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By: Jordan Perreault-Laird

B.S.W. (Ryerson University)

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AUTHOR: Jordan Perreault-Laird, B.S.W. (Ryerson University)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on the findings and implications of gendered precarity in the neoliberal labour market for millennial mothers. By considering the unique intersection of precarity, gender, and age, my findings contribute to the literature by adding qualitative evidence to the anecdotal reports of women being restructured, demoted, and let go from their workplaces while on pregnancy/parental leave. Further, this research contributes to the knowledge on the topic of precarious work by reporting on participants' "sense of precarity" as a result of structural inequalities.

The interviews conducted with six millennial women in their 30s reveal the complexity of their experiences as precarious workers and parents. Specifically, feeling vulnerable in the workplace, the impact of major life changes on millennial mothers' identities, and participants' responses to perceived motherhood penalty. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, considers the limitations of the study and offers possibilities for future research, avenues for policy advocacy, and suggestions for social work practice.

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CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

Precarious employment has been a consistent interest of mine since entering my

undergraduate degree in social work. In fact, precarious employment was the reason I applied to

university. As a nanny, I was tired of one-year contracts, no overtime pay, and long work weeks.

I desired the stability I imagined a profession in social work would offer. Once entering

university, I had the language to describe the experiences of precarity I witnessed in myself and

my peers. Specifically, the fear of not being able to attain the elusive full-time permanent job

where we would feel enough financial security to plan for our lives, including having a child.

The specific incident, however, which brought me to the research topic of millennial working

mothers and precarious employment was a personal experience of restructuring in my own

workplace.

Several years ago, my former place of work underwent restructuring. This process was

brought on by a change in management that held a more business-focussed vision for the

organization than the previous executive. Soon after taking office, restructuring occurred and the

Executive Director – who was on maternity leave – was laid off and her position was replaced

with a General Manager. This managerial shift occurred concurrently with other changes such as

increased worker surveillance and pressure on the equity service centres to engage in fundraising

and adhere to strict budgeting documentation.

In response, the former Executive Director, a millennial woman, resisted her dismissal

with a public campaign against her former employers where she was open about their labour

practices. At the worksite, some workers began to create "hidden and transitory coalitions"

(Smith, 2007). These relationships spanned across the worksite and beyond, involving workers

from other branches. Essentially, what began as individuals connecting to console one another

through the pain and fear they were experiencing under the authority of the new executive

eventually transformed into a core group of people working collectively. The aim of our group

became to support a new group of candidates to run for the office and replace the existing regime

in the next election. As Smith (2007) describes, "these support systems supplied reassuring links

to other interested in making meaningful social change" (p. 155).

Through this experience, I became aware of other millennial women who had found

themselves unemployed or demoted upon returning from pregnancy/parental leave which led me

to develop this research project to explore these stories. Critical researchers are increasingly

taking up this call and locating themselves in their research (Heron, 2005; Palumbo & Friedman,

2014; Wehbi, Cowell, Perreault-Laird, El-Lahib, & Straka, 2017). This practice stems from the

importance of acknowledging your social location within the research. As critical social sciences

do not adhere to a modernism view of objectivity in research, this practice is an exercise in

bringing out social location to the research in an effort to make visible perspectives that can be

overlooked; or what is known by Laughout (2006) as our "blindspots". A foundational aspect of

the process of reflexivity is to challenge ourselves to consider how we know the things we know

(Langhout, 2006). It is equally important "to be cautious of the 'double comfort' of naming our

privilege in practice and in this case, as researchers" (Heron, 2005 as cited in Palumbo &

Friedman, 2014, p. 84), which has brought me to the following considerations.

As a white settler, middle-class, cis, able-bodied, woman in a heteronormative

relationship in higher education, I cannot speak to the struggle my participants may encounter

with respect to motherhood. However, as a woman who has spent her entire career precariously

employed, I can relate to the feelings of fear, dread, anxiety and hopelessness that accompany

this experience. Moreover, as a 28-year-old millennial, I am attuned to the media discourses that paint my generation as privileged, lazy, entitled, and flighty (Gani, 2016).

The literature on precarious work does not take up the specific intersection of gender, precarity, and resistance for millennial mothers. I knew my friend's story was not the only incident of a young mother losing her job and her life being turned upside down. It stuck me as an opportunity to gather the stories of more millennial women's responses to this phenomenon. I wondered, what were the implications mentally, emotionally, materially of insecure work for mothers while on leave, and if those hidden and transitory coalitions were quietly forming out of sight as they so often do.

I am deeply interested in the stories these study participants share about trying to manage this crisis, impacts on how they view themselves, changes in their identities and relationships, if their experiences are taken up in the labour policies, and their stories of resistance. As such, my thesis research explores millennial work mothers' experiences of employment precarity related to their pregnancy/parental leave. Building on literature regarding precarious employment and millennials (Lewchuk et al., 2014; Kershaw, 2017; Martin, 2017; Standing, 2011), the study focuses on this phenomenon by attending to the intersection of two aspects of social identity and inequality – gender (Vosko, 2000) and age (Worth, 2016a & b) – in relation to public policy. Further, it seeks to understand the resilience of the participants as they navigate a challenging labour market as parents. Anecdotal reports cite the business practice of restructuring women out of the workplace during or soon after parental leave (Balkisson, n.d.; CBC Radio 1, 2016). An occurrence which highlights the struggle between employment security and parenthood. It also speaks to the precarity that millennial women face within the Canadian workforce which is increasingly characterized by insecurity, lack of benefits, and non-standard work relationships

(Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003). The findings represent an aspect of gendered

discrimination that has not been explored within the literature on precarious work and embodied

precarity.

Using Foucauldian notions of governmentality, I explore how labour market precarity

and market-orientation are being inscribed upon millennial women's decisions regarding work

and family. This thesis explores the following research questions: how, within an increasingly

deregulated working environment with non-standard employment relationships, do

maternity/parental leave provisions affect millennial women's fundamental right to leave?; and

how is collective action or resistance being taken up in this context? My findings contribute to

the literature by adding qualitative evidence to the anecdotal reports of women being restructured

out of their workplaces while on pregnancy/parental leave. Further, this research aims to

contribute to how the participants experience Butler's "sense of precarity" at the intersections of

precarious work, motherhood, and age.

To do so, I first take up the literature on gender, precarious work, precarity, and age.

Following a review of the related literature, I establish in more detail my theoretical and

methodological frames which inform how I developed and undertook this critical, qualitative

feminist research. The findings chapter then reveals the complexity of millennial working

mother's experiences in the workforce. Specifically, feeling vulnerable in the workplace; the

impact of major life changes on millennial mothers' identities; and responses to the perceived

motherhood penalty in the workplace. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the findings in

relation to the literature, consider the limitations of the study and offer possibilities for future

research, avenues for policy advocacy, and suggestions for social work practice.

CHAPTER 2   LITERATURE REVIEW

Precarity is a broad concept which infiltrates multiple components of millennial women's lives. Scholarly research at the intersections of precarity, work, and millennial women (between the ages of 18 – 37) and parenthood is limited. Rather, the literature speaks about precarity as a state of being, as a political movement (Schram, 2014), as precarious work and as a phenomenon that disproportionately impacts marginalized groups, specifically women (Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Vosko, McDonald, and Campbell, 2009). This literature review explores the concept of precarity in relation to five broad themes at the micro, meso and macro levels. To begin, I explore the way the literature situates employment precarity within the broader economic context of austerity and neoliberalism, paying specific attention to restructuring of workplaces. This follows with an uncovering of the ways millennial women experience precarity. Importantly, I highlight the existing literature on reproductive insecurity within this generation. Finally, this review touches briefly on social policies that can be improved to better support millennial women's return to work. The review of the literature reveals that precarious work is having deep and complex impacts on women's reproductive choices, and that social policies are facilitating ongoing reproductive insecurity by not adequately supporting millennial working women.

Austerity, Restructuring, and Precarious Work

It has been widely argued that the introduction of neoliberal policy frameworks into nation states governing practices has had detrimental effects on the lives of citizens (Harvey, 2005; Lewchuk, 2017; Ostry, Loungani, & Furceri, 2016; Wilson, Calhoun, & Whitmore, 2011). Since the late 1970s, elected bodies in Canada have undergone a transformation framed by

market-oriented restructuring (Harvey, 2005; Wilson, Calhoun, & Whitmore, 2011). At the

political level, talk of deficit and the need for a balanced budget has allowed Canadian politicians

and policy makers to cut funding to social services, deregulate trade, and lessen government

interventions in the market through privatization (Brodie, 1999). In Canada, Mahon (2008)

explore the history of liberalism from the post-World-War-II boom to present day. The post war

period was the height of social liberalism characterized by universal, flat-rate benefits such as

universal health care, income-related social insurance, and social assistance for mothers (Mahon,

2008). This period is also synonymous with strong levels of unionization in both the public and

private sector (Mehta, 2014). Although these levels were never as high as in Scandinavian

countries, they did contribute to many workers attaining basic provisions to support social

reproduction and workers' safety (Mahon, 2008).

Social liberalism began to wane during the 1970s as a result of a global economic crisis,

the rise of globalization, and the introduction of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). As described by

Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a political and theoretical process intent upon the "deregulation,

privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (pp. 11-12). The

implications for social policy were drastic, beginning with cuts to funding and the elimination of

universality from most programs (excluding healthcare) through a process known as

"retrenchment" (Mahon, 2008; Rice & Prince, 2006). In the current neoliberal context, the state's

role is to facilitate the conditions for individual entrepreneurship by establishing open and free

trade markets; even to the detriment of local economies (Harvey, 2005). As Mahon (2008)

explains: "rather than mitigating the impact of growing polarization of market incomes… social

and labour market policies focused on inducing people to accept low-wage jobs" (p. 349).

Effectively, rolling back of entitlements and rolling out neoliberal austerity policies has led to

heightened level of inequality whereby those in the shrinking middle class have access to

benefits and pensions as part of their full-time employment while the growing lower, working

class has become increasingly vulnerable by virtue of occupying "bad jobs" in a country with a

waning social safety net (Harvey, 2005; Mahon, 2008). Those most vulnerable to these

conditions of work are women, young people, racialized individuals, and people with disabilities

(Vosko, Noack, & Thomas, 2016). These changes to the labour market and entitlements have

serious implications for millennial women (born between 1980 – the early 2000s) who have

come of age knowing only austerity while attempting to establish themselves during the

financialization of economic systems.

      Financialization (Chan, 2013) and restructuring (Silver, Shields, Wilson, & Scholz, 2005)

are other substantive components of the move towards neoliberalism within the last three

decades. Epstein (2005) explains financialization as "the increasing role of financial motives,

financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of domestic and

international economies" (as cited in Chan, 2013, p. 366). This manifests as the prioritization of

shareholder value, increased investment in financial rather than physical capital, and financial

"risk management" (Chan, 2013). Importantly, financialization is implicated in the creation of

the "just-in-time" economy "requiring a contingent workforce to meet fluctuating demand"

(Chan, 2013, p. 366). Restructuring is an outcome of financialization and is described as a

process of changing organizational operations and job types to increase "efficiency" and

shareholder outcomes (Cushen & Thompson, 2016). Cushen and Thompson (2016) highlight the

personal impacts of this process, suggesting restructuring with the goal of labour flexibility has

shaped the labour market to include more precarious employment to respond to these

manufactured demands. As described by Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich (2003), precarious

work is a new category of labour categorized by non-standard "employment contracts…job

insecurity, low job tenure, low wages, poor working conditions and high risks of ill health" (p.

455). Social policies that act as a "safety net" for workers who find themselves outside of the

traditional labour market relationship have not kept pace with these transformations (Canadian

Labour Congress [CLC], 2016). Precarious workers are scarcely entitled to state benefits,

vacation, holiday or sick pay (Chan, 2013; CLC, 2016; Cranford et al., 2003). These conditions

of work have led to rising income inequality instigated by policies and practices which favour

shareholders' over workers' interests (Cushen & Thompson, 2016).

Specifically, labour policies have not kept pace with the changing nature of work in

Ontario. In a recent review of the Ontario *Employment Standards Act (ESA; 2000)* and *Labour*

Relations Act (1995) provincial advisors recommended a number of adjustments in response to

the new realities of work (Mitchell & Murray, 2017). The subsequent legislation (Bill 148 – Fair

Workplaces Better Jobs Act, 2017) made a number of important alterations to these labour laws,

however, it did not go far enough in protecting millennial women's pregnancy/parental leave

rights.

There have been a number of anecdotal reports citing the business practice of

restructuring women out of their positions and employment during parental leave (Balkisson,

n.d.; Worth, 2016), which connects workplace restructuring to broader themes of human rights

violations where women find their work or workplaces changed upon return from leave. This

experience is linked to the ESA and the clause within that notes the woman can be terminated if

the termination had nothing to do with their maternity leave. The legislation is written in such a

way that it appears to protect parents from workplace discrimination, but the power is placed

squarely in the hands of the employer to decide which approach to maternity leave to adopt.

Over forty cases brought to the Human Rights Tribunal regarding pregnancy and leave between

2008 and 2014 (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.) demonstrate the employer is able to

interpret this legislation in a way that allows them to terminate women on maternity leave if it is

connected to organizational restructuring. This particularly targets millennial women who are

disproportionately disadvantaged by precarious work and gender-based discrimination. The next

section takes up the literature to examine the ways in which millennial women are positioned

within this economic context and the implications for reproductive justice.

Millennial Women's Experiences of Precarity

Millennials as a demographic group have gained increased attention in scholarship,

media, and marketing as they become the largest group to enter the Canadian workforce

(Perreault-Laird & Silver, 2018). This generation is one shaped by significant global events

including the Great Recession of 2008/09, 9/11, and the hastening emergence of technology such

as the internet (Risman, 2018). In her fascinating book on millennials and gender constructions,

Risman (2018) provides an overview of some of the unique qualities of this generation.

Specifically, she discussed a new phase distinctive of this cohort called "emerging adulthood"

which is characterized by spending more time "finding themselves," taking longer to establish

independence from their parents, engaging in longer periods of being single, and waiting to start

families until their 30s as part of ensuring both partners are economically stable. A significant

part of emerging adulthood is attaining a secure, full-time job (Risman, 2018), which is

becoming increasingly difficult in Canada's precarious labour market (CLC, 2016). Risman

considers the changing dynamics of gendered relationships but falls short of taking up what other

scholars have pointed to as one of the major components influencing this delayed transition to

adulthood: precarious work.

The CLC (2016) frames millennials within the context of a changing Canadian labour

economy. Their report reflects the general characteristics outlined by Risman which describe

millennials as a diverse, highly-educated and more egalitarian generation. However, it adds to

this analysis by outlining issues such as "flexibilization" and "uber-ization" of the labour market

as unique challenges facing this generation. Moreover, the earlier stated issues highlighted as

part of the "emerging adulthood" phase including "boomeranging" back to parents' houses, high

levels of tuition debt, and being unable to secure stable, full-time employment are understood as

major concerns rather than a passing life phase (CLC, 2016). The analysis provided is more

critical of the structural issues facing this generation, echoing much of Kershaw's 2017 report

Code Red. Kershaw pushes this analysis into the political sphere, offering a comparative analysis

on the differences between Ontario's boomer generation and millennial's ability to pay for

school, buy a house, save for retirement, amongst other prime indicators. Significantly, the report

connects provincial political parties and public policy to these indicators, highlighting the

generation disparities. Overall, the report concludes Ontario is a very difficult place for people in

their 20s, 30s and 40s to attain the same quality of life afforded to their parents' generation.

Millennials are left few options in the current context of work. Martin (2017) builds on

Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich (2003) seminal study which demonstrated the rise in self-

employment paralleling the decline in standard employment relationships. Martin's (2017) study,

located in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area draws on the five measurable areas related to

precarity: work and the employment relationship, self-employment, life outside of work, health

and well-being, career opportunities, and the future. Conducting qualitative interviews with 10

millennials, Martin (2017) concludes it is more challenging to access the same employment

security and economic stability for the millennial generation than those previous. High student

debt, unaffordable housing, and financial insecurity due to the precarity of self-employment were

listed as barriers millennials encountered in establishing themselves in the working world;

reinforcing assertions in the literature (Kershaw, 2017; Martin, 2017; Risman, 2018).

Precarious Work and the State of Precarity

Broadly, many millennials are disadvantaged in the current economy through lack of

access to secure jobs with benefits; however, there are some identities that intersect with age to

create experiences of further marginalization. Precarious work and precarity are conceptualized

differently in the literature, one as a labour market precondition, the other as a state of being.

According to Standing (2011), the current labour market economy within the neoliberal,

capitalist state has produced a new, dangerous class of worker called "the Precariat." Standing

uses this term to describe the new precarious proletariat, a socio-economic class that experiences

the pressures associated with their insecure connection to the labour market which can have

negative effects upon their income security. The Precariat is not always relegated to unskilled,

low-paying employment. Increasingly, precarious work is expanding to encompass "white

collar" work, for instance, post-secondary educators and other professionals (Hennessy &

Tranjan, 2018). Though precarious professional jobs may pay well, their contractual, part-time,

and/or temporary nature is what situates these workers within the Precariat class.

The critical literature on precarious work unanimously asserts that this type of

employment relationship has disrupted the traditional life course for many (Morgan, 2015).

Some can "tread water in precarious labour markets for longer" with the help of financial capital

from parents, making the move to adulthood somewhat easier (Morgan, 2015, p. 3). As such, the

scholarship is beginning to move towards an exploration of the conceptualization of precarity as

a state of being. Adopting Judith Butler's framework, Schram (2013) explains "'Precarity' means

more than income volatility. It adds to our ability to highlight a distinctive dimension of the

transformation underway: how people are subjectified as citizens who must accept responsibility

for handling the shocks of marketization" (p. 6). Specifically, Butler's understanding of precarity

extends beyond the field of employment and accounts for the ways people's subjectivities

correspond to feeling precarious in different areas in their lives (Schram, 2013). This uneven

distribution of precarity helps to explain the gendered distribution of preciousness in the context

of social reproduction. Precarious work, oppression, and governmentality coalesce to a way of

viewing "precarity [which] points to something beyond marginalization in ways that underscore

the growing uncertainties associated with the economic transformation currently underway…

neoliberalism begets precarity" (Schram, 2013, p. 6). This notion of precarity connects the

Foucauldian concept of governmentality as an apparatus of regulation. How then, are millennials

governing their choices regarding parenthood in relation to the market?

Millennial Working Women

     For Standing (2011), young people and women are uniquely located in the Precariat

class. There is a substantial body of literature that considers women's subjectivities within the

precarious labour market (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich, 2003; Ng et al., 2016; Vosko,

McDonald, & Campbell, 2009; Worth, 2016a & b); an experience which disproportionately

impacts racialized women (PEPSO, 2018). As a group, millennial women are more educated,

entering the labour force at higher rates, and postponing – or choosing against – becoming

parents until much later in life (Risman, 2018). In spite of their high educational attainment,

millennial women are uniquely disadvantaged in the current economy as they are

overrepresented in atypical employment relationships and continue to experience an unequal

gendered pay gap (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich, 2003). Indeed,

Vosko, McDonald, and Campbell (2009) argue there is a distinctly gendered shape to precarious

work. The feminization of labour has risen in line with the precarious employment (Vosko,

McDonald, & Campbell, 2009). Extending this concept to the feminization of the Precariat,

Standing (2011) explains this occurs marginalization "in a double sense of more women being in

jobs and more jobs being of the flexible type typically taken by women" (p. 60). Concurrently,

women remain precariously employed and frequently forced to take on the "triple shift" (work,

child-care, and elder care). Broadly, this problem is compounded by more women taking on the

role of primary household earner (Standing, 2011) with fewer social policy supports (Vosko &

Clarke, 2009).

Worth's (2016a & b) thorough analysis on precarious work and millennial women

artfully encapsulates many of the themes which present themselves in literature at the

intersection of age, gender, and employment. Worth's (2016a) qualitative study illuminates the

working lives of thirty-three diverse millennial women in Toronto. The author's analysis takes

up Judith Butler's concept of embodied precarity by capturing the ways millennial women in

Ontario negotiate their pursuit of secure employment while balancing other realities including

sexism and ageism, creating a lived sense of precarity. Four main themes were identified: that is,

appreciating the freedom and flexibility of self-employment; economic uncertainty leading to an

overall sense of precarity that impacted women's mental and physical health; "fear of returning

to past precarity" which left some women underemployed; and "borrowed insecurity" which

related to the general fear of precarious work (Worth, 2016a, p. 608). Even when millennial

women secure a standard employment relationship, the fear of precarity led them to take any

full-time work that became available (Worth, 2016a). Unfortunately, Worth's work does not

fully take up class and marital status as potential protective privileges against the more damaging

effects of precarity. Importantly, however, she points to a significant theme in the literature on

millennial women and work: reproductive insecurity.

Reproductive Insecurity and the Motherhood Penalty

Reproductive Insecurity

Reproductive insecurity is a key element in the condition of precarity as understood in the

current context of labour for millennial women. Chan and Tweedie (2015) explain this

phenomenon as "[e]mployment insecurity that could undermine the capacity to either establish

families and/or to care for families" (p. 6). Interviews with millennial professionals (between the

ages of 25 and 45) illuminate the understudied issue of reproductive insecurity. Chan and

Tweedie's (2015) examination of the reproductive choices of millennials moves towards

dispelling the myth that precarious employment is a "stepping stone" or temporary episode in

young people's life courses. In this way, reproductive insecurity is connected to the broader trend

of precarious employment, challenging the notion of precarity as a temporary stage for

millennials. Rather, precarious employment intercepts important life stages; impacting this

groups' long-term decision-making; specifically, their ability to transition between youth to

adulthood (Chan & Tweedie, 2015). This idea of "transitioning" is closely connected to

Risman's analysis of millennials as a generation distinct from baby boomers; specifically, with

respect to family planning.

The Motherhood Penalty

Reproductive insecurity is intimately related to "the motherhood penalty." This concept is

multi-faceted and is taken up in different texts. Modena and Sabatini (2012) explain job loss

continues to be understood by women as a primarily negative side effect of childbearing.

Whereas England, Bearak, Budig, and Hodges (2016) layer into this description the ways

"employers reward experience and tenure with higher wage rates; thus, even absent

discrimination, when motherhood leads women to interrupt their employment, it lowers their

future wages upon their return to employment…may also adversely affect wages through

lowering job performance" (England, et al., 2016, p. 1162). In addition to financial

repercussions, millennial women fear falling into a "precariousness" or "unemployment" trap

that would hinder their chances of attaining a secure, full-time position (Modena & Sabatini,

2012). Deciding against or postponing parenthood not as a decision made in line with their desire

to become a mother, but rather as prevention from precarity, job loss, and financial insecurity.

The mere occurrence of these processes indicates a broader, structural issue related to social

policy informed by gendered constructs.

Considering the affordability question through a quantitative analysis, Zhang (2009) uses

Statistics Canada data to measure the motherhood penalty nationally. Analysis conducted

through the survey of labour and income dynamics demonstrated how:

> more than 40% of new parents could not take maternity leave because their
> financial situation did not allow it, and among parents who took the leave and
> returned to work, 81% indicated that they would have stayed home longer if they
> could have afforded to do so (Zhang, 2009, p. 5).

In the same report, Zhang identified that women without children earned more than mothers. In

this way, the motherhood penalty is a quantifiable phenomenon of which many women are

acutely aware. This knowledge has implications for the choices women make about

reproduction, demonstrating, in short, the ways precarious employment – and by extension –

precarity, impacts life choices of millennial women.

Qualitatively, the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) study

addressed the question of starting a family with participants who cited the "insecurity" and

"unstable" nature of their work as barriers to reproduction. Adding to the quantitative data,

precariously employed women were more likely to delay having children than their securely

employed counterparts (Lewchuk et al., 2013, p. 87). This data reflects Worth's (2016a)

findings, who highlights one woman's feeling of being "overwhelmed at the prospect of buying a

house or securing the finances needed to start a family" (p. 608) while others are actively

delaying starting a family. Further, some millennial women are finding themselves leaving

workplaces which would not "accommodate her pregnancy" (Worth, 2016a, p. 607). Modena

and Sabatini (2012) articulate questions many millennial women consider when starting a family:

"can we—i.e. my partner and I—afford it?" (p. 78). The question of affordability is intimately

connected to social policies which can either facilitate or diminish the prospect of parenthood for

millennial working mothers.

The motherhood penalty and reproductive in/security is closely related to social policies

with can either mitigate or heighten the economic "burdens" associated with parenthood.

Notably, Vosko and Clarke (2009) identify two specific policies implicated in this process: child

care and employment insurance (EI). In Canada, these policies are based on the male-bread

winner model which assumes a nuclear family wherein the man works outside the home and the

woman labours within the domestic, unpaid realm (Vosko & Clarke, 2009). EI and child care

policies continue to be constructed around the notion of the male breadwinner model which

disadvantages women looking to have children and return to work. Robson (2017) and McKay,

Mathieu and Doucet (2016) argue for EI policies that are easier to access for women such as those in Quebec. This suggestion is paralleled in Macdonald and Friendly's (2017) analysis of affordable child care policies which proposes affordable child care has benefits for women and families nationally. Arguably, millennial working mothers experience heightened vulnerability due to their age, gender, and time spent outside of the workforce (Linzdon, 2017). As such, there is definitive space for advocacy and improvement in these policies.

In summary, this literature review has explored existing scholarship at the intersection of precarious work, millennial women, and social policies. A critical review of the literature highlights the socio-economic context of Canadian social and market policies have exacerbated the issue of precarious work for millennial women. The motherhood penalty and reproductive insecurity are uniquely salient for this generation of women who are acutely aware of the economic ramifications of parenthood in a precarious labour context. The literature reveals millennial women are governing their reproductive in response to the precarious labour market as a result of both the motherhood penalty and social policies based on male-breadwinner model. Absent from the literature is a conversation about how social policies including labour law and pregnancy/parental leave are used to contribute to millennial women's "sense of precarity." Moreover, there is limited research on millennial mothers engaged in resistance and community building in response to these constraints.

My thesis explores the way millennial mothers are being marginalized in the workplace. To do so, this thesis asks how, within an increasingly deregulated working environment with non-standard employment relationships, do pregnancy/parental leave provisions affect millennial women's fundamental right to leave? As such, are child bearing millennials governing their

choices regarding parenthood in relation to the market? How is collective action or resistance

being taken up in this context?

CHAPTER 3   THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pregnancy and parental leave have received heightened attention of late as a policy area of focus for recent federal government changes (Abedi, 2018). My thesis explores millennial working mothers' experiences with pregnancy/parental leave in the context of employment precarity. This study offers an opportunity to consider the gendered effects of policies (and lack of it) as they relate to precarious work through the lens of critical scholarship.

Foundational to my research is ensuring epistemological and theoretical consistency. As such, this chapter outlines the basic principles of critical social theory, feminist political economy, and intersectional feminist which are enhanced by drawing on certain aspects of Foucauldian postmodernist theories. While critical social theory and feminist political economy consider the broader structural and policy context of study, intersectional feminism explores how issues of gender, age/generation, race, class, and other subjectivities influence participants' lived experiences of precarious work and pregnancy/parental leave. Attending to issue of power and resistance, Foucauldian notions of biopower, and governmentality inform the ways millennial working mothers respond to their situations.

To begin, this chapter presents epistemological considerations for analytic choices which are grounded in theoretical frameworks. I describe how each theory is taken up in my research design and analysis. After which, I report my methodological considerations of the study while demonstrating how my theoretical frame informed my approach to research.

Theoretical considerations

Critical Social Sciences and Critical Social Theory: The Building Blocks for Change

To begin, this research is situated within the critical social science methodology. Neuman (1997) explains the critical social sciences is a process of inquiry that searches for an understanding of the way in which structures shape people's lived experiences. The purpose of the critical social sciences is to change the world through "uncover[ing] myths, reveal hidden truths, and help people to change the world for themselves" (Neuman, 1997, p. 74). This methodology connects to and encompasses a number of theoretical frames which align with this action-oriented approach to research including critical social theory, feminist theory, anti-oppression, anti-racism, amongst others.

Critical theory is deeply connected to the critical social sciences (Neuman, 1997) and is an integral aspect of this thesis project. Similar to the critical social sciences, critical theory is action-oriented as it seeks to affect change by identifying the systemic barriers marginalizing communities. As expressed by Freeman and Vanconcelos (2010), the three main tenants of critical theory are research which is participatory, pedagogical, and action-oriented. This process-oriented approach explores issue of oppressions in allyship or as a member of the communities. Lived experiences are used to mobilize a response to the embodied knowledge of structural barriers (Freeman & Vanconcelos, 2010). It is further an "evaluative as well as a political activity that involves assessing how things are in order to transform them into what they ought to be" (Freeman & Vanconcelos, 2010, p. 7). Fook and Gardener (2007) elaborate on this definition, identifying five primary components to critical social theory. First, oppression is both personal and structural; therefore, any analysis through this lens must incorporate an analysis of how these spheres interact. Second, the concept of false consciousness is used to understand how people can be active in their own oppression. Third, change must be personal and collective to be

meaningful. Fourth, knowledge is constructed by dominant groups. And lastly, the importance of communication to create a shared understanding of experiences (Fook & Gardener, 2007).

Applying this knowledge to my process of data analysis required locating the barriers parents' encounter during reintegration into the labour market post-parental leave within governmental and organizational policies and practices. As such, my questions asked of the data during analysis included: do maternity/parental leave provisions affect millennial women's fundamental right pregnancy/parental leave? How are workplace practices around restructuring, hiring, termination, implicated in shaping this experience? How are non-standard employment arrangements and/or precarious work influencing women's reproductive in/security? Critical theory is a foundational component to this study and has be intentionally woven throughout the project from recruitment to analysis.

Feminist Political Economy: Whose Work Do We Value and Why?

Considering the issue of women's access to the labour market through a feminist political economy framework additionally situates this topic as a structural concern. Feminist political economy sees social reproduction as an integral aspect of capitalist economies (Cameron, 2006). As explained by Cameron (2006): "social reproduction of the working class is a precondition of capitalist production, ensuring a constant supply of labour with the appropriate skills and behaviours" (p. 46). This work is disproportionately taken up by women. Although social reproduction is highly invisible in the labour market, Cameron (2006) argues the state occupies an important role in intervening to facilitate social reproduction work as it is a benefit to the capitalist economy. These interventions occur through the dispersal of capital via entitlements to women or "replacement of the wage through income programs, or the provision of services to

supplement or socialize household labour" (Cameron, 2006, p. 46), such as employment

insurance, parental/pregnancy leave, and child care subsidies, amongst others.

There is, however, an inherent conflict that arises for the state between the process of

social reproduction and economic production for the purpose of capital accumulation. State

institutions are conceived of as manifestations of power within the capitalist economy and their

engagement with supporting or antagonizing the inherent conflict is dynamic (Cameron, 2006).

Notably, "the contradiction is visible at times of economic crises…and other social forces around

the allocation of resources to social reproduction" (Cameron, 2006, p. 47). These principles

anchor social reproduction within a critical theory which details the structural, economic

implications and outcomes of social reproduction work.

There are, however, limitations to critical social theory and feminist political economic

perspective on social reproduction: primarily, in their understanding how power operates. Fook

(2012) explains that Marxist or structuralist understandings of power – located within the critical

theory – can limit researchers' understanding of power dimensions and dynamics. Postmodern

scholars have critiqued this simplistic view of power as a commodity (Fook, 2012).

Alternatively, Foucault's understanding of power has three elements: power is exercised, not

possessed and is fluid (as cited in Fook, 2012). Importantly, power operates differently,

depending on the context. Therefore, the emphasis during analysis is placed in the ways power

is exercised; such as through discourse, language, and narrative which are informed by context

and history. Adding a Foucauldian postmodern perspective to my data analysis demonstrates the

ways power operates within institutions and through people.

Freeman and Vanconcelos (2010) offer justification for integrating a post-modern

perspective with critical social theory. The authors explain there is a tension within critical

scholarship between modernist and postmodernist thinkers: "the first view asserts that there is no possibility of emancipation for individuals without structural reorganization, whereas the second wishes to free the individual from the constraints of all structures, discursive or physical" (Freeman & Vanconcelos, 2010, p. 10). As such, there is a tendency to take up a one theoretical approach over another as though the two theories exist in binaries. I position myself within critical theory as more structuralist thinker with the view of seeking to extend this analysis by taking up the post-modern, Foucauldian notion of governmentality while identifying its origins in the public, structural spaces. In this way, the change occurs to the systems of oppression (e.g., policy, economies, amongst others) rather than focussing on the emancipation of the mind through discourse-deconstruction.

Governmentality: Women's bodies through a Foucauldian lens

A key concept in Foucauldian thought is governmentality (McKee, 2009). I am intrigued by this notion as it applies to the ways millennials operate within precarious work conditions. McKee (2009) explains governmentality as sets of practices and policies within the "art of governing" by the state which extend to "a mode of political government more concerned with the management of the population than the management of a territory" (McKee, 2009, p. 466). Moisander, Groß, & Eräranta (2018) add to the notion of governmentality, introducing concepts of biopolitics and neoliberal discipline. Biopolitics, as articulated by McKee (2009) "draw[s] attention to a mode of power, which operates through the administration of life itself – meaning bodies (both individually and collectively)" (p. 466). Further exploring these concepts, Moisander and colleagues (2018) explain how neoliberalism is taken up by postmodern researchers as a "a modality of governance and an order of normative reason that extends 'a

specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human

life'" (Brown, 2015 as cited in Moisander et al., 2018, p. 376). This concept is used to explain

the way people "enterprise" or commodify the self in an attempt to expand their human capital.

This notion can be related to the precarious worker who is constructed as a free agent who can

sell their labour in the market.

      Neoliberalism, as it relates to human capital, is a framework through which people

understand themselves. As noted by Moisander and colleagues (2018):

> human capital is based on an assumption that people are inherently calculating
> subjects who apply an economic lens of costs and benefits to every dimension of
> their lives, and see their personal qualities, skills and social relations as a form of
> capital that can be 'mobilized in the search for competitive advantage. (p. 379)

As such, the interaction of neoliberalism and postmodernism collide to create an understanding

of the way people perceive themselves and their decisions based on an economic framework.

      An application of this analysis to the topic would not, therefore, remain at the structural,

legislative, or organizational policy level, but rather insert itself into decisions regarding our

human capital as individual people. Such an extension reaches into a workers' perception of self.

In this way, "studies have highlighted the disciplinary, normalizing effects of neoliberal

governmentality and the enterprise culture on employee subjectivity, demonstrating particularly

how power operates in organizations through self-surveillance and self-discipline" (Moisander et

al., 2018, p. 376). How, then, are women combining their understanding of a precarious

economy with the decision to take pregnancy/parental leave? Are women self-disciplining in the

work place regarding their reproductive choices? Do the policies discipline the worker when they

encounter them? Or, does the mere understanding of the self as a marketable commodity inform

reproductive decisions before the worker even engages at the policy level?

Connecting the idea of neoliberal governing with precarious work, Moisander and

colleagues (2018) highlight the ways the discourse of "autonomy" and "freedom" are mobilized

to enforce discipline. Foucault's concept of "biopower" can be useful in this context. Biopower

is different than disciplinary power insofar as it does not prevent actions but rather "manages

their environments" to promote certain types of activities and behaviours (Moisander et al., 2018,

p. 377). Through biopower, the state produces active neoliberal agents, maintaining control over

workers.

Intersectional feminism

To complement this inquiry, an intersectional lens is added to critical theory and

Foucauldian postmodernism to consider how structural factors manifest in women's personal

experiences. In her article on intersectional feminism, Davies (2008) succinctly articulates

scholarly debates regarding the use of this theory in research. Particular aspects of Davies (2008)

argument resonate with my concerns about employing an intersectional lens as "[i]t allows [the

researcher] to express her familiarity with the latest developments in feminist theory, without

necessarily exploring all the ramifications of the theoretical debates" (p. 75). In an effort to

address some of these concerns, I will now situate how intersectional feminism is taken up in this

analysis.

Beginning with an explanation of this theoretical frame, Christensen and Jensen (2012)

detail how intersectional feminism can be applied to qualitative research. Developed by Black

feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality was initially theorized in

relation to a legal case. Put succinctly, an intersectional lens considers how different identities

can overlap and intersect within a given person creating realities that are unique from

experiencing oppression, domination, or discrimination separately (Crenshaw, 1991). As such, Christensen and Jenson (2012) suggest the "intersectional approach is consequently based on a non-additive principle that refers to how different social categories mutually constitute each other as overall forms of social differentiation or systems of oppression" (p. 110). This differs from previous feminist paradigms which are largely argued to have neglected the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, racialized, queer, disabled, and new comer women within their analysis by forwarding a white, middle-class perception of womanhood (Dominelli, 2002). Using an intersectional approach to research, therefore, requires an understanding of the material and structural implications of "racialization more that races, economic exploitation rather that classes, gendering and gender performance rather than genders" (Choo & Ferree, 2010 as cited in Christensen & Jenson, 2012, p. 111).

Intersectional feminist scholars also ask researchers to consider the unique operations of class, gender, and race as these processes do not materialize in the body and society identically. Considering these differences, intersectionality is not a process of developing a "hierarchy of oppressions" (Kumsa, Chambon, Yan, & Maiter, 2015) as is common when working with communities to which we share a similar identity. This acts to diminish the dynamic ways by which powers and privileges are afforded within and between groups which impact their access to material resources. When analysing this data, I looked for spaces of coalition building, story-sharing, consciousness raising, and discussing opportunities for change.

Using a thoughtful application of critical social theory, feminist political economy, Foucauldian postmodernism, and intersectional feminism, my analysis will offer a nuanced understanding of how precarious work, in combination with governmental and organizational policies have implications on the reproductive choices of millennial women in the labour force.

Through combining these theories, my theoretical framework attends to the multiple spheres of

influence on the participant's lives. As noted earlier, critical theory positions personal problems

in the political sphere, asking researchers to address structural issues that are causing

marginalization. This action-oriented approach allows for difference aspects of marginalization

to be brought to the fore by grounding them in the lived experiences of participants and

community members. There are limitations to this framework, however, which can be ratified

through the inclusion of a postmodern lens. Foucauldian postmodernism takes up this analysis by

examining the process of governmentality, discipline, and biopower. This approach explores the

ways power is exercised within and between people. Joining these approaches in this thesis

requires centring women's experiences. Intersectional feminism is a way to bring together the

personal and political by collecting data from the life experiences of women and connecting

these narratives to broader issues such as class and gender.

Critical social theory is used to consider the structural inequities such as sexism and

patriarchy which impact the participant's experience at work and at home such as the gendered

division of labour and expectations of the participants from their spouses when they become

mothers. Foucauldian notions of biopower and governmental help to understand how women

internalize discourses of who is considered a good worker and the importance of the

governmentality to the functioning of the current economic system. Adopting key ideas from

postmodernism allows me to explore how precarity is experienced on a personal or embodied

level and how this contributes to women's engagement in resistance through community building

and advocating for their rights. Intersectional feminism informs my analysis regarding the

participants' subjectivities by considering how race, gender, age, marital status, and education

shape their experiences within a precarious labour context. Specifically, how having family

support can facilitate their return to work. Uniting these theoretical frameworks will illuminate

how identities and experiences intersect within an economic and policy context to facilitate

power, privilege, oppression, and resistance as will be demonstrated in the next section which

outlines data analysis.

The Study

Ethical Considerations

My qualitative study began by applying to the McMaster Research and Ethics Board

(MREB). I was cognizant that participants may be wary of the interview process if they feel as if

participation in this research my result in loss of employment connections or jeopardize their

current employment relationship. To mitigate this risk, participants were advised at the beginning

of the interview that they were not required to answer any question they feel uncomfortable with

and that they had the right to stop, completely withdraw or take a break during the interview.

Additionally, participants were provided with a list of employment rights and legal rights

organizations if they feel inclined to pursue the issue further.

Efforts to maintain participant confidentiality was be clearly outlined in the consent form

and explained to participants orally. Pseudonyms are used and identifying information has been

removed in the transcription of interviews and reporting of findings. For example, the names of

workplaces and organizations are not identified in the transcripts or in reporting the findings. To

further assure anonymity, participants were given the option to conduct the interview in person,

via Skype or over the phone (please see Appendix B for more information about information

storage and privacy).

Sampling and Recruitment

Recruitment began when I received ethics approval from the MREB (Appendix A).

Eligible participants are women between the ages of 18 – 37 who have taken maternity leave or

were currently on maternity leave and experienced employment restructuring, displacement, or

being pushed out of the workplace in relation to their parental status. I recruited participants by

mounting posters at a city-based community centre which offered programming for children and

families. The same recruitment information was posted online in parenting support groups.

Recruitment material explained the study was inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and queer

women. A total of six millennial mothers contacted me to participate in the interview process.

Once discussing their eligibility and answering any questions about the letter of

information/consent, we arranged to a time to conduct a semi-structured interview. Due to the

reach of social media, the women who volunteered to be interviewed were from different cities

throughout Canada. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and over Skype. In

line with qualitative research (Mason, 2002), this small sample size offered an in-depth

understanding of how the current Canadian policy and practice of pregnancy/parental leave have

affected women, including their considerations on work and family, in the context precarious

work.

Interview Process

Consistent with the feminist focus of the study, a narrative approach centering on

storytelling through individual, in depth semi-structured interviews was used for data collection

(Christenson & Jensen, 2012). Interviews were between 60 – 90 minutes long in a location that

offered visual and aural privacy. Once the participant had time to ask clarifying questions

regarding the study and felt comfortable proceeding, they signed the letter of

information/consent and gave permission to be audio recorded. The participant was also

provided with a copy of the interview guide to follow during the interview. The in-depth semi-

structured format allowed for space during the interview for participants to guide the

conversation and express their own stories while ensuring the main research questions were

addressed (Mason, 2002).

Research questions aligned with the theoretical frame. For instance, one question posed

to all participants was "were there any specific laws or policies you looked to or used when you

were taking your leave?" which was often followed were they effective or not? And finally, how

could they be changed (if necessary). These questions attempted to identify how policies could

be changed to improve the quality of life for millennial mothers in precarious employment.

Participants were also asked about their overall experience with taking leave, how their made

their decision with specific questions about policies their referenced, what some of their primary

concerns were with taking leave, if their work had changed after they took pregnancy/parental

leave. To explore the question of resistance, participants were asked what was the biggest change

they experienced while on leave, and how they responded to the situations they described. For

the full interview guide, please see Appendix C.

At the end of the interview, after the audio recorder had been turned off, they were asked

to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D). The purpose of gathering this

information was to reflect on how participants' identities could impact their experiences of

taking pregnancy/parental leave, an important facet of an intersectional feminist analysis

(Christenson & Jenson, 2012).

Participants

Considering the attention intersectional feminist theory pays to identity and the value of accounting for structural forces such as power, privilege, and oppression upheld by critical theorists, I have presented the demographic information and work experience of the participants. Table 1 displays the demographic and employment information of the participants. Importantly, the table captures the lack of diversity within the participants' social locations which will be discussed later in limitations of the study. Additionally, all the participants have a minimum of post-secondary education, reflecting Standing's (2011) argument that precarious work has permeated all classes of the labour market. Lastly, the diversity of experience with respect to precarious employment is highlighted in the pre and post leave employment status information.

Six women participated in this study. Their ages ranged from early to mid 30s and each mother had one to two children. In terms of educational background, all women attained some form of post-secondary education ranging between an undergraduate degree to PhD. All women identify as white/Caucasian. Each participant was in a long-term, same-sex relationship with five legally married and one in a common-law arrangement. Two participants identify as bi-sexual and four as straight. None of the women identified as disabled. At the time of the study, each participant had experienced precarious work or restructuring during or related to their pregnancy/parental leave. For three women, this occurred years prior to our interview. While the remaining two women were unemployed even though their leave had ended and one was self-employed.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information and Employment Status

Pseudonym	Age range	Gender	Marital Status	Race or Ethnicity	Sexuality	Education	Employment Pre-Leave	Employment Post-Leave
Michelle	30-37	Woman	Legally married	White	Heterosexual	Bachelor's degree and post-graduate diploma	Stable, full-time permanent employment	Stable job but demoted; eventually left, took a 50% pay cut, returned to school to attain a diploma, had second child, currently in full-time employment (over the course of 4 years)
Tory	30-37	Woman	Common-law spouse	White	Bisexual	Bachelor's degree	Precariously employed (part-time contract)	Self-employed
Stephanie	30-37	Woman	Legally married	White	Bisexual	PhD	Precariously employed (full-time contract)	Unemployed (looking for work)
Chantal	30-37	Woman	Legally married	White	Heterosexual	Master's degree	Stable, full-time employment	Stable job but restructured
Jessica	30-37	Woman	Legally married	White	Heterosexual	Bachelor's degree	1st pregnancy precariously employed 2nd pregnancy stable job	1st pregnancy found stable work while on leave 2nd Pregnancy stable job
Hannah	30-37	Woman	Legally married	White	Heterosexual	PhD	Precariously employed	Unemployed

Data Analysis

The audio-recordings were transcribed by myself and two hired transcriptionists (both of whom signed an oath of confidentiality). The transcripts were then re-read while listening to the audio recording to ensure the data was captured verbatim. I then uploaded the transcripts to MAXQDA coding program and began a thematic analysis. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), "thematic data analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). As the authors propose, thematic analysis consists of several stages which I adopted for the purpose of this study.

To begin, as suggested by Clarke and Braun (2006), I familiarized myself with the entire data set, drawing initial, broad codes from the transcripts. This was followed by a meticulous recoding of the data, often using as many of the participants own words to generate the codes. Some of these codes were family/social support, child care responsibilities, burning bridges, financial in/security, major changes, networking, legal action, role of employer, and emotional/mental impact, amongst others. Once this phase was completed, I used the software to create thematic maps as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). These tools helped me to visualize the connections between different codes which enabled the development of broader themes such as strategies, vulnerability, identity shift, child care, and post-partum. Once these themes were developed, this stage was followed by reading the data set in its entirety to consider if the themes are truly reflective of the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, excerpts from the data set were selected which most reflected the richness of the stories shared by the participants. In the next chapter, I present the results of my data analysis, specially, three emergent themes: millennial mothers feeling vulnerable in the workplace; the impact of major

life changes on millennial mother's identities; and, gathering support, creating community, and

challenging gendered expectations of labour.

CHAPTER 4   FINDINGS

This chapter presents the three major themes that emerge from the lived experiences of

millennial mothers in this study whose pregnancy/parental leaves where shaped by precarious

employment in a neoliberal Canadian labour market. In particular, these themes are: 1)

millennial mothers feeling vulnerable in the workplace; 2) the impact of major life changes on

millennial mothers' identities; and 3) responses to the perceived motherhood penalty in the

workplace. Although the literature discusses the gendered processes of precarious work

(Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich, 2003; Ng et al., 2016; Vosko, McDonald, & Campbell, 2009;

Worth, 2016a & b), the results of this data analysis illustrate how these experiences are also

shaped by pressures to perform as good workers within the neoliberal workplace. As a

consequence, when millennial women in this study undergo a major life change by becoming

mothers and attempt to reconcile their two identities as workers and mothers within a workforce,

some experience mental and emotional stressors as a result of the significant structural barriers

they encounter. Meanwhile, women's strategies to respond to these challenges are also informed

by their subjectivities in the workplace and the larger society. Inspired by Risman (2018), I am

particularly interested in highlighting the relationship between macro level social processes and

the micro or lived experiences of these facets of work and gender, links that will become evident

in the following narratives.

"It was my fault for having a baby": Millennial Mothers Feeling Vulnerable in the Workplace

As explained by one participant, millennials as a generation have a unique experience of

work that differs from previous cohorts. This theme shines light on how the millennial working

mothers in this study explain work and motherhood in the context of precarious work. Where

their parents came of age in the "golden era" of Fordism, millennials conception of work was

created in the context of a post-Fordist society governed by neoliberal discourse and policies.

Alluding to this difference, Michelle illustrates the new expected norms of women and mothers

felt by this generation. Michelle is a working mother of three in her early 30s who spent most of

her 20s building her career in the private, corporate sector. She believes:

> …it's hard for a lot of millennial umm millennial women… I'm a generation that
> umm that doesn't I think especially in careers for women, do not like feeling
> vulnerable at all…. And the idea of being vulnerable in our careers is extremely
> daunting and I've learned actually through being a mother and through this whole
> experience about how to be vulnerable and how that that's okay…

Michelle's reflection articulates both her sense of how women in the millennial generation

experience work and the barriers they counter. Understanding vulnerability as "knowing that

you're not going to have control over everything as much as you planned" conveys her

understanding of the need to be self-disciplined as a worker in order to succeed in the workforce.

Although Michelle is the only participant who explicitly named her "vulnerability" as a

millennial working mother, this sentiment is commonly conveyed by other participants when

they speak about the pressure placed on them in the workplace and their employers'

expectations.

Hannah is a first-time mother in her early 30s who worked for many years with the same

team before having a falling out with her managers over their expectations of her working life

post-partum. Her comments reflect workplace demands she felt were necessary to fulfill in order

to succeed in her career. As she explains:

> …[her employers] no longer were comfortable with having someone in this position
> who was not going to travel…basically every other week and they also didn't want
> someone to do it on a part time basis so um, the two things that kind of made it
> impossible for me to keep this position.

Hannah's comments highlight expectations around women specifically, suggesting there was

little room for negotiation with her employers in spite of her commitment and loyalty to her

team. What seems apparent in Hannah's story is the importance of maintaining a certain type of

work which, at the time, felt unmanageable as her partner worked long hours leaving her to take

on the majority of the childcare responsibilities. In spite of her attempts to find a compromise

with her employers where she would "return at a part time capacity and wouldn't travel very

frequently" ultimately, her "perception was that they were kind of like just disappointed with…

like felt like I wasn't following through on the commitments that I made." For Hannah, being

unable to perform her work according to her employer's standard can be read as only working 9

– 5, not taking work home, taking sick days to attend to children. Hannah illuminates the intense

pressure she and other participants such as Michelle and Jessica felt in the workplace as

millennial mothers to put their jobs before their family.

　　　During her first pregnancy/parental leave, Jessica was employed by the government on a

limited term contract. Now, as a 30 something parent of two in a full-time permanent position

with the government, she reflects upon her first leave and the challenges she encountered.

Finding another job and negotiating her new employment contract while on parental/pregnancy

leave illustrates the tension Jessica felt between her understanding of employer's expectations of

workers and her perception of motherhood as being a disadvantage in the workplace. When

asked if she had concerns about her job security and how that affected her mentally and

emotionally, she revealed:

> …there was a lot of lack of confidence in the ability to ask for what I needed and
> what I wanted um, and I think this comes back to um, women not necessarily being
> great negotiators because it's, I felt like I was negotiating from a point of weakness
> from a perspective of weakness rather than from a position of strength. Like if I
> were to be applying for the same job today um that I applied for when I was on

maternity leave I think I probably would've negotiated a higher salary for myself, for example.

Reflecting on her experience, Jessica views motherhood as a disadvantage which lowers her sense of confidence in negotiating an employment contract. There is no suggestion that Jessica's quality of work, references, or any other objective factor is missing from her abilities as a worker; however, she limits herself by a perceived notion of "weakness" as a result of having a child. Gendered constraints come to the fore of this conversation as Jessica reflects what other women in the study notice as a result of their experiences: a sense of uncertainty, lack of confidence, being disappointing as a worker, perceived disadvantage in workforce negotiations, and vulnerability. The structural constraints of gendered life such as taking pregnancy/parental leave impact the way these millennial mothers view their positions in the workforce. Specifically, what their assets are with respect to engaging as free agents in the capitalist labour market.

Before taking maternity leave, Michelle was very successful in her career, having attained upper management level at a private company. She perception of herself as a worker was reinforced by management telling her she would one day be rewarded with a senior leadership position. This focus on attending to the employer's needs continued while she was on pregnancy/parental leave which led her to participate in work events "as a volunteer" and respond to questions and calls from other workers. The following excerpt demonstrates Michelle's self-awareness as she gradually reconciles the pressures of work and motherhood. When asked to reflect on her first leave and the demotion she received when returning to work, she explains:

> …we want to be helpful, and again because we're vulnerable, 'cus we're not there and we're already feeling like oh my god, am I still useful? Am I still relevant in the company? When somebody asks you something, naively you jump on it… in

> lots of women's cases especially in my own umm, you know, it might have made me feel better in the moment like oh yeah, I'm still relevant, but it didn't help the end result, it made it worse…it made them think that they could get away with it as well, like, you know. This is cool, Michelle's cool with this, like look at Michelle's helping us, she's with it.

Her fear of being "irrelevant" and "un-useful" is closely connected to both the perceived importance of being a productive worker and the anxiety of not being able to do so because of motherhood. Unfortunately, Michelle's choice to work while on leave did not result in the promotion she had hoped. She describes the way management engaged in a "psychological breakdown" in her view, "to assess where my loyalties were. How stable I was" once she returned from her leave. Tactics included management explaining to Michelle that if she was "going to continue to be successful as a leader in this company…to not walk as forcefully" because her "walk is intimidating to people", in addition to being told she "needed to not be as vocal" and had a "humility problem." Perhaps most telling, however, is the way Michelle internalizes the treatment by her employer. When asked why she did not take legal action against her employer, she makes sense of this experience by explaining she was made to feel that it was her own "choice" to have the baby as a "modern day woman". She explains:

> …you put that guilt back on yourself and then you end up resenting yourself because you believe that you actually have no right to complain or no right to even be frustrated by what's going on because you're a modern day you know woman that has choice and you chose this, so, deal with it… And you know, my employer is not to blame because you know, they have a company to run and I chose to leave and they have to keep running that company with or without me.

There is a very specific type of managerial disciplining that happens to Michelle. She is punished for taking leave then later rewarded for accepting her punishment of being demoted and manipulated by the organization by suddenly being offered a leadership position. Michelle demonstrates critical thinking as she candidly reflects on the abuse she endured. Although she disagrees with her treatment, she also 'understands' the employer's standpoint. This perspective,

represented in participants' narratives to varied extents, may also increase the sense of isolation

for these work mothers: while they felt commonly unhappy and stuck, they also appear

ambiguous when it comes to whom to blame.

These sentiments are echoed in Hannah's experience. Having worked with her employers

for most of her career she found herself informally dismissed from her position without the

ability to apply for EI and without the employer promised top-up. Her statement demonstrates

the way she over-extended herself for her employer for years until her pregnancy stood in the

way of her being able to engage in her role as she once had. She describes:

> …many years of like working extra hours, like working over time and not charging
> them, like all of these types of things where I felt like I went above and beyond and
> it was… it was like very surprising and hurtful to have them and umm like just
> completely you know act as if it was my fault for … for having a baby and not
> being able to travel.

Like Michelle, Hannah is made to feel as though it is her fault for having children which justifies

her employer's actions. Moreover, being a productive worker in Hannah's experience was

expressed as self-exploitation, a theme which was raised in Tory's account of working after

leave where she performed unpaid work to secure a future job. Hannah, like Michelle,

demonstrates a sense of injustice about their experience and acknowledges that she is being

blamed for taking leave. Hannah's comments below capture many of the participant's sentiments

with respect to being a working millennial mother. When asked what she learned about the

policies surrounding pregnancy/parental leave through her experience of taking leave, she

explains:

> …it's difficult for women to be able to have a family life and successful career
> honestly… everyone who I speak to feels like quote unquote "bad" about going
> on maternity leave, you know, like there's like this guilt that you're taking time
> off and that you don't want to do that to your employer and people don't want to
> like start new positions if they're going to potentially be pregnant in the near
> future so I guess just, it's such a negative umm atmosphere I guess and negative

perceptions of like it's just people aren't doing their jobs or aren't committed to their careers if they're deciding to start a family.

Hannah's reflection suggests being both a mother and having a career is difficult for many millennial women. This "negative atmosphere" or "negative perception" that some employers have towards women is causing emotional and mental unrest and is influencing reproductive and employment decisions. In the case of Michelle, Hannah, Tory, and Jessica, parental leave becomes a barrier to a (successful) career and, by extension, financial independence and economic stability. What happens then, when these major life changes occur for millennial working women? How do they react to the new reality of not always being able to perform according to the standards they perceive are required by their employers? And what are the personal implications? The next theme explores how participants negotiated these major changes in their lives.

"Your identity for so long is your career… now your identity is new mother":
The Impact of Major Life Changes on Millennial Mothers' Identities

Becoming a mother is a major life change for many women. For some of the women in this study, it signified a transition as described above from a worker to working mother. Millennial women in this study speak about an identity shift which happened when they went on leave; one that was deeply connected to returning to work and insecure employment, a demotion, or leaving the workforce. Outside of the pressures and challenges that arise from being a parent to a young child, all the millennial women in this study noted additional mental and emotional impacts that connected with job insecurity, opportunities for promotion, etc. Notably, women express feeling like their "confidence [as a worker] was shattered," how the experience was "crushing," "worrying," "stressful," and created "anxiety" with some millennial mothers developing post-partum depression/anxiety. Others internalize the pressures of their employer to

return to work earlier or justify their employer violating their right to leave, noting they felt

"bad," "guilty," and that it was "their fault" because they chose to have a baby.

For some participants, going on leave while contractually or unemployed means they are

largely reliant on their spouses. For Tory, feeling financially "dependent" is a very challenging

shift to overcome. She is currently a self-employed freelancer, a position she found herself in

after taking pregnancy/parental leave from a part-time position as a journalist. Although the part-

time position she was filling was still available when she finished her leave, the job had been

filled by someone else and she was not entitled to reinstatement. When asked how being a self-

employed working mother impacts her mental and emotional health, Tory responds:

> …I've always been very financially independent since I was quite young… having
> this partner that already made so much more money than me was already
> intimidating that I wasn't contributing my share to the family. It definitely was
> crushing to see that I only made enough money to pay for daycare last year. It was
> another level of like oh yah I'm really a dependent now….

Although Tory is beginning to establish her sense of identity as a working mother through self-

employment, she feels "crushed" by her job insecurity and lack of earnings. However, working

only a few days a week as a freelance journalist has led to increased financial dependence on her

spouse which is a major change from her relationship pre-motherhood. As someone who loves

her career, returning to work is a way for Tory to reconcile her identity as a working mother.

It is important to highlight the privilege that weaves itself through these narratives. All

the women in this study are white, cisgender, and in heteronormative relationships. In addition to

embodying these privileges, Tory and her partner are mortgage free in their 30s meaning she

concurrently has the financial freedom to pursue her career even though having a child has

resulted in taking on less work. Her circumstances echo Hannah's who is also unemployed at the

time of this study but has the financial security to remain unemployed until she finds work that is

in line with her career goals.

Hannah too finds herself in a position where she is financially dependent upon her partner

while she is out of the workforce. At the time of the study, she is the full-time caregiver of her

child and her husband is the primary earner. Although Hannah acknowledges she is in a

privileged position where she can take the time need to find a job, she explains that it leads to an

unbalanced family dynamic because her partner does not have the "flexibility" to look for

another job that would allow him more time with the family. She describes how in this way, her

financial dependence on her spouse is "not just affecting women negatively you know, it's

affecting everyone negatively," alluding to the way insecure employment reinforces gendered

roles in relationships to the determinant of the family dynamic. For many women, this is a

"difficult" shift from their lives before motherhood.

Michelle and Jessica both have the benefit of hindsight as they recount their stories.

Michelle's identity shift was very closely connected to her identity as a working millennial

women and mother. Her struggle came when her employer demoted her upon returning to work

at the same time as she was attempting to construct a new identity as a mother. She explains the

traumatizing experience of undergoing psychological abuse upon returning to work was deeply

connected to suffering from post-partum depression during her second pregnancy. She describes:

> …You think your identity for so long is your career or what you're doing in your
> career and then when that changes and now your identity is like you know, new
> mother, and then potentially you're not sure where your career fits in, you're at a
> total loss and then that loss controls that spiral, that vulnerability, umm that loss of
> identity… that triggers a lot of the anxiety and depression that most women
> wouldn't categorize as post partum anxiety and depression but that's what it is…

Michelle's comments demonstrate the personal struggle of reconciling multiple major changes in

her life (becoming a mother, being demoted, working in a toxic environment) with her sense of

self. Her comments bring to the fore an important question around whether the shift of identity

from worker to mother is constructed socially, occurs by virtue of the demands of parenthood, or

is a result of the dichotomy present in many of these stories: that to be a mother, these millennial

women seem to have to jeopardize their worker identity. This has immense emotional and

psychological impacts on these women.

In spite of women's desire both to have a career and a family, it becomes increasingly

clear in their reflections post-leave that in order to adapt to this new reality, they would need to

change both their expectations of themselves and what types of jobs they could hold. This was

especially true for Stephanie, a first-time mother in her early 30s who worked primarily well-

paid, time-limited contracts. Stephanie's plan to find less grant-based employment demonstrates

how she alters her expectations of work to accommodate her identity shift as part of her strategy

to reconcile her identities as a millennial worker and a mother. When asked what changes she

felt would make her feel more comfortable as a working mother, she responds:

> "Okay what can I do that would be a bit more stable of a position and not contract,
> not grant funded work" and sort of what are the possibilities and also if, it probably
> involves more training…what would be something I could that's short that we lead
> to a stable career um, that's also something I'm interested in so.

Stephanie's comments are also in response to her desire to expand her family. To do so, she feels

the need to secure more stable work which would involve more training in addition to having a

doctorate. At the time of this interview, Stephanie has finished her leave but still finds herself out

of the workforce. Her reflections on retraining and finding a new job suggest certain sacrifices as

she earlier spoke about an interesting career she would like to explore but cannot maintain the

necessary hours as a mother.

Importantly, however, is Stephanie's partner's role in these decisions. She and her partner

are in all ways equivalent in the working world. They have the same level education and are at

similar places in their careers. However, her husband pursued his career and retraining in spite of

being on parental leave concurrently, something Stephanie did not feel she could do because of

parental obligations. Describing her partner's response to taking parental leave:

> …he essentially now has a six month gap in his CV and he sort of felt, I think he
> feels that pressure a bit more than a woman although a woman would also feel that
> pressure um, but you know, I think that there was also some pressure for him to
> continue working even though like contractually he wasn't allowed to um, because
> he would then have a gap in his CV. Um, which was also sometimes frustrating for
> me because I felt like we were both on leave together but I ended up doing a bit
> more of the childcare work and I didn't think that that was necessarily fair cause
> we were supposed to be sort of equal in that.

Much like Hannah and Tory, Stephanie finds herself taking on the majority of the child care

responsibilities. Stephanie's story, however, highlights the gendered expectations of work and

parenthood for this millennial couple wherein Stephanie makes more career sacrifices than her

partner. In her earlier comments, Stephanie speaks about a different kind of pressure, one to find

a "more stable" job. Although it seems that both she and her partner are concerned about

financial and job security, the freedom to realise these goals through retraining and taking on

more work is reserved for her husband. This signifies a major shift in Stephanie's relationship

and identity as she takes on more childcare responsibilities and reframes some of her career goals

in line with her new identity as a working mother. This gender imbalance with respect to finding

ways out of unstable employment and undergoing an identity shift is present in Jessica's

narrative, although, she responds to this change differently.

Jessica works in the public service sector and is one of the few participants who is

currently employed on a full-time permanent basis. Her story is unique because she offers insight

into the differences between taking leave while on a contract with her first child and electing to

return to work early during her second leave. Her choice to return to work early during her

second leave was facilitated by her status as a full-time, permanent employee. Through her story,

Jessica makes the connection between work, motherhood, and identity as it relates to her

experience of post-partum depression and anxiety. Here she shares her biggest struggle related to

her identity shift which happened during her second leave. She describes:

> …probably my biggest struggle in taking leave was um, figuring out my, refocusing my identify and figuring out who I was and then also learning how to care for myself as well as [my children] all at the same time and then also without neglecting my husband and feeling like I was divided in too many ways which brings me to my greatest success which was um, learning to make myself a priority and to do things that um, that I needed to do so that then I didn't feel so divided so then I could give more of myself to um, my family...

Jessica highlights how she is reconciling her need to honour her shift in identity by returning to

work early with her multiple roles in the public and private spheres. Interestingly, Jessica

connects her need to work to her ability to be a mother. What becomes apparent in the following

comments is her process around re-defining her identity and actively working against adopting a

role or identity that did not resonate with her sense of self. She explains:

> …it was something that I've struggled with a lot um, but I've kind of come to terms with the fact that I, as I said before I feel like I'm a better Mother, a better partner when I am more than those things when I am able to think independent thoughts and be an expert in something other than poop and what's in the refrigerator and um, that has been something really important for me to recognize and to acknowledge and to say "This is a reality of modern life and the whole idea women can't have it all" it's very limiting that idea but then also I feel like it puts emphasis on woman wanting to be uh, a mother first but then also being able to work whereas perhaps it's "Maybe I want to work but also be a Mother" and "Why do I have to choose these two things, I can do both very effectively and both very well". Um, so I think it's confronting those um, those misconceptions or those preconceived notions perhaps.

Jessica is challenging the preconceived notions around motherhood while also presenting a

hierarchy of identities; one where the mother identity is predominant in her view of "modern

life." This dichotomy speaks to the rigidity of a system where millennial women are limited in

their choices, being forced to adopt one primary identity which brings with it mental and

emotional challenges. Jessica herself struggles to resolve this tension in her own life after being

diagnosed with post-partum depression. As will be explained later, part of asserting her identity

after the life change of deciding not to be a stay at home mother and overcoming post-partum

depression is to reshape gendered relationship in her own relationship with her spouse.

What becomes clear through these narratives is the outline of a structure which limits the

possibility of being a millennial mother and a productive worker. As Jessica's story highlights,

participants are subjected to the emotional and psychological distress connected to the pressures

of having to make the choice between being a mother" and being a worker; choices which, if

appropriate supportive policies were in place, may not manifest in the same struggles. The next

section takes a closer examination of some of the ways millennial working mothers are

reconciling their current situations and developing strategies to manage the pressures of

precarious work and motherhood as millennial women.

"Okay, here's my plan": Responses to the Perceived Motherhood Penalty in the Workplace

Within these stories of job loss, demotion, restructuring and motherhood, there is a

complexity that presents itself between how one might expect women to respond and the

strategies they adopt. These factors intersect with privilege and hindsight as we will see in the

stories of Michelle and Jessica who both speak of the differences between their first and second

leaves with respect to the lessons they learned and how they acted upon that knowledge during

their second pregnancies. Alternatively, Tory, Stephanie, and Hannah find themselves in

insecure contracts or unemployed after taking their first pregnancy/parental leave. Finally,

Chantal adopts an interesting strategy that allows us to consider strategies from different

perspectives. The structural instability of precarious work reflects itself in the ways they

negotiate their lives as working mothers and the strategies they adopt.

Resistance: "now I'm like: that's bullshit"

Traditional policy methods of responding to restructuring, demotion based on parental

status, or workplace violence include filing a human rights complaint, drawing on union support

(if available) or suing the employer. The stories captured here, however, demonstrate the

complex ways women navigate workplace dynamics, gender, and motherhood, sometimes

outside of the traditional policy avenues.

As mentioned above, Jessica's return to work was closely connected with working

through her post-partum depression which meant returning to work early. After her second child

was born, she asked to return to work early. Her employer agreed even though there was another

worker covering her position during her leave. Below, Jessica describes how she negotiated her

return to work with her employer and the women back filling her role:

> … we sat down with my manager, with our manager, I guess, and um, we figured
> out what our skills were um, but we were, both of us were able to do the full job
> because both of us have done the full job but did say "If we were divide this what
> are you really good it, what am I very good at, what are your strengths, what are
> long term, what are your career goals?" so that we were able to divide things up in
> a very um, manageable way but then also so that it was playing to both of our
> strengths.

Jessica is firmly asserting her Charter of Freedoms right to return to work and negotiating the

process in a way that supported the other women contracted to her position. This story is an

example of how to view millennial mothers as an asset rather than a deficit in the working world

in addition to highlighting the way this group of women (the manager, Jessica, and the contract

employee) worked together to create a positive outcome. Her current employment context differs

greatly from the contractual work she was engaged in during her first leave. This contrast is

brought to the fore in the following excerpt when she was asked about the difference between her

first and second pregnancy/parental leave:

> …I felt much more, as I said I felt much more confident and much more aware of
> my rights um, the second time around then I would've the first. I feel like the first
> I would've been much more cautious and felt like I was asking for too much
> whereas the second time around it was a "No this is something that is, I'm entitled
> to and there's a good reason that I'm entitled to this and I'm going to take full
> advantage of that to um, again to do what I need to do for me and for my child as
> well who's back at home".

Jessica's confidence in asserting her rights could, in part, be due to the fact that she is currently

employed in a full-time, unionized position with access to employment insurance and employer

top-up and benefits. The hindsight demonstrated in the above quotation effectively illuminates

what Vosko and colleagues (2009) call "the gendered contours of precarious employment." That

is, women are in better positions to assert their rights when they are not precariously employed

and when their next employment contract does not wholly depend on their employer's reference.

The concern of not receiving a good reference from former work colleagues or employer was

voiced by half the women in this study.

    For Stephanie, Michelle, and Hannah, their resistance to unhealthy work environments

was to leave their worksites. Highlighting again the constraints of contract work, Hannah

explains that she chose not to pursue legal action because of the harm it might do to her future

employment prospects:

> …I probably could have accessed in terms of like my employee rights, I… I didn't
> want to only because I think that would jeopardize my relationship with these
> people, as much as I wouldn't like to work with them in the future, I do need in
> terms of like connections and different things like that.

Hannah's choice not to pursue any formal grievance through the Labour Relations Board or

Human Rights Tribunal is grounded in her concern regarding future employment. In this way,

her ability to assert her rights as a mother are constrained by the contractual nature of her work

and dependence upon positive employment connections to continue in her career. Considering

strategies of resistance, it is important to recognize the various factors that influence millennial

mother's decisions. For Hannah, she noted concern about employment relationships but she is also in a position where she can rely on her spouse's income without the pressure to immediately find work or settle for work that is a "step back" in her career. Such privileges are not present in all the participant's narratives.

Although both Hannah and Michelle feel constrained in their ability to take formal grievance or legal recourse Michelle does eventually find a way to push back against her employer's efforts to "psychologically break her down" by eventually leaving the company and retraining. At the time of the interview, Michelle has had another child and secured a full-time job at a company where she is making the same salary as she had at the organization she left. Reflecting upon the lessons she learned from taking leave the first time, she explains:

> …we need to stop thinking about all the things that we need to do for our employer, what they need, like what's going to make things better for them…I know in my case I figured talking about what I needed was a form of arrogance or entitlement, and you know, I really shouldn't think or talk that way. And now I'm like that's bullshit, like, *giggle* So, it's important to prioritize and be clear in your communication about what you need.

Michelle's comments push back against what she perceives as employers' expectations of work and reconceptualizes "vulnerability" and asserting her rights as a positive. However, these comments are still individualized and place the onus on the millennial mother to resist rather than critiquing a flawed system. Michelle does feel she has achieved "justice" for herself and the other employees at her former company by naming its toxic work culture, she and Jessica were the only ones who spoke about such resistance. For participants who have insecure employment relationships or are out of the workforce they feel limited in their ability to pursue justice. In some small ways, however, stories of creating community, gathering support, and challenging normative gender expectations do present themselves.

*"We would just like talk openly and honestly about how we were feeling": Gathering Support,
Creating Community, and Challenging Gendered Expectations of Labour*

Almost all the women in the study identified childcare as a major barrier to returning to

work. All the participants discuss long waitlists or challenges to finding affordable, high quality

care. To overcome this limitation, four of the participants explain having family support as a way

to fill the childcare gap. As Stephanie explains:

> …my parents are retired um, they live about an hour away but, you know, if we
> needed them to come they could come and look after my son so it was nice to have
> that to fall back on. For example, if I did get a job earlier than I expected they could
> come and look after my son for a few weeks until we found daycare.

For Stephanie, family members are able to fill gaps in current child care policies but also in the

tenuous time between finding work and needing childcare. There is a certain level of privilege

that comes with being able to draw on your social capital to fill policy gaps, a privilege not

extended to all participants. Jessica and Chantal lived far away from their family which leads

them other ways of managing without sufficient childcare options. For Jessica, this meant her

husband took the remainder of the parental leave. She explains going back to work was an

important part of overcoming her post-partum depression, as a result of not having enough

external support, she needed to challenge the gendered expectations of childcare in her own

relationship by having her spouse take parental leave:

> …he said that he didn't want to and I said "Well I don't want to either and you
> know what I've done 18 months of it between the two kids so you can suck it up a
> do a few months."

Although childcare was a barrier to returning to work, Jessica's assertion of her needs leaves

little room for interpretation: child care needs must be met and they cannot always be met by one

spouse. Gendered norms are still entrenched as demonstrated by the "back and forth" Jessica

engaged in with her husband. This interpersonal negotiation was important not only for Jessica's

mental health, but for her children to feel they have employment options not based on gendered

norms. From her analysis as a feminist, she believes "we socially talk a good game about

feminism but I feel like it's very important to model what that actually looks like for our

daughter." In this way, Jessica is reframing narratives around women and work for her children,

demonstrating men need to take on more childcare and household responsibilities by showing

"Daddies can do laundry just as well as Mommies can."

Support for Michelle came in the form of developing community. During her second

leave, Michelle was diagnosed with post-partum anxiety. In response, she joined a group which

supported women with similar experiences. Once she uncovered that her post-partum anxiety

was connected to the psychological abuse she endured as a result of taking leave, she began

surrounding herself with other women struggling with the same issues. She believes: "There's a

huge I think population of career driven women that really don't jive with … what's out there

with the mom groups and the mom blogs. It just doesn't cut it…" Michelle created her own

group where mothers could speak "openly and honestly about how we were feeling, what was

going on with you know the changes with our partners with our sex lives, with like our bodies,

like you know, what's going on with our careers like, everything" which transformed into a

space of sharing and safety with more mothers where she "set the tone for curating like that it

was okay to talk about these things." She explains this community connection:

> ...allowed me to think in a more positive I think umm healthier way over this sort
> of like real ummm this real issue I had between me as career driven and me as a
> dedicated mother and somebody who really cherished and loved you know, wanted
> to be that like… that career of being like, of being very present for my family and
> those two priorities coming to terms with that like, they didn't have to clash, they
> could compliment one another but I had to find a way for myself of understanding
> how they could compliment one another in a healthy way.

Michelle's journey to a "healthy way" of existing as a working millennial mother was a long

process which involved reconciling her new identity and past workplace trauma. Doing so

required a community of support which reflects feminist understandings of solidarity and

consciousness raising. Michelle's insights challenge the status quo with respect to how

millennial mothers should respond to parenthood. However, it doe not extend to challenging the

structural status quo around childcare barriers or insecure work.

Finding a community of support was also a moment of realization about the barriers

millennial women face in the workplace for Chantal. By "getting together with a bunch of

women" to talk about their "situations" her preconceived notions about pregnancy/parental leave

were challenged. She explains: "I always sort of thought like "oh, we live in Canada, you can

always just sort of take a year off" but like… nope! Not the case." The same sentiment was

shared by all the women in this study, who had not expected to encounter the motherhood

penalty. In line with feminist theory, these stories showcase the way women developing

community are able begin connecting the personal with the political, opening up spaces of

resistance to gendered inequalities.

In summary, this chapter has explored the varied and complex experience of six

millennial mothers who find themselves in a labour market that views motherhood as a

vulnerability in the workplace. Their stories reveal how being a productive worker does not

always result in employment security, moreover, for many women, it felt antithetical to being a

parent. These working women were made to feel guilt or shame by their employer when they

decided to become parents, an experience that was heightened when their employment was

insecure. Being demoted, not hired back, and restructured after becoming mothers were major

changes in the lives of these participants. Many women struggle to reconcile their new identities

after major life changes which has notable emotional and mental impacts on the participants'

confident and sense self. In response, these millennial mothers are finding ways to work within

the current system and develop solidarity amongst women with similar experiences. The

following chapter will draw from the literature to discuss these themes, closely considering how

power and structural inequalities are operating throughout these narratives.

CHPATER 5   DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the study to consider the findings by making connections with the broader literature. Through a Foucauldian lens, I analyze the comments made about motherhood and pregnancy/parental leave as a vulnerability or position of weakness in the workforce, specifically as these ideas relate to biopower and governmentality. Following this analysis is a consideration of how the Canadian social policy context is implicated in processes of re-domestication using a critical theory approach. I then take up the stories of power, resistance, and change and connect them to postmodern conceptualizations of precarity. And finally, I employ a feminist analysis to consider the burgeoning consciousness-raising efforts of some participants.

Significantly, my initial assertion that millennial women are situated uniquely within the Precariat and the labour economy broadly was reinforced through this research. Building on Standing (2011), the Canadian Labour Congress (2016), Kershaw (2017) and Martin (2017), the narratives shared through this study painted a picture of millennial working mothers disadvantaged by the current political and economic system. In spite of "playing the game" (Martin, 2017) by following the traditional path of attaining a post-secondary education, entering into a long-term relationship, pursuing a career, many women were still penalized for taking parental/pregnancy leave. Further, participants' experience of moving from being a worker to being a mother strikes at the core what type of labour is valued in Canadian society. What is understood as predominantly women's work (e.g., child and elder care within the family) is frequently invisible within the capitalist economy. Hatton (2017) provides a categorization of invisible work within the context of through sociocultural, sociolegal, and sociospatial

mechanisms. Through these pathways, the labour women engage in is made invisible and is frequently not compensated or compensated illegally. In spite of this erasure, the social reproduction work of women is providing necessary services and frequently supports the broader economy by its very presence (Luxton, 2006). As such, study participants can be seen grappling with the shift from being valued in the economy to being unvalued as their identity changes from worker to mother.

Precarious work, as experienced by these six millennial working mothers uniquely intersects with gender, creating a tension between being a good or productive worker and motherhood. Through these narratives, we see the productive worker is closely connected to a neoliberal worker. As explained by Moisander and colleagues (2018) power is exercised through managerial governmentality wherein precarious workers are "mobilized and managed as free economic subjects of neoliberalism at a distance, and how their whole life and lifestyle is enrolled as a productive force by managing the 'environment' in which they live and work" (p. 381). Within the economic system of financialization and the policy context of neoliberalism, the millennial working mothers in this study demonstrate an acute understanding of their roles as workers. Indeed, the very implication of motherhood as a position of weakness, as an inconvenience to their employer, or as a state of labour force vulnerability demonstrates an intimate recognition of how workers in this context "enterprise" or commodify the self as suggested by Moisander and colleagues (2018).

Due to this context, many women in this study felt the acute impacts of the motherhood penalty including negative financial repercussions as suggested by England and colleagues (2016), in addition to fearing the "precariousness" trap which interferes with their goals to attain full-time, stable employment (Modena & Sabatini, 2012). Moreover, Stephanie and Tory

discussed postponing or reconsidering having children due to the precarious nature of their work.

The motherhood penalty was further experienced as a form of precarity which constructs "people

out to be deficient neoliberal citizens/subjects incapable of effectively trading their human

capital to succeed in an increasingly market-centered society" (Schram, 2013, p. 3). Packaging of

the self as a labourer is an important part of engaging as in the labour force (Moisander et al.,

2018). For millennial women in this study, their pregnancy/parental leave is viewed as a

disadvantage to this commodification process. This notion is reflected in Foucault's theory of

biopolitics wherein he "illuminates an 'art of governing' that involves sets of practices and

calculated strategies that are both plural and immanent in the state" (McKee, 2009, p. 466).

Strategies of biopolitics are used in such a way in this context as to set in contrast what is

desirable and undesirable as a worker in an effort to encourage workers to adhere to pre-

determined norms that extend outside of what a parent may be able to provide. In this study,

employers and managers make known what type of worker is considered productive or desirable

through rewards and punishments such as demotions, limited term contracts where no loyalty or

responsibility to the mother is required by law, and what Worth (2016a) calls the "fear of

returning to past precarity" (p. 608). Additionally, sometimes unrealistic work expectations are

placed on the participants such in Hannah's situation. As was highlighted earlier, the pressure to

be a worker that always goes above and beyond for their employer can be at odds with what is

realistic for parents. Hannah and Michelle gave much of their personal time to ensuring the

organization succeeded and consequently found themselves demoted or out of work after taking

pregnancy/parental leave.

As expressed by Michelle, the fear of "knowing that you're not going to have control

over everything as much as you planned" is closely connected to vulnerability in the workforce.

The notion of "being vulnerable" in the workplace as Michelle describes, or in a position of weakness as highlighted by Jessica is closely connected to precarious work as workers feel the immense pressure to meet or exceed their employers' expectations for fear of being let go from a position. These findings reflect the sense of "economic precarity and feeling precarious" as described by Worth (2016a) and Butler who articulate the concept of precarity as lived and embodied experience (Schram, 2013), which itself is further evidence of the operation of power through biopolitics and governmentality.

Within these stories of precarity, there are notable traces of self-disciplining at play as demonstrated in comments such as Jessica's where, for a time when she was precariously employed, she internalized the notion of a good work that is different from a working mother, a challenge also faced by Michelle and Hannah. Policies meant to protect women from discrimination in the workforce, enshrining parents' rights in law turned out not to be accessed by five out of six participants. Although many women articulated a knowledge of, and sometimes frustration with their circumstances, many did not connect their lived experiences with broader structural issue of economic disparity. What was most common, was not knowing who to blame (or being upset with their employ/manager), and so continuing to do what they could to acquire the elusive full-time permanent job; perhaps an indication as to the pervasiveness of biopolitics.

The narratives of working millennial mothers in this study reflect similar findings in the literature regarding the changes which occur when women enter parenthood. Several of the women in the study cite being out of the workforce and relying on their spouses' income. What these participants are experiencing could be labelled re-domestication where women, because they earn less than their partners, make the decision to take on the majority of social reproductive

work (Meares, 2010). The concept of re-domestication comes from immigration and settlement

literature to explain the process of women "withdraw[ing] from the labour force post-migration

to focus on their homes and children" as a result of an "absence of 'suitable'" childcare options

(Meares, 2010, p. 474). Although some participants articulated a desire to return to work, a

process which is integral to their personal identities, the choice was made for the women to be

the primary care giver so their partners could provide economic stability for the family. As was

described, this change to primary care giver can be very challenging mentally and emotionally

for women, with two participants citing these serious work-life disruptions as directly connected

to their experiences of post-partum depression and anxiety.

　　　Re-domestication can also be seen in the work of Blair-Loy (2003) who explores the

stories of career-focus women at the executive level as they navigate the shift to parenthood. The

gendered division of care-giving, which a number of participants discuss, has been considered

from multiple angles in the literature. However, the findings of this study reinforce arguments

made by Vosko & Campbell (2009) who cite Canadian social policies (specifically lack of

affordable childcare) as a significant structural barrier impeding to women in precarious work.

Moreover, a change from being a career-focused millennial woman to a full-time parent connects

to Vosko and Campbell's (2009) insights on how precarious work, gender, and lack of affordable

child care intersect causing some women to leave the workforce because the costs of having a

young child outweigh the income they would earn working, such as in Tory's story. Or, for

Hannah, who has chosen to remain out of the workforce because she feels as though the only

option is to take another job that she would be overqualified for just to return to work. Feeling

overqualified for employment opportunities is cited in as a major barrier for millennials in a

recent report conducted by the International Labour Organization (2017).

Building on Judith Butler's notion of precarity as an embodied experience or state of being (Schram, 2013), the stories of women navigating their identities in a precarious labour economy speak to the author's conceptualization of "'[p]recarity' as unifying, as opposed to depoliticizing" (p. 1). According to Schram (2014), Butler's work on precarity emerges out of Foucault's notion of neoliberal governmentality. An important similarity between these two postmodern authors is their conceptualization of power and resistance. Within the participants' narratives, there exists tales of both power and oppression, resistance and governing. In these stories, some women articulate how they actively changed their circumstances through negotiations of power; such as Jessica, who was able to change the nature of her work in enable her to return early and continue in a way that facilitated her emotional, mental, and economic stability. Hannah, Stephanie and Michelle chose to leave their oppressive work sites in spite of the financial challenges that ensued. For Foucault, "power is regarded as less an entity that can be overthrown, destroyed or abandoned, and more a political strategy, with those who 'resist' exercising some power as well as those who seek to govern them" (McKee, 2009, p. 471). In this way, each millennial mother's story reveals its own nuanced experience of power, privilege, oppression, and governance as a response to precarious lives.

Fundamental to a conversation about power and resistance are the stories of solidarity and community building for the participants. Consciousness-raising has been a core component aspect of feminism since its inception (Dominelli, 2002). Consciousness-raising activities can be seen in the efforts of Michelle to bring together women who have experienced precarious employment and its negative outcomes on their health. Chantal engaged in collective discussions about the limitations of EI with a group of women and, as a result, found her views on the topic shifted to a more structural understanding of millennial mothers' individual challenges. Feminist

theorists may view these conversations as the seeds of resistance that could act to shift ideas regarding the barriers millennial women experience in the workplace and eventually lead to advocacy and policy change. However, such activism was not present in the majority of these interviews.

Considering the context of neoliberal, financialization, and precarious work, "[d]eveloping collective approaches to problem-solving can be difficult in individualising environments" (Dominelli, 2002, p. 54). As such, there was only one story where the participant actively campaigned to change workplace policies and helped to teach women about their rights in the workplace. Although stories of individual acts of resistance emerged, collective action was not a common theme. Here, I take guidance from Worth's (2016b) research on millennial women "challenging age and gender stereotypes in the workplace" (p. 1310). The author similarly highlights women's privilege as a factor in their ability to engage in resistance, citing only participants with significant privilege felt confident engaging in resistance. It appears the precarious employment is a highly disciplining factor that pushes resistance either underground or outside of the viable options. Or, perhaps, privilege plays the most significant role of all. The question then becomes, at what point will millennial working mothers and their allies demand better?

In the final chapter followed, I present some concluding comments, as well as implications for social work practice are discussed and policy recommendations brought forward. The limitations and opportunities for future research are also considered.

CHAPTER 6   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has sharpened the shape of gendered precarity. Moreover, it has

contributed to the literature on how precarious work is experienced by millennial mothers within

the neoliberal labour market. Key to this analysis is the broadening of the concept of precarity

which extends beyond the workplace and impacts reproductive choices. Gendered precarity

comes into focus for millennial women when they take pregnancy/parental leave. Motherhood,

for this generation is commonly perceived by participants as antithetical to being a strong

neoliberal worker, or a circumstance in which the mother must compromise her earnings or take

on more work in the domestic sphere than her partner. To pursue gender equality, an important

aspect is to recognize women's unique needs and barriers in the workplace.

This study asked the question: how, within an increasingly deregulated working

environment with non-standard employment relationships, maternity/parental leave provisions

affect millennial women's fundamental right to leave. Despite the parental/pregnancy leave

policies in Canada appearing "progressive" they do not always protect women's reproductive

rights. This is due to a number of factors which were revealed through the participants'

narratives. Significantly, being a good or productive worker in the current financialized,

neoliberal labour economy requires women to be genderless. The worker identity is paramount to

surviving in precarious work conditions. As such, having children and taking time away from the

work force can be read at being unproductive. This was demonstrated through participants

expressing guilt for having taken pregnancy/parental leave, as though it was their fault they

found themselves out of the labour market because they could not perform their work the way

their employer desired.

Canada's pregnancy/parental leave policy is not bad, in this way, but rather is insensitive to the realities of a labour economy in which millennial women are disadvantaged through their overrepresentation in precarious employment. As revealed in this study, employers are using loopholes or blatantly violating the ESA and millennial women who are precariously employed feel they have little to no recourse because they are bound to maintain good working relationships with employers in order to secure their next contract. By virtue of this paradox, millennial mothers in this study cite experiencing significance mental and emotional distress. To respond to these gaps, pregnancy/parental leave policies must attend to the unique barriers millennial women encounter in the workplace.

Emotional and mental distress is also closely connected to participants' identity shift from workers to mothers. My findings reveal millennial women's deep "sense of precarity"; understood by Judith Butler which goes beyond the workforce, making women responsible for being restructured, demoted, or let go because they chose to have children. Using the lens of feminist political economists, it becomes clear that reproductive work is not valued in the current context of work. As such, it is incumbent upon policy makers to consider this cultural barrier and work to ensure millennial women and families are afforded the necessary supports to engage in reproductive labour without enduring significant financial, material, or emotional penalties.

This thesis goes beyond studying gender alone and considers age as a factor contributing to the participants' unique experiences. As explained by Risman (2018), millennial women are coming of age in a different society than their mothers. Women are more highly educated and are expected to earn a living and contribute to the household income. However, as was described by the participants in this study, women are still the primary caregivers, taking on the majority of the child care responsibilities and are far likelier to temporarily compromise their careers once

they become mothers. This traditional gendered division of labour is reinforced as many women

became financially dependent upon their spouses'. Although cultural norms have progressed for

millennials with more women attaining education and entering the workforce, traditional gender

norms still exist in the division of labour with respect to reproductive work such as parenting.

Finally, through this research, I hoped to uncover collective action or resistance being

taken up in this context. Participants' narratives revealed various responses to the perceived

motherhood penalty in the workplace. Some women mobilized their privilege to resist their work

situations. Others created or relied on community connections to support them through this

challenging time. This study adds validity to the anecdotal evidence regarding the topics of

women being restructured out of their workplaces (Balikissoon, n.d.) and offers context to why

more millennial women do not use traditional avenues such as lawyers or human rights tribunals

to seek justice.

The broader question of how to address interpersonal and structural discrimination based

on age, gender, and race in the workplace remains at the foundation of this study. Austerity is

intimately connected to identity-based discrimination (Carasathis, 2015); therefore, bringing

about an end to social spending cutbacks and providing more full-time permanent jobs would

help to quell the rise of sexism in the workplace. This process is integral to creating the financial,

physical, and emotional security necessary for millennial women to exercise their reproductive

rights. At the personal level, millennials' perceptions of gender and gendered norms are different

from previous generations. Some millennial "innovators" are reconstructing masculine and

feminine binaries in a way that allows fluidity between societal roles and an "undoing" of gender

(Risman, 2018). Perhaps hope can be found in the millennial generation's deconstruction of

previously rigid roles with respect to social reproduction as was seen in Jessica's story.

To address the inequity caused by precarious work, gender and the motherhood penalty, I
will recommended necessary policies changes that allow millennial women to make reproductive
choices without the influence of economic precarity and vulnerability later in this chapter. This
thesis has framed the current context of work within the post-Fordist era, highlighting the way
financialization and a just-in-time labour market have led to precarious employment. Those
involved in this type of work, labelled by Standing (2011) as the Precariat are suffering under the
pressures of late capitalism. Millennial women within the Precariat in particular exist at the
intersection of age, gender, and insecurity. These realities impact choices around family planning
and parenthood. Such decisions are equally influenced by Canada's social policies which are
inherently biased against women. As such, millennial women face decisions around child bearing
uniquely within the context of precarious work.

As social workers, understanding the pertinent connection between work, identity, and
mental health can shed new light on the issues facing services users. Moreover, this structural
understanding of the implications of precarity should be a call to advocacy and resistance against
the prevailing discourse that would situation the problem within the service user rather than at
the structural level. Imperatively, the nation state plays a key role in implementing policies that
support equitable citizenship participation for all within its borders.

Implications for Social Work Practice

In a practice context, it is important for social workers to be mindful of the adverse
emotional and psychological impacts being precariously employed can have for millennial
mothers. As was revealed through the participants' stories, this experience can cause levels of
stress that may culminate in post-partum depression or anxiety as it did for two women in this

study. Frontline social work practitioners must be attuned to the added harm precarious

employment can inflict upon millennial mother's sense of identity and make every effort to

engage in consciousness raising efforts by sharing stories of resistance and resilience.

The process of discussing the challenges they encountered while taking

pregnancy/parental leave was noted by some as helpful. Five of six participants were interested

in attending a focus group which speaks to a desire to feel connected to others who have

undergone similar experience. One participant was keen to know if other millennial mothers had

the same difficulties with contract work as herself, while another explained the process of

recounting their story was "therapeutic" as it validated her trauma. By sharing these stories, I

hope other millennial mothers in similar situations will feel as though they are not alone, and,

importantly, that it is not their fault that they are precariously employed but rather a financial and

economic system. As such, it can be changed through collective action and policy improvements.

As work becomes more precarious, it will be incumbent upon unions to adapt to the

changing nature of work. Participants who had access to a union through their workplace were

mixed in their reviews regarding the level of support offered. For some, the unions offered

guidance and support, while others were left to fend for themselves. Unions play a vital role in

protecting workers against the most egregious acts of capitalism exploitation. Importantly, it was

the Canadian Union of Postal Workers who took to the picket line to strike for paid maternity

leave as part of their collective agreements, setting the standard for unions nationally (Canadian

Union of Postal Workers, 2001). As part of the labour movement, social workers must do better

at organizing precarious workers based on their shared experience of precarity and pushing for

legislative changes in line with social movement demands like decent work and stronger

pregnancy/parental leave protections.

As an Executive member of my local who represents over 3,000 precariously employed academic workers, this issue is at the fore of my actions, specifically around organizing. Having an "insider" perspective on this issue, I can say that burnout in the labour movement is a very real problem, and the constant turnover associated with precarious work makes mobilizing even more challenging. That does not mean that as social workers and/or unionists, we should not put our efforts into getting better protections for women and families a top priority of our work; both at the bargaining table and in our communities.

Moreover, this study has demonstrated the need for structural changes. At the macro level, we can begin to challenge biopower through changing discourse, language, and eventually perceptions around precarious work and motherhood for millennial women. More radically, a shift is needed that takes us away from austere capitalism and towards an ethic of care that honours productive and reproductive work equally. Social workers can play a role in this process through advocacy at the policy level.

Policy Recommendations

The women in this study articulated several policy recommendations that would help to alleviate some of the pressures of being a precarious millennial working mother. The following recommendations apply to the ESA and the federal EI plan.

1. Require companies to back fill the position of the person on leave rather than delegate aspects of their work to different staff in a way that eliminates the role entirely. This provision would help ensure stability when taking leave because parents would be ensured employment upon return under the ESA. At present, the ESA secures parent's right to reinstatement, explaining "an employee who takes a pregnancy or parental leave is entitled to: the same job the

employee had before the leave began; or a comparable job, if the employee's old job no longer

exists" (Government of Ontario, 2017). However, the ESA also contains vague language which

offers employers significant authority in terminating or "restructuring" new parents out of their

jobs. The clause reads: "if an employer has dismissed an employee for legitimate reasons that are

totally unrelated to the fact that the employee took a leave, the employer does not have to

reinstate the employee" (Government of Ontario, 2017, Section 3). What is uncovered is an

apparent loophole which allows employers to use this policy in a way that does not support

parents' right to leave. This is the avenue through which precarious employment becomes at

odds with parents' right to leave. In light of this research, I recommend the second clause be

eliminated to adhere to women's human rights protection against discrimination based on

pregnancy. In the same way when a position continues to exist after the person has taken their

leave they should be entitled to return to the job. This is based on Tory's experience of taking

maternity leave when she was filling a long-term leave of absence when she took her leave.

When her leave was over, she was not entitled to her same position as it was being filed by

someone else. The recommendation is also informed by Michelle's story of "delegating herself

out of a job" and being demoted upon her return even though it was called "restructuring." Even

in situations where women are hired under contract, they should still be given the same

entitlements as permanent workers.

  2. Stronger enforcement of the Employment Standards and Labour Relations Acts. This

research echoes the recommendation put forward by the commissioners of the *Changing

Workplaces Review* which called for stronger enforcement of current ESA and LRA regulations.

Mitchell and Murray (2017) argue workers have a general lack of knowledge of their employee

rights which is exploited by an unequal power imbalance with employers which functions as a

detriment to upholding labour standards. As such, "robust enforcement strategies and penalties

for non-compliance…will give workers confidence that society takes their rights seriously and

lets employers know there will be serious consequences if they fail to comply" (Mitchell &

Murray, 2017, p. 10). This recommendation is founded on Hannah's suggestion that her negative

experience with taking pregnancy/parental leave would have been mitigated if her employers

knew there would be consequences for their actions. Moreover, many participants responded that

they had little knowledge of the policies regulating their leave prior to encountering barriers to

accessing their rights.

3. Create more, high-quality, affordable childcare spaces. Participants in this study

articulated the complex financial and emotional frustration that arises from inadequate

childcare offerings in their regions. This paper echoes the recommendation put forward by Ng

and colleagues (2016) who explain: "The Federal and provincial government need to collaborate

and develop a publicly-funded, affordable and accessible childcare system. Community based

childcare options should accommodate the needs of working parents who are increasingly

working irregular shifts" (p. 34). Additionally, two participants shared their challenges with

accessing infant care spaces. As such, the provincial and federal governments should

"[s]trengthen the support for infant care to address the gap in affordable care available to

working parents returning to work after parental leave for the birth or adoption of a new child"

(Ng et al., 2016, p. 35). Possible models include the Denmark model which offers "fully

integrated settings that cater for children from birth to primary school age" (Bertram & Pascale,

2016, p. 3). Russia's 24-hour model is another framework (Bertram & Pascale, 2016) which

would accommodate parents whose work is both non-standard and outside of the traditional 9 – 5

schedule. Providing these options to millennial women would move towards an ethic of care

which considers employment through a more gender equitable lens, thereby creating options to

facilitate reproductive decisions based on personal choice rather than economic insecurity.

     4. Implement a federally funded universal basic income. This recommendation arose in a

conversation with Chantal who voiced concern regarding the limited funding available for stay-

at-home mothers. All participants highlighted financial constraints as a major factor and stressor

in their decision to take maternity leave. Feminist economists argue for the importance of a

guaranteed annual income (GAI), otherwise known as a universal basic income ([UBI]; Schulz,

2017; Young, 2016). UBI is "a payment to eligible couples or individuals that ensures a

minimum income level, regardless of employment status" (Ontario Government, 2018, para. 6).

Proponents highlight the potential for women's emancipation from economic dependency from

male family members and partners (Schulz, 2017). This system also remunerates women for

their reproductive work which is so often made invisible in the post-Fordist economy (Schulz,

2017). Many of the issues regarding eligibility for EI and other social services based on labour

market participation rates would be resolved by an income that women could rely on regardless

of their labour market attachment.

     Although the positive potential for women within a UBI system are numerous, Young

(2016) cautions against considering this approach outside of the broader lens of patriarchal

systems such as the male breadwinner model. Said differently, "a GAI does nothing to disrupt

the traditional gendered division of labour and the structural inequality it instantiates for women

both in and out of the labour force" (Young, 2016, p. 37). As highlighted earlier, millennial

women are still disproportionately impacted by employment insecurity, precarious work, and

unequal access to the labour market based on sexism. Although a GAI may alleviate some of the

precarity inherent in millennial women's lives, implementing a basic income without committing

to other universal policies such as equal access to employment and childcare could have the

damaging effect of restricting women's labour to the private sphere. This is especially true given

the market-focus towards service provision inherent in the post-Fordist economy. Women may

still feel pressured to make the choice of putting their GAI towards purchasing child care

services or staying home. As such, a responsive GAI plan must account for women's

"complicated relationship to work" (Young, 2016, p. 37).

Limitations

A significant limitation of this study is the very small sample size and similar social

locations of the participants. Despite their differential experiences with taking leave, all the

women who responded to the recruitment material are white, cisgender, women in heterosexual

relationships with post-secondary education. Their stories reveal both privilege and oppression

within the context of a white-dominated, settler society where the subjectivities of these

participants are largely accepted as normative. This is to say, that in spite of social standing and

financial resources attributed to these participants, their experiences of work and motherhood are

still negatively impacted by the structural inequalities of gender and capitalist labour. The

identities of the participant group does, however, reinforce Standing's (2011) argument that

precarious work has infiltrated most layers of socio-economic strata. It is no longer just working-

class communities who suffer from insecurity and tenuous employment relations, rather, this

phenomenon has crept into middle-class work and professional designations. As this study only

takes up the stories of one sub-group of women, it would be prudent to expand the scope to

include more narratives from other women sub-groups, such as racialized women, immigrant

women, Indigenous women and two-spirit people, queer relationships, mothers with disAbilities

or whose children are disAbled, and poor women, amongst others.

One of the possibilities for the reason recruitment material did not attract racialized

women, trans folks, or people in queer relationships could be because of my name. I have a very

white and masculine name, perhaps some people would not feel comfortable disclosing their

experiences to me as women if they thought I was a man. Additionally, my profession and

relationship to the School of Social Work may have played a role. Pon, Gosine, and Phillips

(2011) extol the violent, colonial role social work as a profession has played in the oppression of

Indigenous Peoples, Black and racialized communities. Since my recruitment material did not

highlight that my analysis would take an anti-colonial, critical race lens, or class-based lens

perhaps some participants were weary of engaging in a discussion where they could be perceived

as "neglectful" or "unfit" for having to balance a number of part-time jobs by virtue of their

precarious employment status. Finally, precariously employed people have limited time

available; the curse of precarious work is the way it encompasses so much of your time and

thoughts, leaving little opportunity to engage in a research study.

Finally, this research fell prey to time constraints which resulted in part of my feminist

methodology being set aside for another project. In line with feminist theory, I intended to

organize a focus group as a consciousnesses and community building process (Wilkinson, 2011).

Unfortunately, the focus group did not occur. I believe there would have been an added layer of

richness to the findings of this research had a focus group occurred as five of the six participants

were interested in participating. It would also have provided a non-hierarchical approach to

research which is not as easily attained in one-to-one interviews (Wilkinson, 2011). Future

research would be enhanced by taking up this approach.

Possibilities for Future Research

As this research was only exploratory, future studies would benefit from a larger sample size that included more people from a range of subjectivities. Specifically, studies could explore how colonization, slavery, and racism are implicated in Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's experiences of precarious work and parenting as millennials. Additionally, actively recruiting participants who identify as queer, gender non-conforming, and transgender would enhance understandings of how heteropatriarchy and precarity as lived, embodied experiences as they relate to precarious work. Finally, Canada has a long history of being implicated in Eugenic practices, which some argue continue today (Martino & Perreault-Laird, under review); how does precarious work and reproductive freedom intersect with disability and parenting?

There is a board literature on social work and mental health, it would be interesting to consider how millennial mothers are uniquely experiencing mental health struggles associated with precarious work as a cite of further research. A common trend in mental health literature is to adopt an evidence-based approach which individualizes mental health as a personal problem (Plath, 2016). Critical scholars who seek to politicize mental health might benefit from the findings that connect post-partum depression and anxiety to precarious work. In line with this critical framework, a future study could be dedicated solely to the exploration of millennial working women's acts of resistance and community building.

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Appendix A

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Application Status: New ☑ Addendum ☐ Project Number: 2018 032

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

Gendered Precarity: Resiliency and resistance of millennial working mothers

Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
R. Zhou	Social Work	x23787	zhoura@mcmaster.ca

Co-Investigators/ Students	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
J. Perreault-Laird	Social Work	647-703-1791	perreauj@mcmaster.ca

The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:

☐ The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification.

☑ The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification.

☐ The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:

COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.

Reporting Frequency:	Annual: Mar-20-2019		Other:

Date: Mar-20-2018   Vice Chair, Dr. S. Watt

Appendix B

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Study about Precarious Work and Millennial Mothers.

Student Investigator:	**Academic Supervisor**
Jordan Perreault-Laird	Dr Rachel Zhou
School of Social Work	School of Social Work
McMaster University	McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada	Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(647) 703 - 1791	**(905) 525 – 9140 x 23787**
E-mail: perreauj@mcmaster.ca	E-mail: zhoura@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study
WHAT AM I TRYING TO DISCOVER?
As part of my graduate thesis in Social Work, I want to learn about the ways uncertainty or insecurity in the workforce and workplaces influence millennial women's decisions about their work and family. I hope that what I learn as a result of this study will help me to better understand how pregnancy/parental leave affect parents' decisions regarding work and family. This is a line of research that I hope to continue in the future and might use your data for this project as well as for future related studies.

Procedures involved in the Research
WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do participate in an audio-recorded interview of approximately 60-90 minutes at McMaster University or the YWCA Hamilton. The interview could also be done by phone or Skype if that is your preference. I will be asking questions like:

- Can you tell me about your experience of taking pregnancy/parental leave?
- How did you make this decision?
- How much did you know about the policies back then and now?

I will also ask you for some demographic/background information like your age, martial status, number of children, race, and gender.

Potential Risks
ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO DOING THIS STUDY?
There is **minimal psychological risk** in the sense that you may feel emotionally drained recalling and recounting past experiences. The nature of the interview questions does focus on a time in your life that could uncover some negative feelings. Please be reminded that you can

take a break, skip a question or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to you.

There is also **minimal social risk** as you might be nervous of this process if they feel as if participation in this research my result in loss of employment connections or jeopardize your current employment relationship. Again, **you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable**. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Potential Benefits
ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO DOING THIS STUDY?
Through this research, I hope to learn more about the ways uncertainty or insecurity in the workforce and workplaces influence millennial women's decisions regarding work and family. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand how pregnancy/parental leave affect parents' decisions regarding work and family. I cannot guarantee that you will receive personal benefit from participation in this study. However, you may feel relieved to have shared this experience and may find the resource list (below) useful.

Compensation
As a token of appreciation for participating in the study, you will be given a $10 Tim Hortons gift card. If you decide to stop participating at any time you can leave and you can still keep the gift card.

Confidentiality
WHO WILL KNOW WHAT I SAID OR DID IN THE STUDY?
You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name, instead, pseudonyms will be used and identifying information will be removed in the transcription of interviews and reporting of findings. For example, the names of the organization you work for, or city you live in will not be identified in the transcripts or in reporting the findings. No one but me will know you were in the study unless you choose to tell them. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell, so please keep this in mind when deciding what information to share with me.

The information you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet where only myself and my academic supervisor will have access to it. Information will also be kept on a computer will be protected by a password; and the word documents will also be password – protected.
Once the study is complete, an archive of the data, without identifying information, will be maintained for 5 years and then destroyed.

Participation and Withdrawal:
WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND ABOUT BEING IN THE STUDY?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. For whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study or up until approximately

*June 1*st*, 2018*, when I expect to be submitting my thesis, you have the right to withdraw by informing either my supervisor or myself. If you choose to stop participating, your data will not be included in the study and will be destroyed. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with McMaster University, the investigators, Jordan Perreault-Laird and Dr Rachel Zhou or the YWCA Hamilton.

Information about the Study Results:
HOW DO I FIND OUT WHAT WAS LEARNED IN THIS STUDY?
I expect to have this study completed by approximately September, 2018. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study: If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

> Jordan Perreault-Laird
> perreauj@mcmaster.ca
> (647) 703 - 1791

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

> McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
> Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
> C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
> E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jordan Perreault-Laird under the supervision of Dr Zhou of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until June 1st, 2018.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio [video] recorded.

[ ] Yes
[ ] No
2. [ ] Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.
Please send them to me at this email address _____
Or to this mailing address: _____

            _____

            _____

[ ] No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I agree to be contacted about participation in a focus group, and understand that I can always decline the request.
[ ] Yes, please contact me at this email address: _____
[ ] No

Resource List

For information regarding your rights as a worker, please contact the services below.

Workers' Action Centre: http://yourlegalrights.on.ca/organization/workers-action-centre
Ontario Ministry of Labour: https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/filing-employment-standards-claim
Immigrants Working Centre – Hamilton: http://iwchamilton.ca/resources/
Community Legal Education Ontario: https://www.cleo.on.ca/en
LegalLine.ca: https://www.legalline.ca/

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Precarious Work and Millennial Mothers

Jordan Perreault-Laird, (Masters of Social Work Candidate)

(School of Social Work – McMaster University)

Information about these interview questions: This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about the ways uncertainty or insecurity in the workforce and workplaces influence millennial women's decisions about their work and family. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just "yes or no" answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: "*So, you are saying that …?*), to get more information ("*Please tell me more?"),* or to learn what you think or feel about something ("*Why do you think that is…?").*

- Can you tell me about your experience of taking pregnancy/parental leave?
- How did you make this decision?
  - Did you consider your job or the job market?
  - Financial security?
  - Other things what would contribute to the decision-making process?
- How did you approach your employer about taking pregnancy/parental leave?
- Did you worry about your job security after pregnancy/parental leave?
  - Can you tell me about that?
  - What did it feel like feel like emotionally and mentally?
- Were there any specific laws or policies you looked to or used when you were taking your leave?
- How did you respond to the restructuring/dismissal/demotion?
  - What did that feel like?
  - Where there certain things you were worried about?
- Has work changed for you after taking pregnancy/parental leave?
  - Can you tell me about that?
- How much did you know about the policies back then and now?
  - What did you learn?
- What was your biggest challenge with taking leave?
  - How did you address that challenge?
- Are there any questions that are important to you but I didn't have a chance to ask?

Thank you so much for your time and sharing!

Appendix D

Demographic Form
Precarious Work and Millennial Mothers
FOCUS GROUP BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

> **DO NOT**
> **Put your name**
> **on this sheet.**

INSTRUCTIONS: Please fill in this form. Your answers will provide us with some basic background information about you.

1. How would you describe your gender? _____ (Please fill in or leave blank)

2. I'm (Check one):
   [ ] between the ages of 18-20
   [ ] between the ages of 21-29
   [ ] between the ages of 30 – 37
   [ ] prefer not to answer

3. I'm (Check one):
   [ ] single
   [ ] legally married
   [ ] a common-law spouse
   [ ] widowed/partner deceased
   [ ] separated
   [ ] divorced
   [ ] prefer not to answer

4. How many children do you have? _____ (Please fill in or leave blank)
   [ ] prefer not to answer

5. How do you describe your race or ethnicity? _____ (Please fill in or leave blank)
   [ ] prefer not to answer

6. How do you describe your sexuality? _____ (Please fill in or leave blank)
   [ ] prefer not to answer

7. Do you identify as having a disability? _____ (Please fill in or leave blank)

[ ] prefer not to answer

8. What is your level of education? _____ (Please fill in or leave blank)
    [ ] prefer not to answer

Please turn over this brief information sheet and leave it on the table when you leave. Thanks!