the policy’s inception was not worth the additional workplace stress (Najmabadi, 2019). This assistant professor was already leaning in, contrary to Sandberg’s suggestion.

Bartel (2018) explained that one significant barrier preventing women’s progression to the top tiers of leadership in higher education is the shared gender norm of women as caregivers in U.S. society, without adjusting workforce commonplace to create work-life balance specific to

women. Embracing the status quo prevents women from advancing to leadership roles (Hill et al., 2016). While not a simple task, crafting workplace policies that acknowledge the dual roles of women (as caregiver and employee) is necessary to advance working women beyond stagnant statistics.

Problem Statement

Pregnancy and motherhood create an inherent disparity between women and men in the workplace (Anthony, 2011; Baker, 2011; Sandberg, 2013). Specifically, women at the childbearing age, serving as faculty often encounter inadequate maternity leave and family policies that impede pathways for tenure, promotion, and elevation to senior administration (Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The problem presented within this study can be best explored within social constructivism, which is an interpretivist worldview that suggests that meaning is constructed through an individual's interactions with others, as well as through historical and cultural norms (Crotty, 1998). From a constructivism perspective, reality is not created, but constructed through our experiences. This worldview also asserts that knowledge is a constructed human product, as humans make and assign meanings with their minds. Sociologist W.I. Thomas's formulation of the Thomas theorem, "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572), supports the constructivist epistemology and encourages the exploration of constructed realities and the implications of those realities on individuals and their engagement with others. Using this paradigm, not only are women the best source of knowledge regarding their absence in the leadership realm (Belenky et al., 1986), but a woman's knowledge

perspective, or the point of view from which she generates her knowing, makes the consequences of her perspective indeed real.

In this study, it was possible to approach the problem of too few women in higher education leadership roles from several knowledge perspectives specific to women. Belenky et al.'s (1986) publication of *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* offered a theory inclusive of five knowledge perspectives that describe how women view the world and make meaning of their lives within that world. Informed by the social constructivism epistemology, Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) acknowledges that "one shapes and is shaped by one's cultural context; meaning making is both an intrapsychic and extrapsychic phenomenon" (Goldberger, 1997, p. 252), possible to express through five perspectives:

Silence, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; *received knowledge*, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own; *subjective knowledge*, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited; *procedural knowledge*, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and *constructed knowledge*, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 15)

The five perspectives that make up the Women's Ways of Knowing theory provided a lens to explore how women make sense of the world in previous studies on women in school and in the workplace (Becker, 1995; Egan, 1996), as well as in this study. This framework historicizes the path of a woman's inequity in the workplace within U.S. culture by capturing the development of a woman's voice over time, while acknowledging that the problem of too few women in higher education leadership roles can best be explored by examining the knowledge perspective of women who experienced motherhood as a faculty member.

Research Questions

This qualitative study interviewed female faculty on the path to senior level leadership within higher education to examine their understanding of their maternity leave and early motherhood experiences from a knowledge perspective specific to women. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do faculty mothers describe their university work-life balance experiences as they relate to maternity leave and/or family policies?
2. How do knowledge perspectives inform faculty mother experiences, as they pertain to maternity leave and/or family policies as identified in the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986)?

Significance of the Study

As outlined in the introduction of this chapter, maternity leave policies directly impact the career trajectories of female faculty at higher education institutions. The aim of this study was to explore the work-life balance experiences related to maternity leave and/or family policies of female employees on the path to higher education leadership. The findings of the

study serve to support the creation of new policies, revision of current policies, and the perseverance of solid policies that exist to promote stability and economic security for female employees who become mothers while on the leadership path or while in leadership roles in higher education. Further developed university maternity leave and/or family policies could assist in recruiting and retaining women leaders in higher education. In addition, this study contributes to the dearth of literature regarding the work-life balance among faculty mothers.

Limitations

There was a possible restriction on the interpretation of the findings. This limitation takes into account participant disclosure concerning poor job performance and infractions. If a participant faced challenges at work before pregnancy and/or maternity leave, she may not have been forthcoming about it. Confidentiality regarding personnel records prevented the researcher from knowing how such challenges might have impacted the participant's post-pregnancy work-life balance experience. The participants' willingness to disclose honestly and openly throughout the collection process potentially limited the quantity and accuracy of the data. Furthermore, the researcher collected data during pandemic school closures. Participants were adjusting to having their children home while working remotely from home. Participants expressed feeling stressed and tired at the time of the interviews. Lastly, there was limited literature regarding established work-life balance policies created to advance and/or support women in the workplace.

Delimitations

Selectivity within this study limited participation to women who had not experienced post-partum depression. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2017), 11-20% of the women who give birth each year experience post-partum depression.

Some symptoms of this phenomenon include feelings of pessimism, loss of energy, problems concentrating, inability to sleep, and thoughts of suicide (CDC, 2017). The impact that postpartum depression has on the work-life balance experience may not be clearly distinguishable from a negative work-life balance experience.

Additionally, participation in this study was limited to women in tenure-track faculty positions with an interest in higher education leadership.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are provided to assist the reader:

Academic tenure is an “indefinite faculty appointment that can be terminated only for cause or under extraordinary circumstances such as financial exigency and program discontinuation” (American Association of University Professors, 2019, p. 1).

Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provides for the following:

Up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to employees for the following reasons: care of a newborn, newly-adopted or foster child; care of a child, spouse or parent with a serious health condition; or the serious health condition of the employee, including maternity-related disability. (U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave, 1996, p. 15)

Knowledge perspective refers to how one makes meaning of the world and/or their life (Belenky et al., 1986).

Leadership position refers to a full professor or senior administration job placement and includes department chairs, deans, provosts, chancellors, vice presidents and presidents (Shepherd, 2017; Redmond et al., 2017).

Maternity leave describes “the period of time that a new mother takes off from work following the birth of her baby” (American Pregnancy Association, 2019, para. 1).

Pandemic school closures reference the mass school closures across the United States that occurred as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Closures impacted daycare programs, P-12 and higher education institutions (Camera, 2020).

Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, according to the U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave (1996), required the following:

Employers [had] to treat the disability of an employee resulting from pregnancy or childbirth in the same manner as they would treat any other disability. The PDA further specified that if an employer voluntarily provided temporary disability leave, they must allow employees to use this leave for pregnancy or childbirth-related disabilities. (p. 47)

Work-life balance describes an “individual’s ability to meet their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities” (Delecta, 2011, p. 186).

Summary

This chapter served to introduce the study and the problem that women lack equal representation in the leadership positions, potentially complicated by the ‘double track’ working mothers on the leadership path travel, as they are continuously working to combine their home and work life (Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1999). Understanding the experiences of working mothers through the collection of their constructed realities is instrumental in developing maternity and family friendly policies that support a strengthened work-life balance for this population. Presented in this chapter were the research questions, the significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, and an outline of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 of this study offers a synthesis of existing literature relevant to women in the workforce, maternity leave, work-life balance, and women in academia, while further describing the theoretical framework, in an effort to provide context and background supportive of the selected methodology to address the research question. Chapter 3 presents the design of the study, as well as the participation selection process, data collection instrument and procedures, and data analysis technique. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the study findings, which includes conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review connects two bodies of literature to contextualize the study of work-life balance among faculty mothers in higher education. First, the review explores the evolution of women in the workforce. Second is an in-depth review of the issues, experiences, and policies that impact faculty mothers in higher education. Finally, this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework inclusive of Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) utilized in this study. Together, the literature review provides a synthesis of relevant information necessary to address the study's purpose, which was to explore the work-life balance experiences related to maternity leave and/or family policies of female employees on the path to higher education leadership, as well as explore literature pertinent to the research questions:

1. How do faculty mothers describe their university work-life balance experiences as they relate to maternity leave and/or family policies?
2. How do knowledge perspectives inform faculty mother experiences, as they pertain to maternity leave and/or family policies as identified in the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986)?

Not only will this study fill a void in the literature concerning work-life balance among faculty mothers, but the study may also advance institutional policies impacting this population.

To prepare this literature review, the researcher examined numerous books and articles associated with the research topic. A search of university library catalogs and multiple electronic databases, including, but not limited to Emory University library catalog, Mercer University

library catalog, Education Full Text (EBSCO) Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Journal Storage (JSTOR) produced over 120 articles and 15 books that are referenced throughout this study. Key words and search terms included: *cognitive development, evolution of women in the workforce, gender inequality in the workplace, gender roles, faculty mothers, international maternity leave, international motherhood, knowledge perspective, maternity leave in corporate America, maternity leave in higher education, United States and maternity leave, women and leadership, work-life balance, and working mothers*. The conclusion of this synthesis revealed a gap in the literature regarding policy recommendations that are advantageous for faculty mothers. Thus, this qualitative study aimed to contribute to the current body of knowledge by offering a narrative analysis of the maternity leave and family friendly policy experiences facing these women.

Women and the Workforce

In the United States, the earliest account of women in the workforce is in the post-Civil War period, more prevalently recognized as the Reconstruction era (Kleinberg, 2010; Tentler, 1982). Until this time, a woman's place in U.S society (even for enslaved women) was to care for her children, husband, and home. The Union victory over the Confederate army provided freedom for approximately four million slaves, men and women, who would need to work to sustain themselves and their newfound freedom.

Freed African American women began taking service jobs to support themselves. Soon enough, immigrant women who witnessed the independence that employment afforded women joined African American women in their service positions. Shortly thereafter, recognizing that employment could provide even more for their families, middle-class White women joined the

workforce to earn extra income, taking higher positions than minority women. The influx of women into the U.S. workforce did not encounter support, but rather long hours, poor working conditions, and lower pay than men, which mirrored the racial issues challenging the U.S. workforce at the time (Shah, 2015).

To combat inequality in the workforce, women began joining labor unions to benefit from the protection that membership offered, and by 1939, a second major shift occurred and advanced women's place in the workforce (Shah, 2015). The many men who served as soldiers in the U.S. forces during World War II left behind employment positions in need of filling, so not only were women performing jobs considered *man's work*, but women also secured professional positions (Shah, 2015). Wartime propaganda published by the U.S. government to promote public support of the war even created imagery, such as Rosie the Riveter, to encourage women to move into the workforce, allowing women to experience a freedom from men like never before known in U.S. history (Shah, 2015). However, upon their return from war, men wanted their jobs back, so women returned to *woman's work*, such as teaching and secretarial roles.

The mid-20th century was witness to women attempting to define their role in society. The support of nonprofit organizations, labor unions, and the 1960s feminist movement alleviated confusion about a woman's place in society. Women returned to the workforce in large numbers with the belief that they could have both a family and a career (Kleinberg, 1999; Shah, 2015; Tentler, 1982).

In 2018, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that women comprise 47% of the U.S. workforce. However, the creation of many organizations and positions did not consider the employment of female employees, and this poses a serious concern for women's work-life

balance, which according to Delecta (2011) is the ability to meet the demands of work and familial obligations with little role conflict. work-life imbalance negatively impacts human overall well-being and can contribute to or create problems, such as sadness, stress, drug and alcohol abuse, and general dissatisfaction with life (Lowe, 2005). The term *work-life balance* is widely considered a gendered term, as the issue is particularly more pressing for women (Sorenson, 2017). The next section of this review of literature reflects on the multifaceted experience of working mothers, who are charged with balancing pregnancy and early childhood rearing alongside a very pivotal point in their career paths.

Working Mothers

This section explores past and present U.S. policy and legislation relevant to maternity leave and discrimination against working mothers to be and/or mothers. Addressed are the significance of such legislation, its limitations and benefits, and its comparison to that of legislation enacted in other industrialized nations. Also presented are the arguments of those opposed to benefits generated by such legislation.

Maternity Leave, Family Medical Leave Act, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act

The American Pregnancy Association (2019) defined maternity leave as “the period of time that a new mother takes off from work following the birth of her baby” (para. 1). The first policy enacted in the United States with significant relevance to maternity leave was the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (PDA). In 1978, amendment of the sex discrimination clause of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included pregnancy as a basis of discrimination in the labor force (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1997).

The Campaign to End Discrimination Against Pregnant Workers played a pivotal role in the development of the PDA (Grossman & Thomas, 2009). For example, in 1977, while 45% of the U.S. workforce was comprised of women, only 25% of companies offered insurance plans that covered pregnancy, despite coverage for illness and accidents (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Several female employees of General Electric Corporation brought a lawsuit against their employer on the basis of sex discrimination because of the lack of coverage for pregnancy (*General Electric Company v. Gilbert*, 1976). Although the judge ruled in favor of the employer, overturning of the decision occurred a year later due to the campaign's call for legislative action, which resulted in the passage of PDA (1978).

The significance of the PDA of 1978 lies within the societal acknowledgment that while pregnancy is a condition experienced by women, it garners workplace support if women are a part of the workforce. However, approximately 25 years later, U.S citizens acknowledged that the Pregnancy Discrimination Act would not be enough support to retain women in the workforce, as discrimination claims continued to rise, as well as terminations among pregnant employees (Grossman & Thomas, 2009). Thus, the U.S. government determined to take more substantial measures.

The Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) is a federal law enacted under the leadership of former President Bill Clinton for the purpose of establishing balance between the needs of families and the demands of the workplace. According to the U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave (1996), the act also sought to promote stability and economic security, as well as the preservation of family integrity. If the employee had worked for 12 months or 1,250 hours prior to the requested leaved period, FMLA established the following:

Up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to employees for the following reasons: care of a newborn, newly-adopted or foster child; care of a child, spouse or parent with a serious health condition; or the serious health condition of the employee, including maternity-related disability. (U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave, 1996, p. 15).

While this law does establish a balance for a pregnant woman in the workforce, it does little to promote stability and economic security, as there is no guarantee of income during the 12 weeks of leave. In practice, FMLA assures that an eligible female employee will have a job to return to up to 12 weeks after giving birth, but how the female employee maintains stability and economic security during those 12 weeks is her burden. It is important to note that only 50% of pregnant employees qualify for unpaid, job-protected leave through FMLA at the time of a child's birth. In addition to the aforementioned eligibility criteria for women, organizations with less than 50 employees living within a 75-mile radius of the company do not have to provide FMLA for employees. Currently, the push for paid maternity leave would only impact half of the working mothers in the workforce because the other half could very likely not have a job to return to under FMLA protection (Guendelman et al., 2013). As of 2015, the United States is the only industrialized nation in the world without a policy granting access to paid maternity leave (Stearns, 2015).

U.S. Policy Versus International Policy

In January 2011, the Australian government enacted a paid parental leave scheme, a move that drew attention to the United States as the only remaining industrialized nation without a government-mandated paid parental leave scheme (Stearns, 2015). A 2013 study conducted by

Shepherd-Banigan and Bell revealed that of the 190 countries that comprise the United Nations, 178 assured paid leave to all women: a number inclusive of underdeveloped countries as well. International paid maternity leave schemes vary from 14-52 weeks of wage replacement between 75-100% of a women's current earnings, with longer leaves and percentage earnings in mostly European countries (Shepherd-Banigan & Bell, 2013).

The United Nations' International Labour Organization (ILO) maternity leave standards mandate a minimum of 14 weeks of leave (with a recommendation to increase the period to at least 18 weeks), while covering two thirds of an employee's salary to maintain a suitable standard of living while caring for self and child (Addati et al., 2014). Employees can experience the health benefits associated with paid maternity leave as early as pregnancy.

In addition to state-funded paid maternity leave, countries such as France and Denmark guarantee publicly subsidized nonparental childcare, in which most families with children over the age of two participate (Craig & Mulan, 2010). Even with family friendly policies, countries such as Italy have found that only 6% of children under the age of three make up fulltime nonparental childcare. This finding highlights the response of Italian mothers once their mandated 20-week paid leave scheme ends: leave the workforce or look to extended family for support with childcare, as children between the ages of five months and two years are thought to be far too young for full time care (Craig & Mullan, 2010).

Because the United States does not mandate a paid parental leave scheme, there should be little shock in learning that most U.S. employers do not offer paid maternity leave (Stearns, 2015). Of the 50 states that make up the United States, only five (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island) offer access to paid leave through temporary disability

insurance (Stearns, 2015). Paul Ryan, the 54th speaker of the House of Representatives, supported an employer's right to choose if paid maternity leave is a good benefit to offer employees, despite the fact that his staff of federal employees had access to paid benefits. Furthermore, a condition of Ryan's candidacy for the position hinged on a work-life balance demand: the speaker of the House expressed to the Republican conference, "I cannot and will not give up my family time" (as cited in Joyce, 2015, para.3). Unfortunately, this is not a stance that many women in America can take and remain employed or hireable. Shepherd-Banigan and Bell's 2013 quantitative study confirmed "that women in the United States still take less maternity leave and receive far fewer paid leave benefits than women living in other comparably developed countries" (p. 291).

Although U.S. government officials cannot agree on how to fund the paid maternity leave incentive, most agree that a government-supported scheme is necessary, which reflects a change in government climate over the past 25 years (Pew Research Center, 2017). In 2017, former president Donald Trump became the first Republican Party president to approve a paid maternity leave budget proposal, inclusive of six weeks of leave to any woman or man not receiving paid leave through his/her employer. However, it is important to note that former President Trump was not only opposed to a paid maternity leave scheme when he first began campaigning for office, but also that the current proposed plan is the brainchild of the president's daughter and senior advisor, Ivanka Trump, a full-time working mother of three young children. A government mandate for six weeks of paid maternity leave in the United States met approval in 2017 for inclusion in the 2018 budget, as a benefit for federal employees, but ultimately the effort failed (Orgysko, 2017; Smith, 2019). More recently, Senator Carolyn Maloney, author of

the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act (FEPLA), introduced an expanded version of the amendment inclusive of 12 weeks of paid leave for federal employees to care for family and themselves, which is currently at a standstill as Congress works to determine the funding source (Davidson, 2019; National Partnership for Women & Families, 2019).

Also in support of paid maternity leave is 2020 President elect Joseph Biden. Topping his American Rescue Plan is the expansion of the Family Medical Leave Act (Nowak, 2021), which presents the long-awaited opportunity to address what Correll and Bernard (2007) identified as the *motherhood ceiling* facing U.S. women in the workplace. Correll and Bernard (2007) likened the motherhood ceiling to an invisible barrier to senior leadership encountered by working women, comparable to the glass ceiling for women and minorities on the leadership path. The societal advantages of a paid maternity leave scheme may leave the U.S. government regretful of not taking a leading stance sooner.

Advantages of Maternity Leave

Campo (2009), a self-proclaimed feminist, asserted that workplaces and government policies continue to fail women by advancing the narrative of the *care-free* worker. Campo advised that a maternity leave framework should be well thought out and respectful of the women it is created to serve, rather than deciding on an arbitrary number of weeks off from work with some level of compensation, as this reinforces male patterns of work. While there are a variety of feminist theorists, the notion that process thinking should replace static thinking holds true for most feminist theorists (Ferguson, 2017). This idea historicizes the path of a woman's inequity in the workplace, rather than accepting that it is a woman's essence to lag behind in the workplace by asking the question, "How did women end up so far behind?" Cultural feminism

takes a step further and implores researchers to consider the actual essence of women (carrying children and being primary caregivers) when creating maternity leave policies that are meant to be equitable (Sallee, 2008). In doing so, maternity leave policies will develop into more than time off from work; they will employ a process that is individual to women and prepares women for their dual responsibilities as an employee and mother (Poduval & Poduval, 2008).

Pregnant women with access to paid maternity leave experience less physical and mental stress, which positively influences not only their future health and well-being, but also the future health and well-being of their children (Stearns, 2015). Shepherd-Banigan and Bell (2013) found that, after giving birth, paid leave “is related to improved maternal mental health, vitality and role functioning, higher rate of child immunizations, more well-child visits, and longer duration of breastfeeding. Further, paid maternity leave may reduce infant and child mortality” (p. 287). Women and children are not the only beneficiaries of a paid maternity leave scheme though; the organizations that offer paid maternity leave to their female employees benefit as well.

In a 2017 letter to the editor of the Wall Street Journal, Stephen Schwarzman declared that “paid leave is worth every penny” (para. 3). Schwarzman, CEO of the private equity firm Blackstone and the chair of the President’s Strategic and Policy Forum, developed a strategic maternity leave plan within his company to include a 16-week paid leave period (formerly 12 weeks) and a phase-back to work period, with hopes to recruit and retain talent while reducing turnover. The CEO acknowledged that research conducted by Houser and Vartanian (2012) of the Center for Women at Work at Rutgers University in support of paid maternity leave motivated the decision to revisit the company’s policy. Houser and Vartanian (2012) found that receiving paid leave increased a woman’s likelihood of returning to the workforce by 93% in the

year following childbirth. Within the Blackstone firm, Schwarzman (2017) found an increase of 80% in morale and 70% in productivity after enacting the new policy.

The theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) assist in better understanding Schwarzman's findings. Both theories have been used to explain employee motivation within an organization, including the relationship between employee stability and dedication. Social exchange theory posits people trust that goodwill will be reciprocated in the future, while the norm of reciprocity establishes that people feel an obligation to repay what someone has done for them (Settoon et al., 1996). Together, these theories support the view of Perceived Organizational Support, or POS, which purports "that an employees' commitment to the organization is strongly influenced by their perception of the organization's commitment to them" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 500). Increased benefits or adding paid maternity leave for employees is the organization's commitment, and employees respond with commitment by returning to work and being more productive. In addition to a paid maternity leave scheme being beneficial to employers and employees alike, a solid paid policy may have a powerful impact on workplace inequity that persists among working mothers.

Despite the advantages, some oppose paid maternity leave. Many opponents argue that having children is a choice. Further exploring the journey of a woman's choice to have children and the discrimination that accompanies this choice provides additional clarity and context for the problem that this study serves to address.

Choice and Discrimination

Opponents of paid maternity leave perceive motherhood as a choice, not an obligation. Therefore, the government and organizations are not obligated to resolve the consequences.

Workplace discrimination is also justifiable when women make the choice to become mothers, because they could just as easily choose not to be mothers (Williams, 1991).

Contextualizing women's place in U.S. culture highlights harsh truths in regard to this stance. Even after the recruitment of women to the workplace during World War II to maintain U.S. economic stability in wartime, the expectation was that women would return to their fulltime roles as wives and mothers once men reentered the workplace. The women remaining in the workplace were expected to return to more feminine positions, such as teachers and secretaries. Morgenroth and Heilman (2017) explained that such stereotypic expectations ingrained within the culture heavily contribute to a woman's choice and the impact of her choice.

One example of this is the 2004 Australian government's introduction of the baby bonus scheme, which involved a cash payment of \$3000 (which increased to \$5000 by 2008) for each child born to a family (Campo, 2009). While the intent of the payments was to assist in caring for newborn children, the primary purpose of the baby bonus was to combat Australia's lowest fertility trend in history. The famous words that commemorate the baby bonus, uttered by Peter Costello, who held the position of treasurer at the time, were "one for mum, one for dad, and one for the country" (Han, 2017, para. 1), highlighting the cultural expectation for women to do their duty.

Feminist, Joan Williams contended, "The dominant culture shapes a hegemony of values, norms, perceptions and belief that determines acceptable and unacceptable social alternatives" (as cited in Yuracko, 2003, p. 22). The U.S. government decided when women were needed in the workforce, and the Australian government determined when women needed to have children, even going so far as to offer incentives for women who met the need—this is not freely

choosing. Societal expectations or culture continue to play a significant role in a woman's choice to be a mother. While the biology of carrying a child is a woman's burden, Craig and Mullen (2010) explained that societies benefit from reproducing themselves and should bear a major portion of the responsibility. A shift in dominant U.S. culture as it pertains to a woman's choice to have children may eliminate the discriminatory motherhood ceiling.

It is important to explore choice-based discrimination against mothers to better understand the ultimate choice left to women: accept the disadvantages associated with motherhood or decline becoming a mother. As relevant within this study, choice-based discrimination refers to the labor force inequities perceived to be justifiable because a woman chooses to become a mother (Kricheli-Katz, 2012). It is easier to understand this phenomenon by considering that mothers who have no choice in the decision to work are perceived less negatively than mothers who choose to go work but have the option to be a fulltime mother. The latter type of mother is subject to criticism for working purely to satisfy career goals (Poduval & Poduval, 2008).

Conversely, choice-based discrimination does not parallel within fatherhood. Men who choose to be fathers are advantaged in the workplace, as fathers are considered to be providers and more stable than non-fathers (Kricheli-Katz, 2012). Choice-based discrimination does not similarly impact motherhood and fatherhood, leading to the inference that the discrimination does not result from the choice. Instead, it derives from societal expectations within U.S. culture to perceive motherhood as a woman completely devoted to caring for children, while viewing fatherhood as a man completely devoted to providing for children (Yuracko, 2003).

Unsurprisingly, the U.S. fertility rate is experiencing a large decline. Data reveal that women express a desire to have 2.7 children, but they are more likely to have 1.8 children; this gap is the largest in 40 years (Stone, 2018). Until the dominant culture embraces mothers as equally desired and respected contributors in the workplace, a woman's choice remains to either be a disadvantaged mother or to decide against motherhood completely.

The workplace disadvantages associated with motherhood are plentiful. Working mothers are not considered to be the ideal workers that fathers, non-fathers, and non-mothers are, and they are less likely to be hired than their counterparts (Correll & Bernard, 2007; Kricheli-Katz, 2012). Additionally, some condemn working mothers can expect to face condemnation as selfish and unnatural women (Poduval & Poduval, 2008), to carry a disproportionate load of childcare and home responsibilities (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017), to earn less pay than do fathers, non-fathers, and non-mothers (Kricheli-Katz, 2012), and to receive evaluations as less competent and less committed than other applicants during the hiring process (Correll & Bernard, 2007). In a quantitative study that revealed perceptions of competence were lowest for all working mothers—those who took maternity leave and those that did not—when compared to the control group, Morgenroth and Heilman (2017) concluded, “Whatever choice the working mother makes, she is vulnerable to the negative effects of gender stereotypes” (p. 3). Not taking maternity leave did not advantage mothers in this study because these women were acting outside of cultural norms, which was considered just as incompetent as mothers deciding to take maternity leave (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). As it pertains to working mothers, choice-based discrimination can best be explained as the perceived justifiable inequality experienced by mothers who make a choice that the dominant culture deems as unacceptable.

The Academy and Work-Life Balance

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) established the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure to provide guidance for higher education institutions and the academics that work within these institutions. The statement defines academic tenure as “an indefinite appointment that can be terminated only for cause or under extraordinary circumstances such as financial exigency and program discontinuation” (AAUP, 2019, p. 1), which translates to freedom in teaching and research, alongside economic security for those who obtain tenure. Earning tenure often coincides with promotion to full professor, a prominent pathway to higher education leadership (Schnackenberg, 2019), and, as Mandelco (2010) explained, it “is one of the most important transitions a person experiences if choosing an academic career” (p. 1). While women continue to earn doctoral degrees at a higher rate than men, they do not progress to tenure at nearly the same rate as men, and as a result, they are underrepresented in higher education leadership roles (Okahana & Zhou, 2018). Faculty mothers raising young children are unsuccessfully competing with the tenure clock, and their attrition rate remains higher than faculty fathers (Welch et al., 2011).

Data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) painted a clear picture of the decline of women in higher education on the path to leadership. Women make up 51% of assistant professors, 44% of associate professors, but only 32% of full professors. These statistics refute pipeline logic that suggests if more women are hired as junior faculty, more women will be visible as senior faculty (Stout et al., 2007). Furthermore, the pipeline to senior academic leadership is often slower, harder to navigate, and much less attractive for women working in higher education than it is for men (Redmond et al., 2017). Redmond et al. (2017)

highlighted the advantageous differences in timing and career structure for men versus women pursuing academic leadership. Additionally, Mason et al. (2013) reported in their book, *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower*, that women working to earn tenure are 35% less likely to have children than men. In fact, Mason et al. (2013) concluded that female faculty working in higher education postpone the start of a family much longer than women working in law or medicine, and if these faculty desire to be higher education leaders, they are more likely to remain unmarried and childless. These data suggest a specific barrier impacting the advancement of women in higher education. Schnackenberg (2019) provided the term *the maternal wall* as a synonym for the motherhood ceiling, identifying it as one of the largest and most distressing barriers facing women on the leadership path.

In a 2013 article entitled, “Women and Academic Leadership: Leaning Out,” Ward and Eddy, both female faculty at higher education institutions, explained that women who choose to lean back from academic promotion and ultimately senior leadership recognize that academic leadership is not open to women who desire a family life beyond work. Specifically, Ward and Eddy (2013) described women who remain associate professors or opt for nontenure track positions to avoid potential conflicts with motherhood.

Unfortunately, this despairing ideology is not limited to women in higher education. Adapa et al. (2015) conducted a study focused on the underrepresentation of female accountants in leadership roles and discovered that not only did women impose their own career limitations to balance their family life, but also that men believed women were more responsible for participating in part-time work to accommodate their families than should be expected of men. The *mommy track* and *career track* are the *double track* options that only women must choose

(Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1999), further supporting the notion that men experience work-life balance differently than do women. Leadership creates time commitments and pressure that women who choose the double track simply cannot ignore (Redmond et al., 2017).

Women in fields other than higher education share the working mother's struggle to achieve a work-life balance; however, female academics working to obtain tenure may experience the pressures more acutely (Sallee, 2008). Craft and Maseberg-Tomlinson (2015) acknowledged that, while faculty benefit from the autonomy of the nature of academic work, institutions are very demanding of faculty, assuming faculty's academic work as their highest priority, which is a seemingly never-ending workload in the minds of faculty. For instance, Mycherin (2013) cited faculty women taking an average of 4.8 weeks of maternity leave in which women were not in the classroom teaching, but still fulfilling 100% of other contractual obligations. Participants found it difficult to set appropriate boundaries while on maternity leave and felt obligated to fulfill work and motherhood demands. Mycherin (2013) reported these women perceived higher education as still a system for men.

In Stout et al.'s 2007 study, focus groups of junior and senior faculty women revealed they were not convinced that they gained anything through a promotion that comes at the cost of living a balanced life. While some female faculty may forgo the promotion to maintain balance, others leave the field altogether, identifying the inability to negotiate a flexible work schedule as a factor influencing turnover among women administrators in higher education (Jo, 2008). Even so, the women who survive raising children and earning tenure find themselves exhausted and disinterested in new challenges, further delaying their progression to a leadership position (Schnackenberg, 2019). Strengthening the work-life balance of female faculty as mechanism to

address retention and promotion begins with supportive institutional policies (Jo, 2008; Sallee, 2008).

An institution's culture and climate has the potential to contribute to career satisfaction, and a positive workplace culture and climate can impact faculty retention (Stout et al., 2007). Mandelco (2010) emphasized the importance of adopting family friendly policies after women are hired, suggesting that being flexible about when, where, and how work is done eases the integration of family and work demands for female faculty. A 2015 narrative study documenting the challenges faced by one female faculty member returning from maternity leave found that the faculty participant, Christy, would have been interested in and benefited from a temporary or part-time tenure track position, although options like these are rare (Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015). The rarity of such a position suggests that faculty mothers throughout the United States continue to get by with the options afforded to them, rather than receive or solicit what they actually need to achieve a desired work-life balance.

A recent publication, *Women Leading Change in Academia: Breaking the Glass Ceiling, Cliff, and Slipper* (2020) drew attention to the struggles of female faculty efforts to achieve work-life balance. Chapter 12 of the book, entitled "Work-life Balance," highlights the seemingly persistent double track for faculty mothers. Relative to men, these women are more likely to fail at achieving work-life balance when their children are young, and they are seeking tenure. Additionally, Coker and Bush (2020) highlighted the current lack of academic literature capturing the work-life balance experiences of women in leadership roles within academia, which may inform on the lack of institutional support specific to faculty mothers. Coker and Bush (2020), both esteemed female professors, outlined their personal strategies for achieving

work-life balance, as neither female faculty leader could point to institutional support or the academic climate for any gains within their career. They acknowledged that strong institutional support is necessary, but often unavailable. It is the stories of women such as Coker and Bush (2020) that highlight the need for more stories to further understand the work-life balance experiences of female faculty.

Theoretical Framework: Women's Ways of Knowing Theory

Clandinin (2013) defined narrative inquiry as “an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 17). Further, Sandelowski (1991) explained that narrative analyses force researchers to address the story presented to them before creating theories and descriptions of the people they represent—an analysis telling of how an individual makes meaning of their experience. In this study, narrative inquiry facilitated the exploration of the work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers. In their 2016 study of women academics and work-life balance, Toffoletti and Starr chose to approach their research using Barbara Pocock's model of work/care regimes (Pocock, 2005), specifically because the theoretical model accounts for all forms of labor, including labor primarily completed by women that is often ignored, such as voluntary and domestic work. Pocock's theoretical model lends itself to understanding the role gender plays in workplace organizations. More specifically, this study sought to capture how women make sense of workplace experiences that are unique to women as individuals.

Belenky et al. (1986) created the Women's Ways of Knowing theory specifically to understand the experiences of women at the individual level, which can be quite different from that of their male counterparts. The theory describes five knowledge perspectives, or ways in

which a woman makes meaning of life. The theory began as an investigation of the minds of 135 diverse women, conducted over several years by four female psychologists, since previous psychological research to understand women often utilized frameworks designed by men who studied men. The researchers were convinced that women made meaning of the world and their lives differently than did men. Belenky et al.'s (1986) findings provide the five perspectives that describe this difference:

- *silence*, or the absence of voice,
- *received knowledge*, or the voice of others,
- *subjective knowledge*, or the inner voice,
- *procedural knowledge*, or the voice of reason, and
- *constructed knowledge*, which describes the integration of all the voices.

Researchers have employed Belenky et al.'s (1986) Women's Ways of Knowing theory in several studies seeking to better understand how women make sense of their experiences. In Becker's (1995) book chapter, "Women's Ways of Knowing in Mathematics," the author explained that learning math is a cognitive process, rather than a universal truth. To understand how women make sense of math, Becker (1995) proposed examining a theory specific to the cognitive process of women, such as Women's Ways of Knowing theory, designed to understand how women obtain knowledge. Becker (1995) referred to feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan as setting a precedent for gender specific theory when examining cognitive development. When studying moral development in women, Gilligan (1982) challenged Kohlberg's stages of moral development, which precluded most women from reaching the highest level of moral development within the hierarchy. Gilligan's research (1982) found that women take a different

path, based on different values, toward their moral development and ultimately speak in a different voice that cannot be accounted for within Kohlberg's all male sample.

Becker (1995) hypothesized that women's cognitive development also follows a different path from men, just as Gilligan found when studying women's moral development. While researching graduate students studying mathematics, Becker (1995) noted that the decision to pursue graduate school did not differ by gender. However, utilization of the Women's Ways of Knowing theory allowed for easy understanding of development of female interest in mathematics. Despite concern for reinforcing stereotypes or possibly discrediting women's abilities, Becker (1995) highlighted the positive impact of Women's Ways of Knowing theory, as the theory provides a gender-specific framework to understand how women make sense of their lives.

Egan's (1996) research of career mentoring among women working in broadcasting communication sought to understand how women decide their mentoring needs by framing the research within the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986). This quantitative study described the three voices, or knowledge perspectives, that developed from participant responses to 415 questionnaires: 233 constructivists, 82 proceduralists, and 100 subjectivists. Results supported the acceptance of all four hypothesis within this study, since each was found statistically significant. Egan's (1996) research revealed that constructed knowers (those within the highest level of the hierarchy) were more likely than procedural knowers to identify a mentor for themselves and pursue the relationship consistently. Furthermore, procedural knowers, defined as having less self-efficacy, intuition, and analytical ability than constructed knowers, were less likely to see a need for a mentor, although they would benefit more from having a

mentor than constructed knowers. Even subjective knowers, who fall lower in hierarchy than procedural knowers, were more likely to have an impactful mentor, as subjective knowers often lack autonomy to decide against a mentor. Within Egan's (1996) study, Women's Ways of Knowing theory captured a woman's ability to advantage or disadvantage herself in selecting a mentor based on her knowledge perspective of her own needs and served to frame the decisions female participants made.

Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) also proved useful in Haring-Hidore et al.'s 1990 exploratory study of women administrators and how their understanding impacted their decisions and leadership. This research of women administrators (academic deans and vice chancellors) in higher education revealed that none of the six participants expressed a desire to advance; instead, they sought to be their best in their current roles (Haring-Hidore et al., 1990). Within this qualitative study, the researchers interviewed six participants for 1.5 to 2.5 hours and established that two participants were in the constructed knowledge stage, three were in the procedural knowledge stage, and one participant was transitioning from the procedural knowledge stage to the constructed knowledge stage. Haring-Hidore et al. (1990) pointed to five characteristics that mark the highest level of knowing or being a constructed knower, which includes the ability to integrate critical thinking and intuition, the ability to abandon an 'either/or' mindset in an effort to think more creatively, the ability to understand that the answer varies based on context or frame of reference, the ability to listen and reflect empathetically to different points of view, and the ability to actively reflect on one's morality. The one participant transitioning from the procedural knowledge stage to the constructed knowledge stage understood and accepted the characteristics of this stage as true, but this participant did not trust

her own intuition or how she knew what she knew. Participants in the procedural knowledge stage were characterized by their siloed use of critical thinking; these knowers unilaterally analyze the information they gather. Haring-Hidore et al. (1990) provided an in-depth explanation of their interpretation of a procedural and constructed voice within faculty women, which further supports use of the Women's Way of Knowing theory in this study to examine how female faculty make meaning of their work-life balance experiences.

Summary

This literature review explored the addition of women to the workplace, with a focus on working mothers pursuing leadership in higher education and the challenges they face to obtain work-life balance. While men and women leaders in the workplace exhibit different qualities and leadership styles, women are often subject to assessment by male centric leadership models and standards (Dunn et al., 2014). While some research exists on the underrepresentation of women within higher education leadership, there is a dearth of literature specific to the work-life balance experience of faculty mothers (Coker & Bush, 2020), who are most disadvantaged within academic institutional leadership (Kricheli-Katz, 2012; Correll & Bernard, 2007). Even more scarce within the literature are gender specific theoretical frameworks to best understand how faculty mothers make sense of their experience. This qualitative study sought to fill a gap in the literature by better understanding the experiences of faculty mothers and how institutions might strategize to advance this population. The subsequent chapter presents the methodological approach to this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a rationale for the research study, which includes a statement of the problem and the research approach. Following this is an explanation of the study's research design, as well as descriptions of the sample, participants, and validation measures. Furthermore, this chapter details the data collection and analysis methods.

A doctorate degree is a standard requirement for senior level administration and faculty appointments within higher education (Torpey & Watson, 2014). Consider that the National Science Foundation (2018) identified the average age of PhD recipients in the United States as 32, while the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Martin et al., 2019) reported 27 years of age as the average age when women give birth for the first time, with optimal childbearing years deemed between 20-35 years of age. The age trends suggest that the average woman works toward and receives a terminal degree during her childbearing years if she is not a mother already. The trend also suggests that secondary pregnancies and early childhood rearing occur in the earlier stages of a faculty mother's career. Pregnancy and motherhood create an inherent disparity between women and men in higher education (Anthony, 2011; Baker, 2011; Sandberg, 2013). Specifically, women at the childbearing age serving as faculty often face inadequate maternity leave policies that impede pathways for tenure, promotion, and elevation to senior administration.

To provide further context and capture the magnitude of the faculty mother's work-life balance experience and the impact that experience has on a woman's advancement to senior faculty, the current study utilized a narrative approach to elicit the themes. Not only do the

stories collected through narrative inquiry assist in understanding the wholeness of human experience, but stories reveal an individual's perceived knowledge, which plays an integral role in influencing behaviors and decision making (Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015; Radecki & Jaccard, 1995). Ultimately, stories reflect how individuals make meaning of their lives and how they view themselves and the world (Sandelowski, 1991).

Maternity leave policies and practices directly impact the career trajectories of female faculty at institutions of higher education (Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore maternity leave and early motherhood experiences of female employees on the path to higher education leadership, including senior-level administration and faculty appointments. To obtain the information needed for this study, the researcher examined pre, during and post maternity leave experiences. Results from the study can provide institutions with strategies to improve the advancement of women in higher education.

Rationale for Research Approach

Creswell (2013) asserted that qualitative research attempts to analyze participants' language and behavior in their natural setting, while Sandelowski (1991) explained that a narrative inquiry approach within qualitative research "forces scholars to attend first to what is placed immediately before them—stories—before transforming them into descriptions and theories of the lives they represent" (p. 162). In this study, the researcher collected work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers through participant stories. An analysis of the data served to reveal the discontinuities between the actual maternal story and the stories participants created regarding their experience, leaving the researcher to focus on how participants created meaning (Sandelowski, 1991). Several studies have documented the impact of motherhood on the careers

of female academics, but few have explored how faculty mothers make meaning of their work-life balance experience. Furthermore, this study drew upon the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986), as it intentionally and specifically captures how women make meaning of their lives and their place within society.

Research Questions Reiterated

The aim of this study was to explore the maternity leave and early motherhood experiences of female faculty on the path to leadership within higher education. The following questions guided the study:

1. How do faculty mothers describe their university work-life balance experiences as they relate to maternity leave and/or family policies?
2. How do knowledge perspectives inform faculty mother experiences, as they pertain to maternity leave and/or family policies as identified in the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986)?

Research Design

In his 1998 book, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, Crotty established and defined the four elements of qualitative research design:

Methods: the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyst' data related to some research question or hypothesis.

Methodology: the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes.

Theoretical perspective: the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria.

Epistemology: the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology. (p. 3)

This qualitative study included each element, as explained further throughout this chapter.

The epistemology of social constructivism suggests that faculty mothers construct meaning of their experiences through their individual interactions with others (Creswell, 2013). In this study, narrative inquiry served to capture how faculty mothers constructed meaning, as Polkinghorne (1988) explained that human beings are constantly engaged in narrative, telling themselves stories and listening to their own stories in a “virtually uninterrupted monologue,” (p. 160).

In addition to a narrative approach seeking to explore and describe the maternal monologues (Polkinghorne, 1988), narrative inquiry identified faculty mothers as the narrators of their own stories. Within this biographical narrative, the researcher collaborated with the narrators during the analyses process in order to fully capture each participant’s story. This study approached the lack of female faculty advancement from a knowledge perspective, informed by the social constructivism epistemology. Specifically, Women’s Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986), developed in the 1970s by four female psychologists seeking to understand the learning challenges women faced in academic settings, produced five knowledge perspectives specific to women. This narrative study was designed to better understand the work-life balance experiences of female faculty by analyzing their stories from the knowledge

perspectives that emerged through Belenky et al.'s research, published in *Women's Ways of the Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (1986).

Theoretical Framework Revisited

The theoretical framework for this study was Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986). It describes how women come to know through five knowledge perspectives: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. The following paragraphs detail these knowledge perspectives.

Silence, or the first recognized knowledge perspective, describes an absent voice. Although this viewpoint is the rarest, women living within this vantage point rely on authority external to themselves for guidance or the status quo. While these women may in fact be intelligent, they lack confidence in their abilities and their connections to take guidance from themselves. They simply do not know. Silence as a knowledge perspective serves to describe a way of not knowing and provides clear distinction from the remaining four perspectives that describe women's knowing.

Received knowledge focuses on words and listening, as women with this viewpoint hold firmly that knowledge comes from the voice of others. While silent women do not believe in their ability to learn and find words to reflect weapons, the received knowledge perspective makes way for learning through the information provided by authority figures. Because listening and responding are central to this perspective, received knowers are empowered by their ability to empower others with the memorized knowledge they possess. Ambiguity is challenging for received knowers; knowledge must be concrete and come from authority figures.

Women identifying their inner voice marks the transition from received knowledge to *subjective knowledge*. Development of the inner voice within women is often due to loss of trust in male authority figures as women become their own authority figures. Subjective knowers begin to rely on their intuition and experiences to inform their knowledge. Rather than memorize what they have been told, women within a subjective knowledge perspective began to construct knowledge based on their experiences. It is possible to describe this viewpoint as an inner voice protest. Subjective knowers with greater self-worth and optimism begin taking stands and risks, as they better come to know themselves.

The inner voice developed in the subjective knowledge perspective is only quieted by the *procedural knowledge* perspective, which introduces the voice of reason to the subjective knower. Acquiring a voice of reason requires the procedural knower to acknowledge that not all authority figures are negative, and not all inner voices are positive. The procedural knower is more humble, powerful, and balanced than the previous perspectives, and she has a grasp on how to think, rather than what to think. Integrating the silent, received, subjective and procedural knowledge perspectives develops the constructed knowledge perspective. The constructed knower acknowledges that “all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 137). It is from this perspective that women recognize that questions and answers are heavily dependent on context, which changes over time, cultures, disciplines, and individuals. Constructed knowers regard knowledge as complex and in continual need of evaluation.

These five knowledge perspectives, captured by Women’s Ways of Knowing theory, describe the development of a woman’s voice over time and provide a framework to explore

work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers from a knowledge perspective through narrative inquiry and analysis (Belenky et al., 1986; Love & Guthrie, 2002). The narrative approach enabled the researcher to use the Women Ways of Knowing theory as a lens for analyzing each participant's story. The researcher asked broad, open-ended questions that captured the maternal story and the perspectives that followed the unfolding of participants' stories. The collected data informed the researcher on how their experiences and perspectives informed their work-life balance decisions.

Institutional Review Board

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Mercer University (see Appendix A). Participants signed consent forms and assurances that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The research assigned pseudonyms to de-identify participants for data analysis and publication purposes. The researcher stored the obtained data in a password-protected server, where it will remain for one year after publication of the study.

Sample

This study was designed to understand the work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers during maternity leave and early childhood rearing. Typically, female academics give birth to their first child after earning tenure (Connelly & Ghodsee, 2011) and have fewer children than desired, and they are less likely to be married than their male counterparts (Mason & Goulden, 2004; Rudd et al., 2008). However, these highly educated women are more interested in reconciling unfavorable work conditions and unhelpful policies that impact their success as faculty mothers rather than withdrawing from the workforce (Jones, 2012). The sample for this

study included currently employed faculty mothers who sought advancement while working in U.S. higher education since the enactment of FMLA in 1993. The research selected participants according to criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling.

Recruitment for this study occurred through social media outlets and professional groups/organizations, in which faculty mothers were the targeted audience. The distributed advertisement included an explanation of the study, as well as the study's potential beneficial impact on the advancement of women in higher education. The advertisement also included eligibility criteria, so that prospective participants were able to determine if they were eligible to participate in the study. Interested persons received a letter of invitation that included a more detailed description of the study, expectations, and contact information.

Participants

The researcher asked individuals who responded to the study advertisement to participate in a preselection interview, as the study aimed for maximum variation, which involves a wide range of characteristics (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The preselection interview served to identify participants who had more than one maternity leave experience at possibly more than one institution of higher education. Additionally, the preselection interview identified individuals willing to participate in three interviews and follow-up measures. The desired participant group was two to three faculty mothers who had taken maternity leave in the last five years, but final selection included all four faculty mothers who expressed interest and proved eligible. If the sample size had not been reached with the desired participants, the researcher would have increased the maternity leave window in increments of five years dating back to 1993. Through

the preselection interview process, selected participants formally consented to a series of three interviews in writing.

Data Collection

In alignment with what Patton (2002) described as the defining characteristic of a good narrative analysis, the current study offered clear insight into social and cultural meanings. As stated by Patton (2002), “Stories are at the center of narrative analysis” (p. 118). The researcher promoted this by developing narratives full of meaning through in-depth participant interviews as the primary source of data collection. This biographical study relied on three interviews with each participant to gather data. A copy of the interview questions is in Appendix B.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posited that capturing detailed stories from a small number of individuals is the best use for narrative research. To do this, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time interviewing participants and actively engaged them in the data collection process as co-researchers. This narrative study used Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) responsive interview model, as this model asserts a relationship between the researcher and the interviewer where the parties work together to gather the rich, in-depth experience of the participant. In addition, the researcher has autonomy to change questions, sites, or situations to better accommodate an in-action interview process (Creswell, 2013).

Participants engaged in three individual interviews, with each interview lasting 30 minutes to two hours. The first interview captured the participant’s career story, the second interview captured their maternity leave story, and the final interview captured participant’s reflections on her experiences. Interviews consisted of previously formulated and piloted open-ended questions. As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the

recorded one-on-one interviews followed an established protocol and occurred at the convenience and comfort of the participant.

Interviews mimicked informal face-to-face conversations, as they were conducted via video conference. The researcher encouraged candid dialogue and allowed for flexibility as necessary throughout the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As recommended by Patton (2002), the researcher took responsibility for the quality of data collected, as the instrument for this research. To achieve this, the researcher utilized the general interview guide approach, as it ensured the researcher had the structure and flexibility needed to gather good data. The questions within the interview guide delved into two primary areas: the participants' maternal story and the internal perspectives experienced throughout the course of their stories from the five epistemological perspectives within the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986). Conducting interviews in this manner allowed the researcher access to the information needed to discover and confirm themes.

Data Analysis

The researcher, who served as the primary analyst, shared the analysis process with the assigned methodologist for feedback (Lee et al., 2013). Ultimately, the researcher inquired about the faculty mother work-life balance culture, participants from within the culture shared their stories, and the researcher worked to identify the significance of each participant's core story to create a narrative of the culture. The researcher used Polkinghorne's (1988) concept of a core story creation as a method of analyzing narrative text. In core story creation, each participant has a story that conveys a plot. The narrative became a compilation of all the stories highlighting the different plots.

While Polkinghorne (1988) introduced core story creation, he did not outline a process for identifying the core story, but Emden (1998), a qualitative researcher in the nursing field, further developed Polkinghorne's concept by creating a specific method for core story creation. The researcher utilized Emden's (1998) eight-step process for core story creation, which consists of the following:

1. Reading the full interview text several times within an extended time-frame (several weeks) to grasp its content.
2. Deleting all interviewer questions and comments from the full interview text.
3. Deleting all words that detract from the key idea of each sentence or group of sentences uttered by the respondent.
4. Read the remaining text for sense.
5. Repeating steps three and four several times, until satisfied that all key ideas are retained and extraneous content is eliminated, returning to the full text as often as necessary for rechecking.
6. Identifying fragments of constituent themes (subplots) from the ideas within the text.
7. Moving fragments of themes together to create one coherent core story, or series of core stories.
8. Returning the core story to the respondent and asking, "Does it ring true?" and "Do you wish to correct/develop/delete any part?" (p. 35)

As the steps reveal, core story creation reduces full length stories in favor of shorter stories for further analysis. The researcher ensured that not only did each participant have one core story

with a plot, but also that the story was presented in chronological order, despite how participants chose to share their stories.

The final step in this analysis process was emplotment. According to Emden (1998), emplotment involves weaving together the various plots of the various core stories to develop a narrative of the culture. This process required comparing and contrasting the significant themes of the plots and subplots to determine which themes to include in the narrative, which was framed using the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986).

Validation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained the need to validate qualitative methods differently than quantitative methods. The authors established four steps of validation in qualitative research as a measure of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, credibility and transferability served as the primary validation methods. Member checking, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314), furthered the establishment of credibility. The researcher asked participants to assist her in aligning their narrative to the data collected, as a method of member checking. Furthermore, transferability formed through the rich, thick description of the narratives, inclusive of personal participant descriptions, stories, and direct quotes, which provided all of the necessary ingredients for researchers to duplicate this study in the future. Additionally, the researcher employed triangulation, another mechanism to establish credibility, through the use of the multiple data sources. These included several participants and the opinions of their partners, friends, and colleagues, as well as analysts, to include the researcher and peer reviewers, as this promotes consistency within a study (Creswell, 2013).

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher served as the key instrument in this research study (Patton, 2002; Creswell 2013). I completed this research as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership. I have spent my entire professional career in higher education on the leadership path to senior administration. During this time, I have given birth to three children while working full time at two different higher education institutions. Additionally, I resigned from full time employment to complete my dissertation alongside raising my four children, who range in age from 6-18 years old. My motherhood journey and education/career development have been demanding parallels since obtaining my undergraduate degree. As a full-time working mother, I experienced support, as well as defeat within the walls of higher education, both of which impacted my decision to pursue a PhD and to advance knowledge impacting this population.

To account for this possible bias, I approached this study by bracketing out my experiences (Giorgi, 2009) before engaging in the experiences of the participants. Moustakas (1994) described bracketing as the researcher's conscious attempt to erase knowledge associated with the phenomena being researched. To account further for bias, this study included a peer review consisting of peers who were empathetic to the participants being studied, but neutral to the content that participants revealed, as described by Patton (2002).

Reporting Results

Results from this study were reported in narrative form using pseudonyms to de-identify participants and fictional university names to de-identify institutions to protect confidentiality. The researcher described themes emerging from the research with the assistance of narrative text and direct quotes. As recommended by Polkinghorne (1988), these descriptions served to form

“a meaning structure that organizes events and human actions into a whole” (p. 18) through a rich, thick narrative, which this study presents in Chapter 4.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the specific research design and methodology utilized to create a narrative study of the faculty mother work-life balance culture to answer the research question. The researcher identified the methodology, framework, data collection, and data analysis as an overview of this study. Findings from this study contribute to advancing the work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers throughout higher education.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: NARRATIVES AND KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVES

The aim of this narrative study was to explore the work-life balance experiences related to maternity leave and/or family policies of female employees on the path to higher education. Faculty women of childbearing age face inadequate leave policies that hinder their ability to advance professionally (Craft & Maseberg-Tomlinson, 2015). Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) served as a framework to understand how participants made sense of their experience. This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected through interviews of four faculty mothers with six maternity leave experiences between them, across four different institutions of higher education.

The chapter begins with a reiteration of the framework of the study and its application in the current study. Analysis of the participants' responses using Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) served to answer the second research question of this study. Following this is the narrative analysis of the participants' stories, achieved by examining, organizing, and compiling participants' stories. The analysis includes a table depicting participants' pseudonyms, characteristics, and selected demographics; each participant's core story, shortened and retold by the researcher; and findings regarding the emergent themes of those stories framed within the Women's Ways of Knowing theory.

Theoretical Framework Reiterated

The researcher used Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) as a theoretical framework to explore the second research question within this study: How do knowledge perspectives inform faculty mother experiences, as they pertain to maternity leave

and/or family policies as identified in the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986)?

Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) describes how women make sense of their lives across five knowledge perspectives: the *silent knower* whose voice remains absent; the *received knower* whose voice is dependent on knowledge received from others; the *subjective knower* who follows their inner voice; the *procedural knower* who yields to the voice of reason; and the *constructed knower* who integrates the other four positions of knowing. More specifically, constructed knowers are identifiable by their ability to "find a place for reason and intuition and the expertise of others" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 133). The study's participants, identified by the pseudonyms Eve, Rose, Maya and Tia, revealed that each demonstrated characteristics of a constructed knower at the time of the interviews. Even more revealing was each woman's ability to consistently identify other positions of knowing and the impact this ability had on her decision making based on her knowledge perspective at the time of events.

In their 1990 study, Haring-Hidore et al. found that faculty women were either constructed knowers, perceived knowers, or transitioning between the two, with the constructed knower marking the highest level of knowing. Haring-Hidore et al. (1990) delineated five characteristics of a constructed knower, which includes the ability to integrate critical thinking and intuition, the ability to abandon an 'either/or' mindset in an effort to think more creatively, the ability to understand that the answer varies based on the context or frame of reference, the ability to listen and reflect empathetically to different points of view, and the ability to actively reflect on one's morality. Participants within the current study reflected all of the attributes

associated with constructed knowers, and it is their constructed knowledge that produced emergent themes of the faculty mother culture.

Narrative Analysis

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the spread of the COVID-19 virus qualified as a pandemic, prompting the president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, to proclaim a national emergency, as the virus had adversely impacted 47 states (Trump, 2020). A 2020 Women in the Workplace study (McKinsey & Company) highlighted that this world health crisis led to business and school closures throughout the nation, creating a disparaging situation for working mothers that may negatively impact women's progression in the workplace to date. Chapter 5 offers further discussion of the relevance of the Women in the Workplace study (McKinsey & Company, 2020), but it is important to note that all four participants in the current study were impacted by pandemic school closures at their respective universities, as well as their children's schools and daycares. Interviews took place between May 2020-July 2020, and all participants were working from home while being the primary caregiver to their child(ren) who were not attending school or daycare.

The researcher interviewed each participant at three different times to capture their career story, their maternity leave story, and a reflection of both stories, respectively. The interviews were informal, yet semi-structured, and the researcher asked opened-ended questions from the interview guide developed for the study (see Appendix B). The researcher remained muted throughout the interviews, speaking only to probe or clarify participants' responses.

To identify a core story with a plot for each participant, the researcher conducted a narrative analysis by examining the stories told by four female faculty members who

experienced maternity leave as a tenured or tenure track professor while employed at an institution of higher education. Polkinghorne (1995) asserted that a collection of individual stories can offer greater insight than one story could. Thus, following transcription of the recorded interviews, the researcher began Emden's (1998) eight-step process of core story creation, which starts with reading the text several times. Through core story creation, each participant's story was reduced to a shorter story with significant themes. The final step of the process was to return the stories to each participant for her to correct, develop, or delete. The compilation of core stories and significant themes across stories resulted in a narrative of the culture. This section provides descriptions of the participants, their experiential stories, and the themes resulting from core story creation. This narrative was a compilation of core stories serving to answer the first research question: How do faculty mothers describe their university work-life balance experiences as they relate to maternity leave and/or family policies?

Characteristics and Demographics of the Participants

Table 1 summarizes participants' characteristics and relevant demographics. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to each participant and her respective institution(s) to ensure anonymity.

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics and Demographics

Participant	Marital Status	Race/Ethnicity	Age at Time of Leave	Number of Leaves	Tenured or Tenure-Track	# of Children
Eve	Married	White/American	36	1	Tenure-Track	3
Rose	Married	White/American	36	1	Tenure-Track	1
Tia	Married	Black/American	30	2	Tenure-Track	2
			34		Tenure-Track	
Maya	Married	White/Greek American	35	2	Tenure-Track	2
			38		Tenured	

Eve's Exposition

Despite her interests in her undergraduate psychology research projects, Eve feared a psychology graduate program would take too long to complete, so she set her sights on medical school instead. Sounding slightly regretful, Eve described not having much mentorship or exposure to a variety of relevant career paths during her undergraduate years:

One of the things that was scary to me about the prospect of going to medical school is that I couldn't see [imagine], I didn't have any examples of somebody who had gone to medical school and been in a serious relationship, while in medical school or who had successfully navigated having a family.

While Eve had not been certain about a career path, she was certain that she wanted a family and a career that made having a family not only possible, but enjoyable. After all, Eve was in a committed relationship when she was applying for graduate school and eventually, they married. Still, after graduation she continued to complete her medical school applications and

prepared to take the MCAT exam, while working as a paramedic and volunteering as a patient educator at family clinic that serviced low income families.

Eve's experience at the family clinic coupled with her interest in social justice and the health of vulnerable populations prompted her to apply to Master of Public Health programs alongside her medical school applications. After earning her MPH, Eve continued in pursuit of her doctorate in public health, while remaining uncertain of her career plans. Her dissertation committee was comprised of four women, and three of them did not have children, and Eve felt discouraged that academia did not seem like a good fit for a mother. Eve explained, "I was so intimidated by kind of how many hours I felt like they spent on their work and then the need to chase grants to support their work." Despite her hesitation, a mentor convinced Eve that a postdoctoral experience would give her the opportunity to attempt academia without the pressure to stay or leave. At the time, the United States was facing an economic recession, and Eve considered a post doc to be her best opportunity.

During Eve's two-year postdoctoral program, she and her husband bought a house and welcomed their first child with hopes of a full-time job offer once her post doc was complete. However, this was not the case. Eve shared,

It was initially expressed to me that the institution where I did my postdoc would be very interested in hiring me as a full-time faculty member after the postdoc. Because administration and the kind of ideas about what organizations need changes, that was not the case. They were not interested in having me continue with them.

Eve worked in two separate grant-funded positions after her post doc ended. During this time, she and her husband welcomed a second child. Eve planned to return to academia once she could

find a position, which happened only a few years after she completed her post doc. At the time of this study, Eve was a tenure-track associate professor on faculty at a public graduate school of public health.

A 41-year-old White female, Eve had three children, and her youngest child, a 5-year-old boy, was born while Eve was working to earn tenure. Those closest to Eve would describe her as thoughtful, empathetic, and hardworking. In my interviews with Eve, I perceived her to be warm, reflective, intelligent, nurturing, and emotional regarding her experiences. Eve was working from home alongside her three children, who were home due to COVID-19 closures.

Eve did not plan her third pregnancy. In fact, learning she was pregnant made her slightly anxious since she and her family had just moved into a new house in a new town, and she was only in her second semester as a tenure-track faculty member. Eve made it clear that despite the timing, she and her husband knew it was a blessing, and they were looking forward to the fun and excitement that they shared in her previous pregnancies.

Eve was teaching two classes when she became pregnant, and she felt an obligation to remain fully engaged, particularly with her class of doctoral students. However, she recalled feeling exhausted and suffering with morning sickness that lasted throughout the day. Even more tiring, Eve actively hid her pregnancy from students and colleagues alike until she was comfortable disclosing her news. Before announcing her pregnancy to anyone at work, including her department chair, Eve admitted, “I did reach out to more senior colleagues in other departments for their experiences and their advice.” It became evident that much of Eve’s concern stemmed from knowing that no woman in her department, which housed mostly senior male faculty, had been pregnant while on the tenure-track. Eve was an anomaly.

The faculty handbook outlined that faculty on nine-month appointments were eligible to take 60 days of paid leave to address any concern, including giving birth. As her family's highest earner, Eve could not afford to take any unpaid leave time. Having given birth before though, Eve knew the leave time period would not be long enough, so she worked on an extended leave proposal to present to her chair based on her own needs, as well as what other faculty women at the university had been allowed to do. However, early on in her meeting with her chair, she felt she had no negotiating power, as he was declining every idea she presented. She considered bringing to her chair's attention the extra work she was doing, as that might render lighter work in a future semester, but she thought it best to just "smile and nod." Eve experienced defeat in that meeting that she did not part with easily. Eve reflected, "Sometimes I look back on it, and I wish that the options had been clearer or that I could have advocated for myself better, so that the chair would have known that it might be something I need."

About one month before Eve gave birth, she was involved in a car accident on her way to pick her husband up from work. She nor her doctor could be sure of any harm done to the baby, and this took an emotional toll on Eve, as all she could think about was the health of her unborn baby. At her doctor's advising, Eve opted to begin her leave a week before her son was due, but her baby arrived five days beyond his due date. This left Eve with 46 days of leave remaining when her son finally arrived.

Eve's maternity leave was joyous as far as her family was concerned. Eve's husband worked in retail, and while it was not typical for men in retail to take paternity leave, her husband worked 2nd and 3rd shift to be present during the day. They even enrolled their two-year-old and four-year-old children in daycare to make the most of their time with their newborn

son, but Eve's already shortened maternity leave was riddled with work concerns. Eve explained, "I felt like I still had an obligation to answer emails and participate in things." Eve described one research collaboration in which the primary investigator emailed and assigned action items regularly. After considering the financial and legal implications of working on a grant-funded project, Eve decided that she would comply with his requests. Eve also responded to student emails to minimize confusion regarding a class she led and frequented the office a few times during her maternity leave.

Returning to work after her maternity leave ended proved challenging for Eve. With tears in her eyes, Eve recalled an unpleasant interaction with the Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies (ADUS) on her first day back to the office. As Eve was working to transition back into faculty mode, she reached out asking the ADUS if she could assist in responding to an immediate student concern. Eve remembered being told that "I needed to deal with it because my away message clearly indicated that I was now back from leave, and that I should be able to answer the question." This was an indication to Eve that she would not receive the support she needed to adjust to her return to the workplace.

In addition to teaching two classes the semester she returned, Eve participated in a faculty retreat early in the semester, and the scheduling necessary to pump her breastmilk was an overwhelming feat. "That semester I kinda was in firefighting mode. Like, let's just put out all the fires," Eve retorted. She acknowledged struggling to get organized and making a choice to prioritize teaching while her research suffered. She felt different and needy and believed her colleagues viewed her as a mom now rather than a researcher. As many of her colleagues only asked about the baby when they spoke to her, Eve recalled wondering, "Do people realize that

I'm a researcher, that I still want to collaborate on projects, that I still need to get publications out, that I still need mentorship and guidance, because this is only my second year?"

Before taking maternity leave, Eve had been participating as a mentee in a university established faculty mentorship program. Eve was in a small group with other faculty members in their first or second year on the tenure track, and she was matched with a senior faculty member through this program. Although none of the faculty worked in her department or school, Eve described the program as her "saving grace" when she returned to campus from maternity leave. Through this connection, Eve found the support and mentorship she needed to survive her return to the office. Eve worked to ground herself and eventually met with the dean of her school to share her exhausting and unfavorable maternity leave experience. After meeting with another faculty woman who had recently taken a maternity leave, Eve's dean compared the experiences and shared her findings with the faculty senate. The result was the establishment of a more supportive maternity leave plan. Eve laughed through her tears when she described joking with her colleagues to say, "I did that for you!"

Rose's Recollection

Rose never thought she would work in academia, much less that she would be a tenure-track faculty member. In fact, she avoided the faculty path. In sharing her story with me, the first thing Rose said was "I never wanted to be in academia, but here I am." Once a cell biology major during her undergraduate studies, Rose proved disinterested in the field after a year of full-time employment. However, the lab experience opened her eyes to the field of public health where Rose would combine her knowledge of the hard sciences with her newfound interest in policy and social justice.

After receiving a Master of Public Health degree in Epidemiology, Rose worked at a county health department where she found her coworkers to be enjoyable, but the work to be bureaucratic; impacting real change did not seem nearly close enough. While Rose had not planned to return to school for a terminal degree, her academic mentor reached out with a funding opportunity to obtain a doctorate in public health. Despite wondering what kind of work she would do as “a PhD that wouldn’t be in academia,” Rose knew she loved being a student, and a funded degree was not an opportunity to pass up, so she enrolled as a doctoral student and earned her PhD.

While completing her first postdoctoral position with a government agency, Rose’s female work mentor highlighted that she was climbing the ladder to academia, despite trying to avoid it. In reflecting on her mentor’s observation, Rose accepted a second postdoctoral position in a university setting, supervised by her former academic mentor, a senior female faculty member. Both women agreed that this would be the best way for Rose to determine if the faculty path was appropriate for her.

After one year in the position, Rose joined the faculty as a research faculty member. She reflected,

I don’t know why I was so averse to academia. I guess I was young and idealistic. And I just thought, well, you know, that work is not doing anything to improve anybody's lives or doing any real justice to population health, but, you know, in retrospect, that was naïve.

After receiving two large grants as a research faculty member, Rose was encouraged to apply for the tenure-track by the department chair who noted that she should be associate level already. At

the time of this study, Rose was a tenure-track assistant professor on faculty at a private public health graduate school.

A 36-year-old White female, Rose had taken one maternity leave to date to give birth to her daughter, who was eight months old at the time of the interview. Those closest to Rose would describe her as responsible, strong, loyal, and hardworking. In my interviews with Rose, I found her to be modest, engaged, logical, and tired. Rose was working remotely due to pandemic school closures. It was necessary to schedule our interviews around her infant's schedule, as well as her work schedule.

Rose planned her pregnancy. She explained,

I always thought I wanted children, although I knew I didn't want [to have] them for a long time. So, I was 35 when I became pregnant, and I think that's just because that's sort of the age at which you get bumped into the advanced maternal age category.

Rose shared that her husband was younger than she was, and while he was not quite ready to begin their family, he supported the decision to begin trying because she wanted to do so. After all, Rose had planned to have her career on track before ever trying to conceive, and having an assistant professor position at a reputable university made her feel comfortable that her career was on track. However, Rose remembered all too well the anxiety associated with negotiating a tenure-track position the same fall semester she was trying to conceive. She described thinking the following:

Do I tell them that I'm pregnant and then like switch on the tenure track and then all of a sudden, I'm out for maternity leave, or do I sort of keep that to myself because I don't want that to be used against me at all?

Rose was responsible for a full course load and felt uncomfortable seeking a promotion while planning a maternity leave, but the knowledge that she was already teaching a course that should be reserved for a more senior faculty member encouraged her to continue negotiating for the promotion. Learning that she was pregnant in January and knowing that the fiscal year would end in July prompted Rose to secure the position even more urgently before her September due date. Rose obtained the tenure-track position, and her pregnancy announcement was met with warm reception and the expectation that she would identify any necessary coverage while on leave.

At the instruction of her chair, Rose met with the department administrator to learn of the department's maternity leave policy. She was informed by her department administrator that the university provided four weeks of paid leave and that staff could use their vacation benefit to cover the remainder of the 12 weeks, but Rose noted, "They told me it was department dependent. I was surprised it wasn't standardized." After learning that her department would provide paid leave coverage for the remaining weeks of her 12-week leave, Rose made plans to turn two of her grants over to staff members to manage while on leave and requested and received an extension on a paper submission deadline occurring during her planned leave period. Rose was responsible for a fall course as well, so she and negotiated coverage with her chair.

Most of Rose's pregnancy spent at work was a joyful experience. Rose recounted, "The entire staff is all women, most of whom have children, some little children, some grown children. So that was just incredibly supportive, and everyone was just so happy." Her office mates even held a baby shower in her honor. Rose's office was in a different building from most of her faculty colleagues, and the women she mentioned were staff members working in the

same research center. Rose did not report directly to her male chair; instead, she reported to a senior faculty woman directing the research center. Rose appeared grateful for her ability to work remotely throughout her pregnancy, exclaiming, “I’ve never before had a job where I didn’t have to track every hour as either sick time or vacation time if I wasn’t in the office, so yeah, I feel very lucky.”

While Rose experienced slight disappointment regarding her birthing plan, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl and began her 12 weeks leave period. While on maternity leave, Rose admitted to checking email regularly and editing her own writing, but this was usually during long spurts of sleep for the baby. Rose did not feel pressure to engage with work and maintained a boundary around the very new experience of motherhood. After all, it was Rose’s first time changing a diaper, and she nursed her baby exclusively while home on leave. Rose knew the time to get acquainted with her daughter on maternity leave was too short before it ever ended. Rose remarked, “I was sort of resigned to having to just comply and go back to work.” Rose’s husband, a Certified Personal Accountant, had flexibility in his career, and the couple decided that he would care primarily for the baby while Rose worked, alongside a hired nanny who would come to their house three days a week. Rose returned to work four days a week in January 2020.

On her first Monday back at work, Rose recalled biking to work and crying about leaving her daughter. She arrived at the office but had forgotten her office keys. Rose went home and decided it was not the right day to return to work. Leaving her daughter did not get easier, but Rose described adapting her working style when she returned to work, stating, “Now at work I’m

just doing work, and I'm really trying to do it efficiently and quickly because I treasure the time I get to leave."

While Rose was adjusting to her new life as a working mother, her university moved to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Rose became the primary caregiver of her daughter during the business day. Rose had only been back in the office from maternity leave for two months before working from home indefinitely. Despite having the workload of a new baby and a tenure-track career, managing both from home. Rose explained that the pandemic created an opportunity for her to get the time with her daughter that she knew she needed. Rose added, "Being able to see what I would have been missing out on, had the pandemic not extended my time at home with her, I can't imagine now." Rose was unsure of how she would leave her daughter again to return to a full workday once the pandemic ends, but she was certain that she would adjust her work life to prioritize her role as a mother even more than before COVID-19 closures.

Tia's Tale

In high school, Tia's consistent stellar academic performance in math and science was the influencing factor on her decision to become a surgeon, and not just any surgeon, but a cardiovascular thoracic surgeon. While Tia attended a racially diverse high school, her placement in advanced coursework magnified her minority status daily, and she insisted her college learning experience would be different by attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

After researching HBCU statistics regarding medical school preparation, Tia enrolled at her top choice HBCU as freshman biology major. Early on in her very social undergraduate

years, Tia described “coming to herself” during a moment of inward reflection. She recalled asking herself, “Are you really going to be a surgeon? If someone dies, are you going to be able to go deliver that news? And I was like, this is not even realistic. I am not that person.” Tia changed majors several times, but her passion for the sciences remained. It was a Women’s Studies lecturer that pointed Tia to public health. Tia jokingly recalled one graduate school’s recommendation: “She said I was so in love with public health that I was annoying.”

Tia received a Master of Public Health and continued her doctorate education at the same institution but decided to switch mentors because her mentor doubted her abilities. Tia recalled finding a significant error within an analysis completed by a White male colleague, but initially her mentor would not engage her concern, only to later learn that Tia had been correct. Even as a PhD student, Tia experienced racism and a lack of support from department faculty that left her strongly considering quitting her doctoral program. The environment and the money were not worth the stress. Luckily, one of Tia’s part-time positions she held as doctoral student developed into a unique opportunity for professional growth. A trusted faculty member took an extended maternity leave and hired Tia to manage three studies in her absence, one of which Tia used to write her dissertation and earn her PhD.

Tia hoped for a postdoctoral position that would give her the opportunity to focus, as she had not been able to in graduate school. She declined a postdoc position from her doctoral institution and moved to another state to accept a postdoc position, which Tia described as a good experience, but it “didn’t propel me in any way forward.” Tia got married, but her husband was enrolled in business school, and they continued to live in separate states throughout her postdoctoral position. Unexpectedly, the newly married couple conceived their first child, and

without much professional guidance, a very pregnant Tia began applying for faculty jobs. In her third trimester of pregnancy, Tia started her first position as a tenure-track assistant professor on faculty at a public university.

A 37-year-old Black female, Tia had two children, of which her daughter was born a few months after accepting her first faculty position. Tia also gave birth to a son while working as a tenure-track assistant professor at another institution only two years later. Those closest to Tia would describe her as strong, fun, blunt, and thoughtful. During my time with Tia, I found her to be vivacious, transparent, analytical, and humorous. Tia was working from home, alongside her two children, who were home due to COVID-19 closures.

Tia had not prepared to start a family when she did, and she expected some professional challenges to arise as she navigated her new career. However, she did not anticipate embarking on her most demeaning experience to date as a faculty member. With only a few months of pregnancy remaining, Tia remembered being stared at constantly due to her plumping figure, being consistently micromanaged, which sometimes mirrored harassment, having her laptop stolen by a student who dared to greet her beforehand, and learning there was no true support mechanisms for her research agenda. The stress of her impending leave was what worried her most. Tia had not been in her role for a year, and her position was not covered under FMLA, so she negotiated for six weeks of maternity leave, to which her department chair responded, “There was this woman who had a baby on Saturday. She was at this meeting on Monday. I don’t think you should do that, but, you know, two weeks will probably be fine.” Tia explained that between the transition of moving across states and living with her husband for the first time since being married, she did not have the energy to respond to what she felt was brutal but knew was

certainly unreasonable for such a flexible role. She complied and returned to the office two weeks after giving birth to her daughter. Tia's mother stepped in to care for her granddaughter and assist Tia with her transition. Tia could not think of a bigger regret. Of all the sacrifices she made for her career, this was the one Tia would undo if she could.

Tia began pumping immediately after giving birth to build a reserve of milk for her daughter, but her attempts to plan a smooth return to the office proved futile. Nursing was painful, emotional breakdowns were consistent, and sleep deprivation became her norm, as her daughter would not sleep through the night until later when she was 18 months old. Tia recalled, "I was angry. I was resentful that I was there. I felt like I wasn't getting any work done. I felt like I was drowning at work. I felt like I was drowning at home."

Not long after Tia returned to her position, she began searching for another job, and she did not limit her search to faculty positions. Tia's professional reputation and connections soon warranted a tenure track Assistant Professor job offer at a thriving, yet less bureaucratic, university across town within a more family friendly department. Tia resigned her former position and headed for greener pastures.

While Tia wanted more children, her new faculty role and adjusting to motherhood suggested to her that she should hold off on her next pregnancy. She managed enough stress between being undermined at a new colleague, a new department chair expecting physical presence almost daily, and her husband's startup efforts that left her the primary breadwinner for their family. However, after a year in her new faculty role, Tia experienced her second unplanned pregnancy.

While her new university had its flaws, Tia acknowledged feeling more supported at work than she did in her first pregnancy. She stated, “I didn’t experience nearly as much discomfort in the workplace as I did with the first, and I think it’s also because there are many more women in the department.” While her new institution did not have a maternity leave policy specific to faculty, Tia was eligible to take three months of paid leave, and she did so to care for her newborn son. Additionally, the tenure clock automatically stopped for faculty women taking maternity leave, but Tia opted out of the extension and continued to pursue tenure alongside her pregnancy and leave period.

Much of Tia’s excitement during her second pregnancy and leave period was the result of knowing what to expect of work and pregnancy that she had not known previously. While she still experienced stress at work and at home, Tia had a better sense of how to manage it all. This included dealing with a more strenuous pregnancy on her body, her faculty mentor unexpectedly resigning as her mentor, a rare allergy diagnosis for her son, and teaching the semester she returned to work. Tia assumed responsibility for her experience, although she believed that institutions should be doing more thoughtful policy development regarding the duality facing female employees:

There should be different levels to it. We should be more thoughtful around what the message is that we’re giving to mothers specifically. I don’t know no mother, where the father does the same amount of work . . . so we’re not gonna pretend now that everything is equitable.

Tia spoke of not wanting to ruffle the feathers of her colleagues in pursuit of an equitable leave experience for pregnant faculty women, and she could not reconcile how the faculty

mothers who proceeded her seemed to forget about their pregnancy and leave experiences as their careers grew. With laughter and a firm tone, Tia stated,

I hope I get on that committee (Faculty Senate Committee), so I can say that once I get tenure, actually, “This is bullshit! Y’all giving men the same amount of time off as you’re giving women, and they’re not fucking carrying a baby and pushing them out of their vaginas.”

Tia shared that earlier that same day her department chair stated that she was ready to go up for tenure. I celebrated with Tia, and then we laughed at all the good trouble she would get into advancing university policies once she earned tenure.

Maya’s Memoir

Maya knew she wanted to travel the world. Attending a high school with an International Baccalaureate program presented a few options to make Maya’s desire a reality, but she specifically remembered the USAID speaker, the one who inspired her to pursue global health. She traveled to South Africa soon after high school, admitting that she was more of a tourist than a researcher at that point. Maya chose to attend her state college, a leading university in public health, and this environment exposed her to even more public health opportunities. Still a bit uncertain of her career path, Maya majored in public health and decided on the Peace Corps as her next step, as she was still sure about her desire to travel.

After two years of working abroad, Maya knew she wanted to go to graduate school, but had concerns about a longtime career in public health. As a first-generation Greek American, not only did her family’s opinion of her career choice matter, but their expectations were limited to traditional career paths, such as doctor or lawyer. Maya completed a Master Public Health

program believing she would work in applied public health. However, watching her mentor navigate the field led Maya to believe she could have a greater impact on public health if she, too earned a PhD. Her terminal degree would also provide enough status to satisfy her parents' hopes for her career path.

Without fully considering what a career as an academic would entail, Maya completed her doctoral program and did very well academically. The funding she acquired from the National Institute of Health made her a competitive candidate on her faculty search, which resulted in two fulltime offers immediately upon graduation. Maya decided to accept the position located closest to her boyfriend, a man she met while enrolled in her doctoral program and would eventually marry. At the time of this study, Maya was a tenured associate professor on faculty at a public health graduate school.

A 42-year-old White Greek female, Maya had two children; a seven-year-old daughter she gave birth to as a tenure-track faculty member and a four-year-old son who was born after she earned tenured. Maya had worked at the same institution since completing her doctoral program. Those closest to Maya would describe her as hardworking, considerate, innovative, and fun. In my interviews with Maya, I found her to be wise, composed, generous, and funny. Maya was working from home, alongside her two children, who were home due to COVID-19 closures.

Maya and her husband prioritized their career paths and other personal decisions, such as traveling, the first eight years of marriage. Their delay to have children was not customary in their large Greek extended family, who anxiously awaited the birth of the couple's first child. Maya later regretted their decision to wait after losing her loving mother-in-law soon after her

second child was born. Nevertheless, Maya postponed pregnancy until she felt ready to become a mom. Furthermore, she expressed, “It’s kind of embarrassing to admit, but part of the decision was a little bit driven by my tenure clock.” Maya knew she would not have the capacity to make large strides toward earning tenure and welcome a baby to her family, so she waited to get pregnant and decided she would just be “an older mom.” After a year of trying to conceive alongside traveling internationally for work, she welcomed the good news of her first pregnancy. Her family and colleagues were also excited that a baby was finally on the way.

Maya kept up at work and even taught a course while pregnant, despite developing a skin rash during pregnancy that kept her up at night scratching. Maya acknowledged feeling supported by her colleagues, including her department chair, exclaiming, “Everyone wanted me to succeed.” She learned from her department administrator that the university had a flat policy for faculty leave, but departments could do more, and Maya’s department agreed to 12 weeks of paid leave. However, it was not clear to Maya if she could legally take leave from her grant efforts. One grant covered a portion of her university salary, and the grant-funded project was not being put on hold while she was on leave. Maya knew that no one would be assigned to her grant efforts when she went on leave, but she would still receive pay, and therefore, she felt a responsibility to keep working. No one ever gave a straight answer regarding her coverage concerns. Maya joked, “It’s kind of like don’t ask, don’t tell. That’s exactly what it’s like!”

As customary within Maya’s culture, she stayed home the first 40 days after giving birth to her daughter. While this time proved helpful for healing and bonding, the constant visitation of family and friends made it challenging to create a schedule for the new family. Maya

reflected, “I will say the hardest part of having this baby and coming back and transitioning is that it was like learning new roles in our house. Like our dynamic has changed dramatically.”

Maya spent a significant portion of her leave period learning the laws associated with becoming an employer, so that she could legally hire a nanny, another decision she later regretted, as the benefit was not worth managing another person. Maya’s lack of coverage on the grant-funded research project meant that Maya’s pregnant colleague would travel to Maya’s home to make it possible for her to complete her portion of work while on leave, to which Maya conceded was the only way to finish the project. While Maya appreciated the support she received, she worked because she thought she had to work:

One possibility would have been that some of the administrative support that’s given for the kinds of grants that I was on could have been used to pay my salary, so that legally and technically, I could have not been working on those. But that was not something I understood.

Maya learned about this option from another colleague at the same university once her leave had ended. After a busy leave period, Maya transitioned from nursing her baby exclusively and prepared for her return to work.

Maya had a fridge for her breastmilk and an office door that locked when she needed to pump. She recalled being in an elevator with male colleagues and her mini cooler she used to travel with her breastmilk when one man jokingly asked if she was trying to sneak a six pack into the office. Maya took the joke in stride and within a year of her return to work she submitted her dossier for tenure.

Within months of the submission, she was pregnant with her second child and would learn that she earned tenure while pregnant with her son. Maya had international travel planned for work a month after earning tenure, but Maya was uncomfortable taking the necessary antimalarials while pregnant. She convinced herself that it was fine, although the trip proved otherwise. To make matters worse, the exciting news of tenure came just as her mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer. Exhausted by caring for her growing two-year-old and her husband caring for his ill mother, the support of tenure was Maya's saving grace during her second pregnancy. She explained, "I have to admit, like I did not worry about papers quite as much right. I'm still trying to get the grants out because I want the salary coverage but definitely didn't have to worry as much."

Maya gave birth to her son and enjoyed a bonding leave period. She expressed that "the second time around was just so much easier because I've been there, done that. And I knew how I wanted things to kind of run." Her first pregnancy taught her that the responsibility of a new child would fall mostly upon her whether she thought it should or not.

As she recalled her university experience, Maya mocked, "We know that you're going to slow down, but we're not going to change, like, you know, we're not going to move benchmarks or deliverables, because you don't do that." Maya accepted this reality of her chosen career. However, Maya made it clear that after prioritizing a career, her children had become her new priority, and her labor of love toward them could not be compared to the taxing labor of a job. Maya shared with contentment, "Whether or not I go up for professor, I may never. I may stay at associate and not try for that next level." She made it clear that earning the rank of professor dimmed in comparison to raising her children. Maya's days of prioritizing her career were over.

Themes

As constructed knowers, participants were able to integrate all five knowledge perspectives to make sense of themselves and their world. To understand how participants made meaning of their work-life balance experiences, the researcher identified silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge when present within the stories shared. Each theme that emerged reflected a development of knowledge across experiences. It is important to note that not only was silence the rarest position, but giving birth was a turning point for silent women that assisted them in transitioning to received knowers. Furthermore, received knowers who attend college transition to subjective knowers, as college demands cognitive advancement (Belenky et al., 1986). All four participants were mothers and college graduates, so fewer of their encounters reflected silence or received knowledge.

To develop a narrative of the faculty mother work-life balance culture, the researcher used emplotment to identify themes emerging across participant stories (Emden, 1998). This involved weaving together the plots of core stories created through the analysis of Eve, Rose, Tia, and Maya's interviews. To capture an even more vivid story as it relates to each theme, the description of each theme is inclusive of direct quotes not included in participants' core stories. The following themes emerged: *Mentorship*, *Support to Return to Work After Leave*, *Advancing Leave Policies*, and *Work-Life Balance*.

Mentorship

At the core of each career narrative is an unplanned faculty career. By the end of their undergraduate programs, neither Rose, Eve, Tia nor Maya had plans to pursue careers in

academia. Furthermore, a more senior faculty woman influenced each participant's decision to pursue academia. Female mentorship proved essential throughout all of their careers, including when they became faculty mothers. Eve shared, "A mentor said to me, you know, a postdoc is a good opportunity, even if you're not sure that you want a job in academia, because it allows you to kind of put your foot in the door." Faculty mentorship encouraged Eve to consider a career in academia, even after her own experience with an all-female dissertation committee left her feeling inadequate to be a university faculty member. Later as a pregnant faculty member Eve recalled reaching out to more senior colleagues across departments to gather their experiences and advice on being pregnant and taking leave. Eve knew she was the first pregnant woman on the tenure-track, and she needed professional mentorship from the women who had gone before her. Eve's actions reflected her position as a constructed knower.

Constructed knowers are most likely to identify a mentor and pursue the relationship consistently (Egan, 1996). Eve had already begun her career as a faculty member, and she was pregnant with her third child when her thoughts on mentorship reflected constructed knowing. Before having children, earning a PhD, or beginning her career, Eve's mentorship reflected her being a received knower. With no interest of working in academia, Eve applied to a postdoctoral program at the insistence of a mentor. Furthermore, Eve initially wanted to pursue a career in medicine, but when she identified a lack of mentorship, she withdrew her plan, as she perceived that there was no one from whom to receive knowledge. Eve's story is reflective of her developing knowledge regarding mentorship across her career.

Similarly, Rose and Tia developed their mentorship knowledge across their careers. Rose had not considered earning another degree after her MPH. Rose recalled,

I got an email from my advisor from my graduate studies. She said that they had gotten this training grant to fund PhDs. I'd never been interested in doing a PhD, but it would be fully funded, and it was such a great opportunity.

Before beginning her career as a faculty member, Rose's experience with mentorship reflected her positioning as a received knower.

Tia's experience as a doctoral student included being hazed by her mentor, which Tia knew was inappropriate, yet the experience proved insightful to her, positioning her as a subjective knower during the earlier career mentorship she received. However, my last interview with Tia revealed that while her department chair had only recently recommended her for tenure, Tia had already sought out mentorship and believed she was ready to earn tenure a year prior. Both Rose and Tia's mentorship experiences support the development of knowledge across their careers. Faculty mothers may be positioned as received or subjective knowers in regard to mentorship, earlier in their career development, despite their natural tendency to evolve as constructed knowers later in their careers.

Support to Return to Work After Leave

Eve, Rose, Tia, and Maya all struggled with their return to work once their maternity leave period ended. While they all expressed sadness at not being ready to leave their newborns, it was the presence or absence of workplace support that determined how each woman adjusted to becoming a faculty mother. Tia's lack of support after returning from her first leave led her to find a new job within a year, whereas the unexpected show of support Eve received not only kept her from quitting her job but encouraged her to champion for support of other faculty mothers.

However, although participants were able to identify the support that they needed upon their return to work, they rarely demanded it.

As each participant returned to work, they carried their newfound motherhood at their forefronts. When describing her return to work from maternity leave, Tia explained, “It’s not just about learning how to care for a new person, like you are a different person.” The ways in which the women described knowing the support they needed to return to work were consistently communicated from the new mother perspective within them, and not the faculty person perspective. Much of what the women knew as new mothers was subjective. The subjective knower looks to their own experience as the source of truth and knowledge, a perspective described as having an infallible internal instinct that lends to constant inner protest (Belenky et al., 1986). However, when subjective knowers transition into procedural knowers, the voice of reason quiets their inner protest. Procedural knowers are calmer and more powerful in thinking, as well as marked by their desire to understand external authority. New mothers positioned as procedural knowers reflected women who knew what support they needed upon their return to work, but they often yielded to their voice of reason, which for all four mothers translated to compliance with the status quo at their workplaces.

Rose believed that it was too soon to leave her daughter, but she described just complying and returning to the office when her leave period ended: “It was mostly a challenge, just to leave her. She was only, you know, less than three months old. I really didn’t want to leave her in daycare.” Fortunately for Rose, the impact of pandemic closures allowed her to work remotely through the first year of her child’s life and keep her daughter home with her while doing so. Rose described the unique opportunity of witnessing all of the experiences she would have

otherwise missed, and she expressed, “Everybody should be home for that first year, and it might seem like a long time, but a year in our lifetimes, that's nothing.” As a new mother positioned as a procedural knower, Rose’s voice of reason exceeded her intuition when she returned to work.

Maya and Eve both shared stories of the challenges of pumping their breast milk upon returning to work. Maya described sitting on a cooler in a bathroom stall trying to use an inoperable plug, while Eve struggled to schedule pumping with fear of being disruptive during a faculty retreat. In both instances the women knew what support they needed, but their reasoning led them to comply with the support provided.

Furthermore, Eve expressed knowing that her return to work would be challenging based on the negative encounter with the Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies on the first day she returned to work. However, rather than challenge authority on the support she needed, Eve identified solace in a faculty mentorship group outside of her department and school and managed the best she could. Similarly, Maya relied on a pregnant colleague to travel to her home during her maternity leave to manage a project that she did not have the support of external authority to postpone.

Tia’s choice to return to work two weeks after giving birth is most reflective of new mothers as procedural knowers. Tia prioritized the knowledge of an external authority ahead of what she knew she needed. Two weeks after giving birth, she physically returned to work while acknowledging, “My coochie was hurting, my breasts were hurting, and I had to go back to this office.” As procedural knowers, the new mothers desired to be understanding of external truths and authority even when doing so jeopardized their own well-being. As constructed knowers at the time of their interviews, each woman described prioritizing procedures when returning to

work, as they reflected on their experiences. If the support they needed did not already exist, the mothers chose to make do with the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Advancing Leave Policies

Within their narratives, each woman pointed to policies having a negative impact on their work-life balance experience. Leave policies were unclear, unstandardized, underdeveloped, and even nonexistent in one situation. Some participants suggested that the policy disarray felt intentional. Despite both Eve and Maya struggling to understand how to manage grant efforts while on leave, neither received directions that clarified what they should do. Even when Tia's institution offered a well-meaning policy and stopped the tenure clock automatically, it was not a good idea for Tia, and she was burdened with undoing the automation.

As the women shared their maternity leave stories and reflections of their experience, much of their attention focused on institutional advancing leave policies. Additionally, each woman acknowledged that advancing leave policies were to the benefit of future faculty mothers. Distinguishing characteristics of constructed knowers are their ability to be reflective, as well as their ability to integrate subjective and objective knowledge. Constructed knowers do not dismiss their former ways of knowing; they can trust their own knowing without being dominated by or dismissing procedural knowledge, subjective knowledge, received knowledge, or silence. When participants spoke of advancing leave policies, their positioning as constructed knowers was evident.

Maya and Tia both took two maternity leaves while working as university professors, and both women expressed having a more positive experience during their second maternity leave. Maya worked at the same institution for both leave periods, and there was no change in

advancing leave policies between her first and second leave. Tia's second leave period occurred at a different institution than her first, and although she acknowledged joining a more family friendly department, the maternity leave policies were similarly lacking. Without an advancement of policy, both women took more liberties and trusted what they knew they needed during their second leave. Tia recalled struggling to nurse her son and feeling supported, rather than guilty, in leaving the office to be with her infant. Maya expressed "Once I had my first kid I kind of got over that a little bit where I was like, 'Look, life is not only about what I present at work,'" as she previously was overly concerned with how her colleagues viewed her after giving birth. Further, Maya earned tenure between her first and second leave period, and the stability that tenure provided lessened the worry and stress she carried during her first pregnancy. While new mothers were positioned as procedural knowers, the two veteran mothers identified as constructed knowers during their second leave period. The knowers truly became an intimate part of the known.

Faculty mothers approached advancing leave policies as constructed knowers. The intimacy of childbirth and responsibilities of caregiving for a newborn equipped participants to trust their knowledge as constructed knowers, as well as the time they spent reflecting on their experiences. Rose expressed, "I feel like I could go on forever about how we need paid maternity leave for six months to a year, but I'll take 12 weeks because that's way more than a lot of people get." Rose was working from home with her infant daughter due to COVID-19 closures, and she was not sure of what she would do when work required returning to the office. Rose had only sought out external childcare for one month before being positioned to care for her own

child alongside her work. In addition, Rose could not imagine having another child with such a short maternity leave period.

Tia also spoke of extending the maternity leave period to allow moms to become comfortable in their new roles as mothers, in addition to caring for their newborn and healing physically themselves. Tia also highlighted the inequity in not advancing policy:

You still have to do a year's worth of work even though your pregnant for nine months of those and out for three months. So essentially, what you're doing is operating at a higher level to achieve everything that you were supposed to achieve in a nine-month period while you're pregnant. It's not equitable.

Tia described new advancing leave policies that could assist in achieving a more equitable experience for faculty mothers.

Similarly, Maya shared,

I mean there's just no way to completely disconnect when you're leading activities that need to keep moving while you're gone. Like my class, somebody else can teach my class, but somebody else can't make this research project keep going. So even though the university who is technically paying me said, "You know, you can take this time off," I still had to make sure that these projects were going to get implemented.

Maya highlighted that current policies did not provide for an uninterrupted maternity leave for faculty mothers. None of the participants believed they could completely disconnect while on maternity leave. Advancing maternity leave policies for faculty mothers included extending the leave period and the opportunity to disconnect.

Eve described starting her maternity leave sooner than expected because she had been in a car accident in the last month of pregnancy. Despite her heightened physical and emotional needs, Eve's leave period consisted of 46 days once her son was born. Eve explained, "Even in my own research work I advocate for other women, but when it came to me, I just felt like, 'Oh, well, this is the system. And I have to work within the system.'" Eve's knowledge perspective had since shifted from procedural knowing to constructed knowing, as evidenced by her advocacy to advance leave policies campus wide at her institution after her own negative experience. Initially, Eve believed that, because she had different needs as a pregnant person and new mother than those covered under established institutional policies, her needs were less valid. However, her advocacy for new policies was specific to the pregnancy and new mother experience.

Tia, who also advocated for advancing leave policies specific to her needs, stated, "I think most institutions that I know of, academic institutions, have not carefully thought out what it actually means when you are a pregnant person, and you are still accomplishing the same if not more than your counterparts." When working to advance policies that impact faculty mothers, participants hoped for policies specific to their needs.

Work-Life Balance

Participants responded to requests to define work-life balance and describe their own work-life balance before sharing their career or maternity leave stories. Their responses to this prompt, as well as the career and leave stories they shared, captured an ongoing duality between work and life that participants did not resolve, but prioritized one over the other at different times. After having children, each woman consistently prioritized life over work and planned to

continue doing so until their children were older, even at the expense of their careers. Eve, Rose, Tia, and Maya articulated a clear understanding of work-life balance, but they expressed doubts that achieving it was possible. Becoming comfortable with the ambiguity of work-life balance points to their positioning as constructed knowers.

Participants accepted that, as faculty mothers, they would not come to experience work-life balance as it is defined, unless work expectations changed. Childbirth and child rearing happened within a more specified timeframe than becoming university faculty, and each mother's desire to be present while her children were growing up was greater than her desire to advance her careers. The strong sense of moral obligation the mothers felt toward their children further reflects their positioning as constructed knowers when describing their work-life balance. Eve expressed, "Sometimes feeling like you're doing all the right things, as a parent, seems like it's in conflict with doing all the right things as an academic." Eve was clear that her role as a mom took priority, despite feeling like she was falling behind. Maya explained that her children were her priority:

There's no such thing as my kids need too much of me, but there is such a thing as work needs too much of me, or I am demanding too much of myself to be successful at this level, my job.

Maya acknowledged that prioritizing her children meant she might not be promoted, and she had become okay with it.

Rose, the newest and youngest of the faculty mothers, described coming to terms with the duality of work-life balance early on in her daughter's life. Rose explained,

For me, work is one aspect of my life, but my life is such a bigger, richer quilt behind all of the things like my family and my other experiences and other interests. And so being able to make time for people and other things and travel and all the other aspects of life. And being able to do that financially as well. And I think I've achieved that right now, for sure.

As a junior faculty member on the tenure track, Rose admitted that never getting promoted would be fine with her. Faculty mothers deny that there can be a true balance between work and life, but they try and make the most of their dichotomy, in which life typically takes the priority.

As participants shared their stories, it is important to note the emotion attached to their stories. Eve cried at several points across all three interviews. Tia spoke angrily regarding much of her leave story, even using profanity to express the worst parts of her experience. Maya consistently communicated frustration through sarcasm. Participants conveyed particularly strong emotions as they shared their work-life balance experiences.

Summary

This chapter captured the work-life balance stories of Eve, Rose, Tia and Maya, four faculty mothers working to earn tenure within higher education. While each participant identified as a constructed knower within the theoretical framework Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky et al., 1986), at the time of their interviews, participants were positioned as different types of knowers across their experiences. The collective experiences of faculty mothers presented in this chapter served to answer the research questions posed within this study. The four themes that emerged, *Mentorship*, *Support to Return to Work After Leave*, *Advancing Leave Policies*, and *Work-Life Balance*, create a narrative of the faculty mother culture inclusive of benefits and

challenges worthy of further exploration to advance faculty mothers throughout higher education. Chapter 5 provides a summary of key findings, affirmation of current literature, study implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall aim of this narrative study was to explore the work-life balance experiences related to maternity leave and/or family policies of female employees on the path to higher education leadership. Chapter 1 provided background and context of the problem as an introduction to this study. Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature related to the history of women in the workforce, domestic and international policies regarding maternity leave, women in academia, and the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) adopted as the framework of this study. Chapter 3 outlined this narrative study's qualitative methodology and design. Chapter 4 presented the narratives of each participant, as well as a narrative of the faculty mother culture, framed through the lens of Women's Ways of Knowing theory, to understand how participants made sense of their work-life balance experiences. Additionally, Chapter 4 also identified the knowledge perspectives evinced by participants, as well as four themes that emerged from participant core stories to develop a narrative of the faculty mother culture. This chapter includes a summary of key findings inclusive of emergent themes, affirmation of current literature, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Key Findings

To explore the disparities that pregnancy and motherhood can create for faculty mothers in higher education, the researcher formulated two research questions to guide the study. The analysis of data presented in Chapter 4 is summarized following each research question. For the first research question, the discussion focuses on the themes that emerged from participants' narratives. For the second research question, the discussion focuses on the knowledge

perspectives of the participants, as delineated by Belenky et al. (1986) in their Women’s Ways of Knowing theory and evidenced in participants’ narratives.

Research Q1

The first research question (Q1) was as follows: How do faculty mothers describe their university work-life balance experiences as they relate to maternity leave and/or family policies?

Figure 1 depicts the findings for the first research question. Four themes emerged from the research that developed a narrative of the faculty mother culture. These were *Mentorship*, *Support to Return to Work After Leave*, *Advancing Leave Policies*, and *Work-Life Balance*.

Figure 1

Summary of Key Findings for Research Question 1



Mentorship is Essential

Mentorship proved essential among faculty mothers as early as their graduate school years. Faculty mothers did not begin their career path with a plan to work in academia, but

through mentorship, they found fulfilling careers as higher education faculty. Maya, a tenured associate professor at the time of our interview, revealed, “I’m first-generation Greek American; my parents moved from Greece to the United States. And when you’re first generation, you get to be a doctor or lawyer. There’s like no other career paths.” Despite her parents’ expectations, Maya acknowledged that her graduate program advisor, a faculty woman using her terminal degree to complete research and applied work, influenced her otherwise. Choosing the faculty path allowed Maya to appease her traditional parents by earning a prestigious degree, while doing the work she enjoyed.

Not only were faculty mother career paths influenced by more senior faculty women, but the motherhood paths of more senior faculty women also influenced faculty mothers. Maya described the importance of her department chair’s experience:

I also knew she wanted me to succeed and had been through it herself. So, I mean, that’s kind of a leg up on a female mentor when they’re parents as well. You know even men . . . they just . . . it’s just a different experience in my opinion.

Once working in academia, faculty mothers sought out career mentorship and work-life balance advice, particularly from the women who advanced or gave birth before them.

Support to Return to Work After Leave is Important

Faculty mothers struggled to return to work after their maternity leave period ended. Not only did the women find the 12-week maternity leave period to be too short, but institutional support once women physically returned to campus was lacking. Faculty mothers described returning to work while managing their healing bodies, a newborn, marital challenges amidst the transition to parents, new childcare arrangements, infant/family illness, and sleep deprivation.

Tia exclaimed, “As soon as I went back my milk supply plummeted!” Maya shared, “It was constantly every three or four days. Crap. She has a fever. Which one of us is going to stay home? I just remember that whole first year being like that. I’m so glad those days are over.” Despite faculty mothers wanting more support when they returned to work, they held existing support mechanisms and supportive colleagues in high regard.

Advancing Leave Policies is Necessary

Advancing leave policies was the hope of each faculty mother in this study. The absence of policies and underdeveloped policies during and after their pregnancy disadvantaged faculty mothers. They described adhering to policies not created with them in mind or not created at all. Furthermore, none of the participants believed they had the ability to completely disconnect while on leave, so they all responded to work emails, which was the most minimal engagement.

Tia recalled feeling overwhelmed by teaching a course the same semester she returned from maternity leave. She acknowledged, “It would have also been nice to for them to say something like, “Okay, if you were supposed to be teaching this semester, you get a teaching credit.”

Similarly, Eve, who taught two courses the semester she returned from maternity leave, encountered a lack of support on her first day back to work. Eve described her Director of Graduate Studies expecting her to be fully prepared to respond to student emergencies on the first day of her return. The need for a transition period was better understood through Maya, who shared, “Part of the hardest part of like having this baby and coming back and transitioning is that it was like learning new roles in our house. Our dynamic has changed dramatically.” Faculty mothers were returning to work with a new identity, and they desired policies that would extend

the leave period and allow them to fully disconnect while on leave to assist in embracing their new role as mother.

Work-Life Balance is Unfeasible

Faculty mothers found duality within work-life balance and did not believe it could be accomplished within their work and life. Throughout their careers, the women made a choice to prioritize work or life depending on the circumstance, but once they had children, faculty mothers consistently prioritized life. Faculty mothers accepted that their career paths might be delayed or altered because of their decision to have a child(ren).

Research Q2

The second research question (Q2) was as follows: How do knowledge perspectives inform faculty mother experiences, as they pertain to maternity leave and/or family policies as identified in the Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986)? In this study, the researcher used the lens of Women Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) to understand how women make sense of their world through five knowledge perspectives. *Figure 2* presents the summary of findings for the second research question. Silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge describe the different positions from which participants understood their lives.

Figure 2

Summary of Key Findings for Research Question 2

<p style="text-align: center;">Mentorship is Essential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty mothers may be positioned as received knowers in regard to mentorship, earlier in their career development, despite their natural tendency to evolve as constructed knowers later in their careers.
<p style="text-align: center;">Support Returning to Work after Leave is Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty mothers may be positioned as procedural knowers when giving birth for the first time, but second time moms proved to be constructed knowers.
<p style="text-align: center;">Advancing Leave Policies is Necessary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty mothers discussed advancing leave policies as constructed knowers. The knowers truly became an intimate part of the known.
<p style="text-align: center;">Work-Life Balance is Unfeasible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty mothers described work-life balance as constructed knowers.

Faculty mothers were mostly informed as constructed knowers, the highest position of knowing. Constructed knowing represents the integration of the knower, the known, and communication of the known. Constructed knowers are reflective, articulate, and comfortable with ambiguity, as they do not expel their former ways of knowing but choose to integrate all their knowing. As faculty mothers reflected on their work-life balance experiences, different positions of knowing across their development became evident. Faculty mothers were positioned as received and subjective knowers during the mentorship they received early in their career paths. The women relied on the knowledge of authority figures or their own voice to determine their career paths. However, later in their careers, faculty mothers were positioned as constructed knowers, not only reflected in their pursuit of mentorship, but also within their ability to integrate the mentorship they received with what they had come to know as true.

Faculty mothers sought out support returning to work as procedural knowers. Procedural knowing, marked by the voice of reason, positioned faculty mothers to follow institutional policies upon their return to work, despite knowing the policies disadvantaged them. Faculty mothers giving birth a second time during their faculty career transitioned to the position of constructed knowers, seeking support upon their return to work. Maya stated, “The second time around was just so much easier because I’ve been there, done that. And I knew how I wanted things to kind of run.” Maya described being less fearful and pretentious regarding her needs when she returned to work after her second leave period. Likewise, Tia exclaimed, “I didn’t experience nearly as much discomfort in the workplace as I did with the first!” Within her second leave period, Tia opted against stop the tenure clock, which was uncommon, and negotiated flexibility to care for her son, who suffered from a rare allergy condition. Both Maya and Tia were comfortable requesting support that did not exist, as well as requesting exemptions to policies that negatively impacted them.

Faculty mothers were positioned as constructed knowers within their efforts and hope to advance policy. Their insight and ideas developed as a result of reflecting on their own struggles with university policies and articulating what would be more beneficial to future faculty mothers, which demonstrated an integration of subjective and objective knowledge. Although participants highlighted that policies were inequitable and not made with them in mind, faculty mothers successfully navigated the experience. Similarly, faculty mothers did not believe that work-life balance existed for them, but they resolved to make peace with the dichotomy. In discussions of advancing policy and work-life balance, faculty mothers disagreed with the status quo without dismissing it, further reflecting their position as constructed knowers.

Affirming Current Literature

Chapter 2 of this study connected the history of women in the workforce to the issues, experiences, and policies impacting faculty mothers in higher education. Some of this study's findings, as well as participant experiences, affirmed the research described within the literature review. This occurred in reference to maternity leave schemes; choice-based discrimination; decreased morale and production due to inadequate, impersonal leave policies, impact of the maternal wall and double track, and the challenges of working remotely while caring for children homebound due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early in the literature review, Stearns (2015) explained that the United States is the only industrialized nation that does not offer a paid maternity leave scheme. Stearns (2015) added that it should not be surprising that without a national mandate, most U.S. employers do not offer paid maternity leave. The institutions employing the faculty mothers in this study did not offer paid maternity leave to faculty. In fact, none of the institutions had policies specific to faculty taking maternity leave or family leave. Each institution adhered to the national mandate, Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave, 1996), which offers faculty 12 weeks of job protected leave if employees had been employed for 12 months. This leave period is not specific to pregnancy or motherhood but covers a conglomerate of leave situations, and employees can use it once every 12 months. If a faculty member qualified for job-protected leave under FMLA, their salary was covered for the 12-week period or 60 business days if their academic department approved. Tia, who began a faculty position in her third trimester of pregnancy, was not covered under FMLA as she had not been employed for a year when she gave birth. Tia's employer allotted her two weeks to give birth and return to the office

in the absence of a national mandate. Eve was in a car accident in her third trimester of pregnancy, and the time she needed to take off to heal from the accident lessened the amount of time she would have once she gave birth. Eve's employer required her to return to work after 46 business days. Chapter 2 of this study described choice-based discrimination against mothers, which refers to the workforce inequities perceived justifiable because a woman chooses to be a mother. Both Tia and Eve suffered choice-based discrimination as they returned to work.

In 2017, Stephen Schwarzman, CEO of a private equity firm, penned a letter to the editor of the Wall Street Journal exclaiming that "paid leave is worth every penny." Schwarzman acknowledged research developed at Rutgers University as a factor to revisit the company's maternity leave policy, as Houser and Vartanian (2012) found that receiving paid maternity leave increased the chances of a woman returning to the workforce after childbirth by 93 percent. Specifically, Schwarzmann's firm saw an 80% increase in morale and 70% in productivity. While all the faculty mothers in this study returned to work without a paid maternity leave scheme, both participants who were ineligible for FMLA coverage described a lack of morale and productivity upon their return to work. Within a year, Tia resigned and accepted another faculty position, while Eve resolved to meet with senior leadership and address the policies that negatively impacted her. Schwarzmann's new maternity leave policy extended the leave period from 12 weeks to 16 weeks and established a phase back to work period. This study found that faculty mothers also desired an extended leave period and policies specific to their situations, such as an adjustment period when returning from leave.

Campo (2009) explained that maternity leave frameworks should be well thought out and respectful of the women they serve, rather than arbitrary days off with some level of

compensation. As participants described their experiences with policies, most of their frustration pointed to the policies not serving them well. Tia exclaimed, “I don’t know no mother, where the father does the same amount of work . . . not one fucking household! So we’re not gonna pretend now that everything is equitable,” as she described having to adhere to the same leave policies as men. Maya expressed frustration that institutions were allowing policies to remain status quo, while knowing faculty mothers needed more. Maya’s impression of higher education institutions was “We know that you're going to slow down, but we’re not going to change, like, you know, we’re not going to move benchmarks or deliverables, because you don’t do that.” Despite faculty mothers adhering to the policies that were set in place, they found them to be inequitable. Chapter 2 of this study discussed the application of cultural feminism to maternity leave policies by considering the essence of women (carrying children and being primary caregivers) when creating policy (Sallee, 2008). Faculty mothers desired policies that took in account their new role as mothers alongside employee and the support to do both roles well.

The maternal wall or motherhood ceiling is identified in the literature review as the largest and most distressing barrier that women on the leadership path face (Schnackenberg, 2019). Further, Chapter 2 of this study described the double track, which includes the mommy track and career track, as an option that disproportionately impacts the possibility of achieving work-life balance in the lives of women (Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1999). Sorenson (2017) evens explained that work-life balance is considered a gendered term, as the issue is more pressing for women. Faculty mothers in this study were impacted by the maternal wall and forced to navigate the double track within their maternity leave experiences. Each woman accepted that having children meant moving slower in their careers than their male counterparts,

as well as their female counterparts without children or with adult children, as motherhood became their priority. Stout et al. (2007) revealed that women are not convinced that earning a promotion at the expense of living a balanced life is worth it. Similarly, faculty mothers in this study were willing to forgo promotion to focus more of their energy on motherhood.

Since 2015, McKinsey and Company and LeanIn.org have published an annual report entitled *Women in the Workplace*, inclusive of data on the state of women to assist in advancing diversity in the workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2020). The most recent 2020 study, which was released amidst pandemic closures, revealed,

The pandemic has also intensified challenges that women already face in the workplace. Working mothers have always worked a “double shift”—a full day of work, followed by hours spent caring for children and doing household labor. Now the supports that made this even possible for women—including school and childcare—have been upended.

(McKinsey & Company, 2020, p. 6)

Faculty mothers in this study expressed experiencing more stress as a result of having their children at home while trying to work remotely. While Rose was delighted to have her daughter nearby to nurse rather than pump, she could only work when her infant daughter slept. Our interviews were scheduled around the baby’s sleep, and Rose acknowledged being tired. Two of my interviews with Tia took place in her car since she did not have much quiet space with her children home. Managing her school-age daughter proved easier though than her daycare-age son who desired Tia’s engagement throughout the day. While Maya had a home office, her youngest child unexpectedly joined our interview on one occasion, and Maya shared that the

interruption was her new normal. Maya stated, “I am, like, finding a way to at least, maintain, if not advance. So, I don’t think I’ll fall too far behind.”

Prior to pandemic closures, the women believed that achieving work-life balance was not an option for them. The lack of physical boundaries between faculty mothers and their children that developed as a result of pandemic closures further challenged their ability to achieve work-life balance as a mother and employee. Maya proclaimed, “It’s just not affecting women the same way. I have some male colleagues who are like divorced dads, and like, it’s just a completely different experience. Like they now have more time to work.”

Implications

The Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) does little to promote stability and economic security in the lives of pregnant women in the United States. The act provides unpaid, job-protected leave for 12 weeks to allow care for one’s own or a family member’s medical needs, and employees are eligible after 12 months of employment (U.S. Commission on Family and Medical Leave, 1996). Because the United States does not have a national paid maternity leave scheme, U.S. women giving birth are forced to rely on FMLA to provide parameters for their leave experience, despite FMLA not being specific to pregnancy or childbirth. Montez et al. (2020) described a physician who gave birth prematurely at 27 weeks and returned to work in two weeks so that she would have leave coverage remaining once her newborn daughter was released from the hospital. In addition to only 50% of American women being eligible for FMLA at the time of their leave period (Guendelman et al., 2013), FMLA is not comprehensive coverage for pregnant women, as revealed through participant experiences in this study. Furthermore, FMLA implies that an already pregnant woman will lose stability and economic

security if she decides to initiate employment or change jobs before giving birth, because her new employer is not obligated to protect her position while she is on leave; pregnancies end in nine months, but eligibility is limited to persons employed 12 months or longer.

It is important to note that the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 was temporarily amended between September 11, 2020 and December 31, 2021 as a response to school and daycare pandemic closures. The Families First Coronavirus Respond Act (FFCRA) required employers to provide paid leave to eligible employees so that employees could take time off from work to care for their children (U.S. Department of Labor [DOL], 2020). The primary purpose for creating this temporary rule was to ensure employers stabilized their payrolls, so employees could maintain their income while fighting the public health crisis (DOL, 2020). While the provision had limitations, establishing a temporary rule to assist working parents highlighted the U.S. government's awareness of the dire problem facing American parents, as well as the government's capacity to address the problem swiftly.

Without a federal mandate and few state mandates, universities are at liberty to interpret the Family Medical Leave Act to their advantage and often to the disadvantage of mothers. Currently, five states have Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML), with three additional states set to establish programs by January 2023 (Montez et al., 2020). Forty-two states remain with no PFML. Rose (2019) reported that one U.S. institution required a faculty mother to use sick leave after giving birth to cover time that the university deemed paid time off for all other employees during winter recession. Had the woman given birth after winter recession, she would have received paid time off during the winter recession as did her colleagues with no regard to her pregnancy, allowing her to maximize any FMLA protections. Without university policies

specific to pregnancy and motherhood, faculty mothers will continue to have inequitable leave experiences.

Additionally, lacking policies undermines motherhood and fails to uphold the dignity of womanhood. Pope John Paul II (1981) wrote,

The *true advancement of women* requires that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role. (p. 29)

Unlike other leave types, a maternity leave period marks a woman returning to the workplace as an employee and a new mother. In addition to managing her own care, she is now responsible for the care of a newborn, and the policies created to guide her experience should reflect her situation. Establishing work-life balance is most pressing for mothers. Working mothers still identify as primary caregivers to their children, and they are typically more responsible for domestic duties than are their partners (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017), but policies guiding working mothers do not support work-life balance. Furthermore, in their study of motherhood, Laney et al. (2013) identified development in 30 faculty women and found that while motherhood reigns over careers and creates career limitations for faculty mothers, motherhood also expands a woman's personal, relational, and vocational capacity. Thus, the creation of university policies specific to pregnancy and motherhood establishes more timely and appropriate guidance for faculty mothers, as well as enhances the employee experience and productivity.

This research study contributes to ongoing conversations regarding the retention and advancement of faculty women in higher education. The theoretical framework used in this study, Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986) had not previously been used to understand how women make sense of their university work-life balance experiences as related to maternity and family policies. The framework highlighted faculty mothers as authorities in their work-life balance experience, further supporting faculty mother inclusion and leadership in the development of policies that impact them. Early in 2021, Meghan McCain, daughter of former Republican senator John McCain, publicly declared that her position regarding paid maternity leave had changed after giving birth and returning to work on January 4th (Rosa, 2021). While pregnant, McCain worked as a daily television cohost alongside five other women on a prominent show entitled *The View*. The show, aired five days a week since 1997, averages 2.9M women viewers daily (MacLellan, 2019). McCain did not support a mandated maternity leave scheme previously, but her own challenging motherhood experience led her to declare,

We are leaving women in this country without [that] capacity and ability—unless you have an employer that allows you to take care of your child—to heal physically, which is something that needs to happen. This is something that's really, a really dark spot for our country. We are the only developing nation that doesn't supply women with paid family leave. (as cited in Rosa, 2021, p. 1)

Meghan McCain's words reflect a woman coming to know differently after the experience of giving birth and returning to work, just as faculty mothers' knowledge perspectives transitioned across their experiences. Faculty mothers are the knowers of their experience. Eve reflected,

Sometimes I look back on it, and I wish that the options had been clearer or that I could have advocated for myself better, so that the chair would have known that it might be something I need. I really felt like I had no negotiating power, and that the only thing I could say was, you know, just kind of smile and nod.

Limitations of the Study

This study was not without limitations. Although participants' narratives captured maternity leave experiences at five institutions, all faculty mothers were employed at schools of public health. Further, maternity leave is a women's health issue, and participants working as public health advocates may have contributed biased responses regarding the study topic. Moreover, tenure-track faculty women experience socioeconomic privilege that historically disenfranchised women do not (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017), so disparities described by faculty mothers could be more numerous and intensified among working mothers. Another limitation within this study was the process of collecting data during pandemic closures. Participants were adjusting to having their children home while trying to work remotely from home, and they expressed feeling stress and fatigue at the time of our interviews. Lastly, I served as the sole interviewer for this study, thereby introducing the possibility of bias, as I am a mother to four children, although I consciously and consistently suspended my judgement and bracketed my biases throughout the interview process.

Recommendations for Future Research

There were three findings from this study that influenced my recommendations for future research:

- Faculty mothers desire more support returning to work after giving birth.

- Faculty mothers desire extended leave time, the ability to disconnect while on leave, and a leave that is specific to their experience.
- Faculty mothers do not believe there is a work-life balance regarding their careers and motherhood.

Given these findings, future researchers could design several studies to not only explore the findings of this study, but to also further support practically advancing these findings into the daily lives of faculty mothers. Designing a qualitative study to capture established support mechanisms, as well as desired support mechanisms for faculty mothers returning from leave, would advance this study by providing specific policies for institutions to adopt or adapt to support mothers returning from leave. This narrative inquiry described much of what faculty mothers found to be unsupportive when returning from leave, thus creating an opportunity to explore supportive policies for faculty mothers. Another possible study design includes exploring existing advantageous parental leave policies in higher education, inclusive of universities with high female faculty retention rates, as well as those universities with more women appointed to leadership roles.

A study designed to capture the work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers across academic disciplines would advance this study by exploring if this study's problem is prevalent outside of the field of public health. Furthermore, a quantitative study design could advance the findings of this study by capturing a larger sample and quantifying the disparaging experiences of faculty mothers. All four participants in this study struggled with the policies they faced, but qualitative research, although transferable, is rarely considered generalizable. A quantitative study would support generalizability of the policy challenges facing the faculty mother culture.

However, a qualitative study designed to explore the perspectives of university policy makers would serve to advance the findings of this study. The faculty and staff responsible for establishing university policy understand the institutional implications of extending the maternity leave period, as well as creating policy specific to faculty mothers. Their compiled knowledge serves to create solutions and destroy barriers that may hinder the implementation of the current study's findings.

Finally, framing the current study differently may advance its findings. This study explored the work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers through the lens of Women's Ways of Knowing theory (Belenky et al., 1986), which serves to explore how women make sense of their lives across time. Another framework to consider when exploring work-life balance among faculty mothers is the Feminine Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2005), which assesses women's conformity to gender norms in the United States. Exploring gender norms among faculty mothers could inform policy makers of factors to address that are specific to faculty mothers.

Final Thoughts

This study aimed to explore the work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers. In researching this topic, I compiled the collective experiences of four faculty mothers which shed light on the university challenges faculty mothers face as they navigate their careers and the decision to have children. While the recommendations for future research imply establishing research to support formal policy changes, many universities have the autonomy, flexibility, and resources that allow informal governance to establish policies and work cultures supportive of faculty mothers more immediately. Although universities tend to nurture and develop

researchers, and as a result gain prestige from the knowledge researchers produce, their failure to nurture and develop faculty mothers, who are university researchers producing knowledge, is inconsistent with the needs of faculty mothers and contrary to the mission of universities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

MERCER UNIVERSITY

*Institutional Review Board
For Research Involving Human Subjects*

Thursday, March 26, 2020

Mrs. Lozairé Hodges Riley
3001 Mercer University Drive
Tift College of Education - Atlanta
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: A Narrative Inquiry of Work-life Balance Among Faculty Mothers in Higher Education (H2003098)

Dear Mrs. Hodges Riley:

On behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 24-Mar-2020 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with the 2018 Federal Regulations [21 CFR 56.110\(b\)](#) and [45 CFR 46.110\(b\)](#) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) [_6, _7](#) per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 26-Mar-2020. The protocol expires on 25-Mar-2021. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:

The purpose of this study is to explore work-life balance experiences of faculty mothers on the path to and/or engaged in higher education leadership.

NOTE: You **MUST** report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and **ALL** accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our [Satisfaction Survey](#) and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,



Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM.
Director of Research Compliance
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone: 478-301-4101 | Email: ORC_Mercer@Mercer_Edu | Fax: 478-301-2329
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your educational and work background?
2. How would you describe your overall feelings about your career so far?
3. How would you describe your overall feelings as a mother to a young child(ren)?
4. How would you define work-life balance?
 - How important is achieving work-life balance to you?
5. Before learning of your pregnancy, how did you feel about your university work-life balance?
6. Once pregnant, how did you feel about informing your employer?
7. Describe your experience being a pregnant faculty woman in the workplace?
 - Are there any specific measures you took to ensure success at work as a pregnant faculty woman? If yes, explain.
 - Was leaving the workplace a serious consideration at any point during your pregnancy? If yes, explain.
8. Describe your experience being a faculty woman on maternity leave?
 - Are there any specific measures you took to ensure success at work while on leave? If yes, explain.
 - Was leaving the workplace a serious consideration at any point during your maternity leave? If yes, explain.
9. Describe your experience being a faculty mother returning from maternity leave?
 - Are there any specific measures you took to ensure success at work as a new mother returning from leave? If yes, explain.
 - Was leaving the workplace a serious consideration at any point after your maternity leave? If yes, explain.
10. Describe your experience being a faculty mother to a young child?
 - Are there any specific measures you took to ensure success at work as a mother to a young child? If yes, explain.
11. Does your institution have pregnancy leave policies? If yes, tell me how your institution's leave policies impacted your pregnancy, maternity leave or return plans?
12. How did your immediate supervisor impact your pregnancy, maternity leave or return plans?
13. How did your partner's opinion impact your pregnancy, maternity leave or return plans?
14. Was there anything that promoted good work-life balance for you throughout your pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work? If yes, explain.
15. If you learned you were pregnant again, would you do anything differently in planning your maternity leave and return from work? Why or Why not?