WOMEN TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES REGARDING MATERNAL BODIES, MATERNITY LEAVE, AND RETURNING TO WORK

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By
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Jessica Renee Fairbairn, candidate for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum & Instruction, has presented a thesis titled, *Women Teachers' Experiences Regarding Maternal Bodies, Maternity Leave, and Returning to Work*, in an oral examination held on October 18, 2019. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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ABSTRACT

In 2017, I became pregnant with my first child and I became overwhelmed with questions regarding my professional and personal identity. After confiding in others, I understood that numerous women felt strong emotions regarding their pregnancies and maternity leaves. I then began to think about how women teachers are treated during, and after pregnancy and maternity leave.

There is a dearth of research on women’s interpretations of pregnancy based employment discrimination and felt the need to research this topic. Despite federal, provincial, and local policies that are to protect pregnant women in the work place, I found that women are still discriminated in the work place. Using narrative inquiry as my methodology, and critical feminist theory as my theoretical framework, I conducted semi-structure interviews with four participants. Using the stories from my participants, as well as my own, I gained insights into the present situation of pregnant teachers and their experiences with their maternal body and work. Using thematic analysis to interpret the data, the emerging themes that are discussed at length are job security and policies, physical and emotional tolls, and balancing the mother and professional role.

The intention of this work is not to provide a conclusive finding, but share women’s experiences in hopes that other pregnant teachers do not feel alone in their feelings as I once did, and to acknowledge and speak up for the change that is needed to create equality.
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Most of all, Madison, this is for you. I love you. There are moments that I have missed with you, but I hope one day that you understand what was accomplished with this sacrifice of time, and that you are the reason and drive behind this thesis. Remember, “Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.”
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Chapter One: Introduction

During my eighth year of teaching, I started my Master’s courses in Education, Instruction and Curriculum, in fall of 2016. I returned to university studies to invigorate my career by my love of acquiring knowledge. It was not that I disliked teaching; I wanted to be surrounded with likeminded people who I hoped would reignite my passion for teaching again. Initially, I had full intentions of completing a course route Master’s program, with a focus on technology in education. My focus on technology in education had lead me to attend many conferences, offer professional development days on technology, and dedicate the majority of my instructional planning to integrate technology to engage the students. Due to scheduling conflicts, wait lists, and an unfamiliar registration processes, I could not begin my program with any technology classes. Therefore, I signed up for an elective, and a mandatory class. After first term, I became pregnant and my worldview, along with my place in the world, changed. Motherhood is exhausting. Teaching is exhausting, and yet some women tackle these roles simultaneously. In short, my Master’s journey consisted of five months before I found myself responsible for somebody else. Fast forward to February 2019, and I am pregnant with my second child. While I would never trade my experience of being a mother for anything, nothing could have prepared me for being one.

Although I was excited to be pregnant, the life changes did not come without challenges. I began to realize that not only did I feel differently, colleagues were treating me differently, and I did not like it. I now know that these feelings are partly due to social structures and gendered discourses, and tensions in my sense of identity, but I was ill equipped in what to feel or think beyond frustration at the time. I began to think about how women teachers are treated during, and after pregnancy and maternity leave. I found myself becoming extremely overwhelmed with
questions such as: will my professional role be the same after my pregnancy? What will my role be in the classroom during pregnancy? What will happen to my classroom upon leave? Can I apply for a leadership position if I am pregnant and leaving the profession for a defined period of time? Is it fair that I can apply to my principal or vice principal for a leadership role, leave my leadership role for a year, and resume the role after I return? Will there be time to balance a mother role and a professional teaching role? Is it possible to align personal and professional goals when you are a teacher who chooses to be a mother?

These questions arose not because I was over-thinking my situation, but because I have witnessed changes in various women colleagues’ teaching careers during and after their pregnancy and maternity leave. Women teachers are not guaranteed the same teaching assignment, or school or classroom, after completing a maternity leave. I have witnessed situations where women, despite having a continuing contract, were assigned a substitute role for a semester versus having their designated classrooms and courses to teach. Others have felt compelled to return months early in order to coincide with the beginning of a new school year, in fear that if they returned halfway through a year, they would not maintain their original job assignment.

Similarly, I was the victim of collegial vultures when I announced my pregnancy. Colleagues immediately assumed they had the right to ask for anything, ranging from my classroom, my parking spot, to my extra-curricular role/team, and supervision responsibilities. It was as though my colleagues and employer regarded children simply “as a personal lifestyle choice, as if [I] had decided to take up sky-diving or dog breeding” (Ravizza & Peterson-Iyer, 2005, p.311) not realizing there are multiple discourses at work in producing such thinking.
Unwittingly, I was seeing the hierarch of teaching positions and the process for advancing with the system in which I worked.

I had these thoughts, and was able to put them into words because I was taking a research class. Frankly, I had no choice if I wanted to pass the class. I became immersed in the research, and now a thesis has come from it. I find it hilarious how an exhausting, emotional, and incredible two year journey can be summed up in the previous sentence, implying that was “all I did” to make this thesis happen.

I admit these questions never concerned me until I was pregnant, and confess that I initially situated myself as a hypocrite. I now scowl at the temporary contract colleagues who gossip about the potentially pregnant woman, in hopes that the woman’s leave will give them the opportunity for a continuing contract. I think “shame on you for not thinking about the woman’s point of view and what she is going through,” and then I remember that I was once that temporary contract colleague. Upon being hired, I was told it was for a maternity leave, and I remember thinking “I hope that woman does not come back to this school because then maybe I can stay.” I was naive, and my priorities and mindset were different, but I was part of the problem that I am now experiencing of being treated differently as a pregnant woman.

In a just world, women would not fear that pregnancy may negatively affect their teaching careers, and how others perceive them, and yet I do. In the school division / province where I work, a woman with a full time continuing contract is guaranteed a job, but not necessarily the same role within that job upon return despite policies stating the employee and employer “must cooperate and compromise to find reasonable and practical solutions” (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014). Maternity leave should not affect that role negatively, and accommodations should be made to assume the woman leaving will return to a similar position
as prior to pregnancy. Some women wanting to bear children may have to decide when it is the right time, versus when they would like to, or are able to become pregnant. Men do not have to fear a negative change in their careers because anatomy does not allow for them to bear children, but women should also have the right to be free from this fear. Society should recognize the benefits of “the unpaid labor of women as they work many hours, days, years, to raise healthy, well adjusted children who will become productive citizens (Ravizza & Peterson-Iyer, 2005, p.311) versus seeing accommodation as a burden in the workplace, especially considering schools depend on children to populate schools! For these reasons, I seek to gain insights into the present situation of pregnant teachers and their experiences with their maternal body and work.

Clarification of Terms

For the benefit of my readers, I have provided clarification on some of the terms used, and the reasoning for specific word choices that I use throughout my thesis.

The word women is preferred over female. Women was chosen because it is defined as “an adult female person” (Merriam-Webster, 2019), therefore implying that a woman is female. As well, scientific reports often use the word female, and it makes my data sound scientific or that I am referring to animals. The word female is still present in the data. I kept this word when it was mentioned in my participant data to ensure authenticity. As well, certain policies use the word female. To stay consistent, when referring to the policies, I kept the word.

Administration refers to the people who are serving as principals, or vice principals, and have the highest authority within a school. Every school division in Saskatchewan employ administrative staff and the amount of people within these roles varies from school to school.

Oral and written language differ. The semi-structured interviews that took place with the participants were casual, conversational, and comfortable. The participants chose the settings,
and having a relaxed setting is important because I wanted participants to talk openly about their experiences; therefore, I kept the verbal fillers within the quotations in the transcriptions for authenticity. Our conversations were recorded collegial dialogue.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the present situation of pregnant teachers and their experiences with their maternal body and work. Despite efforts to achieve social, economic and political equality for woman, the "unjust treatment of pregnant workers is so widespread that it has been described by Mäkelä (2005, p.50) as 'commonplace'" (Gatrell, 2010, p.98). Specific to the urban setting where I work as a secondary teacher, I explored the present situation of pregnant teachers and their experiences in this location. My participants discussed in detail their experiences from when the time they announced they were pregnant, up until their return into the work force following approximately a one-year maternal and parental leave. Research questions I sought to answer were: what impact do they believe the experience has on their career trajectories? What are their stories of maternity leave and immediately beyond? What are their stories of when they returned to work? A major theme of the research I have read (Chami, 2016; Edwards, 1996; Nowak, Naude & Thomas, 2014) shows women’s experiences of being demoted, or treated unfairly upon returning to work. Ideally, upon return to work, women should be consulted by the employer in regard to their job assignment, and women should have the right to return to their leadership roles within the school that they left while on maternity leave. Employers may feel that their obligations are fulfilled upon simply “giving” a woman a job, versus ensuring she has a similar role to when she left. Ultimately, I do not want myself, or other women, to fear leaving their profession to bear children because of the negative impact leaving may have on their careers.
Literary Novel as a Counter-point

During the time I was developing my research, Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, originally published in 1980, was being made into a television series. My coworker raved about the novel, and as an English teacher, I felt compelled to read it. It overwhelmed me. In the novel, women function as commodities, fighting for their personal identity and freedom beyond fertility. Although fiction, the novel hauntingly depicts situations similar to the experiences of women in today’s world. As with her other dystopian novels, Atwood claims that all the incendiary details and incidents are drawn from real global events. Much in the novel echoed my research, and I made strong connections in terms of how women’s bodies are contested in political spaces. In the novel, Atwood presents Canada as a place of refuge for women, free of suppression from the totalitarian state known as the Gilead; however, I am writing from the position of a suppressed woman living in Canada. Because I read the novel while pregnant and doing research, its parallels to society and my life quickly resonated deeply within me. In Gilead, June, the protagonist, is referred as property of *Fred*, producing the name Offred. I recognize that like June, women’s identities are altered, perhaps even defined by pregnancy. Our pregnancies and childbirth are commoditized, subsuming our previous identities. Reproductive similarities aside, naming in many cultures continue to privilege the patrilineal, and obliterate the matrilineal origins of our identities. These reflections have led me to include *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a reference throughout my research, as a counter-point to the academic sources I have cited to support my interpretations. Much like June, “I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born” (75).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Pregnancy based employment discrimination “has been a topic of interest for gender inequality scholars…employer stereotypes and financial interests leave pregnant women vulnerable to being fired. We still know little, however, about women’s interpretations” (Byron & Roscigno, 2014, p.435) as there is a dearth of research pertaining to pregnant teachers in Canada. To compensate, I researched pregnancy and policies and their effects among nurses, and women in academia. The literature review focuses on identity work and traditional views of women, current policies governing maternity leave, and the experiences of women returning to work after pregnancy and childbirth. In order to seek out more information, I looked to Canadian, Saskatchewan, and local policies surrounding maternity leave. Although many policies are in place, there is virtually no literature that discusses women teachers and how these policies affect them, or how they feel about them. While my searches contained valuable information concerning women, pregnancy, maternity leaves, policies, identity, and the feelings these women had, only one resource I found, a Canadian thesis (Chami, 2016) specifically discusses women, Canadian teachers and their experiences with child rearing.

One article by Bigham, Dulude, Dulude Lay, & Pinnegar (2005), sought out to investigate the relationship between mothering and teaching in the United States. Teaching is dominated by females, so a “closer view of how experiences gained as a mother influences the experience of teaching may give us insight into the experience of educators and mothers alike” (Bigham et al. 2005, p.56). Throughout this article, the stories show that teachers that are mothers feel inadequate, and struggle to balance various roles, especially when these roles conflict. This feeling of inadequacy stems from mothers who are teachers feeling “obligated to do what is right,” since their lives are “intricately bound to the lives of others” (Bigham et al. p.60). They believe they are nurturers at home and at school, seek intrinsic rewards, and live with
“‘angst’ as a result of a hard situation, [they] accept it because [they] would rather do what [they] feel is right” (Bighman et al. p.66). The authors do not discuss why women feel inadequate and do not seek to change it, but would rather live with ‘angst.’ Although it is clear that life experience impacts teaching, “little has been done to explore how life experiences informs and helps one better understand life as a teacher” (p.56).

As Dillabough states (1999) the “battle for women to assert themselves as ‘professionals’ continues” (p.385). Women desire to:

- Protect and set themselves apart from any blame[...] and such assertions seem necessary for survival in the teaching profession. The need for self-protection, [...] point to the struggle women teachers engage in to both resist and get beyond their marginal positioning in the profession. (Dillabough, 1999, p.385)

With this assertion in mind, and because there is not an abundance of literature, additional research is essential in terms of allowing people to hear the experiences of women teachers balancing, or attempting to balance, their families and careers.

**Identity**

In the 1970s and through the 1980s pregnancy discrimination could result in a forced leave from the teaching profession (Edwards, 1996). The employer forced the leave, and over time, employees challenged the leaves, but informal practices of forced leave within various school systems still occurred (Edwards, 1996). Today in Canada, most mothers are no longer opting to leave the workplace, and many mothers are developing their careers around formal policies set in place for maternity leave. In one study, women emphasized, “paid work is essential for their personal autonomy. Having witnessed the cost to their mothers of the emotional or financial dependence, they emphasized that working was essential to being able to
provide for themselves and their children” (Hoffnung & Williams, 2012, p.323). This sense of autonomy differs from the traditional notions of the “ideal” woman. Unfortunately, much of those past views still exist today as women teachers are still seen as “subordinated, as ‘mothers’” (p.385) due to “historically determined gender dualisms [that] serve as identity-framing devices in the field of teaching” (Dillabough, 1999, p.387).

These findings parallel aspects of The Handmaids Tale as gender dualisms exist both in this world, and within the novel. Atwood’s (2014) provocation, “but I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (pg.256) originates from the Bible, and means that men were originally given the responsibility to teach. Women were not allowed to teach, or exercise authority over men, and were to remain silent. Although the first edict has changed drastically, in that majority of teachers are female, the other two have not. It seems that gender dualism roots itself in tradition, and is hard for women to break free. For example:

Act[s] of service should lead (at least in theory) to a certain appreciation for the work women do. However,[…][appreciation can only emerge as a response to conflation of women and service. Women teachers therefore emerge as a devalued entity unless they are serving others. (Dillabough, 1999, p.384)

In other words, by writing this thesis, I reveal these outdated views in hopes to have them dismantled, but by serving others, I only conflate the traditional view of women and service.

Identity and the teaching profession cannot be separated. As quoted in Day, Kingston, Sammons, & Stobart (2006)

Self is a crucial element in the way teachers construe and construct the nature of their work (Kelchtermans & Vandenberge, 1994) and the events and experiences in the
personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to the performance of their professional roles. (p.603)

If a woman teacher is labelled, she internalizes the label and it becomes part of her ‘self.’ In return, that transcends into her teaching whether positive or negative. Moreover, with present economic, family and educational social structures put in place that value the man, it does not come as a surprise that pregnant women feel devalued within their workplace. Gatrell (2010) says:

Employers associate maternity with poor work performance, low work orientation, compromised health, unreliability, potential leakage' and the inconveniently demanding bodies of infant children. Thus, throughout the literature, the event of maternity is seen to have the effect of devaluing the employed female body. (p. 107)

While some progressive change has occurred, the literature continually displays mothers being disadvantaged at work due to pregnancy and maternity leave, which verify traditional views of women may be responsible for this problem.

Policy

Policy has a direct impact on employers and employees. Federal, provincial, and local policies legally state the employer and employee rights in regards to maternity leave, and returning to the work place. For this study, Federal, Provincial, and local policies are examined because they all impact the maternal worker. In particular, the two areas addressed are:


b. Inequities in policy and practices effecting potential earnings and advancement.
Governing maternity leave across jurisdictions in Canada, and Saskatchewan.

Arguably, conditions for pregnant women in the work force have improved in the last fifty years, but are still not ideal (Edwards, 1996). In fact, "despite years of equal opportunities legislation aimed at protecting pregnant and newly maternal workers (and regardless of whether businesses are corporate or small) there is a long way to go before such integration occurs" (Gatrell, 2010, p.108). The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2014) completed a detailed document entitled Policy on Pregnancy & Human Rights in the Workplace. This document states, "The Canadian Human Rights Act (the Act) prohibits discrimination related to pregnancy. Pregnancy-related discrimination is a form of sex discrimination because only women can become pregnant." (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014, para. 3) and yet women still feel and report that they are being discriminated against in the workplace. It also states, "the pregnant employee, the employer, and other parties such as union representatives, must cooperate and compromise to find reasonable and practical solutions" (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014, para.5). These policies are important because "research consistently identifies contradictions between equal opportunities polices aimed at protecting pregnant and newly maternal employees and the manner in which such women are treated in practice" (Gatrell, 2010, p.97). Despite policies in place, "women's maternal 'bodies'...their ability to procreate, their pregnancy, breastfeeding and childcare...are [treated as] suspect, stigmatized, and used as grounds for control and exclusion" (Gatrell, 2010, p.97). These policies still enforce gender role stereotypes and the “subordination of working women by emplacing that a mother’s place is principally in the home” (Chami, 2016, p.1). Because human resources may still see a maternity leave as a lack of commitment to the workforce, they may look to employ those who would not be leaving for a maternity leave (Gatrell, 2010). Moreover, although these policies are
intended to protect pregnant women, they may be counterintuitive as “family friendly policies, which are normally aimed at reducing gender inequality, appear at times to increase gender inequality” (Aisenbrey, Evertsson & Grunow, 2009, p.573). Focusing on gender-neutral policies intended to support women, “research indicates that women have more difficulty reaching and maintaining powerful occupational positions in countries with extensive parental leave policies” (Aisenbrey et al., 2009, p.573). It is crucial to explore why women are treated this way, despite certain policies and changes intended to better their work conditions. It may be that there is a "disparity between articulated policy and actual practice"(North- Samardzic & Taksa, 2011, p.199) within the work place and that social norms do not supersede policy.

Inequities in policy and practices effecting potential earning and advancement.

In accordance with the Government of Canada’s Employment Insurance Maternity and Parental Benefits website (Government of Canada, 2019), an expectant mother can collect unemployment insurance during her maternity leave, which is eighteen weeks. She, or the father, is also entitled to thirty-four weeks of parental leave at fifty-five percent of her/his wage (Government of Canada, 2019). Additionally, in Saskatchewan women teachers may qualify for the Supplemental Employment Benefits Plan (SEB). SEB was previously referred to as Supplementary Unemployment Benefits (SUB), and SUB was part of the Provincial Agreement that was signed in 1993. Therefore, SEB or SUB has been in place for twenty-eight years, and prior to these years, woman could only collect Employment Insurance, assuming she gave birth after 1971, when the Canadian Government began to grant employment insurance for special benefits, such as maternity leave (Lin, 1998). Today, the SEB policy:

tops up EI benefits for birth mothers to 95 percent of salary for teaching days lost during the eligible period. The SEB plan was negotiated within the Provincial Collective
The SEB plan is problematic because it is enacted in such a way that creates a systemic inequity based on the school calendar. For example, teachers only receive top up “when teachers would receive salary” (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2018, pg.3), during the school year. Because of the nature of teaching contracts, teachers are not paid during the summer months, or for any statutory holidays, there is no conceivable way for a woman to receive the full seventeen weeks of maternity benefits because those weeks will always be interrupted by a holiday. For example, a teacher who gives birth on July 1 will not receive any remuneration under SEB until September, meaning that eight out of seventeen weeks is unpaid because the leave falls outside of the school year. In another example, when a baby is born during the months of May to August, eight weeks of top up to ninety-five percent of the woman’s wage is not paid out. In that case, forty percent of a teacher's salary for those eight weeks – approximately 2500-5000 dollars depending on a teacher's pay scale is forfeited. In order to benefit fully, teachers must ultimately plan to have a baby outside of the summer months to ensure the maximum amount of SEB is paid. The SEB plan disadvantages women who are subject to a biological process that they cannot control, which is becoming pregnant.

According to The Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (2017), pregnant women on full time continuing contracts are guaranteed a job upon returning from maternity leave, but are not guaranteed a placement at the same school they left prior to the maternity leave, or the same teaching assignment. Despite evidence showing that pregnant mothers are experiencing high levels of stress, the Saskatchewan Teaching Federation has not negotiated a policy that secures a teacher's status within a school, other than full time employment somewhere in the same
division. In Saskatchewan, that division may be large, potentially involving hours of driving time to cross; therefore, teachers may be relocated to different towns or cities due to job stability. The change in school placements and roles, appear to contradict the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2014) that states, "the pregnant employee, the employer, and other parties such as union representatives, must cooperate and compromise to find reasonable and practical solutions” (para. 5). Part of the problem is defining what interpretation constitutes “reasonable and practical.” Similarly, the Saskatchewan provincial policies surrounding Maternity Leave state “if the leave is longer than 60 days, the employee can be reinstated to a comparable job” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017, pg.1), but there are numerous interpretations that constitute “comparable.” Women’s previous experiences throughout the literature illustrate that although they may return to a job, it may not be similar, or in the desired grade level or subject area. Chami’s (2016) research recounts how a woman was promised a position, and then upon return was assigned to another position. A couple years later, this same woman was told she would have a job in the physical education department, a role she had been wanting for some time. However, she “missed her opportunity once more as she began her second maternity leave at the time that the opening presented itself” (p.38). Ultimately, the prospect of a career advancement may be chronologically compromised due to being on an entitled leave. Career advancements, and placement at the previous school with the previous role, are not the only matters of concern. These deviations, on top of transitioning back to work, exacerbate the stress the teacher feels as she is learning to cope with the competing roles of motherhood and career. The fabled work-life balance is made impossible.

Again, although there are policies ensuring ‘fair’ pay and a full time continuing contract, little is done to ensure women’s career goals are established, much less sustained (Gatrell, 2010).
Establishing career goals are important as “identity will be affected by external (policy) and internal (organizational) and personal experiences past and present, and so is not always stable” (Day et al., 2006). It would lessen the stress if teachers were at the minimum consulted regarding their transition back, and for secondary teachers, a similar role with familiar subject area as, “subjects and its status are related more closely to identity (Day et al., 2006). It is evident in the participant data that no participants were granted the opportunity to discuss their return to the work place. Perhaps, "it is time that woman's own perceptions of their employment opportunities are considered in any discussion of the effectiveness of the legislation aimed at improving employment opportunities for women" (North- Samardzic & Taksa, 2011, p.199) as opposed to just filling out paperwork and human resources acting as if they are doing women teachers a favour of holding a job for them. Correspondingly, maintaining women’s career goals should be a priority considering “high birth rates were found among teachers and health care professionals” (Bavel, 2010, p.442) and the teaching profession is predominantly women.

Chami (2016) and Gatrell (2010) suggest that women do not feel as respected upon returning to the work place as they once did prior to leaving on maternity leave. Chami (2016) notes that Women are already “physically removed from the workplace and inevitably lose subsequent experience, opportunities for professional development, and involvement in school community” (p.24). For example, I am aware of a school division policy where teachers are not permitted to keep school equipment, such as a laptop, while on maternity leave. The requirement to surrender computer equipment disadvantages women by disrupting communication with the employer, which in turn exacerbates their isolated position. Therefore, computers should be retained by the employee to make the transition easier. Any new policies or programming can be addressed via email, and that may help women transition because after all, they are still
employed and are still getting paid through SEB. It is one minor detail that may alleviate a lot of additional stress.

**Returning to Work**

Upon returning to work, policies concerning maternity leave secure women’s jobs, but not necessarily their positions. Beyond the initial position itself, literature shows that women are also concerned with the following:

a) **Their changing body.**

b) **Societal pressures which produce guilt.**

**Their changing body.**

Bianchi’s (2011) work regarding changing families and workplaces, show that more mothers work during their pregnancy more often and longer, and take less maternity leave in hopes of developing their careers. Bianchi (2011) states that

Between 1975 and 2009, the labor force rate of mothers with children under age eighteen increased from 47.4 percent to 71.6 percent. For mothers of children under age six, the share in the labor force rose from 39.0 percent to 63.6 percent. (p.16)

Despite these numbers showing that women are staying in the work place, pregnant women need assurances and safeguards that taking some time off from the job around the birth of a child will not permanently derail fulfilling careers as the “pregnant body” (p.29) is discriminated against in the work place. At times “new mothers' subordinate roles are seen to be a 'severe nuisance,' their post birth bodies being censured as bringing into the workplace: 'an unwelcome domestic odour, a whiff of kitchen and nursery’” (Gatrell, 2010, p.104), and assumptions are made that a pregnant woman is distracted from her duties. Subtle discrimination towards mothers in the work place, “known as the “motherhood wage penalty” or “the family
gap”—[is present] because they are assumed to be less committed workers than men or women without children (Bianchi, 2011, p.25). Health agencies (Dee, Salon & Van, 2013) recommend breast-feeding for a minimum of one year, ideally for two, due to the health benefits and bonding for both mother and baby. Instead, “employers may be more willing to provide cigarette breaks than to provide breaks to accommodate breast-feeding- albeit that smokers are obliged to leave office premises and must consume cigarettes in the open air” (Gatrell, 2010, p.106) making it less awkward for others despite the vast differences in regard to health. Managing breast feeding and other aspects of motherhood should be permissible in a workplace without “facing hostility for workplace routines” (Gatrell, 2010, p.105). Employers should have the responsibility to consider the health of their employees as it benefits everyone in the workplace.

Often the pregnant body is stereotyped and associated immediately with sick leave, which in turn fosters more guilt in a woman for being pregnant. Although pregnant women may develop health issues, pregnancy is not pathology. I take my job seriously, which is why during the period of my nausea and sickness in the first trimester, I remained at school. I was also very tired, but still did not call in sick or leave early or in any way exploit my flexible working conditions. I am not the only one who feels this way. The literature displays that “studies within the socio-cultural and feminist literatures report how employed pregnant women often remain present at work despite feeling ill…highlight[ing] the determination among some pregnant women to remain at work despite nausea, exhaustion, and other symptoms” (Gatrell, 2010, p.102). There is a stigma attached to sickness and pregnancy, but “employers’ negative evaluation of pregnant employees’ health is related more to perceptions about pregnancy sickness than to any research based evidence (Gatrell, 2010, p.102). The views surrounding sick leave reflect systemic discrimination due to ingrained societal views and pressures.
Societal pressures which produce guilt.

A recurring theme within the literature is additional stress experienced by women returning to work because of societal views, and the unaccommodating workplace. Often, when women take on the additional role of a career, their demands are not lessened at home. Various studies (Nowak, Naude & Thomas 2014, Hoffnung & Williams, 2012) have looked at the mother-professional dynamic, and how both are constructed and lived simultaneously. Attitudes about gender roles are responsible for how others view the mother. For example, according to Hoffnung & William (2012) the "traditional perspective" (p.232) assigns men as the provider and women as the nurturer, while an "egalitarian perspective" assigns the previous roles as equal. From a traditional perspective, if the mother decides to return to work full time and place her children in care, she may be subjected to negative scrutiny. Many assume the mother should be the first, most readily available care giver. It seems that in order for women to find a space in the work place, she must “control her fertility, so as not to be shackled by endless years of childbearing” (Chami, 2016, p.5), assuming that childrearing in a professional career is the equivalent of being chained down. These comments relate directly to issues “which concern the conflation of the categories ‘teaching’ and ‘motherhood,’ where the latter category emerges as symbolic of diminished status and working conditions which further marginalize women (Dillabough, 1999, p.383). It seems that a woman’s commitment is viewed in relation to their mothering role versus their careers (Healy, 1999, p.185). Gender roles are prevalent in society still and "organizations are blind to gender through a perpetuation of the instated male norm and the suppression of gender differences" (North- Samardzic & Taksa, 2011, p.199). Also, because many women’s careers may change after giving birth and beginning to raise a child, some are forced to believe that “women ‘chose’ their career trajectories rather than being shaped by other
social forces that may be discriminatory” (North-Samardzic & Taksa, 2011, p.211). Women feel pressure from work, home and society. Certain factors, such as these pressures, influence women returning to work from a maternity leave.

Faced with competing demands, mothers are finding that they can only be “average” in the roles as mother, teacher, wife, and friend. They deal with debilitating guilt, and feel anxious a lot of the time trying to balance such roles (Chami, 2016). Common themes from the literature show women having a “constant burden of worry and guilt. Guilt is an overwhelming reality” (Chami, 2016, p.49) for a lot of mothers. They feel that they are not giving enough time to their family life, but at the same time, work expectations are ever changing. Some feel that a teacher returning from maternity leave should “pick up the slack that she left behind” while others seem to protect returning colleagues as though coming back “is a disability” (Chami, 2016, p.49).

Most often, women returning to work are expected to take on the same roles, extra-curricular included, despite the added responsibilities at home. People at work only see the work life, and vice versa for the home life.

Much of the relevant literature (Bianchi 2011, Gatrell 2010, Chami 2016) looks at women’s decisions to return to work full time, part time, or at all, in order to maintain the best work-home self, and manage the stress they feel. As previously stated, societal views are to some extent responsible for labeling the mother as the full time care giver. These labels occur because the history of women’s service roles is often the focus, depicting women only as mothers, and therefore subordinates in the workplace (Dillabough, 1999). A woman teacher is thought of as ‘motherly’ before she even thinks about child rearing, and these preconceived notions or “constraints are clearly linked to identity narratives which concern women’s reproductive capacity rather than their ability, (Dillabough, 1999, p.381) showing that societal views are to
some extent responsible for labeling the mother as the full time caregiver. Given these views, it comes as no surprise that women have “expressed feelings of anxiety and guilt in having others involved in the care of their child” (Nowak et al., 2014). Chapter three, methodology, looks more closely at this dynamic in regards to critical feminism as my theoretical framework. The previous mentioned roles of full-time mother, and full-time career, are demanding roles to consistently fulfill.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Design

In summary, this qualitative study uses Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology. It is informed by critical feminist theory, using the methods of semi-structured interview process along with thematic data analysis. I met with four women participants, similar to myself in terms of being employed for more than five years, and taking a maternity leave in the past five years. The women who participated in this study agreed to share their experiences as “you don’t tell a story only to yourself. There’s always someone else” (Atwood, 2014 p.44).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a methodology of tradition, and is trusted to help readers understand the experiences of others (Hendry, 2013). Using narrative inquiry as my methodology, I studied the present situation of pregnant teachers and their experiences with their maternal body, maternity leave and their return into the teaching profession following a maternal and parental leave. Narrative Inquiry seemed the appropriate choice of methodology as narrative inquiry “is understood as the primary way in which humans make meaning” (Hendry, 2009, p.72). Essentially, if “inquiry (research) is understood as meaning making, then all inquiry is narrative” (Hendry, 2009, p.72) which means this methodology serves my purpose of inquiring about women’s experiences. Narrative inquiry allows me to answer my research question, and to look for understanding and meaning from my question instead of seeking a conclusive finding or solution. Because my research sampling in small, I cannot assume that all pregnant teachers, or teachers that are mothers share the same experience. Narrative inquiry “allows for the subtle nuances of human experiences to rise to the surface and reveal themselves” (Birks & Mills, 2014, p.164) and I wanted a methodology that gave space to focus on the women’s authentic
stories, but not represent a definite finding. Further, the methodology suits my purpose because it helps others make sense of others’ worlds, and understand phenomena within a specific context as “stories are the closest we can come to shared experience” (Niekerk & Savin-Baden, 2007, p.462). Not all people are parents; therefore, I wanted to ensure that all readers could understand to some degree what women may be experiencing.

Broadly speaking, through narrative inquiry “stories are collected as a means of understanding experience as lived and told, through both research and literature (Niekerk & Savin-Baden, 2007, p.458). Narrative inquiry as a methodology begins with narrative research where the researcher interviews participants who tell their story. Next, it is the inquiry into the stories “that may create an educative experience as individuals find new and more expansive ways to interpret their own and other’s experiences (Birks & Mills, 2014, p.162). Narrative inquiry supports the belief “that subject matter, both human and nonhuman, are best studied in their natural settings and that authentic understanding is gained from the meaning people bring to the phenomenon” (Birks & Mills, 2014, p.163). The stories are the focal point, and Niekerk & Savin-Badin (2007) share that stories are difficult to argue with “because stories are both connected to, and representative of, identities and thus to criticize a story is often therefore seen as a criticism of identity” (p.462). Stories then are the foremost way of thinking about and sharing an experience. Using narrative inquiry, the focus of analysis is

the people who tell us stories about their lives, the stories being the means of understanding our participants better. Thus, storytelling tends to be closer to actual life events than other methods of research that are just designed to elicit explanations.

(Niekerk & Savin-Baden, 2007, p.464)
Just as how June views the telling of her story in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, "I would like to believe this is a story that I am telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance” (Atwood, 2014, p.44). Stories do more than explain. They share vital, powerful experiences in hopes that others may comprehend, learn and expose the injustices within society.

I was unsure what the participants were going to share with me, and sought narrative inquiry due to its reflexivity. As I was writing, I found myself thinking about the influences on my thinking. Initially, I was unaware of the various social structures that dominated the view of pregnant women in the workplace, and sought more information on identity and these structures to make sense of my story, and my participants’ stories. I knew I would share my personal stories with the participants and be involved as the researcher, so I desired a methodology that would allow me to work closely with my participants to understand their stories, and make meaning from my own. I wanted the participants’, as well as my own stories, understood and according to Birks and Mills (2014), narrative works to “entail intimate engagement of the research and co-researcher(s) in the story of the relationship. You write yourself into the work” (p.164). According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), researchers who also study “their own practice…gain a better understanding of their own stories, and shift from presumed knower to learner (as cited in Bigham, Dulude, Dulude Lay, & Pinnegar, 2005, p.57). The researcher is personally involved, sharing similar experiences, so it is vital that the researcher has an ethical relationship with the participants. Relationality is “at the heart of all narrative research work and to think and live narratively requires one to be centered in the notion of relationship through story” (Birks & Mills, 2014, p.165). Discussions surrounding child rearing, and the changes, hardships, and emotions that come with such discussions take place because the methodology
allows the researcher to be open and reflexive. I knew I would be working with participants in which I already had an established relationship with due to my purposeful sampling. Because of these established relationships and the desire to see positive change come from sharing these stories, all my participants were open, and willing to share their experiences. It seems that “participants involved in narrative inquiry invariably enjoy the process and often see themselves as co-inquirers and co-collaborators in the studies in which they are involved (Niekerk & Savin-Baden, 2007, p.471). Participants and researcher work together to establish an understanding of the phenomenon. My voice, along with my participants, is heard, and similar to Miller (2005), I will “break my own silences...and question ways in which I transfer socially constructed expectations of myself as a woman into my role as teacher” (p.61). I participated in this research process with my participants “to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.103). I shared my stories alongside my participants, not for comparison, but in hopes to foster a deeper relationship as that is a crucial part of narrative inquiry.

Justice is often gained by the knowledge we obtain through sharing stories, and narratives are possessed with a capacity for social justice, which allows historically marginalized and silenced peoples to tell their stories and for others to listen and respond. We make meaning through our stories, we are our narratives and our stories are who we are. (Birks & Mills, 2014, p.165)

Narrative inquiry allows exposure to "women's own voices 'in order to gain an insight into' women's experiences and attitudes"(North-Samardzic & Taksa, 2011, p.199) regarding the maternal body, relevant policies, and returning to the work place. Narrative inquiry is useful for this type of research because it allows the “crucial aspects of women’s experiences [that] have
remained invisible in the face of mainstream discourse in the career field” (Schultheiss, 2009, p.25) to surface. Huber, Huber, Steeves, & Caine (2013) states that “narrative inquiry is increasingly written about not only a research methodology, but as relationships that can provide a hearing for the stories of people on the margins, whose experience is generally not heard (p.220). This information is important because feminists are not only fighting for their voices to be heard, but they are working on “integrating women into male power structures [and incorporating] ‘women’s experiences’ into existing canons”’ (Miller, 2005, p.63). As well, my data is explicitly dealing with women teachers; therefore, narrative inquiry in education works well because it pays

Attention to the lived experience of teachers…responses can be seen to be insightful and informative about the readers and about the text themselves. Furthermore, it “deepen[s] the understanding of teacher practical knowledge through developing epistemologies, methodologies, and modes of representation for studying and representing teacher’s work, their thinking about it, and how they make meaning of it. (Atkinson, 2009, p.92)

Birks and Mills (2014) states it is important that the authentic stories and observations are revealed by the participants themselves through the telling of their own stories. To summarize, narrative inquiry does not provide one bold truth, but provides insights or some truth about the phenomena that may lead to social change. After all, “if it’s a story that I’m telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it” (Atwood, 2014, p.44).

Theoretical Framework

Narrative inquiry is compatible with, or “fits” with the framework of critical feminist within this thesis. Female psychologists, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986),
began to intersect narrative and feminists theories, and wrote about “women’s development in terms of ‘a narrative self- past and future’” (as cited in Huber, Huber, Steeves & Caine, 2013, p.219). As well, “intersections between feminist understandings and narrative can be seen in the work of cultural anthropologist Bateson (1989) who writes of women ‘composing lives’…through inventing new stories” (Huber et.al., 2013). It seems that women have been using feminist and narrative theories simultaneously for quite some time to learn, share with others, and create meaning.

Critical feminist theory is appropriate for this study because the stance is consistent with my research question. Both critical theory and feminist theory seek human emancipation from circumstances of oppression. In the case of my thesis, women are disadvantaged by social structures, and seek equality to men within these structures. Critical feminist theory explains why, and what affirmative change may come from changing the status quo. The two are complementary because in order for change to occur, people have to be aware, understand, and then implement a plan. Both theories share those qualities. Both theories are broad, and have multiple sub divisions. I purposefully did not specify a sub division because I did not want a narrow framework or to be distracted by conflicting nuances. The ideas, which constitute critical theory and feminist theory, greatly differ, and therefore create a potential source of internal conflict. Avoiding specific schools of thought allows me to focus on multiple aspects of each theory to make sense of the data. For example, had I focused on racial or cultural differences, other critical theories would be dominant. Clearly, some women experiences more disadvantage than others, and some men experience more advantages than others do, based on social distinction. My participants, due to purposeful sampling, and the social/ historic context of place, did not focus those distinctions.
Critical theory critiques society as a whole. Critical theory shows that society is to blame for certain injustices and those injustices need to be addressed. It helps others understand how to reframe current practices to gain emancipation for all. It does not simply explain how society functions, but attempts to explain why society functions the way it does and tries to decipher how society withholds freedom from humans. It asks people to reconsider our understanding of power, forms of resistance, and understand the oppressed. Critical theory questions power and the status quo, and offers practical solutions on how to create positive change. It allows exploration in the dominant forms of power, and sexism and allows gained insight into these problems. In order to offer solutions to free the oppressed, it is crucial to understand the patriarchal society in which we live in. Once understood, work can be done to achieve equality.

Critical theory is recognized in feminist theories as social structures which perpetuate gender inequality. However, feminism is hard to define. In fact “as a matter of principle, some feminists prefer not to define feminism all, arguing that feminism is so diverse that no single version of it could possibly do justice to its many forms” (Johnson, 2014, p.104). Johnson (2014) believes that

The word ‘feminism’ is an umbrella that covers many approaches to gender and patriarchy. In the most general sense, feminism is a way of thinking critically about gender and its place in social life, but from here it ranges in many directions. (p.95)

For the purpose of my research, the definition I chose is “feminism is a way of thinking--of observing the world, asking questions, and seeking answers-- that may lead to particular opinions, but does not consist of the opinion themselves” (Johnson, 2014, p.104). I chose this definition because it answers my research question, and allows me to ask questions without seeking one concrete answer. Critical feminist theory is used because it is more than just finding
the number of who feel oppressed. We must look at how and why society is treating women and the social structures that allow this type of behaviour to and then work for change. Also, gender is a construct and that needs to be looked at critically as it gives privilege to some and disadvantages others.

Critical feminist theory confronts the injustices in society, and to be frank, society is partially responsible for how women are perceived. In order to fully understand critical feminist theory, people must “view identity as something which is not solely determined by one’s own narrative, but which is also shaped by social and structural relations both within and beyond education” (Dillabough, 1999, p.387). Through a critical and feminist lens, the knowledge that I share presents the existing social structures that work to oppress others. It is more than simply reading the research, but empowering the oppressed by focusing on their experiences.

In the novel The Handmaid’s Tale, The Republic of Gilead is the authoritarian, patriarchal regime that rules over the United States; therefore, controlling social structures. June states,

We looked at one another’s faces and saw dismay, and a certain shame, as if we’d been caught doing something we shouldn’t. It’s outrageous, one woman said, but without belief. What was it about this that made us feel we deserved it? (Atwood 2014, p.204)

The social structures in place allows the women to feel that they are to blame. In actuality, it is the social structure itself that oppress women, and June fights to have her voice heard. Her voice and actions disrupt the silence as she tries to bring awareness to what is happening to women, and push for affirmative change. Her actions reflect those of critical theory and feminist theory.

In the early nineteenth century, teaching was associated with women’s instinct for mothering, and women were used to model and nurture proper behaviour, while the men took
leadership or administrative positions (Miller, 2005). Presently, the majority of teachers are women, yet the voice of women leaders is frequently absent in existing literature, and instead educational leadership continues to be dominated by male norms (Mario, 2015). Perhaps the view of women teachers has not changed due to pre-existing gender roles that persist in education. In the past, it seems that the “rational man” is favoured in terms of teacher professionalism, and “personal perspectives (e.g. emotions, experience) should not inform... the actions of teachers (Dillabough, 1999, p.378). To this day, some advocate that teachers’ identities conform to a more “objective and procedural account of professionalism” (Dillabough, 1999, p.378) versus the irrational, “image of women dating back to the Enlightenment” (Dillabough, 1999, p.380). This way of thinking means that teaching “has been shaped by biologically determined gender dualisms which have led to the coding of women as ‘feminine’ and, hence, the representation of ‘women teachers as mothers” (Dillabough, 1999, p.380). A woman teacher is thought of as ‘motherly’ before she even thinks about child rearing, and these preconceived notions or “constraints are clearly linked to identity narratives which concern women’s reproductive capacity rather than their ability, as it were, to be ‘rational’” (Dillabough, 1999, p.381) highlighting the body and the mind dichotomy.

Women’s identities must be determined by their own narrative, but instead they are “shaped by social and structural relations both within and beyond education” (Dillabough, 1999, p.387). Rather than internalizing the conceptions of what they ‘should be,’ women in education “can challenge gendered constructions...transform social constructions of knowledge - about teaching and learning as well as about women as teachers” (Miller, 2005, p.73). To challenge gendered constructions is difficult given that “gender dualisms[...continue to inform the construction of the modern teacher” (Dillabough, 1999, p.387). Not all women are a
representation of conventional gendered construction, as I do not see myself as this representation. I entered the teaching profession because I sought out a professional career in my area of interest, and not because of my docile nature, or ‘mothering’ attitude, and yet that notion still exists and plays a role in women’s careers, especially during pregnancy. During pregnancy people do not just see the woman, they physically see the ‘maternal body’ and women teachers “still struggle with contradictory aspects of the feminization of teaching and the ways that feminization has both promoted and sabotaged the interests of women” (Miller, 2005, p.148). Ideally, women could be able to establish their own identities free from gender constructions.

Byron and Roscigno (2014) show that pregnant women are devalued by employees and employers due to societal assumptions about gender. Often, women are “disadvantaged both structurally and culturally in this organizational milieu, gatekeepers enact gendered assumptions regarding the “ideal worker,” and women who become pregnant are often targeted” (Byron & Roscigno, 2014, p.436). Pregnant women are targeted as caring less about their jobs due to their divided loyalties. According to Acker (1990), women are compared to their male counterparts (the “ideal worker”) who is “committed, flexible, singularly focused on their job and unencumbered by child bearing or child rearing (as cited in Byron & Roscigno, 2014, p.439). In this conceptual framework, white heterosexual men are the norm against which all others are judged. The traditional career trajectory of men is therefore the norm by which a woman’s path is measured; there is no room on the arc for deviation such as a time-out for childbearing or childrearing (Heilbrun, 1988).

Therefore, critical feminism is an applicable lens for this study. Feminists have long struggled with the inequities that result from how pregnancy will affects the body, but also how pregnancy may affect careers. According to Statistics Canada (2011) 59% of secondary teachers,
and 84% of elementary teachers are female, and the “more female-dominated the study field, the less inclined graduates are to postpone motherhood” (Bavel, 2010, p.452). Because of this statistic, it would seem that women’s teaching careers could be accommodated to fit the women’s needs; nevertheless, women still feel guilt and are being penalized for a natural function, procreation. It is obvious that childbirth “implies an interruption of activity in the labor market at least for some time” and women may want to plan when to have children when “taking a break may be perceived as less damaging to their careers” (Bavel, 2010, p.455). Unfortunately, some women do not have the luxury or even the biological capacity of planning their pregnancies around the right time regarding their careers.

A deep concern of women is that society has yet to change patriarchal views regarding them. Women were, and arguably are, “relegated, to ‘nature’ with childbearing and motherhood forming the core of women’s nature. Under such conditions, the relationship between women and men is determined by a sexual contract…which surrenders women’s bodies and offspring to men and to society” (Bernardi, & Neyer, 2011, p.165). This association dangerously portrays the assumption that if maternity is framed as biological and natural, “social motherhood (that is care work done by mothers and the rearing of children) appears as women’s ‘natural’ responsibility…” therefore denying that motherhood is work (Bernardi, & Neyer, 2011, p.165). Society positions the working mother as an unfit employee instead of seeing the vast amount of benefits mothers provide to individuals and the workplace, as well as society. Motherhood must be seen as a part, not the whole of a woman’s identity. It is equivalent to other identities that are acquired and does not imply subordination. Instead it “opens up possibility for agency…the emotional, intellectual, and often spiritual rewards of motherhood are stressed and the desire for caring and mothering is seen as a strength which women should try to re-legitimize in their life
rather than deny it” (Bernardi, & Neyer, 2011, p.167). Child rearing could be seen as adding a repertoire of skills to one’s teaching, and not as a detriment.

Societal views need to change. Injustices need to be confronted. This research seeks to do that, in an attempt to achieve the following goal specified by Weir (1997):

We need new models of identity, individuation, of agency and autonomy, which will take account of the important critiques of these concepts which have been generated by feminists theorists[…] We need to make a space for an understanding of self-identity which will not clash with our conviction that individuals must be understood as embedded, ‘embodied,’ localized, constituted, fragmented and subjected to systems of power, oppression and exploitation. We need, still to understand ourselves clearly as capable of learning, of changing, of making the world, and ourselves, better. (as cited in Dillabough, 1999, p.391)

Women’s identities are shaped by social structures. Although difficult, women have to break the gendered social structures that surround them. Sharing stories, and understanding how pregnant women are treated in the workplace begins to display the injustices around us. By learning with one another, women can create positive change in society.

Context and Participants

My methodology and framework necessitates that I be specific in my careful selection of participants. The narrative research consisted of semi-structured interviews. Purposeful sampling is crucial because I am interested in recent experiences of teachers with continuing contracts who have taken a maternity leave, and returned to work. According to Patton (1990)

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting in formation-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal
about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 169)

The purpose of my thesis is to make meaning of the lived experiences of my participants, and not seek a conclusive finding. Therefore, I learn more by focusing on the in depth stories of a few women versus gathering “standardized information from a large, statistically representative sample of pregnant teachers” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Purposeful sampling allowed me to understand the detailed effects of current policies, the treatment endured once a woman shares she is pregnant, and return to work from a maternity leave.

First, I obtained permission from the Research Ethics Board to conduct the study. Next, I obtained permission from a disclosed school board in Saskatchewan to conduct the research and email participants that met my requirements. The email contained the following information: Letter of Intention, Recruitment Poster, Consent Form, and interview protocol.

Specific participant criteria was as follows:

- Must live in Saskatchewan
- Must hold a Professional A teaching certificate
- Must currently be teaching within a Saskatchewan school for a minimum of five years
- Must have had a permanent, full time contract for a minimum of one year prior to maternity leave
- Must identify as a cisgender
- Must have taken a maternity leave and returned to the same division at least once full time
• Must be willing to discuss their individual stories and experiences regarding their pregnancy, maternity leave, and returning of their career

• Must be able to provide informed, signed consent to participate in the research

It is important to note that, even though women as a large group are disadvantaged, my research focuses on women who are privileged in terms of occupational status, education and income. Each participant is white, heterosexual, cisgender and able bodied. Each participant was eligible for maternity leave, and had a working spouse or partner providing income to the family. I have chosen to work with women who teach in the same urban setting as me, so that my participants and I are able to care for our infant children.

Methods

Narrative inquiry is my chosen methodology because it helps readers understand the experience of others. Within this methodology I desired a method of data collection that is appropriate to answer my research question, that focuses on voice. I chose semi-structured interviews because I wanted a structure for each participant to be similar, but I also wanted to encourage the telling of their own stories. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility between having a structure to rely on in the event that the one point was exhausted and we needed to continue, but there was no pressure to answer all questions. The questions were provided in advance and some participants came with prepared notes or discussion points, but participants were not required to prepare. During our meetings, a copy of the questions were available to reference. Having the questions to refer to, the participants were able to lead more of the conversations as opposed to waiting for me to ask the next one. Participants were encouraged to answer with as much or as little detail as they desired before moving on to the next question. I
shared my experiences with the participant when asked, or when clarification was needed. Otherwise, I tried not to dominate the conversation.

Using the criteria mentioned for purposeful sampling, I chose three participants. Each participant was someone I already knew and formed an established relationship. The relationships were established through working in the same division in various High schools. I chose these people to ensure relationality given the nature of discussion; thereby, making the conversations seem natural and comfortable. Each agreed to be interviewed. Participant one, Olivia, agreed to meet with me first, followed by Heidi and Michelle. Olivia informed me that she shared with Claudia what I was writing on, and that Claudia wanted to be a part of the research. I obtained her email, then phone number, and we exchanged messages to discuss. I agreed to add this participant on the same basis as the others, in terms of meeting the criteria and relationality. I chose pseudonyms for all of my participants to guarantee confidentiality. All participants have two or more children, and took maternity leave for all children.

My participation data is specific, and revealing in this context of our workplace, and employer, so I chose pseudonyms to protect their identity. I deleted data that identified my participants. For example, I deleted references to specific places, people, dates, and medical procedures to ensure identifying details were eliminated. I took these cautionary measures for protection of my participants because discussing childbirth, and all its excitement and troubles, are difficult for many women. They shared intimate details about their life, and intimate details about their treatment in their work environments that might have revealed their identities.

The protection of their identities does not distort the evidence. These women shared their intimate stories with me because of our personal connection and the importance of this information being shared in commitment to making pregnant and mother teachers lives better.
This shared information does not lose importance by being anonymous and their experiences are valid. Polit & Beck (2003) and Høye & Severinsson (2007) reiterate, “consumers of research assess the quality of evidence offered in a study by evaluating the conceptual and methodological decisions the researchers have made. Therefore, the researcher needs to make good decisions to produce evidence of the highest possible quality” (as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 399). I made good decisions to provide that quality.

I recorded all semi-structured interviews on a recording device. I uploaded the recordings to my computer as an mp3 file, and then sent the recordings to REV.com to have them transcribed. I found it easier to read versus to listen. I wanted to write on and literally see the data in order make deeper sense of it. I chose REV.com because it had positive reviews, guaranteed confidentiality, had a quick turnaround period, and was cost effective. I found that the results were immediate and accurate.

Once I received the manuscripts from our conversations, I started with participant one, and worked through all four manuscripts. First, I read participant’s manuscript separately and carefully and I did not write on the manuscript. I read to ensure I understood the data and to sense any patterns. I noticed errors with proper nouns, but they were not confusing as I deleted them in my data due to confidentiality. As predicted, the sequence of questions prescribed by the semi-structured interviews helped me interpret my data because, for the majority of my participants, the data followed the logical order of my questions. I set aside six different coloured highlighters in anticipation of a minimum six themes. At this time, I was not calling them themes, but noticing patterns and similarities. All my participants first talked about the anxieties surrounding job security when they were pregnant. This consistency arose because my first question in the semi structured interview was “were you treated any differently at work upon
announcing you were pregnant? (Either by staff, parents, or students).” Because job security was the first reoccurring element I noticed in participant number one, Olivia’s data, I highlighted it orange, and continued reading to find similar words and phrases to highlight orange. The second set of stories that was shown, based on the order of my questions, was policy related items. I will note that policy was not the overwhelming theme in Olivia’s data, but arose because of the sequential order of the semi-structured questions. This was highlighted in pink. The same process continued and patterns of physical/emotions issues, and guilt and balance roles. The first five out of twelve pages of Olivia’s data was highlighted, meaning all four of these similarities were recurring. I continued reading and highlighting within these four as they occurred. Once I was finished, I went back and looked at what was not highlighted. I felt that some information that was not highlighted was important because the participant was passionate about speaking about it, and I remember conversations surrounding continuing education were evident in other participant’s manuscripts. Therefore, I created a fifth miscellaneous category. I told myself I would deal with this category later, and I created it because I was scared to leave out any crucial data at this point. As well, I still was unsure what crucial data really looked like. After analyzing Olivia’s data, it became evident that thematic analysis would be the process I use to encode my qualitative data.

Before I committed to these themes and method of thematic analysis, I used Olivia’s highlighted data as a guide, and I continued with Heidi, Michelle’s and Claudia’s manuscript in the order they were interviewed. The patterns were differently expressed among the participants due to various circumstances such as their place of employment, first or second maternity leave, and personal health, but all patterns were present among all participants. I told myself that if new themes emerged, I would create another category. After reading through again, I found that
no new themes emerged, and if I was unsure of something that the miscellaneous category served me well because it allowed me to highlight information I did not want to leave out, but it did not seem to easily fit anywhere. The miscellaneous category gave me comfort in knowing I was not missing anything, and that I could go back to this later and decide what I want to do with it. If I noticed overlap, and could not make a decision as to what category it fit under, I chose both and said I would make a decision later.

After the initial reading of all four participants’ data, it was evident that the most logical method to encode this information was thematic analysis. It was present in the data before I even knew it was called something specific because

Many researchers have already developed the ability to sense themes. Their ability should help them understand how sensing themes is the first step in using a systemic, disciplinary way of analyzing (i.e., coding) information, whether the information is verbal, behavioral, documented or live. (Boyatzis, 1998, p.8)

The portions that were not highlighted were easily disregarded and I felt confident were not needed. The parts not highlighted consisted of the conversation not relating to the research questions that was extraneous. I read through the data thoroughly, and I placed it into categories that emerged from the data. Knowing my participants did not affect the themes that emerged because I could not anticipate what information they would share. Indicators and qualifications that were related were grouped together to form five major themes (Boyatzis, 1998). A theme “is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.4). In my instance, the theme “was identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information),” and upon further examination, also “at the latent level (underlying the
phenomenon)” because the emerging themes are part of the reason the issue exists (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 7). The three themes that were present in the literature were guilt, physical/emotional stress, and policy. Only one study (Chami, 2016) focused on policies within Canada, but multiple readings discussed the other two themes. Therefore, some of the themes that emerged were expected.

The highlighted notes started on paper. The reading, and the thematic analysis of this data occurred over a week’s time. I worked diligently to keep focused on the data. I did experience a small setback with one of my manuscripts. Claudia’s manuscript was hard to understand in comparison to the recording. Where she could not be heard, REV.com wrote “inaudible” in multiple places, and it disrupted the flow of reading. I wanted to ensure that it was accurate as possible because I was working off of the manuscripts, and not the recordings at this point. Therefore, I contacted REV.com, the company responsible for the transcribing, and asked them to transcribe her audio again. Upon review, they agreed that the original transcribed version could have been better, and they spent a day redoing the manuscript free of charge. Upon receiving the updated version, I worked with this one for the next portion of my thematic analysis. The updated version did not change my themes or my data. It simply clarified words versus the original {inaudible} that was in its place, and made it easier for me to copy and paste into my digital copy of my thematic analysis.

Knowing my thematic analysis would have to live digitally instead of on paper, I created a table within a word document. I coded the themes the same colours as I used on my paper copies. This portion for me was the most difficult, and I spent the most time here. Within each theme, I decided what needed to be copied and pasted into this chart which would eventually become part of my data chapter. I struggled with this because all of what I highlighted in the
paper copy became my digital copy. I had an abundance of data. As an English teacher with an Bachelor of Arts degree in English, I have been trained a certain way to write papers, and I felt that all of my data was too extensive, and cumbersome to put in one chapter. At the same time, I felt that all of the information was necessary and that taking words out or shortening passages would diminish the authenticity of my participants’ voices. I decided to put everything I highlighted in because I could always delete later. It seemed that this process is not out of the ordinary as “typically, research using qualitative methods requires long hours of immersion in information collection and even more hours in information processing and analysis before interpretation” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.8). I would rather have too much and have a lengthy manuscript than miss something my participants shared within those themes. The themes of balance, and physical/emotional I found easier to copy and paste into a chart because they were clear categories. I saw a lot of overlap between policies and job security, but made a decision based on what the participant talked about most. The most challenging was the miscellaneous category. I had a lot of jumbled information that did not seem to fit into a theme, and at this time was still unsure where it would fit, but was too fearful to omit this portion. At the same time, I was grateful I did this because it reassured me that I was not leaving out any information.

I created a word document with five distinct themes. I started with job security, then physical/emotional, policy, guilt/balance roles, and miscellaneous. This order is based on appearance in the data and not in descending order of importance. I worked within the themes of each individual participant, and would complete a theme before I moved on to another theme. In other words, I took job security, and copied and pasted a quotation from Olivia first, followed by Heidi, Michelle and Claudia. Again, it is not in order of importance, but in order of appearance from my participant material. I cannot put importance of one theme or person over another which
is why all my data was looked at chronologically. To create my data chapter, I took the data within each theme, and put my words in-between various quotations to explain the data. I did this process for the first four categories. As I was writing, it became more evident that some categories overlapped, and I made a decision on where it would fit based on readability. Originally, I generated job security and policy as two separate themes. Upon placing them into the data chapter, I realized that insecurities surrounding women teachers’ jobs were mainly due to policies, or lack thereof. I found it difficult to separate the two; therefore, the two categories are combined. The overlap of themes occurred multiple times throughout my data chapter. I placed the information under the subtitle that I felt the data was more sharply focused on. For example, policies also affect physical and emotional well-being, and guilt, but the category exists because their feelings are the focus. The overlap cannot be avoided. My last category was the miscellaneous one. I had a few paragraphs about transition, careers, setbacks/challenges, and judgments and stigma. I typed this portion up separately at the bottom of my other categories and ignored it until I was done with the other categories. I decided that the miscellaneous theme was the cause of my other themes. For example, some items in this category such as career setbacks were due to policies, and mainly guilt, so it became a subtitle under guilt. Judgements were discussed in regards to returning to work, so that became a subtitle under policies for transitioning back to work. Essentially, I eliminated the miscellaneous theme by dividing it into smaller themes, and placing them within the previous. From there, my data chapter was complete.

Within this chapter I explained that this qualitative study uses Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology because it serves my purpose of inquiring about women’s experiences; thereby, answering my research question. It focuses on the women’s stories, and helps others
make sense of other’s worlds. The attention to relationality allows me to share and learn from my participants’ experiences, as well as my own. This methodology also possess capacity for social justice which allows marginalized peoples to tell their stories (Birks & Mills, 2014). Critical feminist displays that the view of women has not changed due do preexisting gender roles that persist in education. Using purposeful sampling, I explained how I chose four participants. Using semi structured interviews, I met with my participants, and I analyzed their data using thematic analysis. Three major themes were presented. The themes of job security and policies, physical and emotional tolls, and balancing the mother and professional roles are discussed at length in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Data Collection: “smacked in the face with the idea of you are so replaceable”

As stated in my methodology chapter, I individually met with four women and engaged in conversations using a semi structured interview process. After using thematic analysis to complete the data, the emerging themes were job security and policies, physical and emotional tolls, and balancing the mother and professional role.

Job Securities and Policies: “There was no reason. There was no reason.”

Throughout the literature there is little to no specific mention of teachers’ experiences regarding their job security within Canada. Although the Canadian Human Rights Act (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014) prohibits discrimination related to pregnancy, all four participants were in fear of losing their careers due to child rearing. Three of four participants had temporary contracts during their first pregnancy, which is why they felt they might not be employed during, or after pregnancy. To clarify, temporary contacts are:

for a period of 20 or more consecutive school days but less than one complete academic year and are to be used when a teacher is employed for the purpose of filling an unexpected vacancy during the school year or to replace a teacher who is absent for any reason during that period. (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2017, pg.2)

Indefinite, continuing, or permanent contracts are those that “have a starting date but do not have a date for termination of employment. Therefore, they remain in force from year to year without any further documentation required” (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, 2017, pg.1).

Once a temporary contract is signed, it cannot be revoked, but it does have an end date. The participants were concerned about having another temporary contract not granted to them upon being pregnant, or returning from a maternity leave. For example, a woman teacher on a
temporary contract that expires in June, hopes to sign another contract for September. Because teachers do not work during summer, all temporary contracts expire over these two months. If a teacher conceives during her contract, she may not be given another contract to return in September because she would be unable to work the entire duration, presuming the temporary contract was for a full year, or longer than her pregnancy. Without a contract, she cannot obtain full time hours with full time pay, or collect Supplemental Employment Benefits (SEB), which I explained further in this chapter.

Heidi tells of a time where she kept her pregnancy from her employers as long as she could because she had a temporary contract. She states,

When I didn't have a permanent contract, it was more like I can't let anyone know this, because I will not get something if it comes up. Right? I wasn't really excited to tell people, because I didn't want people to know at work or I didn't want someone to catch wind of it, right? In case something came up that could possibly get my foot in the door for a contract or anything like that.

If she had had a permanent contract, she would have had a job during her entire pregnancy, and upon her return from maternity leave. Similarly, Michelle explains that she was also on a temporary contract the first time she found out she was pregnant and worried about her employment and whether she would be employed after giving birth. She confided in her friend who advised, “hide it. We'll put you in baggy shirts…we will make sure nobody knows, we will make sure all of that.” She goes on to say that she hears many women try to plan their pregnancies around contracts, stating “I’m not getting pregnant until I have a permanent contract because the job security, right? There's this stigma that you will not get hired or they will not bring you back unless you're permanent because they don't have to.” Another participant, Olivia,
also hid her first pregnancy for as long as she could to help her keep her position. She recalls, “I was pregnant… and then I hid my pregnancy until the latest I could from my principal, because I was scared. Oh, I lied so bad to everybody.” According to the participants, job security is threatened because policies surrounding temporary contracts do not guarantee the woman will return to employment, or even be able to work during a pregnancy.

Without a continuing contract, a teacher is not guaranteed employment after a maternity leave. Employers may also be hesitant to give pregnant teachers contracts because these women would take some time off during the duration of the contract to give birth; therefore, punishing women for a fundamentally human choice. These situations are worrisome for women given the relevant provisions of the Labour Standard Act. The Labour Standards Act highlights three conditions for applications for Maternity leave (Statutes of Saskatchewan, 2014). Teachers on temporary contracts meet all of required conditions; thus, teachers should have the right to leave, and return from a maternity leave without jeopardizing their employment.

Conditions for applications for Maternity Leave for Female employees are stated as:

23(1) Every employee who:

(a) is currently employed and has been in the employment of her employer for a total of at least 20 weeks in the 52 weeks immediately preceding the day on which the requested leave is to commence.

(b) submits to her employer an application in writing for leave under this section at least four weeks before the day specified by her in the application as the day on which she intends to commence the leave; and

(c) provides her employer with a certificate of a qualified medical practitioner certifying that she is pregnant and specifying the estimated date of birth; shall be granted by her
employer maternity leave from her employment with the employer in accordance with subsection (3). (Statutes of Saskatchewan, 2014)

The Local Collective Bargaining Agreement is negotiated at a local level, and fits the needs of individual school divisions within Saskatchewan. Each division’s agreements vary on location, and in accordance to what teachers needs are. The Local Collective Bargaining Agreement which I focused on, contains the information that a teacher is entitled to return to her teaching duties equivalent to those to which the teacher is entitled in accordance with The Labour Standards Act. The Labour Standards Act then states

An employer who has granted maternity leave to an employee pursuant to this Part shall, at the expiration of the leave, reinstate the employee in the position occupied by the employee at the time the leave commenced or in a comparable position. (Statutes of Saskatchewan, 2014)

There is no direct reference to a continuing contract guaranteeing employment, and yet three of four participants were concerned about losing their jobs due to pregnancy, while on a temporary contract. Unfortunately, the wording “comparable position” is vague in that it may refer to benefits, pension, employment, but still does not assure the same role, school, or area of teaching expertise. Claudia’s administration told her she was resuming her role at the same school she was employed prior to maternity leave. Closer to her return date, she called Human Resources to discuss her return to work. Human Resources is responsible for employing and deciding teachers’ school and roles. Human Resources told her she had a job in a different school, teaching in an unfamiliar subject area. She claims,

That’s not fair. Then you know, they're like, ‘Yeah, well, we need you in this position,’ and I'm like, ‘But I'm not social sciences. Like I'm English. I don't even have a minor in
this stuff. Why do you need me over there?’ ‘Well, that's just where you would best fit,’ and really there was no reason. There was no reason. It was basically like maybe a five to ten minute conversation and that was it. It was basically just informing and that was the end of that.

According to her, it was the “first time where I just felt like just a number to be plopped in a spot.” It is especially disconcerting to her that she was told she would be at the school she was at prior to the maternity leave, with a similar role. After a maternity leave, it is hard enough transitioning back to work with the new responsibilities of a child at home. Day, Kingston, Sammons & Stobert (2006) writes that “teachers have high stability in their careers ‘when they have a good relationship with pupils and when they function well in the school organization’” (p.292). A change to one of these aspects results in a period of instability within the teacher’s career (Day et.al., 2006), and changing schools and roles after a maternity leave erodes this stability. She is not the only participant who feels depreciated.

Like Claudia, Heidi tells a similar experience of being unappreciated/disrespected. Upon returning from maternity leave, her principal told her she was returning to the same school she was at prior to her leave, with a similar teaching role. The school had a timetable for her, and “everything was set up. I was good to go. I was happy to go back, go and work with my friends and everything like that and everything was good to go.” Her vice principal then called back, and told her to call Human Resources to confirm her placement as administration had heard otherwise. Heidi called, and Human Resources had placed her at a different school, with a change in teaching assignment out of her area of expertise. She explains,
So I was getting LRP, law, there was another class in there that I was like, ‘Are you kidding me?’ Like you're taking away a full English time table of what I've always taught and giving me this mixed bag of stuff that I have no idea how to teach.

Near the end of this topic, Heidi also mentioned that she wished to feel “a sense of value… That doesn't seem to be honored and that sometimes is a hard pill to swallow, you know? It's like, ‘No, you can go over here now or you can do this now.’” This feeling of not being valued may also be due to the fact that for secondary school teachers, “professional identity is derived, in the first instance, from subjects that they teach, which have a strong and ongoing influence on their perceptions of themselves as professionals” (Day et.al., 2006). Participants throughout the data reiterate feeling undervalued multiple times. Later, when I was discussing sick leaves and physical problems associated with working while pregnant, Heidi again brought up the fact that,

... Even when I went on my medical leave, right? You really get smacked in the face with the idea of you are so replaceable. You know? To build stuff, to create stuff, to, you know, like it's the time and the effort never really seems to be, ‘Thank you, you did a great job. We're really going to miss you.’

Granted, not many teachers are regularly acknowledged for work done well, but not being acknowledged, or feeling undervalued, is different from having to adjust to a new teaching role in a different school, with different rules, structures and colleagues. Referring back to the literature review, change in schools placements and roles for teachers returning to work, seem to contradict the Canadian Human Rights Commission that states, "the pregnant employee, the employer, and other parties such as union representatives, must cooperate and compromise to find reasonable and practical solutions" (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014). No participants met with Human Resources to discuss their return to work. Instead, all participants
were told via telephone the school they would be placed at to work, and what their teaching assignments would be. The reality is that most “women teachers are situated on the inferior side of the gender binary. This position ultimately leads women’s exclusion from the formal language of teacher professionalism, yet simultaneously, defines their inclusion on the basis of female subordination” (Dillabough, 1999, p.381) and are also excluded from negotiating their job assignments upon return. Despite attempts to argue, and ask for an explanation, much less a justification, not one participant was granted an opportunity to cooperate with the employer, or assert their viewpoint. Negotiating conversations did not take place, despite the previous literature (Day et.al., 2006) showing that teacher’s identity and the subjects they teach are closely related.

Also in accordance with the Government of Canada’s EI Maternity and Parental Benefits website (Government of Canada, 2019), an expectant mother can collect unemployment insurance during their maternity leave, which is eighteen weeks, and parental leave which is thirty-four weeks. For varying reasons, some women do not take the entire leave available to them. In this study, fear for job security, similar job assignments upon return, as well as control, lead all participants to return to work from their maternity leave before their benefits were finished. For example, Olivia, much like Heidi, recounted that, with her first-born “I was only on temporary contracts… Where are they going to put me? I had no idea where they were going to put me.” She returned to work two months early in hopes of obtaining the same job assignment that she had left. With her second child, she states going back early “was my choice, but I like to have my stuff, my room, and I like to start at the beginning. Does that make sense? I'm very like that. That sounds awful, but I'm very controlling like that.” Especially with her first-born, the uncertainty of where Human Resources would place her, was stressful. She states
“Oh, I hated that. I hated because I’m a control freak and not knowing like where, so, yeah. That was awful.” She uses the term “control freak” to explain her feelings towards job security, and what her job assignment would entail. After her first maternity leave she received a completely different position which involved a “learning curve, but at least I knew the staff and students. After [her second child], I was lucky enough. I went straight back to my room and back to everything after [her second child].” She wanted control of her situation; therefore, she returned to work early from both maternity leaves to start the school year, versus coming halfway through the year, or semester, to maintain that control.

**Supplemental Employment Benefits Plan (SEB): “Asking women to plan their fertility around what your work pays you.”**

A continuing contract is often necessary for women teachers in Saskatchewan to obtain financial support from the Supplemental Employment Benefits Plan (SEB). This plan was discussed in detail in the literature review under the policy section. Olivia received SEB for her first born, but her second child was born in April leaving Olivia unentitled to the last 4-7 weeks of SEB because the leave was partially during July and August. Another participant, Michelle, remembers her experience with SEB:

Somebody made a comment to me one time about ‘well, you didn't plan that very well.’ And I'm like, ‘well first of all I didn't have that luxury’ I know some women do and they do plan it so it coincides with work. And I know a lot of women time it so that they don't have their baby at the end of June because they lose eight weeks on their top up. I actually remember thinking if we have a third and I get pregnant, this was like two months ago, I'm like shit, I'm losing eight weeks out on my top up. That was a thought in
my mind. Isn't that brutal? You're asking women to plan their fertility around what your work pays you.

The potential decrease in SEB earnings caused her additional stress. She states,

It was a stress on me, once we started trying, I kind of wanted to look into that and was like oh, that's quite a bit of money. And then when we weren't getting pregnant right away I was like I'm gonna lose out on this, and it was almost like a stress. It was almost like a race to get pregnant. And I'm not racing anyone. I felt more pressure as time kept going and we kept trying and I was like this is just unbelievable. I shouldn't have to feel this way.

Michelle explains the inequity within SEB: “I have a baby in September, I get more money, than you have your baby in June, but we are both employed under the same contract and of the same value underneath the same system, the same policies.” Value is a word that she uses frequently during our conversation, and she makes the point that,

Other companies, very near dear local companies, that pay their women, their moms 95% of their salary for the full year, as long as they come back and they have to work another year. You have to pay that time back. 95% of their salary for the full year. Which means to me that they value, they're recognizing the value of women and what they are doing.

As well, the amount of SEB a woman receives correlates with the accumulation of sick days, and teacher step increments that increase salary. Going back to Michelle’s example, it is not fair that the woman who gave birth in September earning sick days, and accumulated steps more quickly, which equate to larger sums of money, than the woman who gave birth in May.

Financial rewards are present with the perfect planning of a baby regarding the policies put in place, and realistically, not many have the luxury of such planning. It is an inequity; however, it
is difficult to argue because teacher contracts are not like other employers that employ people twelve months of the year.

Transitioning back to work: “You're stealing that time from your baby.”

Currently, there are no policies to support women’s transition back into work. Research suggests that women returning into the work force are not seen in the same way as when they left (Gatrell, 2010), and the transition is hard enough without further acts of discrimination. As stated in the literature review, the requirement to surrender computer equipment in certain school divisions serves to disadvantage women by disrupting communication, which in turn exacerbates their isolated position. Claudia’s water broke early and she was taken to the hospital, placed on medication, and had to rest at home for four days. While awaiting the birth of her baby, she worked on her computer because she felt guilty, and because she was not expecting to leave her job as early as she did. Once home, she remembers:

I was trying to catch up and everything and get everything ready and then my principal is like, ‘Oh and by the way, you need to hand in your computer.’ I'm like, ‘The baby came unexpectedly five weeks early. I'm trying to prep for the next teacher and send her emails.

She had a newborn baby, she wanted to plan for her leave, but her computer was taken, and still she felt guilty about things that are beyond her control. Today, the maintenance of the majority of student files, teaching plans, and parent communication is conducted online. Claudia reported that her friend, who was returning from maternity leave did not receive her computer until she “was officially back in the building,” on first day of teaching. Teachers need their computers prior to the first day to arrange plans for their students, as well as to communicate with their colleagues. The vital component of having possession of a work computer should be granted.
The literature review focused on policies, specifically maternity and parental leaves. One might assume that longer parental leaves are more beneficial and reduce marginalization in the workforce. Others argue the latter that the majority of leaves are taken by mothers and that reinforces the gender stereotypes. Focusing on gender-neutral policies used by women, “research indicates that women have more difficulty reaching and maintaining powerful occupational positions in countries with extensive parental leave policies” (Aisenbrey et al., 2009, p.573). In Canada, pregnant mothers have the choice of twelve or eighteen months for a maternity leave. Three out of four participants choose to come back before the twelve months to their careers for various reasons. When announcing that she was coming back early to work, colleagues of Michelle asked “why would you go back early? You're stealing that time from your baby. And I'm like, are you kidding me?” Similarly, Michelle states that when other female teachers returned early from maternity leave, she was appalled by the “the comments that came out of people's mouths, and I just am like shame on you guys. You have no idea. Why do you care?” Some people view a leave of absence as a lack of commitment to a career, while others come from a traditional perspective, and if the mother decides to return to work full time and place her children in care, she may be subjected to negative scrutiny not applied to working men. This scrutiny roots itself in the fact that women teachers are continually “reconstituted as ’mothers and guardians’” (Dillabough, 1999, p.381). Because of this thinking:

The professional status of women teachers is closely tied to domestic work in the private sphere. This linking of women teachers to the private sphere remains dependent, at least in part, upon traditional distinctions within political consciousness between the ‘public man’ and ‘private women.’ (Dillabough, 1999, p.380)

Michelle is accurate when she says that there is always
a stigma, right? So, you're gonna come in halfway through a semester? Yeah. I am. Or no, I'm gonna wait. But are you doing it because you want to or are you doing it because you feel pressured to come in at the beginning when things are, instead of disrupting after Easter or after February break...

It seems that people will judge women regardless of how little or how much leave is taken. Women deal with these judgments, while attending to their demands at home, and demands at work.

**Sick leave: “I had so many appointments.”**

At work, further judgement of the pregnant woman is in regards to the amount of sick leave they may use. In accordance with the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation Sick Leave Policy (2019) teachers are eligible to collect up to twenty sick days per year which can be banked and carried forward to subsequent years. This is a valuable benefit considering the physical and emotional turmoil that a woman endures while pregnant. Unfortunately, circumstances arise where even when a teacher feels well enough to work, she is forced to use her sick days, as was the case for Michelle and Heidi. For example, within two schools, students with diseases that threaten an unborn child, such as hand-foot-and-mouth, and Fifths disease were reported. Due to risks associated with high fevers leading to miscarriages, and the potential of passing the disease to the baby, (National Health Service, 2018) pregnant teachers are forced to take their sick leave in schools where pupils or staff present these diseases. Michelle questions why there is not a policy protecting pregnant women against such diseases, without affecting their sick leave benefit that they need to use when they are sick. Not to mention, “I have to take two days of sick leave, I have to plan. I have to plan for two days of sub or however many days it was at the time, right? I found that challenging, that's hard.” Sick leave is also used to attend
medical appointments. Fortunately, some participants found their pregnancies “good” and were not met with any negativity from Human Resources regarding scheduling appointments or taking sick leave. After all, sick leave is negotiated for those reasons. Michelle states important information regarding scheduling and sick leave. She states

I had to go for blood work. I had to go for extra ultrasounds. And that test, the glucose test, you have to take your sick leave for all of that. You have to take your medical appointment leaves for all that, right? And I had so many appointments and all of that and those are just things that people don't realize, that comes out of your sick leave, where other, men and women who aren't pregnant, and I know we chose, this is the thing, I understand that I chose to have a child, it's a choice, most of the time, right? I understand that I chose to have a child and so, there are certain expectations with that, but it shouldn't have to feel that it's like, not being punished, never felt that it's like oh, I have to use my sick leave, but you never really think about it before, right? Like, men don't have to worry about that.

To be clear, non-pregnant employees also need to use their sick leave to attend medical appointments. The point Michelle was making is that it seems that pregnant women have many more appointments to attend. It is problematic that there are no policies surrounding situations like this since pregnant teachers face a lot of emotional and physical stress at an already emotionally and physically exhausting job. Especially considering the verbal policy in some school divisions threaten that if a teacher is sick more than the supposed national average of 7.5 days, he/she can expect a conversation with administration or Human Resources as to why more days than the average were taken. In the event that that conversation takes place, Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation Sick Leave and Policy (2019) states that the nature of the medical
appointment or the nature of the condition for which the employee is seeking medical services is “personal and confidential and does not need to be disclosed.” Therefore, these conversations should not take place, and assuming the teacher is taking time from sick leave due to pregnancy, she does not need to disclose she is pregnant until four weeks prior to her maternity leave, if she chooses to take a leave.

Often, when mothers take on the additional role of a career, their demands at home are not lessened. Ideally, there needs to be a balance. Upon returning to work, Heidi feels that there needs to be more support for teachers who are parents versus pregnant mothers because it is a busier time. When pregnant, she was often asked “‘Do you need a sub? Do you need to get some marking done?’ You know, that kind of thing whereas now it's like, now I need that and no one asks or seems supportive.” Not only do mothers use numerous sick days for themselves in regard to pregnancy, they also use their sick days to attend to their sick children. Often times the participants reported lying about being sick because their kids were sick, and they needed to stay home and there is no policy relevant to care of sick children or dependents. Their teaching roles remain the same with the demands of planning, meeting the students’ varying needs, marking, extra-curricular and so forth. Then, they go home to a second workday with their own children.

Physical and Emotional: “Oh my God, I just peed my pants”

It is difficult to deal with the changing body. Like June, “I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it’s shameful or immodest but because I don’t want to see it. I don’t want to look at something that determines me so completely” (Atwood, 2014 p.71). Dealing with “bodily fluids” in regards to breast feeding, washroom breaks, and a woman’s water breaking, is discussed. The ability to deal with these physical aspects prove more difficult while also dealing with emotions such as the need for control, balancing roles, and guilt.
Breast-feeding: “Do not enter. Privacy needed.”

As stated in the literature review, health agencies recommend breast-feeding a minimum of one year, ideally for two, due to the multiple health benefits and bonding for both mother and baby. Breast-feeding is a public health issue, as healthier children require less resources from health care, and less sick time from mothers than unhealthy children do. After returning to work full time from a year of maternity leave, a teacher wanted to continue providing her child with breast milk, and therefore needed to pump her breasts at work. She put a sign up on her classroom door stating “Do not enter. Privacy needed” and pumped in her classroom. She had to dedicate her lunch hours, and her prep to doing so. If we were in meetings, she would leave two to three times a day to ensure she could pump. She found the classroom environment draining, and uncomfortable and was told to look at pictures of her children while she pumped to help produce milk. Any teacher with school keys could walk in at any time despite her sign. As well, when she had a substitute in, or was in meetings, she did not have access to her room forcing her to find a dedicated, comfortable place within a school setting, which is virtually impossible to find. Managing breast feeding and other aspects of motherhood should be permissible in a workplace without “facing hostility for workplace routines” (Gatrell, 2010, p.105). It is beneficial to seek out how and why the "impending motherhood changes the employer/employee relationship and what might be done about this" (Gatrell, 2010, p.98) especially considering that inadequate breast feeding support could result in women taking sick time to care for sick children, as breast fed infants are healthier than formula fed (Gatrell, 2010). Furthermore, “the situation for women who are pressured into switching to formula milk before they wished to must be very stressful and stress – as is well-known, is the major cause of sickness absence from work” (Gatrell, 2010 p.108). The previous teacher pumped for two months after returning to
work, and stopped pumping earlier than she desired, because she was mentally and physically exhausted. She felt too much of her day was taking up pumping, and it was too uncomfortable. Despite her doula’s advice, and her original plans, she stopped pumping her breast milk, thereby decreasing her child’s supply of breast milk, earlier than planned. Employers should have the responsibility to provide for the health of their employees as it benefits everyone in the workplace.

**Bodily fluids: “Then my water broke.”**

All participants agreed that appointment scheduling and “peeing every hour” were problematic while working pregnant. In fact, Heidi’s experience with bodily fluids was “embarrassing.” While in her classroom,

I was sitting at my desk and I stood up to get the computer set up for [a student] and then my water broke, I'm like, ‘Oh my God, I just peed my pants,’ like, ‘I don't have an extra pair of pants. Why didn't I bring an extra pair of pants to work?’ I'm like, ‘Oh my God, what is going on?’ I'm like, ‘Oh, that's not stopping. Yeah, that's not pee.

While in her room, listening to a presentation by a student, her water broke. Due to her sense of humour, she laughed and claimed it was funny, and that “those kids remembered that forever.”

From my own experience, one moment I will remember forever, is the taste of a cold can of Coca Cola. I was in my first trimester with Madison sitting in my university night class. About an hour into class, I was tired, and nauseous. I went for a walk to feel better. I stopped at the campus store, and bought a can of Coca Cola. I sat in class, opened the can, not caring that it was in the middle of someone’s sentence, and sipped on the cold, refreshing, fizzy drink. To this day, it was the best thing I have ever tasted. Twenty to thirty minutes later, my nausea and tiredness was gone. I felt “normal” and I enjoyed every moment of that drink.
I am happy that I stayed in class, because I felt that it was an important class, and colleagues and employers often stereotype the pregnant body and associate it immediately with sick leave, fostering more guilt in a woman for being pregnant (Gatrell 2010). Pregnancy is not an illness, and although pregnant women may develop health issues, pregnancy is not pathology. Michelle experienced eighteen weeks of morning sickness. Her doctor prescribed her Diclectin, a drug used to treat nausea and vomiting, and it made her very sleepy. She still went to work. She tells me,

I remember one time I had to leave the classroom cause I was dry heaving. I never vomited, but I was dry heaving so much. And in English, we talk a lot, so, I'm swallowing air and then I'm dry heaving and I'd have to leave the classroom and dry heave and then I'd come back in. And on top of that I was taking Diclectin, so I was so tired. And you know how tiring it is in the first trimester to begin with, right? So, super huge challenge.

Her experience is common as “studies within the socio-cultural and feminist literatures report how employed pregnant women often remain present at work despite feeling ill…highlight[ing] the determination among some pregnant women to remain at work despite nausea, exhaustion, and other symptoms.” (Gatrell, 2010, p.102)

Michelle was at risk for preterm labour, and had to have a surgical procedure. She took sick leave for this surgery, and returned to work soon after. She also had to take sick leave when students contracted Fifths disease, which was discussed earlier in this paper. Despite all these occurrences, and having another child at home to think about, she still worked through her pregnancy. Working while pregnant poses many challenges, but it is even more emotionally
devastating when a miscarriage occurs. One participant speaks about her loss during the first trimester. After experiencing this loss, she needed

a [surgery] and being in the hospital, I had to come to work on Monday. Like I would just come right back to work. And you can't really talk about it. You're not gonna tell everybody that you just had a miscarriage, right?

She endured weeks of exhaustion and sickness, to then heal physically from a surgical procedure, and emotionally from a loss of a baby, to return to her “everyday” work routine.

Control: “for sure. Control freaks.”

As the participants neared the beginning of their maternity leave, all had difficulties leaving their job. All felt the need to organize, plan, and help transition the teacher replacing them. As previously mentioned, Claudia spent days in the hospital prior to giving birth, planning and organizing her leave. Similarly, on the way to the hospital to have my baby, I made my husband stop at the school to drop off my computer because Human Resources demanded I surrender it. Also, when doctors told Michelle some difficult news regarding her baby, she had to plan for her leave instead of simply leaving. She says,

I was at the fetal assessment unit and they thought that he had, I was told that he could have, on top of having a stomach issue, he could've had two massive holes in his heart. So, now, on top of having to have stomach surgery he's gonna have to have heart surgery which also means that he could have Downs Syndrome…

Her husband could not get the day off work to come to this appointment, so she heard this news alone and then returned to the school to talk to her administration. Her administration was very supportive. She continues:
I drove back to work and I sat with [administration] and I was bawling. I'm like ‘I cannot work anymore. I'm too stressed out. I have no idea. I need to be done.’ And they're like ‘okay.’ Cause they're like okay, I'm like ‘what do I need to do?’ So, I spent, I got my finals in order, I had to prepare all of that stuff, I got everything, so I still had a responsibility. I should be able to, and I couldn’t [walk away]… So, I still spent time and I did all of that. And I was just thinking that so many times, there's a lot of women who go off pregnancy early because of high blood pressure or for whatever reason it might be, right? And they still feel responsible to do the planning, to do all of that stuff, so I'm just, is that a responsibility? Is that on us? Is that an expectation?

Michelle often questions why she felt the need to continue planning and preparing her classroom for someone else to come in and teach. She questions is it

Our educator mindset that we have a hard time letting go of control? Is that we feel responsible for the rest of the semester? Is that our responsibility? What's the policy behind that? Is there a policy with that? Was that your job? Or can you literally just, you're on maternity leave, I'm walking away.

This theme of control was dominant throughout all my discussions with all participants. Claudia mentioned it previously with her planning in the hospital, regarding an email she hoped her replacement would read to her students. She felt she had no closure with her room, and needed some. She also returned from a maternity leave early “due to the nature of [her program]....It would just be too chaotic, too much transition for them, too much for me.” Olivia went back early from both maternity leaves because she wanted that control in her room. Michelle also returned to work early to have control. As well, she was the only participant to mention that her early return was partially due to financial pressure. Frankly, she stated, “I need money.” She
also talks about her transitioning period being enforced because she was given transition days to help her replacement transition into her classroom, but Michelle is being paid to be at work regardless. The replacement teacher is told to sit and watch, but the discussions happen after or before paid working hours, so transitioning actually becomes more work for the pregnant woman who is not being paid additionally to transition the new teacher. We also have to remember that the replacement teacher does have the same professional credentials and degree we do, and is more than capable. She questions “Is that your responsibility as a person preparing to go on mat leave?” She guarantees that if nothing was left for someone, “people would have made a comment… ‘What do you mean she just left? She didn't leave anything for you?’” As well, she states “I've heard women say that they've planned when they get pregnant because it makes it easier coming back at the beginning of the school year, semester turn around, Easter time or June.” I mentioned that perhaps educators have “Type A personalities” and she responded “for sure. Control freaks.” Societal pressures are present as Dulude et al. (2006) shares where teachers feelings of inadequacy stems from their desires to balance the roles of mother and teacher, and as Michelle stated “people would have made a comment.”

**Balancing Roles: “Give me a break.”**

Teaching is physically and emotionally exhausting. Pregnancy is physically and emotionally exhausting. Yet, some women choose to take these roles on simultaneously. Heidi calls doing this reality, plus the marking, and planning the “double whammy.” The recurring words that emerged from the data were “hard” and “guilt” when asked about work/life balance. Heidi states she returned to work with mixed emotions because

Then you're trying to budget differently and you're trying to figure out, ‘Oh my God, what do I do with this little critter?’ You know? Like and there's just so many unknowns
that it's like, throw me a bone. You know? I'm repopulating your school division. Give me a break. Right?

As well, she also felt that she was fighting to obtain the position she once had before her leave.

Heidi says:

you work so hard to get somewhere and then all of a sudden it almost feels like you're back to zero, you know? You've got the experience. You've got your preps, your classes are all done. That's not the hard part.

I found myself struggling to balance the roles of mother and graduate student. In January of 2018, I signed up for a winter class. My daughter was two months old, and I was on maternity leave. Prior to having a child, I assumed I would have no trouble balancing roles. I considered myself busy enough, and figured that maternity leave would actually leave me more time to accomplish things. I was so wrong. Maternity leave was beautiful, but exhausting. I tried waking up at five and six o’clock am, before Madison was awake, to work on my paper, only to find myself crying at the keyboard because I was so tired from already being up all night breast-feeding my baby. I will never forget a breakfast with my girlfriend one February morning. I called my faculty advisor to discuss whether I had to drop a class because I could not write, and continue with it. I remember bawling uncontrollably on the phone, holding Madison, while my friend stared at me in confusion as I confessed, mostly to myself, that I could not do it all. I felt defeated. I felt like a failure. After my faculty advisor assured me everything was going to be ok, I stared back at my friend, who knowing me so well, said nothing, and we continued with our breakfast.
**Guilt: “I very seldom give my kids 100% of myself.”**

A hard part of life is finding balance, which does not seem to exist, on top of finding a sense of belonging. The literature discussed that mothers are feeling that they can only be “average” in the roles as mother, teacher, wife, friend etc., deal with debilitating guilt, and are anxious about trying to balance such roles (Chami, 2016).

After having more than one child, both Heidi and Claudia made the difficult decision of moving to half time employment to try to find that balance. Fortunately, both felt sufficiently financially secure to have this as an option, as for some it is not financially feasible. Heidi explains, “now when you have kids and the responsibilities are ten times more and then going half time. That was hard. That was the hardest thing, you know, to just finally admit, like I couldn't do it.” Heidi talks about responding to parent and student emails during her child’s hockey games, staying up late while exhausted to mark her students’ work, and her husband yelling at her to get off her phone or her computer. She paused, and continued with,

I very seldom give my kids 100% of myself, because in the back of my head, I'm sitting there going, ‘God, I have so many papers to do. If I do ... If I can get through this many,’ you know? Like, ‘I need to get through this, this weekend.’ I need to get through setting goals for myself, that I'm never 100% with my kids.

She feels that her kids and her husband should be taking priority, but also risks losing a continuous full time contract if the demanding needs of her job cannot be met. She thought that half time teaching would help, but she still does not find a complete workable balance. She says: Why can't I find a balance?” Because I get home, I'll sit down, I'll start marking for a bit, I'll make supper, start making supper, you know, depending if we're eating in the van or if we're eating at home or wherever and I look at it before, I'm like, "What the hell did I do
when I worked full time and got home at 4:00?” Like how was this possible? I don't know. I don't know that answer. I think we ate a lot of spaghetti.

It is a constant cycle of guilt, even when there is a minute of free time, because she feels that time could be spent with her kids, or spent marking or planning. Guilt, once again is mentioned when she says:

I sit there and I feel guilty and I know what I maybe, if I got the marking done, then I wouldn't feel that weight anymore, right? So you feel guilty when you're not doing your work, that you probably should be doing, but when you're doing your work, you know you're not spending time with the people who you should be spending time with.

While Heidi is questioning where the balance is, Michelle is stating, “I don't think there is a balance. I find myself investing more time in the people that shouldn't matter more than the people that should.” Michelle refuses to take work home. After work, “I'm exhausted. I cannot imagine sitting down at my kitchen table marking essays and assignments after teaching all day, coming home and being a mom.” She does not know how other moms do it, and states “I know lots of moms, teacher moms, even after having one, went part time and they just said for them that's the best work life balance, but for me I'm like, I just financially can't afford to do that.”

I know this feeling of guilt all too well. As I am typing this, I am reminded that hours earlier when I was leaving my house, my daughter outstretched her hands and said “up” to me. I did not pick her up because I knew I was about to leave her with her father, and focus on my writing. She looked at me as I said “not right now honey,” and she sat down and cried. I wanted to cry with her. I wanted to stay, and still I left knowing she was fine with her dad, but I was feeling guilty. Ultimately, the fabled work-life balance is made impossible.
Extracurricular: “It’s hard. It’s hard.”

A recurring theme within the guilt category was extra-curricular. Heidi says that upon returning, her conversation with administration went as follows: “How is everything going? How's the baby? Good? Good? Okay, here you go. Back to it. Oh, and what can you coach?”

Likewise, when asked about a balance, the first thing Olivia said was

It's hard. It's hard. I don't know. And then I feel like with extra cur, like I should be doing more extra cur, like they're asking for people to do the formal this Thursday, but [my child] has [an activity], but I should help out more. It's a very ... I feel guilty a lot. I feel guilty one way or the other. How do I find balance?

Upon returning to work from maternity leave, Michelle shared similar sentiments:

I feel like I have to do something. You know, coming off of mat leave, so my first year after mat leave I helped in the canteen and then the year after that I joined SRC. I coached volleyball this year. Just 'cause I still wanted to be involved with it, it was my choice, but looking back it probably wasn't the best thing. Like work life balance was not awesome. It was not awesome.

Heidi compares her life regarding extra-curricular before and after children. She says

I look at how much I used to do in the school and when I really knew kids, like when I was coaching, when I did yearbook, when I, you know, when I was at [this school] I did yearbook. I was the [school] rep. I coached curling and softball and helped out with all these other teams. You do that, because you don't have ... Like there's nothing after. Now, I can barely function, because it's like, ‘Okay, what do we have to do?’ Like I have 50 million lists in my head, like just spinning, trying to keep things straight. I'm like, ‘I can't coach.’ And then it's ‘Oh, well, it would be good, extra curr, extra curr,’ and it's like,
okay, are those comments made at me? But you know what, I will be on committees that do have meetings like awards committee, grad committee, that kind of thing where I can do my work at school, but I cannot do it after school, because my kids are busy.

Claudia did not do any extra-curricular upon returning to work despite wanting to coach basketball because she could not find the time. She states that:

  I think maybe we are seeing a lot of males in the high schools get a lot more gigs than we are because they have time to do all these extracurricular. That's why they are getting hired because even when I asked to get into wellness…he just named off men in both departments, completely full of men. I was like, ‘Well you guys could use a female wellness teacher and you could use a female [subject area] teacher for sure.’ That’s sad.

In September, I helped coach volleyball. I had a minor role, but still took my ten-month-old daughter to tryouts, practices and games. I was approached by another teacher who stated, “Oh. It is good for you to come back now and do this because that way when you come back you do not have to do much extra curr. You would have already done it.” I was surprised that one of the first things she would mention is my contribution to extra-curricular, when I was not even in the classroom for another four months.

  Career Setbacks: “Oh well, you're going to be having babies soon, right?”

With participants sharing that there is no balance between mothering and teaching, it does not come as a surprise that participants cannot find time to further their education. Heidi claims “definitely at this point, I don't think I would go after my Masters. I'm just too busy with my family.” When I asked Claudia about a Master’s Program, she was frank and said “I’m scared shitless to go back for my master's with two kids at home.” She said that pregnancy has kept her
from advancing because she will wait until her kids are older and more independent to go back to school. Time and money play a factor for Michelle who says:

   Right now, I would love to do my masters…those maternity leaves, the lack of money really killed me there, so and then after two now, everything's getting busy. It was the lack of money for the maternity leaves that really knocked me down.

Perhaps finances would be less of an issue if she was able to collect the full amount of SEB had she been able to “plan” her pregnancy to do so, but that was topic addressed earlier.

   It seems that time, whether it be not having enough, or being available at the right time, is a factor in pursuing a career advancement. Sometimes, it is sex discrimination. Heidi states “being a young teacher, just married, I was passed up for a couple spots, because they're like, ‘Oh well, you're going to be having babies soon, right?’” She claims that she has friends who are in administration and while engaging in casual conversation regarding hiring: He's like, “That's not how it always goes, but that was one of the considerations of, you know, she's getting married this summer, she's probably going to have kids right away. What are we wanting for that position long term?” as well as “then it came up to coaching abilities and what you can do and extra curr and everything like that and if she's got a family, that's going to change it.

   Heidi said that same administrator,

   Passed over [me] for a male teacher at that point and yeah, that kind of sucked. That was a hard pill to swallow… Like I said, I think I was treated differently before I was even pregnant, than when I was pregnant.

Heidi’s quote proves that “women’s labours in teaching cannot be separated from the historically constructed knowledge claims which circulate about gender relations in society” (Dillabough, 1999, p.384). That particular administrator judged her work as a teacher, simply on the fact that
she is a woman, and he made predictions about her capacity solely based on her gender. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* June was thought of similarly as “we are two-legged wombs, that’s all; sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (Atwood, 2014, p.157).

Relatedly, I had a colleague become angry with me for being pregnant because for her, my leaving was the reason her class schedule changed for the worse. Upon telling her that my pregnancy is not the reason for her predicament she apologized and said it is “not my fault that administration hired such a young, female staff and that is something they should have thought of prior, and now they have to deal with.” What she did not realize is that she was advocating toward purposeful hiring which can be problematic for young women. Ultimately, the prospect of a career advancement may be chronologically compromised due to being on an entitled leave. For example, a principal verbally granted a temporary contract to a woman teacher to continue teaching in September. Upon finding out the teacher was pregnant, she received a telephone call stating her schedule would have to be filled, and she would no longer have a contract.

**Summary**

This chapter presents three major themes: job security and policies, physical and emotional, and balancing the mother and professional role. Little research had been done on women teachers’ experiences, let alone pregnant teachers, or teachers that are mothers. The available literature found mothers, regardless of their job, feeling constant guilt and instability within their lives. This guilt may be due to societal pressures which convince women that they should be able to find a work life balance that presently does not exist. Although policies were mentioned in the literature review, little focused on Canadian policies, and even less discussed job security.
What is significant in this study is that all participants felt change could be implemented to ensure pregnant teachers, and teachers that are mothers are respected and valued in the workplace. Some participants had a difficult time transitioning into a new teaching role after maternity leave, while some were in jeopardy of losing their jobs due to pregnancy. No participant was consulted previously about their upcoming roles upon returning from a maternity leave, but were expected to maintain their same commitment, if not more so, to their professions, including extracurricular, despite taking on the additional role of mother.

The data reveals insights into the present situation of women, pregnant teachers and their experiences with their maternal body and work; thereby, answering my research question. There are no specific conclusions to be made. Critical theory and critical feminist theory were used as my theoretical framework because they are emancipatory. Through reading this data, I hope that others can adequately critique the social structures that exist, and offer solutions to create change from the experience my participants and I have shown. It is important to remember that “By telling you anything at all I’m at least believing in you, I believe you’re there, I believe you into being. Because I’m telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are” (Atwood, 2014 p. 208).
Chapter Five: Recommendations

Implications for Further Research

People want to tell their story, and understanding phenomena from a participant’s perspective is important. Thus, I would like to make some recommendations based on what I have learned in my research. I suggest choosing another methodology that allows for more than four participants. I am confident that women would want to participate. As others heard about my study, I had numerous teachers ask about it, and want to be part of the research. I had to choose my participants carefully, as I had over ten willing to speak about their experiences, and I needed to find a way to narrow that number. Recommendations are made for this study to be done outside of one urban center. There would be value in seeking participants from various divisions across the province, and talking to those in rural and urban settings.

As well, my data only shows stories from cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, white women. There are multiple “dimensions of inequality under the rubric of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Weber, 1998, p.13) that are not mentioned in this thesis. Systems of inequality exist, and these limit some people, while privileging others. Johnson (2014) states “…many women have access to privilege based on race, class, disability status, or sexual orientation and it is difficult for many to see women as oppressed without insulting ‘truly oppressed’ groups such as the lower classes racial minorities” (p.22). Such systems beyond gender are not mentioned in this thesis. As well, all my participants had children biologically. It did not look at surrogates, or adoption policies.

Hope for a Change

I am hopeful that three particular policies will either be implemented, or changed to protect pregnant teachers from discrimination in the work place. The first, as mentioned in the
literature review, is that the Saskatchewan Teaching Federation has not negotiated a policy that secures a teacher's status within a school, other than full time employment in the same division. The change in school placements and roles, appear to contradict the Canadian Human Rights Commission that states, "the pregnant employee, the employer, and other parties such as union representatives, must cooperate and compromise to find reasonable and practical solutions" (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2014). None of the participants were consulted regarding their return to work after maternity leave. They were told what was happening, and there were no choices to be made. Instead, I would like to see employers and employees work together to find solutions that best suit each other’s needs. To be frank, all I am asking for is a conversation to take place to create a compromise.

The second policy is concerning the SEB plan. The SEB plan is problematic because it is enacted in such a way that creates a systemic inequity based on a calendar. Participants, while already worrying about conceiving and their jobs, shared that they were concerned about the timing of their pregnancy and potentially losing income that is dependent on the child’s birth date. Ultimately, pregnancy is lovely and scary, there are hundreds of things to think about, and a job should not be one of those things. Implementing change within these policies would show the employer is valuing the pregnant employee.

The third policy surrounds women being permitted their school email, and computer. Access to these components ensure the teacher may be aware of any new policies, or programming, and helps them stay connected to their school community. They are still employed and are still getting paid through SEB, and keeping equipment will help women transition back to their jobs again. It is one minor detail that may alleviate a lot of additional stress.
Next, I’d like for others to understand that we are part of a patriarchal society, which can be difficult to comprehend for some. Patriarchy is described a society that “promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified and male centered” (Johnson 2014, p.5). This thesis does not exist to lay blame on an individual, but instead display that my participants and I are subject to societal norms that exist. It is comfortable to cling to the illusion that everything is all right, that bad things do not happen to good people, that good people cannot participate in the production of injustice and cruelty, and that if we only leave things alone they’ll stay pretty much as they are and, we often like to think, always have been.” (Johnson, 2014, p.21)

The fact of the matter is, once we read and understand such systems of oppression exist, we cannot “act as if none of it is there, because the realization that is does exist is a door that swings only one way and we cannot go back again to the state of not knowing” (Johnson, 2014, p.21).

Often times, we are unaware that society even influences us, or we chose to ignore it. I hope that this thesis allows people to think more critically about how social structures exist, and they stand to create equality.

In the end, I struggle to define feminism. I understand that it means different things to different people, but as a woman with a daughter, and as a woman pregnant for a second time, I know I feel a need for it. When I bring up the term feminism in any way with a group of friends, or with some family, I am immediately met with a response along the lines of “women are equal now. It’s 2019,” but I know that is not true for me. I remind myself that the public response to feminism has been ferociously defensive precisely because feminism touches such a deep nerve of truth and denial that keeps us from it. If feminism
were truly ridiculous, it would be ignored. But it is not ridiculous, and so it provokes a backlash. (Johnson, 2014, p.21)

Feminism, and those that stand with it, may be scorned because it challenges the status quo, but it is important to speak up against the injustices. I’d like to think that change can be created because social systems are fluid. Johnson (2014) says

a society is not some thing that sits there forever as it is. Because a system only happens as people participate in it, it cannot help but be a dynamic process of creation and re-creation from one moment to the next (p.228).

I hope that the re-creation is one that is equal for all.

Conclusion

Using a form of narrative inquiry, I was able to explore my research questions in some depth and learn about the experiences of pregnant teachers and their maternal body and work. Both critical theory and feminist theory seek human emancipation from circumstances of oppression, and women are disadvantaged by social structures. Critical feminist theory explains why, and what affirmative change may come from changing the status quo. Implications, and hopes for change have been given. In the end, remember June’s struggle, and the words that never left her, “Nolite te bastardes carborundorum” (Atwood, 2014, p.214), which translates to “don’t let the bastards grind you down” (Atwood, 2014, p.216).
References


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Appendix A: Letter of Intention

Date: October 19, 2018

Project Title: Female Teacher’s Experiences Regarding Maternal Bodies, Maternity Leave, and Returning to Work

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Supervisor: Dr. Valerie Mulholland, Language and Literacy, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, (306) 585-5607, val.mulholland@uregina.ca

Dear Superintendents of Regina Catholic School Division,

This research is qualitative and will focus on narrative inquiry methodology. In the proposed research, I will ask participants to reflect on their experiences with the maternal body, maternity leave, their return to work, and the impact the previous has had on their educational careers.

The following has a detailed purpose and objectives, as well as the attached emails contain consent forms, the questions, and a recruitment poster. Please see these items for more information.

Once a participant reviews the following documents, she may email me to inform me that she would like to be a participant.

I please ask for permission to send this email (letter of intention) along with the attachments to specific employed teachers, in hopes that some agree to be participants. I will choose the specific, employed teachers based on those that fit the criteria mention in the recruitment poster.

No research will be conducted during work hours, or places of employment.

Please feel free to call or email me with any questions regarding the procedures of this study: Proch20j@uregina.ca 3065317768

Thank you for your time,

Jessica Fairbairn

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

- I seek to explore the present situation of female, pregnant educators and their experiences with their maternal body and work. In detail, I would like to explore the anecdotal experiences of women teachers during the time they announce they are
pregnant, up until their return into the work force following a minimum of one-year maternal and parental leave. What impact do they believe the experience has on their career trajectories? What are their stories of maternity leave and immediately beyond? What are their stories of when they returned to work? (the classroom, teaching, other assignments & appointments)

- The objectives I would like to obtain through my research are:
  - Learn about the experiences of female, pregnant teachers
  - Discover what attitudes, reactions and experiences they encountered upon their return to the workplace
  - Understand how official policy affects women leaving the work place on maternity leave
  - Understand general themes that may emerge throughout the narrative stories and why such themes emerged
  - Understand how maternity leave and pregnancy affects their career trajectories
  - Share stories of the maternal bodies, maternity leave, and their teaching careers upon returning to work

- The data collected will mainly be used as part of a published thesis, but it is not limited to presentations at scholarly meetings, presentations at school board levels, conference presentations and/or a published article/chapter

**Procedures:**

- 3-4 participants will be asked to partake in this study from October 2018-February 2019. This time line allows for an exchange of stories to ensure your voices are accurately heard, and allows for reflexivity. You will be asked to meet with the researcher twice, for a minimum of 30 minutes each time we meet. The researcher may ask of a supplementary third meeting with other participants to share stories of your choice. You may deny the supplementary third meeting, and still be eligible to participate in the study
- All meetings will be recorded electronically (video and audio)
- You will chose to meet at your place of residence, my place of residence, or the university. Because you and the researcher will have infants to care for, it is not feasible to locate one particular location. The data collection will always take place where you feel most comfortable. No data will be recorded in your place of work, nor will it be recorded with anyone present but the participant and researcher.
- In the event that participants agree to meet with one another and share, only agreeing participants and the researcher will be present
- I will start with semi-structured interview questions that are open ended to initiate conversation. The specific questions will be distributed with the consent letter, and emailed out prior to you
- At any time, please feel free to call or email me with any questions regarding the procedures of the study or your role: Jessica Fairbairn 3065317768 Proch20j@uregina.ca
Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

Department of Education
University of Regina

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN maternity and careers in education.

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of Female Teacher’s Experiences Regarding Maternal Bodies, Maternity Leave, and Returning to Work

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to:

- Review the attached consent letter and questionnaire
- Participate in semi structured interviews with a researcher
- Be willing to share experiences regarding pregnancy, maternity leave, and career choices/changes
- Be open to meeting with other participants in this study to share experiences

Your participation would involve a minimum of two sessions, each of which is approximately 30 minutes.

Please see the second page for specific participant criteria

The attached consent letter has more detailed information regarding this study.

If you have any questions, or would like to volunteer for this study, please contact

Jessica Fairbairn
Proch20j@uregina.ca
306-531-7768

This study has been reviewed and received approval through the Research Ethics Board, University of Regina.
Specific participant criteria is as follows:

- Must live in Saskatchewan
- Must hold a Professional A teaching certificate
- Must currently be teaching within Regina Catholic Schools or Regina Public schools for a minimum of five years
- Must have had a permanent, full time contract for a minimum of one year prior to maternity leave
- Must identify as a cisgender
- Must have taken a maternity leave and returned to work at least once full time
- Must be willing to discuss their individual stories and experiences regarding their pregnancy, maternity leave, and returning of their career
- Must be able to provide informed, signed consent to participate in the research
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

University of Regina
3737 Wascana Pkwy
Regina, SK
S4S0A2

Informed Consent Form for participants agreeing to Participate in the project

Date: October 19, 2018

Project Title: Female Teacher’s Experiences Regarding Maternal Bodies, Maternity Leave, and Returning to Work

Researcher(s): Jessica Fairbairn, Teacher, Miller Comprehensive Catholic High school, Graduate Student, Curriculum and Instruction, University of Regina, 306-531-7768, Proch20j@uregina.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Valerie Mulholland, Language and Literacy, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, (306) 585-5607, val.mulholland@uregina.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

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  - Understand how maternity leave and pregnancy affects their career trajectories
  - Share stories of the maternal bodies, maternity leave, and their teaching careers upon returning to work
• The data collected will mainly be used as part of a published thesis, but it is not limited to presentations at scholarly meetings, presentations at school board levels, conference presentations and/or a published article/chapter

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• You will chose to meet at your place of residence, my place of residence, or the university. Because you and the researcher will have infants to care for, it is not feasible to locate one particular location. The data collection will always take place where you feel most comfortable. No data will be recorded in your place of work, nor will it be recorded with anyone present but the participant and researcher.
• In the event that participants agree to meet with one another and share, only agreeing participants and the researcher will be present
• I will start with semi-structured interview questions that are open ended to initiate conversation. The specific questions will be distributed with the consent letter, and emailed out prior to you
• At any time, please feel free to call or email me with any questions regarding the procedures of the study or your role: Jessica Fairbairn 3065317768 Proch20j@uregina.ca

Potential Risks:
• There may be emotional, and/or psychological risks to you by participating in this research such as overwhelming emotional responses when talking about your birth experiences, and returning to work after having a baby
• Risks will be addressed by a withdrawal. You decide what you would like to share, and can stop at any time you feel the need. You may withdraw as stated in the consent form. You are encouraged to only answer those questions that you are comfortable with, and the questions are attached with the recruitment letter so you may view them prior to meeting the researcher. If needed, counselors are covered by teacher's plan through Great West Life.

Potential Benefits:
• There are no direct benefits to participants
• You will have the opportunity to have your story heard. Despite efforts to produce equality for pregnant woman, the "unjust treatment of pregnant workers is so
widespread that it has been described by Makela (2005) as 'commonplace'" (Gatrell, 2014), and by sharing these stories we may be able to change the unjust treatment. I hope to ensure a woman’s initial role stays if she chose child bearing and rearing, and seek to understand what is being done at the school level to ensure women are balancing work and home life. If common themes emerge in the data, a woman should recognize that she is not alone with her situation and feelings

- Society may learn to change their patriarchal views regarding women. Society should not see the working mother as an unfit employee, but instead see the vast amount of benefits being a mother has for the individual and the workplace. Perhaps society would see child rearing as adding a repertoire of skills to ones teaching, and not a setback because of a short absence.

Confidentiality:

- Refers to procedures used by the researcher at all stages of the project to protect participants’ identity.
- Participation is voluntary.
- All meetings will be private. Upon request, you may meet with other participants, and the researcher.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity upon writing the thesis
- The Consent Forms will be stored separately from the data, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses
- In the event that you choose to meet with one or more participants in a small focus group, the researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.
- After our recorded meetings, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit.

Storage of Data:

- I will comply with the Research Ethics Board requirement that data be archived for a minimum of six (6) years. All the data will be stored on a flash memory stick. The information will be password protected. In the event that I write a scholarly paper about the research, I will provide you with an electronic link to the paper if it is published. After six years, I will delete the data files and shred the papers.
- I am available to answer questions that you may have regarding the procedures and goals of the study.
Right to Withdraw:
- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort, even if the consent form is signed and data has been collected.
- Should you wish to withdraw, please email proch20j@uregina.ca prior to December 30th, 2018. Any participant data collected will be shredded, and/or deleted electronically.
- Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until December 30th 2018. After this date, it is possible that some results have been analyzed, written up and/or presented and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Follow up:
- An electronic link to the finished thesis will be provided to all participants

Ethics Approval: This project was approved by the Research Ethics Board, University of Regina. If research subjects have any questions or concerns about their rights or treatment as subjects, they may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 585-4775 or by e-mail: research.ethics@uregina.ca

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher: Jessica Fairbairn 3065317768 proch20j@uregina.ca

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

______________________________      _______________________
Name of Participant                  Signature                  Date

______________________________
Researcher’s Signature              Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.
Appendix D: Questions for Participants

1. Were you treated any differently at work upon announcing you were pregnant? (Either by staff, parents, or students)

2. What challenges did you have while working pregnant? (Sickness, pregnant “body” nuisances, “vultures”)

3. Why did you take the length of time you did for maternity leave, and looking back, are you happy with that decision?

4. Are you happy with the policies that are put in place for maternity and paternity leave?

5. Were supports in place to ease the transition of maternity leave to working life again?

6. How do you find balancing a mother role and professional teaching role?

7. Has maternity/paternity leave kept you from advancing in your career when you wanted to?

8. Were you met with a similar teaching assignment upon returning to work?
Appendix E: Research Ethics Board Approval

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<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>REB#</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jessica Fairbairn</td>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
<td>2018-179</td>
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<td>Dr. Val Mulholland</td>
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<td>Female educator's experiences regarding how maternal bodies, maternity</td>
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<td>leave, and return to work affects careers</td>
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<td>Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review</td>
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<td>Recruitment Poster</td>
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The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, or related documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, procedures or related documents should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for the renewal and closure forms:

https://www.uregina.ca/research/or-faculty-staff/ethics-compliance/human/ethicsforms.html

Laurie Clune PhD
REB Chair
University of Regina