Daddy's Home:
A Qualitative Analysis of Firm-Level Paternity Leave Usage Incentives

By

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ABSTRACT

Americans' lack of access to paid parental leave is a stressor for many families, especially given the significantly lower uptake rate for fathers' leave than mothers'. Research suggests that increased usage of paternity leave would greatly benefit the economy, working mothers, and families as a whole. However, paid leave is offered only by certain employers, and little research has been done to determine what organizational factors impact fathers' decisions to take advantage of firm-provided paid parental leave. Using interviews with American fathers whose employers provide paid, protected paternity leave, I find that company structure, job responsibilities, and co-worker attitudes have significant impacts on individuals' paternity leave decisions. Specifically, consistent company-wide messaging, public precedents, and flexible leave policies promote more positive attitudes toward leave-taking in the workplace. These findings may help guide parental leave policy decisions on the firm, state, and federal levels. On the firm level, I argue that all team leaders should be briefed in similar procedural frameworks. Especially for firms with longer parental leave allowances, policies should aim to prioritize employee flexibility and ease of re-entry after return. More broadly, my findings suggest that policies offered to mothers and fathers should be equal for similar roles in order to counteract societally upheld gendered divisions of labor in parenting.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite being one of the richest countries in the world, the United States falls short of its peers in providing access to paid leave for parents. While over 40 developed countries[1] provide some form of federally mandated paid leave for at least one parent, the United States provides none (Pew Research Center 2019). Because paid leave is not federally mandated, it is up to individual employers to offer their employees any paid leave, and these offerings vary greatly across the marketplace. As a result, many families are financially penalized by parenthood. Even in industries which offer paid parental leave for mothers and fathers, men disproportionately do not participate (Popper 2019). This trend exists despite much research stating that fathers who take paid leave have increased quality of life (Petts et al. 2019; Buenning 2015; Patnaik 2017; Tamm 2018). Though women's status in the labor economy has improved in recent years, the gender wage gap is largely attributable to motherhood and the lack of equitable paid parental leave (Weeden, Cha, and Bucca 2016). Given the increase in dual income households in the 21st century (Pew Research Center 2015), incentivizing fathers to take paid leave could provide a substantial benefit for working mothers.

Several studies exist that attempt to analyze fathers' attitudes and behaviors surrounding paid parental leave in European countries, where paternity leave policies are much more progressive. There, fathers' choices to take parental leave are largely impacted by the behaviors of other fathers and their co-parent's role in the labor market (Bygren & Duvander 2006, Lammi-Taksula 2008). More recent research in the United States has found that most working parents would prefer equal partnership across economic and domestic roles (Pedulla & Thébaud 2015). However, little research has been done within the United States to understand why men are less

[1] Of these 41 countries, 34 provide paid paternity leave allowances. See Appendix A for a chart from Pew Research Center's 2019 report listing countries offering paid parental leave & the total time allocated per country.

inclined to take paid parental leave when it is offered to them, and how they can be incentivized to make use of policies aimed at limiting inequality in the post-parenthood labor pool.

In this study, I seek to understand the organizational factors contributing to fathers' significantly lower participation rate than mothers in taking firm-provided paid parental leave. Keeping in mind the relative success of Nordic and European countries' leave policies, I draw on interviews with recent fathers in the top three federal income tax brackets. I explore the impact of various organizational factors on each father's choice to take paid parental leave. Across participants, I find precedent to be an influential factor in the writing of company policy and individual fathers' decisions to take paternity leave, similar to patterns seen in European studies (Bygren & Duvander 2006). Flexibility in the workplace and company policy also provides employees who take leave with the security of scheduling flexibility and comfortable career re-entry. These findings suggest a need for consistent company-wide policy, well-articulated and accommodating leave timelines, and more equitable policies across teams, genders, and branches of companies.

THE HISTORY OF GENDER, PARENTING, AND LABOR IN AMERICA

Capitalism & The Gendered Division Of Labor

Throughout history, gender and labor have been inextricably linked. Prior to the formation of our modern capitalist economy, families in the United States were primarily rural, self-sufficient entities (Ogburn & Nimkoff 1955; Goode 1964; Cowan 1976). Most families aimed to produce enough to maintain their own livelihoods and trade for other necessities, making the domestic sphere the focus of labor (Cowan 1976). Women were highly regarded in familial social units, sharing household tasks with all members of the family, including men (Cowan 1976). However, in the late 18th century, when the industrial revolution came to the

United States, women's status in the family hierarchy fell (Nicholas & Oxley 1994). As cities grew and the industrial economy prospered, a form of capitalism emerged which relied on new technology and machinery (Nicholas & Oxley 1994). Whereas the family was the main unit of production prior to the Industrial Revolution, capitalist post-industrialization centered on the individual "wage worker" (Nicholas & Oxley 1994). Consequently, men developed an advantage in the labor market, as their greater physical strength maximized operating efficiency (Nicholas & Oxley 1994).

While most men left the domestic sphere to gain employment, women's employment prospects did not increase, leaving wives and mothers to bear their family's domestic labor (Nicholas & Oxley 1994; Cowan 1976). Not only did labor responsibilities become increasingly gendered, but working class families' economic stability decreased. With a new focus on wage work, men emerged as sole "breadwinners," while women's domestic labor was not monetized (Nicholas & Oxley 1994). Though women were not "gainfully" employed, they still spent significantly more hours per day laboring than their male counterparts did—almost double the hours in some households (Cowan 1976; Nicholas & Oxley 1976). By the early 20th century, domestic responsibilities had become social signals of a woman's worth; women who held jobs or had unkempt households were judged for being disloyal wives or uncaring mothers (Cowan 1976).

Between 1890 and 1990, married women's participation in the paid labor force increased from fewer than 5% to over 60% (Goldin 1991). This increase was largely a consequence of the unique demands of the wartime economy during World War II (Goldin 1991). As men left their jobs to serve in the military, a general sense of patriotic responsibility and a push from nationalist propaganda (such as "Rosie the Riveter") encouraged women to help alleviate the

economic burdens of war (Goldin 1991). During this time, women who stepped up to fill traditionally male labor roles acquired a range of professional skills and grew increasingly more comfortable balancing paid labor with domestic responsibilities (Goldin 1991). Through the end of the 20th century, middle-class women increasingly attended college and pursued professional careers (Eisenmann 2006). Nonetheless, they continued to face significant societal pressure to maintain the domestic ideals of womanhood, with a majority of middle-class working women eventually exiting the workforce upon motherhood (Eisenmann 2006; Stone & Hernandez 2013). For many of these middle-class women, pursuing careers was a personal choice. However, for lower-class women whose husbands were absent or did not take home a high enough salary to support their families, working was a necessity (Eisenmann 2006). Though committed to employment, these women still faced a harsh "motherhood penalty," consistently under-earning compared to their coworkers, and were stigmatized for their failure to meet societal standards for maternal domesticity (Anderson & Binder 2002; Eisenmann 2006).

Though movements for gender equality have made significant strides in the United States since the turn of the century, the gendered wage gap remains a stalling point for equality in the workforce. The average full-time female employee in America still earns 80.7 cents to every dollar her male counterpart earns (Kiersz, Sheth, Gall 2019). This number is smaller still for women of color and women in low-income jobs, with the pay disparity reaching as low as 54 cents to a man's dollar for some Hispanic, African American, and Native American women (Payscale 2019, Senate Joint Economic Committee 2016). Existing research attributes the wage gap largely to the disadvantages facing working mothers, as the average wage gap between mothers and female nonmothers is even greater than the average gendered wage gap (SJEC 2016; Crittenden 2001; Correll et al. 2007). The responsibility of primary caregiving is largely at

odds with the demands of full-time professional jobs, causing most mothers in professional and managerial jobs to experience adversity in the advancement of their careers (Stone & Hernandez 2013; Williams & Segal 2003).

Despite much social progress in the workforce, women are still societally perceived as primary caregivers and leaders of the domestic sphere (Thébaud 2010; Stone & Hernandez 2013). Even in dual-income households where mothers take home larger annual salaries, effectively serving as primary "breadwinners," they still, on average, perform more hours of household work per week than fathers do (Thébaud 2010). Lower-class and single mothers, whose careers are necessary in ensuring the financial sustenance of their families, are still largely unaided in balancing these careers with the demands of motherhood (Eisenmann 2006). In contrast, wealthy women are more equipped to pursue long-term professional careers due to their ability to employ secondary caregivers and domestic workers more readily (Lersch, Jacob, and Hank 2017). The tension between motherhood and careers is further exacerbated by the unequal division of parental leave-taking in the United States; as long as mothers participate in leave-taking more than fathers do, fathers will be less responsible for sharing domestic sphere responsibilities.

Understanding (Un)paid Family Leave in America

In the last fifty years, some federal legislation has been enacted to protect working mothers, but these laws fail to alleviate many of the financial and domestic stressors of parenting. In 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 (PDA) was passed to protect female applicants or employees from unfavorable treatment on the basis of pregnancy or childbirth (Gault et al. 2014). Through this act, pregnant women were granted paid sick days and health insurance, and they were guaranteed the same leave as any employee with a temporary

medical condition or disability (PDA 1978). PDA's passing in 1978 supported new mothers' participation in the labor force by ensuring that mothers could maintain their salaries, get medical benefits, and keep their jobs after childbirth (Spalter-Roth, Withers, and Gibbs 1992). However, PDA did not provide paid leave nor require employers to provide paid leave for mothers unless they were providing paid leave for other temporary medical conditions.

Fifteen years later, the United States passed the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), under which eligible employees could take up to twelve weeks of protected unpaid leave in the event of a serious health condition, including childbirth (Arellano 2015). Though FMLA did not require employers to provide compensation during an employee's leave, it was progressive for its time, offering job-protected leave to both male and female employees and shifting public attitudes about gendered roles in parenting and the home (Waldfogel 1999). However, FMLA did not cover everyone—only those who had been employed by public agencies and private firms with over 50 employees for at least a year were eligible (Gault et al. 2014).

Since then, no federal policies have been enacted to protect Americans' access to parental leave. Racial and socioeconomic disparities are widened by unequal access to parental leave, a privilege largely determined by income level, access to insurance, family size, and financial and family support (Ittai 2018). Currently, the United States does not provide federally guaranteed paid parental leave after childbirth to either parent, while most countries of similar wealth do (Gault et al. 2014). Some states—California, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Hawaii—have passed state legislation guaranteeing women at least partial wage replacement when taking pregnancy-related leave (Gault et al. 2014). However, these state-based leave policies are less generous in extending leave-taking privileges to fathers, often reinforcing the

gendered division of domestic and professional labor in the United States (Gault et al. 2014). Most fathers who have the opportunity to take paid paternity leave are offered it as a benefit from their employers. As of 2019, however, only 9% of employers offered paid paternity leave as a benefit to working fathers, and within those firms, 76% of fathers returned to work within a week of their child's birth (National Partnership for Women & Families 2017). This low uptake rate among the most privileged fathers suggests a host of organizational barriers that prevent paid paternity leave usage and uphold traditional gender roles from within the workplace.

THE "IDEAL WORKER": SIGNALING PROFESSIONAL (UN)DESIRABILITY

When firms hire employees, they aim to recruit the most talented candidates who are worthy of continued investment. For many parents, especially working mothers, having children can subtly deter employers from investing in their potential. In the professional workplace, there exists an "informational asymmetry" between employers and employees (Spence 1973). Through the hiring process, employers make investments in human capital without complete knowledge of candidates' capacities, including productivity, skill, or commitment to work (Spence 1973). Therefore, according to signaling theory, potential candidates elicit "signals" in an attempt to fill the informational imbalance, such as listing educational status on a resumé or completing a certification training, to indicate the extent of their professional capacities (Connelly et al. 2011; Spence 1973). Once hired, employees continue to transmit signals that they are worth a firm's ongoing investment, such as taking on additional projects, working overtime, and developing relationships with superiors, all of which likely increase the employee's chance of upward mobility in the firm or industry (Forbes 1987; Rosenbaum 1979; Spence 1973). Conversely, an "expendable" employee may engage in behaviors that transmit the opposite signal—that they are an impractical investment in the firm's future— and the firm may choose to terminate them.

Firms participate in signaling as well, offering benefits and bonuses to attract hiring candidates and retain valuable employees (Karasek & Bryant 2012; Connelly et al. 2011). Paid parental leave is one such benefit offered by employers, largely used to attract hardworking parents seeking a workplace that prioritizes work-life balance (Valcour et al. 2010). However, even with such policies in place, many employees may still be hesitant to take leave or request personal support, as behaviors associated with personal development (rather than commitment to the workplace) are often perceived as negative signals to employers (Tô 2018; Valcour et al. 2010; Casper & Harris 2007). Signaling theory posits that a firm simply offering a benefit is not enough reason for an employee to use said benefit, given that signaling costs can still be high (Valcour et al. 2010). For parents whose careers are not well-established, taking paid parental leave can have high signaling costs, but forgoing it can incur high personal costs, such as expensive childcare services, decreased personal satisfaction, and tension between co-parents (Tô 2018; Petts et al. 2019; Barcus et al. 2019).

Bringing the context of motherhood into the framework of signaling theory, research suggests that motherhood has a high signaling cost to employers. Mary Blair-Loy (2003) suggests that contemporary beliefs about what it means to be a "ideal worker" contradict what it means to be a "committed mother"; the former will supposedly sacrifice all personal concerns in order to perform to the best of their ability in a work environment, while the latter will prioritize the family above all else. However, this tension does not manifest in differences in effort, as most mothers demonstrate the same level of commitment to their jobs as nonmothers (Blair-Loy 2003; Bielby & Bielby 1984; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) build upon Blair-Loy's research to argue that motherhood is a "devalued status" in the workplace. Using a mixed methods multivariate & audit study of employers, they found that, on

average, employers ranked mothers as having "decreased competence" and offered them lower salaries than other applicants, all other factors equal (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). This finding suggests the existence of a "motherhood penalty" in the workplace—even the most qualified and talented mothers fare poorly against equally qualified non-mother candidates (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). Almost all women who have children "fall behind" their male and female non-mother colleagues as a result of the costs incurred by childbirth (Kleven et al. 2019; Tô 2018). Moreover, mothers who take longer leaves are typically worse off in their long run career trajectories than mothers who take less (Kleven et al. 2019).[2] Fundamentally, being a mother is a negative signal that is likely to undermine a woman's efforts in the workplace, regardless of her commitment to her job.

Linh Tô (2018) repurposes Spence's signaling model to further explain how taking paid parental leave can hurt working mothers in the United States. Using data from various women's careers, beginning with the birth of their first child, she uses regression analysis to test the impacts of leave-taking behaviors on long-term career trajectories (Tô 2018). Using these projected impacts, she creates a model to represent the competitive market for labor, assessing a potential leave extension policy aimed at giving women more flexibility to take leave without the adverse signaling costs (Tô 2018). Her findings support a view that any firm-level intervention will be less successful in incentivizing leave-taking than government-enforced paid leave policies. This idea is in accordance with the pattern that, in places where paid leave is widely used, such as the Nordic countries, it is mandated federally, rather than by individual firms opting to provide it (Lammi-Taskula 2008; Haataja 2009; Haas & Rostgaard 2011).

[2] Usually, mothers have to take longer leaves due to lack of outside support, medical concerns related to pregnancy, or lack of a consistent co-parent (Kleven et al. 2019). Given that these mothers are punished for taking longer leaves, it is evident that the cyclical nature of this problem punishes those already at a disadvantage.

Building off Bernheim's idea that social norms enforce signaling equilibriums, Tô also suggests that fathers face higher signaling costs for taking paid parental leave than mothers do (Bernheim 1994; Tô 2018). This supposition is consistent with the outdated, yet still commonplace, attitude that fathers should serve as primary breadwinners and mothers as primary caregivers. Bygren & Duvander's (2006) quantitative analysis of the labor market in Sweden found that a father's decision to take paid leave is largely impacted by his workplace's culture. In their study, fathers were found to be more likely to take leave if they worked in a female-led firm or if a high percentage of men in their firm took paid leave. From these findings, it can be inferred that fathers who work at firms with more progressive social norms with sympathetic superiors have lower signaling costs associated with taking paternity leave.

In her book, *Fixing Parental Leave: The Six Month Solution* (2020), Gayle Kaufman builds upon this theory, mentioning that many fathers face pressure from within their workplaces to limit their paternity leave usage. High signaling costs associated with paternity leave usage are harmful to all kinds of families. In heterosexual co-parenting pairs, fathers' failure to take leave reinforces gendered stereotypes. In male same-sex co-parenting pairs, high signaling costs associated with paternity leave prevent either father from feeling fully supported in caring for his child. For female same-sex co-parenting pairs, low paternity leave uptake across the labor market suggests the potential for a double motherhood penalty. Single parents struggle under high paternity leave signaling costs as well, as they lack the parenting support necessary to offset such costs. Consequently, it is clear that lowering the signaling costs associated with taking parental leave has numerous benefits for families. Increasing support for paternity leave provides significant benefits to employers as well—firms that successfully cultivate an environment

conducive to leave-taking have an advantage in recruiting candidates, motivating employees, and retaining top talent (Kaufman 2020).

PRIOR RESEARCH

How Paternity Leave Helps Families

Despite evolving social norms, stigma still significantly contributes to women's uphill battles in the workforce (Stone & Hernandez 2013). Having children fundamentally impacts women's career trajectories in a way that rarely impacts men's, and women are often viewed as "opting out" of the workforce when making the choice to be parents (Stone 2007; Stone & Hernandez 2013). However, through interviews with 54 mothers who quit their jobs after having children, Stone & Hernandez (2013) found that stigma played a large role in most women's decision to exit the labor pool and focus on parenting. Many of these women originally planned on continuing their careers after having children, but felt friction balancing the demands of a full-time career with being the primary caregiver for their family (Stone & Hernandez 2013). In conflict with the theory that women voluntarily "opted out", many of these women felt that the decision to end their careers was made *for* them, rather than *by* them (Stone & Hernandez 2013). For a majority of the cases in Stone & Hernandez's research, women did not receive much support from their male co-parents. However, a large body of research points to the notion that women who do share domestic responsibilities with their male co-parents are more likely to succeed in their long-term career goals (Petts et al. 2019; Patnaik 2017). Using survey data from 19 countries, Pettit and Hook (2005) found that countries with high maternal employment rates coincided with the countries that offered some form of federally mandated childcare support. In some cases, this support took the form of paid time off for fathers (Pettit & Hook 2005).

Further research expands upon this idea by suggesting that fathers' use of paid paternity leave is highly influential in promoting success for the whole family (Petts et al. 2019; Patnaik 2017; Buenning 2015; Tamm 2018). Petts, Knoester, and Waldfogel (2019), using OLS regression models to analyze data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, concluded that mothers whose male co-parents took paternity leave were more successful in their professional pursuits (Petts et al. 2019). Beyond this conclusion, they found that children whose parents shared caregiving responsibilities were happier and more developmentally adjusted, and that fathers who took paternity leave had higher levels of parental engagement, greater personal satisfaction, and were less likely to get divorced than fathers who did not take leave (Petts et al. 2019, Ayanna 2006). Also using OLS regression models, Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007) analyzed data in the United States from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort to find that fathers who took over two weeks of paternity leave were more involved in their children's lives in the long run than fathers who took less than two weeks of leave.

Gayle Kaufman's (2020) interview data aligns closely Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel's (2007) findings. Fathers in Kaufman's (2020) study who took substantial paternity leaves reported stronger bonds with their children, even in adolescence and early adulthood, than fathers who did not take as much leave. Children whose fathers took comprehensive paternity leaves reported higher education levels and more healthy emotional development as well (Kaufman 2020). Fathers who took longer paternity leaves also developed caregiving skills early on, making them better domestic co-parents and more prepared for intervention throughout their children's lives (Kaufman 2020). As a result, it is likely that in dual-income households where both parents take similar amounts of leave, gendered expectations about male breadwinning and female caretaking are less prevalent (Kaufman 2020). According to observational research and

regression analysis of the Socio-Economic Panel in Germany, when a father took paternity leave, he and his co-parent shared a more equitable division of domestic responsibilities throughout their relationship than co-parents in which the father did not take leave (Buenning 2015; Tamm 2018). Fathers who took paternity leave reported up to 10 hours more involvement in their children's lives per week than fathers who did not take leave (Buenning 2015; Tamm 2018).

Bratberg & Naz (2014) analyzed Norwegian population data from 1992-2003 to find that mothers were less likely to take excess leave when their male co-parents took more leave than the minimum paternity leave required in Norway. Their finding is in alignment with Evertsson & Duvander's (2010) statistical analysis of the Swedish Level of Living Survey, which found that women who bore the sole responsibility of parental leave took longer maternity leaves than their female counterparts whose co-parents also took leave. Evertsson & Duvander (2010) also concluded that women who took leave for longer periods of time faced significantly higher barriers to re-entry in the workforce and weakened career trajectories. Together, this data suggests that an increase in the percentage of fathers taking paternity leave would ameliorate mothers' domestic stress and career re-entry prospects. Beyond just mothers, comprehensive paternity leave usage has the potential to provide numerous benefits to families in the United States. However, because American attitudes toward the family still dictate that women should be primary caregivers, and because taking paternity leave confers high signaling costs on employees, very few fathers take time off after the birth of their children, even when paid leave is offered (Thébaud 2010; Popper 2019; National Partnership for Women & Families 2017)).

Many factors are at play in parents' decisions about taking leave, particularly the organizational characteristics of their workplaces (Pedulla & Thébaud 2015; Bygren & Duvander 2006). Through a survey, Pedulla & Thébaud (2015) found that, constraints removed, most

parents would like to have an equal partnership on the work and family fronts, but face significant pressure to conform to community norms in their workplaces. Using a mixed methods research design comprised of interviews and triangulation sampling, Samtleben et al. (2019) built upon Pedulla & Thebaud's research to conclude that, despite fathers' hesitation to take paid parental leave, fathers, as a group, often face fewer barriers upon re-entry into the workplace than women do. Broadly, these findings suggest that changes in the way organizations approach paternity leave could have significant impacts on cultural attitudes toward gender in the workplace.

Exploring Alternatives

While the United States government lacks a consistent solution to its paternity leave problem, other countries have been more robust in their approaches. In Nordic countries, both mothers and fathers are entitled to paid parental leave and are encouraged to take leave from work to raise small children (Haataja 2009). In the late 20th century, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Finland each introduced forms of parental leave that could be split equally between two parents (Haataja 2009). Though these policies did alleviate some of the financial burden of having children, they did not yield significant changes in the division of domestic labor—most mothers took more parental leave than their husbands or male co-parents (Haataja 2009; Nyberg 2004). In 1993, Norway introduced a "daddy quota" to its parental leave legislature, and many other Nordic countries followed suit. The "daddy quota" guaranteed that a certain number amount of parental leave was designated specifically for fathers, and if the fathers did not use their quota, neither parent would receive leave (Haataja 2009; Haas & Rostgaard 2011). Since then, these countries have seen a marked change in attitudes regarding fathers' role in caregiving, with Nordic fathers now taking more paternity leave than fathers in

the rest of the world (Haas & Rostgaard 2011; Lammi-Taskula 2008). Following the success of the Nordic model, the Canadian province of Quebec implemented a "daddy quota" in 2006 (Patnaik 2017). Using regression discontinuity analysis, Ankita Patnaik (2017) found that 75% of new fathers were using paternity leave in the two-year period following the quota's passing, compared to the earlier 53%. During the course of this research, she also observed that fathers' increased involvement in the domestic sphere allowed mothers more time to commit to their career aspirations; new mothers in Quebec whose co-parents had taken paid leave using the "daddy quota" had a 7% higher rate of working full-time jobs in the years following childbirth than those whose co-parents had not (Patnaik 2017).

In a larger cost-benefit analysis of many proposed and existing family leave policies, Ariel Ayanna (2006) expresses the expected shortcomings of the Nordic model when applied to the American political economy. He suggests that, though the "use-it-or-lose-it" model saves on costs and encourages both parents to take leave, it has the potential to negatively impact worker attitudes and efficiency. Especially if such a policy is adopted without worker compensation beyond base salaries, it runs the risk of disproportionately punishing lower-income families, in which both parents cannot afford to take a full term of leave. Ayanna attributes gender inequality in the workplace to imbalanced parental leave-taking behaviors, which reinforce "the American model of the ideal worker as anyone but a woman of child-bearing age" (Ayanna 2006, 297). Recalling FMLA, he asserts that unpaid leave further propagates the gendered imbalance in leave-taking, because women, on average, are paid lower salaries than men and are therefore more likely to sacrifice their income by independently taking leave when in a dual-income, heterosexual co-parenting unit (Ayanna 2006).

His analysis emphasizes that this trend in gendered leave-taking extends to wage replacement leave policies, which are fairly common in American firms (Ayanna 2006). Though these policies increase the favorability of taking paternity leave, they do not lessen the economic bias in favor of maternity leave, and consequently do not encourage taking paternity leave (Ayanna 2006; Kimmel & Amuedo-Dorantes 2004). He continues that a mandatory leave-taking policy would increase the number of men taking leave, but at the cost of appearing too paternalistic in a political economy that negatively interprets "interference with the free market" (Ayanna 2006, 298). A mandatory leave-taking policy would also incur enforcement costs and negatively impact worker productivity (Ayanna 2006). Instead of the aforementioned policies, Ayanna suggests opting for a compensatory leave policy that encourages parents to take leave concurrently by adding compensation beyond a worker's base salary if he takes paternity leave, with an extra leave-taking bonus given to working parents in single-income households or when both parents in dual-income households take leave.

Drawing upon this body of research, it is clear that increased paternity leave-taking behaviors has substantial benefits for women's success in the workforce, as well as for child development, parental satisfaction, and the familial division of labor (Petts et al. 2019; Patnaik 2017; Buenning 2015; Tamm 2018; Ayanna 2006). However, it remains unclear what can be done in the American political economy to address the currently imbalanced leave-taking behaviors. Though a nationally mandated policy would benefit most working Americans, the most actionable opportunity to address existing policies currently exists at the firm level. Considerable work points to the conclusion that while women's involvement in the workforce is steadily on the rise, the stigma associated with motherhood and its perceived tensions with professional careers are very much prevalent (Stone & Hernandez 2013; Blair-Loy 2003; Bielby

& Bielby 1984; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). Paired with signaling theory, this research suggests the need for firm-based institutionalized incentives for paternity leave-taking. Through interviews with fathers who used firm-provided paid paternity leave, I investigate the impact of various elements of company culture on fathers' leave-taking decisions. On a broader scale, I also explore the factors encouraging the expansion of existing leave policies in these workplaces. I then use these findings to suggest scalable recommendations for encouraging a higher incidence of thorough paternity leave-taking.

DATA & METHODS

Data Sources

This study draws upon individual interviews with working fathers across the United States who used paid paternity leave provided by their firms. Because paid leave is not provided by the government, but rather by individual employers, I conducted preliminary research to identify which industries most commonly offered substantial paid paternity leave policies. Likely because offering personal benefits is a positive signal to hiring candidates, paid parental leave is most commonly offered in industries with competitive hiring processes, such as the e-commerce, media, science/technology, and business industries (Entrepreneur 2017; Chicago Tribune 2016). Keeping this in mind, I utilized personal connections, alumni networks, and Human Resources teams to connect with fathers who used paid paternity leave in these industries. In order to assess the effects of each respondent's company culture on his paternity leave decision, I aimed to control for personal factors related to economic insecurity by only interviewing fathers who made over $80,000 in base-level salaries annually. This qualification did not limit my pool substantially, as the industries in which fathers were offered paid paternity leave tended to coincide with industries in which entry-level pay was high. As paid paternity leave policies are

continuously evolving, I limited my study to fathers who had at least one child under the age of 5 and were therefore eligible for paid paternity leave at least once in the last five years to ensure my findings were relevant to the current climate.

Over the course of this study, I spoke with fifteen working fathers. Most interviews took place via phone or Skype, with in-person meetings taking place whenever possible. If geography allowed, I let participants pick locations that were best for them and quiet enough to allow for recording. At the start of each interview, I noted the interviewee's familial situation, employment industry, and his company's official paid paternity leave policy. I conducted a semi-structured interview, exploring each subject's personal experience with paid leave in his firm, asking about the gender breakdown of employees in his company, the motivation behind his decision about paternity leave, the stigma or support offered by his firm to working parents, and the interviewee's perceived rate at which mothers versus fathers took paid leave, noting when responses across teams within the same company. For fathers with multiple children, I prompted them to ruminate on each individual experience and the factors that may have made each paternity leave decision slightly different. To ensure I was thoroughly understanding and representing each father's individual career and family circumstances, I also asked each father follow-up questions unique to his specific experiences.[3] The interviews varied in length—averaging around thirty minutes—with none taking over an hour.

After conducting a preliminary round of interviews, I reached out to respondents who had reported either especially low or high rates of fathers taking paid leave in their company to ask if any of their colleagues would participate in my study. By snowball sampling, I hoped to gain a better insight into the organizational factors contributing to individuals' decisions about paternity

[3] See Appendix B for scripted interview guide, not including follow-up or improvised questions

leave. Through these referrals, I rounded out the rest of my interviews. Of the fifteen fathers I interviewed, five worked in financial services, four worked in tech, three worked in business (non-finance capacities), one worked in pharmaceuticals, one worked in legal services, and one worked in government services.[4] Given my initial research, this sample seemed fairly representative of the primary industries providing paid paternity leave to employees. As I progressed through the interviewing timeline, I picked up on themes that I had not initially considered, such as the relationship between taking leave and getting promoted and the distinction between continuous and flexible leave policies. After gaining more insight on these subjects in the early stages of my interviews, I was able to integrate more targeted questions surrounding these themes in later interviews.

Data Analysis

In my recruitment email, I informed potential participants that I would like to record our interviews. I gave them the option to not be recorded if they preferred, but all participants consented to recording. During each interview, my main goal was to connect with the subject and focus on his experiences, but I took general notes on each father's key points. Afterwards, I transcribed the recordings using Otter.ai and coded the transcripts using hand coding, paying particular attention to the commonly discussed themes of precedents, flexibility, messaging, and job responsibility. In my interviews, I sought to answer two main questions. One, what firm-level behaviors & organizational factors impact fathers' decisions to take paid paternity leave when offered? Secondly (and more broadly) what firm-level behaviors & organizational factors impact firms' decisions to expand or promote paid paternity leave policies? Although my interviewees often brought up the personal and familial factors at play in their paid paternity leave decisions,

[4] See Appendix B for a full list of fathers interviewed

my main focus in this study was to understand the organizational motivations shaping behaviors. As such, I primarily concentrated on these topics in my data analysis. To protect anonymity, I will use pseudonyms to discuss the fathers and firms referenced in this study.

Researcher Positionality

Given the low stakes of my research, I was able to have lighthearted conversations with my participants. From my perspective, the comfortability between participants and myself was crucial in allowing them to open up. The tone of my exchange with every father I interviewed became more jovial as the conversation went on, which was especially helpful in bridging the obvious differences between my experiences and theirs. As a young, childless, female student, I did not have much in common with the fathers I interviewed, which likely had an effect on their perceptions of me. While we were able to connect through similar educational backgrounds and urban residences, many of the daily issues and responsibilities these men faced—both at home and in the workplace—were very different from my own experiences. As such, I made sure to end each interview by asking each father to share anything he felt was important to my understanding of this issue and his experience that we had not already covered. During this portion of the interview, most fathers pointed me to nuances I had not yet considered.[5] Through research and further interviews, I was able to meaningfully integrate these nuances into my study.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Though all fathers in this study were offered paid paternity leave by their employers, these policies varied greatly in terms of compensation, length, and continuity. Most fathers emphasized the consequences of their decision to take paid paternity leave on their long-term

[5] When I started interviewing participants, I had not considered the difference between mandatory continuous and flexible leave policies. However, acknowledging this distinction ended up being a pivotal part of my data analysis.

career trajectories, but few applied this same logic to their consideration of women taking maternity leave. Almost all fathers in this study, regardless of their position in the process, referenced precedent-setting as key to promoting leave usage. These men reported that decision-making highly depended on their workplace responsibilities and hierarchical status, as well as their personal vision of how best to support their co-parent. In interviews, subjects did not tend to consider the perspectives of employees who were not offered such paid leave, but emphasized the importance of companies offering paid parental leave as a necessary prerequisite to attract the most qualified and hard-working candidates.

Local Precedent

Almost every father I spoke to cited the role of company precedent in his decision to take paid leave. Some fathers said previous leave-takers served as inspiration for their own decisions, while other fathers were precedent-setters for their companies, establishing norms that they expected future fathers would reference when making their own leave-taking decisions. Some cited the lack of evident anecdotes of fathers taking leave as the reason for low perceived uptake rates in their companies, and therefore, higher signaling costs associated with future leave-taking.

Matthew, a Director of Product for a medical technology company, spoke about his experience being impacted by early precedent. Though he experienced some pushback from superiors against taking the full duration of his paternity leave, he recalled:

> Right before me, there was a very high up engineer who took his three months, and he was one of the reasons why I thought about it. And, granted, his role was an engineering role, but it definitely allowed me to see what it would look like to take paternity leave.

Though his company may not have had a high uptake of paternity leave, having a high-profile example from which to set expectations was pivotal in Matthew's decision to ultimately take his

paternity leave. After taking leave, Matthew said he was able to serve a similar role for other fathers in his shoes:

> I met with a father who heard about me taking [paternity leave] and decided that he was going to take two months off for his daughter who was just born. He has told me that [his decision] was directly inspired by [mine], so it is very clear to me that this is something where examples are helpful for people.

Matthew's experience highlights the importance of setting visible precedents, even if they are small. Steven, who worked in Strategy & Operations for a hedge fund, had multiple such precedents for his decision. He said that "in the last four years, [he had] not seen anyone *not* take the full amount of time" allowed at his company. For Steven, taking leave was not a difficult decision. Because taking paternity leave was the norm at his company, he knew long before he had children that it would be something he would do when the time came.

Ethan, a Brand Manager at a marketing agency, had no such opportunity to model his decision on precedent. Ethan is one of the first fathers at his company to take paternity leave under a newly approved company policy allowing six months of paid leave for all parents, regardless of gender. He understood the weight his decision held for the future of leave-taking at his company:

> From a cultural standpoint, people were very much encouraging me to want to take it. There were a lot of half-joking, half-not comments, particularly from the guys that I work with. They wanted me to take the full thing so that it's easier for them to take the full thing when it's their time to have kids. So, I want to say there's some oddness in terms of the precedent that's being set with my decision right now. It is early, but there's definitely a lot of eyes on it.

Ethan's decision to take leave was particularly stressful because he knew his choice would have long-lasting impacts on the norms of fathers' leave usage in his company. Ethan also expressed anxiety about the signaling costs of taking six months off in an environment where six weeks off had been the norm. Because Ethan was the precedent-setter for his company's new policy, his

decision came with less certainty about the consequences for his career trajectory, despite the organizational pressure to take leave. If Ethan's experience returning to work goes smoothly, his decision may encourage a precedent of leave-taking under the company's new policy.

Manish, a Vice President at an investment management firm, serves as a manager to a team doing financial market research, and similarly shared feelings of responsibility for setting a precedent for the people who work for him:

> I have a responsibility to signal to my team that it's acceptable to take parental leave. If I didn't take all of it, my team might view the example to look up to as someone who did not take their parental leave.

Manish's awareness of his responsibility to lower signaling costs for his employees comes from his own experiences with superiors setting positive leave-taking precedents. Before his child was born, a partner at the firm told him, "make sure to take all your time, that's what I did." On a broader scale, the company's CEO had recently become a father and was making it clear that he took the full extent of his paid paternity leave. Manish said that, in the past year, several fathers who had taken their full paternity leave were promoted to managerial positions. Ivan, an analyst at Manish's firm, believed that nearly all fathers working for their firm took a substantive portion of their paternity leave. This high perceived uptake rate is likely because of the widespread precedent of leave-taking encouraging future leave-taking across all levels of the company.

Connor, a researcher in pharmaceuticals, shared that at the time of his second son's birth, he was not worried about the signaling costs associated with taking paternity leave because he knew his then-employer would be shuttered a few months after the period of leave ended. However, if he had not been in this particular situation, the decision may have been harder. He recalled "a lack of examples of people in senior positions taking full advantage of their paternity leaves," saying, "there was this sort of implicit idea that you would not take excessive leave. You

would maybe go home for a week or two, but not take full advantage [of the leave offered]." Ultimately, Connor took leave primarily because, given the company's imminent closure, he knew the negative signaling costs he faced would be short-lived.

Everett, a data scientist for a tech firm, said his firm expanded their paternity leave policy from seven to seventeen weeks in the last two years. Since then, he said he "[hadn't] seen men take the maximum [amount of leave] or even close to it." He mentioned he had a friend who works at Facebook: another firm in the technology sector with a roughly 17-week paternity leave policy. Despite having a very similar leave policy, Facebook's leave-usage patterns were very different than Everett's firm's:

> At Facebook, you're expected to take the entire time off. Your boss will tell you to. That seems to be a top-down thing, because Mark Zuckerberg took a lot of time off, around three or four months, and that was really talked about. That's just not how the culture has evolved at [my firm] yet. As I said, it's a newer policy, so maybe it will get better over time.

From Everett's point of view, the presumed factor differentiating his company's leave usage patterns from Facebook's uptake of a similar policy was the visibility of high-status precedents. Ostensibly, Mark Zuckerberg taking a comprehensive amount of paternity leave showed other fathers at Facebook that it is laudable to do the same, lowering the signaling costs associated with fathers taking leave.

The finding that precedent lowers signaling costs associated with fathers taking leave is in line with Bygren & Duvander's (2006) finding that fathers in Sweden were more incentivized to use their paid paternity leave when a high percentage of fathers in the company had used their leave. It is clear that, in companies with a strong precedent for paternity leave usage, fathers are likely to continue to take their leave. The more observable instances of leave-taking, the more leave-taking becomes the cultural norm, which will ultimately lower signaling costs for future

fathers taking paternity leave (Bernheim 1994). These interviews also highlight the importance of *visible* leave-taking, as well as precedent from superiors. If leave usage is common but not publicly highlighted, it has a less significant impact on future decision-making. Similarly, precedents set by higher-ups within companies are pivotal in lowering signaling costs for their employees. These precedents matter in small, localized networks such as working teams within companies, as well as in the broader context of multi-tiered international corporations.

Market Precedent & Competition

Globally, companies with an international presence or more diverse cultural ties tended to have a more progressive attitude toward paternity leave. Multiple fathers working for firms with international presences cited global pressure as a reason for their companies' more liberal paternity leave policies. Even within the United States, fathers believed that, in industries with competitive markets for labor, unsupportive firms would be more likely to experience employee turnover.

Ethan, the aforementioned precedent-setter for his marketing firm's new leave policy, referenced the role of international pressure in his company's decision to expand paternity leave:

> There was a policy in place [at our company] for a year which allowed six weeks paid paternity leave. At the same time, they expanded their policies to be even more expansive for Europe and other major markets. Some people who work at our company reached out and said, 'You know, we really appreciate the expanded policy, but at the same time, we work *with* our European counterparts. It seems strange to work through two policies, one for Europe and one for the US.' And to our company's credit, they very much listened. And about six months ago they announced that they were going to move towards the more comprehensive European policy even in the US, which means that it doesn't matter paternity vs. maternity, adoption vs, biological. Everyone is entitled to six months paid leave. It's a pretty progressive policy, certainly by US standards.

Whether Ethan's company will continue to exhibit support for employees who make full use of this new policy remains to be seen, but the policy expansion—an unmistakably large jump for

fathers, from six weeks to six months—may not have happened if the firm were operating solely within the framework of leave policy in the United States.

Ricky works in the financial sector for a U.S.-based firm with offices in Europe and Asia. He shared his smooth experience with paternity leave at his company, assuring me that "even though [his] company is competitive, it's easy to take leave." When thinking about his firm relative to other, similar firms with lower paternity leave uptake, Ricky said,

> Here, there is an immediate comparison with European companies because we have a presence in Europe, where they have even better benefits. The American leg of our company is pressed by that difference. It can't be too large. We strive to be an international company with people from all different backgrounds. I don't know what it would be like for a company that is more all-American. There is a lot of competition between companies for talent, and if we want to attract diverse talent, we need to provide competitive benefits.

Ricky and his wife immigrated to the United States from Chile, where parental leave policies for both mothers and fathers are much more generous. When looking for work here, family benefits "were an important consideration." Ricky's experience highlights that firms with more competitive benefits have a global advantage in the labor market, attracting more diverse candidates. In some sense, employees who care deeply about paid family leave are likely to self-select for workplaces that will accommodate this desire.

Within the United States, Connor has noticed the same pattern in highly competitive industries:

> Paternity leave is becoming something that more and more employees are insisting on. I think it makes sense for the high-tech companies in Silicon Valley and pharmaceuticals, where they really need to retain their employees. It's becoming a benefit that they can point to. I think they see it as a way to retain employees. Because this is a very competitive market for them. There's lots of places for me to go work in the area. And it's the same for the tech companies, there's hundreds of companies you can go work for! So I think, especially when you have intense competition for employees, these kinds of benefits are going to be encouraged.

In a competitive, globalized economy, employees have control over where they choose to work. For both Ricky and Connor, the ability to take paternity leave without pushback is one reason they choose to work for their companies, despite an abundance of employers in their industries. When I asked Everett what prompted his company to make the aforementioned policy jump from seven to seventeen weeks of paid paternity leave allowance, his thoughts echoed Connor's. He felt that his firm was "competing for talent with top-level tech companies like Facebook, Google, and Spotify," who all provided at least four months of paid paternity leave to their employers.

This labor market pattern is in accordance with previous findings which conclude that firms, in addition to employees, participate in signaling by offering attractive benefits to attract desirable candidates (Karasek & Bryant 2012; Connelly et al. 201, Valcour et al. 2010). Kaufman (2020) stressed that offering comprehensive leave pays off for companies, as firms who offer and support leave-taking will be more attractive to hiring candidates, foster good faith & hard work among employees, and retain top talent. Rowe-Finkbeiner et al. (2016) emphasized the positive impact expanded paid family leave would have on the American economy through the lens of gender diversity, and it is clear that increasing paid paternity leave benefits cultural diversity in the labor pool as well. If firms want to compete on a global scale, they must consider implementing a strong paid family leave policy.

Messaging

The tone of messaging from employees' superiors or from the firm itself also has a significant impact on employees' paternity leave decisions. Several companies' Human Resources teams have implemented consistent company-wide messaging guidelines, while other companies operate on a less organized case-by-case basis. From speaking to these fathers, company-wide messaging produces a more universal positive environment surrounding leave-

taking, while leaving messaging decisions up to individual managers produces more inconsistent experiences.

Manish was familiar with his investment management firm's paternity leave policies before becoming a father, as "people in [the group he manages] have taken paternity leave." His company's HR team sends all managers a document of messaging guidelines to ensure their reactions to new parents avoid a tone like, "Oh... okay, what are we going to do when you're away...?" and instead sound like, "Congratulations! We'll make it happen." Having been on both ends of the paternity leave issue, Manish shared positive feelings about his company's approach to parental leave-related messaging:

> I think there's a strong push toward deliberate signaling from top management in [the firm], which aims to destigmatize taking leave to the extent possible. I think more companies should do that. It'll be interesting to see if there is a trend towards it. I thought HR's document was good because it said that, though there are broad environmental factors, like you observe other people taking leave and therefore you want to, the most important signal you get is from your own manager. At that point I hadn't had a baby, and I wasn't sure what to expect in those conversations or what new parents were expecting to hear from me. So, it was good for someone to tell me, 'Hey, this is how it would be good for you to react.'

This document is shared with all managers in Manish's company, where paternity leave appears to be widely utilized. This high uptake rate is understandable, given that all new parents are theoretically receiving similar, encouraging messaging from their bosses.

Manish shared HR's guidelines document with me after our conversation. It includes guidelines for the pre-leave, leave, and post-leave phases. The overarching principles of the company's desired approach to parental leave are to "be as supportive and flexible as possible," that "communication and transparency are critical to flexibility," that parents should be "encouraged to take leave," and that bosses should "be sensitive and prepared" for any unplanned changes. The section on the "pre-leave" phase encourages managers to make any

soon-to-be parents aware of all the resources available to working parents at their company and to put them in contact with other parents at the company who have taken parental leave. It also provides a framework for creating "transition plans" to help employees delegate responsibilities and resources for ongoing projects to other team members. During the "leave" phase, managers are encouraged to congratulate new parents and end work-related communication with the employee. Halfway through the employee's leave, managers are expected to work with HR to work out a plan for the employee's return. Once the employee returns to work, the "post-leave" phase begins, and managers are asked to plan a team meal or meeting to "show enthusiasm for [the employee's] return and reinforce that they are a valued part of the team." They are also encouraged to have an individual meeting with the new parent to communicate expectations and update them on the team's status and progress. Such thorough guidance for managers throughout all stages of the leave process helps explain why Manish and Ivan both expressed minimal consequences of leave on the career trajectories of employees in their firm and stressed the ease of re-entry after paternity leave.

Thomas, who works at a law firm, expressed more variance in his firm's leave-related messaging, saying individual employees may experience differing amounts of support depending on the partner they worked under:

> I think it's highly dependent on the partners that associates are working for. Some partners are more encouraging and make it very easy for parents to take leave, including the men. Other partners don't have an opinion, which kind of makes it harder. And then, other partners, say, 'Yeah that's fine, take leave, but you're going to be available if we need you, right?' and there's an implied mentality that you need to be working even while you're on leave. It is really partner-specific. And maybe that's more of a structural thing, where the firm needs to get the partners on a more uniform application of the policy.

At his firm, unlike Manish and Ivan's, no aid was built in to help employees' re-entry after leave. From Thomas's perspective, it is not clear how many fathers are actually taking leave at his firm,

but he suspected most fathers were not making full use of their paid leave. He suspected that all partners were receiving some sort of briefing about parental leave guidelines, but that it probably did not say much more than, "during this leave of absence, no work should be given to the attorney." As a result, some associates could have much higher signaling costs associated with taking paternity leave than others, depending on the supportiveness of their partner mentors.

Ian, who works as a governmental consultant,[6] shared a similar experience with variable responses across his workplace. Though his boss supported his decision to take paternity leave and made the process easy for him, he said that a lot of people in his workplace had "antiquated views about fathers' responsibilities and didn't understand why [he] was doing it." From Ian's point of view, most people in his workplace did not have a positive sentiment towards fathers taking extensive paternity leave, but he was able to because he had a more sympathetic boss by chance. Brian echoed Ian's sentiments, saying, "I wouldn't say that my company culture necessarily *promotes* taking [paternity leave], but I can say that all my colleagues on my team, including my supervisors, were very supportive. People on other teams likely have different experiences." Drawing from both Ian and Brian's experiences, in companies without specific guidelines surrounding paternity leave, positive experiences are heavily dependent on having a supportive boss or team.

Given that all employees at a given firm are subject to the same policies, it is disadvantageous to the policies' implementations when various stakeholders are communicating in different ways. In order to bring about a more uniform and equitable experience for all employees taking leave, all levels of the company should operate within the same frameworks

[6] Ian's case falls slightly outside of my general research purview. Though he is a public sector employee, his paternity leave was paid for under the recent passage of paid FMLA in Washington D.C. Because his agency fosters a firm-like environment, I chose to analyze his experiences alongside the other fathers. However, it is pertinent to note that he is the only public sector interviewee in my study.

about monitoring leave. Messages from superiors serve as important signals to employees about the cost of leave-taking, and ideally, in a consistent workplace environment, the cost should not vary significantly from employee to employee. The guiding document used at Manish's firm serves as an example for ensuring consistent firm-wide messaging regarding parental leave.

Job Requirements & Workplace Hierarchy

Beyond employer attitudes, job-specific responsibilities have significant effects on an employee's ability or desire to be away from their work for an extended period of time. Of the fathers I spoke to, those with more generalized responsibilities felt it was easier to take leave than those whose roles were unique to them or directly client-facing.

Thomas, the attorney, mentioned wanting to make partner at his company and expressed some concerns about the negative signaling costs associated with taking a long paternity leave. However, he was more impacted by the "ethical obligation" he owed his clients, "aside from the fact that the firm gives [him] 12 weeks off." Thomas mentioned that as he has moved up the ranks at his firm, his "concern has shifted to the client, rather what [his] employer is gonna think." In his situation, his role handling individual cases had a greater impact on his decision to take leave than any messaging from his firm. Though he took leave after the birth of his most recent child, he expressed that it was difficult because "the client's needs always go on." On the contrary, Ivan, a Quantitative Analyst for an investment management firm, said it was not difficult for him to take leave given the team-based nature of his work. However, he postulated that taking leave might be harder for Portfolio Managers or Traders, whose earnings were driven by "how much money they bring to the company." In their cases, taking leave might cause a hit to earnings.

Matthew, who worked as a Director of Product for a medical technology company, served as a core part of the firm's R&D team and was responsible for "apportioning the work for the rest of the roles" on the team. He felt that "an engineer on [his] team who's getting assigned work can take time off a little more easily, because that work would simply be assigned to another engineer." For Matthew, however, "another product person would need to be brought in to balance" his absence. "I was less fungible," he said. He later mentioned being subtly encouraged not to take his leave by members of his team, but did not think his experience was representative of others' in his company. Matthew's experience suggests increased consequences of personal absence for fathers whose workplace duties are not shared amongst employees.

This issue is exacerbated in smaller companies or teams. Ethan, a Brand Manager at a food & beverage marketing agency, is part of a small team consisting of "three marketers and an art director." For a team of that size, "losing a third [of them] is not insignificant for half a year, and for teams smaller than that […] they might just have one person working on something." In Ethan's case, the six month leave policy at his firm has only recently taken effect, but he imagines "more long term moves and job rotations" will need to take place in order to rebalance teams during a key player's extended leave. Though he expressed excitement about his company's newly expanded leave policy, Ethan suspected this reshuffling of employees and teams might cause himself and future leave-takers to experience some confusion when returning to work. In larger companies, this fear of reshuffling is less prevalent. Though his allotted leave was only three weeks compared to Ethan's six months, Manish, who does financial market research for the same large investment firm Ivan works at, felt it was not hard to get back on the ground running after taking leave. Because the company is large and team-oriented, projects that came to Manish's team during his absence were allotted to another team member with his

qualifications, and "managers made very sure there was cover for [his] role while [he] was away."

These findings align with Goldin's (2015) postulation that the best way to promote gender equality in the workplace is to promote flexibility between employees' roles. Companies that allow for delegation of absent employees' roles are likely to have increased satisfaction with paternity leave policies and likely, greater uptake. In companies where roles are more individual, procedural structures that encourage role-sharing and stress minimization before, during, and after the leave period will improve the leave-taking experience for parents.

Policy Variation

Across those interviewed in my study, paternity leave policies varied greatly in length and flexibility. Fathers whose paid leave offerings were shorter cited higher perceived uptake rates in their firms than fathers with longer offerings. While some fathers were required to take all their time off continuously, others were able to take their leave in parts at a time within a year of the child's birth. This difference proved to be very important in subjects' perception of leave-taking in their company. Fathers in the latter group, who were able to break up their allowed time usually did so, and expressed much easier experiences taking leave on both the work and home fronts. Fathers in the former group, however, experienced more pushback from their companies and often reported rougher re-entry after time off.

a. Length

Brian, who works as a compliance officer for a financial services firm, was offered one week of paid paternity leave by his employer— the shortest paid paternity leave length of all the fathers I interviewed. Ethan, with the aforementioned newly-approved six months paid leave, had the longest. Steven, Ivan, Manish, and Ricky's companies all offered new fathers between

two and three weeks of paid leave. All four fathers cited high perceived uptake rates for these policies, with taking paternity leave being the norm. When paternity leave is not considerably longer than the length of annual paid time off, signaling costs for taking it are likely lower. Because employees' time away from work is insignificant relative to their time at work, career re-entry is often comfortable. Thomas, Matthew, Ian, and Everett however, who were offered between six and seventeen weeks, shared low perceived uptake rates for paternity leave-taking in their companies. Looking at the subjects in my interviews, it appears as though length of leave is negatively correlated with uptake rate. However, this does not mean shorter leaves are better or more conducive to equality, as they do little to solve the underlying social problems that prompt this study. A mere week of paid leave provides a negligible benefit to a father or his family and continues to perpetuate gendered parenting norms in the workplace.

Most of the employers represented in my interviews offered significantly longer paid parental leaves for mothers than fathers, with an average of 7.3 weeks more paid leave for mothers across subjects in this study. Thomas referenced the signaling costs associated with taking paternity leave, saying it was stressful to be "absent for three months" as he tries "to make [his] run up to partner" in his law firm. He mentioned that, though his company is roughly fifty-fifty male to female, partner ranks are "totally different… there are a *lot* more male partners." Reflecting on this disparity, Thomas said:

> The firm probably tries as hard as they can not to take [taking parental leave] into account when promoting people, but it's got to be on some people's minds, I have to imagine. That is why I'm glad to see fathers' leave extended, because I really do think that women, when they take five or six months, even though the policy is not supposed to impact their promotion and salary determinations, it's gotta have some bias. But you know, if the men are all taking something similar or something close to that, it kind of mitigates the difference.

Thomas realized, when considering his own desire to be promoted and perceived as a "dedicated" employee, that mothers are not usually offered the same choices because they bear a majority of parenting responsibility, especially in the early stages, if they are the only ones being offered substantial leave.

Matthew recalled his former employer considering expanding their paternity leave policy a few years back:

> There was talk at that point about it turning the two weeks we were offered into six, and the conversation from what I heard through the grapevine was, 'but what is the dad even doing?,' and it remained at two.

At that company, Matthew felt an implicit stigma associated with fathers being active participants in the domestic sphere. When elaborating on these attitudes, which he felt were societally prevalent, Matthew said:

> The best thing we can do for gender equality is mandate it for men and women alike. That way, we will take the argument away from people who whisper in the back room, 'I would never hire a woman because they get this extra leave,' and just make it a non-issue. In that case, you could hire a man and you would have the same problem. And you know, that to me is, is the biggest missing piece. I've come to the equal treatment of men and women from a parental leave standpoint as core to gender equality in hiring and promotions.

From Matthew's point of view, cultural attitudes surrounding parenting will not change until parental leave policies do. As long as women are offered significantly more leave than men are, they will be expected to be more active parents, and therefore, less dedicated employees.

To the same end, Brian expressed frustration with being given only a week of leave compared to mothers' longer leave allowances:

> If you look at the policies themselves and the way they're crafted, you could say it appears as though they don't expect fathers to be as involved in the duties of the household. If you talk to management and read what's being produced at their level, they appear to be fairly agnostic, but when you look at the company policy itself, it's crafted in a way such that there seems to be more of an implied burden, on the domestic side of things, on the female of the household. I want to—and am expected to—be an equal

> partner to my wife, but as soon as the child is born, the company policy only letting me have one week off implies that is not what I should be doing.

In Brian's personal experience, the lack of attention to paternity leave in company policy reinforces gendered stereotypes of familial divisions of labor. Additionally, such a short leave is not conducive to sharing domestic responsibilities with a co-parent.

The variety of emotions and responses to leave length show that, while policies shape cultural attitudes, cultural attitudes shape policies in return. Even though companies with longer paternity leave allowances have lower leave participation rates, these companies are more likely to be supportive of shared co-parenting and working mothers' career advancement. Furthermore, Blair-Loy's (2003) conclusion that the demands of traditional motherhood are at odds with the demands of traditional careers is clearly upheld by significant differences in leave allowances for fathers as opposed to mothers.

b. Flexibility

As an attorney, Thomas has taken paternity leave twice, after the birth of each of his children. At his company, the official paternity leave policy allows fathers significant flexibility as long as their leave is "initiated within the first six months of the birth and completed within the first year." Thomas recalled feeling inundated by work at the time of his first child's birth, saying "there was a big arbitration that I was a key player in, and it was just impractical for me to just be absent totally." Instead of having to choose between using his (then four weeks) paid leave to spend time with his family and being present for a case he was heavily involved in, Thomas was able to do both. He "spread out [his leave] so that [he] left early every day for a couple months or didn't work on Fridays." Though this flexibility was helpful for him in balancing work and family during a busy time, he felt "still at work" mentally during the course of his paternity leave. The second time around, his involvement at work was not so inescapable,

and he was able to take all of his paid leave (then six weeks) continuously. Between the birth of his first and second child, a new leave policy was approved, allowing twelve weeks paid leave for fathers— which would retroactively apply to Thomas's second leave. Since returning to work after the initial six weeks of leave, Thomas plans to "spread out the additional six weeks that they gave [him]," as "they've been really flexible with that too." Thomas said if he were presented the ability to take twelve weeks paid but only if it was continuously taken, he "probably would not take the full twelve." For Thomas, whose case work makes it difficult to be absent from work for long periods of time, the flexibility to accommodate paternity leave to fit his schedule makes it significantly easier to be able to take the full duration, especially as the leave allowance gets longer.

Around the time Connor's wife gave birth to their second son, Connor's pharmaceutical company's research site was going through a closure, which proved to be a pivotal transition time for his team. His superiors wanted him around to help with the process, but because his company's paternity leave policy mandated that leave be taken continuously, taking paid leave meant that he could not help his team with this transition. At his company, (and most others) "once [a father] activated [his] leave, the company could not contact [him], could not send [him] emails, could not ask [him] to do anything work related." For these reasons, he remembered being encouraged not to take his paternity leave, or to take just a small portion of it. As previously mentioned, Connor cited a low precedent for leave-taking at his former company. Extrapolating from his experience, it is likely that the lack of flexibility in the leave policy may have dissuaded fathers from using paternity leave to its full extent.

Drew, a software development consultant, shared his experience feeling "unhelpful" at home for a long period of time:

> As the father, after a couple weeks of being at home with a newborn, things get set up and vaguely organized. And then, I don't feel like I have quite as much to do. I'm not breastfeeding or anything like that. There's only so much a little baby does after a while. It's changing a lot of diapers and doing a lot of feeding, and especially if your wife's breastfeeding, after a couple of weeks, you start to just sit around the house. I help out where I can, but… I'm sort of an extra wheel.

For this reason, he shared that mandatory continuous leave policies might be counterproductive to maximum assistance on the home front. He remembered someone who waited several months to take "a later paternity leave to do full-time baby watching while his wife was going back to work." This friend was able to delay the entirety of his leave to help his wife's career re-entry because their family had crucial support from family members in the first few weeks after the baby's birth. However, for dual-income families that do not have access to extra help in the early weeks, the ability for fathers to take a shorter amount of time off in the early weeks and a longer amount of time off during their co-parent's re-entry period at work could be quite beneficial. Ian, who was able to separate his leave into distinct sections, followed a timeline to this effect. He "was home with [his] wife and son for the first month, then she was home for three months, then he was home for two months while she returned to work." He said that, "even though it wasn't the most efficient thing, [he] wouldn't have done it any other way" and that it allowed him to bond with his child and his wife to feel fully supported. Especially for longer durations of leave, mandatory continuous paternity leave disadvantages a variety of fathers, including those with intensive personal workloads and working co-parents. Within the United States, firms are in control of the paternity leave policies they put forth, and the distinction between mandatory continuous leave and something more flexible is worth considering.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A large body of research suggests that tension between the demands of the professional and domestic spheres hurts women in the pursuit of their careers (Stone 2007; Stone &

Hernandez 2013; Blair-Loy 2003; Cornell, Benard, and Paik 2007). A smaller but growing field also exists which suggests that men's involvement in caregiving from the onset yields positive consequences for parents as well as children (Petts et al. 2019; Patnaik 2017). When it is offered, paternity leave is one way in which fathers can engage in said caregiving, alleviating their female co-parent's domestic responsibilities and often lessening the difficulty of her re-entry into the workforce. However, taking time off from work can cause financial insecurity and economic tension for many families, and paid paternity leave is not mandated federally.

Federal Recommendations

On a federal level, the United States falls short of over forty countries in providing access to comprehensive paid family leave (Pew Research Center 2019). Though my study focuses primarily on the firm-level leave-taking context, prior research has contended that government-backed policies would be more successful in incentivizing leave-taking than any firm-level intervention (Ayanna 2006; Tô 2018). Of course, providing any funding for new parents to take time off would come at a cost to the government. However, given the current policy (or lack thereof), even the smallest changes could reap widespread benefits for American families. If the U.S. were to propose a comprehensive paid family leave policy in the near future, it could look to the successes of European policies for early inspiration. However, Ayanna (2006) has postulated that the Nordic "daddy quota" might be too paternalistic for Americans' liking, suggesting that a reward for action model could be more effective.

One such way to provide a reward for paternity leave usage is to integrate it into tax filing, a practice most Americans annually participate in. The United States has already implemented several tax credits, and research suggests these credits are efficient in incentivizing

desired behavior[7] (Batchelder et al. 2006; Liebman 1998). As such, the tax code could be amended to include an opt-in credit that rewards parents for paid or unpaid parental leave-taking. In order to be eligible for the credit, parents would need to provide proof of legal, FMLA-compliant parental leave usage between 2 and 12 weeks[8] and employment at the time of leave usage. They would also need to provide confirmation that they had adopted, given birth to, or become a legal guardian of a dependent in the given tax year. Ideally, this credit could be applied to all eligible families, with a few stipulations: the amount of credit earned would increase as the amount of leave used increased and the amount of credit earned would be applied progressively, with the greatest credits awarded to the lowest-income households.[9] Though this policy is mainly aimed at parents without employer-provided leave compensation, it would also provide an additional incentive for those who are offered paid leave to take time off.

Obviously, the nuances of such a policy have the potential to greatly impact its outcomes. One consideration worth noting is the issue of dual-income households. Ideally, co-parents would be offered a greater benefit if both parents (rather than just one) use parental leave, but under a tax credit system, parents filing as Single or Head of Household would be at a disadvantage compared to parents Married Filing Jointly. Before a tax credit policy is considered, further work should be done to explore how different filing statuses, leave lengths,

[7] Among others, the Earned Income Tax Credit is aimed at incentivizing labor force participation and the American Opportunity Tax Credit is aimed at promoting educational attainment (Internal Revenue Service 2020).

[8] Given prior research by Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007), two weeks appears to be the minimum amount of leave to produce lasting benefits for parents and children. Under the proposed policy, parents would still be eligible for this tax credit if they used over 12 weeks of parental leave. However, 12 weeks is the maximum amount of leave covered under FMLA for male and female parents, so the proposed credit only applies for up to 12 weeks of leave usage.

[9] As mentioned in the Data/Methods section, the households most likely to benefit from employer-provided paid parental leave are already relatively high earning. Parents in lower-income households who do not have employer-provided funding are disproportionately affected by parental leave, as they are losing a more substantial portion of their salary relative to yearly earnings. As such, a progressive credit policy would most benefit the families who need leave-taking assistance most.

family structures, income levels, and other relevant factors affect household outcomes under this policy. Provisions for taking parental leave for those whom FMLA does not apply[10] should also be considered. Regardless, any policy mandating paid leave on a federal level or providing tax-based incentives to take leave would be costly. It is likely that many Americans would be opposed to being taxed at a higher rate in order to provide leave-taking benefits to parents, limiting the immediate possibilities for a federal policy.

Statewide Recommendations

While getting the entire country on board for a consistent and comprehensive federal policy could be difficult, states should consider policies that support at least partial compensation for employees taking family leave and consider provisions that make leave equally possible for fathers and mothers. Several of the fathers I spoke to were based in California, where parental leave is partially funded by the state through an employee payroll tax (Miller 2019; Gault et al. 2014). Rhode Island also funds paid family leave through an employee payroll tax, while New Jersey, New York, and Washington also tax employers to provide theirs (Miller 2019). These policies do not provide 100% wage replacement, but offer a substantial starting point (Miller 2019; Gault et al. 2014). In areas where paternity leave is at least partially covered by the state, city, or other governmental agency, firms are not completely footing the cost of an employee's time off, and therefore, send more positive leave-taking signals to their employees. However, just as passing a federal bill could be difficult, state legislation poses similar challenges, given high costs and opposition for government intervention in personal lives.

[10] FMLA only applies to employees who have worked at a public agency or private firm with over 50 employees for at least a year at the time of leave usage (Gault et al. 2014). A tax credit policy that relies on FMLA-compliant leave usage would disadvantage those working at small firms or agencies and those for whom careers are not particularly stable.

Firm-level Recommendations

Regardless, given the growing progressive movement for a less gendered division of familial labor, it is likely that paid paternity leave will be increasingly offered at the firm level as an attractive signal to potential employees. Though paid leave would be most beneficial to working-class groups, it is currently offered primarily to upper-class parents in high-earning jobs. Though a government-based policy would be the most successful way to reach the groups that need such a benefit most, if firm-level policies have high success rates where currently offered, they could influence other industries to implement their own policies. However, as it stands, these policies currently fail to substantially increase fathers' leave-taking, as most fathers still do not take paid leave even when it is offered to them (National Partnership for Women & Families 2017). My first firm-level recommendation is to make leave allowances for mothers and fathers more equitable. Though biological mothers may need a few extra weeks of medical leave to recover post-partum, leave policies with over seven weeks less for fathers (as was the average in my subject population) only perpetuate gendered stereotypes of labor and fail to alleviate the burden motherhood has on women's career prospects.

Furthermore, it is not enough for employers to merely offer paid paternity leave to their male employees—they must implement these policies in ways that are conducive to widespread uptake. Not only will successful implementation benefit working parents and their families, but firms will benefit from providing an environment that encourages fathers to make use of paid paternity leave as well. For example, in this study, Ian recalled how his boss' supportiveness encouraged him to be a better employee:

> I felt really valued when [my employer] supported me to take as much time as they did. And I worked harder on the front end to make sure that I wasn't leaving people in a lurch. I put together lots of transition documents and made sure that I had done more than my

> share of work. And then, on the back end, I came back and I was rested and ready to jump into my work fully again.

As suggested by Kaufman (2020), companies that encourage leave-taking have an advantage in their ability to retain more committed, excited employees, especially in competitive industries. They will also be able to hire and develop a more diverse workforce. As Ricky mentioned in our conversation, he prioritized companies in his job search that were most supportive of fathers taking paid leave, as that was the norm in his home country. Similarly, companies with progressive attitudes toward paternity leave are likely to be more inclusive of women as well. As such, companies that offer paid parental leave, and particularly, paid paternity leave, should *want* fathers to make use of these policies.

To encourage use of such policies, employers must enact workplace norms that encourage fathers to take leave when offered and to reduce the stigma around motherhood and caretaking. Drawing from previous findings as well as my interviews, I first propose that firms will maximize their paternity leave uptake rates when their policies are flexible, rather than continuous. Flexible policies give more perceived power to employees, as they have more control over the timing of their leave usage. By allowing employees to divide their allotted leave into a schedule most suited to their unique parenting and work situations, flexible policies lower the signaling costs associated with leave-taking and accommodate a wider range of job responsibilities and family situations. Flexible paternity leave policies directly impact working mothers as well, as families can customize leave timelines that ease both parents' career re-entries. Secondly, firms' parental leave policies should include step-by-step guidelines and frameworks for employees and managers across the company and account for the coverage of essential, singularly covered roles. The briefing provided to Manish regarding procedure for employees taking leave can serve as a model for future Human Resources teams in crafting

consistent messaging and procedural frameworks for managers and teams. Consistent messaging across all levels of the firm eliminates variability in responses and encourages equal access to parental leave.

Furthermore, companies with international presences should consider broadening their U.S. policies to meet global standards in order to provide more equitable benefits across the board. If a firm's American branch is providing less leave for new parents than its European branches, employees in the America branch will likely have some concerns. The American branch will be a less attractive employer to hiring candidates, and as such, it may not be able to perform on the same level as its European counterparts. Finally, establishing company precedent is pivotal to lowering the signaling costs for fathers taking paternity leave. New fathers should be encouraged to connect with fathers who previously took leave, and superiors or company higher ups should make their leave-taking publicly known. Everett mentioned the case of Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook—when a well-respected higher-up in a company takes a substantial amount of paternity leave, the taboo surrounding paternity leave diminishes, and the norm shifts towards leave-taking. Consequently, I recommend firms go so far as to make taking the full length of paternity leave mandatory for senior-level employees having children. This requirement will signal to entry-level or rising employees that taking leave is praiseworthy and not correlated with a lack of ambition.

These suggestions are not exhaustive. Further research might consider the effects of these suggestions on companies of different sizes or in different industries. Of course, many fathers' decisions are also influenced by personal factors and cannot be entirely accounted for through organizational analysis. However, these suggestions provide a comprehensive starting point for any company that wishes to effectively implement a paid paternity leave policy.

CONCLUSION

A large body of research highlights the vast benefits of fathers spending time with their children and co-parents in the children's early years (Kaufman 2020; Buenning 2015; Patnaik 2017; Tamm 2018). However, access to paid parental leave is not federally mandated. It is up to firms to decide whether or not to provide paid parental leave to their employees, and even when it is offered, an underwhelming number of men take it. Using interviews with recent fathers in workplaces that guarantee access to paid paternity leave, my research aims to illuminate the underlying organizational factors influencing fathers' paid leave decisions.

Though I asked every father about the gendered makeup of their company, very few fathers felt that their experiences were impacted by having a more gender-balanced workplace. This finding is in conflict with Bygren & Duvander's (2006) study that fathers were more likely to take leave in a female-led workplace. Previous research attributes many fathers' choice not to take paid leave to the idea that fathers face higher signaling costs associated with this behavior than mothers do, because signaling equilibriums enforce societal norms (Tô 2018, Bernheim 1994). In line with this theory, many fathers I spoke to emphasized the importance of precedent on their decision to take paternity leave. Fathers who noted a high perceived rate of other fathers taking leave at their companies typically felt more personally inclined to take it themselves. This finding is consistent with Brygren & Duvander's (2006) research in Sweden, where they found that men who had worked alongside fathers who had previously taken leave were more likely to take leave at the time of their child's birth.

I also found that precedent-setters placed more significant weight on their leave-taking decisions than those following the leads of others. These precedent-setters included bosses, the first member of a team to have a child, and fathers working in companies who only recently

began offering paid leave. These fathers were aware that their decisions would become the precedents by which future fathers would make their decisions. Following signaling theory, these men's choices would become the norms through which another group of parents, "future fathers", would assign signaling costs to their own paid leave choices. From talking to "future fathers" at other companies, I found that many who did not feel a strong personal drive to take paid leave still chose to do so when it was a norm in their workplace, echoing Pedulla & Thébaud's (2015) notion that parents are pressured to conform to community norms in the workplace. Further research is necessary to more clearly understand the psychology of precedent-setting in this capacity: what specific organizational motives can be provided to precedent-setters to ensure they act to lower signaling costs for future decision-makers?

My study also shows that precedent-setting influences organizational encouragement on a more global scale. Several of my interviewees worked at firms with international branches, which had more progressive paternity leave policies, possibly due to a greater cultural emphasis on family and work-life balance. These men resoundingly felt that their companies emphasized the importance of taking paternity leave, possibly in some way to position themselves on the same level as their international counterparts. Furthermore, many fathers who were raised outside of the United States, where the likelihood of receiving paid paternity leave is more certain, remarked that they accepted their job offers based on the company's commitment to providing paid paternity leave. This finding aligns with Valcour et al.'s (2011) conclusion that firms participate in signaling by offering benefits to attract a more competitive candidate pool.

Though I would have liked to speak to both fathers who took leave when offered and those who did not, I ended up speaking only to the former. This may have been due to self-selection, as men who did not take paid leave likely felt less eager to discuss their experience.

However, in order to more definitively categorize firm-level interventions in paternity leave decisions as motivational or prohibitive, future studies would benefit from comparing the responses of men in both groups. There is also some question as to how much effect state policy had in influencing each man's decision. Certain firm-level interventions may have different effects in different legal contexts, which could be explored in future research as well.

In this study, I spoke predominantly with fathers in urban areas who worked for larger, multi-branched companies. These geographic regions are often associated with more progressive attitudes toward family and work, which may have been why many of the men I spoke to referenced high incidences of fathers taking paid leave in their companies, despite much research pointing to the contrary trend on a national level. Future research should pay particular attention to men in workplaces with particularly low rates of fathers' taking paternity leave in order to gain a broader understanding of this pattern. It would also be beneficial to consider the experiences of fathers parenting outside of heterosexual marriages, such as those who are single or in same-sex partnerships.

This study fits into a growing body of research and literature about promoting gender equality in the labor market through increasing participation in firm-mandated paternity leave. I found that most fathers who take paternity leave usually are inspired to do so because of a personal desire to spend time with their co-parent and children, but that organizational structure has a significant impact on fathers' satisfaction with their experiences. Subjects highlighted the importance of visible precedents in their decision to take leave, global standards and competition impacting newer, more generous policies, workplace duties affecting the ability to be absent from work, flexibility's key role in helping fathers fit leave into their individual lives, and consistency of company messaging in leveling the playing field for all employees. These insights

help us understand how firms can best create paid paternity leave policies that will benefit both employees and the firms themselves.

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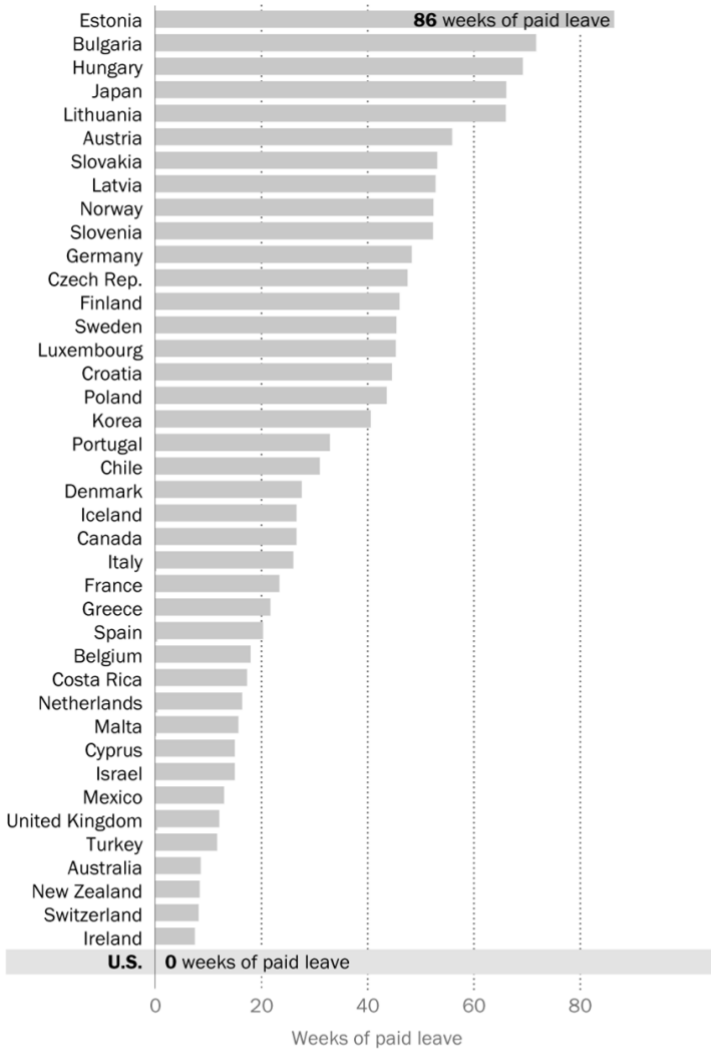
APPENDIX A

Data From a Pew Research Center Report on International Paid Parental Leave Offerings published on December 16th, 2019

Image A1: Total weeks of mandated paid parental leave offerings across the world



Note: Includes maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave entitlements in place as of April 2018. Estimates based on a "full-rate equivalent," calculated as total number of weeks of any paid leave available to a new parent, multiplied by average rate of earnings reimbursement for those weeks of leave.
Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Family Database.

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APPENDIX B

Data Collection Records From Interviews Conducted Between October 2019 and March 2020

Figure B1: Scripted Interview Guide

Where do you work? (Company, Industry, Location)

What is your job title? Walk me through some of your usual projects & responsibilities.

Would you say your schedule is more structured or self-disciplined? Are you expected to complete a set of tasks every day, or is it up to you to get things done within the limits of your assigned projects?

Outside of parental leave, how lax or strict would you say your employer is toward taking other forms of personal leave or benefits?

What is the gender breakdown of your company/team? What is the gender of your direct boss or superior?

What is your company's paid leave policy for parents, however that is broken down? How much time is allowed and how is the compensation broken down? Does the leave have to be taken continuously or can it be divided into distinct portions?

Tell me about your parenting situation. Do you have a co-parent? Do you live together? Do they also provide family income?

Did you take paid parental leave after the birth of your most recent child?

Walk me through that decision. What personal factors were at play?

Were there certain superiors or colleagues who inspired you to take paternity leave? How did the community make you feel supported or unsupported? What behaviors or statements from within your company affected your paternity leave decision?

What were the transitions like? What steps did you take before, during, and after your leave to delegate your responsibilities and communicate with your colleagues? How did your colleagues and superiors handle the transition?

What was returning to work like? Were you expected to land on your feet immediately, or was there an adjustment period?

Is there anything you wished your company, colleagues, or superiors had done that would have changed your experience?

Do a lot of parents work for your company? What is your perceived rate of fathers taking paid leave in your company? Does it vary across teams? What about mothers taking maternity leave?

From your point of view, are there specific policies or cultural attitudes associated with stigma or traditionally gendered roles in the family? Do more mothers than fathers in your office take on the responsibility of picking kids up from school or similar responsibilities?

In your experience, does taking paid leave affect an employee's standing for receiving an end-of-year bonus or being promoted?

Obviously, my experience with this issue is limited to research and listening to personal accounts. Is there anything you think is important that we have not yet discussed?

Figure B2: Full List of Fathers Interviewed

Father	Industry	Job Title	Paid Leave Allowance	Paid Leave Used	Notes
Steven	Financial Services	Senior Associate	2 weeks	2 weeks	
Ivan	Financial Services	Quantitative Analyst	3 weeks (flexible)	3 weeks	Ivan & Manish work at the same firm. Paternity leave was partially compensated by CA state.
Manish	Financial Services	Executive Vice President	3 weeks (flexible)	1.5 weeks (planning to spread out remaining 1.5)	Manish & Ivan work at the same firm. Paternity leave was partially compensated by CA state.
Ricky	Financial Services	Vice President	3 weeks (flexible)	3 weeks	Paternity leave was partially compensated by CA state.
Thomas	Legal Services	Senior Associate, Attorney	First Child: 4 weeks Second Child: 12 weeks (both flexible)	First Child: 4 weeks Second Child: 6 weeks (planning to spread out remaining 6)	Paternity leave was partially compensated by CA state.
Ethan	Business (Marketing)	Brand Manager	6 months (mandatory continuous)	6 months (in use at time of interview)	Ethan is pioneering a new policy at the firm.
Matthew	Tech	Director of Product, Research & Development	6 weeks (flexible w/ restrictions)	6 weeks	Matthew's firm's 6 week paid leave policy was compliant with a city-wide 6 week paid leave minimum in San Francisco. Paternity leave was partially compensated by CA state.
Connor	Pharmaceuticals	Research Investigator	5 weeks (mandatory continuous)	5 weeks (not technically taken as paternity leave, but rather a work-from-home arrangement)	Connor had an abnormal experience due to knowing his role would be terminated shortly after leave usage.
Brian	Financial Services	Compliance Officer	1 week (mandatory continuous)	1 week	Brian also used a substantial amount of vacation time and unpaid paternity leave after his child was born.
Ian	Government Services	Consultant	8 weeks (flexible)	8 weeks	Ian is a public sector employee. Paternity leave was paid for under Washington D.C.'s paid FMLA.
Everett	Tech	Data Scientist	17 weeks (flexible)	In use, planning to take 17 weeks in two rounds	
Drew	Tech	Software Architect	Variable	3 weeks	
Gavin	Tech	Development Executive	12 weeks (flexible)	10 weeks	Paternity leave was partially compensated by CA state.
Louis	Business (Sales)	Vice President	5 weeks (flexible)	5 weeks	
Patrick	Business	Head of Acquisitions	9 weeks (mandatory continuous)	6 weeks	